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BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE
ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY
PACCHIAROTTO

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

ROBERT BROWNING



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BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE:

INCLUDING

A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES.



To the Countess Cowper.

*I*F I mention the simple truth: that this Poem absolutely owes its existence to you, — who not only suggested, but imposed on me as a task, what has proved the most delightful of May-month amusements, — I shall seem honest, indeed, but hardly prudent; for how good and beautiful ought such a poem to be!

Euripides might fear little; but I, also, have an interest in the performance; and what wonder if I beg you to suffer that it make, in another and far easier sense, its nearest possible approach to those Greek qualities of goodness and beauty, by laying itself gratefully at your feet?

R. B.

London, July 23, 1871.

OUR EURIPIDES, THE HUMAN,
WITH HIS DROPPINGS OF WARM TEARS,
AND HIS TOUCHES OF THINGS COMMON
TILL THEY ROSE TO TOUCH THE SPHERES.



BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE.

ABOUT that strangest, saddest, sweetest song
I, when a girl, heard in Kameiros once,
And, after, saved my life by? Oh, so glad
To tell you the adventure !

Petalé,

Phullis, Charopé, Chrusion ! You must know,
This "after" fell in that unhappy time
When poor reluctant Nikias, pushed by fate,
Went falteringly against Syracuse ;
And there shamed Athens, lost her ships and men,
And gained a grave, or death without a grave.
I was at Rhodes — the isle, not Rhodes the town ;

Mine was Kameiros — when the news arrived :
Our people rose in tumult, cried, “ No more
Duty to Athens ! let us join the League,
And side with Sparta, share the spoil, — at worst,
Abjure a headship that will ruin Greece ! ”
And so, they sent to Knidos for a fleet
To come and help revolters. Ere help came, —
Girl as I was, and never out of Rhodes
The whole of my first fourteen years of life,
But nourished with Ilissian mother's-milk, —
I passionately cried to who would hear,
And those who loved me at Kameiros, “ No !
Never throw Athens off for Sparta's sake, —
Never disloyal to the life and light
Of the whole world worth calling world at all !
Rather go die at Athens, lie outstretched
For feet to trample on, before the gate
Of Diomedes or the Hippadai,
Before the temples and among the tombs,
Than tolerate the grim felicity
Of harsh Lakonia ! Ours the fasts and feasts,

Choës and Chutroi ; ours the sacred grove,
Agora, Dikasteria, Poikilé,
PILUX, Keramikos ; Salamis in sight !
Psuttalia, Marathon itself, not far !
Ours the great Dionusiatic theatre,
And tragic triad of immortal fames,
Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides !
To Athens, all of us that have a soul,
Follow me !” And I wrought so with my prayer,
That certain of my kinsfolk crossed the strait,
And found a ship at Kaunos ; well-disposed
Because the Captain — where did he draw breath
First but within Psuttalia ? Thither fled
A few like-minded as ourselves. We turned
The glad prow westward ; soon were out at sea,
Pushing, brave ship with the vermilion cheek,
Proud for our heart’s true harbor. But a wind
Lay ambushed by Point Malea of bad fame,
And leapt out, bent us from our course. Next day
Broke stormless, and so next blue day and next.
“ But whither bound in this white waste ? ” we plagued

The pilot's old experience : " Cos, or Crete ? "
Because he promised us the land ahead.
While we strained eyes to share in what he saw,
The captain's shout startled us ; round we rushed :
What hung behind us but a pirate-ship
Panting for the good prize ? " Row ! harder row !
Row for dear life ! " the captain cried : " 'tis Crete,
Friendly Crete, looming large there ! Beat this craft,
That's but a keles, one-benched pirate-bark,
Lokrian, or that bad breed off Thessaly !
Only, so cruel are such water-thieves,
No man of you, no woman, child, or slave,
But falls their prey, once let them board our boat ! "
So, furiously our oarsmen rowed and rowed ;
And when the oars flagged somewhat, dash and dip,
As we approached the coast and safety, so
That we could hear behind us plain the threats
And curses of the pirate panting up
In one more throe and passion of pursuit, —
Seeing our oars flag in the rise and fall,
I sprang upon the altar by the mast,

And sang aloft — some genius prompting me —
That song of ours which saved at Salamis :
“ O sons of Greeks ! go, set your country free,
Free your wives, free your children, free the fanes
O' the gods, your fathers founded, — sepulchres
They sleep in ! Or save all, or all be lost ! ”
Then, in a frenzy, so the noble oars
Churned the black water white, that well away
We drew, soon saw land rise, saw hills grow up,
Saw spread itself a sea-wide town with towers,
Not fifty stadio distant ; and, betwixt,
A large bay and a small, the islet-bar,
Even Ortugia's self — oh, luckless we !
For here was Sicily and Syracuse :
We ran upon the lion from the wolf.
Ere we drew breath, took counsel, out there came
A galley, hailed us : “ Who asks entry here
In war-time ? Are you Sparta's friend or foe ? ”
“ Kaunians, ” — our captain judged his best reply,
“ The mainland-seaport that belongs to Rhodes ;
Rhodes that casts in her lot now with the League,

Forsaking Athens, — you have heard belike !”
“ Ay, but we heard all Athens in one ode
Just now ! we heard her in that Aischulos !
You bring a boatful of Athenians here,
Kaunians although you be ; and prudence bids
For Kaunos’ sake, why, carry them unhurt
To Kaunos, if you will : for Athens’ sake,
Back must you, though ten pirates blocked the bay !
We want no colony from Athens here,
With memories of Salamis, forsooth,
To spirit up our captives, that pale crowd
I’ the quarry, whom the daily pint of corn
Keeps in good order and submissiveness.”
Then the gray captain prayed them by the gods,
And by their own knees, and their fathers’ beards,
They should not wickedly thrust suppliants back,
But save the innocent on traffic bound, —
Or, maybe, some Athenian family
Perishing of desire to die at home, —
From that vile foe still lying on its oars,
Waiting the issue in the distance. Vain !

Words to the wind! And we were just about
To turn and face the foe, as some tired bird
Barbarians pelt at, drive with shouts away
From shelter in what rocks, however rude
She makes for, to escape the kindled eye,
Split beak, crook'd claw, o' the creature, cormorant,
Or ossifrage, that, hardly baffled, hangs
Afloat i' the foam, to take her if she turn.
So were we at destruction's very edge,
When those o' the galley, as they had discussed
A point, a question raised by somebody,
A matter mooted in a moment, — "Wait!"
Cried they (and wait we did, you may be sure),
"That song was veritable Aischulos,
Familiar to the mouth of man and boy,
Old glory: how about Euripides?
The newer and not yet so famous bard,
He that was born upon the battle-day
While that song and the salpinx sounded him
Into the world, first sound, at Salamis —
Might you know any of his verses too?"

Now, some one of the gods inspired this speech :
Since ourselves knew what happened but last year —
How, when Gulippos gained his victory
Over poor Nikias, poor Demosthenes,
And Syracuse condemned the conquered force
To dig and starve i' the quarry, branded them —
Freeborn Athenians, brute-like in the front
With horse-head brands, — ah, “ Region of the Steed ! ” —
Of all these men immersed in misery,
It was found none had been advantaged so
By aught in the past life he used to prize
And pride himself concerning, — no rich man
By riches, no wise man by wisdom, no
Wiser man still (as who loved more the Muse)
By storing, at brain's edge and tip of tongue,
Old glory, great plays that had long ago
Made themselves wings to fly about the world, —
Not one such man was helped so at his need
As certain few that (wisest they of all)
Had, at first summons, oped heart, flung door wide,
At the new knocking of Euripides,

Nor drawn the bolt with who cried "Decadence!
And, after Sophokles, be nature dumb!"
Such, — and I see in it God Bacchos' boon
To souls that recognized his latest child,
He who himself, born latest of the gods,
Was stoutly held impostor by mankind, —
Such were in safety: any who could speak
A chorus to the end, or prologize,
Roll out a rhesis, wield some golden length
Stiffened by wisdom out into a line,
Or thrust and parry in bright monostich,
Teaching Euripides to Syracuse —
Any such happy man had prompt reward:
If he lay bleeding on the battle-field
They stanch'd his wounds, and gave him drink and
 food;
If he were slave i' the house, for reverence
They rose up, bowed to who proved master now,
And bade him go free, thank Euripides!
Ay, and such did so: many such, he said,
Returning home to Athens, sought him out,

The old bard in the solitary house,
 And thanked him ere they went to sacrifice.
 I say, we knew that story of last year !

Therefore, at mention of Euripides,
 The captain crowed out " Euoi, praise the God !
 Oöp, boys, bring our owl-shield to the fore !
 Out with our Sacred Anchor ! Here she stands,
 Balaustion ! Strangers, greet the lyric girl !
 Euripides ? Babai ! what a word there 'scaped
 Your teeth's enclosure, quoth my grandsire's song !
 Why, fast as snow in Thrace, the voyage through,
 Has she been falling thick in flakes of him !
 Frequent as figs at Kaunos, Kaunians said.
 Balaustion, stand forth and confirm my speech !
 Now it was some whole passion of a play ;
 Now, peradventure, but a honey-drop
 That slipt its comb i' the chorus. If there rose
 A star, before I could determine steer
 Southward or northward — if a cloud surprised
 Heaven, ere I fairly hollaed ' Furl the sail ! ' —

She had at finger's end both cloud and star ;
Some thought that perched there, tame and tuneable,
Fitted with wings ; and still, as off it flew,
' So sang Euripides,' she said, ' so sang
The meteoric poet of air and sea,
Planets and the pale populace of heaven,
The mind of man, and all that's made to soar !'
And so, although she has some other name,
We only call her Wild-pomegranate-flower,
Balaustion ; since, where'er the red bloom burns
I' the dull dark verdure of the bounteous tree,
Dethroning, in the Rosy Isle, the rose,
You shall find food, drink, odor, all at once ;
Cool leaves to bind about an aching brow,
And, never much away, the nightingale.
Sing them a strophe, with the turn-again,
Down to the verse that ends all, proverb-like,
And save us, thou Balaustion, bless the name !"

But I cried, " Brother Greek ! better than so,—
Save us, and I have courage to recite

The main of a whole play from first to last ;
That strangest, saddest, sweetest song of his,
ALKESTIS ; which was taught, long years ago
At Athens, in Glaukinos' archonship,
But only this year reached our Isle o' the Rose.
I saw it at Kameiros ; played the same,
They say, as for the right Lenean feast
In Athens ; and beside the perfect piece, —
Its beauty and the way it makes you weep, —
There is much honor done your own loved God
Herakles, whom you house i' the city here
Nobly, the Temple wide Greece talks about !
I come a suppliant to your Herakles !
Take me and put me on his temple-steps,
To tell you his achievement as I may,
And, that told, he shall bid you set us free ! ”

Then, because Greeks are Greeks, and hearts are hearts,
And poetry is power, — they all outbroke
In a great joyous laughter with much love :
“ Thank Herakles for the good holiday !

Make for the harbor ! Row, and let voice ring,
' In we row, bringing more Euripides !'
All the crowd, as they lined the harbor now,
' More of Euripides !' — took up the cry.
We landed ; the whole city, soon astir,
Came rushing out of gates in common joy
To the suburb temple ; there they stationed me
O' the topmost step : and plain I told the play,
Just as I saw it ; what the actors said,
And what I saw, or thought I saw the while,
At our Kameiros theatre, clean-scooped
Out of a hill-side, with the sky above
And sea before our seats in marble row :
Told it, and, two days more, repeated it,
Until they sent us on our way again
With good words and great wishes.

Oh, for me ! —

A wealthy Syracusan brought a whole
Talent, and bade me take it for myself :
I left it on the tripod in the fane, —
For had not Herakles a second time

Wrestled with Death, and saved devoted ones?—
Thank-offering to the hero. And a band
Of captives, whom their lords grew kinder to
Because they called the poet countryman,
Sent me a crown of wild-pomegranate-flower :
So, I shall live and die Balaustion now.
But one — one man — one youth, — three days, each
day, —

(If, ere I lifted up my voice to speak,
I gave a downward glance by accident)
Was found at foot o' the temple. When we sailed,
There, in the ship, too, was he found as well,
Having a hunger to see Athens too.
We reached Peiraiæus ; when I landed — lo,
He was beside me. Anthesterion-month
Is just commencing : when its moon rounds full,
We are to marry. O Euripides !
I saw the master : when we found ourselves
(Because the young man needs must follow me)
Firm on Peiraiæus, I demanded first
Whither to go and find him. Would you think ?

The story how he saved us made some smile :
They wondered strangers were exorbitant
In estimation of Euripides.
He was not Aischulos nor Sophokles :
— “ Then, of our younger bards who boast the bay,
Had I sought Agathon, or Iophon,
Or, what now had it been Kephisophon ?
A man that never kept good company,
The most unsociable of poet-kind,
All beard that was not freckle in his face ! ”

I soon was at the tragic house, and saw
The master, held the sacred hand of him,
And laid it to my lips. Men love him not :
How should they ? Nor do they much love his friend
Sokrates : but those two have fellowship ;
Sokrates often comes to hear him read,
And never misses if he teach a piece.
Both, being old, will soon have company,
Sit with their peers above the talk. Meantime,
He lives as should a statue in its niche ;

Cold walls enclose him, mostly darkness there,
 Alone, unless some foreigner uncouth
 Breaks in, sits, stares an hour, and so departs,
 Brain-stuffed with something to sustain his life,
 Dry to the marrow 'mid much merchandize.
 How should such know and love the man?

Why, mark!

Even when I told the play and got the praise,
 There spoke up a brisk little somebody,
 Critic and whippersnapper, in a rage
 To set things right: "The girl departs from truth!
 Pretends she saw what was not to be seen,
 Making the mask of the actor move, forsooth!
 'Then a fear flitted o'er the wife's white face,' —
 'Then frowned the father,' — 'then the husband shook,' —
 'Then from the festal forehead slipt each spray,
 'And the heroic mouth's gay grace was gone;'
 As she had seen each naked fleshly face,
 And not the merely-painted mask it wore!"
 Well, is the explanation difficult?
 What's poetry except a power that makes?

And, speaking to one sense, inspires the rest,
Pressing them all into its service ; so
That who sees painting, seems to hear as well
The speech that's proper for the painted mouth ;
And who hears music, feels his solitude
Peopled at once — for how count heart-beats plain
Unless a company, with hearts which beat,
Come close to the musician, seen or no ?
And who receives true verse at eye or ear,
Takes in (with verse) time, place, and person too,
So, links each sense on to its sister-sense,
Grace-like : and what if but one sense of three
Front you at once ? The sidelong pair conceive
Through faintest touch of finest finger-tips —
Hear, see, and feel, in faith's simplicity,
Alike, what one was sole recipient of :
Who hears the poem, therefore, sees the play.

Enough and too much ! Hear the play itself !
Under the grape-vines, by the streamlet-side,
Close to Baccheion ; till the cool increase,

And other stars steal on the evening-star,
And so, we homeward flock i' the dusk, we five !
You will expect, no one of all the words
O' the play but is grown part now of my soul,
Since the adventure. 'Tis the poet speaks :
But if I, too, should try and speak at times,
Leading your love to where my love, perchance,
Climbed earlier, found a nest before you knew —
Why, bear with the poor climber, for love's sake !
Look at Baccheion's beauty opposite,
The temple with the pillars at the porch !
See you not something beside masonry ?
What if my words wind in and out the stone
As yonder ivy, the god's parasite ?
Though they leap all the way the pillar leads,
Festoon about the marble, foot to frieze,
And serpentiningly enrich the roof,
Toy with some few bees and a bird or two, —
What then ? The column holds the cornice up !

There slept a silent palace in the sun,
With plains adjacent and Thessalian peace —
Pherai, where King Admetos ruled the land.

Out from the portico there gleamed a god,
Apollon : for the bow was in his hand,
The quiver at his shoulder, all his shape
One dreadful beauty. And he hailed the house,
As if he knew it well and loved it much :
“ O Admeteian domes ! where I endured,
Even the god I am, to drudge a while,
Accepting the slave's table thankfully,
Do righteous penance for a reckless deed ! ”
Then told how Zeus had been the cause of all,
Raising the wrath in him which took revenge,
And slew those forgers of the thunderbolt
Wherewith Zeus blazed the life from out the breast
Of Phoibos' son Asklepios (I surmise,

Because he brought the dead to life again),
And so, for punishment, must needs go slave,
God as he was, with a mere mortal lord :
— Told how he came to King Admetos' land,
And played the ministrant, was herdsman there,
Warding from him and his all harm away
Till now ; “ For, holy as I am,” said he,
“ The lord I chanced upon was holy too :
Whence I deceived the Moirai, drew from death
My master, this same son of Pheres, — ay,
The goddesses conceded him escape
From Hades, when the fated day should fall,
Could he exchange lives, find some friendly one
Ready, for his sake, to content the grave.
But trying all in turn, the friendly list,
Why, he found no one, none who loved so much,
Nor father, nor the aged mother's self
'That bore him, no, not any save his wife,
Willing to die instead of him, and watch
Never a sunrise nor a sunset more ;
And she is even now within the house,

Upborne by pitying hands, the feeble frame
Gasping its last of life out ; since to-day
Destiny is accomplished, and she dies ;
And I, lest here pollution light on me,
Leave, as ye witness, all my wonted joy
In this dear dwelling. Ay,— for here comes Death
Close on us of a sudden ! who, pale priest
Of the mute people, means to bear his prey
To the house of Hades. The symmetric step !
How he treads true to time and place and thing,
Dogging day, hour, and minute, for death's-due !”
And we observed another deity,
Half in, half out the portal, — watch and ward, —
Eying his fellow : formidably fixed,
Yet faltering too at who affronted him,
As somehow disadvantaged, should they strive.
Like some dread heapy blackness, ruffled wing,
Convulsed and cowering head that is all eye,
Which proves a ruined eagle, who, too blind
Swooping in quest o' the quarry, fawn, or kid,
Descried deep down the chasm 'twixt rock and rock,

Has wedged and mortised, into either wall
O' the mountain, the pent earthquake of his power ;
So lies, half hurtless yet still terrible,
Just when who stalks up, who stands front to front,
But the great lion-guarder of the gorge,
Lord of the ground, a stationed glory there !
Yet he too pauses ere he try the worst
O' the frightful unfamiliar nature, new
To the chasm, indeed, but elsewhere known enough,
Among the shadows and the silences
Above i' the sky : so, each antagonist
Silently faced his fellow and forbore.
Till Death shrilled, hard and quick, in spite and fear :

“ Ha, ha ! and what may'st thou do at the domes,
Why hauntest here, thou Phoibos ? Here again
At the old injustice, limiting our rights,
Balking of honor due us gods o' the grave !
Was 't not enough for thee to have delayed
Death from Admetos, — with thy crafty art
Cheating the very Fates, — but thou must arm

The bow-hand and take station, press 'twixt me
And Pelias' daughter, who then saved her spouse, —
Did just that, now thou comest to undo, —
Taking his place to die, Alkestis here ?”
But the god sighed, “ Have courage ! All my arms,
This time, are simple justice and fair words.”

Then each plied each with rapid interchange :

“ What need of bow were justice arms enough ? ”

“ Ever it is my wont to bear the bow.”

“ Ay, and with bow, not justice, help this house ! ”

“ I help it, since a friend's woe weighs me too.”

“ And now, — wilt force from me this second corpse ? ”

“ By force I took no corpse at first from thee.”

“ How then is he above ground, not beneath ? ”

“ He gave his wife instead of him, thy prey.”

“ And prey, this time at least, I bear below ! ”

“ Go take her ! — for I doubt persuading thee . . . ”

“ To kill the doomed one ? What my function else ? ”

“ No ! Rather, to despatch the true mature.”

“ Truly I take thy meaning, see thy drift ! ”

“ Is there a way then she may reach old age ? ”

“ No way ! I glad me in my honors too ! ”

“ But, young or old, thou tak'st one life, no more ? ”

“ Younger they die, greater my praise redounds ! ”

“If she die old, — the sumptuous funeral!”

“Thou layest down a law the rich would like.”

“How so? Did wit lurk there and 'scape thy sense?”

“Who could buy substitutes would die old men.”

“It seems thou wilt not grant me, then, this grace?”

“This grace I will not grant: thou know'st my ways.”

“Ways harsh to men, hateful to gods, at least!”

“All things thou canst not have: my rights for me!”

And then Apollon prophesied, — I think,
More to himself than to impatient Death,
Who did not hear or would not heed the while, —
For he went on to say, “Yet even so,
Cruel above the measure, thou shalt clutch

No life here ! Such a man do I perceive
Advancing to the house of Pheres now,
Sent by Eurustheus to bring out of Thrace,
'The winter world, a chariot with its steeds !
He indeed, when Admetos proves the host,
And he the guest, at the house here, — he it is
Shall bring to bear such force, and from thy hands
Rescue this woman ! Grace no whit to me
Will that prove, since thou dost thy deed the same,
And earnest too my hate, and all for nought !”

But how should Death or stay or understand ?
Doubtless, he only felt the hour was come,
And the sword free ; for he but flung some taunt, —
“ Having talked much, thou wilt not gain the more !
This woman then descends to Hades' hall
Now that I rush on her, begin the rites
O' the sword ; for sacred to us gods below,
That head whose hair this sword shall sanctify !”

And, in the fire-flash of the appalling sword,

The uprush and the outburst, the onslaught
Of Death's portentous passage through the door,
Apollon stood a pitying moment-space :
I caught one last gold gaze upon the night
Nearing the world now : and the god was gone,
And mortals left to deal with misery ;
As in came stealing slow, now this, now that
Old sojourner throughout the country-side,
Servants grown friends to those unhappy here :
And, cloudlike in their increase, all these griefs
Broke and began the over-brimming wail,
Out of a common impulse, word by word.

“ Whatever means the silence at the door ?
Why is Admetos' mansion stricken dumb ?
Not one friend near, to say if we should mourn
Our mistress dead, or still Alkestis live
And see the light here, Pelias' child — to me,
To all, conspicuously the best of wives
That ever was toward husband in this world !
Hears any one or wail beneath the roof,

Or hands that strike each other, or the groan
Announcing all is done and nought to dread?
Still not a servant stationed at the gates!
O Paian, that thou would'st dispart the wave
O' the woe, be present! Yet, had woe o'erwhelmed
The housemates, they were hardly silent thus:
It cannot be, the dead is forth and gone.
Whence comes thy gleam of hope? I dare not hope:
What is the circumstance that heartens thee?
How could Admetos have dismissed a wife
So worthy, unescorted to the grave?
Before the gates I see no hallowed vase
Of fountain-water, such as suits death's door;
Nor any clipt locks strew the vestibule,
Though surely these drop when we grieve the dead:
Nor sounds hand smitten against youthful hand,
The woman's way. And yet — the appointed time —
How speak the word? — this day is even the day
Ordained her for departing from its light.
O touch calamitous to heart and soul!
Needs must one, when the good are tortured so,

Sorrow, — one reckoned faithful from the first.”

Then their souls rose together, and one sigh
Went up in cadence from the common mouth :
How “ Vainly — any whither in the world
Directing or land-labor or sea-search —
To Lukia or the sand-waste, Ammon's seat —
Might you set free their hapless lady's soul
From the abrupt Fate's footstep instant now.
Not a sheep-sacrificer at the hearths
Of gods had they to go to : one there was
Who, if his eyes saw light still, — Phoibos' son, —
Had wrought so, she might leave the shadowy place
And Hades' portal ; for he propped up Death's
Subdued ones, till the Zeus-flung thunder-flame
Struck him : and now what hope of life to hail
With open arms ? For all the king could do
Is done already, — not one god whereof
The altar fails to reek with sacrifice :
And for assuagement of these evils — nought ! ”

But here they broke off ; for a matron moved
Forth from the house : and, as her tears flowed fast,
They gathered round. “ What fortune shall we hear ?
To mourn indeed, if aught affect thy lord,
We pardon thee : but lives the lady yet,
Or has she perished ? — that we fain would know ! ”

“ Call her dead, call her living, each style serves,”
The matron said : “ though grave-wards bowed, she
breathed ;
Nor knew her husband what the misery meant
Before he felt it : hope of life was none :
The appointed day pressed hard ; the funeral pomp
He had prepared too.”

When the friends broke out,
“ Let her in dying know herself at least
Sole wife, of all the wives 'neath the sun wide,
For glory and for goodness ! ” — “ Ah, how else
Than best ? who controverts the claim ? ” quoth she :
“ What kind of creature should the woman prove
That has surpassed Alkestis ? — surelier shown

Preference for her husband to herself
Than by determining to die for him?
But so much all our city knows indeed :
Hear what she did indoors and wonder then !
For, when she felt the crowning day was come,
She washed with river-waters her white skin,
And, taking from the cedar closets forth
Vesture and ornament, bedecked herself
Nobly, and stood before the hearth, and prayed :
' Mistress, because I now depart the world,
Falling before thee the last time, I ask —
Be mother to my orphans ! wed the one
To a kind wife, and make the other's mate
Some princely person : nor, as I who bore
My children perish, suffer that they too
Die all untimely, but live, happy pair,
' Their full glad life out in the fatherland ! '
And every altar through Admetos' house
She visited and crowned and prayed before,
Stripping the myrtle-foliage from the boughs,
Without a tear, without a groan, — no change

At all to that skin's nature, fair to see,
Caused by the imminent evil. But this done, —
Reaching her chamber, falling on her bed,
There, truly, burst she into tears and spoke :
' O bride-bed ! where I loosened from my life
Virginity for that same husband's sake
Because of whom I die now — fare thee well !
Since nowise do I hate thee : me alone
Hast thou destroyed ; for, shrinking to betray
Thee and my spouse, I die : but thee, O bed !
Some other woman shall possess as wife —
Truer, no ! but of better fortune, say !
— So falls on, kisses it till all the couch
Is moistened with the eye's sad overflow.
But, when of many tears she had her fill,
She flings from off the couch, goes headlong forth,
Yet, — forth the chamber, — still keeps turning back
And casts her on the couch again once more.
Her children, clinging to their mother's robe,
Wept meanwhile : but she took them in her arms,
And, as a dying woman might, embraced

Now one and now the other : 'neath the roof,
All of the household servants wept as well,
Moved to compassion for their mistress ; she
Extended her right hand to all and each,
And there was no one of such low degree
She spoke not to nor had an answer from.
Such are the evils in Admetos' house.
Dying, — why, he had died ; but, living, gains
Such grief as this he never will forget ! ”
And when they questioned of Admetos, “ Well —
Holding his dear wife in his hands, he weeps ;
Entreats her not to give him up, and seeks
The impossible, in fine : for there she wastes
And withers by disease, abandoned now,
A mere dead weight upon her husband's arm.
Yet none the less, although she breaths so faint,
Her will is to behold the beams o' the sun :
Since never more again, but this last once,
Shall she see sun, its circlet or its ray.
But I will go, announce your presence, — friends
Indeed ; since 'tis not all so love their lords

As seek them in misfortune, kind the same :
But you are the old friends I recognize.”

And at the word she turned again to go :
The while they waited, taking up the plaint
To Zeus again : “ What passage from this strait ?
What loosing of the heavy fortune fast
About the palace ? Will such help appear,
Or must we clip the locks, and cast around
Each form already the black peplos' fold ?
Clearly the black robe, clearly ! All the same
Pray to the gods ! — like gods' no power so great !
O thou King Paian, find some way to save !
Reveal it, yea, reveal it ! Since of old
Thou found'st a cure, why, now again become
Releaser from the bonds of Death, we beg,
And give the sanguinary Hades pause ! ”
So the song dwindled into a mere moan ;
How dear the wife, and what her husband's woe ;
When suddenly —

“ Behold, behold ! ” breaks forth :

“ Here is she coming from the house indeed !
Her husband comes, too ! Cry aloud, lament,
Pheraian land, this best of women, bound —
So is she withered by disease away —
For realms below and their infernal king !
Never will we affirm there's more of joy
Than grief in marriage ; making estimate
Both from old sorrows anciently observed,
And this misfortune of the king we see —
Admetos who, of bravest spouse bereaved,
Will live life's remnant out, no life at all ! ”

So wailed they, while a sad procession wound
Slow from the innermost o' the palace, stopped
At the extreme verge of the platform-front :
There opened, and disclosed Alkestis' self,
The consecrated lady, borne to look
Her last — and let the living look their last —
She at the sun, we at Alkestis.

We

For would you note a memorable thing ?

We grew to see in that severe regard, —
Hear in that hard dry pressure to the point,
Word slow pursuing word in monotone, —
What Death meant when he called her consecrate
Henceforth to Hades. I believe, the sword —
Its office was to cut the soul at once
From life, — from something in this world which hides
Truth, and hides falsehood, and so lets us live
Somehow. Suppose a rider furls a cloak
About a horse's head; unfrightened, so,
Between the menace of a flame, between
Solicitation of the pasturage,
Untempted equally, he goes his gait
To journey's end; then pluck the pharos off!
Show what delusions steadied him i' the straight
O' the path, made grass seem fire and fire seem grass,
All through a little bandage o'er the eyes!
For certainly with eyes unbandaged now
Alkestis looked upon the action here,
Self-immolation for Admetos' sake;
Saw, with a new sense, all her death would do,

And which of her survivors had the right,
And which the less right, to survive thereby.
For, you shall note, she uttered no one word
Of love more to her husband, though he wept
Plenteously, waxed importunate in prayer—
Folly's old fashion when its seed bears fruit.
I think she judged that she had bought the ware
O' the seller at its value, — nor praised him,
Nor blamed herself, but, with indifferent eye,
Saw him purse money up, prepare to leave
The buyer with a solitary bale —
True purple — but in place of all that coin,
Had made a hundred others happy too,
If so willed fate or fortune! What remained
To give away, should rather go to these
Than one with coin to clink and contemplate.
Admetos had his share and might depart,
The rest was for her children and herself.
(Charopé makes a face : but wait a while !)
She saw things plain as gods do : by one stroke
O' the sword that rends the life-long veil away.

(Also Euripides saw plain enough :
 But you and I, Charopé, — you and I
 Will trust his sight until our own grow clear).

“ Sun, and thou light of day, and heavenly dance
 O' the fleet cloud-figure ! ” (so her passion paused,
 While the awe-stricken husband made his moan,
 Muttered now this now that inaptitude :

“ Sun that sees thee and me, a suffering pair,
 Who did the gods no wrong whence thou should'st
 die ! ”)

Then, as if, caught up, carried in their course,
 Fleeting and free as cloud and sunbeam are,
 She missed no happiness that lay beneath :

“ O thou wide earth, from these my palace roofs,
 To distant nuptial chambers once my own
 In that Iolkos of my ancestry ! ” —

There the flight failed her. “ Raise thee, wretched one,
 Give us not up ! Pray pity from the gods ! ”

Vainly Admetos : for “ I see it — see

The two-oared boat! The ferryer of the dead,
 Charon, hand hard upon the boatman's-pole,
 Calls me — even now calls — ‘Why delayest thou?
 Quick! Thou obstructest all made ready here
 For prompt departure: quick, then!’”

“Woe is me!

A bitter voyage this to undergo,
 Even i' the telling! Adverse Powers above,
 How do ye plague us!”

Then a shiver ran:

“He has me — seest not? — hales me, — who is it? —
 To the hall o' the Dead — ah, who, but Hades' self,
 He, with the wings there, glares at me, one gaze
 All that blue brilliance, under the eyebrow!
 What wilt thou do? Unhand me! Such a way
 I have to traverse, all unhappy one!”

“Way — piteous to thy friends, but, most of all,
 Me and thy children: ours assuredly
 A common partnership in grief like this!”

Whereat they closed about her ; but " Let be !
Leave, let me lie now ! Strength forsakes my feet.
Hades is here, and shadowy on my eyes
Comes the night creeping. Children — children, now
Indeed, a mother is no more for you !
Farewell, O children, long enjoy the light ! "
" Ah, me ! the melancholy word I hear,
Oppressive beyond every kind of death !
No, by the Deities, take heart, nor dare
To give me up — no, by our children too
Made orphans of ! But rise, be resolute !
Since, thou departed, I no more remain !
For in thee are we bound up, to exist
Or cease to be — so we adore thy love ! "

— Which brought out truth to judgment. At this word
And protestation, all the truth in her
Claimed to assert itself : she waved away
The blue-eyed, black-wing'd phantom, held in check
The advancing pageantry of Hades there,
And, with no change in her own countenance,

She fixed her eyes on the protesting man,
And let her lips unlock their sentence, — so !
“ Admetos, — how things go with me thou seest, —
I wish to tell thee, ere I die, what things
I will should follow. I — to honor thee,
Secure for thee, by my own soul's exchange,
Continued looking on the daylight here —
Die for thee — yet, if so I pleased, might live.
Nay, wed what man of Thessaly I would,
And dwell i' the dome with pomp and queenliness.
I would not, — would not live bereft of thee,
With children orphaned, neither shrank at all,
Though having gifts of youth wherein I joyed.
Yet, who begot thee and who gave thee birth,
Both of these gave thee up ; for all, a term
Of life was reached when death became them well,
Ay, well — to save their child and glorious die :
Since thou wast all they had, nor hope remained
Of having other children in thy place.
So, I and thou had lived out our full time,
Nor thou, left lonely of thy wife, wouldst groan

With children reared in orphanage : but thus
Some god disposed things, willed they so should **be**.
Be they so ! Now do thou remember this,
Do me in turn a favor, — favor, since
Certainly I shall never claim my due,
For nothing is more precious than a life :
But a fit favor, as thyself wilt say,
Loving our children here no less than I,
If head and heart be sound in thee at least.
Uphold them, make them masters of my house,
Nor wed and give a step-dame to the pair,
Who, being a worse wife than I, thro' spite
Will raise her hand against both thine and mine.
Never do this at least, I pray to thee !
For hostile the new-comer, the step-dame,
To the old brood — a very viper she
For gentleness ! Here stand they, boy and girl ;
The boy has got a father, a defence
Tower-like he speaks to and has answer from :
But thou, my girl, how will thy virginhood
Conclude itself in marriage fittingly ?

Upon what sort of sire-found yoke-fellow
Art thou to chance? with all to apprehend —
Lest, casting on thee some unkind report,
She blast thy nuptials in the bloom of youth.
For neither shall thy mother watch thee wed,
Nor hearten thee in childbirth, standing by
Just when a mother's presence helps thee most!
No, for I have to die: and this my ill
Comes to me, nor to-morrow, no, nor yet
The third day of the month, but now, even now,
I shall be reckoned among those no more.
Farewell, be happy! And to thee, indeed,
Husband, the boast remains permissible
Thou hadst a wife was worthy! and to you,
Children, as good a mother gave you birth."

"Have courage!" interposed the friends. "For him
I have no scruple to declare, all this
Will he perform, except he fail of sense."

"All this shall be — shall be!" Admetos sobbed:

“Fear not! And, since I had thee living, dead
Alone wilt thou be called my wife: no fear
That some Thessalian ever styles herself
Bride, hails this man for husband in thy place!
No woman, be she of such lofty line
Or such surpassing beauty otherwise!
Enough of children: gain from these I have,
Such only may the gods grant! since in thee
Absolute is our loss, where all was gain.
And I shall bear for thee no year-long grief,
But grief that lasts while my own days last, love!
Love! For my hate is she who bore me, now;
And him I hate, my father: loving-ones
Truly, in word not deed! But thou didst pay
All dearest to thee down, and buy my life,
Saving me so! Is there not cause enough
That I who part with such companionship
In thee, should make my moan? I moan, and more:
For I will end the feastings — social flow
O’ the wine friends flock for, garlands, and the Muse
That graced my dwelling. Never now for me

To touch the lyre, to lift my soul in song
At summons of the Lybian flute ; since thou
From out my life hast emptied all the joy !
And this thy body, in thy likeness wrought
By some wise hand of the artificers,
Shall lie disposed within my marriage-bed :
This I will fall on, this enfold about,
Call by thy name, — my dear wife in my arms
Even though I have not, I shall seem to have —
A cold delight, indeed, but all the same
So should I lighten of its weight my soul !
And, wandering my way in dreams perchance,
Thyself wilt bless me : for, come when they will,
Even by night our loves are sweet to see.
But were the tongue and tune of Orpheus mine,
So that to Koré crying, or her lord,
In hymns, from Hades I might rescue thee,
Down would I go, and neither Plouton's dog
Nor Charon, he whose oar sends souls across,
Should stay me till again I made thee stand
Living, within the light ! But, failing this,

'There, where thou art, await me when I die,
Make ready our abode, my house-mate still !
For in the self-same cedar, me with thee,
Will I provide that these our friends shall place,
My side lay close by thy side ! Never, corpse
Although I be, would I division bear
From thee, my faithful one of all the world !”

So he stood sobbing : nowise insincere,
But somehow child-like, like his children, like
Childishness the world over. What was new
In this announcement that his wife must die ?
What particle of pain beyond the pact
He made, with eyes wide open, long ago, —
Made, and was, if not glad, content to make ?
Now that the sorrow, he had called for, came,
He sorrowed to the height : none heard him say,
However, what would seem so pertinent,
“ To keep this pact, I find surpass my power .
Rescind it, Moirai ! Give me back her life,
And take the life I kept by base exchange !

Or, failing that, here stands your laughing-stock
Fooled by you, worthy just the fate o' the fool
Who makes a pother to escape the best
And gain the worst you wiser Powers allot !”
No, not one word of this : nor did his wife,
Despite the sobbing, and the silence soon
To follow, judge so much was in his thought, —
Fancy that, should Moirai acquiesce,
He would relinquish life, nor let her die.
The man was like some merchant who, in storm,
Throws the freight over to redeem the ship :
No question, saving both were better still.
As it was, — why, he sorrowed, which sufficed.
So, all she seemed to notice in his speech
Was what concerned her children. Children, too,
Bear the grief and accept the sacrifice.
Rightly rules Nature : does the blossomed bough
O' the grape-vine, or the dry grape's self, bleed wine ?

So, bending to her children all her love,
She fastened on their father's only word

To purpose now, and followed it with this :

“O children ! now yourselves have heard these things, —
Your father saying he will never wed
Another woman to be over you,
Nor yet dishonor me !”

“And now at least
I say it, and I will accomplish too !”

“Then, for such promise of accomplishment,
Take from my hand these children !”

“Thus I take —
Dear gift from the dear hand !”

“Do thou become
Mother, now, to these children in my place !”

‘Great the necessity I should be so,
At least, to these bereaved of thee !”

“Child — child !

Just when I needed most to live, below
Am I departing from you both !”

“ Ah me !

And what shall I do, then, left lonely thus ?”

“ Time will appease thee : who is dead is nought.”

“ Take me with thee — take, by the gods below !”

“ We are sufficient, we who die for thee.”

“ O Powers ! ye widow me of what a wife !”

“ And truly the dimmed eye draws earthward now !”

“ Wife, if thou leav'st me, I am lost indeed !”

“ She once was — now is nothing, thou may'st say.”

“ Raise thy face, nor forsake thy children thus !”

“ Ah, willingly indeed I leave them not !

But — fare ye well, my children ! ”

“ Look on them —
Look ! ”

“ I am nothingness.”

“ What dost thou ! Leav'st ”

“ Farewell ! ”

And in the breath she passed away.

“ Undone — me miserable ! ” moaned the king,

While friends released the long-suspended sigh.

“ Gone is she : no wife for Admetos more ! ”

Such was the signal : how the woe broke forth,

Why tell ? — or how the children's tears ran fast,

Bidding their father note the eyelids' stare,

Hands' droop, each dreadful circumstance of death.

“ Ay, she hears not, she sees not : I and you,

'Tis plain, are stricken hard, and have to bear !”

Was all Admetos answered ; for, I judge,

He only now began to taste the truth :

The thing done lay revealed, which undone thing,

Rehearsed for fact by fancy, at the best,

Never can equal. He had used himself

This long while (as he muttered presently)

To practise with the terms, the blow involved

By the bargain, sharp to bear, but bearable

Because of plain advantage at the end.

Now that, in fact not fancy, the blow fell —

Needs must he busy him with the surprise.

“ Alkestis — not to see her nor be seen,

Hear nor be heard of by her, any more,

To-day, to-morrow, to the end of time, —

Did I mean this should buy my life ?” thought he.

So, friends came round him, took him by the hand,

Bade him remember our mortality,

Its due, its doom : how neither was he first,

Nor would be last, to thus deplore the loved.

“ I understand,” slow the words came at last.
“ Nor of a sudden did the evil here
Fly on-me : I have known it long ago,
Ay, and essayed myself in misery ;
Nothing is new. You have to stay, you friends,
Because the next need is to carry forth
The corpse here : you must stay and do your part,
Chant proper pæan to the god below ;
Drink-sacrifice he likes not. I decree
That all Thessalians over whom I rule
Hold grief in common with me ; let them shear
Their locks, and be the peplos black they show !
And you to the chariot yoke your steeds,
Or manage steeds one-frontleted, — I charge,
Clip from each neck with steel the mane away !
And through my city, nor of flute nor lyre
Be there a sound till twelve full moons succeed.
For I shall never bury any corpse
Dearer than this to me, nor better friend :
One worthy of all honor from me, since
Me she has died for, she and she alone.”

With that, he sought the inmost of the house,
He and his dead, to get grave's garniture,
While the friends sang the pæan that should peal.
"Daughter of Pelias, with farewell from me,
I' the house of Hades have thy unsunned home !
Let Hades know, the dark-haired deity, —
And he who sits to row and steer alike,
Old corpse-conductor, let him know he bears
Over the Acherontian lake this time,
I' the two-oared boat, the best, — oh, best by far
Of womankind ! For thee, Alkestis Queen,
Many a time those haunters of the Muse
Shall sing thee to the seven-stringed mountain-shell,
And glorify in hymns that need no harp,
At Sparta when the cycle comes about,
And that Karneian month wherein the moon
Rises and never sets the whole night through :
So too at splendid and magnificent
Athenai. Such the spread of thy renown,
And such the lay that, dying, thou hast left
Singer and sayer. Oh that I availed

Of my own might to send thee once again
From Hades' hall, Kokutos' stream, by help
O' the oar that dips the river, back to-day!"

So, the song sank to prattle in her praise :
" Light, from above thee, lady, fall the earth,
Thou only one of womankind to die,
Wife for her husband ! If Admetos take
Any thing to him like a second spouse, —
Hate from his offspring and from us shall be
His portion, let the king assure himself !
No mind his mother had to hide in earth
Her body for her son's sake, nor his sire
Had heart to save whom he begot, — not they,
The white-haired wretches ! only thou it was,
I' the bloom of youth, didst save him and so die !
Might it be mine to chance on such a mate
And partner ! For there's penury in life
Of such allowance : were she mine at least,
So wonderful a wife, assuredly
She would companion me throughout my days

And never once bring sorrow !”

A great voice —

“ My hosts here !”

Oh, the thrill that ran through us !

Never was aught so good and opportune

As that great interrupting voice ! For see !

Here maundered this dispirited old age

Before the palace ; whence a something crept

Which told us well enough without a word

What was a-doing inside, — every touch

O' the garland on those temples, tenderest

Disposure of each arm along its side,

Came putting out what warmth i' the world was left.

Then, as it happens at a sacrifice

When, drop by drop, some lustral bath is brimmed :

Into the thin and clear and cold, at once

They slaughter a whole wine-skin ; Bacchos' blood

Sets the white water all a-flame : even so,

Sudden into the midst of sorrow, leapt

Along with the gay cheer of that great voice,
Hope, joy, salvation : Herakles was here !
Himself o' the threshold, sent his voice on first
To herald all that human and divine
I' the weary happy face of him, — half god,
Half man, which made the god-part god the more.

“ Hosts mine,” he broke upon the sorrow with,
“ Inhabitants of this Pheraian soil,
Chance I upon Admetos inside here ? ”

The irresistible sound wholesome heart
O' the hero, — more than all the mightiness
At labor in the limbs that, for man's sake,
Labored and meant to labor their life long, —
This drove back, dried up sorrow at its source.
How could it brave the happy weary laugh
Of who had bantered sorrow, “ Sorrow here ?
What have you done to keep your friend from harm ?
Could no one give the life I see he keeps ?
Or, say there's sorrow here past friendly help,

Why waste a word or let a tear escape
While other sorrows wait you in the world,
And want the life of you, though helpless here?"
Clearly there was no telling such an one
How, when their monarch tried who loved him more
Than he loved them, and found they loved, as he,
Each man, himself, and held, no otherwise,
That, of all evils in the world, the worst
Was — being forced to die, whate'er death gain :
How all this selfishness in him and them
Caused certain sorrow which they sang about, —
I think that Herakles, who held his life
Out on his hand, for any man to take —
I think his laugh had marred their threnody.

"He is i' the house," they answered. After all,
They might have told the story, talked their best
About the inevitable sorrow here,
Nor changed nor checked the kindly nature, — no !
So long as men were merely weak, not bad,
He loved men : were they gods he used to help?

“Yea, Pheres' son is in-doors, Herakles :
But say, what sends thee to Thessalian soil,
Brought by what business to this Pherai town?”

“A certain labor that I have to do
Eurustheus the Tirunthian,” laughed the god.

“And whither wendest”—on what wandering
Bound now?” (they had an instinct, guessed what meant
Wanderings, labors, in the god's light mouth.)

“After the Thracian Diomedes' car
With the four horses.”

....“Ah! but canst thou that?
Art inexperienced in thy host to be?”

“All-inexperienced: I have never gone
As yet to the land o' the Bistones.”

“Then look
By no means to be master of the steeds

Without a battle !”

“ Battle there may be :

I must refuse no labor, all the same.”

“ Certainly, either having slain a foe

Wilt thou return to us, or, slain thyself,

Stay there !”

“ And, even if the game be so,

The risk in it were not the first I run.”

“ But, say thou overpower the lord o' the place,

What more advantage dost expect thereby?”

“ I shall drive off his horses to the king.”

“ No easy handling them to bit the jaw !”

“ Easy enough ; except, at least, they breathe

Fire from their nostrils !”

“ But they mhuice up me

With those quick jaws !”

“You talk of provender
For mountain-beasts, and not mere horses' food !”

“Thou may'st behold their mangers caked with gore !”

“And of what sire does he who bred them boast
Himself the son ?”

“Of Ares, king o' the targe —
Thracian, of gold throughout.”

Another laugh.

“Why, just the labor, just the lot for me,
Dost thou describe in what I recognize !
Since hard and harder, high and higher yet,
Truly this lot of mine is like to go
If I must needs join battle with the brood
Of Ares : ay, I fought Lukaon first,
And again, Kuknos : now engage in strife
This third time, with such horses and such lord.
But there is nobody shall ever see
Alkmené's son shrink, foemen's hand before !”

—“ Or ever hear him say ” (the chorus thought)

“ That death is terrible ; and help us so
To chime in — ‘ terrible beyond a doubt,
And, if to thee, why, to ourselves much more :
Know what has happened, then, and sympathize ! ’ ”

Therefore they gladly stopped the dialogue,
Shifted the burthen to new shoulder straight,
As, “ Look where comes the lord o’ the land, himself,
Admetos, from the palace ! ” they out-broke
In some surprise, as well as much relief.

What had induced the king to waive his right
And luxury of woe in loneliness ?

Out he came quietly ; the hair was clipt,
And the garb sable ; else no outward sign
Of sorrow as he came and faced his friend.
Was truth fast terrifying tears away ?

“ Hail, child of Zeus, and sprung from Perseus too ! ”
The salutation ran without a fault.

“ And thou, Admetos, King of Thessaly ! ”

“Would, as thou wishest me, the grace might fall !
But my good-wisher, that thou art, I know.”

“What's here? these shorn locks, this sad show of
thee?”

“I must inter a certain corpse to-day.”

“Now, from thy children God avert mischance !”

“They live, my children ; all are in the house !”

“Thy father — if 'tis he departs indeed,
His age was ripe at least.”

“My father lives,
And she who bore me lives too, Herakles.”

“It cannot be thy wife Alkestis gone?”

“Two-fold the tale is, I can tell of her.”

“ Dead dost thou speak of her, or living yet ? ”

“ She is — and is not : hence the pain to me ! ”

“ I learn no whit the more, so dark thy speech ! ”

“ Know'st thou not on what fate she needs must fall ? ”

“ I know she is resigned to die for thee.”

“ How lives she still, then, if submitting so ? ”

“ Eh, weep her not beforehand ! wait till then ! ”

“ Who is to die is dead ; doing is done.”

“ To be and not to be are thought diverse.”

“ Thou judgest this — I, that way, Herakles ! ”

“ Well, but declare what causes thy complaint !

Who is the man has died from out thy friends ?”

“ No man : I had a woman in my mind.”

“ Alien, or some one born akin to thee ?”

“ Alien : but still related to my house.”

“ How did it happen then that here she died ?”

“ Her father dying left his orphan here.”

“ Alas, Admetos — would we found thee gay,
Not grieving !”

“ What as if about to do
Subjoinest thou that comment ?”

“ I shall seek
Another hearth, proceed to other hosts.”

“Never, O king, shall that be! No such ill
Betide me!”

“Nay, to mourners, should there come
A guest, he proves importunate!”

“The dead —
Dead are they: but go thou within my house!”

“’T is base carousing beside friends who mourn.”

“The guest-rooms, whither we shall lead thee, lie
Apart from ours.”

“Nay, let me go my way!
Ten thousandfold the favor I shall thank!”

“It may not be thou goest to the hearth
Of any man but me!” so made an end
Admetos, softly and decisively,
Of the altercation. Herakles forbore:
And the king bade a servant lead the way,
Open the guest-rooms ranged remote from view

O' the main hall, tell the functionaries, too,
They had to furnish forth a plenteous feast :
And then shut close the doors o' the hall, midway,
"Because it is not proper friends who feast
Should hear a groaning or be grieved," quoth he.

Whereat the hero, who was truth itself,
Let out the smile again, repressed a while
Like fountain brilliance one forbids to play.
He did too many grandnesses, to note
Much in the meaner things about his path :
And stepping there, with face towards the sun,
Stopped seldom to pluck weeds or ask their names.
Therefore he took Admetos at the word :
This trouble must not hinder any more
A true heart from good will and pleasant ways.
And so, the great arm, which had slain the snake,
Strained his friend's head a moment in embrace
On that broad breast beneath the lion's hide,
Till the king's cheek winced at the thick rough gold ;
And then strode off, with who had care of him,

To the remote guest-chamber : glad to give
Poor flesh and blood their respite and relief
In the interval 'twixt fight and fight again —
All for the world's sake. Our eyes followed him,
Be sure, till those mid-doors shut us outside.
The king, too, watched great Herakles go off
All faith, love, and obedience to a friend.

And when they questioned him, the simple ones,
“What dost thou? Such calamity to face,
Lies full before thee — and thou art so bold
As play the host, Admetos? Hast thy wits?”
He replied calmly to each chiding tongue :
“But if from house and home I forced away
A coming guest, would'st thou have praised me more?
No, truly! since calamity were mine,
Nowise diminished ; while I showed myself
Unhappy and inhospitable too :
So adding to my ills this other ill,
That mine were styled a stranger-hating house.
Myself have ever found this man the best

Of entertainers when I went his way
To parched and thirsty Argos."

"If so be —

Why didst thou hide what destiny was here,
When one came that was kindly, as thou say'st?"

"He never would have willed to cross my door,
Had he known aught of my calamities.
And probably to some of you I seem
Unwise enough in doing what I do ;
Such will scarce praise me : but these halls of mine
Know not to drive off and dishonor guests."
And so, the duty done, he turned once more
To go and busy him about his dead.
As for the sympathizers left to muse,
There was a change, a new light thrown on things,
Contagion from the magnanimity
O' the man whose life lay on his hand so light,
As up he stepped, pursuing duty still,
"Higher and harder," as he laughed and said.
Somehow they found no folly now in the act

They blamed erewhile : Admetos' private grief

Shrank to a somewhat pettier obstacle

I' the way o' the world : they saw good days had been,

And good days, peradventure, still might be ;

Now that they overlooked the present cloud

Heavy upon the palace opposite.

And soon the thought took words and music thus : —

“ Harbor of many a stranger, free to friend,

Ever and always, O thou house o' the man

We mourn for ! Thee, Apollon's very self,

The lyric Puthian, deigned inhabit once,

Become a shepherd here in thy domains,

And pipe, adown the winding hill-side paths,

Pastoral marriage-poems to thy flocks

At feed : while with them fed in fellowship,

Through joy i' the music, spot-skin lynxes ; ay,

And lions too, the bloody company,

Came, leaving Othrus' dell ; and round thy lyre,

Phoibos, there danced the speckle-coated fawn, -

Pacing on lightsome fetlock past the pines

Tress-topped, the creature's natural boundary,
Into the open everywhere ; such heart
Had she within her, beating joyous beats,
At the sweet re-assurance of thy song !
Therefore the lot o' the master is to live
In a home multitudinous with herds,
Along by the fair-flowing Boibian lake,
Limited, that ploughed land and pasture-plain,
Only where stand the sun's steeds, stabled west
I' the cloud, by that mid-air which makes the clime
Of those Molossoi : and he rules as well
O'er the Aigaian, up to Pelion's shore, —
Sea-stretch without a port ! Such lord have we :
And here he opens house now, as of old,
Takes to the heart of it a guest again :
Though moist the eyelid of the master, still
Mourning his dear wife's body, dead but now !”

And they admired : nobility of soul
Was self-impelled to reverence, they saw ;
The best men ever prove the wisest too ;

Something instinctive guides them still aright.
And on each soul this boldness settled now,
That one, who revered the gods so much,
Would prosper yet : (or — I could wish it ran —
Who venerates the gods i' the main, will still
Practise things honest though obscure to judge.)

They ended, for Admetos entered now ;
Having disposed all duteously indoors,
He came into the outside world again,
Quiet as ever : but a quietude
Bent on pursuing its descent to truth,
As who must grope until he gain the ground
O' the dungeon doomed to be his dwelling now.
Already high o'erhead was piled the dusk,
When something pushed to stay his downward step,
Pluck back despair just reaching its repose.
He would have bidden the kind presence there
Observe that, — since the corpse was coming out,
Cared for in all things that befit the case,
Carried aloft, in decency and state,

To the last burial place and burning pile, —
'Twere proper friends addressed, as custom prompts,
Alkestis bound on her last journeying.

“ Ay, for we see thy father,” they subjoined,
“ Advancing as the aged foot best may ;
His servants, too : each bringing in his hand
Adornments for thy wife, all pomp that's due
To the downward-dwelling people.” And in truth,
By slow procession till they filled the stage,
Came Pheres, and his following, and their gifts.
You see, the worst of the interruption was,
It plucked back, with an over-hasty hand,
Admetos from descending to the truth,
(I told you) — put him on the brink again,
Full i' the noise and glare where late he stood :
With no fate fallen and irrecoverable,
But all things subject still to chance and change :
And that chance, — life, and that change, — happiness.
And with the low strife came the little mind :
He was once more the man might gain so much,

Life too and wife too, would his friends but help !
All he felt now was, that there faced him one
Supposed the likeliest, in emergency,
To help : and help, by mere self-sacrifice
So natural, it seemed as if the sire
Must needs lie open still to argument,
Withdraw the rash decision, not to die,
But rather live, though death would save his son : —
Argument like the ignominious grasp
O' the drowner whom his fellow grasps as fierce,
Each marvelling that the other needs must hold
Head out of water, though friend choke thereby.

And first the father's salutation fell.
Burthened, he came, in common with his child,
Who lost, none would gainsay, a good chaste spouse :
Yet such things must be borne, though hard to bear.
“ So, take this tribute of adornment, deep
In the earth let it descend along with her !
Behooves we treat the body with respect
— Of one who died, at least, to save thy life,

Kept me from being childless, nor allowed
That I, bereft of thee, should peak and pine
In melancholy age ; she, for the sex,
All of her sisters, put in evidence,
By daring such a feat, that female life
Might prove more excellent than men suppose.
O thou Alkestis ! ” out he burst in fine,
“ Who, while thou savedst this my son, didst raise
Also myself from sinking, — hail to thee !
Well be it with thee even in the house
Of Hades ! I maintain, if mortals must
Marry, this sort of marriage is the sole
Permitted those among them who are wise ! ”

So his oration ended. Like hates like :
Accordingly Admetos, — full i' the face
Of Pheres, his true father, outward shape
And inward fashion, body matching soul, —
Saw just himself when years should do their work
And re-enforce the selfishness inside
Until it pushed the last disguise away :

As when the liquid metal cools i' the mould,
Stands forth a statue: Bloodless, hard, cold bronze.
So, in old Pheres, young Admetos showed,
Pushed to completion: and a shudder ran,
And his repugnance soon had vent in speech:
Glad to escape outside, nor, pent within,
Find itself there fit food for exercise.
“Neither to this interment called by me
Comest thou, nor thy presence I account
Among the covetable proofs of love.
As for thy tribute of adornment, — no!
Ne'er shall she don it, ne'er in debt to thee
Be buried! What is thine, that keep thou still!
Then it behoved thee to commiserate
When I was perishing: but thou, who stood'st
Foot-free o' the snare, wast acquiescent then
That I, the young, should die, not thou, the old, —
Wilt thou lament this corpse thyself hast slain?
Thou wast not, then, true father to this flesh;
Nor she, who makes profession of my birth,
And styles herself my mother, neither she

Bore me : but, come of slave's blood, I was cast
Stealthily 'neath the bosom of thy wife !
Thou showedst, put to touch, the thing thou art,
Nor I esteem myself born child of thee !
Otherwise, thine is the pre-eminence
O'er all the world in cowardice of soul :
Who, being the old man thou art, arrived
Where life should end, didst neither will nor dare
Die for thy son, but left the task to her,
The alien woman, whom I well might think
Own, only mother both and father too !
And yet a fair strife had been thine to strive,
— Dying for thine own child ; and brief for thee
In any case, the rest of time to live ;
While I had lived, and she, our rest of time,
Nor I been left to groan in solitude.
Yet certainly all things which happy man
Ought to experience, thy experience grasped.
Thou wast a ruler through the bloom of youth,
And I was son to thee, recipient due
Of sceptre and demesne, — no need to fear

That dying thou should'st have an orphan house
For strangers to despoil. Nor yet wilt thou
Allege that as dishonoring, forsooth,
Thy length of days, I gave thee up to die, —
I, who have held thee in such reverence !
And in exchange for it, such gratitude
Thou, father, — thou award'st me, mother mine !
Go, lose no time, then, in begetting sons
Shall cherish thee in age, and, when thou diest,
Deck up and lay thee out, as corpses claim !
For never I, at least, with this my hand
Will bury thee : it is myself am dead
So far as lies in thee. But if I light
Upon another saviour, and still see
The sunbeam, — his, the child I call myself,
His, the old age that claims my cherishing.
How vainly do these aged pray for death,
Abuse the slow drag of senility !
But should death step up, nobody inclines
To die, nor age is now the weight it was ! ”
You see what all this poor pretentious talk

Tried at, — how weakness strove to hide itself
In bluster against weakness, — the loud word
To hide the little whisper, not so low
Already in that heart beneath those lips !
Ha ! could it be, who hated cowardice
Stood confessed craven, and who lauded so
Self-immolating love, himself had pushed
The loved one to the altar in his place ?
Friends interposed, would fain stop further play
O' the sharp-edged tongue : they felt love's champion
here
Had left an undefended point or two, .
The antagonist might profit by ; bade " Pause !
Enough the present sorrow ! Nor, O son,
Whet thus against thyself thy father's soul ! "

Ay, but old Pheres was the stouter stuff !
Admetos, at the flintiest of the heart,
Had so much soft in him as held a fire :
The other was all iron, clashed from flint
Its fire, but shed no spark and showed no bruise.

Did Pheres crave instruction as to facts?
He came, content, the ignoble word, for him,
Should lurk still in the blackness of each breast,
As sleeps the water-serpent half-surmised :
Not brought up to the surface at a bound,
By one touch of the idly-probing spear,
Reed-like against the unconquerable scale.
He came pacific, rather, as strength should,
Bringing the decent praise, the due regret,
And each banality prescribed of old.
Did he commence, "Why let her die for you?"
And rouse the coiled and quiet ugliness,
"What is so good to man as man's own life?"
No : but the other did : and, for his pains,
Out, full in face of him, the venom leapt.

"And whom dost thou make bold, son — Luvian slave,
Or Phrugian whether, money made thy ware,
To drive at with revilings? Know'st thou not
I, a Thessalian, from Thessalian sire
Spring, and am born legitimately free?"

Too arrogant art thou ; and, youngster-words
Casting against me, having had thy fling,
Thou goest not off as all were ended so !
I gave thee birth indeed and mastership
I' the mansion, brought thee up to boot : there ends
My owing, nor extends to die for thee !
Never did I receive it as a law
Hereditary, no, nor Greek at all,
That sires in place of sons were bound to die.
For, to thy sole and single self wast thou
Born, with whatever fortune, good or bad ;
Such things as bear bestowment, those thou hast ;
Already ruling widely, broad-lands, too,
Doubt not but I shall leave thee in due time :
For why ? My father left me them before.
Well then, where wrong I thee ? — of what defraud ?
Neither do thou die for this man, myself,
Nor let him die for thee ! — is all I beg.
Thou joyest seeing daylight : dost suppose
Thy father joys not too ? Undoubtedly,
Long I account the time to pass below,

And brief my span of days ; yet sweet the same :
Is it otherwise to thee who, impudent,
Didst fight off this same death, and livest now
Through having sneaked past fate apportioned thee,
And slain thy wife so? Cryest cowardice
On me, I wonder, thou — the poor poltroon
A very woman worsted, daring death
Just for the sake of thee, her handsome spark?
Shrewdly hast thou contrived how not to die
For evermore now : 'tis but still persuade
The wife for the time being — take thy place !
What, and thy friends who would not do the like
These dost thou carp at, craven thus thyself?
Crouch and be silent, craven! Comprehend
That, if thou lovest so that life of thine,
Why everybody loves his own life too :
So, good words henceforth ! If thou speak us ill,
Many and true an ill thing shalt thou hear !”

There you saw leap the hydra at full length !
Only, the old kept glorying the more,

The more the portent thus uncoiled itself,
Whereas the young man shuddered head to foot,
And shrank from kinship with the creature. Why
Such horror, unless what he hated most,
Vaunting itself outside, might fairly claim
Acquaintance with the counterpart at home :
I would the Chorus here had plucked up heart,
Spoken out boldly, and explained the man,
If not to men, to gods. That way, I think,
Sophokles would have led their dance and song.
Here they said simply "Too much evil spoke
On both sides !" As the young before, so now
They bade the old man leave abusing thus.

"Let him speak, — I have spoken !" said the youth ;
And so died out the wrangle by degrees,
In wretched bickering. "If thou wince at fact,
Behooved thee not prove faulty to myself !"

"Had I died for thee I had faulted more !"

“ All's one, then, for youth's bloom and age to die? ”

“ Our duty is to live one life, not two ! ”

“ Go then, and outlive Zeus, for aught I care ! ”

“ What, curse thy parents with no sort of cause ? ”

“ Curse, truly ! All thou lovest is long life ! ”

“ And dost not thou, too, all for love of life,
Carry out now, in place of thine, this corpse ? ”

“ Monument, rather, of thy cowardice,
Thou worst one ! ”

“ Not for me she died, I hope !
That thou wilt hardly say ! ”

“ No, simply this :
Would some day thou may'st come to need myself ! ”

“ Meanwhile, woo many wives — the more will die ! ”

“And so shame thee who never dared the like!”

“Dear is this light o’ the sun-god — dear, I say!”

“Proper conclusion for a beast to draw!”

“One thing is certain: there’s no laughing now,
As out thou bearest the poor dead old man!”

“Die when thou wilt, thou wilt die infamous!”

“And once dead, whether famed or infamous,
I shall not care!”

“Alas and yet again!

How full is age of impudency!”

“True!

Thou could’st not call thy young wife impudent:
She was found foolish merely.”

“Get thee gone!

And let me bury this my dead!”

“I go.

Thou buriest her whom thou didst murder first ;
Whereof there's some account to render yet
Those kinsfolk by the marriage-side ! I think
Brother Akastos may be classed, with me,
Among the beasts, not men, if he omit
Avenging upon thee his sister's blood !”

“Go to perdition, with thy housemate too,
Grow old all childlessly, with child alive,
Just as ye merit ! for to me, at least,
Beneath the same roof ne'er do ye return.
And did I need by heralds' help renounce
The ancestral hearth, I had renounced the same !
But we — since this woe, lying at our feet
I' the path, is to be borne — let us proceed,
And lay the body on the pyre.”

I think,

What, thro' this wretched wrangle, kept the man
From seeing clear — beside the cause I gave —
Was that the woe, himself described as full

I' the path before him, there did really lie —
Not roll into the abyss of dead and gone.
How, with Alkestis present, calmly crowned,
Was she so irrecoverable yet?
The bird, escaped, that's just on bough above,
The flower, let flutter half-way down the brink !
Not so detached seemed lifelessness from life,
But — one dear stretch beyond all straining yet —
And he might have had her at his heart once more.
But, in the critical minute, up there comes
The father and the fact, to trifle time !
“ To the pyre ! ” an instinct prompted : pallid face,
And passive arm, and pointed foot, O friends !
When these no longer shall absorb the sight,
Admetos will begin to see indeed
Who the true foe was, where the blows should fall !

So, the old selfish Pheres went his way,
Case-hardened as he came ; and left the youth
(Only half-selfish now, since sensitive)
To go on learning by a light the more,

As friends moved off, renewing dirge the while :

“Unhappy in thy daring ! Noble dame,
Best of the good, farewell ! With favoring face
May Hermes the infernal, Hades too,
Receive thee ! And if there, ay, there, — some touch
Of further dignity await the good,
Sharing with them, may'st thou sit throned by her
The Bride of Hades, in companionship !”

Wherewith, the sad procession wound away,
Made slowly for the suburb sepulchre.
And lo, — while still one's heart, in time and tune,
Paced after that symmetric step of Death
Mute-marching, to the mind's eye, at the head
O' the mourners — one hand pointing out their path
With the long pale terrific sword we saw,
The other leading, with grim tender grace,
Alkestis quieted and consecrate, —
Lo, life again knocked laughing at the door !
The world goes on, goes ever, in and through,

And out again o' the cloud. We faced about,
Fronted the palace where the mid-hall-door
Opened — not half, nor half of half, perhaps —
Yet wide enough to let out light and life,
And warmth, and bounty, and hope, and joy, at once.
Festivity burst wide, fruit rare and ripe
Crushed in the mouth of Bacchos, pulpy-prime,
All juice and flavor, save one single seed
Duly ejected from the god's nice lip,
Which lay o' the red edge, blackly visible —
To wit, a certain ancient servitor :
On whom the festal jaws o' the palace shut,
So, there he stood, a much-bewildered man.
Stupid? Nay, but sagacious in a sort :
Learned, life-long, i' the first outside of things,
Though bat for blindness to what lies beneath,
And needs a nail-scratch ere 'tis laid you bare.
This functionary was the trusted one
We saw deputed by Admetos late
To lead in Herakles and help him, soul
And body, to such snatched repose, snapped-up

Sustainment, as might do away the dust
O' the last encounter, knit each nerve anew
For that next onset sure to come at cry
O' the creature next assailed, — nay, should it prove
Only the creature that came forward now
To play the critic upon Herakles !

“ Many the guests ” — so he soliloquized
In musings burdensome to breast before,
When it seemed not too prudent, tongue should wag —
“ Many, and from all quarters of this world,
The guests I now have known frequent our house,
For whom I spread the banquet ; but than this,
Never a worse one did I yet receive
At the hearth here ! One who seeing, first of all
The master's sorrow, entered gate the same,
And had the hardihood to house himself.
Did things stop there ? But, modest by no means,
He took what entertainment lay to hand,
Knowing of our misfortune, — did we fail
In aught of the fit service, urged us serve

Domestics was a mother : myriad harms
She used to ward away from every one,
And mollify her husband's ireful mood.
I ask then, do I justly hate or no
This guest, this interloper on our grief?"

"Hate him and justly!" Here's the proper judge
Of what is due to the house from Herakles!
This man of much experience saw the first
O' the feeble duckings-down at destiny,
When King Admetos went his rounds, poor soul,
A-begging somebody to be so brave
As die for one afraid to die himself—
'Thou, friend? Thou, love? Father or mother, then!
None of you? What, Alkestis must Death catch?
O best of wives, one woman in the world!
But nowise droop: our prayers may still assist:
Let us try sacrifice; if those avail
Nothing, and gods avert their countenance,
Why, deep and durable the grief will be!"
Whereat the house, this worthy at its head,

Re-echoed "deep and durable our grief!"
This sage, who justly hated Herakles,
Did he suggest once "Rather I than she!"
Admonish the Turannos — "Be a man!
Bear thine own burden, never think to thrust
Thy fate upon another, and thy wife!
It were a dubious gain could death be doomed
That other, yet no passionatest plea
Of thine, to die instead, have force with fate;
Seeing thou lov'st Alkestis: what were life
Unlighted by the loved one? But to live —
Not merely live unsolaced by some thought,
Some word so poor — yet solace all the same —
As 'Thou i' the sepulchre, Alkestis, say!
Would I, or would not I, to save thy life,
Die, and die on, and die forever more?'
No! but to read red-written up and down
The world, 'This is the sunshine, this the shade,
This is some pleasure of earth, sky, or sea,
Due to that other dead, that thou may'st live!'
Such were a covetable gain to thee?

Go die, fool, and be happy while 'tis time !”
One word of counsel in this kind, methinks,
Had fallen to better purpose than Ai, Ai,
Pheu, pheu, e, papai, and a pother of praise
O' the best, best, best one ! Nothing was to hate
In king Admetos, Pheres, and the rest
O' the household down to his heroic self !
'This was the one thing hateful : Herakles
Had flung into the presence, frank and free,
Out from the labor into the repose,
Ere out again and over head and ears
I' the heart of labor, all for love of men :
Making the most o' the minute, that the soul
And body, strained to height a minute since,
Might lie relaxed in joy, this breathing-space,
For man's sake more than ever ; till the bow,
Restrung o' the sudden, at first cry for help,
Should send some unimagined shaft
'True to the aim and shatteringly through
The plate-mail of a monster, save man so.
He slew the pest o' the marish yesterday :

To-morrow he would bit the flame-breathed stud
That fed on man's-flesh : and this day between —
Because he held it natural to die,
And fruitless to lament a thing past cure,
So, took his fill of food, wine, song, and flowers,
Till the new labor claimed him soon enough, —
“Hate him and justly !”

True, Charopé mine !

The man surmised not Herakles lay hid
I' the guest ; or knowing it, was ignorant
That still his lady lived, for Herakles ;
Or else judged lightness needs must indicate
This or the other caitiff quality ;
And therefore — had been right if not so wrong !
For who expects the sort of him will scratch
A nail's depth, scrape the surface just to see
What peradventure underlies the same ?

So, he stood petting up his puny hate,
Parent-wise, proud of the ill-favored babe.
Not long ! A great hand, careful lest it crush,

Startled him on the shoulder : up he stared ;
And over him who stood but Herakles ?
There smiled the mighty presence, all one smile,
And no touch more of the world-weary god,
Through the brief respite ! Just a garland's grace
About the brow, a song to satisfy
Head, heart, and breast, and trumpet-lips at once,
A solemn draught of true religious wine,
And — how should I know ? — half a mountain goat
Torn up and swallowed down, — the feast was fierce
But brief : all cares and pains took wing and flew,
Leaving the hero ready to begin
And help mankind, whatever woe came next,
Even though what came next should be nought more
Than the mean querulous mouth o' the man, remarked
Pursing its grievance up till patience failed,
And the sage needs must rush out, as we saw,
To sulk outside and pet his hate in peace.
By no means would the Helper have it so :
He who was just about to handle brutes
In Thrace, and bit the jaws which breathed the flame, --

Well, if a good laugh and a jovial word
Could bridle age which blew bad humors forth,
That were a kind of help too !

“Thou, there !” hailed

This grand benevolence the ungracious one —
“Why look'st so solemn and so thought-absorbed ?
To guests, a servant should not sour-faced be,
But do the honors with a mind urbane.
While thou, contrariwise, beholding here
Arrive thy master's comrade, hast for him
A churlish visage, all one beetle-brow —
Having regard to grief that's out-of-door !
Come hither, and so get to grow more wise !
Things mortal — know'st the nature that they have ?
No, I imagine ! whence could knowledge spring ?
Give ear to me, then ! For all flesh to die,
Is Nature's due ; nor is there any one
Of mortals with assurance he shall last
The coming morrow : for, what's born of chance
Invisibly proceeds the way it will,
Not to be learned, no fortune-teller's prize.

This, therefore, having heard and known through me,
Gladden thyself! Drink! Count the day-by-day
Existence thine, and all the other — chance!
Ay, and pay homage also to, by far
The sweetest divinities for man,
Kupris! Benignant goddess will she prove!
But as for aught else, leave and let things be!
And trust my counsel, if I seem to speak
To purpose — as I do apparently.
Wilt not thou, then, — discarding over much
Mournfulness, do away with this shut door,
Come drink along with me, be-garlanded
This fashion? Do so, — and, — I well know what, —
From this stern mood, this shrunk-up state of mind,
'The pit-pat fall o' the flagon-juice down throat,
Soon will dislodge thee from bad harborage!
Men being mortal, should think mortal-like:
Since to your solemn, brow-contracting sort,
All of them, — so I lay down law at least, —
Life is not truly life but misery."

Whereto the man with softened surliness :

“ We know as much : but deal with matters, now,
Hardly befitting mirth and revelry.”

“ No intimate, this woman that is dead :

Mourn not too much ! For, those o' the house itself,
Thy masters live, remember !”

“ Live indeed ?

Ah, thou know'st nought o' the woe within these
walls !”

“ I do — unless thy master spoke me false
Somehow !”

“ Ay, ay, too much he loves a guest,
Too much, that master mine !” so muttered he.

“ Was it improper he should treat me well,
Because an alien corpse was in the way ?”

“ No alien, but most intimate indeed !”

“ Can it be, some woe was, he told me not? ”

“ Farewell and go thy way! Thy cares for thee —
To us, our master's sorrow is a care.”

“ This word begins no tale of alien woe! ”

“ Had it been other woe than intimate,
I could have seen thee feast, nor felt amiss.”

“ What! have I suffered strangely from my host? ”

“ Thou cam'st not at a fit reception-time :
With sorrow here beforehand ; and thou seest
Shorn hair, black robes.”

“ But who is it that's dead?
Some child gone? or the aged sire perhaps? ”

“ Admetos' wife, then! she has perished, guest! ”

“ How sayest? And did ye house me all the same? ”

“Aye; for he had thee in that reverence
He dared not turn thee from his door away!”

“O hapless, and bereft of what a mate!”

“All of us now are dead, not she alone!”

“But I divined it! seeing, as I did,
His eye that ran with tears, his close-clipt hair,
His countenance! Though he persuaded me,
Saying it was a stranger's funeral
He went with to the grave: against my wish,
He forced on me that I should enter doors,
Drink in the hall o' the hospitable man
Circumstanced so! And do I revel yet
With wreath on head? But—thou to hold thy peace,
Nor tell me what a woe oppressed my friend!
Where is he gone to bury her? Where am I
To go and find her?”

“By the road that leads
Straight to Larissa, thou wilt see the tomb,
Out of the suburb, a carved sepulchre.”

So said he, and therewith dismissed himself
Inside to his lamenting: somewhat soothed,
However, that he had adroitly dashed
The mirth of the great creature: oh, he marked
The movement of the mouth, how lip pressed lip,
And either eye forgot to shine, as, fast,
He plucked the chaplet from his forehead, dashed
The myrtle-sprays down, trod them underfoot!
And all the joy and wonder of the wine
Withered away, like fire from off a brand
The wind blows over — beacon though it be,
Whose merry ardor only meant to make
Somebody all the better for its blaze,
And save lost people in the dark: quenched now!

Not long quenched! As the flame, just hurried off
The brand's edge, suddenly renews its bite,
Tasting some richness caked i' the core o' the tree,—
Pine, with a blood that's oil, — and triumphs up
Pillar-wise to the sky and saves the world:
So, in a spasm and splendor of resolve,

All at once did the god surmount the man.

“ O much-enduring heart and hand of mine !
Now show what sort of son she bore to Zeus,
That daughter of Elektruon, Tirun's child.
Alkmené ! for that son must needs save now
The just-dead lady : ay, establish here
I' the house again Alkestis, bring about
Comfort and succor to Admetos so !
I will go lie in wait for Death, black-stoled
King of the corpses ! I shall find him, sure,
Drinking beside the tomb, o' the sacrifice :
And if I lie in ambushade, and leap
Out of my lair, and seize — encircle him
Till one hand join the other round about —
There lives not who shall pull him out from me,
Rib-mauled, before he let the woman go !
But even say I miss the booty, — say,
Death comes not to the boltered blood, — why then,
Down go I, to the unsunned dwelling-place
Of Koré and the king there, — make demand,

Confident I shall bring Alkestis back,
So as to put her in the hands of him
My host, that housed me, never drove me off:
Though stricken with sore sorrow, hid the stroke,
Being a noble heart and honoring me!
Who of Thessalians, more than this man, loves
The stranger? Who, that now inhabits Greece?
Wherefore he shall not say the man was vile
Whom he befriended, — native noble heart ! ”

So, one look upward, as if Zeus might laugh
Approved of his human progeny, —
One summons of the whole magnific frame,
Each sinew to its service, — up he caught,
And over shoulder cast, the lion-shag,
Let the club go, — for had he not those hands?
And so went striding off, on that straight way
Leads to Larissa and the suburb tomb.
Gladness be with thee, Helper of our world !
I think this is the authentic sign and seal
Of godship, that it ever waxes glad,

And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts
Into a rage to suffer for mankind,
And recommence at sorrow: drops like seed
After the blossom, ultimate of all.
Say, does the seed scorn earth, and seek the sun?
Surely it has no other end and aim
Than to drop, once more to die into the ground,
Taste cold and darkness and oblivion there:
And thence rise, tree-like grow through pain to joy,
More joy and most joy, — do man good again.

So, off strode to the struggle Herakles.
When silence close behind the lion-garb,
Back came our dull fact settling in its place,
Though heartiness and passion half-dispersed
The inevitable fate. And presently
In came the mourners from the funeral,
One after one, until we hoped the last
Would be Alkestis and so end our dream.
Could they have really left Alkestis lone
I' the wayside sepulchre! Home, all save she!

And when Admetos felt that it was,
By the stand-still : when he lifted head and face
From the two hiding hands and peplos' fold,
And looked forth, knew the palace, knew the hills,
Knew the plains, knew the friendly frequency there,
And no Alkestis any more again,
Why the whole woe billow-like broke on him.

“ O hateful entry, hateful countenance
O' the widowed halls ! ” — he moaned. “ What was to be ?
Go there ? Stay here ? Speak, not speak ? All was now
Mad and impossible alike ; one way
And only one was sane and safe — to die :
Now he was made aware how dear is death,
How lovable the dead are, how the heart
Yearns in us to go hide where they repose,
When we find sunbeams do no good to see,
Nor earth rests rightly where our footsteps fall.
His wife had been to him the very pledge,
Sun should be sun, earth — earth ; the pledge was robbed,
Pact broken, and the world was left no world.”

He stared at the impossible, mad life :
Stood, while they bade " Advance — advance ! Go deep
Into the utter dark, thy palace-core !"
They tried what they called comfort, " touched the quick
Of the ulceration in his soul," he said,
With memories, — " once thy joy was thus and thus !"
True comfort were to let him fling himself
Into the hollow grave o' the tomb, and so
Let him lie dead along with all he loved.

One bade him note that his own family
Boasted a certain father whose sole son,
Worthy bewailment, died : and yet the sire
Bore stoutly up against the blow and lived ;
For all that he was childless now, and prone
Already to gray hairs, far on in life.
Could such a good example miss effect ?
Why fix foot, stand so, staring at the house ?
Why not go in, as that wise kinsman would ?

" O that arrangement of the house I know !

How can I enter, how inhabit thee,
Now that one cast of fortune changes all ?
Oh, me ! for much divides the then from now !
Then — with those pine-tree torches, Pelian pomp
And marriage-hymns, I entered, holding high
The hand of my dear wife ; while many-voiced
The revelry that followed me and her
That's dead now, — friends felicitating both,
As who were lofty-lineaged, each of us
Born of the best, two wedded and made one ;
Now — wail is wedding-chant's antagonist,
And, for white peplos, stoles in sable state
Herald my way to the deserted couch ! ”

The one word more they ventured was, “ This grief
Befell thee witless of what sorrow means,
Close after prosperous fortune : but, reflect !
Thou hast saved soul and body. Dead, thy wife —
Living, the love she left. What's novel here ?
Many the man, from whom Death long ago
Loosed the life-partner ! ”

Then Admetos spoke :

Turned on the comfort, with no tears, this time.

He was beginning to be like his wife.

I told you of that pressure to the point,

Word slow pursuing word in monotone,

Alkestis spoke with ; so Admetos, now,

Solemnly bore the burden of the truth.

And as the voice of him grew, gathered strength,

And groaned on, and persisted to the end,

We felt how deep had been descent in grief,

And with what change he came up now to light,

And left behind such littleness as tears.

“ Friends, I account the fortune of my wife

Happier than mine, though it seem otherwise :

For, her indeed no grief will ever touch,

And she from many a labor pauses now,

Renowned one ! Whereas I, who ought not live,

But do live, by evading destiny,

Sad life am I to lead, I learn at last !

For how shall I bear going in-doors here ?

Accosting whom ? By whom saluted back,

Shall I have joyous entry? Whither turn?
Inside, the solitude will drive me forth,
When I behold the empty bed — my wife's —
The seat she used to sit upon, the floor
Unsprinkled as when dwellers loved the cool,
The children that will clasp my knees about.
Cry for their mother back : these servants too
Moaning for what a guardian they have lost !
Inside my house such circumstance awaits.
Outside, — Thessalian people's marriage-feasts
And gatherings for talk will harass me,
With overflow of women everywhere ;
It is impossible I look on them —
Familiars of my wife and just her age !
And then, whoever is a foe of mine,
And lights on me — why, this will be his word —
' See there ! alive ignobly, there he skulks
That played the dastard when it came to die,
And, giving her he wedded, in exchange,
Kept himself out of Hades safe and sound,
The coward ! Do you call that creature — man ?

He hates his parents for declining death,
Just as if he himself would gladly die !'
This sort of reputation shall I have,
Beside the other ills enough in store.
Ill-famed, ill-faring, — what advantage, friends,
Do you perceive I gain by life for death ?”
That was the truth. Vexed waters sank to smooth ;
'T was only when the last of bubbles broke,
The latest circlet widened all away,
And left a placid level, that up swam
To the surface the drowned truth, in dreadful change.
So, through the quiet and submission, — ay,
Spite of some strong words — (for you miss the tone)
The grief was getting to be infinite —
Grief, friends fell back before. Their office shrank
To that old solace of humanity —
“ Being born mortal, bear grief ! Why born else ? ”
And they could only meditate anew.

“ They, too, upborne by airy help of song,
And haply science, which can find the stars,

Had searched the heights : had sounded depths as well
By catching much at books where logic lurked,
Yet nowhere found they aught could overcome
Necessity : not any medicine served,
Which Thracian tablets treasure, Orphic voice
Wrote itself down upon : nor remedy
Which Phoibos gave to the Asklepiadai ;
Cutting the roots of many a virtuous herb
To solace overburdened mortals. None !
Of this sole goddess, never may we go
To altar nor to image ; sacrifice
She hears not. All to pray for is, — ‘ Approach !
But, oh, no harder on me, awful one,
Than heretofore ! Let life endure thee still !
For, whatsoever Zeus’ nod decree, that same
In concert with thee hath accomplishment,
Iron, the very stuff o’ the Chaluboi,
Thou by sheer strength dost conquer and subdue ;
Nor, of that harsh abrupt resolve of thine,
Any relenting is there !’

“O my king!

Thee also, in the shackles of those hands,
Unshunnable, the goddess grasped! Yet, bear!
Since never wilt thou lead from underground
The dead ones, wail thy worst! If mortals die,—
The very children of immortals, too,
Dropped 'mid our darkness, these decay as sure!
Dear indeed was she while among us: dear,
Now she is dead, must she forever be:
Thy portion was to clasp, within thy couch,
The noblest of all women as a wife.
Nor be the tomb of her supposed some heap
That hides mortality: but like the gods
Honored, a veneration to a world
Of wanderers! Oft the wanderer, struck thereby,
Who else had sailed past in his merchant-ship,
Ay, he shall leave ship, land, long wind his way
Up to the mountain-summit, till there break
Speech forth, ‘So, this was she, then, died of old
To save her husband! now a deity
She bends above us. Hail, benignant one!

Give good ! ' Such voices so will supplicate.

But — can it be ? Alkmené's offspring comes,
Admetos ! — to thy house advances here ! ”

I doubt not, they supposed him decently

Dead somewhere in that winter world of Thrace —

Vanquished by one o' the Bistones, or else

Victim to some mad steed's voracity —

For did not friends prognosticate as much ?

It were a new example to the point,

That “ children of immortals, dropped by stealth

Into our darkness, die as sure as we ! ”

A case to quote and comfort people with :

But, as for lamentation, *ai* and *pheu*,

Right-minded subjects kept them for their lord.

Ay, he it was advancing ! In he strode,

And took his stand before Admetos, — turned

Now by despair to such a quietude,

He neither raised his face nor spoke, this time,

The while his friend surveyed him steadily.

That friend looked rough with fighting : had he strained

Worst brute to breast was ever strangled yet?
Somehow, a victory — for there stood the strength,
Happy, as always ; something grave, perhaps ;
The great vein-cordage on the fret-worked brow,
Black-swollen, beaded yet with battle-drops
The yellow hair o' the hero ! — his big frame
A-quiver with each muscle sinking back
Into the sleepy smooth it leaped from late.
Under the great guard of one arm, there leant
A shrouded something, live and woman-like,
Propped by the heart-beats 'neath the lion-coat.
When he had finished his survey, it seemed,
The heavings of the heart began subside,
The helping breath returned, and last the smile
Shone out, all Herakles was back again,
As the words followed the saluting hand.

“ To friendly man, behooves we freely speak,
Admetos ! — nor keep buried, deep in breast,
Blame we leave silent. I assuredly
Judged myself proper, if I should approach

By accident calamities of thine,
To be demonstrably thy friend : but thou
Told'st me not of the corpse then claiming care,
That was thy wife's, but didst instal me guest
I' the house here, as if busied with a grief
Indeed, but then, mere grief beyond thy gate :
And so, I crowned my head, and to the gods
Poured my libations in thy dwelling-place,
With such misfortune round me. And I blame —
Certainly blame thee, having suffered thus !
But still I would not pain thee, pained enough :
So let it pass ! Wherefore I seek thee now,
Having turned back again though onward bound,
That I will tell thee. Take and keep for me
This woman, till I come thy way again,
Driving before me, having killed the king
O' the Bistones, that drove of Thracian Steeds :
In that case, give the woman back to me !
But should I fare, — as fare I fain would not,
Seeing I hope to prosper and return, —
Then, I bequeath her as thy household slave.

She came into my hands with good hard toil !
For, what find I, when started on my course,
But certain people, a whole country-side,
Holding a wrestling-bout? as good to me
As a new labor : whence I took, and here
Come keeping with me, this, the victor's prize.
For, such as conquered in the easy work,
Gained horses which they drove away : and such
As conquered in the harder, — those who boxed
And wrestled, — cattle ; and, to crown the prize,
A woman followed. Chancing as I did,
Base were it to forego this fame and gain ?
Well, as I said, I trust her to thy care :
No woman I have kidnapped, understand !
But good hard toil has done it : here I come !
Some day, who knows? even thou wilt praise the feat !

Admetos raised his face and eyed the pair :
Then, hollowly and with submission, spoke,
And spoke again, and spoke time after time,
When he perceived the silence of his friend

Would not be broken by consenting word.
As a tired slave goes adding stone to stone
Until he stop some current that molests,
So poor Admetos piled up argument
Vainly against the purpose, all too plain
In that great brow acquainted with command.

“ Nowise dishonoring, nor 'mid my foes
Ranking thee, did I hide my wife's ill fate.
But it were grief superimposed on grief,
Should'st thou have hastened to another home.
My own woe was enough for me to weep !
But, for this woman, — if it so may be, —
Bid some Thessalian, — I entreat thee, king ! —
Keep her, — who has not suffered like myself !
Many of the Pheraioi welcome thee !
Be no reminder to me of my ills !
I could not, if I saw her come to live,
Restrain the tear ! Inflict on me, diseased,
No new disease : woe bends me down enough !
Then, where could she be sheltered in my house,

Female and young too? For that she is young,
The vesture and adornment prove. Reflect!
Should such an one inhabit the same roof
With men? And how, mixed up, a girl, with youths,
Shall she keep pure, in that case? No light task
To curb the May-day youngster, Herakles!
I only speak because of care for thee!
Or must I, in avoidance of such harm,
Make her to enter, lead her life within
The chamber of the dead one, all apart?
How shall I introduce this other couch,
This where Alkestis lay? A double blame
I apprehend: first, from the citizens—
Lest some tongue of them taunt that I betray
My benefactress, fall into the snare
Of a new fresh face: then, the dead one's self,—
Will she not blame me likewise? Worthy, sure,
Of worship from me! circumspect, my ways,
And jealous of a fault, are bound to be.
But thou,—O woman! whosoe'er thou art,—
Know, thou hast all the form, art like as like

Alkestis, in the bodily shape ! Ah, me !
Take, — by the gods ! — this woman from my sight,
Lest thou undo me, the undone before !
Since I seem — seeing her — as if I saw
My own wife ! And confusions cloud my heart,
And from my eyes the springs break forth ! Ah, me
Unhappy ! — how I taste for the first time
My misery in all its bitterness !”

Whereat the friends conferred : “ The chance, in truth,
Was an untoward one — none said otherwise.
Still, what a god comes giving, good or bad,
That, one should take and bear with. Take her, then !”

Herakles, — not unfastening his hold
On that same misery, beyond mistake
Hoarse in the words, convulsive in the face, —
“ I would that I had such a power,” said he,
“ As to lead up into the light again
Thy very wife, and grant thee such a grace !”

“ Well do I know thou would'st : but where the hope?
There is no bringing back the dead to light.”

“ Be not extravagant in grief, no less !
Bear it, by augury of better things ! ”

“ 'Tis easier to advise ‘ bear up, ’ than bear ! ”

“ But how carve way i' the life that lies before,
If bent on groaning ever for the past ? ”

“ I myself know that : but a certain love
Allures me to the choice I shall not change.”

“ Ay, but, still loving dead ones, still makes weep ! ”

“ And let it be so ! She has ruined me,
And still more than I say : that answers all.”

“ Oh, thou hast lost a brave wife ! who disputes ? ”

“ So brave a one — that he whom thou behold'st
Will never more enjoy his life again ! ”

“ Time will assuage ! The evil yet is young ! ”

“ Time, thou may'st say, will ; if time mean to die.”

‘ A wife — the longing for new marriage-joys
Will stop thy sorrow ! ”

“ Hush, friend, — hold thy peace !
What hast thou said ! I could not credit ear ! ”

“ How then ? Thou wilt not marry, then, but keep
A widowed couch ? ”

“ There is not any one
Of womankind shall couch with whom thou seest ! ”

“ Dost think to profit thus in any way
The dead one ? ”

“ Her, wherever she abide,
My duty is to honor.”

“ And I praise —
Indeed I praise thee ! Still, thou hast to pay
The price of it, in being held a fool ! ”

“ Fool call me — only one name call me not !
Bridegroom ! ”

“ No : it was praise, I portioned thee,
Of being good true husband to thy wife ! ”

‘ When I betray her though she is no more,
May I die ! ’

And the thing he said was true ;
For out of Herakles a great glow broke.
There stood a victor worthy of a prize :
The violet-crown that withers on the brow
Of the half-hearted claimant. Oh, he knew
The signs of battle hard fought and well won,
This queller of the monsters ! — knew his friend
Planted firm foot, now, on the loathly thing
That was Admetos late ! “ would die,” he knew,
Ere let the reptile raise its crest again.

If that was truth, why try the true friend more ?

“ Then, since thou canst be faithful to the death,
Take, deep into thy house, my dame ! ” smiled he.

“ Not so ! — I pray, by thy Progenitor ! ”

“ Thou wilt mistake in disobeying me ! ”

“ Obeying thee, I have to break my heart ! ”

“ Obey me ! Who knows but the favor done
May fall into its place as duty too ? ”

So, he was humble, would decline no more
Bearing a burden : he just sighed, “ Alas !
Wouldst thou hadst never brought this prize from game ! ”

“ Yet, when I conquered there, thou conqueredst ! ”

“ All excellently urged ! Yet — spite of all,

Bear with me ! let the woman go away !”

“ She shall go, if needs must: but ere she go,
See if there *is* need !”

“ Need there is ! At least,
Except I make thee angry with me, so !”

“ But I persist, because I have my spice
Of intuition likewise: take the dame !”

“ Be thou the victor, then ! But certainly
Thou dost thy friend no pleasure in the act !”

“ Oh, time will come when thou shalt praise me !
Now —
Only obey !”

“ Then, servants, since my house
Must needs receive this woman, take her there !”

“ I shall not trust this woman to the care
Of servants.”

“ Why, conduct her in thyself,
If that seem preferable ! ”

“ I prefer,
With thy good leave, to place her in thy hands ! ”

“ I would not touch her ! Entry to the house —
That, I concede thee. ”

“ To thy sole right-hand,
I mean to trust her ! ”

“ King ! Thou wrenchest this
Out of me by main force, if I submit ! ”

“ Courage, friend ! Come, stretch hand forth ! Good !
Now touch
The stranger-woman ! ”

“ There ! A hand I stretch —
As though it meant to cut off Gorgon's head ! ”

“ Hast hold of her ? ”

“ Fast hold. ”

“ Why, then, hold fast,
And have her ! and, one day, asseverate

Thou wilt, I think, thy friend, the son of Zeus,
He was the gentle guest to entertain !
Look at her ! See if she, in any way,
Present thee with resemblance of thy wife !

Ah, but the tears come, find the words at fault :
There is no telling how the hero twitched
The veil off : and there stood, with such fixed eyes
And such slow smile, Alkestis' silent self !
It was the crowning grace of that great heart,
To keep back joy : procrastinate the truth
Until the wife, who had made proof and found
The husband wanting, might essay once more,
Hear, see, and feel him renovated now —
Able to do, now, all herself had done,
Risen to the height of her : so, hand in hand,
The two might go together, live and die.

Beside, when he found speech, you guess the speech.
He could not think he saw his wife again :
It was some mocking god that used the bliss

To make him mad ! Till Herakles must help :
Assure him that no spectre mocked at all ;
He was embracing whom he buried once.
Still, — did he touch, might he address the true, —
True eye, true body, of the true live wife ?

And Herakles said, smiling “ All was truth.
Spectre ? Admetos had not made his guest
One who played ghost-invoker, or such cheat !
Oh, he might speak and have response, in time !
All heart could wish was gained now — life for death :
Only, the rapture must not grow immense :
Take care, nor wake the envy of the gods ! ”

“ O thou, of greatest Zeus true son ! ” — so spoke
Admetos when the closing word must come,
“ Go ever in a glory of success,
And save, that sire, his offspring to the end !
For thou hast — only thou — raised me and mine
Up again to this light and life ! ” Then asked
Tremblingly, how was trod the perilous path

Out of the dark into the light and life :
How it had happened with Alkestis there.

And Herakles said little, but enough —
How he engaged in combat with that king
O' the demons : how the field of contest lay
By the tomb's self : how he sprang from ambushade,
Captured Death, caught him in that pair of hands.

But all the time, Alkestis moved not once
Out of the set gaze and the silent smile ;
And a cold fear ran through Admetos' frame :
“ Why does she stand and front me, silent thus ? ”

Herakles solemnly replied, “ Not yet
Is it allowable thou hear the things
She has to tell thee : let evanish quite
That consecration to the lower gods,
And on our upper world the third day rise !
Lead her in, meanwhile ; good and true thou art,
Good, true, remain thou ! Practise piety

To stranger-guests the old way! So, farewell!
Since forth I fare, fulfil my urgent task
Set by the king, the son of Sthenelos."
Fain would Admetos keep that splendid smile
Ever to light him. "Stay with us, thou heart!
Remain our house-friend!"

"At some other day!

Now, of necessity, I haste!" smiled he.

"But may'st thou prosper, go forth on a foot
Sure to return! Through all the tetrarchy,
Command my subjects that they institute
Thanksgiving-dances for the glad event,
And bid each altar smoke with sacrifice!
For we are minded to begin a fresh
Existence, better than the life before;
Seeing, I own myself supremely blest."

Whereupon all the friendly moralists
Drew this conclusion: chirped, each beard to each:
"Manifold are thy shapings, Providence!

Many a hopeless matter gods arrange.
What we expected, never came to pass :
What we did not expect, gods brought to bear ;
So have things gone, this whole experience through ! ”

Ah, but if you had seen the play itself !
They say, my poet failed to get the prize :
Sophokles got the prize, — great name ! They say,
Sophokles also means to make a piece,
Model a new Admetos, a new wife :
Success to him ! One thing has many sides.
The great name ! But no good supplants a good,
Nor beauty undoes beauty. Sophokles
Will carve and carry a fresh cup, brimful
Of beauty and good, firm to the altar-foot,
And glorify the Dionusiac shrine :
Not clash against this crater, in the place
Where the god put it when his mouth had drained,

To the last dregs, libation life-blood-like,
And praised Euripides for evermore —
The Human with his droppings of warm tears.

Still, since one thing may have so many sides,
I think I see how, — far from Sophokles, —
You, I, or any one, might mould a new
Admetos, new Alkestis. Ah, that brave
Bounty of poets, the one royal race
That ever was, or will be, in this world !
They give no gift that bounds itself, and ends
I' the giving and the taking: theirs so breeds
I' the heart and soul o' the taker, so transmutes
The man who only was a man before,
That he grows god-like in his turn, can give —
He also: share the poet's privilege,
Bring forth new good, new beauty, from the old.
As though the cup that gave the wine, gave, too,
The god's prolific giver of the grape,
That vine, was wont to find out, fawn around
His footstep, springing still to bless the dearth,

At bidding of a Mainad. So with me :
For I have drunk this poem, quenched my thirst,
Satisfied heart and soul — yet more remains !
Could we too make a poem ? Try at least,
Inside the head, what shape the rose-mists take !

When God Apollon took, for punishment,
A mortal form, and sold himself a slave
To King Admetos till a term should end, —
Not only did he make, in servitude,
Such music, while he fed the flocks and herds,
As saved the pasturage from wrong or fright,
Curing rough creatures of ungentleness :
Much more did that melodious wisdom work
Within the heart o' the master : there, ran wild
Many a lust and greed that grow to strength
By preying on the native pity and care,
Would else, all undisturbed, possess the land.

And these, the god so tamed, with golden tongue,
That, in the plenitude of youth and power,

Admetos vowed himself to rule thenceforth
In Pherai solely for his people's sake,
Subduing to such end each lust and greed
That dominates the natural charity.

And so the struggle ended. Right ruled might :
And soft yet brave, and good yet wise, the man
Stood up to be a monarch ; having learned
The worth of life, life's worth would he bestow
On all whose lot was cast, to live or die,
As he determined for the multitude.
So stands a statue : pedestalled sublime,
Only that it may wave the thunder off,
And ward, from winds that vex, a world below.

And then, — as if a whisper found its way
E'en to the sense o' the marble, — “ Vain thy vow !
The royalty of its resolve, that head
Shall hide within the dust ere day be done :
That arm, its outstretch of beneficence ;
Shall have a speedy ending on the earth :

Lie patient, prone, while light some cricket leaps
And takes possession of the masterpiece,
To sit, sing louder as more near the sun.
For why? A flaw was in the pedestal ;
Who knows? A worm's work! Sapped, the certain
fate
O' the statue is to fall, and thine to die!"
Whereat the monarch, calm, addressed himself
To die, but bitterly the soul outbroke —
"O prodigality of life, blind waste
I' the world, of power profuse without the will
To make life do its work, deserve its day!
My ancestors pursued their pleasure, poured
The blood o' the people out in idle war,
Or took occasion of some weary peace
To bid men dig down deep or build up high,
Spend bone and marrow that the king might feast
Intrenched and buttressed from the vulgar gaze.
Yet they all lived, nay, lingered to old age:
As though Zeus loved that they should laugh to scorn
The vanity of seeking other ends,

In rule, than just the ruler's pastime. They
Lived ; I must die."

And, as some long last moan
Of a minor suddenly is propped beneath
By note which, new-struck, turns the wail, that was,
Into a wonder and a triumph, so
Began Alkestis : "Nay, thou art to live !
The glory that, in the disguise of flesh,
Was helpful to our house, — he prophesied
The coming fate : whereon, I pleaded sore
That he, — I guessed a god, who to his couch
Amid the clouds must go and come again,
While we were darkling, — since he loved us both,
He should permit thee, at whatever price,
To live and carry out to heart's content
Soul's purpose, turn each thought to very deed,
Nor let Zeus lose the monarch meant in thee.

To which Apollon, with a sunset smile,
Sadly — 'And so should mortals arbitrate !

' It were unseemly if they aped us gods,
And, mindful of our chain of consequence,
Lost care of the immediate earthly link :
Forewent the comfort of life's little hour,
In prospect of some cold abysmal blank
Alien eternity, — unlike the time
They know, and understand to practise with, —
No, — our eternity, — no heart's blood, bright
And warm outpoured in its behoof, would tinge
Never so palely, warm a whit the more ;
Whereas retained and treasured — left to beat
Joyously on, a life's length, in the breast
O' the loved and loving, — it would throb itself
Through, and suffuse the earthly tenement,
Transform it, even as your mansion here
Is love-transformed into a temple-home
Where I, a god, forget the Olumpian glow,
I' the feel of human richness like the rose ;
Your hopes and fears, so blind and yet so sweet,
With death about them. Therefore, well in thee
To look, not on eternity, but time :

To apprehend that, should Admetos die,
All we gods purposed in him dies as sure :
'That, life's link snapping, all our chain is lost.
And yet a mortal glance might pierce, methinks,
Deeper into the seeming dark of things,
And learn, no fruit, man's life can bear, will fade :
Learn, if Admetos die now, so much more
Will pity for the frailness found in flesh,
Will terror at the earthly chance and change
Frustrating wisest scheme of noblest soul,
Will these go wake the seeds of good asleep
Throughout the world : as oft a rough wind sheds
The unripe promise of some field-flower, — true !
But loosens too the level, and lets breathe
A thousand captives for the year to come.
Nevertheless, obtain thy prayer, stay fate ?
Admetos lives — if thou wilt die for him !'

So was the pact concluded that I die,
And thou live on, live for thyself, for me,
For all the world. Embrace and bid me hail,

Husband, because I have the victory :
Am heart, soul, head to foot, one happiness !”

Whereto Admetos, in a passionate cry,
“ Never, by that true word Apollon spoke !
All the unwise wish is unwished, O wife !
Let purposes of Zeus fulfil themselves,
If not through me, then through some other man !
Still, in myself he had a purpose too,
Inalienably mine, to end with me :
This purpose — that, throughout my earthly life,
Mine should be mingled and made up with thine, —
And we two prove one force, and play one part,
And do one thing. Since death divides the pair,
’Tis well that I depart, and thou remain
Who wast to me as spirit is to flesh :
Let the flesh perish, be perceived no more,
So thou, the spirit that informed the flesh,
Bend yet a while, a very flame above
The rift I drop into the darkness by, —
And bid remember, flesh and spirit once

Worked in the world, one body, for man's sake.
Never be that abominable show
Of passive death, without a quickening life—
Admetos only, no Alkestis now!”

Then she, “ O thou Admetos ! must the pile
Of truth on truth, which needs but one truth more
To tower up in completeness, trophy-like,
Emprize of man, and triumph of the world,
Must it go ever to the ground again
Because of some faint heart or faltering hand,
Which we, that breathless world about the base,
Trusted should carry safe to altitude,
Superimpose o' the summit our supreme
Achievement, our victorious coping-stone ?
Shall thine, Beloved, prove the hand and heart
That fail again, flinch backward at the truth
Would cap and crown the structure this last time, —
Precipitate our monumental hope
To strew the earth ignobly yet once more ?
See how, truth piled on truth, the structure wants,

Waits just the crowning truth I claim of thee !
Wouldst thou, for any joy to be enjoyed,
For any sorrow that thou mightst escape,
Unwill thy will to reign a righteous king ?
Nowise ! And were there two lots, death and life, —
Life, wherein good resolve should go to air,
Death, whereby finest fancy grew plain fact
I' the reign of thy survivor, life or death ?
Certainly death, thou choolest. Here stand I
The wedded, the beloved : hadst thou loved
One who less worthily could estimate
Both life and death than thou ? Not so should say
Admetos, who Apollon made come court
Alkestis in a car, submissive brutes
Of blood were yoked to, symbolizing soul
Must dominate unruly sense in man.
Then shall Admetos and Alkestis see
Good alike, and alike choose, each for each,
Good, — and yet, each for the other, at the last,
Choose evil ? What ? thou soundest in my soul
To depths below the deepest, reachest good

In evil, that makes evil good again,
And so allottest to me that I live
And not die — letting die, not thee alone,
But all true life that lived in both of us ?
Look at me once ere thou decree the lot ! ”

’Therewith her whole soul entered into his,
He looked the look back, and Alkestis died.

And even while it lay, i’ the look of him,
Dead, the dimmed body, bright Alkestis’ soul
Had penetrated through the populace
Of ghosts, was got to Koré, — throned and crowned
The pensive queen o’ the twilight, where she dwells
Forever in a muse, but half away
From flowery earth she lost and hankers for, —
And there demanded to become a ghost
Before the time.

Whereat the softened eyes
Of the lost maidenhood that lingered still

Straying among the flowers in Sicily,
Sudden was startled back to Hades' throne,
By that demand: broke through humanity
Into the orb'd omniscience of a god,
Searched at a glance Alkestis to the soul,
And said — while a long slow sigh lost itself
I' the hard and hollow passage of a laugh :

“ Hence, thou deceiver ! This is not to die,
If, by the very death which mocks me now,
The life, that's left behind and past my power,
Is formidably doubled. Say, there fight
Two athletes, side by side, each athlete armed
With only half the weapons, and no more,
Adequate to a contest with their foe :
If one of these should fling helm, sword, and shield
To fellow — shieldless, swordless, helmless late —
And so leap naked o'er the barrier, leave
A combatant equipped from head to heel

Yet cry to the other side, ‘ Receive a friend

Who fights no longer !' ' Back, friend, to the fray !'
Would be the prompt rebuff ; I echo it.
Two souls in one were formidable odds :
Admetos must not be himself and thou !”

And so, before the embrace relaxed a whit,
The lost eyes opened, still beneath the look ;
And lo, Alkestis was alive again,
And of Admetos' rapture who shall speak ?

So, the two lived together long and well.
But never could I learn, by word of scribe
Or voice of poet, rumor wafts our way,
'That, — of the scheme of rule in righteousness,
The bringing back again the Golden Age,
Our couple, rather than renounce, would die —
Ever one first faint particle came true,
With both alive to bring it to effect :
Such is the envy gods still bear mankind !

So might our version of the story prove,

And no Euripidean pathos plague
Too much my critic-friend of Syracuse.

“ Besides your poem failed to get the prize :
(That is, the first prize : second prize is none.)
Sophokles got it !” Honor the great name !
All cannot love two great names ; yet some do :
I know the poetess who graved in gold,
Among her glories that shall never fade,
This style and title for Euripides,
The Human with his droppings of warm tears.

I know, too, a great Kaunian painter, strong
As Herakles, though rosy with a robe
Of grace that softens down the sinewy strength :
And he has made a picture of it all.
There lies Alkestis dead, beneath the sun,
She longed to look her last upon, beside
The sea, which somehow tempts the life in us
To come trip over its white waste of waves,
And try escape from earth, and fleet as free.

Behind the body, I suppose there bends
Old Pheres in his hoary impotence ;
And women-wailers, in a corner crouch
— Four, beautiful as you four — yes, indeed ! —
Close, each to other, agonizing all,
As fastened, in fear's rhythmic sympathy,
To two contending opposite. There strains
The might o' the hero 'gainst his more than match,
— Death, dreadful not in thew and bone, but like
The envenomed substance that exudes some dew,
Whereby the merely honest flesh and blood
Will fester up and run to ruin straight,
Ere they can close with, clasp and overcome
The poisonous impalpability
That simulates a form beneath the flow
Of those gray garments ; I pronounce that piece
Worthy to set up in our Poikilé !

And all came, — glory of the golden verse,
And passion of the picture, and that fine
Frank outgush of the human gratitude

Which saved our ship and me, in Syracuse, —
Ay, and the tear or two which slipt perhaps
Away from you, friends, while I told my tale,
— It all came of this play that gained no prize!
Why crown whom Zeus has crowned in soul before?

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY:

INCLUDING

A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES,

BEING THE

LAST ADVENTURE OF BALAUCTION.

οὐκ ἔσθω κενέβρει' · ὅποταν δὲ θύῃς τι, κάλει με.

I eat no carrion ; when you sacrifice
Some cleanly creature—call me for a slice !

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY.

WIND, wave, and bark, bear Euthukles and me,
Balaustion, from — not sorrow but despair,
Not memory but the present and its pang!
Athenai, live thou hearted in my heart:
Never, while I live, may I see thee more,
Never again may these repugnant orbs
Ache themselves blind before the hideous pomp,
The ghastly mirth which mocked thine overthrow
— Death's entry, Haidēs' outrage!

Doomed to die, —

Fire should have flung a passion of embrace
About thee till, resplendently inarmed,
(Temple by temple folded to his breast,
All thy white wonder fainting out in ash) .

Some vaporous sigh of soul had lightly 'scaped,
And so the Immortals bade Athenai back !
Or earth might sunder and absorb thee, save,
Buried below Olumpos and its gods,
Akropolis to dominate her realm
For Koré, and console the ghosts ; or, sea,
What if thy watery plural vastitude,
Rolling unanimous advance, had rushed,
Might upon might, a moment, — stood, one stare,
Sea-face to city-face, thy glaucous wave
Glassing that marbled last magnificence, —
Till fate's pale tremulous foam-flower tipped the gray,
And when wave broke and overswarmed and, sucked
To bounds back, multitudinously ceased,
And land again breathed unconfused with sea,
Attiké was, Athenai was not now !

Such end I could have borne, for I had shared.
But this which, glanced at, aches within my orbs
To blinding, — bear me thence, bark, wind and wave !
Me, Euthukles, and, hearted in each heart,

Athenai, undisgraced as Pallas' self,
Bear to my birth-place, Helios' island-bride,
Zeus' darling: thither speed us, homeward-bound,
Wafted already twelve hours' sail away
From horror, and a sunset nearer Rhodes!

Why should despair be? Since, distinct above
Man's wickedness and folly, flies the wind
And floats the cloud, free transport for our soul
Out of its fleshly durance dim and low, —
Since disembodied soul anticipates
(Thought-borne as now, in rapturous unrestraint)
Above all crowding, crystal silentness,
Above all noise, a silver solitude: —
Surely, where thought so bears soul, soul in time
May permanently bide, "assert the wise,"
There live in peace, there work in hope once more,
O nothing doubt, Philemon! Greed and strife,
Hatred and cark and care, what place have they
In yon blue liberality of heaven?
How the sea helps! How rose-smit earth will rise

Breast-high thence, some bright morning, and be
Rhodes!

Heaven, earth and sea, my warrant — in their name,
Believe — o'er falsehood, truth is surely sphered,
O'er ugliness beams beauty, o'er this world
Extends that realm where, "as the wise assert,"
Philemon, thou shalt see Euripides
Clearer than mortal sense perceived the man!
A sunset nearer Rhodes, by twelve hours' sweep
Of surge secured from horror? Rather say,
Quieted out of weakness into strength.
I dare invite, survey the scene my sense
Staggered to apprehend: for, disenvolved
From the mere outside anguish and contempt,
Slowly a justice centred in a doom
Reveals itself. Ay, pride succumbed to pride,
Oppression met the oppressor and its match.
Athenai's vaunt braved Sparté's violence
Till, in the shock, prone fell Peiraios, low
Rampart and bulwark lay, as, — timing stroke
Of hammer, axe, beam hoist and poised and swung, —

The very flute-girls blew their laughing best,
In dance, about the conqueror while he bade
Music and merriment help enginery
Batter down, break to pieces all their trust,
Those citizens once, slaves now. See what walls
Play substitute for the long double range
Themistoklean, heralding a guest
From harbor on to citadel! Each side
The senseless walls demolished stone by stone,
See, — outer wall as stonelike, — heads and hearts, —
Athenai's terror-stricken populace!
Prattlers, tongue-tied in crouching abjectness, —
Braggarts, who wring hands wont to flourish swords —
Sophist and rhetorician, demagogue,
(Argument dumb, authority a jest)
Dikast and heliast, pleader, litigant,
Quack-priest, sham-prophecy-retailer, scout
O' the customs, sycophant, whate'er the style,
Altar-scrap-snatcher, pimp and parasite, —
Rivalities at truce now each with each.
Stupefied mud-banks, — that's the use they serve!

While the one order which performs exact
To promise, functions faithful last as first,
What is it but the city's lyric troop,
Chantress and psaltress, flute-girl, dancing-girl?
Athenai's harlotry takes laughing care
'Their patron miss no pipings, late she loved,
But deathward tread at least the kordax-step.

Die then, who pulled such glory on your heads!
'There let it grind to powder! Perikles!
The living are the dead now: death be life!
Why should the sunset yonder waste its wealth?
Prove thee Olympian! If my heart supply
Inviolate the structure,—true to type,
Build me some spirit-place no flesh shall find,
As Pheidias may inspire thee; slab on slab,
Renew Athenai, quarry out the cloud,
Convert to gold yon west extravagance!
'Neath Propulaia, from Akropolis
By vapory grade and grade, gold all the way,
Step to thy snow-Pnux, mount thy Bema-cloud,

Thunder and lighten thence a Hellas through
That shall be better and more beautiful
And too august for Sparté's foot to spurn!
Chasmed in the crag, again our Theatre
Predominates, one purple: Staghunt-month,
Brings it not Dionusia? Hail, the Three!
Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides
Compete, gain prize or lose prize, godlike still.
Nay, lest they lack the old god-exercise —
Their noble want the unworthy, — as of old,
(How otherwise should patience crown their might?)
What if each find his ape promoted man,
His censor raised for antic service still?
Some new Hermippos to pelt Perikles,
Kratinos to swear Pheidias robbed a shrine,
Eruxis — I suspect, Euripides,
No brow will ache because with mop and mow
He gibes my poet? There's a dog-faced dwarf/
That gets to godship somehow, yet retains
His apehood in the Egyptian hierarchy,
More decent yet indecorous enough:

Why should not dog-ape, graced in due degree,
Grow Momos as thou Zeus? Or didst thou
sigh

Rightly with thy Makaria? "After life,
Better no sentiency than turbulence;
Death cures the low contention." Be it so!
Yet progress means contention, to my mind.

Euthukles, who, except a love that speaks,
Art silent by my side while words of mine
Provoke that foe from which escape were vain
Henceforward, wake Athenai's fate and fall, —
Do I amiss, who wanting strength use craft,
Advance upon the foe I cannot fly,
Nor feign a snake is dormant though it gnaw?
That fate and fall, once bedded in our brain,
Roots itself past upwrenching; but coaxed forth
Encouraged out to practise fork and fang, —
Possibly, satiate with prompt sustenance,
It may pine off far likelier than left swell
In peace by our pretension to ignore,

O! pricked to threefold fury, should our stamp
Bruise and not brain the pest.

A middle course.

What hinders that we treat this tragic theme
As the Three taught when either woke some
woe,

—How Klutaimnestra hated, what the pride
Of Iokasté, why Medeia clove
Nature asunder. Small rebuked by large,
We felt our puny hates refine to air,
Our prides as poor prevent the humbling hand,
Our petty passion purify its tide.
So, Euthukles, permit the tragedy
To re-enact itself, this voyage through,
Till sunsets end and sunrise brighten Rhodes!
Majestic on the stage of memory,
Peplosed and kothorned, let Athenai fall
Once more, nay, oft again till life conclude,
Lent for the lesson: Choros, I and thou,
What else in life seems piteous any more

After such pity, or proves terrible
Beside such terror?

Still — since P'hrunichos
Offended, by too premature a touch
Of that Milesian smart-place freshly frayed —
(Ah, my poor people, whose prompt remedy
Was — fine the poet, not reform thyself!)
Beware precipitate approach! Rehearse
Rather the prologue, well a year away,
Than the main misery, a sunset old.
What else but fitting prologue to the piece
Style an adventure, stranger than my first
By so much as the issue it enwombed
Lurked big beyond Balaustion's littleness?
Second supreme adventure! O that Spring,
That eve I told the earlier to my friends!
Where are the four now, with each red-ripe mouth
Crumpled so close, no quickest breath it fetched
Could disengage the lip-flower furred to bud
For fear Admetos, — shivering head and foot,

As with sick soul and blind averted face
He trusted hand forth to obey his friend, —
Should find no wife in her cold hand's response,
Nor see the disenshrouded statue start
Alkestis, live the life and love the love!
I wonder, does the streamlet ripple still,
Out-smoothing galingal and watermint
Its mat-floor? while at brim, 'twixt sedge and sedge,
What bubblings past Baccheion, broadened much,
Pricked by the reed and fretted by the fly,
Oared by the boatman-spider's pair of arms!
Lenaia was a gladsome month ago —
Euripides had taught "Andromedé:"
Next month, would teach "Kresphontes" — which
 same month,
Some one from Phokis, who companioned me
Since all that happened on those temple-steps,
Would marry me and turn Athenian too.
Now! if next year the masters let the slaves
Do Bacchic service and restore mankind
That trilogy whereof, 'tis noised, one play

Presents the Bacchai, — no Euripides
Will teach the choros, nor shall we be tinged
By any such grand sunset of his soul,
Exiles from dead Athenai, — not the new
That's in the cloud there with the star above!

Speak to the infinite intelligence,
Sing to the everlasting sympathy!
Winds belly sail, and drench of dancing brine
Buffet our boat-side, so the prore bound free!
Condense our voyage into one great day
Made up of sunset-closes: eve by eve,
Resume that memorable night-discourse
When, — like some meteor-brilliance, fire and filth,
Or say, his own Amphitheos, deity
And dung, who, bound on the gods' embassy,
Got men's acknowledgment in kick and cuff —
We made acquaintance with a visitor
Ominous, apparitional, who went
Strange as he came, but shall not pass away.
Let us attempt that memorable talk,

Clothe the adventure's every incident
With due expression: may not looks be told,
Gesture made speak, and speech so amplified
That words find blood-warmth which, cold-writ, they
lose?

Recall the night we heard the news from Thrace,
One year ago, Athenai still herself.

We two were sitting silent in the house,
Yet cheerless hardly. Euthukles, forgive!
I somehow speak to unseen auditors.
Not *you*, but — Euthukles had entered, grave,
Grand, may I say, as who brings laurel-branch
And message from the tripod: such it proved.

He first removed the garland from his brow,
Then took my hand and looked into my face.
"Speak good words!" much misgiving faltered I.

"Good words, the best, Balaustion! He is crowned,
Gone with his Attic ivy home to feast,

Since Aischulos required companionship.
Pour a libation for Euripides!"

When we had sat the heavier silence out —
"Dead and triumphant still!" began reply
To my eye's question. "As he willed, he worked:
And, as he worked, he wanted not, be sure,
Triumph his whole life through, submitting work
To work's right judges, never to the wrong,
To competency, not ineptitude.

When he had run life's proper race and worked
Quite to the stade's end, there remained to try
Its turning, should strength dare the double course.
Half the diaulos reached, the hundred plays
Accomplished, force in its rebound sufficed
To lift along the athlete and insure
A second wreath, proposed by fools for first,
The statist's olive as the poet's bay.
Wiselier, he suffered not confuse his sight,
Retard his pace a twofold aim, at once
Poet and statist; though the multitude

Girded him ever 'All thine aim thine art?
The idle poet only? No regard
For civic duty, public service, here?
We drop our ballot-bean for Sophokles!
Not only could he write "Antigoné,"
But—since, we argued, whoso penned that piece
Might just as well conduct a squadron,—straight
Good-naturedly he took on him command,
Got laughed at and went back to making plays,
Having allowed us our experiment
Respecting the fit use of faculty.'
No whit the more did athlete slacken pace.
Soon the jeers grew: 'Cold hater of his kind,
A sea-cave suits him, not the vulgar hearth!
What need of tongue-talk, with a bookish store
Would stock ten cities?' Shadow of an ass!
No whit the worse did athlete touch the mark,
And, at the turning-point, consign his scorn
O' the scorers to that final trilogy
'Hupsipule,' 'Phoinissai,' and the Match
Of Life Contemplative with Active Life,

Zethos against Amphion. Ended so?
Nowise! — began again; for heroes rest
Dropping shield's oval o'er the entire man;
And he who thus took Contemplation's prize,
Turned stade-point but to face Activity.
Out of all shadowy hands extending help
For life's decline pledged to youth's enterprise,
Whatever renovation flatter age, —
Society with pastime, solitude
With peace, — he chose the hand that gave the heart,
Bade Macedonian Archelaos take
The leavings of Athenai, ash once flame.
For fifty politicians' frosty make,
One poet's ash found ample and to spare,
He propped the state and filled the treasury:
Counselled the king as might a meaner soul,
Furnished the friend with what shall stand in stead
Of crown and sceptre, star his name about
When these are dust; for him, Euripides
Last the old hand on the old phorminx flung,
Clashed thence 'Alkaion,' maddened 'Pentheus' up

Then music sighed itself away, one moan
Iphigeneia made by Aulis' strand ;
With her and music died Euripides.

“The poet-friend who followed him to Thrace,
Agathon, wrote thus much: the merchant-ship
Moreover brought a message from the king
To young Euripides, who went on board
This morning at Mounuchia: all is true.”

I said, “Thank Zeus for the great news and good!”

“Nay, the report is running in brief fire
Through the town's stubbly furrow,” he resumed:
—“Entertains brightly what their favorite styles
'The City of Gapers' for a week perhaps,
Supplants three luminous tales, but yesterday
Pronounced sufficient lamps to last the month:
How Glauketes, outbidding Morsimos,
Paid market-price for one Kopaic eel
A thousand drachmai, and then cooked his prize

Not proper conger-fashion but in oil
 And nettles, as man fries the foam-fish-kind ;
 How all the captains of the triremes, late
 Victors at Arginousai, on return
 Will, for reward, be straightway put to death ;
 How Mikon wagered a Thessalian mime
 Trained him by Lais, looked on as complete,
 Against Leogoras' blood-mare koppa-marked,
 Valued six talents, — swore, accomplished so,
 The girl could swallow at a draught, nor breathe,
 A choinix of unmixed Mendesian wine ;
 And having lost the match will — dine on herbs !
 Three stories late a-flame, at once extinct,
 Out-blazed by just 'Euripides is dead' !

" I met the concourse from the Theatre,
 The audience flocking homeward : victory
 Again awarded Aristophanes
 Precisely for his old play chopped and changed
 'The Female Celebrators of the Feast' —
 That Thesmophoria : tried a second time,

'Never such full success!' — assured the folk,
Who yet stopped praising to have word of mouth
With 'Euthukles, the bard's own intimate,
Balaustion's husband, the right man to ask.'

"'Dead, yes, but how dead, may acquaintance know?
You were the couple constant at his cave:
Tell us now, is it true that women, moved
By reason of his liking Krateros' . . .

"I answered, 'He was loved by Sokrates.'

"'Nay,' said another, 'envy did the work!
For, emulating poets of the place,
One Arridaios, one Krateues, both
Established in the royal favor, these' . . .

"'Protagoras instructed him,' said I.
'*Phu*,' whistled Comic Platon, 'hear the fact!
'Twas well said of your friend by Sophokles,
'He hate our women? In his verse, belike.

But when it comes to prose-work, — ha, ha, ha!"
 New climes don't change old manners: so, it
 chanced,

Pursuing an intrigue one moonless night
 With Arethousian Nikodikos' wife,
 (Come now, his years were simply seventy-five)
 Crossing the palace-court, what haps he on
 But Archelaos' pack of hungry hounds?
 Who tore him piecemeal ere his cry brought help.'

"I asked: 'Did not you write, "The Festivals"?'
 You best know what dog tore him when alive.
 You others, who now make a ring to hear,
 Have not you just enjoyed a second treat,
 Proclaimed that ne'er was play more worthy prize
 Than this, myself assisted at, last year,
 And gave its worth to, — spitting on the same?
 Appraise no poetry, — price cuttlefish,
 Or that seaweed-alphestes, scorpion-sort,
 Much famed for mixing mud with fantasy
 Of midnights! I interpret no foul dreams."

If so said Euthukles, so could not I,
Balaustion, say. After "Lustraté"
No more for me of "people's privilege,"
No witnessing "the grand old Comedy
Coeval with our freedom, which, curtailed,
Were freedom's deathblow: relic of the past,
When Virtue laughingly told truth to Vice,
Uncensured, since the stern mouth, stuffed with
flowers,
Through poetry breathed satire, perfumed blast
Which sense snuffed up while searched unto the bone!"
I was a stranger: "For first joy," urged friends,
"Go hear our Comedy, some patriot piece
That plies the selfish advocates of war
With argument so unevadible
That crash fall Kleons whom the finer play
Of reason, tickling, deeper wounds no whit
Than would a spear-thrust from a savory-stalk!
No: you hear knave and fool told crime and fault,
And see each scourged his quantity of stripes.
'Rough dealing, awkward language,' whine our fops:

The world's too squeamish now to bear plain words
 Concerning deeds it acts with gust enough :
 But, thanks to wine-lees and democracy,
 We've still our stage where truth calls spade a spade!
 Ashamed? Phuromachos' decree provides
 The sex may sit discreetly, witness all,
 Sorted, the good with good, the gay with gay,
 Themselves unseen, no need to force a blush.
 A Rhodian wife and ignorant so long?
 Go hear next play!"

I heard "Lusistraté."

Waves, said to wash pollution from the world,
 Take that plague-memory, cure that pustule caught
 As, past escape, I sat and saw the piece
 By one appalled at Phaidra's fate,—the chaste,
 Whom, because chaste, the wicked goddess chained
 To that same serpent of unchastity
 She loathed most, and who, coiled so, died distraught
 Rather than make submission, loose one limb
 Love-wards, at lambency of honeyed tongue,
 Or torture of the scales which scraped her snow

—I say, the piece by him who charged this piece
(Because Euripides shrank not to teach,
If gods be strong and wicked, man, though weak,
May prove their match by willing to be good)
With infamies the Scythian's whip should cure —
“Such outrage done the public—Phaidra named!
Such purpose to corrupt ingenuous youth,
Such insult cast on female character!” —
Why, when I saw that bestiality —
So beyond all brute-beast imagining,
That when, to point the moral at the close,
Poor Salabaccho, just to show how fair
Was “Reconciliation,” stripped her charms,
That exhibition simply bade us breathe,
Seemed something healthy and commendable
After obscenity grotesqued so much
It slunk away revolted at itself.
Henceforth I had my answer when our sage
Pattern-proposing seniors pleaded grave,
“You fail to fathom here the deep design!
All's acted in the interest of truth,

Religion, and those manners old and dear
Which made our city great when citizens
Like Aristeides and Miltiades
Wore each a golden tettix in his hair."
What do they wear now under — Kleophon?

Well, for such reasons, — I am out of breath,
But loathsomeness we needs must hurry past, —
I did not go to see, nor then nor now,
The "Thesmophoriazousai." But, since males
Choose to brave first, blame afterward, nor brand
Without fair taste of what they stigmatize,
Euthukles had not missed the first display,
Original portrait of Euripides
By "Virtue laughingly reproving Vice :"
"Virtue," — the author, Aristophanes,
Who mixed an image out of his own depths,
Ticketed as I tell you. Oh, this time
No more pretension to recondite worth!
No joke in aid of Peace, no demagogue
Pun-pelleted from Pnux, no kordax-dance

Overt helped covertly the Ancient Faith!
All now was muck, home-produce, honestman
The author's soul secreted to a play
Which gained the prize that day we heard the death.

I thought, "How thoroughly death alters things!
Where is the wrong now, done our dead and great?
How natural seems grandeur in relief,
Cliff-base with frothy spites against its calm!"

Euthukles interposed— he read my thought —

"O'er them, too, in a moment came the change.
The crowd's enthusiastic, to a man:
Since, rake as such may please the ordure-heap
Because of certain sparkles presumed ore,
At first flash of true lightning overhead,
They look up, nor resume their search too soon.
The insect-scattering sign is evident,
And nowhere winks a fire-fly rival now,
Nor bustles any beetle of the brood

With trundled dung-ball meant to menace heaven.
Contrariwise, the cry is, 'Honor him!'
'A statue in the theatre!' wants one;
Another, 'Bring the poet's body back,
Bury him in Peiraios: o'er his tomb
Let Alkamenes carve the music-witch,
The songstress-seiren, meed of melody:
Thoukudides invent his epitaph!'
To-night the whole town pays its tribute thus."

Our tribute should not be the same, my friend!
Statue? Within our heart he stood, he stands!
As for the vest outgrown now by the form,
Low flesh that clothed high soul, — a vesture's fate —
Why, let it fade, mix with the elements
There where it, falling, freed Euripides!
But for the soul that's tutelary now
Till time end, o'er the world to teach and bless —
How better hail its freedom than by first
Singing, we too, its own song back again,
Up to that face from which flowed beauty — face

Now abler to see triumph and take love
Than when it glorified Athenai once?

The sweet and strange Alkestis, which saved me,
Secured me — you, ends nowise, to my mind,
In pardon of Admetos. Hearts are fain
To follow cheerful weary Herakles
Striding away from the huge gratitude,
Club shouldered, lion-fleece round loin and flank,
Bound on the next new labor "height o'er height
Ever surmounting — destiny's decree!"
Thither He helps us: that's the story's end;
He smiling said so, when I told him mine —
My great adventure, how Alkestis helped.
Afterward, when the time for parting fell,
He gave me, with two other precious gifts,
This third and best, consummating the grace,
"Herakles," writ by his own hand, each lire.

"If it have worth, reward is still to seek.
Somebody, I forget who, gained the prize

And proved arch-poet : time must show !” he smiled :
“ Take this, and, when the noise tires out, judge me --
Some day, not slow to dawn, when somebody --
Who? I forget -- proves nobody at all !”

Is not that day come? What if you and I
Re-sing the song, inaugurate the fame?
We have not waited to acquaint ourselves
With song and subject: we can prologuize
How, at Eurustheus' bidding, — hate strained hard, —
Herakles had departed, one time more,
On his last labor, worst of all the twelve ;
Descended into Haides, thence to drag
The triple-headed hound, which sun should see
Spite of the god whose darkness whelped the Fear.
Down went the hero, “back — how should he come?”
So laughed King Lukos, an old enemy,
Who in that prolonged absence, plain defeat
Of the land's loved one, — for he saved the land
And for that service wedded Megara
Daughter of Thebai, realm her child should rule, —

Saw his occasion, seized the tempting prey,
The Heracleian House, defenceless left,
Father and wife and child, to trample out
Trace of its hearth-fire: since extreme old age
Wakes pity, woman's wrong wins championship,
And the child grows the man and takes revenge.
Hence see we that, from out their palace-home
Hunted, for last resource they cluster now
Couched on the cold ground, hapless supplicants
About their court-yard altar, — Household Zeus, —
Delaying death so, till deliverance come —
When did it ever? — from the deep and dark.
And thus breaks silence old Amphitruon's voice. . .
Say I not true thus far, my Euthukles?

Suddenly, torchlight! knocking at the door,
Loud, quick, "Admittance for the revel's lord!"
Some unintelligible Komos-cry —
Raw-flesh red, no cap upon his head,
Dionusos, Eacchos, Phales, Iacchos,
In let him reel with the kid-skin at his heel,

Where it buries in the spread of the bushy myrtle-bed!

(Our Rhodian Jackdaw-song was sense to that!)

Then laughter, outbursts ruder and more rude,

Through which, with silver point, a fluting pierced,

And ever "Open, open, Bacchos bids!"

But at last — one authoritative word!

One name of an immense significance:

For Euthukles rose up, threw wide the door.

There trooped the Choros of the Comedy

Crowned and triumphant; first, those flushed Fifteen

Men that wore women's garb, grotesque disguise.

Then marched the Three, — who played Mnesilochos,

Who, Toxotes, and who, robed right, masked rare,

Monkeyed our Great and Dead to heart's content

That morning in Athenai. Masks were down

And robes doffed now; the sole disguise was drink

Mixing with these — I know not what gay crowd,

Girl-dancers, flute-boys, and pre-eminent

Among them, — doubtless draped with such reserve

As stopped fear of the fifty-drachma fine
(Beside one's name on public fig-tree nailed)
Which women pay who in the streets walk bare, —
Behold Elaphion of the Persic dance !
Who lately had frisked fawn-foot, and the rest,
— All for the Patriot Cause, the Antique Faith,
The Conservation of True Poesy —
Could I but penetrate the deep design !
Elaphion, more Peiraios-known as " Phaps,"
Tripped at the head of the whole banquet-band
Who came in front now, as the first fell back ;
And foremost — the authoritative voice,
The revel-leader, he who gained the prize,
And got the glory of the Archon's feast —
There stood in person Aristophanes.
And no ignoble presence ! On the bulge
Of the clear baldness, — all his head one brow, —
True, the veins swelled, blue network, and there surged
A red from cheek to temple, — then retired
As if the dark-leaved chaplet damped a flame, —
Was never nursed by temperance or health.

But huge the eyeballs rolled black native fire,
Imperiously triumphant: nostrils wide
Waited their incense; while the pursed mouth's pout
Aggressive, while the beak supreme above,
While the head, face, nay, pillared throat thrown back,
Beard whitening under like a vinous foam,
These made a glory, of such insolence —
I thought, — such domineering deity
Hephaistos might have carved to cut the brine
For his gay brother's prow, imbrue that path
Which, purpling, recognized the conqueror.
Impudent and majestic: drunk, perhaps,
But that's religion; sense too plainly snuffed:
Still, sensuality was grown a rite.

What I had disbelieved most, proved most true.
There was a mind here, mind a-wantoning
At ease of undisputed mastery
Over the body's brood, those appetites.
Oh, but he grasped them grandly, as the god
His either struggling handful, — hurtless snakes

Held deep down, strained hard off from side and side!
Mastery his, theirs simply servitude,
So well could firm fist help intrepid eye.
Fawning and fulsome, had they licked and hissed?
At mandate of one muscle, order reigned.
They had been wreathing much familiar now
About him on his entry; but a squeeze
Choked down the pests to place: their lord stood free

Forward he stepped, I rose and fronted him.
"Hail, house, the friendly to Euripides!"
(So he began) "Hail, each inhabitant!
You, lady? What, the Rhodian? Form and face,
Victory's self upsoaring to receive
The poet? Right they named you . . . some rich
name,
Vowel-buds thorned about with consonants,
Fragrant, felicitous, rose-glow enriched
By the Isle's unguent: some diminished end
In *ion*, Kallistion? delicater still,
Kubelion or Melittion, — or, suppose,

(Less vulgar love than bee or violet)
 Phibalion, for the mouth split red-fig-wise,
 Korakinidion, for the coal-black hair,
 Nettarion, Phabion, for the darlingness?
 But no, it was some fruit-flower, Rhoidion . . . ha,
 We near the balsam-bloom — Balaustion! Thanks,
 Rhodes! Folk have called me Rhodian, do you know?
 Not fools so far! Because, if Helios wived,
 As Pindaros sings somewhere prettily,
 Here blooms his offspring, earth-flesh with sun-fire,
 Rhodes' -blood and Helios' gold. My phorminx, boy!
 Why does the boy hang back and baulk and ode
 Tiptoe at spread of wing? But like enough,
 Sunshine frays torchlight. Witness whom you scare,
 Superb Balaustion! Look outside the house!
Pho, you have quenched my Komos by first frown,
 Struck dead all joyance: not a fluting puffs
 From idle cheekband! Ah, my Choros too?
 You've eaten cuckoo-apple? Dumb, you dogs?
 So much good Thasian wasted on your throats
 And out of them not one *Threttanelo*?

Neblaretai! Because this earth-and-sun
Product looks wormwood and all bitter herbs?
Well, do I blench, though me she hates the most
Of mortals? By the cabbage, off they slink!
You, too, my Chrusomelolonthion-Phaps,
Girl-goldling-beetle-beauty? You, abashed,
Who late, supremely unabashable,
Propped up my play at that important point
When Artamouxia tricks the Toxotes?
Ha, ha,—thank Hermes for the lucky throw,—
We came last comedy of the whole seven,
So went all fresh to judgment well-disposed
For who should fatly feast them, eye and ear,
We two between us! What, you fail your friend?
Away then, free me of your cowardice!
Go, get you the goat's breakfast! Fare afield,
Ye circumcised of Egypt, pigs to sow,
Back to the Priest's or forward to the crows,
So you but rid me of such company!
Once left alone, I can protect myself
From statuesque Balaustion pedestalled

On much disapprobation and mistake!
 She dares not beat the sacred brow, beside!
 Bacchos' equipment, ivy safeguards well
 As Phoibos' bay.

"They take me at my word!

One comfort is, I shall not want them long,
 The Archon's cry creaks, creaks, 'Curtail expense!'
 The war wants money, year the twenty-sixth!
 Cut down our Choros number, clip costume,
 Save birds' wings, beetles' armor, spend the cash
 In three-crest skull-caps, three days' salt-fish-slice,
 Three-banked-ships for these sham-ambassadors,
 And what not: any cost but Comedy's!
 'No Choros'—soon will follow; what care I?
 Archinos and Agurrhios, scrape your flint,
 Flay your dead dog, and curry favor so!
 Choros in rags, with loss of leather next,
 We lose the boy's vote, lose the song and dance,
 Lose my Elaphion! Still, the actor stays.
 Save but my acting, and the baldhead bard

Kudathenaian and Pandionid,
 Son of Philippos, Aristophanes
 Surmounts his rivals now as heretofore,
 Though stinted to mere sober prosy verse—
 'Manners and men,' so squeamish gets the world!
 No more 'step forward, strip for anapæsts!'
 No calling naughty people by their names,
 No tickling audience into gratitude
 With chickpease, barleygroats and nuts and plums,
 No setting Salabaccho" . . .

As I turned—

"True, lady, I am tolerably drunk:
 The proper inspiration! Otherwise,—
 Phrunichos, Choirilos!—had Aischulos
 So foiled you at the goat-song? Drink's a god.
 How else did that old doating driveller
 Kratinos foil me, match my masterpiece
 The 'Clouds'? I swallowed cloud-distilment—dew
 Undimmed by any grape-blush, knit my brow

And gnawed my style and laughed my learnedest ;
While he worked at his 'Willow-wicker-flask,'
Swigging at that same flask by which he swore,
Till, sing and empty, sing and fill again,
Somehow result was — what it should not be
Next time, I promised him and kept my word!
Hence, brimful now of Thasian . . . I'll be bound,
Mendesian, merely : triumph-night, you know,
The High Priest entertains the conqueror,
And, since war worsens all things, stingily
The rascal starves whom he is bound to stuff,
Choros and actors and their lord and king
The poet ; supper, still he needs must spread —
And this time all was conscientious fare :
He knew his man, his match, his master — made
Amends, spared neither fish, flesh, fowl nor
 wine :
So merriment increased, I promise you,
Till — something happened."

Here he strangely paused.

“After that,—well, it either was the cup
To the Good Genius, our concluding pledge,
That wrought me mischief, decently unmixed,—
Or, what if, when *that* happened, need arose
Of new libation? Did you only know
What happened! Little wonder I am drunk.”

Euthukles, o'er the boat-side, quick, what change,
Watch, in the water! But a second since,
It laughed a ripply spread of sun and sea,
Ray fused with wave, to never disunite.
Now, sudden all the surface, hard and black,
Lies a quenched light, dead motion: what the cause?
Look up and lo, the menace of a cloud
Has solemnized the sparkling, spoiled the sport!
Just so, some overshadow, some new care
Stopped all the mirth and mocking on his face,
And left there only such a dark surmise
—No wonder if the revel disappeared,
So did his face shed silence every side!
I recognized a new man fronting me.

"So!" he smiled, piercing to my thought at once,
 "You see myself? Balaustion's fixed regard
 Can strip the proper Aristophanes
 Of what our sophists, in their jargon, style
 His accidents? My soul sped forth but now
 To meet your hostile survey,—soul unseen,
 Yet veritably cinct for soul-defence
 With satyr sportive quips, cranks, boss and spike,
 Just as my visible body paced the street,
 Environed by a boon companionship
 Your apparition also puts to flight.
 Well, what care I if, unaccoutred twice,
 I front my foe—no comicality
 Round soul, and body-guard in banishment?
 Thank your eyes' searching, undisguised I stand:
 The merest female child may question me.
 Spare not, speak bold, Balaustion!"

I did speak :

"Bold speech be—welcome to this honored hearth,
 Good Genius! Glory of the poet, glow

O' the humorist who castigates his kind,
Suave summer-lightning lambency which plays
On stag-horned tree, misshapen crag askew,
Then vanishes with unvindictive smile
After a moment's laying black earth bare.
Splendor of wit that springs a thunderball —
Satire — to burn and purify the world,
True aim, fair purpose: just wit justly strikes
Injustice,— right, as rightly quells the wrong,
Finds out in knaves', fools', cowards' armory
The tricky tinselled place fire flashes through,
No damage else, sagacious of true ore;
Wit, learned in the laurel, leaves each wreath
O'er lyric shell or tragic barbiton,—
Though alien gauds be singed, — undesecrate,
The genuine solace of the sacred brow.
Ay, and how pulses flame a patriot-star
Steadfast athwart our country's night of things,
To beacon, would she trust no meteor-blaze,
Athenai from the rock she steers for straight!
O light, light, light, I hail light everywhere,

•

No matter for the murk that was, — perchance,
That will be, — certes, never should have been
Such orb's associate !

“Aristophanes !

‘The merest female child may question you?’

Once, in my Rhodes, a portent of the wave
Appalled our coast : for many a darkened day,
Intolerable mystery and fear.

Who snatched a furtive glance through crannied peak,
Could but report of snake-scale, lizard-limb, —
So swam what, making whirlpools as it went,
Madded the brine with wrath or monstrous sport.

‘’Tis Tuphon, loose, unmanacled from mount,’
Declared the priests, ‘no way appeasable
Unless perchance by virgin-sacrifice !’

Thus grew the terror and o’erhung the doom —
Until one eve a certain female-child
Strayed in safe ignorance to seacoast edge,
And there sate down and sang to please herself.
When all at once, large-looming from his wave,

Out leaned, chin hand-propped, pensive on the ledge,
A sea-worn face, sad as mortality,
Divine with yearning after fellowship.
He rose but breast-high. So much god she saw;
So much she sees now, and does reverence!"

Ah, but there followed tail-splash, frisk of fin!
Let cloud pass, the sea's ready laugh outbreaks.
No very godlike trace retained the mouth
Which mocked with —

“So, He taught you tragedy!

I always asked, ‘Why may not women act?’
Nay, wear the comic visor just as well;
Or, better, quite cast off the face-disguise
And voice-distortion, simply look and speak,
Real women playing women as men — men!
I shall not wonder if things come to that,
Some day when I am distant far enough.
Do you conceive the quite new Comedy
When laws allow? laws only let girls dance,
Pipe, posture, — above all, Elaphionize,

Provided they keep decent — that is, dumb.
Ay, and, conceiving, I would execute,
Had I but two lives: one were overworked!
How penetrate incrusted prejudice,
Pierce ignorance three generations thick
Since first Sousarion crossed our boundary?
He battered with a big Megaric stone;
Chionides felled oak and rough-hewed thence
This club I wield now, having spent my life
In planing knobs and sticking studs to shine;
Somebody else must try mere polished steel!"

Emboldened by the sober mood's return,
"Meanwhile," said I, "since planed and studded club
Once more has pashed competitors to dust,
And poet proves triumphant with that play,
Euthukles found last year unfortunate,—
Does triumph spring from smoothness still more
smoothed,
Fresh studs sown thick and threefold? In plain words,
Have you exchanged brute-blows, which teach the brute

Man may surpass him in brutality,
For human fighting, or true god-like force
Which breathes persuasion nor needs fight at all?
Have you essayed attacking ignorance,
Convicting folly, by their opposites,
Knowledge and wisdom? not by yours for ours,
Fresh ignorance and folly, new for old,
Greater for less, your crime for our mistake!
If so success at last have crowned desert,
Bringing surprise (dashed haply by concern
At late discovery — such wild waste of strength
(And what strength!) went so long to keep in
vogue
Such warfare (and what warfare!) shamed away,
Made obsolete forever, as foe fell
By the first arrow native to the orb,
First onslaught worthy Aristophanes) —
Was this conviction's entry that same strange
Something that happened ' to confound your feast? "

" Ah, did he witness then my play that failed,

First 'Thesmophoriazousai?' Well and good!
 But did he also see,—your Euthukles,—
 My 'Grasshoppers' which followed and failed too,
 Three months since, at the 'Little-in-the-Fields'?"

"To say that he did see that First—should say
 He never cared to see its following."

"There happens to be reason why I wrote
 First play and second also. Ask the cause!
 Fit answer, authorizing either act,
 I warrant you receive ere talk be done.
 But here's the point: as Euthukles made vow
 Never again to taste my quality,
 So I was minded next experiment
 Should tickle palate—yea, of Euthukles!
 Not by such utter change, such absolute
 A topsyturvy of stage-habitude
 As you and he want,—Comedy built fresh,
 By novel brick and mortar, base to roof,—
 No, for I stand too near and look too close!

Pleasure and pastime yours, spectators brave,
 Should I turn art's fixed fabric upside down!
 Little you guess how such tough work tasks soul!
 Not overtasks, though: give fit strength fair play,
 And strength's a demiourgos!

“Art renewed?

Ay, in some closet where strength shuts out — first
 The friendly faces, sympathetic cheer:
 ‘More of the old provision, none supplies
 So bounteously as thou, — our love, our pride,
 Our author of the many a perfect piece!
 Stick to that standard, change were decadence!’
 Next, the unfriendly: ‘This time, strain will tire,
 He's fresh, Ameipsias thy antagonist!’
 — Or better, in some Salaminian cave
 Where sky and sea and solitude make earth
 And man and noise one insignificance,
 Let strength propose itself, — behind the world, —
 Sole prize worth winning, work that satisfies
 Strength it has dared and done strength's uttermost
 After which, — clap-to closet and quit cave, —

Strength may conclude in Archelaos' court,
And yet esteem the silken company
So much sky-scud, sea-froth, earth-thistledown,
For aught their praise or blame should joy or grieve.
May lead the still life, ply the wordless task:
Then only, when seems need to move or speak,
Moving—for due respect, since statesmen pass,
(Strength, in the closet, watched how spiders spin!)
Speaking—when fashion shows intelligence,
(Strength, in the cave, had whistled to the gulls!)
Despise the world and reverence yourself,—
Why, you may unmake things and remake things,
And throw behind you, unconcerned enough,
What's made or marred: 'you teach men, are not
taught!'
So marches off the stage Euripides!

"No such thin fare feeds flesh and blood like mine,
No such faint fume the Aristophanic soul,
No such seclusion, closet, cave or court,
Suits either like our Iostephanos

Worth making happy what coarse way she will—
The happy-maker, when the cries increase
About the favorite! 'Aristophanes!
More grist to mill, here's Kleophon to grind!
He's for refusing peace, though Sparté cede
Even Dekeleia! Here's Kleonumos
Declaring—if he threw away his shield,
He'll thrash you till you lay your lyre aside!
Orestes bids mind where you walk of nights:
He wants your cloak as you his cudgelling.
Here's, finally, Melanthios fat with fish,
The gormandizer-spendthrift-dramatist!
So, bustle! Pounce on opportunity!
Let fun a-screaming in Parabasis,
Find food for folk agape at either end,
Mad for amusement! Times grow better too,
And should they worsen, why, who laughs, forgets.
In no case, venture boy-experiments!
Old wine's the wine: new poetry drinks raw:
Two plays a season is your pledge, beside;
So, give us 'Wasps' again, grown hornets now!"

Then he changed.

“Do you so detect in me —
Brow-bald, chin-bearded, me, curved cheek, carved lip,
Or where soul sits and reigns in either eye —
What suits the — stigma, I say, — style say you,
Of ‘Wine-lees-poet?’ Bravest of buffoons,
Less blunt than Telekleides, less obscene
Than Murtilos, Hermippos: quite a match
In elegance for Eupolis himself,
Yet pungent as Kratinos at his best?
Graced with traditional immunity
Ever since, much about my grandsire’s time,
Some funny village-man in Megara,
Lout-lord and clown-king, used a privilege,
As due religious drinking-bouts came round,
To daub his phiz, — no, that was afterward, —
He merely mounted cart with mates of choice
And traversed country, taking house by house,
At night, — because of danger in the freak, —
Then holloaed, ‘Skin-flint starves his laborers!

Clinch-fist stows figs away, cheats government!
Such an one likes to kiss his neighbor's wife,
And beat his own; while such another . . . Boh!'
Soon came the broad day, circumstantial tale, .
Dancing and verse, and there's our Comedy,
There's Mullos, there's Euetes, there's the stock
I shall be proud to graft my powers upon!
Protected? Punished quite as certainly
When Archons pleased to lay down each his law, —
Your Morucheides-Surakosios sort, —
Each season, 'No more naming citizens,
Only abuse the vice, the vicious spare!
Observe, henceforth no Areopagite
Demean his rank by writing Comedy!'
(They one and all could write the 'Clouds' of course)
'Needs must we nick expenditure, allow
Comedy half a chorus, supper — none,
Times being hard, while applicants increase
For, what costs cash, the Tragic Trilogy.'
Lofty Tragedians! How they lounge aloof
Each with his Triad, three plays to my one,

Not counting the contemptuous fourth, the frank
Concession to mere mortal levity,
Satyric pittance tossed our beggar-world !
Your proud Euripides from first to last
Doled out some five such, never deigned us more !
And these — what curds and whey for marrowy wine !
That same Alkestis you so rave about
Passed muster with him for a Satyr-play,
The prig! — why trifle time with toys and skits
When he could stuff four ragbags sausage-wise
With sophistry, with bookish odds and ends,
Sokrates, meteors, moonshine, ' Life's not Life,'
' The tongue swore, but unsworn the mind remains,'
And fifty such concoctions, crab-tree-fruit
Digested while, head low and heels in heaven,
He lay, let Comics laugh — for privilege !
Looked puzzled on, or pityingly off,
But never dreamed of paying gibe by jeer,
Buffet by blow: plenty of proverb-pokes
At vice and folly, wicked kings, mad mobs !
No sign of wincing at my Comic lash,

No protest against infamous abuse,
Malignant censure, — nought to prove I scourged
With tougher thong than leek-and-onion-plait!
If ever he glanced gloom, aggrieved at all,
The aggriever must be — Aischulos perhaps :
Or Sophokles he'd take exception to.
— Do you detect in me — in me, I ask,
The man like to accept this measurement
Of faculty, contentedly sit classed
Mere Comic Poet — since I wrote 'The Birds'?"

I thought there might lurk truth in jest's disguise.

"Thanks!" he resumed, so quick to construe smile
"I answered — in my mind — these gapers thus :
Since old wine's ripe and new verse raw, you judge —
What if I vary vintage-mode and mix
Blossom with must, give nosegay to the brew,
Fining, refining, gently, surely, till
The educated taste turn unawares
From customary dregs to draught divine?"

Then answered — with my lips: More 'Wasps' you
want?

Come next year and I give you 'Grasshoppers'!
And 'Grasshoppers' I gave them, — last month's play.
They formed the Choros. Alkibiades,
No longer Triphales but Trilophos,
(Whom I call Darling-of-the-Summertime,
Born to be nothing else but beautiful
And brave, to eat, drink, love his life away)
Persuades the Tettix (our Autochthon-brood,
That sip the dew and sing on olive-branch
Above the ant-and-emmet populace)
To summon all who meadow, hill and dale
Inhabit, bee, wasp, woodlouse, dragonfly,
To band themselves against red nipper-nose
Stagbeetle, huge Taügetan (you guess —
Sparté) Athenai needs must battle with,
Because her sons are grown effeminate
To that degree — so morbifies their flesh
The poison-drama of Euripides,
Morals and music — there's no antidote

Occurs save warfare which inspirits blood,
And brings us back perchance the blessed time
When (Choros takes up tale) our commonalty
Firm in primæval virtue, antique faith,
Ere earwig-sophist plagued or pismire sage,
Cockered no noddle up with A, b, g,
Book-learning, logic-chopping, and the moon,
But just employed their brains on '*Ruppapai*,
Row, boys, munch barley-bread, and take your ease —
Mindful, however, of the tier beneath !'
Ah, golden epoch ! while the nobler sort
(Such needs must study, no contesting that !)
Wore no long curls, but used to crop their hair,
Gathered the tunic well about the ham,
Remembering 'twas soft sand they used for seat
At school-time, while — mark this — the lesson long,
No learner ever dared to cross his legs !
Then, if you bade him take the myrtle-bough
And sing for supper — 'twas some grave romaunt
How man of Mitulené, wondrous wise,
Fumped into hedge, by mortals quickset call'

And there anticipating Oidipous,
Scratched out his eyes and scratched them in again.
 None of your Phaidras, Augés, Kanakés,
 To mincing music, turn, trill, tweedle-trash,
 Whence comes that Marathon is obsolete!
 Next, my Antistrophé was—praise of Peace:
 Ah, could our people know what Peace implies!
 Home to the farm and furrow! Grub one's vine,
 Romp with one's Thratta, pretty serving-girl,
 When wife's busy bathing! Eat and drink,
 And drink and eat, what else is good in life?
 Slice hare, toss pancake, gayly gurgle down
 The Thasian grape in celebration due
 Of Bacchos! Welcome, dear domestic rite,
 When wife and sons and daughters, Thratta too,
 Pour peasoup as we chant delectably
In Bacchos reels, his tunic at his heels!
 Enough, you comprehend, — I do at least!
 Then, — be but patient, — the Parabasis!
 Pray! For in that I also pushed reform.
 None of the self-laudation, vulgar brag,

Vainglorious rivals cultivate so much!
No! If some merest word in Art's defence
Justice demanded of me, — never fear!
Claim was preferred, but dignifiedly.
A cricket asked a locust (winged, you know)
What he had seen most rare in foreign parts?
'I have flown far,' chirped he, 'North, East, South
West,
And nowhere heard of poet worth a fig
If matched with Bald-head here, Aigina's boast,
Who in this play bids rivalry despair
Past, present and to come, so marvellous
His Tragic, Comic, Lyric excellence!
Whereof the fit reward were (not to speak
Of dinner every day at public cost
I' the Prutaneion) supper with yourselves,
My Public, best dish offered bravest bard!'
No more! no sort of sin against good taste!
Then, satire, — Oh, a plain necessity!
But I won't tell you: for — could I dispense
With one more gird at old Aripgrades?

How scorpion-like he feeds on human flesh—
Ever finds out some novel infamy
Unutterable, inconceivable,
Which all the greater need was to describe
Minutely, each tail-twist at ink-shed time . . .
Now, what's your gesture caused by? What you loathe,
Don't I loathe doubly, else why take such pains
To tell it you? But keep your prejudice!
My audience justified you! Housebreakers!
This pattern-purity was played and failed
Last Rural Dionusia—failed! for why?
Ameipsias followed with the genuine stuff.
He had been mindful to engage the Four—
Karkinos and his dwarf-crab-family—
Father and sons, they whirled like spinning-tops,
Choros gigantically poked his fun,
The boy's frank laugh relaxed the seniors' brow,
The skies re-echoed victory's acclaim,
Ameipsias gained his due, I got my dose
Of wisdom for the future. Purity?
No more of that next month, Athenai mine!

Contrive new cut of robe who will, — I patch
The old exomis, add no purple sleeve!
The Thesmophoriazousai, smartened up
With certain plaits, shall please, I promise you!

“Yes, I took up the play that failed last year,
And re-arranged things; threw adroitly in, —
No Parachoregema, — men to match
My women there already; and when these
(I had a hit at Aristullos here,
His plan how womankind should rule the roast)
Drove men to plough — ‘A-field, ye cribbed of cape!’
Men showed themselves exempt from service straight
Stupendously, till all the boys cried, ‘Brave!’
Then for the elders, I bethought me too,
Improved upon Mnesilochos’ release
From the old bowman, board and binding-strap:
I made his son-in-law Euripides
Engage to put both shrewish wives away,
‘Gravity,’ one, the other, ‘Sophist-lore,’
And mate with the Bald Bard’s hetairai twain —

'Goodhumor' and 'Indulgence:' on they tripped,
 Murrhiné, Akalanthis, — 'beautiful
 Their whole belongings' — crowd joined choros there!
 And while the Toxotes wound up his part
 By shower of nuts and sweetmeats on the mob,
 The woman-choros celebrated New
 Kalligeneia, the frank last-day rite.
 Brief, I was chairéd and caressed and crowned,
 And the whole theatre broke out a-roar,
 Echoed my admonition — choros-cap —
Rivals of mine, your hands to your faces!
Summon no more the Muses, the Graces,
Since here by my side they have chosen their places!
 And so we all flocked merrily to feast, —
 I, my choragos, choros, actors, mutes
 And flutes aforesaid, friends in crowd, no fear,
 At the Priest's supper; and hilarity
 Grew none the less that, early in the piece,
 Ran a report, from row to row close-packed,
 Of messenger's arrival at the Port
 With weighty tidings, 'Of Lusandros' flight,'

Opined one; 'That Euboa penitent
Sends the Confederation fifty ships,'
Preferred another; while 'The Great King's Eye
Has brought a present for Elaphion here,
That rarest peacock Kompolakuthes!'
Such was the supposition of a third.
'No matter what the news,' friend Strattis laughed,
'It won't be worse for waiting: while each click
Of the klepsudra sets a-shaking grave
Resentment in our shark's-head, boiled and spoiled
By this time: dished in Sphettian vinegar,
Silphion and honey, served with cocks'-brain-sauce!
So, swift to supper, Poet! No mistake,
This play; nor, like the unflavored 'Grasshoppers,'
Salt without thyme!' Right merrily we supped,
Till—something happened.

“Out it shall, at last!

“Mirth drew to ending, for the cup was crowned
To the Triumphant! 'Kleonclapper erst,
Now, Plier of a scourge Euripides

Fairly turns tail from, flying Attiké
 For Makedonia's rocks and frosts and bears,
 Where, furry grown, he growls to match the squeak
 Of girl-voiced, crocus-vested Agathon!
 Ha ha, he he!' When suddenly a knock—
 Sharp, solitary, cold, authoritative.

“‘*Babaiax!* Sokrates a-passing by,
 A-peering in, for Aristullos' sake,
 To put a question touching Comic Law?’

“No! Enters an old pale-swathed majesty,
 Makes slow mute passage through two ranks as mute,
 (Strattis stood up with all the rest, the sneak!)
 Gray brow still bent on ground, upraised at length
 When, our Priest reached, full-front the vision paused.

“‘Priest!’—the deep tone succeeded the fixed gaze—
 ‘Thou carest that thy god have spectacle
 Decent and seemly; wherefore, I announce
 That, since Euripides is dead to-day,

My Choros, at the Greater Feast, next month,
Shall, clothed in black, appear ungarlanded !'

"Then the gray brow sank low, and Sophokles
Re-swathed him, sweeping doorward: mutely passed
'Twixt rows as mute, to mingle possibly
With certain gods who convoy age to port ;
And night resumed him.

"When our stupor broke,
Chirpings took courage, and grew audible.

" "Dead — so one speaks now of Euripides !'
'Ungarlanded his Choros, did he say?
I guess the reason: in extreme old age
No doubt such have the gods for visitants.
Why did he dedicate to Herakles
An altar else, but that the god, turned Judge,
Told him in dream who took the crown of gold?
He who restored Akropolis the theft,
Himself may feel perhaps a timely twinge
At thought of certain other crowns he filched

From — who now visits Herakles the Judge.
 Instance "Medeia!" that play yielded palm
 To Sophokles; and he again — to whom?
 Euphorion! Why? Ask Herakles the Judge!
 Ungarlanded, just means — economy!
 Suppress robes, chaplets, every thing suppress
 Except the poet's present! An old tale
 Put capitally by Trugaios — eh?
 'News from the world of transformation strange!
 How Sophokles is grown Simonides,
 And, — aged, rotten, — all the same, for greed
 Would venture on a hurdle out to sea!' —
 So jokes Philonides. Kallistratos
 Retorts, 'Mistake! Instead of stinginess —
 The fact is, in extreme decrepitude,
 He has discarded poet and turned priest,
 Priest of Half-Hero Alkon: visited
 In his own house too by Asklepios' self,
 So he avers. Meanwhile, his own estate
 Lies fallow; Iophon's the manager, —
 Nay, touches up a play, brings out the same,

Asserts true sonship. See to what you sink
 After your dozen-dozen prodigies!
 Looking so old — Euripides seems young,
 Born ten years later.'

“‘Just his tricky style!

Since, stealing first away, he wins first word
 Out of good-natured rival Sophokles,
 Procures himself no bad panegyric.
 Had fate willed otherwise, himself were taxed
 To pay survivor's-tribute, — harder squeezed
 From anybody beaten first to last,
 Than one who, steadily a conqueror,
 Finds that his magnanimity is tasked
 To merely make pretence and — beat itself!’

“So chirped the feasters though suppressedly.

‘But I — what else do you suppose? — had pierced
 Quite through friends' outside-straining, foes' mock-
 praise,

And reached conviction hearted under all.
Death's rapid line had closed a life's account,
And cut off, left unalterably clear
The summed-up value of Euripides.

“Well, it might be the Thasian! Certainly
There sang suggestive music in my ears;
And, through — what sophists style — the wall of sense
My eyes pierced: death seemed life and life seemed
death,
Envisaged that way, now, which I, before,
Conceived was just a moon-struck mood. Quite plain
There re-insisted, — ay, each prim stiff phrase
Of each old play, my still-new laughing-stock,
Had meaning, well worth poet's pains to state,
Should life prove half true life's term — death, the rest.
As for the other question, late so large
Now all at once so little, — he or I,
Which better comprehended playwright craft, —
There, too, old admonition took fresh point.
As clear recurred our last word-interchange

'Two years since, when I tried with 'Ploutos.' 'Vain!'
Saluted me the cold grave-bearded age —
'Vain, this late trial, Aristophanes!
None baulks the genius with impunity!
You know what kind's the nobler, what makes grave
Or what makes grin; there's yet a nobler still,
Possibly, — what makes wise, not grave, — and glad,
Not grinning: whereby laughter joins with tears,
Tragic and Comic Poet prove one power,
And Aristophanes becomes our Fourth —
Nay, greatest! Never needs the Art stand still,
But those Art leans on lag, and none like you,
Her strongest of supports, whose step aside
Undoes the march: defection checks advance
Too late adventured! See the "Ploutos" here!
This step decides your foot from old to new —
Proves you relinquish song and dance and jest,
Discard the beast, and, rising from all-fours,
Fain would paint, manlike, actual human life,
Make veritable men think, say and do.
Here's the conception: which to execute,

Where's force? Spent! Ere the race began, was breath
 O' the runner squandered on each friendly fool —
 Wit-fireworks fizzed off while day craved no flame :
 How should the night receive her due of fire
 Flared out in Wasps and Horses, Clouds and Birds,
 Prodigiously a-crackle? Rest content!
 The new adventure for the novel man
 Born to that next success myself foresee
 In right of where I reach before I rest.
 At end of a long course, straight all the way,
 Well may there tremble somewhat into ken
 The untrod path, clouds veiled from earlier gaze!
 None may live two lives: I have lived mine through
 Die where I first stand still. You retrograde.
 I leave my life's work. *I* compete with you,
 My last with your last, my "Antiope" —
 "Phoinissai" — with this "Ploutos?" No, I think!
 Ever shall "great and awful Victory
 Accompany my life" — in Maketis
 If not Athenai. Take my farewell, friend!
 Friend, -- for from no consummate excellence

Like yours, whatever fault may countervail,
Do I profess estrangement: murk the marsh,
Yet where a solitary marble block
Blanches the gloom, there let the eagle perch!
You show — what splinters of Pentelikos,
Islanded by what ordure! Eagles fly,
Rest on the right place, thence depart as free;
But ware man's footstep, would it traverse mire
Untainted! Mire is safe for worms that crawl.'

"Balaustion! Here are very many words,
All to portray one moment's rush of thought, —
And much they do it! Still, you understand.
The Archon, the Feast-master, read their sum
And substance, judged the banquet-glow extinct,
So rose, discreetly if abruptly, crowned
The parting cup, — 'To the Good Genius, then!'

"Up starts young Strattis for a final flash:
'Ay, the Good Genius! To the Comic Muse,
She who evolves superiority,

Triumph and joy from sorrow, unsuccess
And all that's incomplete in human life ;
Who proves such actual failure transient wrong,
Since out of body uncouth, halt and maimed —
Since out of soul grotesque, corrupt or blank —
Fancy, uplifted by the Muse, can flit
To soul and body, re-instate them Man :
Beside which perfect man, how clear we see
Divergency from type was earth's effect !
Escaping whence by laughter, — Fancy's feat, —
We right man's wrong, establish true for false, —
Above misshapen body, uncouth soul,
Reach the fine form, the clear intelligence —
Above unseemliness, reach decent law, —
By laughter : attestation of the Muse
That low-and-ugsome is not signed and sealed
Incontrovertibly man's portion here,
Or, if here, — why, still high-and-fair exists
In that ethereal realm where laughs our soul
Lift by the Muse. Hail then her ministrant !
Hail who accepted no deformity

In man as normal and remediless,
But rather pushed it to such gross extreme
That outraged we protest by eye's recoil
The opposite proves somewhere rule and law!
Hail who implied, by limning Lamachos,
'Plenty and pastime wait on peace, not war!'
Philokleon — 'better bear a wrong than plead,
Play the litigious fool to stuff the mouth
Of dikast with the due three-obol fee!'
The Paphlagonian — 'stick to the old sway
Of few and wise, not rabble-government!'
Trugaios, Pisthetairos, Strepsiades, —
Why multiply examples? Hail, in fine,
The hero of each painted monster — so
Suggesting the unpictured perfect shape!
Pour out! A laugh to Aristophanes!'

"Stay, my fine Strattis" — and I stopped applause —

"To the Good Genius — but the Tragic Muse!

She who instructs her poet 'Bid man's soul

Play man's part merely nor attempt the gods'

Ill-guessed of! Task humanity to height,
Put passion to prime use, urge will, unshamed
When will's last effort breaks in impotence!
No power forego, elude: no weakness, —plied
Fairly by power and will, —renounce, deny!
Acknowledge, in such miscalled weakness, strength
Latent: and substitute thus things for words!
Make man run life's race fairly, —legs and feet,
Craving no false wings to o'erfly its length!
Trust on, trust ever, trust to end —in truth!
By truth of extreme passion, utmost will,
Shame back all false display of either force —
Barrier about such strenuous heat and glow,
That cowardice shall shirk contending, —cant,
Pretension, shrivel at truth's first approach!
Pour to the Tragic Muse's ministrant
Who, as he pictured pure Hippolotos,
Abolished our earth's blot Aripgrades;
Who, as he drew Bellerophon the bold,
Proclaimed Kleonumos incredible;
Who, as his Theseus towered up man once more,

Made Alkibiades shrink boy again!
A tear — no woman's tribute, weak exchange
For action, water spent and heart's-blood saved —
No man's regret for greatness gone, ungraced
Perchance by even that poor meed, man's praise —
But some god's superabundance of desire,
Yearning of will to 'scape necessity, —
Love's overbrimming for self-sacrifice,
Whence good might be, which never else may be,
By power displayed, forbidden this strait sphere, —
Effort expressible one only way —
Such tear from me fall to Euripides!'

"The Thasian! — All, the Thasian, I account!

"Whereupon outburst the whole company
Into applause and — laughter, would you think?

"The unrivalled one! How, never at a loss,
He turns the Tragic on its Comic side
Else imperceptible! Here's death itself —

Death of a rival, of an enemy, —
Scarce seen as Comic till the master-touch
Made it acknowledge Aristophanes!
Lo, that Euripidean laurel-tree
Struck to the heart by lightning! . Sokrates
Would question us, with buzz of "how" and "why,"
Wherefore the berry's virtue, the bloom's vice,
Till we all wished him quiet with his friend;
Agathon would compose an elegy,
Lyric bewailment fit to move a stone,
And, stones responsive, we might wince, 'tis like;
Nay, with most cause of all to weep the least,
Sophokles ordains mourning for his sake
While we confess to a remorseful twinge: —
Suddenly, who but Aristophanes,
Prompt to the rescue, puts forth solemn hand,
Singles us out the tragic tree's best branch,
Persuades it groundward and, at tip, appends,
For votive-visor, Faun's goat-grinning face!
Back it flies, evermore with jest a-top,
And we recover the true mood, and laugh!'

“I felt as when some Nikias, — ninny-like
Troubled by sunspot-portent, moon-eclipse, —
At fault a little, sees no choice but sound
Retreat from foeman; and his troops mistake
’The signal, and hail onset in the blast,
And at their joyous answer, *alalé*,
Back the old courage brings the scattered wits;
He wonders what his doubt meant, quick confirms
The happy error, blows the charge amain.
So I repaired things.

“‘Both be praised’ thanked I.

‘You who have laughed with Aristophanes,
You who wept rather with the Lord of Tears!
Priest, do thou, president alike o’er each,
Tragic and Comic function of the god,
Help with libation to the blended twain!
Either of which who serving, only serves —
Proclaims himself disqualified to pour
To that Good Genius — complex Poetry,
Uniting each god-grace, including both:
Which, operant for body as for soul,

Masters alike the laughter and the tears,
Supreme in lowliest earth, sublimest sky.
Who dares disjoin these, — whether he ignores
Body or soul, whichever half destroys, —
Maims the else perfect manhood, perpetrates
Again the inexpiable crime we curse —
Hacks at the Hermai, halves each guardian shape
Combining, nowise vainly, prominence
Of august head and enthroned intellect,
With homelier symbol of asserted sense, —
Nature's prime impulse, earthly appetite.
For, when our folly ventures on the freak,
Would fain abolish joy and fruitfulness,
Mutilate nature — what avails the Head
Left solitarily predominant, —
Unbodied soul, — not Hermes, both in one?
I, no more than our City, acquiesce
In such a desecration, but defend
Man's double nature — ay, wert thou its foe!
Could I once more, thou cold Euripides,
Encounter thee, in nought would I abate

My warfare, nor subdue my worst attack
On thee whose life-work preached "Raise soul, sink
sense!

Evirate Hermes!" — would avenge the god,
And justify myself. Once face to face,
Thou, the argute and tricky, shouldst not wrap,
As thine old fashion was, in silent scorn
Those breast-beats quickened at the sting of truth;
Nor turn from me, as, if the tale be true,
From Lais when she met thee in thy walks,
Demanded why she had no rights as thou.

Not so shouldst thou betake thee, be assured,
To book and pencil, deign me no reply!
I would extract an answer from those lips
So closed and cold, were mine the garden-chance!
Gone from the world! Does none remain to take
Thy part and ply me with thy sophist-skill?
No sun makes proof of his whole potency
For gold and purple in that orb we view;
The apparent orb does little but leave blind
The audacious, and confuse the worshipping.

But, close on orb's departure, must succeed
The serviceable cloud, — must intervene,
Induce expenditure of rose and blue,
Reveal what lay in him, was lost to us.
So, friends, what hinders, as we homeward go,
If, privileged by triumph gained to-day,
We clasp that cloud our sun left saturate,
The Rhodian rosy with Euripides?
Not of my audience on my triumph-day,
She and her husband! After the night's news
Neither will sleep, but watch; I know the mood.
Accompany! my crown declares my right!

“And here you stand with those warm golden eyes!

“In honest language, I am scarce too sure
Whether I really felt, indeed expressed
Then, in that presence, things I now repeat:
Nor half, nor any one word, — will that do?
May be, such eyes must strike conviction, turn
One's nature bottom upwards, show the base —

The live rock latent under wave and foam :
Superimposure these! Yet solid stuff
Will ever and anon, obeying star,
(And what star reaches rock-nerve like an eye?)
Swim up to surface, spout or mud or flame,
And find no more to do than sink as fast.

“Anyhow, I have followed happily
The impulse, pledged my Genius with effect,
Since, come to see you, I am shown — myself!”

I answered :

“One of us declared for both
Welcome the glory of Aristophanes.’
The other adds, ‘and, — if that glory last,
Nor marsh-born vapor creep to veil the same, —
Once entered, share in our solemnity!
Commemorate, as we, Euripides!’”

“What?” he looked round, “I darken the bright
house?”

Profane the temple of your deity?
 That's true! Else wherefore does he stand portrayed?
 What Rhodian paint and pencil saved so much,
 Beard, freckled face, brow — all but breath, I hope!
 Come, that's unfair: myself am somebody,
 Yet my pictorial fame's just potter's work, —
 I barely figure on men's drinking-mugs!
 I and the Flat-nose, Sophroniskos' son,
 Oft make a pair. But what's this lies below?
 His table-book and graver, playwright's tool!
 And lo, the sweet psalterion, strung and screwed,
 Whereon he tried those *le-é-é-é-és*
 And *ke-é-é-é-és* and turns and trills,
 Lovely lark's tirra-lirra, lad's delight!
 Aischulos' bronze-throat eagle-bark at blood
 Has somehow spoiled my taste for twitterings!
 With . . . what, and did he leave you 'Herakles'?
 'The 'Frenzied Hero,' one unfractured sheet,
 No pine-wood tablets smeared with treacherous wax —
 Papuros perfect as e'er tempted pen!
 This sacred twist of bay-leaves dead and sere

Must be that crown the fine work failed to catch,—
No wonder! This might crown 'Antiope.'
'Herakles' triumph? In your heart perhaps!
But elsewhere? Come now, I'll explain the case,
Show you the main mistake. Give me the sheet!"

I interrupted:

"Aristophanes!

The stranger-woman sues in her abode —
'Be honored as our guest!' But, call it—shrine,
Then 'No dishonor to the Daimon!' bids
The priestess 'or expect dishonor's due!'
You enter fresh from your worst infamy,
Last instance of long outrage; yet I pause,
Withhold the word a-tremble on my lip,
Incline me, rather, yearn to reverence,—
So you but suffer that I see the blaze
And not the bolt,—the splendid fancy-fling,
Not the cold iron malice, the launched lie
Whence heavenly fire has withered; impotent,
Yet execrable, leave it 'neath the look

Of yon impassive presence! What he scorned,
His life long, need I touch, offending foot,
To prove that malice missed its mark, that lie
Cumbers the ground, returns to whence it came?
I marvel, I deplore,—the rest be mute!
But, throw off hate's celestialty,—
Show me, apart from song-flash and wit-flame,
A mere man's hand ignobly clinched against
Yon supreme calmness,—and I interpose,
Such as you see me! Silk breaks lightning's blow!

He seemed to scarce so much as notice me,
Aught I had spoken, save the final phrase:
Arrested there.

“Euripides grown calm!

Calmness supreme means dead and therefore safe,”
He muttered: then more audibly began—

“Dead! Such must die! Could people comprehend!
There's the unfairness of it! So obtuse

Are all: from Solon downward with his saw
'Let none revile the dead,—no, though the son,
Nay, far descendant, should revile thyself!'—
To him who made Elektra, in the act
Of wreaking vengeance on her worst of foes,
Scruple to blame, since speech that blames insults
Too much the very villain life-released.
Now, *I* say, only after death, begins
That formidable claim,—immunity
Of faultiness from fault's due punishment!
The living, who defame me,—why, they live:
Fools,—I best prove them foolish by their life,
Will they but work on, lay their work by mine,
And wait a little, one Olympiad, say!
Then—where's the vital force, mine froze beside?
The sturdy fibre, shamed my brittle stuff?
The school-correctness, sure of wise award
When my vagaries cease to tickle taste?
Where's censure that must sink me, judgment big
Awaiting just the word posterity
Pants to pronounce? Time's wave breaks, buries—
whom,

Fools, when myself confronts you four years hence;
 But die, ere next Lenaia,—safely so
 You 'scape me, slink with all your ignorance,
 Stupidity and malice, to that hole
 O'er which survivors croak 'Respect the dead!'

Ay, for I needs must! But allow me clutch
 Only a carrion-handful, lend it sense,
 (Mine, not its own, or could it answer me?)
 And question 'You, I pluck from hiding-place,
 Whose cant was, certain years ago, my "Clouds"
 Might last until the swallows came with Spring—
 Whose chatter, "Birds" are unintelligible,
 Mere psychologic puzzling: poetry?
 List, the true lay to rock a cradle with!
O man of Mitulené, wondrous wise!
 —Would not I rub each face in its own filth
 To tune of 'Now that years have come and gone,
 How does the fact stand? What's demonstrable
 By time, that tries things?—your own test, not mine
 Who think men are, were, ever will be fools,
 Though somehow fools confute fools,—as these, you!

Don't mumble to the sheepish twos and threes
You cornered and called "audience!" face this *me*
Who know, and can, and — helped by fifty years —
Do pulverize you pygmies, then as now!'

"Ay, now as then, I pulverize the brood,
Balaustion! Mindful, from the first, where foe
Would hide head safe when hand had flung its stone,
I did not turn cheek and take pleasantry,
But flogged while skin could purple and flesh start,
To teach fools whom they tried conclusions with.
First face a-splutter at me got such splotch
Of prompt slab mud as, filling mouth to maw,
Made its concern thenceforward not so much
To criticise me as go cleanse itself.
The only drawback to which huge delight, —
(He saw it, how he saw it, that calm cold
Sagacity you call Euripides!)
— Why, 'tis that, make a muckheap of a man,
There, pillared by your prowess, he remains,
Immortally immerded. Not so he!

Men pelted him but got no pellet back.
He reasoned, I'll engage, — 'Acquaint the world
Certain minuteness butted at my knee?
Dogface Eruxis, the small satirist, —
What better would the manikin desire
Than to strut forth on tiptoe, notable
As who so far up fouled me in the flank?'
So dealt he with the dwarfs: we giants, too,
Why must we emulate their pin-point play?
Render imperishable — impotence,
For mud throw mountains? Zeus, by mud unreached, —
Well, 'twas no dwarf he heaved Olumpos at!"

My heart burned up within me to my tongue.

"And why must men remember, ages hence,
Who it was rolled down rocks, but refuse too —
Strattis might steal from! mixture-monument,
Recording what? 'I, Aristophanes,
Who boast me much inventive in my art,
Against Euripides thus volleyed muck

Because, in art, he too extended bounds.
I — patriot, loving peace and hating war, —
Choosing the rule of few, but wise and good,
Rather than mob-dictature, fools and knaves
However multiplied their mastery, —
Despising most of all the demagogue,
(Noisome air-bubble, buoyed up, borne along
By kindred breath of knave and fool below,
Whose hearts swell proudly as each puffing face
Grows big, reflected in that glassy ball,
Vacuity, just bellied out to break
And righteously bespatter friends the first)
Loathing, — beyond a less puissant speech
Than my own god-grand language to declare, —
The fawning, cozenage and calumny
Wherewith such favorite feeds the populace
That fan and set him flying for reward : —
I who, detecting what vice underlies
Thought's superstructure, — fancy's sludge and slime
'Twi'xt fact's sound floor and thought's mere surface-
growth

Of hopes and fears which root no deeplier down
Than where all such mere fungi breed and bloat —
Namely, man's misconception of the God : —
I, loving, hating, wishful from my soul
'That truth should triumph, falsehood have defeat,
— Why, all my soul's supremacy of power
Did I pour out in volley just on him
Who, his whole life long, championed every cause
I called my heart's cause, loving as I loved,
Hating my hates, one false one true for both, —
Championed my cause — not flagellating foe
With simple rose and lily, gibe and jeer,
Sly wink of boon-companion o'er his bowze
Who, while he blames the liquor, smacks the lip,
Blames, doubtless, but leers condonation too, —
No, the balled fist broke brow like thunderbolt,
Battered till brain flew! Seeing which descent,
None questioned that was first acquaintanceship,
The avenger's with the vice he crashed through bone
Still, he displeased me ; and I turned from foe
To fellow-fighter, flung much stone, more mud, —

But missed him, since he lives aloof, I see.
Pah! stop more shame deep-cutting glory through,
Nor add, this poet, learned, — found no taunt
Tell like 'That other poet studies books!'
Wise, — cried 'At each attempt to move our hearts,
He uses the mere phrase of daily life!'
Witty, — 'His mother was a herb-woman!'
Veracious, honest, loyal, fair-and-good, —
'It was Kephisophon who helped him write!'

"Whence, — O the tragic end of Comedy! —
Balaustion pities Aristophanes.
For, who believed him? Those who laughed so loud?
They heard him call the sun Sicilian cheese!
Had he called true cheese — curd, would muscle move?
What made them laugh but the enormous lie?
'Kephisophon wrote "Herakles"?' ha, ha,
What can have stirred the wine-dregs, soured the soul,
And set a-lying Aristophanes?
Some accident at which he took offence!
The Tragic Master in a moody muse

Passed him unhailing, and it hurts — it hurts!
Beside, there's license for the Wine-lees-song!''

Blood burnt the cheek-bone, each black eye flashed
fierce.

“But this exceeds our license! Stay a while —
That's the solution! both are foreigners,
The fresh-come Rhodian lady, and her spouse
The man of Phokis: newly resident,
Nowise instructed — that explains it all!
No born and bred Athenian but would smile,
Unless frown seemed more fit for ignorance.
These strangers have a privilege!

“You blame”

(Presently he resumed with milder mien)
“Both theory and practice — Comedy:
Blame her from altitudes the Tragic friend
Rose to, and upraised friends along with him,
No matter how. Once there, all's cold and fine,

Passionless, rational ; our world beneath
Shows (should you condescend to grace so much
As glance at poor Athenai) grimly gross —
A population which, mere flesh and blood,
Eats, drinks and kisses, falls to fisticuffs,
Then hugs as hugely: speaks too as it acts,
Prodigiously talks nonsense, — townsmen needs
Must parley in their town's vernacular.
Such world has, of two courses, one to choose:
Unworld itself, — or else go blackening off
To its crow-kindred, leave philosophy
Her heights serene, fit perch for owls like you.
Now, since the world demurs to either course,
Permit me, — in default of boy or girl,
So they be reared Athenian, good and true, —
To praise what you most blame ! Hear Art's defence !
I'll prove our institution, Comedy,
Coeval with the birth of freedom, matched
So nice with our Republic, that its growth
Measures each greatness, just as its decline
Would signalize the downfall of the pair.

Our Art began when Bacchos . . . never mind!
You and your master don't acknowledge gods:
'They are not, no, they are not!' well, — began
When the rude instinct of our race outspoke,
Found, — on recurrence of festivity
Occasioned by black mother-earth's good will
To children, as they took her vintage-gifts, —
Found — not the least of many benefits —
That wine unlocked the stiffest lip, and loosed
The tongue late dry and reticent of joke,
Through custom's gripe which gladness thrusts aside.
So, emulating liberalities,
Heaven joined with earth for that god's day at least,
Renewed man's privilege, grown obsolete,
Of telling truth nor dreading punishment.
Whereon the joyous band disguised their forms
With skins, beast-fashion, daubed each phiz with dregs,
'Then holloaed, 'Neighbor, you are fool, you — knave,
You — hard to serve, you — stingy to reward!'
The guiltless crowed, the guilty sunk their crest,
And good folks gained thereby, 'twas evident.

Whence, by degrees, a birth of happier thought,
The notion came — not simply this to say,
But this to do — prove, put in evidence,
And act the fool, the knave, the harsh, the hunks,
Who *did* prate, cheat, shake fist, draw purse-string tight,
As crowd might see, which only heard before.

“So played the Poet, with his man of parts;
And all the others, found unqualified
To mount cart and be persons, made the mob,
Joined choros, fortified their fellows' fun,
Anticipated the community,
Gave judgment which the public ratified.
Suiting rough weapon doubtless to plain truth,
They flung, for word-artillery, why — filth;
Still, folks who wiped the unsavory salute
From visage, would prefer the mess to wit —
Steel, poked through midriff with a civil speech,
As now the way is: then, the kindlier mode
Was — drub not stab, ribroast not scarify!
So did Sousarion introduce, and so,

Did I, acceding, find the Comic Art :
 Club, — if I call it, — notice what's implied !
 An engine proper for rough chastisement,
 No downright slaying : with impunity —
 Provided crabtree, steeped in oily joke,
 Deal only such a bruise as laughter cures.
 I kept the gained advantage : stickled still
 For club-law — stout fun and allowanced thuraps :
 Knocked in each knob a crevice to hold joke
 As fig-leaf holds the fat-fry.

“Next, whom thrash.

Only the coarse fool and the clownish knave?
 Higher, more artificial, composite
 Offence should prove my prowess, eye and arm !
 Not who robs henroost, tells of untaxed figs,
 Spends all his substance on stewed ellops-fish,
 Or gives a pheasant to his neighbor's wife :
 No ! strike malpractice that affects the State,
 The common weal — intriguer or poltroon,
 Venality, corruption, what care I

If shrewd or witless merely?—so the thing
Lay sap to aught that made Athenai bright
And happy, change her customs, lead astray
Youth or age, play the demagogue at Pnux,
The sophist in Palaistra, or—what's worst,
As widest mischief,—from the Theatre
Preach innovation, bring contempt on oaths,
Adorn licentiousness, despise the Cult.
Are such to be my game? Why, then there wants
Quite other cunning than a cudgel-sweep!
Grasp the old stout stock, but new tip with steel
Each boss, if I would bray—no callous hide
Simply, but Lamachos in coat of proof,
Or Kleon cased about with impudence!
Shaft pushed no worse while point pierced sparkling
That none smiled 'Sportive, what seems savagest,
—Innocuous anger, spiteless rustic mirth!'
Yet spiteless in a sort, considered well,
Since I pursued my warfare till each wound
Went through the mere man, reached the principle
Worth purging from Athenai. Lamachos?

No, I attacked war's representative ;
Kleon? No, flattery of the populace ;
Sokrates? No, but that pernicious seed
Of sophists whereby hopeful youth is taught
To jabber argument, chop logic, pore
On sun and moon, and worship whirligig.
Oh, your tragedian, with the lofty grace,
Aims at no other and effects as much?
Candidly: what's a polished period worth,
Filed curt sententiousness of loaded line,
When he who deals out doctrine, primly steps
From just that selfsame moon he maunders of,
And, blood-thinned by his pallid nutriment,
Proposes to rich earth-blood—purity?
In me, 'twas equal-balanced flesh rebuked
Excess alike in stuff-guts Glauketes
Or starveling Chairephon; I challenged both,—
Strong understander of our common life,
Staple sustainment of humanity.
Whereas when your tragedian cries up Peace—
He's silent as to cheesecake Peace may chew;

Seeing through rabble-rule, he shuts his eye
To what were better done than crowding Pnux—
Dancing 'Threttanelo, the Kuklops drunk!'

"My power has hardly need to vaunt itself!
Opposers peep and mutter, or speak plain:
'No naming names in Comedy!' votes one,
'Nor vilifying live folk!' legislates
Another, 'urge amendment on the dead!'
'Don't throw away hard cash,' supplies a third,
'But crib from actor's dresses, choros-treats!'
Then Kleon did his best to bully me:
Called me before the Law Court: 'Such a play
Satirized citizens with strangers there,
Such other,'—why, its fault was in myself!
I was, this time, the stranger, privileged
To act no play at all,—Egyptian, I—
Rhodian or Kameirensian, Aiginete,
Lindian, or any foreigner he liked—
Because I can't write Attic, probably!
Go ask my rivals,—how they roughed my fleece,

And how, shorn pink themselves, the huddled sheep
 Shiver at distance from the clapping shears !
 Why must they needs provoke me ?

“ All the same,

No matter for its triumph, I foretell
 Subsidence of the day-star : quench his beams ?
 No Aias e'er was equal to the feat
 By throw of shield, tough-hided seven times seven,
 'Twixt sky and earth ! 'tis dullards soft and sure
 Who breathe against his brightest, here a sigh
 And there a ' So let be, we pardon you !'
 Till the minute mist hangs entire, has tamed
 Noonblaze to ' twilight mild and equable,'
 Vote the old women spinning out of doors.
 Give me the earth-spasm, when the lion ramped
 And the bull gendered in the brave gold flare !
 O you shall have amusement, — better still,
 Instruction ! no more horse-play, naming names,
 Taxing the fancy when plain sense will serve !
 Thearion, now, my friend who bakes you bread,

What's worthier limning than his household life?
His whims and ways, his quarrels with the spouse,
And how the son, instead of learning knead
Kilikian loaves, brings heart-break on his sire
By buying horseflesh branded *San*, each flank,
From shrewd Menippos who imports the ware:
While pretty daughter *Kepphé* too much haunts
The shop of *Sporgilos* the barber! brave!
Out with *Thearion's* meal-tub politics
In lieu of *Pisthetairos*, *Strepsiades*!
That's your exchange? O Muse of *Megara*!
Advise the fools '*Feed babe on weasel-lap*
For wild-boar's marrow, Cheiron's hero-pap,
And rear, for man — Ariphrades, mayhap!'
Yes, my *Balaustion*, yes, my *Euthukles*,
That's *your* exchange, — who, foreigners in fact
And fancy, would impose your squeamishness
On sturdy health, and substitute such brat
For the right offspring of us *Rocky Ones*,
Because babe kicks the cradle, — crows, not
mewls!

“Which brings me to the prime fault, poison-speck
Whence all the plague springs—that first feud of all
'Twixt me and you and your Euripides.
'Unworld the world' frowns he, my opposite.
I cry, 'Life!' 'Death,' he groans, 'our better Life!'
Despise what is—the good and graspable,
Prefer the out of sight and in at mind,
To village-joy, the well-side violet-patch,
The jolly club-feast when our field's in soak,
Roast thrushes, haresoup, peasoup, deep washed down
With Peparethian; the prompt paying off
That black-eyed brown-skinned country-flavored wench
We caught among our brushwood foraging:
On these look fig-juice, curdle up life's cream,
And fall to magnifying misery!
Or, if you condescend to happiness,
Why, talk, talk, talk about the empty name
While thing's self lies neglected 'neath your nose!
I need particular discourtesy
And private insult from Euripides
To render contest with him credible?

Say, all of me is outraged! one stretched sense,
I represent the whole Republic, — gods,
Heroes, priests, legislators, poets, — prone,
And pummelled into insignificance,
If will in him were matched with power of stroke.
For see what he has changed or hoped to change!
How few years since, when he began the fight,
Did there beat life indeed Athenai through!
Plenty and peace, then! Hellas thundersmote
The Persian. He himself had birth, you say,
That morn salvation broke at Salamis,
And heroes still walked earth. Themistokles—
Surely his mere back-stretch of hand could still
Find, not so lost in dark, Odusseus?— he
Holding as surely on to Herakles,—
Who touched Zeus, link and link, the unruptured
chain!
Were poets absent? Aischulos might hail—
With Pindaros, Theognis, — whom for sire?
Homeros' self, departed yesterday!
While Hellas, saved and sung to, then and thus,—

Ah, people, — ah, lost antique liberty!
We lived, ourselves, undoubted lords of earth:
Wherever olives flourish, corn yields crop
To constitute our title — ours such land!
Outside of oil and breadstuff, — barbarism!
What need of conquest? Let barbarians starve!
Devote our whole strength to our sole defence,
Content with peerless native products, home,
Beauty profuse in earth's mere sights and sounds,
Such men, such women, and such gods their guard!
The gods? he worshipped best who feared them most,
And left their nature uninquired into,
— Nature? their very names! pay reverence,
Do sacrifice for our part, theirs would be
To prove benignantest of playfellows.
With kindly humanism they countenanced
Our emulation of divine escapes
Through sense and soul: soul, sense are made to use!
Use each, acknowledging its god the while!
Crush grape, dance, drink, indulge, for Bacchos' sake
Tis Aphrodité's feast-day — frisk and fling,

Provided we observe our oaths, and house
Duly the stranger: Zeus takes umbrage else!
Ah, the great time — had I been there to taste!
Perikles, right Olympian, occupied
As yet with getting an Olumpos reared
Marble and gold above Akropolis, —
Wisely so spends what thrifty fools amassed
For cut-throat projects. Who carves Promachos?
Who writes the Oresteia?

“Ah, the time!

For, all at once, a cloud has blanched the blue,
A cold wind creeps through the close vineyard-rank
The olive-leaves curl, violets crisp and close
Like a nymph's wrinkling at the bath's first splash
(Your pardon!) There's a restlessness, a change,
Deterioration. Larks and nightingales
Are silenced, here and there a gor-crow grim
Flaps past, as scenting opportunity.
Where Kimon passaged to the Boulé once,
A starveling crew, unkempt, unshorn, unwashed,

Occupy altar-base and temple-step,
Are minded to indoctrinate our youth!
How call these carrion kill-joys that intrude?
'Wise men,' their nomenclature! Prodikos—
Who scarce could, unassisted, pick his steps
From way Theseia to the Tripod's way,—
This empty noddle comprehends the sun,—
How he's Aigina's bigness, wheels no whit
His way from east to west, nor wants a steed!
And here's Protagoras sets wrongheads right,
Explains what virtue, vice, truth, falsehood mean,
Makes all we seemed to know prove ignorance
Yet knowledge also, since, on either side
Of any question, something's straight to say,
Nothing to 'stablish, all things to disturb!
And shall youth go and play at kottabos,
Leaving unsettled whether moon-spots breed?
Or dare keep Choes ere the problem's solved—
Why should I like my wife who dislikes me?
But sure the gods permit this, censure that?'
So tell them! straight the answer's in your teeth:

'You relegate these points, then, to the gods?
What and where are they?' 'What my sire supposed,
And where yon cloud conceals them!' . . . 'Till they
'scape

And scramble down to Leda, as a swan,
Europa, as a bull! why not as — ass
To somebody? Your sire was Zeus perhaps!
Either — away with such ineptitude!
Or, wanting energy to break your bonds,
Stick to the good old stories, think the rain
Is — Zeus distilling pickle through a sieve!
Think thunder's thrown to break Theoros' head
For breaking oaths first! So you let ourselves
Instruct your progeny what fools are you
For fearing Zeus, who is the atmosphere,
Brother Poseidon, otherwise called — sea,
And son Hephaistos — fire and nothing else!
Over which nothings there's a something still,
"Necessity," that rules the universe
And cares as much about your Choes-feast
Performed or intermitted, as you care

Whether gnats sound their trump from head or tail!
When, stupefied at such philosophy,
We cry, 'Arrest the madmen, governor!
Pound hemlock and pour bull's-blood, Perikles!'
Would you believe? The Olympian bends his brow,
Scarce pauses from his building! 'Say they thus?
Then, they say wisely. Anaxagoras,
I had not known how simple proves eclipse
But for thy teaching! Go, men, learn like me!'

“Well, Zeus nods: man must reconcile himself,
So, let the Charon's-company harangue,
And Anaxagoras be — as we wish!
A comfort is in nature: while grass grows
And water runs, and sesame pricks tongue,
And honey from Brilesian hollow melts
On mouth, and Bacchis' lip beats both, my boy,
You will not be untaught life's use, young man?'
Pho! My young man just proves that panniered ass
Said to have borne Youth strapped on his stout back,
Who bargained with a serpent, let him swap

The priceless boon for — water to quench thirst!
What's youth to my young man? In love with age,
He Spartanizes, argues, fasts and prates,
Denies the plainest rules of life, long since
Proved sound; sets all authority aside,
Must simply recommence things, learn ere act,
And think out thoroughly how youth should pass —
Just as if youth stops passing, all the same!

“One last resource is left us — poetry!
'Vindicate nature, prove Plataian help,
Turn out, a thousand strong, all right and tight,
To save Sense, poet! Bang the sophist brood
Would cheat man out of wholesome sustenance
By swearing wine is water, honey — gall
Saperdion — The Empousa! Panic-smit,
Our juveniles abstain from Sense and starve.
Be yours to disenchant them! Change things back!
Or better, strain a point the other way
And handsomely exaggerate wronged truth!
Lend wine a glory never gained from grape,

Help honey with a snatch of him we style
 The Muses' Bee, bay-bloom-fed Sophokles,
 And give Saperdion a Kimberic robe !'

“ ‘I, his successor,’ gruff the answer grunts,
 ‘Incline to poetize philosophy,
 Extend it rather than restrain ; as thus —
 Are heroes men? No more, and scarce as much,
 Shall mine be represented. Are men poor?
 Behold them ragged ! sick ? lame, halt and blind !
 Do they use speech ? Ay, street-terms, market-phrase !
 Having thus drawn sky earthwards, what comes next
 But dare the opposite, lift earth to sky ?
 Mere puppets once, I now make womankind,
 For thinking, saying, doing, match the male.
 Lift earth ? I drop to, dally with, earth’s dung !
 — Recognize in the very slave — man’s mate,
 Declare him brave and honest, kind and true,
 And reasonable as his lord, in brief.
 “I paint men as they are” — so runs my boast —
 “Not as they should be :” paint — what’s part of
 “man.”

—Women and slaves, — not as, to please your pride,
 They should be, but your equals, as they are.
 O and the Gods! Instead of abject mien,
 Submissive whisper, while my Choros cants
 “Zeus, — with thy cubit’s length of attributes, —
 May I, the ephemeral, ne’er scrutinize
 Who made the heaven and earth and all things there! ’
 Myself shall say’ . . . Ay, ‘Herakles’ may help!
 Give me, — I want the very words, — attend!”

He read. Then — “Murder’s out, — ‘There are no
 gods,’

Man has no master, owns, by consequence,
 No right, no wrong, except to please or plague
 His nature: what man likes be man’s sole law!
 Still, since he likes Saperdion, honey, figs,
 Man may reach freedom by your roundabout!
 ‘Never believe yourselves the freer thence!
 There are no gods, but there’s “Necessity,” —
 Duty enjoined you, fact in figment’s place,
 Throned on no mountain, native to the mind!

Therefore deny yourselves Saperdion, figs, .
 And honey, for the sake of—what I dream,
 A-sitting with my legs up!

“Infamy!

The poet casts in calm his lot with these
 Assailants of Apollon! Sworn to serve
 Each Grace, the Furies call him minister—
 He, who was born for just that rosy world
 Renounced so madly, where what's false is fact,
 Where he makes beauty out of ugliness,
 Where he lives, life itself disguised for him
 As immortality—so works the spell,
 Enthusiastic mood which marks a man
 Muse-mad, dream-drunken, wrapt around by verse,
 Encircled still with poet-atmosphere,
 As lark emballed by its own crystal song,
 Or rose enmisted by that scent it makes!
 No, this were unreality! the real
 He wants, not falsehood,—truth alone he seeks,
 Truth, for all beauty! Beauty, in all truth—

That's certain somehow! Must the eagle lilt
Lark-like, needs fir-tree blossom rose-like? No!
Strength and utility charm more than grace,
And what's most ugly proves most beautiful.
So much assistance from Euripides!

“Whereupon I betake me, since needs must,
To a concluding ‘Go and feed the crows!
Do! Spoil your art as you renounce your life,
Poetize your so precious system, do,
Degrade the hero, nullify the god,
Exhibit women, slaves and men as peers,—
Your castigation follows prompt enough!
When all's concocted up stairs, heels o'er-head,
Down must submissive drop the masterpiece
For public praise or blame: so, praise away,
Friend Sokrates, wife's-friend Kephisophon!
Boast innovations, cramp phrase, uncouth song,
Hard matter and harsh manner, gods, men,
slaves
And women jumbled to a laughing-stock

Which Hellas shall hold sides at lest she split!
Hellas, on these, shall have her word to say!

“ She has it and she says it—there’s the curse!—
She finds he makes the shag-rag hero-race,
The noble slaves, wise women, move as much
Pity and terror as true tragic types:
Applauds inventiveness—the plot so new,
The turn and trick subsidiary so strange!
She relishes that homely phrase of life,
That common town-talk, more than trumpet-blasts;
Accords him right to chop and change a myth;
‘What better right had he, who told the tale
In the first instance, to embellish fact?
This bard may disembellish yet improve!
Both find a block: this man carves back to bull
What first his predecessor cut to sphynx:
Such genuine actual roarer, nature’s brute,
intelligible to our time, was sure
The old-world artist’s purpose, had he worked
To mind; this artist means and makes the thing!

Then, past dispute, the verse slips oily-bathed
 In unctuous music: say, effeminate —
 You also say, like Kuthereia's self,
 A lulling effluence which enswathes some isle
 Where hides a nymph, not seen but felt the more.
 That's Hellas' verdict!

“ Does Euripides

Even so far absolved, remain content?
 Nowise! His task is to refine, refine,
 Divide, distinguish, subtilize away
 Whatever seemed a solid planting-place
 For footfall, — not in that phantasmal sphere
 Proper to poet, but on vulgar earth
 Where people used to tread with confidence.
 There's left no longer one plain positive
 Enunciation incontestable
 Of what's good, right and decent here on earth.
 Nobody now can say, 'this plot is mine,
 Though but a plethron square, — my duty!' — 'Yours?
 Mine, or at least not yours,' snaps somebody!

And, whether the dispute be parent-right
Or children's service, husband's privilege
Or wife's submission, there's a snarling straight,
Smart passage of opposing 'yea' and 'nay,'
'Should,' 'should not,' till, howe'er the contest end,
Spectators go off sighing, 'Clever thrust! \\
Why was I so much hurried to pay debt,
Attend my mother, sacrifice an ox,
And set my name down "for a trireme, good"?
Something I might have urged on t'other side!
No doubt, Chresphontes or Bellerophon
We don't meet every day; but Stab-and-stitch
The tailor — ere I turn the drachmas o'er
I owe him for a chiton, as he thinks,
I'll pose the blockhead with an argument!'

"So has he triumphed, your Euripides!
Oh, I concede, he rarely gained a prize:
That's quite another matter! cause for that!
Still, when 'twas got by Ions, Iophon,
Ôff he would pace confoundedly superb,

Supreme, no smile at movement on his mouth
Till Sokrates winked, whispered: out it broke!
And Aristullos jotted down the jest,
While Iophons or Ions, bay on brow,
Looked queerly, and the foreigners — like you —
Asked o'er the border with a puzzled smile
— 'And so, you value Ions, Iophons,
Euphorions! How about Euripides?'
(Eh, brave bard's-champion? Does the anger
boil?

Keep within bounds a moment, — eye and lip
Shall loose their doom on me, their fiery worst!)
What strangers? Archelaos heads the file!
He sympathizes, he concerns himself,
He pens epistle, each successful play:
'Athenai sinks effete; there's younger blood
In Makedonia. Visit where I rule!
Do honor to me and take gratitude!
Live the guest's life, or work the poet's way,
Which also means the statesman's: he who wrote
Erechtheus' may be rawly politic

At home where Kleophon is ripe ; but here
My council-board permits him choice of seats.'

"Now, this was operating, — what should prove
A poison-tree, had flowered far on to fruit
For many a year, — when I was moved, first man,
To dare the adventure, down with root and branch.
So, from its sheath I drew my Comic steel,
And dared what I am now to justify.
A serious question first, though!

“Once again!

Do you believe, when I aspired in youth,
I made no estimate of power at all,
Nor paused long, nor considered much, what class
Of fighters I might claim to join, beside
That class wherewith I cast in company?
Say, you — profuse of praise no less than blame —
Could not I have competed — franker phrase
Might trulier correspond to meaning — still,
Competed with your Tragic paragon?

Suppose me minded simply to make verse,
To fabricate, parade resplendent arms,
Flourish and sparkle out a Trilogy, —
Where was the hinderance? But my soul bade 'Fight!
Leave flourishing for mock-foe, pleasure-time;
Prove arms efficient on real heads and hearts!' —
How? With degeneracy sapping fast
The Marathonian muscle, nerved of old
To maul the Mede, now strung at best to help
— How did I fable? — War and Hubbub mash
To mincemeat Fatherland and Brotherhood,
Pound in their mortar Hellas, State by State,
'That greed might gorge, the while frivolity
Rubbed hands and smacked lips o'er the dainty dish!
Authority, experience — pushed aside
By any upstart pleading throng and press
O' the people! 'Think, say, do thus!' Wherefore,
 pray?
'We are the people: who impugns our right
Of choosing Kleon that tans hide so well,
Huperbolos that turns out lamps so trim,

Hemp-seller Eukrates or Lusikles
Sheep-dealer, Kephalos the potter's son,
Diitriphes who weaves the willow-work
To go round bottles, and Nausikudes
The meal-man? Such we choose and more, their mates,
To think and say and do in our behalf!
While sophistry wagged tongue, emboldened still,
Found matter to propose, contest, defend,
'Stablish, turn topsyturvy, — all the same,
No matter what, provided the result
Were something new in place of something old, —
Set wagging by pure insolence of soul
Which needs must pry into, have warrant for
Each right, each privilege good policy
Protects from curious eye and prating mouth!
Everywhere lust to shape the world anew,
Spurn this Athenai as we find her, build
A new impossible Cloudcuckooburg
For feather-headed birds, once solid men,
Where rules, discarding jolly habitude,
Nourished on myrtle-berries and stray ants,

King Tereus who, turned Hoopoe Triple-Crest,
Shall terrify and bring the gods to terms!

“Where was I? Oh! Things ailing thus — I ask,
What cure? Cut, thrust, hack, hew at heap-on-heaped
Abomination with the exquisite

Palaistra-tool of polished Tragedy?

‘Erechtheus’ shall harangue Amphiktuon,

And incidentally drop word of weight

On justice, righteousness, so turn aside

The audience from attacking Sicily! —

The more that Choros, after he recounts

How Phrixos rode the ram, the far-famed Fleece,

Shall add — at last fall of grave dancing-foot —

‘Aggression never yet was helped by Zeus!’

That helps or hinders Alkibiades?

As well expect, should Pheidias carve Zeus’ self

And set him up, some half a mile away,

His frown would frighten sparrows from your field!

Eagles may recognize their lord, belike,

But as for vulgar sparrows, — change the god,

And plant some big Priapos with a pole!
I wield the Comic weapon rather — hate!
Hate! honest, earnest, and directest hate —
Warfare wherein I close with enemy,
Call him one name and fifty epithets,
Remind you his great-grandfather sold bran,
Describe the new exomion, sleeveless coat
He knocked me down last night and robbed me of,
Protest he voted for a tax on air!
And all this hate — if I write Comedy —
With tolerance, most like — applause, perhaps
True veneration; for I praise the god
Present in person of his minister,
And pay — the wilder my extravagance —
The more appropriate worship to the Power
Adulterous, night-roaming, and the rest:
Otherwise, — that originative force
Of nature, impulse stirring death to life,
Which, underlying law, seems lawlessness,
Yet is the outbreak which, ere order be,
Must thrill creation through, warm stocks and stones,

Phales Iacchos.

“Comedy for me!

Why not for you, my Tragic masters? Sneaks
Whose art is mere desertion of a trust!
Such weapons lay to hand, the ready club,
The clay-ball, on the ground a stone to snatch,—
Arms fit to bruise the boar's neck, break the chine
O' the wolf,—and you must impiously—despise?
No, I'll say, furtively let fall that trust
Consigned you! 'Twas not 'take or leave alone,'
But 'take and, wielding, recognize your god
In his prime attributes!' And though full soon
You sneaked, subsided into poetry,
Nor met your due reward, still,—heroize
And speechify and sing-song and forego
Far as you may your function,—still its pact
Endures, one piece of early homage still
Exacted of you; after your three bouts
At hoitytoity, great men with long words,
And so forth,—at the end, must tack itself
The genuine sample, the Satyric Play,

Concession, with its wood-boys' fun and freak,
To the true taste of the mere multitude.
Yet, there again! What does your Still-at-itch,
Always-the-innovator? Shrugs and shirks!
Out of his fifty Trilogies, some five
Are somehow suited: Satyrs dance and sing,
Try merriment, a grimly prank or two,
Sour joke squeezed through pursed lips and teeth on
edge,
Then quick on top of toe to pastoral sport,
Goat-tending and sheep-herding, cheese and cream,
Soft grass and silver rillets, country-fare —
When throats were promised Thasian! Five such
feats, —
Then frankly off he threw the yoke: next Droll,
Next festive drama, covenanted fun,
Decent reversion to indecency,
Proved — your 'Alkestis!' There's quite fun
enough,
Herakles drunk! From out fate's blackening wave
Calamitous, just zigzags some shot star,

Poor promise of faint joy, and turns the laugh
On dupes whose fears and tears were all in waste!

“For which sufficient reasons, in truth’s name,
I closed with whom you count the Meaner Muse,
Classed me with Comic Poets who should weld
Dark with bright metal, show their blade may keep
Its adamantine birthright though a-blaze
With poetry, the gold, and wit, the gem,
And strike mere gold, unstiffened out by steel,
Gem, no rough iron joints its strength around,
From hand of — posturer, not combatant!

“Such was my purpose: it succeeds, I say!
Have not we beaten Kallikratidas,
Not humbled Sparté? Peace awaits our word,
In spite of Theramenes, and his like.
Since my previsions, — warranted too well
By the long war now waged and worn to end —
Had spared such heritage of misery,
My after-counsels scarce need fear repulse.
Athenai, taught prosperity has wings,

Cages the glad recapture. Demos, see,
From folly's premature decrepitude
Boiled young again, emerges from the stew
Of twenty-five years' trouble, sits and sways,
One brilliance and one balsam,— sways and sits
Monarch of Hellas! ay and, sage again,
No longer jeopardizes chieftainship,
No longer loves the brutish demagogue
Appointed by a bestial multitude,
But seeks out sound advisers. Who are they?
Ourselves, of parentage proved wise and good!
To such may hap strains thwarting quality,
(As where shall want its flaw mere human stuff?)
Still, the right grain is proper to right race;
What's contrary, call curious accident!
Hold by the usual! Orchard-grafted tree,
Not wilding, race-horse-sired, not rouncey-born,
Aristocrat, no sausage-selling snob!
Nay, why not Alkibiades, come back
Filled by the Genius, freed of petulance,
Frailty,— say, youthfulness that's all at fault,—

Renewed to Perikles and something more?
— Being at least our duly born and bred,—
Curse on what chaunoprockt first gained his ear
And got his . . . well, once true man in right place,
Our commonalty soon content themselves
With doing just what they are born to do,
Eat, drink, make merry, mind their own affairs
And leave state-business to the larger brain!
I do not stickle for their punishment;
But certain culprits have a cloak to twitch,
A purse to pay the piper: flog, say I,
Your fine fantastics, paragons of parts,
Who choose to play the important! Far from side
With us, their natural supports, allies,—
And, best by brain, help who are best by birth
To fortify each weak point in the wall
Built broad and wide and deep for permanence
Between what's high and low, what's rare and vile,—
'They cast their lot perversely in with low
And vile, lay flat the barrier, lift the mob
'To dizzy heights where Privilege stood firm.

And then, simplicity become conceit, —
Woman, slave, common soldier, artisan,
Crazy with new-found worth, new-fangled claims, —
These must be taught next how to use their heads
And hands in driving man's right to mob's rule!
What fellows thus inflame the multitude?
Your Sokrates, still crying, 'Understand!'
Your Aristullos, — 'Argue!' Last and worst,
Should, by good fortune, mob still hesitate,
Remember there's degree in heaven and earth,
Cry, 'Aischulos enjoined us fear the gods,
And Sophokles advised respect the kings!'
Why, your Euripides informs them — Gods?
They are not! Kings? They are, but . . . do not I,
In 'Suppliants,' make my Theseus, — yours, no
more, —
Fire up at insult of who styles him King?
Play off that Herald, I despise the most,
As patronizing kings' prerogative
Against a Theseus proud to dare no step
Till he consult the people?

“Such as these —

Ah, you expect I am for strangling straight?
 Nowise, Balaustion! All my roundabout
 Ends at beginning, with my own defence!
 I dose each culprit just with — Comedy.
 Let each be doctored in exact the mode
 Himself prescribes: by words, the word-monger —
 My words to his words, — my lies, if you like,
 To his lies. Sokrates I nickname thief,
 Quack, necromancer; Aristullos, — say,
 Male Kirké who bewitches and bewrays
 And changes folk to swine; Euripides, —
 Well, I acknowledge! Every word is false,
 Looked close at; but stand distant and stare through,
 All's absolute indubitable truth
 Behind lies, truth which only lies declare!
 For come, concede me truth's in thing not word,
 Meaning not manner! Love smiles 'rogue' and
 'wretch'
 When 'sweet' and 'dear' seem vapid; Hate adopts
 Love's 'sweet' and 'dear,' when 'rogue' and 'wretch'
 fall flat;

Love, Hate — are truths, then, each, in sense not
 sound.

Further : if Love, remaining Love, fell back
 On 'sweet' and 'dear,' — if Hate, though Hate the
 same,

Dropped down to 'rogue' and 'wretch,' — each
 phrase were false.

Good! and now grant I hate no matter whom
 With reason : I must therefore fight my foe,
 Finish the mischief which made enmity.

How? By employing means to most hurt him
 Who much harmed me. What way did he do harm?
 Through word or deed? Through word? with word,
 wage war!

Word with myself directly? As direct
 Reply shall follow : word to you, the wise,
 Whence indirectly came the harm to me?
 What wisdom I can muster waits on such :
 Word to the populace which, misconceived
 By ignorance and incapacity,
 Ends in no such effect as follows cause

When I, or you the wise, are reasoned with,
So damages what I and you hold dear?
In that event, I ply the populace
With just such word as leavens their whole lump
'To the right ferment for my purpose. *They*
Arbitrate properly between us both?
They weigh my answer with his argument,
Match quip with quibble, wit with eloquence?
All they attain to understand is — blank!
Two adversaries differ! which is right
And which is wrong, none takes on him to say,
Since both are unintelligible. Pooh!
Swear my foe's mother vended herbs she stole,
They fall a-laughing! Add,—his household drudge
Of all-work justifies that office well,
Kisses the wife, composing him the play,—
They grin at whom they gaped in wonderment,
And go off—'Was he such a sorry scrub?
This other seems to know! we praised too fast!'
Why then, my lies have done the work of truth,
Since 'scrub,' improper designation, means

Exactly what the proper argument
— Had such been comprehensible — proposed
To proper audience — were I graced with such —
Would properly result in ; so your friend
Gets an impartial verdict on his verse,
'The tongue swears, but the soul remains unsworn !

"There, my Balaustion ! All is summed and said,
No other cause of quarrel with yourself !
Euripides and Aristophanes
Differ : he needs must round our difference
Into the mob's ear ; with the mob I plead.
You angrily start forward 'This to me ?'
No speck of this on you the thrice refined !
Could parley be restricted to us two,
My first of duties were to clear up doubt
As to our true divergence each from each.
Does my opinion so diverge from yours ?
Probably less than little — not at all
To know a matter, for my very self
And intimates — that's one thing ; to imply

By 'knowledge' — loosing whatsoe'er I know
Among the vulgar who, by mere mistake,
May brain themselves and me in consequence, —
That's quite another. 'O the daring flight!
This only bard maintains the exalted brow,
Nor grovels in the slime nor fears the gods!'
Did *I* fear — *I* play superstitious fool,
Who, with the due proviso, introduced,
Active and passive, their whole company
As creatures too absurd for scorn itself?
Zeus? I have styled him — 'slave, mere thrashing-
block!'

I'll tell you: in my very next of plays,
At Bacchos' feast, in Bacchos' honor, full
In front of Bacchos' representative,
I mean to make main-actor — Bacchos' self!
Forth shall he strut, apparent, first to last,
A blockhead, coward, braggart, liar, thief,
Demonstrated all these by his own mere
Xanthias the man-slave: such man shows such god
Shamed to brute-beastship by comparison!

And when ears have their fill of his abuse,
And eyes are sated with his pommelling, —
My Choros taking care, by, all the while
Singing his glory, that men recognize
A god in the abused and pommelled beast, —
Then, should one ear be stopped of auditor,
Should one spectator shut revolted eye, —
Why, the Priest's self will first raise outraged voice
' Back, thou barbarian, thou ineptitude!
Does not most license hallow best our day,
And least decorum prove its strictest rite?
Since Bacchos bids his followers play the fool,
And there's no fooling like a majesty
Mocked at, — who mocks the god, obeys the law —
Law which, impute but indiscretion to,
And . . . why, the spirit of Euripides
Is evidently active in the world!'
Do I stop here? No! feat of flightier force!
See Hermes! what commotion raged, — reflect! —
When imaged god alone got injury
By drunkards' frolic! How Athenai stared

Aghast, then fell to frenzy, fit on fit,—
Ever the last, the longest! At this hour,
The craze abates a little; so, my Play
Shall have up Hermes: and a Karion, slave,
(Since there's no getting lower) calls our friend
The profitable god, we honor so,
Whatever contumely fouls the mouth—
Bids him go earn more honest livelihood
By washing tripe in well-trough—wash he does,
Duly obedient! Have I dared my best?
Asklepios, answer!—deity in vogue,
Who visits Sophokles familiarly,
If you believe the old man,—at his age,
Living is dreaming, and strange guests haunt door
Of house, belike, peep through and tap at times
When a friend yawns there, waiting to be fetched,—
At any rate, to memorize the fact,
He has spent money, set an altar up
In the god's temple, now in much repute.
That temple-service trust me to describe—
Cheaters and choused, the god, his brace of girls,

Their snake, and how they manage to snap gifts
'And consecrate the same into a bag,'
For whimsies done away with in the dark!
As if, a stone's throw from that theatre
Whereon I thus unmask their dupery,
The thing were not religious and august!

"Of Sophokles himself — nor word nor sign
Beyond a harmless parody or so!
He founds no anti-school, upsets no faith,
But, living, lets live, the good easy soul
Who, — if he saves his cash, unpoetlike,
Loves wine and — never mind what other sport,
Boasts for his father just a sword-blade-smith,
Proves but queer captain when the people claim,
For one who conquered with 'Antigone,'
The right to undertake a squadron's charge, —
And needs the son's help now to finish plays,
Seeing his dotage calls for governance
And Iophon to share his property, —
Why, of all this, reported true, I breathe

Not one word — true or false, I like the man!
Sophokles lives, and lets live: long live he!
Otherwise, — sharp the scourge and hard the blow!

“And what’s my teaching but — accept the old,
Contest the strange! acknowledge work that’s done,
Misdoubt men who have still their work to do!
Religions, laws and customs, poetries,
Are old? So much achieved victorious truth!
Each work was product of a lifetime, wrung
From each man by an adverse world: for why?
He worked, destroying other older work
Which the world loved and so was loath to lose.
Whom the world beat in battle — dust and ash!
Who beat the world, left work in evidence,
And wears its crown till new men live new lives,
And fight new fights, and triumph in their turn.
I mean to show you on the stage! you’ll see
My Just Judge only venture to decide
Between two suitors, which is god, which man,
By thrashing both of them as flesh can bear.

You shall agree, — whichever bellows first,
He's human ; who holds longest out, divine :
That is the only equitable test !
Cruelty ? Pray, who pricked them on to court
My thong's award ? Must they needs dominate ?
Then I — rebel ! Their instinct grasps the new ?
Mine bids retain the old : a fight must be,
And which is stronger the event will show.
O but the pain ! Your proved divinity
Still smarts all reddened ? And the rightlier served !
Was not some man's-flesh in him, after all ?
Do let us lack no frank acknowledgment
There's nature common to both gods and men !
All of them — spirit ? What so winced was clay !
Away pretence to some exclusive sphere
Cloud-nourishing a sole selected few
Fume-fed with self-superiority !
I stand up for the common coarse-as-clay
Existence, — stamp and ramp with heel and hoof
On solid vulgar life, you fools disown !
Make haste from your unreal eminence,

And measure lengths with me upon that ground
Whence this mud-pellet sings and summons you!
I know the soul, too, how the spark ascends
And how it drops apace and dies away.
I am your poet-peer, man thrice your match!
I too can lead an airy life when dead,
Fly like Kinesias when I'm cloudward bound;
But here, no death shall mix with life it mars!

“So, my old enemy who caused the fight,
Own I have beaten you, Euripides!
Or,—if your advocate would contravene,—
Help him, Balaustion! Use the rosy strength!
I have not done my utmost,—treated you
As I might Aristullos, mint-perfumed,—
Still, let the whole rage burst in brave attack!
Don't pay the poor ambiguous compliment
Of fearing any pearl-white knuckled fist
Will damage this broad buttress of a brow!
Fancy yourself my Aristonumos,
Ameipsias or Sannurion: punch and pound!

Three cuckoos who cry 'cuckoo!' much I care!
They boil a stone! *Neblaretai! Rattei!*"

Cannot your task have end here, Euthukles?
Day by day glides our galley on its path:
Still sunrise and still sunset, Rhodes half-reached,
And still, my patient scribe! no sunset's peace
Descends more punctual than that brow's incline
O'er tablets which your serviceable hand
Prepares to trace. Why treasure up, forsooth,
These relics of a night that left me rich,
But, in remembrance merely, makes less poor
None, stranger to Athenai and her past?
For—how remembered! As some greedy hind
Persuades a honeycomb, beyond the due,
To yield its hoarding,—heedless what alloy
Of the poor bee's own substance taints the gold
Which, unforced, yields few drops, but purity,—
So would you fain relieve of load this brain,

Though the hived thoughts must bring away, with
strength,
What words and weakness, strength's receptacle —
Wax from the store! Yet, — aching soothed away, —
Accept the compound! No suspected scent
But proves some rose was rifled, though its ghost
Scarce lingers with what promised musk and myrrh.
No need of farther squeezing! What remains
Can only be Balaustion, just her speech!

Ah, but — because speech serves a purpose still! —

He ended with that flourish. I replied,

“Fancy myself your Aristonumos?
Advise me, rather, to remain myself,
Balaustion, — mindful what mere mouse confronts
'The forest-monarch Aristophanes!
I who, a woman, claim no quality

Beside the love of all things lovable
Created by that power pre-eminent
In knowledge, as in love I stand perchance,
— You, the consummately-creative! How
Should I, then, dare deny submissive trust
To any process aiming at result
Such as you say your songs are pregnant with?
Result, all judge: means, let none scrutinize
Save those aware how glory best is gained
By daring means to end, ashamed of shame,
Constant in faith that only good works good,
While evil yields no fruit but impotence!
Graced with such plain good, I accept the means!
Nay, if result itself in turn become
Means, — who shall say? — to ends still loftier yet, —
Though still the good prove hard to understand,
The bad still seemingly predominate, —
Never may I forget which order bears
The burden, toils to win the great reward,
And finds, in failure, the grave punishment,
So, meantime, claims of me a faith I yield!

Moreover, a mere woman, I recoil
From what may prove man's-work permissible,
Imperative. Rough strokes surprise: what then?
Some lusty armsweep needs must cause the crash
Of thorn and bramble ere those shrubs, those flowers,
We fain would have earth yield exclusively,
Are sown, matured, are garlanded for boys
And girls, who know not how the growth was gained.
Finally, am I not a foreigner?
No born and bred Athenian, — isled about,
I scarce can drink, like you, at every breath,
Just some particular doctrine which may best
Explain the strange thing I revolt against —
How — by involvement, who may extricate? —
Religion perks up through impiety,
Law leers with license, folly wise-like frowns,
The seemly lurks inside the abominable.
But opposites, — each neutralizes each
Haply by mixture: what should promise death,
May haply give the good ingredient force,
Disperse in fume the antagonistic ill.

This institution, therefore, — Comedy, —
By origin, a rite ; by exercise,
Proved an achievement tasking poet's power
To utmost, eking legislation out
Beyond the legislator's faculty,
Playing the censor where the moralist
Declines his function, far too dignified
For dealing with minute absurdities ;
By efficacy, — virtue's guard, the scourge
(Of vice, each folly's fly-flap, arm in aid
Of all that's righteous, customary, sound
And wholesome ; sanctioned therefore, — better say,
Prescribed for fit acceptance of this age
By, not alone the long recorded roll
Of earlier triumphs but, success to-day —
(The multitude as prompt recipient still
Of good gay teaching from that monitor
They crowned this morning — Aristophanes —
As when Sousarion's car first traversed street) —
This product of Athenai — *I* dispute,
Impugn? There's just one only circumstance

Explains that! I, poor critic, see, hear, feel ;
But eyes, ears, senses prove me — foreigner !
Who shall gainsay that the raw new-come guest
Blames oft, too sensitive? On every side
Of — larger than your stage — life's spectacle,
Convention here permits and there forbids
Impulse and action, nor alleges more
Than some mysterious ' So do all, and so
Does no one: ' which the hasty stranger blames
Because, who bends the head unquestioning,
Transgresses, turns to wrong what else were right,
By failure of a reference to law
Beyond convention ; blames unjustly, too —
As if, through that defect, all gained were lost
And slave-brand set on brow indelibly ;—
Blames unobservant or experienceless
That men, like trees, if stout and sound and sane,
Show stem no more affected at the root
By bough's exceptional submissive dip
Of leaf and bell, light danced at end of spray
To windy fitfulness in wayward sport, —

No more lie prostrate, — than low files of flower
Which, when the blast goes by, unruffled raise
Each head again o'er ruder meadow-wreck
Of thorn and thistle that refractory
Demurred to cower at passing wind's caprice.
Why shall not guest extend like charity,
Conceive how, — even when astounded most
That natives seem to acquiesce in muck
Changed by prescription, they affirm, to gold, —
Such may still bring to test, still bear away
Safely and surely much of good and true
Though latent ore, themselves unspecked, unspoiled?
Fresh bathed i' the icebrook, any hand may pass
A placid moment through the lamp's fierce flame:
And who has read your 'Lemnians,' seen 'The Hours,
Heard 'Female-Playhouse-seat-Pre-occupants,'
May feel no worse effect than, once a year,
Those who leave decent vesture, dress in rags
And play the mendicant, conform thereby
To country's rite, and then, no beggar-taint
Retained, don vesture due next morrow-day.

What if I share the stranger's weakness then?
Well, should I also show his strength, his sense
Untutored, ay! — but then untampered with!

“ I fancy, though the world seems old enough,
Though Hellas be the sole unbarbarous land,
Years may conduct to such extreme of age,
And outside Hellas such new isles may lurk,
That haply, — when and where remain a dream! —
In fresh days when no Hellas fills the world,
In novel lands as strange where, all the same,
Their men and women yet behold, as we,
Blue heaven, black earth, and love, hate, hope and
fear,
Over again, unhelped by Attiké —
Haply some philanthropic god steers bark,
Gift-laden, to the lonely ignorance
Islanded, say, where mist and snow mass hard
To metal — ay, those Kassiterides!
Then asks: ‘Ye apprehend the human form.
What of this statue, made to Pheidias’ mind,

This picture, as it pleased our Zeuxis paint?
Ye too feel truth, love beauty: judge of these!' .
Such strangers may judge feebly, stranger-like:
'Each hair too indistinct—for, see our own!
Hands, not skin-colored as these hands we have,
And lo, the want of due decorum here!
A citizen, arrayed in civic garb,
Just as he walked your streets apparently,
Yet wears no sword by side, adventures thus,
In thronged Athenai! foolish painter's-freak!
While here's his brother-sculptor found at fault
Still more egregiously, who shames the world,
Shows wrestler, wrestling at the public games,
Atrociously exposed from head to foot!' .
Sure, the Immortal would impart at once
Our slow-stored knowledge, how small truths sup-
pressed
Conduce to the far greater truth's display,—
Would replace simple by instructed sense,
And teach them how Athenai first so tamed
The natural fierceness that her progeny

Discarded arms nor feared the beast in man:
Wherefore at games, where earth's wise gratitude,
Proved by responsive culture, claimed the prize
For man's mind, body, each in excellence, —
When mind had bared itself, came body's turn,
And only irreligion grudged the gods
One naked glory of their master-work
Where all is glorious rightly understood, —
The human frame; enough that man mistakes:
Let him not think the gods mistaken too!

“But, peradventure, if the stranger's eye
Detected . . . Ah, too high my fancy-flight!
Pheidias, forgive, and Zeuxis bear with me —
How on your faultless should I fasten fault
Of my own framing, even? Only say, —
Suppose the impossible were realized,
And some as patent incongruity,
Unseemliness, — of no more warrant, there
And then, than now and here, whate'er the time
And place, — I say, the Immortal, — who can
doubt? —

Would never shrink, but own 'The blot escaped
Our artist: thus he shows humanity!'

"May stranger tax one peccant part in thee,
Poet, three-parts divine? May I proceed?

"'Comedy is prescription and a rite.'
Since when? No growth of the blind antique time,
'It rose in Attiké with liberty;
When freedom falls, it too will fall.' Scarce so!
Your games,—the Olympian, Zeus gave birth to
these;

Your Pythian,—these were Phoibos' institute.
Isthmian, Nemeian,—Theseus, Herakles
Appointed each, the boys and barbers say!
Earth's day is growing late: where's Comedy?
'Oh, that commenced, an age since,—two, belike,—
In Megara, whence here they brought the thing!'
Or I misunderstand, or here's the fact—
Your grandsire could recall that rustic song,
How suchanone was thief, and miser such,

And how,—immunity from chastisement
Once promised to bold singers of the same
By daylight on the drunkard's holiday,—
The clever fellow of the joyous troop
Tried acting what before he sang about,
Acted and stole, or hoarded, acting too:
While his companions ranged a-row, closed up
For Choros,—bade the general rabblement
Sit, see, hear, laugh,—not join the dance themselves.
Soon, the same clever fellow found a mate,
And these two did the whole stage-mimicking,
Still closer in approach to Tragedy,—
So led the way to Aristophanes,
Whose grandsire saw Sousarion, and whose sire—
Chionides; yourself wrote 'Banqueters'
When Aischulos had made 'Prometheus,' nay,
All of the marvels; Sophokles,—I'll cite,
'Oidipous'—and Euripides—I bend
The head—'Medeia' henceforth awed the world!
'Banqueters' 'Babylonians'—next come you!
Surely the great days that left Hellas free

Happened before such advent of huge help,
Eighty-years-late assistance? Marathon,
Plataia, Salamis were fought, I think,
Before new educators stood reproved,
Or foreign legates blushed, excepted to!
Where did the helpful rite pretend its rise?
Did it break forth, as gifts divine are wont,
Plainly authentic, incontestably
Adequate to the helpful ordinance?
Founts, dowered with virtue, pulse out pure from
source ;
'Tis there we taste the god's benign intent :
Not when, — fatigued away by journey, foul
With brutish trampling, — crystal sinks to slime,
And lymph forgets the first salubriousness.
Sprang Comedy to light thus crystal-pure?
'Nowise!' yourself protest with vehemence ;
'Gross, bestial, did the clowns' diversion break ;
Every successor paddled in the slush ;
Nay, my contemporaries one and all
Gay played the mudlark till I joined their game ;

Then was I first to change buffoonery
For wit, and stupid filth for cleanly sense,
Transforming pointless joke to purpose fine,
Transfusing rude enforcement of home-law —
“Drop knave’s-tricks, deal more neighbor-like, ye
boors!” —

With such new glory of poetic breath
As, lifting application far past use
O’ the present, launched it o’er men’s lowly heads
To future time, when high and low alike
Are dead and done with, while my airy power
Flies disengaged, as vapor from what stuff
It — say not, *dwelt* — but *fitlier*, dallied with
To forward work, which done, — deliverance brave, —
It soars away, and mud subsides to dust.
Say then, myself invented Comedy!’

“So mouths full many a famed *Parabasis*!
Agreed! No more, then, of prescriptive use,
Authorization by antiquity,
For what offends our judgment! ’Tis your work,

Performed your way: not work delivered you
Intact, intact producible in turn.
Everywhere have you altered old to new —
Your will, your warrant: therefore, work must stand
Or stumble by intrinsic worth. What worth?
Its aim and object! Peace, you advocate,
And war would fain abolish from the land:
Support religion, lash irreverence,
Yet laughingly administer rebuke
To superstitious folly, — equal fault!
While innovating rashness, lust of change,
New laws, new habits, manners, men and things,
Make your main quarry, — 'oldest' meaning 'best.'
You check the fretful litigation-itch,
Withstand mob-rule, expose mob-flattery,
Punish mob-favorites; most of all press hard
On sophists who assist the demagogue,
And poets their accomplices in crime.
Such your main quarry, — by the way, you strike
Ignobler game, mere miscreants, snob or scamp,
Cowardly, gluttonous, effeminate:

Still with a bōlt to spare when dramatist
Proves haply unproficient in his art.
Such aims — alone, no matter for the means —
Declare the unexampled excellence
Of their first author — Aristophanes !

“Whereat — Euripides, oh, not thyself —
Augustlier than the need! — thy century
Of subjects dreamed and dared and done, before
‘Banqueters’ gave dark earth enlightenment,
Or ‘Babylonians’ played Prometheus here, —
These let me summon to defend thy cause!
Lo, as indignantly took life and shape
Labor by labor, all of Herakles, —
Palpably fronting some o’erbold pretence
‘Eurustheus slew the monsters, purged the world!’
So shall each poem pass you and imprint
Shame on the strange assurance. *You* praised Peace:
Sing him full-face, Kresphontes! ‘Peace’ the theme?
‘Peace, in whom depths of wealth lie, — of the bles
Immortals beauteousest, ~-

Come! for the heart within me dies away,
So long dost thou delay!
O I have feared lest old age, much annoy,
Conquer me, quite outstrip the tardy joy,
Thy gracious triumph-season I would see,
The song, the dance, the sport, profuse of crowns to be,
But come! for my sake, goddess great and dear,
Come to the city here!
Hateful Sedition drive thou from our homes,
With Her who madly roams
Rejoicing in the steel against the life
That's whetted — banish Strife!

“Shall I proceed? No need of next and next!
That were too easy, play so presses play,
Trooping tumultuous, each with instance apt,
Each eager to confute the idle boast!
What virtue but stands forth panegyrized,
What vice, unburned by stigma, in the books
Which bettered Hellas, — beyond graven gold
Or gem-indenture, sung by Phoibos' self

And saved in Kunthia's mountain treasure-house —
Ere you, man, moralist, were youth or boy?
— Not praise which, in the proffer, mocks the praised
By sly admixture of the blameworthy
And enforced coupling of base fellowship. —
Not blame which gloats the while it frowning laughs,
'Allow one glance on horrors — laughable!' —
This man's entire of heart and soul, discharged
Its love or hate, each unalloyed by each,
On objects worthy either; earnestness,
Attribute him, and power! but novelty?
Nor his nor yours a doctrine — all the world's!
What man of full-grown sense and sanity
Holds other than the truth, — wide Hellas through, —
Though truth he acts discredit truth he holds?
What imbecile has dared to formulate
'Love war, hate peace, become a litigant!' —
And so preach on, reversing rule of right
Because he quarrels, combats, goes to law?
No, for his comment runs, with smile or sigh
According to heart's temper 'Peace were best,

Except occasions when we put aside
Peace, and bid all the blessings in her gift
Quick join the crows, for sake of Marathon!'

"Nay, you reply; for one, whose mind withstands
His heart, and, loving peace, for conscience' sake
Wants war,—you find a crowd of hypocrites
Whose conscience means ambition, grudge and greed.
On such, reproof, sonorous doctrine, melts
Distilled like universal but thin dew
Which all too sparsely covers country: dear,
No doubt, to universal crop and clown,
Still, each bedewed keeps his own head-gear dry
With upthrust *skiadeion*, shakes adroit
The droppings to his neighbor. 'No! collect
All of the moisture, leave unhurt the heads
Which nowise need a washing, save and store
And dash the whole condensed to one fierce spout
On some one evildoer, sheltered close,—
Fond he supposed,—till you beat guard away,
And showed your audience, not that war was wrong,

But Lamachos absurd,—case, crests and all,—
Not that democracy was blind of choice,
But Kleon and Huperbolos accurst:
Not superstition vile, but Nikias crazed,—
The concrete for the abstract; that's the wag!
What matters Choros crying, 'Hence, impure!'
You cried, 'Ariphrades does thus and thus!'
Now, earnestness seems never earnest more
Than when it dons for garb—indifference;
So, there's much laughing: but, compensative,
When frowning follows laughter, then indeed
Scout innuendo, sarcasm, irony!—
Wit's polished warfare glancing at first graze
From off hard headpiece, coarsely-coated brain
O' the commonalty—whom, unless you prick
To purpose, what avails that finer pates
Succumb to simple scratching? Those—not these—
'Tis Multitude, which, moved, fines Lamachos,
Banishes Kleon and burns Sokrates,
House over head, or, better, poisons him.
Therefore in dealing with King Multitude,

Club-drub the callous numsculls! In and in
Beat this essential consequential fact
That here they have a hater of the three,
Who hates in word, praise, nickname, epithet
And illustration, beyond doubt at all!
And similarly, would you win assent
To — Peace, suppose? You tickle the tough hide
With good plain pleasure her concomitant —
And, past mistake again, exhibit Peace —
Peace, vintager and festive, cheesecake-time,
Hare-slice-and-peasoup season, household-joy;
Theoria's beautiful belongings match
Oporia's lavish condescendings: brief,
Since here the people are to judge, you press
Such argument as people understand:
If with exaggeration — what care you?

“Have I misunderstood you in the main?
No! then must answer be, such argument,
Such policy, no matter what good love
Or hate it help, in practice proves absurd,

Useless and null: henceforward intercepts
Sober effective blow at what you blame,
And renders nugatory rightful praise
Of thing or person. The coarse brush has daubed —
What room for the fine limner's pencil-mark?
Blame? You curse, rather, till who blames must
blush —

Lean to apology or praise, more like!
Does garment, simpered o'er as white, prove gray?
'Black, blacker than Acharnian charcoal, black
Beyond Kimmerian, Stugian blackness black.'
You bawl, till men sigh 'nearer snowiness!'
What follows? What one faint-rewarding fall
Of foe belabored ne'er so lustily?
Laugh Lamachos from out the people's heart?
He died, commanding, 'hero,' say yourself!
Gibe Nikias into privacy? — nay, shake
Kleon a little from his arrogance
By cutting him to shoe-sole-shreds? I think,
He ruled his life-long and, when time was ripe,
Died fighting for amusement, — good tough hide!

Sokrates still goes up and down the streets
And Aristullos puts his speech in book,
When both should be abolished long ago.
Nay, wretchedest of rags, Ariphrades —
You have been fouling that redoubtable
Harp-player, twenty years, with what effect?
Still he strums on, strums ever cheerily,
And earns his wage, — who minds a joke? men say.
No, friend! The statues stand — mudstained at most —
Titan or pygmy: what achieves their fall
Will be, long after mud is flung and spent,
Some clear thin spirit-thrust of lightning — truth!

“Your praise, then — honey-smearing helps your friend,
More than blame's ordure-smirch hurts foe, perhaps?
Peace, now, misunderstood, ne'er prized enough,
You have interpreted to ignorance
Till ignorance opes eye, bat-blind before,
And for the first time knows Peace means the power
On maw of pan-cake, cheese-cake, barley-cake,
No stop nor stint to stuffing. While, in camp,

Who fights chews rancid tunny, onions raw,
Peace sits at cosey feet with lamp and fire,
Complaisant smooth-sleeked flute-girls giggling gay.
How thick and fast the snow falls, freezing War
Who shrugs, campaigns it, and may break a shin
Or twist an ankle! come, who hesitates
To give Peace, over War, the preference?
Ah, friend — had this indubitable fact
Haply occurred to poor Leonidas,
How had he turned tail on Thermopulai!
It cannot be that even his few wits
Were addled to the point that, so advised,
Preposterous he had answered — ‘Cakes are prime,
Hearth-sides are snug, sleek dancing-girls have worth,
And yet — for country’s sake, to save our gods
Their temples, save our ancestors their tombs,
Save wife and child and home and liberty, —
I would chew sliced-salt-fish, bear snow — nay, starve,
If need were, — and by much prefer the choice!’
Why, friend, your genuine hero, all the while,
Has been — who served precisely for your butt —

Kleonumos that, wise, cast shield away
On battle-ground ; cried, 'Cake my buckler be,
Embossed with cream-clot ! peace, not war, I choose,
Holding with Dikaiopolis !' Comedy
Shall triumph, Dikaiopolis win assent,
When next Miltiades shirks Marathon,
Themistokles swaps Salamis for — cake,
And Kimon grunts, 'Peace, grant me dancing-girls !'
But sooner, hardly ! twenty-five years since,
The war began, — such pleas for Peace have reached
A reasonable age. The end shows all !
And so with all the rest you advocate !
'Wise folk leave litigation ! ware the wasps !
Who loves the law and lawyers, heliast-like,
Wants hemlock !' None shows that so funnily.
But, once cure madness, how comports himself
Your sane exemplar, what's our gain thereby ?
Philokleon turns Bdelukleon ! just this change, —
New sanity gets straightway drunk as sow,
Cheats baker-wives, brawls, kicks, cuffs, curses folk,
Parades a shameless flute-girl, bandies filth

With his own son who cured his father's cold
By making him catch fever — funnily!
But as for curing love of law-suits — faugh!

“And how does new improve upon the old
— Your boast — in even abusing? Rough, may be —
Still, honest was the old mode. ‘Call thief — thief!’
But never call — thief even — murderer!
Much less call fop and fribble, worse one whit
Than fribble and fop! Spare neither! beat your brains
For adequate invective, — cut the life
Clean out each quality, — but load your lash
With no least lie, or we pluck scourge from hand!
Does poet want a whipping, write bad verse,
Inculcate foul deeds? There's the fault to flog!
You vow, ‘The rascal cannot read nor write,
Spends more in buying fish than Morsimos,
Somebody helps his Muse and courts his wife,
His uncle deals in crockery, and last, —
Himself's a stranger!’ That's the cap and crown
Of stinging-nettle, that's the master-stroke!

What poet-rival, — after 'housebreaker,'
'Fish-gorging,' 'midnight footpad,' and so forth, —
Proves not, beside, 'a stranger?' Chased from charge
To charge, and, lie by lie, laughed out of court, —
Lo, wit's sure refuge, satire's grand resource —
All, from Kratinos downward — 'strangers' they!
Pity the trick's too facile! None so raw
Among your playmates but have caught the ball
And sent it back as briskly to — yourself!
You too, my Attic, are styled 'stranger' — Rhodes
Aigina, Lindos or Kameiros, — nay,
'Twas Egypt reared (if Eupolis be right)
Who wrote the comedy (Kratinos vows)
Kratinos helped a little! Kleon's self
Was nigh promoted Comic, when he haled
My poet into court, and o'er the coals
Hauled and re-hauled 'the stranger, — insolent,
Who brought out plays, usurped our privilege!
Why must you Comics one and all take stand
On lower ground than truth from first to last?
Why all agree to let folks disbelieve,

So laughter but reward a funny lie?
Repel such onslaughts— answer, sad and grave,
Your fancy-fleerings— who would stoop so low?
Your own adherents whisper, — when disgust
Too menacingly thrills Logeion through
At— Perikles invents this present war
Because men robbed his mistress of three maids—
Or— Sokrates wants burning, house o'er head, —
'What, so obtuse, not read between the lines?
Our poet means no mischief! All should know—
Ribaldry here implies a compliment!
He deals with things, not men, — his men are things —
Each represents a class, plays figure-head
And names the ship: no meaner than the first
Would serve; he styles a trireme "Sokrates" —
Fears "Sokrates" may prove unseaworthy,
(That's merely — "Sophists are the bane of boys")
Rat-riddled ("they are capable of theft")
Rotten or whatsoe'er shows ship-disease,
("They war with gods and worship whirligig.")
You never took the joke for earnest? scarce

Supposed mere figure-head meant entire ship,
And Sokrates—the whole fraternity?'

“This then is Comedy, our sacred song,
Censor of vice, and virtue's guard as sure:
Manners-instructing, morals' stop-estray,
Which, born a twin with public liberty,
Thrives with its welfare, dwindles with its wane!
Liberty? what so exquisitely framed
And fitted to suck dry its life of life
To last faint fibre?—since that life is truth!
You who profess your indignation swells
At sophistry, when specious words confuse
Deeds right and wrong, distinct before, you say—
(Though all that's done is—dare veracity,
Show that the true conception of each deed
Affirmed, in vulgar parlance, 'wrong' or 'right,'
Proves to be neither, as the hasty hold,
But, change your side, shoots light, where dark alone
Was apprehended by the vulgar sense)
You who put sophistry to shame, and shout,

There's but a single side to man and thing ;
A side so much more big than thing or man
Possibly can be, that—believe 'tis true?
Such were too marvellous simplicity!—
Confess, those sophists whom yourself depict,
(—Abide by your own painting!) what they teach,
They wish at least their pupil to believe,
And, what believe, to practise! did *you* wish
Hellas should haste, as taught, with torch in han
And fire the horrid Speculation-shop?
Straight the shop's master rose and showed the mob
What man was your so monstrous Sokrates;
Himself received amusement, why not they?
Just as did Kleon first play magistrate
And bid you put your birth in evidence—
Since no unbadged buffoon is licensed here
To shame us all when foreign guests may mock—
Then,—birth established, fooling licensed you,—
He, duty done, resumed mere auditor,
Laughed with the loudest at his Lamia-shape,
Kuklororos-roaring, and the camel-rest.

Nay, Aristullos, — once your volley spent
On the male-Kirké and her swinish crew, —
PLATON, — so others call the youth we love, —
Sends your performance to the curious king —
‘Do you desire to know Athenai’s knack
At turning seriousness to pleasantry?
Read this! One Aristullos means myself.
The author is indeed a merry grig!’
Nay, it would seem as if yourself were bent
On laying down the law ‘Tell lies I must —
Aforethought and of purpose, no mistake!’
When forth yourself step, tell us from the stage,
‘Here you behold the King of Comedy —
Me, who, the first, have purged my every piece
From each and all my predecessors’ filth,
Abjured those satyr-adjuncts sewn to bid
The boys laugh, satyr-jokes whereof not one
Least sample but would make my hair turn gray
Beyond a twelvemonth’s ravage! I renounce
Mountebank-claptrap, such as firework-fizz
And torch flare, or else nuts and barleycorns

Scattered among the crowd, to scramble for
And stop their mouths with ; no such stuff shames me!
Who, — what's more serious, — know both when to
strike

And when to stay my hand : once dead, my foe,
Why, done, my fighting! *I* attack a corpse?
I spare the corpse-like even! punish age?
I pity from my soul that sad effete
Toothless old mumbler called Kratinos! once
My rival, — now, alack, the dotard slinks
Ragged and hungry to what hole's his home ;
Ay, slinks through byways where no passenger
Flings him a bone, to pick. You formerly
Adored the Muses' darling : dotard now,
Why, he may starve! O mob most mutable!
So you harangued in person ; while, — to point
Precisely out, these were but lies you launched, —
Prompt, a play followed primed with satyr-frisks,
No spice spared of the stomach-turning stew,
Full fraught with torch-display, and barley-throw,
And Kleon, dead enough, bedaubed afresh ;

While daft Kratinos — home to hole trudged he,
 Wrung dry his wit to the last vinous dregs,
 Decanted them to 'Bottle,' — beat, next year, —
 'Bottle' and dregs — your best of 'Clouds' and dew!
 Where, Comic King, may keenest eye detect
 Improvement on your predecessors' work
 Except in lying with audacity?

"Why — genius! That's the grandeur, that's the
 gold —

That's *you* — superlatively true to touch —
 Gold, leaf or lump — gold, anyhow the mass
 Take manufacture and prove Pallas' casque
 Or, as your choice falls, simply cask to keep
 Corruption from decay! Your rivals' hoard
 May ooze forth, lacking such preservative:
 Yours cannot — gold plays guardian far too well!
 Genius, I call *you*: dross, your rivals share;
 Ay, share and share alike, too! says the world,
 However you pretend supremacy
 In aught beside that gold, your very own.

Satire? 'Kratinos for our satirist!'
The world cries. Elegance? 'Who elegant
As Eupolis?' resounds as noisily.
Artistic fancy? Choros-creatures quaint?
Magnes invented 'Birds' and 'Frogs' enough,
Archippos punned, Hegemon parodied,
To heart's content, before you stepped on stage.
Moral invective? Eupolis exposed
'That¹ prating beggar, he who stole the cup,'
Before your 'Clouds' rained grime on Sokrates;
Nay, what beat 'Clouds' but 'Konnos,' muck for mud?
Courage? How long before, well-masked, you poured
Abuse on Eukrates and Lusikles,
Did Telekleides and Hermippos pelt
Their Perikles and Kumon? standing forth,
Bare-headed, not safe crouched behind a name,—
Philonides or else Kallistratos,
Put forth, when danger threatened,—mask for face,
To bear the brunt,—if blame fell, take the blame,—
If praise . . . why, frank laughed Aristophanes
'They write such rare stuff? No, I promise you!'

Rather, I see all true improvements, made
Or making, go against you — tooth and nail
Contended with! 'tis still Moruchides,
'Tis Euthumenes, Surakosios, nay,
Argurrhios and Kinesias, — common sense
And public shame, these only cleanse your style!
Coerced, prohibited, — you grin and bear,
And, soon as may be, hug to heart again
The banished nastiness too dear to drop!
Krates could teach and practise festive song
Vet scorn scurrility; as gay and good,
Pherekrates could follow. *Who* loosed hold,
Must let fall rose-wreath, stoop to muck once more!
Did your particular self advance in aught,
Task the sad genius — steady slave the while —
To further — say, the patriotic aim?
No, there's deterioration manifest
Year by year, play by play! survey them all,
From that boy's-triumph when 'Acharnes' dawned,
To 'Thesmophoriazousai,' — this man's-shame!
There, truly, patriot zeal so prominent

Allowed friends' plea perhaps: the baser stuff
Was but the nobler spirit's vehicle
Who would imprison, unvolatilize
A violet's perfume, blends with fatty oils
Essence too fugitive in flower alone;
So, calling unguent — violet, call the play —
Obscenity impregnated with 'Peace'!
But here's the boy grown bald, and here's the play
With twenty years' experience: where's one spice
Of odor in the hogs'-lard? what pretends
To aught except a grease-pot's quality?
Friend, sophist-hating! know, — worst sophistry
Is when man's own soul plays its own self false,
Reasons a vice into a virtue, pleads
'I detail sin to shame its author' — not
'I shame Ariphrades for sin's display'!
'I show Oporia to commend Sweet Home' —
Not 'I show Bacchis for the striplings' sake!

"Yet all the same — O genius and O gold —
Had genius ne'er diverted gold from use

Worthy the temple, to do copper's work
And coat a swine's trough — which abundantly
Might furnish Phoibos' tripod, Pallas' throne !
Had you, I dream, discarding all the base,
The brutish, spurned alone convention's watch
And ward against invading decency,
Disguised as license, law in lawlessness,
And so, re-ordinating outworn rule,
Made Comedy and Tragedy combine,
Prove some new Both-yet-neither, all one bard,
Euripides with Aristophanes
Co-operant ! this, reproducing Now
As that gave Then existence : Life to-day,
This, as that other — Life dead long ago !
The mob decrees such feat no crown, perchance,
But — why call crowning the reward of quest ?
Tell him, my other poet, — where thou walk'st
Some rarer world than e'er Ilissos washed !

“ But dream goes idly in the air. To earth !
Earth's question just amounts to — which succeeds,

Which fails of two life-long antagonists?
Suppose my charges all mistake! assume
Your end, despite ambiguous means, the best —
The only! you and he, a patriot-pair,
Have striven alike for one result — say, Peace!
You spoke your best straight to the arbiters —
Our people: have you made them end this war
By dint of laughter and abuse and lies
And postures of Oporia? Sadly — No!
This war, despite your twenty-five years' work,
May yet endure until Athenai falls,
And freedom falls with her. So much for you!
Now, the antagonist Euripides —
Has he succeeded better? Who shall say?
He spoke quite o'er the heads of Kleon's crowd
To a dim future, and if there he fail,
Why, you are fellows in adversity.
But that's unlike the fate of wise words launched
By music on their voyage. Hail, Depart,
Arrive, Glad Welcome! Not my single wish —
Yours also wafts the white sail on its way,

Your nature too is kingly. All beside
I call pretension — no true potentate,
Whatever intermediary be crowned,
Zeus or Poseidon, where the vulgar sky
Lacks not Triballos to complete the group.
I recognize, — behind such phantom-crew, —
Necessity, Creation, Poet's Power,
Else never had I dared approach, appeal
To poetry, power, Aristophanes!
But I trust truth's inherent kingliness,
Trust who, by reason of much truth, shall reign
More or less royally — may prayer but push
His sway past limit, purge the false from true!
Nor, even so, had boldness nerved my tongue
But that the other king stands suddenly,
In all the grand investiture of death,
Bowing your knee beside my lowly head —
Equals one moment!

“Now, arise and go!

Both have done homage to Euripides!”

Silence pursued the words : till he broke out —

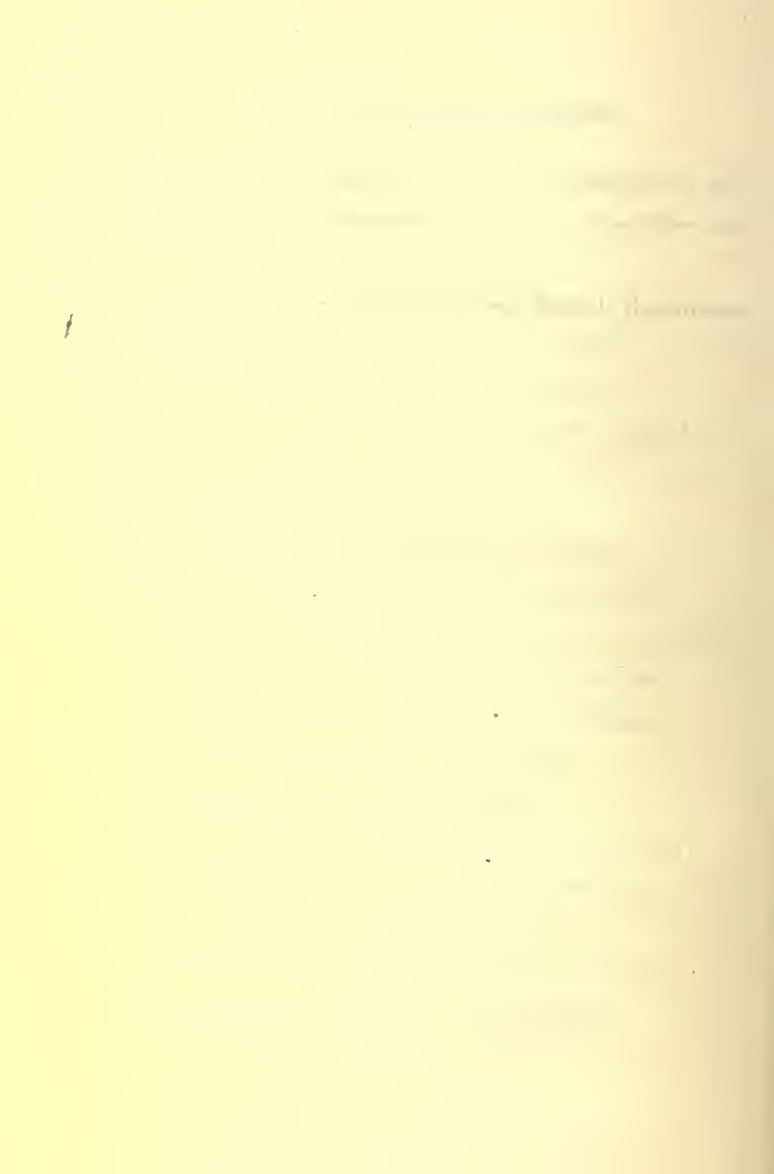
“Scarce so! This constitutes, I may believe,
Sufficient homage done by who defames
Your poet's foe, since you account me such ;
But homage-proper, — pay it by defence
Of him, direct defence and not oblique,
Not by mere mild admonishment of me !”

“Defence? The best, the only !” I replied.
“A story goes — When Sophokles, last year,
Cited before tribunal by his son
(A poet — to complete the parallel)
Was certified unsound of intellect,
And claimed as only fit for tutelage,
Since old and doating and incompetent
To carry on this world's work, — the defence
Consisted just in his reciting (calm
As the verse bore, which sets our heart a-swell
And voice a-heaving too tempestuously)
That choros-chant ‘The station of the steed,

Stranger! thou comest to, — Kolonos white!'
Then he looked round and all revolt was dead.
You know the one adventure of my life —
What made Euripides Balaustion's friend.
When I last saw him, as he bade farewell,
'I sang another "Herakles,"' smiled he;
'It gained no prize: your love be prize I gain!
Take it — the tablets also where I traced
The story first with stulos pendent still —
Nay, the psalterion may complete the gift,
So, should you croon the ode bewailing Age,
Yourself shall modulate — same notes, same strings —
With the old friend who loved Balaustion once.'
There they lie! When you broke our solitude,
We were about to honor him once more
By reading the consummate Tragedy.
Night is advanced; I have small mind to sleep;
May I go on, and read, — so make defence,
So test true godship? You affirm, not I,
— Beating the god, affords such test: *I* hold
That when rash hands but touch divinity,

The chains drop off, the prison-walls dispart,
And — fire — he fronts mad Pentheus! Dare we try?"

Accordingly I read the perfect piece.



HERAKLES.

—◆—
AMPHITRUON.

ZEUS' Couchmate, — who of mortals knows not me,
Argive Amphitruon whom Alkaios sired
Of old, as Perseus him, I — Herakles?
My home, this Thebai where the earth-born spike
Of Sown-ones burgeoned: Ares saved from these
A handful of their seed that stocks to-day
With children's children Thebai, Kadmos built.
Of these had Kreon birth, Menoikeus' child,
King of the country, — Kreon that became
The father of this woman, Megara,
Whom, when time was, Kadmeians one and all
Pealed praise to, marriage-songs with fluted help,

While to my dwelling that grand Herakles
Bore her, his bride. But, leaving Thebes — where I
Abode perforce — this Megara and those
Her kinsmen, the desire possessed my son
Rather to dwell in Argos, that walled work,
Kuklopiian city, which I fly, myself,
Because I slew Elektruon. Seeking so
To ease away my hardships and once more
Inhabit his own land, for my return
Heavy the price he pays Eurustheus there —
The letting in of light on this choked world!
Either he promised, vanquished by the goad
Of Heré, or because fate willed it thus.
The other labors — why, he toiled them through;
But for this last one — down by Tainaros,
Its mouth, to Haides' realm descended he
To drag into the light the three-shaped hound
Of Hell: whence Herakles returns no more.
Now, there's an old-world tale, Kadmeians have,
How Dirké's husband was a Lukos once,
Holding the seven-towered city here in sway

Before they ruled the land, white-steeded pair,
Amphion, Zethos, born to Zeus the twins.
This Lukos' son, — named like his father too,
No born Kadmeian but Euboia's gift, —
Comes and kills Kreon, lords it o'er the land,
Falling upon our town sedition-sick.
To us, akin to Kreon, just that bond
Becomes the worst of evils, seemingly;
For, since my son is in the earth's abysms,
This man of valor, Lukos, lord and king,
Seeks now to slay these sons of Herakles,
And slay his wife as well, — by murder thus
Thinking to stamp out murder, — slay too me,
(If me 'tis fit you count among men still, —
Useless old age) and all for fear lest these,
Grown men one day, exact due punishment
Of bloodshed and their mother's father's fate.
I therefore, since he leaves me in these domes,
The children's household guardian, — left, when earth's
Dark dread he underwent, that son of mine, —
I, with their mother, lest his boys should die,

Sit at this altar of the savior Zeus
Which, glory of triumphant spear, he raised
Conquering — my nobly-born! — the Minuai.
Here do we guard our station, destitute
Of all things, drink, food, raiment, on bare ground
Couched side by side : sealed out of house and home
Sit we in a resourcelessness of help.
Our friends — why, some are no true friends, I see!
The rest, that are true, want the means to aid.
So operates in man adversity:
Whereof may never anybody — no,
Though half of him should really wish me well, —
Happen to taste! a friend-test faultless, that!

MEGARA.

Old man, who erst didst raze the Taphian town,
Illustriously, the army-leader, thou,
Of speared Kadmeians — how gods play men false!
I, now, missed nowise fortune in my sire,
Who, for his wealth, was boasted mighty once,
Having supreme rule, — for the love of which

Leap the long lances forth at favored breasts,—
And having children too: and me he gave
Thy son, his house with that of Herakles,
Uniting by the far-famed marriage-bed.
And now these things are dead and flown away,
While thou and I await our death, old man,
These Herakleian boys too, whom — my chicks —
I save beneath my wings like brooding bird.
But one or other falls to questioning,
“O mother,” cries he, “where in all the world
Is father gone to? What’s he doing? when
Will he come back?” At fault through tender years,
They seek their sire. For me, I put them off,
Telling them stories; at each creak of door,
All wonder, “Does he come?”—and all afoot,
Make for the fall before the parent knee.
Now then, what hope, what method of escape
Facilitatest thou?—for, thee, old man,
I look to,—since we may not leave by stealth
The limits of the land, and guards, more strong
Than we, are at the outlets; nor in friends

Remain to us the hopes of safety more.
Therefore, whatever thy decision be,
Impart it for the common good of all!
Lest now should prove the proper time to die,
Though, being weak, we spin it out and live.

AMPHITRUON.

Daughter, it scarce is easy, do one's best,
To blurt out counsel, things at such a pass.

MEGARA.

You want some sorrow more, or so love life?

AMPHITRUON.

I both enjoy life, and love hopes beside.

MEGARA.

And I; but hope against hope — no, old man!

AMPHITRUON.

In these delayings of an ill lurks cure.

MEGARA.

But bitter is the meantime, and it bites.

AMPHITRUON.

O there may be a run before the wind
From out these present ills, for me and thee,
Daughter, and yet may come my son, thy spouse!
But hush! and from the children take away
Their founts a-flow with tears, and talk them calm,
Steal them by stories — sad theft, all the same!
For, human troubles — they grow weary too;
Neither the wind-blasts always have their strength,
Nor happy men keep happy to the end:
Since all things change — their natures part in twain;
And that man's bravest, therefore, who hopes on,
Hopes ever: to despair is cowardly.

CHOROS.

These domes that overroof,
This long-used couch, I come to, having made

A staff my prop, that song may put to proof
The swan-like power, age-whitened,—poet's aid
Of sobbed-forth dirges—words that stand aloof
From action now: such an I—just a shade
With night for all its face, a mere night-dream—
And words that tremble too: howe'er they seem,
Devoted words, I deem.

O, of a father ye unfathered ones,
O thou old man, and thou whose groaning stuns—
Unhappy mother—only us above,
Nor reaches him below in Haidēs' realm, thy love!
—(Faint not too soon, urge forward foot and limb
Way-weary, nor lose courage—as some horse
Yoked to the car whose weight recoils on him
Just at the rock-ridge that concludes his course!
Take by the hand, the peplos, any one
Whose foothold fails him, printless and fordome!
Aged, assist along me aged too,
Who,—mate with thee in toils when life was new,
And shields and spears first made acquaintanceship,—

Stood by thyself and proved no bastard-slip
Of fatherland when loftiest glory grew.) —
See now, how like the sire's
Each eyeball fiercely fires!
What though ill-fortune have not left his race?
Neither is gone the grand paternal grace!
Hellas! O what — what combatants, destroyed
In these, wilt thou one day seek — seek, and find all
void!

Pause! for I see the ruler of this land,
Lukos, now passing through the palace-gate.

LUKOS.

The Herakleian couple — father, wife —
If need I must, I question: "must" forsooth?
Being your master — all I please, I ask.
To what time do you seek to spin out life?
What hope, what help see, so as not to die?
Is it you trust the sire of these, that's sunk
In Haides, will return? How past the pitch,

Suppose you have to die, you pile the woe —
Thou, casting, Hellas through, thy empty vaunts
As though Zeus helped thee to a god for son ;
And thou, that thou wast styled our best man's wife ;
Where was the awful in his work wound up,
If he did quell and quench the marshy snake
Or the Nemean monster whom he snared
And — says, by throttlings of his arm, he slew ?
With these do you outwrestle me ? Such feats
Shall save from death the sons of Herakles
Who got praise, being nought, for bravery
In wild-beast-battle, otherwise a blank ?
No man to throw on left arm buckler's weight,
Not he, nor get in spear's reach ! bow he bore —
True coward's weapon : shoot first and then fly !
No bow-and-arrow proves a man is brave,
But who keeps rank, — stands, one unwinking stare
As, ploughing up, the darts come, — brave is he.
My action has no impudence, old man !
Providence, rather : for I own I slew
Kreon, this woman's sire, and have his seat.

Nowise I wish, then, to leave, these grown up,
 Avengers on me, payment for my deeds.

AMPHITRUON.

As to the part of Zeus in his own child,
 Let Zeus defend that! As to mine, 'tis me
 The care concerns to show by argument
 The folly of this fellow, — Herakles,
 Whom I stand up for! since to hear thee styled
 Cowardly — that is unendurable.
 First then, the infamous (for I account
 Amongst the words denied to human speech,
 Timidity ascribed thee, Herakles!)
 This I must put from thee, with gods in proof.
 Zeus' thunder I appeal to, those four steeds
 Whereof he also was the charioteer
 When, having shot down the earth's Giant-growth —
 (Never shaft flew but found and fitted flank)
 Triumph he sang in common with the gods.
 The Kentaur-race, four-footed insolence —
 Go ask at Pholoé, vilest thou of kings,

Whom they would pick out and pronounce best man,
If not my son, "the seeming brave," say'st thou!
But Dirphus, thy Abantid mother-town,
Question her, and she would not praise, I think!
For there's no spot, where having done some good,
Thy country thou mightst call to witness worth.
Now, that allwise invention, archer's-gear,
Thou blamest: hear my teaching and grow sage!
A man in armor is his armor's slave,
And, mixed with rank and file that want to run,
He dies because his neighbors have lost heart.
Then, should he break his spear, no way remains
Of warding death off, — gone that body-guard,
His one and only; while, whatever folk
Have the true bow-hand, — here's the one main
 good, —
Though he have sent ten thousand shafts abroad,
Others remain wherewith the archer saves
His limbs and life, too, — stands afar and wards
Away from flesh the foe that vainly stares
Hurt by the viewless arrow, while himself

Offers no full front to those opposite,
But keeps in thorough cover: there's the point
That's capital in combat — damage foe,
Yet keep a safe skin — foe not out of reach
As you are! Thus my words contrast with thine,
And such, in judging facts, our difference.
These children, now, why dost thou seek to slay?
What have they done thee? In a single point
I count thee wise — if, being base thyself,
Thou dreadst the progeny of nobleness.
Yet this bears hard upon us, all the same,
If we must die — because of fear in thee —
A death 'twere fit thou suffer at our hands,
Thy betters, did Zeus rightly judge us all.
If therefore thou art bent on sceptre-sway,
Thyself, here — suffer us to leave the land,
Fugitives! nothing do by violence,
Or violence thyself shalt undergo
When the gods' gale may chance to change for thee!
Alas, O land of Kadmos, — for 'tis thee
I mean to close with, dealing out the due

Revilement, — in such sort dost thou defend
Herakles and his children? Herakles
Who, coming, one to all the world, against
The Minuai, fought them and left Thebes an eye
Unblinded henceforth to front freedom with!
Neither do I praise Hellas, nor shall brook
Ever to keep in silence that I count
Towards my son, craven of cravens — her
Whom it behooved go bring the young ones here
Fire, spears, arms — in exchange for seas made
safe,
And cleansings of the land, his labor's price.
But fire, spears, arms, — O children, neither Thebes
Nor Hellas has them for you! 'Tis myself,
A feeble friend, ye look to: nothing now
But a tongue's murmur, for the strength is gone
We had once, and with age are limbs a-shake
And force a-flicker! Were I only young,
Still with the mastery o'er bone and thew,
Grasping first spear that came, the yellow locks
Of this insulter would I bloody so —

Should send him skipping o'er the Atlantic bounds
Out of my arm's reach through poltroonery!

CHOROS.

Have not the really good folk starting-points
For speech to purpose, — though rare talkers they?

LUKOS.

Say thou against us words thou towerest with!
I, for thy words, will deal thee blows, their due.
Go, some to Helikon, to Parnasos
Some, and the clefts there! Bid the woodmen fell
Oak-trunks, and, when the same are brought inside
The city, pile the altar round with logs,
Then fire it, burn the bodies of them all,
That they may learn thereby, no dead man rules
The land here, but 'tis I, by acts like these!
As for you, old sirs, who are set against
My judgments, you shall groan for — not alone
The Herakleian children, but the fate
Of your own house beside, when faring ill

By any chance : and you shall recollect
Slaves are you of a tyranny that's mine !

CHOROS.

O progeny of earth, — whom Ares sowed
When he laid waste the dragon's greedy jaw —
Will ye not lift the staves, right-hand supports,
And bloody this man's irreligious head?
Who, being no Kadmeian, rules, — the wretch, —
Our easy youth : an interloper too !
But not of me, at least, shalt thou enjoy
Thy lordship ever ; nor my labor's fruit, —
Hand worked so hard for, — have ! A curse with thee,
Whence thou didst come, there go and tyrannize !
For never while I live shalt thou destroy
The Herakleian children : not so deep
Hides he below ground, leaving thee their lord !
But we bear both of you in mind, — that thou,
The land's destroyer, dost possess the land,
While he who saved it, loses every right.
I play the busy-body — for I serve

My dead friends when they need friends' service most?
O right-hand, how thou yearnest to snatch spear
And serve indeed! in weakness dies the wish,
Or I had stayed thee calling me a slave,
And nobly drawn my breath at home in Thebes
Where thou exuldest! — city that's insane,
Sick through sedition and bad government,
Else never had she gained for master — thee!

MEGARA.

Old friends, I praise you: since a righteous wrath
For friend's sake well becomes a friend. But no!
On our account in anger with your lord,
Suffer no injury! Hear my advice,
Amphitruon, if I seem to speak aright.
O yes, I love my children! how not love
What I brought forth, what toiled for? and to die —
Sad I esteem too; still, the fated way
Who stiffens him against, that man I count
Poor creature; us, who are of other mood,
Since we must die, behooves us meet our death

Not burnt to cinders, giving foes the laugh —
To me, worse ill than dying, that! we owe
Our houses many a brave deed, now to pay.
Thee, indeed, gloriously men estimate
For spear-work, so that unendurable
Were it that thou shouldst die a death of shame.
And for my glorious husband, where wants he
A witness that he would not save his boys
If touched in their good fame thereby? since birth
Bears ill with baseness done for children's sake,
— My husband needs must be my pattern here!
See now thy hope — how much I count thereon!
Thou thinkest that thy son will come to light:
And, of the dead, who came from Hades back?
But we with talk this man might mollify:
Never! Of all foes, fly the foolish one!
Wise, well-bred people, make concession to!
Sooner you meet respect by speaking soft.
Already it was in my mind — perchance
We might beg off these children's banishment;
But even that is sad — involving them

In safety, ay — and piteous poverty !
Since the host's visage for the flying friend
Has, only one day, the sweet look, 'tis said.
Dare with us death, which awaits thee, dared or no !
We call on thine ancestral worth, old man !
For who out-labors what the gods appoint,
Shows energy, but energy gone mad.
Since what must — none e'er makes what must not be.

CHOROS.

Had any one, while yet my arms were strong,
Been scorning thee, he easily had ceased.
But we are nought, now ; thine henceforth to see —
Amphitruon, how to push aside these fates !

AMPHITRUON.

Nor cowardice nor a desire of life
Stops me from dying : but I seek to save
My son his children. Vain ! I set my heart,
It seems, upon impossibility.
See, it is ready for the sword, this throat

To pierce, divide, dash down from precipice !
But one grace grant us, king, we supplicate !
Slay me and this unhappy one before
The children, lest we see them — impious sight ! —
Gasping the soul forth, calling all the while
On mother and on father's father ! Else,
Do as thy heart inclines thee ! No resource
Have we from death, and we resign ourselves.

MEGARA.

And I too supplicate : add grace to grace,
And, though but one man, doubly serve us both !
Let me bestow adornment of the dead
Upon these children ! Throw the palace wide !
For now we are shut out. Thence these shall share
At least so much of wealth, was once their sire's !

LUKOS.

These things shall be. Withdraw the bolts, I bid
My servants ! Enter and adorn yourselves !
I grudge no peploi ; but when these ye wind

About your bodies, — that adornment done, —
Then I shall come and give you to the grave.

MEGARA.

O children, follow this unhappy foot,
Your mother's, into your ancestral home,
Where others have the power, are lords in truth,
Although the empty name is left us yet!

AMPHITRUON.

O Zeus, in vain I had thee marriage-mate,
In vain I called thee father of my child!
Thou wast less friendly far than thou didst seem.
I, the mere man, o'ermatch in virtue thee
The mighty god: for I have not betrayed
The Herakleian children, — whereas thou
Hadst wit enough to come clandestinely
Into the chamber, take what no man gave,
Another's-place; and when it comes to help
Thy loved ones, there thou lackest wit indeed!
Thou art some stupid god, or born unjust.

CHOROS.

Even a dirge, can Phoibos suit
In song to music jubilant
For all its sorrow: making shoot
His golden plectron o'er the lute,
Melodious ministrant.
And I, too, am of mind to raise,
Despite the imminence of doom,
A song of joy, outpour my praise
To him — what is it rumor says? —
Whether — now buried in the ghostly gloom
Below ground, — he was child of Zeus indeed,
Or mere Amfitruon's mortal seed —
To him I weave the wreath of song, his labor's meed.
For, is my hero perished in the feat?
The virtues of brave toils, in death complete,
These save the dead in song, — their glory-garland
meet!

First, then, he made the wood
Of Zeus a solitude,

Slaying its lion-tenant ; and he spread
The tawniness behind — his yellow head
Enmuffled by the brute's, backed by that grin of dread.
The mountain-roving savage Kentaur-race
He strewed with deadly bow about their place,
Slaying with winged shafts : Peneios knew,
Beauteously-eddyng, and the long tracts too
Of pasture trampled fruitless, and as well
Those desolated haunts Mount Pelion under,
And, grassy up to Homolé, each dell
Whence, having filled their hands with pine-tree
plunder,
Horse-like was wont to prance from, and subdue
The land of Thessaly, that bestial crew.
The golden-headed spot-backed stag he slew,
That robber of the rustics : glorified
Therewith the goddess who in hunter's pride
Slaughters the game along Oinoé's side.
And, yoked abreast, he brought the chariot-breed
To pace submissive to the bit, each steed
That in the bloody cribs of Diomede

Champed and, unbridled, hurried down that gore
For grain, exultant the dread feast before —
Of man's flesh: hideous feeders they of yore!
All as he crossed the Hebros' silver-flow
Accomplished he such labor, toiling so
For Mukenaian tyrant; ay, and more —
He crossed the Melian shore
And, by the sources of Amauros, shot
To death that strangers'-pest
Kuknos, who dwelt in Amphanaia: not
Of fame for good to guest!

And next, to the melodious maids he came,
Inside the Hesperian court-yard: hand must aim
At plucking gold fruit from the appled leaves,
Now he had killed the dragon, backed like flame,
Who guards the unapproachable he weaves
Himself all round, one spire about the same.
And into those sea-troughs of ocean dived
The hero, and for mortals calm contrived,
Whatever oars should follow in his wake.

And under heaven's mid-seat his hands thrust he,
At home with Atlas: and, for valor's sake,
Held the gods up their star-faced mansionry.
Also, the rider-host of Amazons
About Maiotis many-streamed, he went
To conquer through the billowy Euxeine once,
Having collected what an armament
Of friends from Hellas, all on conquest bent
Of that gold-garnished cloak, dread girdle-chase!
So Hellas gained the girl's barbarian grace
And at Mukenai saves the trophy still—
Go wonder there, who will!

And the ten thousand-headed hound
Of many a murder, the Lernaian snake
He burned out, head by head, and cast around
His darts a poison thence, — darts soon to slake
Their rage in that three-bodied herdsman's gore
Of Erutheia. Many a running more
He made for triumph and felicity,
And, last of toils, to Haides, never dry

Of tears, he sailed: and there he, luckless, ends
His life completely, nor returns again.
The house and home are desolate of friends,
And where the children's life-path leads them, plain
I see, — no step retraceable, no god
Availing, and no law to help the lost!
The oar of Charon marks their period,
Waits to end all. Thy hands, these roofs accost! —
To thee, though absent, look their uttermost!

But if in youth and strength I flourished still,
Still shook the spear in fight, did power match will
In these Kadmeian co-mates of my age,
They would, — and I, — when warfare was to wage,
Stand by these children; but I am bereft
Of youth now, lone of that good genius left!

But hie, desist! for here come these, —
Draped as the dead go, under and over, —
Children long since, — now hard to discover, —
Of the once so potent Herakles!

And the loved wife dragging, in one tether
About her feet, the boys together ;
And the hero's aged sire comes last !
Unhappy that I am ! Of tears which rise, —
How am I all unable to hold fast,
Longer, the aged fountains of these eyes !

MEGARA.

Be it so ! Who is priest, who butcher here
Of these ill-fated ones, or stops the breath
Of me, the miserable ? Ready, see,
The sacrifice — to lead where Haides lives !
O children, we are led — no lovely team
Of corpses — age, youth, motherhood, all mixed !
O sad fate of myself and these my sons
Whom with these eyes I look at, this last time !
I, indeed, bore you : but for enemies
I brought you up to be a laughing-stock,
Matter for merriment, destruction-stuff !
Woe's me !
Strangely indeed my hopes have struck me down

From what I used to hope about you once —
The expectation from your father's talk !
For thee, now, thy dead sire dealt Argos to :
Thou wast to have Eurustheus' house one day,
And rule Pelasgia where the fine fruits grow ;
And, for a stole of state, he wrapped about
Thy head with that the lion-monster bore,
That which himself went wearing armor-wise.
And thou wast King of Thebes — such chariots there
Those plains I had for portion — all for thee,
As thou hadst coaxed them out of who gave birth
To thee, his boy : and into thy right hand
He thrust the guardian-club of Daidalos, —
Poor guardian proves the gift that plays thee false !
And upon thee he promised to bestow
Oichalia — what, with those far-shooting shafts,
He ravaged once ; and so, since three you were,
With threefold kingdoms did he build you up
To very towers, your father, — proud enough,
Prognosticating, from your manliness
In boyhood, what the manhood's self would be.

For my part, I was picking out for you
Brides, suiting each with his alliance — this
From Athens, this from Sparté, this from Thebes —
Whence, suited — as stern-cables steady ship —
You might have hold on life gods bless. All gone!
Fortune turns round and gives us — you, the Fates
Instead of brides — me, tears for nuptial baths,
Unhappy in my hoping! And the sire
Of your sire — he prepares the marriage-feast
Befitting Haides who plays father now —
Bitter relationship! Oh me! which first —
Which last of you shall I to bosom fold?
To whom shall I fit close, his mouth to mine?
Of whom shall I lay hold and ne'er let go?
How would I gather, like the brown-winged bee,
The groans from all, and, gathered into one,
Give them you back again, a crowded tear!
Dearest, if any voice be heard of men
Dungeoned in Haides, thee — to thee I speak!
Here is thy father dying, and thy boys!
And I too perish, famed as fortunate

By mortals once, through thee ! Assist them ! Come !
But come ! though just a shade, appear to me !
For, coming, thy ghost-grandeur would suffice,
Such cowards are they in thy presence, these
Who kill thy children now thy back is turned !

AMPHITRUON.

Ay, daughter, bid the powers below assist !
But I will rather, raising hand to heaven,
Call thee to help, O Zeus, if thy intent
Be, to these children, helpful anyway,
Since soon thou wilt be valueless enough !
And yet thou hast been called and called ; in vain
I labor : for we needs must die, it seems.
Well, aged brothers — life's a little thing !
Such as it is, then, pass life pleasantly
From day to night, nor once grieve all the while !
Since Time concerns him not about our hopes, —
To save them, — but his own work done, flies off.
Witness myself, looked up to among men,
Doing noteworthy deeds : when here comes fate

Lifts me away, like feather skyward borne,
In one day! Riches then and glory, — whom
These are found constant to, I know not. Friends,
Farewell! the man who loved you all so much,
Now, this last time, my mates, ye look upon!

MEGARA.

Ha!

O father, do I see my dearest? Speak!

AMPHITRUON.

No more than thou canst, daughter — dumb like thee!

MEGARA.

Is this he whom we heard was underground?

AMPHITRUON.

Unless at least some dream in day we see!

MEGARA.

What do I say? what dreams insanely view?
This is no other than thy son, old sire!

Here, children! hang to these paternal robes,
Quick, haste, hold hard on him, since here's your true
Zeus that can save — and every whit as well!

HERAKLES.

O hail, my palace, my hearth's propula, —
How glad I see thee as I come to light!
Ha, what means this? My children I behold
Before the house in garments of the grave,
Chapleted, and, amid a crowd of men,
My very wife — my father weeping too,
Whatever the misfortune! Come, best take
My station nearer these and learn it all!
Wife, what new sorrow has approached our home?

MEGARA.

O dearest! light flashed on thy father now!
Art thou come? art thou saved and dost thou fall
On friends in their supreme extremity?

HERAKLES.

How say'st thou? Father! what's the trouble here?

MEGARA.

Undone are we! — but thou, old man, forgive
If first I snatch what thou shouldst say to him!
For somehow womanhood wakes pity more.
Here are my children killed and I undone!

HERAKLES.

Apollon, with what preludes speech begins!

MEGARA.

Dead are my brothers and old father too.

HERAKLES.

How say'st thou? — doing what? — by spear-stroke
whence?

MEGARA.

Lukos destroyed them — the land's noble king!

HERAKLES.

Met them in arms? or through the land's disease?

MEGARA.

Sedition : and he sways seven-gated Thebes.

HERAKLES.

Why then came fear on the old man and thee ?

MEGARA.

He meant to kill thy father, me, our boys.

HERAKLES.

How say'st thou ? Fearing what from orphanage ?

MEGARA.

Lest they should some day pay back Kreon's death.

HERAKLES.

And why trick out the boys corpse-fashion thus ?

MEGARA.

These wraps of death we have already donned.

HERAKLES.

And you had died through violence? Woe's me!

MEGARA.

Left bare of friends: and thou wast dead, we heard

HERAKLES.

And whence came on you this faintheartedness?

MEGARA.

The heralds of Eurustheus brought the news.

HERAKLES.

And why was it you left my house and hearth?

MEGARA.

Forced thence: thy father — from his very couch!

HERAKLES.

And no shame at insulting the old man?

MEGARA.

Shame, truly! no near neighbors *he* and Shame!

HERAKLES.

And so much, in my absence, lacked I friends?

MEGARA.

Friends, — are there any to a luckless man?

HERAKLES.

The Minuai-war I waged, — they spat forth these

MEGARA.

Friendless, — again I tell thee, — is ill-luck.

HERAKLES.

Will not you cast these hell-wraps from your hair

And look on light again, and with your eyes

Taste the sweet change from nether dark to day?

While I — for now there needs my handiwork —

First I shall go, demolish the abodes

Of these new lordships; next hew off the head
Accurst and toss it for the dogs to trail.
Then, such of the Kadmeians as I find
Were craven though they owed me gratitude,—
Some I intend to handle with this club
Renowned for conquest; and with winged shafts
Scatter the others, fill Ismenos full
With bloody corpses,—Dirké's flow so white
Shall be incarnadined. For, whom, I pray,
Behooves me rather help than wife and child
And aged father? Farewell, "Labors" mine!
Vainly I wrought them: my true work lay here!
My business is to die defending these,—
If for their father's sake they meant to die.
Or how shall we call brave the battling it
With snake and lion, as Eurustheus bade,
If yet I must not labor death away
From my own children? "Conquering Herakles"
Folks will not call me as they used, I think!)
'The right thing is for parents to assist
Children, old age, the partner of the couch.

AMPHITRUON.

'True, son! thy duty is — be friend to friends
And foe to foes: yet — no more haste than needs!

HERAKLES.

Why, father, what is over-hasty here?

AMPHITRUON.

Many a pauper, — seeming to be rich,
As the word goes, — the king calls partisan.
Such made a riot, ruined Thebes to rob
Their neighbor: for, what good they had at home
Was spent and gone — flew off through idleness.
You came to trouble Thebes, they saw: since seen,
Beware lest, raising foes, a multitude,
You stumble where you apprehend no harm.

HERAKLES.

If all Thebes saw me, not a whit care I.
But seeing as I did a certain bird

Not in the lucky seats. I knew some woe
Was fallen upon the house: so, purposely,
By stealth I made my way into the land.

AMPHITRUON.

And now, advancing, hail the hearth with praise
And give the ancestral home thine eye to see!
For he himself will come, thy wife and sons
To drag-forth — slaughter — slay me too, — this king!
But, here remaining, all succeeds with thee —
Gain lost by no false step. So, this thy town
Disturb not, son, ere thou right matters here!

HERAKLES.

Thus will I do, for thou say'st well; my home
Let me first enter! Since at the due time
Returning from the unsunned depths where dwells
Haides' wife Koré, let me not affront
Those gods beneath my roof, I first should hail!

AMPHITRUON.

For didst thou really visit Haides, son?

HERAKLES.

Ay—dragged to light, too, his three-headed beast.

AMPHITRUON.

By fight, didst conquer—or through Koré's gift?

HERAKLES.

Fight: well for me, I saw the Orgies first!

AMPHITRUON.

And is he in Eurustheus' house, the brute?

HERAKLES.

Chthonia's grove, Hermion's city, holds him now.

AMPHITRUON.

Does not Eurustheus know thee back on earth?

HERAKLES.

No: I would come first and see matters here.

AMPHITRUON.

But how wast thou below ground such a time?

HERAKLES.

I stopped, from Haides, bringing Theseus up.

AMPHITRUON.

And where is he?—bound o'er the plain for home?

HERAKLES.

Gone glad to Athens—Haides' fugitive!

But, up, boys! follow father into house!

There's a far better going-in for you

Truly, than going-out was! Nay, take heart,

And let the eyes no longer run and run!

And thou, O wife, my own, collect thy soul

Nor tremble now! Leave grasping, all of you,
My garments! I'm not winged, nor fly from friends!
Ah, —

No letting go for these, who all the more
Hang to my garments! Did you foot indeed
The razor's edge? Why, then I'll carry them —
Take with my hands these small craft up, and tow
Just as a ship would. There! don't fear I shirk
My children's service! this way, men are men,
No difference! best and worst, they love their boys
After one fashion: wealth they differ in —
Some have it, others not; but each and all
Combine to form the children-loving race.

CHOROS.

Youth is a pleasant burthen to me;
But age on my head, more heavily
Than the crags of Aitna, weighs and weighs,
And darkening cloaks the lids and intercepts the rays
Never be mine the preference
Of an Asian empire's wealth, nor yet

Of a house all gold, to youth, to youth
That's beauty, whatever the gods dispense!
Whether in wealth we joy, or fret
Paupers, — of all God's gifts most beautiful, in truth!

But miserable murderous age I hate!
Let it go to wreck, the waves adown,
Nor ever by rights plague tower or town
Where mortals bide, but still elate
With wings, on ether, precipitate,
Wander them round — nor wait!

But if the gods, to man's degree,
Had wit and wisdom, they would bring
Mankind a twofold youth, to be
Their virtue's sign-mark, all should see,
In those with whom life's winter thus grew spring.
For when they died, into the sun once more
Would they have traversed twice life's racecourse o'er
While ignobility had simply run
Existence through, nor second life begun.

And so might we discern both bad and good
As surely as the starry multitude.
Is numbered by the sailors, one and one.
But now the gods by no apparent line
Limit the worthy and the base define;
Only, a certain period rounds, and so
Brings man more wealth,—but youthful vigor, no!

Well! I am not to pause
Mingling together—wine and wine in cup—
The Graces with the Muses up—
Most dulcet marriage: loosed from music's laws,
No life for me!
But where the wreaths abound, there ever may I be!
And still, an aged bard, I shout Mnemosuné—
Still chant of Herakles the triumph-chant,
Companioned by the seven-stringed tortoise-shell
And Libuan flute, and Bromios' self as well,
God of the grape, with man participant!
Not yet will we arrest their glad advance—
The Muses who so long have led me forth to dance!

A paian — hymn the Delian girls indeed,
Weaving a beauteous measure in and out
His temple-gates, Latona's goodly seed ;
And paians — I too, these thy domes about,
From these gray cheeks, my king, will swan-like
shout —

Old songster! Ay, in song it starts off brave —
“Zeus' son is he!” and yet, such grace of birth
Surpassing far, to man his labors gave
Existence, one calm flow without a wave,
Having destroyed the beasts, the terrors of the earth.

LUKOS.

From out the house Amhitruon comes — in time!
For 'tis a long while now since ye bedecked
Your bodies with the dead-folks' finery.
But quick! the boys and wife of Herakles —
Bid them appear outside this house, keep pact
To die, and need no bidding but your own!

AMPHITRUON.

King! you press hard on me sore-pressed enough,
 And give me scorn — beside my dead ones here.
 Meet in such matters were it, though you reign,
 To temper zeal with moderation. Since
 You do impose on us the need to die —
 Needs must we love our lot, obey your will.

LUKOS.

Where's Megara, then? Alkmené's grandsons, where?

AMPHITRUON.

She, I think, — as one figures from outside, —

LUKÓS.

Well, this same thinking, — what affords its ground?

AMPHITRUON.

— Sits suppliant on the holy altar-steps, —

LUKOS.

Idly indeed a suppliant to save life!

AMPHITRUON.

—And calls on her dead husband, vainly too!

LUKOS.

For he's not come, nor ever will arrive.

AMPHITRUON.

Never—at least, if no god raise him up.

LUKOS.

Go to her, and conduct her from the house!

AMPHITRUON.

I should partake the murder, doing that.

LUKOS.

We,—since thou hast a scruple in the case,—
Outside of fears, we shall march forth these lads,
Mother and all. Here, follow me, my folk—
And gladly so remove what stops our toils!

AMPHITRUON.

Thou—go then! March where needs must! What
remains—

Perhaps concerns another. Doing ill,
Expect some ill be done thee!

Ha, old friends!

On he strides beautifully! in the toils
O' the net, where swords spring forth, will he be fast—
Minded to kill his neighbors—the arch-knave!
I go, too—I must see the falling corpse!
For he has sweets to give—a dying man,
Your foe, that pays the price of deeds he did.

CHOROS.

Troubles are over! He the great king once,
Turns the point, tends for Haides, goal of life!
O justice, and the gods' back-flowing fate!

AMPHITRUON.

Thou art come, late indeed, where death pays crime—
These insults heaped on better than thyself!

CHOROS.

Joy gives this outburst to my tears! Again
Come round those deeds, his doing, which of old
He never dreamed himself was to endure —
King of the country! But enough, old man!
Indoors, now, let us see how matters stand —
If somebody be faring as I wish!

LUKOS.

Ah me — me!

CHOROS.

This strikes the keynote — music to my mind,
Merry i' the household! Death takes up the tune!
The king gives voice, groans murder's prelude well!

LUKOS.

O, all the land of Kadmos! slain by guile!

CHOROS.

Ay, for who slew first? Paying back thy due,
Resign thee! make, for deeds done, mere amends!
Who was it grazed the gods through lawlessness —
Mortal himself, threw up his fools'-conceit
Against the blessed heavenly ones — as though
Gods had no power? Old friends, the impious man
Exists not any more! The house is mute.
Turn we to song and dance! For, those I love,
Those I wish well to, well fare they, to wish!

Dances, dances and banqueting
To Thebes, the sacred city through,
Are a care! for, change and change
Of tears to laughter, old to new,
Our lays, glad birth, they bring, they bring!
He is gone and past, the mighty king!
And the old one reigns, returned — O strange!
From the Acherontian harbor too!
Advent of hope, beyond thought's widest range!

To the gods, the gods are crimes a care,
And they watch our virtue, well aware
That gold and that prosperity drive man
Out of his mind—those charioteers who hale
Might-without-right behind them: face who can
Fortune's reverse which time prepares, nor quail?
—He who evades law and in lawlessness
Delights him,—he has broken down his trust—
The chariot, riches haled—now blackening in the
dust!

Ismenos, go thou garlanded!
Break into dance, ye ways, the polished bed
O' the seven-gated city! Dirké, thou
Fair-flowing, with the Asopiad sisters all,
Leave your sire's stream, attend the festival
Of Herakles, one choir of nymphs, sing triumph now!
O woody rock of Puthios and each home
O' the Helikonian Muses, ye shall come
With joyous shouting to my walls, my town
Where saw the light that Spartan race, those "Sown,"

Brazen-shield-bearing chiefs, whereof the band
With children's children renovates our land,
To Thebes a sacred light!
O combination of the marriage rite —
Bed of the mortal-born and Zeus, who couched
Beside the nymph of Perseus' progeny!
For credible, past hope, becomes to me
That nuptial story long ago avouched,
O Zeus! and time has turned the dark to bright,
And made one blaze of truth the Herakleidan might —
His, who emerged from earth's pavilion, left
Plouton's abode, the nether palace-cleft.
Thou wast the lord that nature gave me — not
That baseness born and bred — my king, by lot!
— Baseness made plain to all, who now regard
The match of sword with sword in fight, —
If to the gods the Just and Right
Still pleasing be, still claim the palm's award.

Horror!

Are we come to the selfsame passion of fear,

Old friends? — such a phantasm fronts me here
Visible over the palace-roof!

In flight, in flight, the laggard limb

Bestir! and haste aloof

From that on the roof there — grand and grim!

O Paian, king!

Be thou my safeguard from the woful thing!

IRIS.

Courage, old men! beholding here — Night's birth

Madness, and me the handmaid of the gods,

Iris: since to your town we come, no plague —

Wage war against the house of but one man

From Zeus and from Alkmené sprung, they say.

Now, till he made an end of bitter toils,

Fate kept him safe, nor did his father Zeus

Let us once hurt him, Heré nor myself.

But, since he has toiled through Eurustheus' task,

Heré desires to fix fresh blood on him —

Slaying his children: I desire it too.

Up then, collecting the unsoftened heart,
Unwedded virgin of black Night! Drive, drag
Frenzy upon the man here — whirls of brain
Big with child-murder, while his feet leap gay!
Let go the bloody cable its whole length!
So that, — when* o'er the Acherousian ford
He has sent floating, by self-homicide,
His beautiful boy-garland, — he may know
First, Heré's anger, what it is to him,
And then learn mine. The gods are vile indeed
And mortal matters vast, if he 'scape free!

MADNESS.

Certes, from well-born sire and mother too
Had I my birth, whose blood is Night's and Heaven's;
But here's my glory, — not to grudge the good!
Nor love I raids against the friends of man.
I wish, then, to persuade, — before I see
You stumbling, you and Heré! trust my words!
This man, the house of whom ye hound me to,

Is not unfamed on earth nor gods among ;
Since, having quelled waste land and savage sea,
He alone raised again the falling rights
Of gods—gone ruinous through impious men.
Desire no mighty mischief, I advise !

IRIS.

Give thou no thought to Heré's faulty schemes !

MADNESS.

Changing her step from faulty to fault-free !

IRIS.

Not to be wise, did Zeus' wife send thee here !

MADNESS.

Sun, thee I cite to witness—doing what I loath to do !
But since indeed to Heré and thyself I must subserve,
And follow you quick, with a whizz, as the hounds
a-hunt with the huntsman,

— Go I will ! and neither the sea, as it groans with its
waves so furiously,

Nor earthquake, no, nor the bolt of thunder gasping
out heaven's labor-throe,

Shall cover the ground as I, at a bound, rush into
the bosom of Herakles !

And home I scatter, and house I batter,

Having first of all made the children fall, —

And he who felled them is never to know

He gave birth to each child that received the blow,

Till the Madness, I am, have let him go !

Ha, behold, already he rocks his head — he is off
from the starting-place !

Not a word, as he rolls his frightful orbs, from their
sockets wrenched in the ghastly race !

And the breathings of him he tempers and times no
more than a bull in act to toss,

And hideously he bellows invoking the Keres, daugh-
ters of Tartaros.

Ay, and I soon will dance thee madder, and pipe
thee quite out of thy mind with fear !

So, up with the famous foot, thou Iris, march to
Olympus, leave me here!

Me and mine, who now combine, in the dreadful shape
no mortal sees,

And now are about to pass, from without, inside of
the home of Herakles!

CHOROS.

Otototoi, — groan! Away is mown

Thy flower, Zeus' offspring, City!

Unhappy Hellas, who dost cast (the pity!)

Who worked thee all the good,

Away from thee, — destroyest in a mood

Of Madness him, to death whom pipings dance!

There goes she, in her chariot, — groans, her brood, —

And gives her team the goad, as though adrift

For doom, Night's Gorgon, Madness, she whose glance

Turns man to marble! with what hissings lift

Their hundred heads the snakes, her head's inherit-
ance!

Quick has the god changed fortune: through their sire

Quick will the children, that he saved, expire!
O miserable me! O Zeus! thy child —
Childless himself — soon vengeance, hunger-wild,
Craving for punishment, will lay how low —
Loaded with many a woe!

O palace-roofs! your courts about,
A measure begins all unrejoiced
By the tympanies and the thyrsos hoist
Of the Bromian revel-rout!
O ye domes! and the measure proceeds
For blood, not such as the cluster bleeds
Of the Dionusian pouring-out!

Break forth, fly, children! fatal this —
Fatal the lay that is piped, I wis!
Ay, for he hunts a children-chase —
Never shall madness lead her revel
And leave no trace in the dwelling-place!
Ai ai, because of the evil!
Ai ai, the old man — how I groan

For the father, and not the father alone!
 She who was nurse of his children,—small
 Her gain that they ever were born at all!

See! See!

A whirlwind shakes hither and thither
 The house — the roof falls in together!
 Ha, ha, what dost thou, son of Zeus?
 A trouble of Tartaros broke loose,
 Such as once Pallas on the Titan thundered,
 Thou sendest on thy domes, roof-shattered and wall-
 sundered!

MESSENGER.

O bodies white with age!—

CHOROS.

What cry, to me—

What, dost thou call with?

MESSENGER.

There's a curse indoors!

CHOROS.

I shall not bring a prophet: you suffice!

MESSENGER.

Dead are the children!

CHOROS.

Ai ai!

MESSENGER.

Groan! for, groans
Suit well the subject! Dire the children's death,
Dire too the parent's hands that dealt the fate.
No one could tell worse woe than we have borne!

CHOROS.

How dost thou that same curse — curse, cause for
groan —
The father's on the children, make appear?
Tell in what matter they were hurled from heaven
Against the house — these evils; and recount
The children's hapless fate, O Messenger!

• MESSENGER.

The victims were before the hearth of Zeus,
A household-expiation: since the king
O' the country, Herakles had killed and cast
From out the dwelling; and a beauteous choir
Of boys stood by his sire, too, and his wife.
And now the basket had been carried round
The altar in a circle, and we used
The consecrated speech. Alkmené's son, —
Just as he was about, in his right hand,
'To bear the torch, that he might dip into
The cleansing-water, — came to a stand-still;
And, as their father yet delayed, his boys
Had their eyes on him. But he was himself
No longer: lost in rollings of the eyes;
Out-thrusting eyes — their very roots — like blood!
Froth he dropped down his bushy-bearded cheek,
And said, — together with a madman's laugh —
"Father! why sacrifice, before I slay
Eurustheus? why have twice the lustral fire,

And double pains, when 'tis permitted me
To end, with one good hand-sweep, matters here?
Then, — when I hither bring Eurustheus' head, —
Then for these just slain, wash hands once for all!
Now, — cast drink-offerings forth, throw baskets down!
Who gives me bow and arrows, who my club?
I go to that Mukenai! One must match
Crowbars and mattocks, so that — those sunk stones
The Kuklops squared with picks and plumb-line red —
I, with my bent steel, may o'ertumble town!"

Which said, he goes and, — with no car to have —
Affirms he has one! mounts the chariot-board,
And strikes, as having really goad in hand!
And two ways laughed the servants — laugh with awe;
And one said, as each met the other's stare,
"Playing us boys' tricks? or is master mad?"

But up he climbs, and down along the roof,
And, dropping into the men's place, maintains
He's come to Nisos city, when he's come
Only inside his own house! then reclines
On floor, for couch, and, as arrived indeed,

Makes himself supper ; goes through some brief stay
Then says he's traversing the forest-flats
Of Isthmos ; thereupon lays body bare
Of bucklings, and begins a contest with
—No one ! and is proclaimed the conqueror —
He by himself—having called out to hear
—Nobody ! Then, if you will take his word,
Blaring against Eurustheus horribly,
He's at Mukenai. But his father laid
Hold of the strong hand and addressed him thus :
“ O son, what ails thee ? Of what sort is this
Extravagance ? Has not some murder-craze,
Bred of those corpses thou didst just despatch,
Danced thee drunk ? ” But he, — taking him to crouch,
Eurustheus' sire, that apprehensive touched
His hand, a suppliant, — pushes him aside,
Gets ready quiver, and bends bow against
His children — thinking them Eurustheus' boys
He means to slay. They, horrified with fear,
Rushed here and there, — this child, into the robes
O' the wretched mother — this, beneath the shade

O' the column,—and this other, like a bird,
Cowered at the altar-foot. The mother shrieks
“Parent—what dost thou?—kill thy children?” So
Shriek the old sire and crowd of servitors.
But he, outwinding him, as round about
The column ran the boy,—a horrid whirl
O' the lathe his foot described!—stands opposite,
Strikes through the liver! and supine the boy
Bedews the stone shafts, breathing out his life.
But “Victory” he shouted! boasted thus:
“Well, this one nestling of Eurustheus—dead—
Falls by me, pays back the paternal hate!”
Then bends bow on another who was crouched
At base of altar—overlooked, he thought—
And now prevents him, falls at father's knee,
Throwing up hand to beard and cheek above.
“O dearest!” cries he “father, kill me not!
Yours, I am—your boy: not Eurustheus' boy
You kill now!” But he, rolling the wild eye
Of Gorgon,—as the boy stood all too close
For deadly bowshot,—mimicry of smith

Who batters red-hot iron, — hand o'er head
Heaving his club, on the boy's yellow hair
Hurls it and breaks the bone. This second caught,—
He goes, would slay the third, one sacrifice
He and the couple; but, beforehand here,
The miserable mother catches up,
Carries him inside house and bars the gate.
Then he, as he were at those Kuklops' work,
Digs at, heaves doors up, wrenches doorposts out,
Lays wife and child low with the selfsame shaft.
And this done, at the old man's death he drives;
But there came, as it seemed to us who saw,
A statue — Pallas with the crested head,
Swinging her spear — and threw a stone which smote
Herakles' breast and stayed his slaughter-rage,
And sent him safe to sleep. He falls to ground —
Striking against the column with his back —
Column which, with the falling of the roof,
Broken in two, lay by the altar-base.
And we, foot-free now from our several flights,
Along with the old man, we fastened bonds

Of rope-noose to the column, so that he,
Ceasing from sleep, might not go adding deeds
To deeds done. And he sleeps a sleep, poor wretch,
No gift of any god! since he has slain
Children and wife. For me, I do not know
What mortal has more misery to bear.

CHOROS.

A murder there was which Argolis
Holds in remembrance, Hellas through,
As, at that time, best and famous:
Of those, the daughters of Danaos slew.
A murder indeed was that! but this
Outstrips it, straight to the goal has pressed.
I am able to speak of a murder done
To the hapless Zeus-born offspring, too —
Prokné's son, who had but one —
Or a sacrifice to the Muses, say
Rather, who Itus sing alway,
Her single child! But thou, the sire
Of children three — O thou consuming fire! —

In one outrageous fate hast made them all expire!
And this outrageous fate —
What groan, or wail, or deadmen's dirge,
Or choric dance of Haidēs shall I urge
The Muse to celebrate?

Woe! woe! behold!
The portalled palace lies unrolled,
This way and that way, each prodigious fold!
Alas for me! these children, see,
Stretched, hapless group, before their father — he
The all-unhappy, who lies sleeping out
The murder of his sons, a dreadful sleep!
And bonds, see, all about, —
Rope-tangle, ties and tether, — these
Tightenings around the body of Herakles
To the stone columns of the house made fast!
But — like a bird that grieves
For callow nestlings, some rude hand bereaves —
See, here, a bitter journey over-past,
The old man — all too late — is here at last!

AMPHITRUON.

Silently, silently, aged Kadmeians !
Will ye not suffer my son, diffused
Yonder, to slide from his sorrows in sleep ?

CHOROS.

And thee, old man, do I, groaning, weep,
And the children too, and the head there — used
Of old to the wreaths and paians !

AMPHITRUON.

Farther away ! Nor beat the breast,
Nor wail aloud, nor rouse from rest
The slumberer — asleep, so best !

CHOROS.

Ah me — what a slaughter !

AMPHITRUON.

Refrain — refrain !
Ye will prove my perdition !

CHOROS.

Unlike water,
Bloodshed rises from earth again!

AMPHITRUON.

Do I bid you bate your breath, in vain—
Ye elders? Lament in a softer strain!
Lest he rouse himself, burst every chain,
And bury the city in ravage—bray
Father and house to dust away!

CHOROS.

I cannot forbear—I cannot forbear!

AMPHITRUON.

Hush! I will learn his breathings: there!
I will lay my ears close.

CHOROS.

What, he sleeps?

AMPHITRUON.

Ay, — sleeps ! A horror of slumber keeps
 The man who has piled
 On wife and child
 Death and death, as he shot them down
 With clang o' the bow.

CHOROS.

Wail —

AMPHITRUON.

Even so !

CHOROS.

— The fate of the children —

AMPHITRUON.

Triple woe !

CHOROS.

— Old man, the fate of thy son !

AMPHITRUON.

Hush, hush! Have done!
He is turning about!
He is breaking out!
Away! I steal
And my body conceal,
Before he arouse,
In the depths of the house!

CHOROS.

Courage! The Night
Maintains her right
On the lids of thy son there, sealed from sight!

AMPHITRUON.

See, see! To leave the light
And, wretch that I am, bear one last ill,
I do not avoid; but if he kill
Me his own father, and devise
Beyond the present miseries

A misery more ghastly still —
And to haunt him, over and above
Those here who, as they used to love,
Now hate him, what if he have with these
My murder, the worst of Erinues?

CHOROS.

Then was the time to die, for thee,
When ready to wreak in the full degree
Vengeance on those
Thy consort's foes
Who murdered her brothers! glad, life's close,
With the Taphioi down,
And sacked their town
Clustered about with a wash of sea!

AMPHITRUON.

To flight — to flight!
Away from the house, troop off, old men!
Save yourselves out of the maniac's sight!

He is rousing himself right 'up : and then,
Murder on murder heaping anew,
He will revel in blood your city through!

CHOROS.

O Zeus, why hast, with such unmeasured hate,
Hated thy son, whelmed in this sea of woes?

HERAKLES.

Hah, —

In breath indeed I am — see things I ought —
Æther, and earth, and these the sunbeam-shafts!
But then — some billow and strange whirl of sense
I have fallen into! and breathings hot I breathe —
Smoked upwards, not the steady work from lungs.
See now! Why bound, — at moorings like a ship, —
About my young breast and young arm, to this
Stone piece of carved work broke in half, do I
Sit, have my rest in corpses' neighborhood?
Strewn on the ground are winged darts, and bow
Which played my brother-shieldman, held in hand. —

Guarded my side, and got my guardianship!
I cannot have gone back to Haides — twice
Begun Eurustheus' race I ended thence?
But I nor see the Sisupheian stone,
Nor Plouton, nor Demeter's sceptred maid!
I am struck witless sure! Where can I be?
Ho there! what friend of mine is near or far —
Some one to cure me of bewilderment?
For nought familiar do I recognize.

AMPHITRUON.

Old friends, shall I go close to these my woes?

CHOROS.

Ay, and let me too, — nor desert your ills!

HERAKLES.

Father, why weepest thou, and buriest up
Thine eyes, aloof so from thy much-loved son?

AMPHITRUON.

O child! — for, faring badly, mine thou art!

HERAKLES.

Do I fare somehow ill, that tears should flow?

AMPHITRUON.

Ill,— would cause any god who bore, to groan!

HERAKLES.

That's boasting, truly! still, you state no hap.

AMPHITRUON.

For, thyself seest—if in thy wits again.

HERAKLES.

Heyday! How riddlingly that hint returns!

AMPHITRUON.

Well, I am trying— art thou sane and sound!

HERAKLES.

Say if thou lay'st aught strange to my life's charge!

AMPHITRUON.

If thou no more art Haides-drunk, — I tell!

HERAKLES.

I bring to mind no drunkenness of soul.

AMPHITRUON.

Shall I unbind my son, old men, or what?

HERAKLES.

And who was binder, tell! — not *that*, my deed!

AMPHITRUON.

Mind that much of misfortune — pass the rest!

HERAKLES.

Enough! from silence, I nor learn nor wish.

AMPHITRUON.

O Zeus, dost witness here throned Heré's work?

HERAKLES.

But have I had to bear aught hostile thence?

AMPHITRUON.

Let be the goddess—bury thine own guilt!

HERAKLES.

Undone! What is the sorrow thou wilt say?

AMPHITRUON.

Look! See the ruins of thy children here!

HERAKLES.

Ah me! What sight do wretched I behold?

AMPHITRUON.

Unfair fight, son, this fight thou fastenedst
On thine own children!

HERAKLES.

What fight? Who slew these?

HERAKLES.

AMPHITRUON.

Thou and thy bow, and who of gods was cause.

HERAKLES.

How say'st? What did I? Ill-announcing sire!

AMPHITRUON.

—Go mad! Thou askest a sad clearing up!

HERAKLES.

And am I also murderer of my wife?

AMPHITRUON.

All the work here was just one hand's work — thine!

HERAKLES.

Ai ai — for groans encompass me — a cloud!

AMPHITRUON.

For these deeds' sake do I begroan thy fate!

HERAKLES.

Did I break up my house or dance it down?

AMPHITRUON.

I know just one thing — all's a woe with thee!

HERAKLES.

But where did the craze catch me? where destroy?

AMPHITRUON.

When thou didst cleanse hands at the altar-flame.

HERAKLES.

Ah me! why is it then I save my life —
Proved murderer of my dearest ones, my boys?
Shall not I rush to the rock-level's leap,
Or, darting sword through breast and all, become
My children's blood-avenger? or, this flesh
Burning away with fire, so thrust away
'The infamy, which waits me there, from life?

Ah, but, — a hindrance to my purposed death,
Theseus arrives, my friend and kinsman, here !
Eyes will be on me ! my child-murder-plague
In evidence before friends loved so much !
O me, what shall I do ? Where, taking wing
Or gliding underground, shall I seek out
A solitariness from misery ?
I will pull night upon my muffled head !
Let this wretch here content him with his curse
Of blood : I would pollute no innocents !

THESEUS.

I come, — with others who await beside
Asopos' stream, the armed Athenian youth, —
Bring thy son, old man, spear's fight-fellowship !
For a bruit reached the Erectheidai's town
That, having seized the sceptre of this realm,
Lukos prepares you battle-violence.
So, paying good back, — Herakles began,
Saving me down there, — I have come, old man,
If aught, of my hand or my friends', you want.

What's here? Why all these corpses on the ground?
Am I perhaps behindhand — come too late
For newer ill? Who killed these children now?
Whose wife was she, this woman I behold?
Boys, at least, take no stand in reach of spear!
Some other woe than war, I chance upon!

AMPHITRUON.

O thou, who sway'st the olive-bearing height! —

THESEUS.

Why hail'st thou me with woful prelude thus?

AMPHITRUON.

Dire sufferings have we suffered from the gods.

THESEUS.

These boys, — who are they, thou art weeping o'er?

AMPHITRUON.

He gave them birth, indeed. my hapless son!
Begot, but killed them — dared their bloody death.

THESEUS.

Speak no such horror!

AMPHITRUON.

Would I might obey!

THESEUS.

O teller of dread tidings!

AMPHITRUON.

Lost are we —

Lost — flown away from life!

THESEUS.

What sayest thou?

What did he?

AMPHITRUON.

Erring through a frenzy-fit,
He did all, with the arrows dipped in dye
Of hundred-headed Hudra.

THESEUS.

Heré's strife !

But who is this among the dead, old man ?

AMPHITRUON.

Mine, mine, this progeny — the labor-plagued,
Who went with gods once to Phlegruia's plain,
And in the giant-slaying war bore shield !

THESEUS.

Woe — woe ! What man was born mischanceful thus !

AMPHITRUON.

Thou couldst not know another mortal man
Toil-weary, more outworn by wanderings.

THESEUS.

And why i' the peploi hides he his sad head ?

AMPHITRUON.

Not daring meet thine eye, thy friendliness
And kinship, — nor that children's-blood about !

THESEUS.

But *I* come to who shared my woe with me!
Uncover him!

AMPHITRUON.

O child, put from thine eyes
The peplos, throw it off, show face to sun!
Woe's weight well matched contends with tears in
thee.

I supplicate thee, falling at thy cheek
And knee and hand, and shedding this old tear!
O son, remit the savage lion's mood,
Since to a bloody, an unholy race
Art thou led forth, if thou be resolute
To go on adding ill to ill, my child!

THESEUS.

Let me speak! Thee, who sittest — seated woe —
I call upon to show thy friends thine eye!
For there's no darkness has a cloud so black
May hide thy misery thus absolute.

Why, waving hand, dost sign me—murder's done?
Lest a pollution strike me, from thy speech?
Nought care I to — with thee, at least — fare ill:
For I had joy once! *Then*,—soul rises to, —
When thou didst save me from the dead to light!
Friends' gratitude that tastes old age, I loathe,
And him who likes to share when things look fine,
But, sail along with friends in trouble—no!
Arise, uncover thine unhappy head!
Look on us! Every man of the right race
Bears what, at least, the gods inflict, nor shrinks.

HERAKLES.

Theseus, hast seen this match—my boys with me?

THESEUS.

I heard of, now I see the ills thou sign'st.

HERAKLES.

Why then hast thou displayed my head to sun?

THESEUS.

Why? mortals bring no plague on aught divine!

HERAKLES.

Fly, O unhappy, me — an impious plague!

THESEUS.

No plague of vengeance flits to friends from friends

HERAKLES.

I praise thee! But I helped thee, — that is truth.

THESEUS.

And I, advantaged then, now pity thee.

HERAKLES.

— The pitiable, — my children's murderer!

THESEUS.

I mourn for thy sake, in this altered lot.

HERAKLES.

Hast thou found others in still greater woe?

THESEUS.

Thou, from earth, touchest heaven, one huge distress!

HERAKLES.

Accordingly, I am prepared to die.

THESEUS.

Think'st thou thy threats at all import the gods?

HERAKLES.

Gods please themselves: to gods I give their like.

THESEUS.

Shut thy mouth, lest big words bring bigger woe!

HERAKLES.

I am full fraught with ills — no stowing more!

THESEUS.

Thou wilt do — what, then? Whither moody borne?

HERAKLES.

Dying, I go below earth whence I came.

THESEUS.

Thou hast used words of — what man turns up first!

HERAKLES.

While thou, being outside sorrow, schoolest me.

THESEUS.

The much-enduring Herakles talks thus? —

HERAKLES.

Not the so much-enduring: measure's past!

THESEUS.

— Mainstay to mortals, and their mighty friend?

HERAKLES.

They nowise profit me: but Heré rules.

THESEUS.

Hellas forbids thou shouldst ineptly die.

HERAKLES.

But hear, then, how I strive by arguments
Against thy teachings! I will ope thee out
My life — past, present — as unlivable.
First, I was born of this man, who had slain
His mother's aged sire, and, sullied so,
Married Alkmené, she who gave me birth.
Now, when the basis of a family
Is not laid right, what follows needs must fall;
And Zeus, whoever Zeus is, formed me foe
To Heré (take not thou offence, old man!
Since father, in Zeus' stead, account I thee)
And, while I was at suck yet, frightful snakes
She introduced among my swaddling-clothes, —
That bed-fellow of Zeus! — to end me so.

But when I gained the youthful garb of flesh,
The labors I endured — what need to tell?
What lions ever, or three-bodied brutes,
Tuphons or giants, or the four-legged swarms
Of Kentauro-battle, did not I end out?
And that hound, headed all about with heads
Which cropped up twice, the Hudra, having slain —
I both went through a myriad other toils
In full drove, and arrived among the dead
To convoy, as Eurustheus bade, to light
Haides' three-headed dog and door-keeper.
But then I, — wretch, — dared this last labor — see!
Slew my sons, keystone-coped my house with ills.
To such a strait I come! nor my dear Thebes
Dare I inhabit, — and, suppose I stay?
Into what fane or festival of friends
Am I to go? My curse scarce courts accost!
Shall I seek Argos? How, if fled from home?
But say, — I hurry to some other town!
And there they eye me, as notorious now, —
Kept by sharp tongue-taunts under lock and key —

“Is not this he, Zeus’ son, who murdered once
Children and wife? Let him go rot elsewhere!”
To any man renowned as happy once,
Reverses are a grave thing; but to whom
Evil is old acquaintance, there’s no hurt
To speak of, he and misery are twins.
To this degree of woe I think to come:
For earth will utter voice forbidding me
To touch the ground, and sea — to pierce the wave,
The river-springs — to drink, and I shall play
Ixion’s part quite out, the chained and wheeled!
And best of all will be, if so I ’scape
Sight from one man of those Hellenes, — once
I lived among, felicitous and rich!
Why ought I then to live? What gain accrues
From good-for-nothing, wicked life I lead?
In fine, let Zeus’ brave consort dance and sing,
Stamp foot, the Olympian Zeus’ own sandal-trick!
What she has willed, that brings her will to pass —
The foremost man of Hellas pedestalled,
Up, over, and down whirling! Who would pray

To such a goddess?— that, begrudging Zeus
Because he loved a woman, ruins me—
Lover of Hellas, faultless of the wrong!

THESEUS.

This strife is from no other of the gods
Than Zeus' wife; rightly apprehend, as well,
Why, to no death—thou meditatest now—
I would persuade thee, but to bear thy woes!
None, none of mortals boasts a fate unmixed,
Nor gods—if poets' teaching be not false.
Have not they joined in wedlock against law
With one another? not, for sake of rule,
Branded their sires in bondage? Yet they house,
All the same, in Olumpos, carry heads
High there, notorious sinners though they be!
What wilt thou say, then, if thou, mortal-born,
Bearest outrageously fate gods endure?
Leave Thebes, now, pay obedience to the law,
And follow me to Pallas' citadel!
There, when thy hands are purified from stain,

House will I give thee, and goods shared alike.
What gifts I hold too from the citizens
For saving twice seven children, when I slew
The Knosian bull, these also give I thee.
And everywhere about the land are plots
Apportioned me: these, named by thine own name,
Shall be henceforward styled by all men — thine,
Thy life long; but at death, when Haides-bound,
All Athens shall uphold the honored one
With sacrifices, and huge marble heaps:
For that's a fair crown our Hellenes grant
Their people — glory, should they help the brave!
And I repay thee back this grace for thine
That saved me, now that thou art lorn of friends —
Since, when the gods give honor, friends may flit:
For, a god's help suffices, if he please.

HERAKLES.

Ah me, these words are foreign to my woes!
I neither fancy gods love lawless beds,
Nor, that with chains they bind each other's hands,

Have I judged worthy faith, at any time ;
Nor shall I be persuaded — one is born
His fellows' master ! since God stands in need —
If he is really God — of nought at all.
These are the poets' pitiful conceits !
But this it was I pondered, though woe-whelmed —
“ Take heed lest thou be taxed with cowardice
Somehow in leaving thus the light of day ! ”
For whoso cannot make a stand against
These same misfortunes, neither could withstand
A mere man's dart, oppose death, strength to strength
Therefore unto thy city I will go
And have the grace of thy ten thousand gifts.
There ! I have tasted of ten thousand toils
As truly — never waived a single one,
Nor let these runnings drop from out my eyes !
Nor ever thought it would have come to this —
That I from out my eyes do drop tears ! Well !
At present, as it seems, one bows to fate.
So be it ! Old man, thou seest my exile —
Seest, too, me — my children's murderer !

These give thou to the tomb, and deck the dead,
Doing them honor with thy tears — since me
Law does not sanction! Propping on her breast,
And giving them into their mother's arms,
— Re-institute the sad community
Which I, unhappy, brought to nothingness —
Not by my will! And, when earth hides the dead,
Live in this city! — sad, but, all the same,
Force thy soul to bear woe along with me!
O children, — who begat and gave you birth —
Your father, has destroyed you! nought you gain
By those fair deeds of mine I laid you up,
As by main-force I labored glory out
To give you, — that fine gift of fatherhood!
And thee, too, O my poor one, I destroyed,
Not rendering like for like, as when thou kept'st
My marriage-bed inviolate, — those long
Household-seclusions draining to the dregs
Inside my house! O me, my wife, my boys —
And — O myself, how, miserably moved,
Am I disyoked now from both boys and wife!

O bitter those delights of kisses now —
And bitter these my weapons' fellowship!
For I am doubtful whether shall I keep
Or cast away these arrows which will clang
Ever such words out, as they knock my side —
“Us — thou didst murder wife and children with!
Us — child-destroyers — still thou keepest thine!”
Ha, shall I bear them in my arms, then? What
Say for excuse? Yet, naked of my darts
Wherewith I did my bravest, Hellas through,
Throwing myself beneath foot to my foes,
Shall I die basely? No! relinquishment
Of these must never be, — companions once,
We sorrowfully must observe the pact!
In just one thing, co-operate with me
Thy sad friend, Theseus! Go along with him
To Argos, and in concert get arranged
The price my due for bringing there the Hound!
O land of Kadmos, Theban people all,
Shear off your locks, lament one wide lament,
Go to my children's grave and, in one strain,

Lament the whole of us — my dead and me —
Since all together are fordone and lost,
Smitten by Heré's single stroke of fate!

THESEUS.

Rise up now from thy dead ones! Tears enough,
Poor friend!

HERAKLES.

I cannot: for my limbs are fixed.

THESEUS.

Ay: even these strong men fate overthrows!

HERAKLES.

Woe!

Here might I grow a stone, nor mind woes more!

THESEUS.

Cease! Give thy hand to friendly helpmate now!

HERAKLES.

Nay, but I wipe off blood upon thy robes!

THESEUS.

Squeeze out and spare no drop! I take it all!

HERAKLES.

Of sons bereaved, I have thee like my son!

THESEUS.

Give to my neck thy hand! 'tis I will lead.

HERAKLES.

Yoke-fellows friendly — one heart-broken, though!

O father! such a man we need for friend!

AMPHITRUON.

Certes, the land that bred him boasts good sons!

HERAKLES.

Turn me round, Theseus — to behold my boys!

THESEUS.

What? will the having such a love-charm soothe?

HERAKLES.

I want it; and to press my father's breast.

AMPHITRUON.

See here, O son! for, what I love thou seek'st!

THESEUS.

Strange! Of thy labors no more memory?

HERAKLES.

All those were less than these, those ills I bore!

THESEUS.

Who sees thee grow a woman,—will not praise!

HERAKLES.

I live low to thee? Not so once, I think!

THESEUS.

Too low by far! "Famed Herakles" — where's he?

HERAKLES.

Down amid evils, of what kind wast *thou*?

THESEUS.

As far as courage — least of all mankind!

HERAKLES.

How say'st, then, *I* in evils shrink to nought?

THESEUS.

Forward!

HERAKLES.

Farewell, old father!

AMPHITRUON.

Thou too, son!

HERAKLES.

Bury the boys as I enjoined!

AMPHITRUON.

And *me* —

Who will be found to bury now, my child?

HERAKLES.

Myself!

AMPHITRUON.

When, coming?

HERAKLES.

When thy task is done.

AMPHITRUON.

How?

HERAKLES.

I will have thee carried forth from Thebes
To Athens. But bear in the children, earth
Is burthened by! Myself, — who with these shames
Have cast away my house, — a ruined hulk,
I follow — trailed by Theseus — on my way ;
And whoso rather would have wealth and strength
Than good friends, reasons foolishly therein!

CHOROS.

And we depart, with sorrow at heart,
Sobs that increase with tears that start ;
The greatest of all our friends of yore,
We have lost forevermore !

When the long silence ended, — “ Our best friend --
Lost, our best friend ! ” he muttered musingly.
Then, “ Lachares the sculptor ” (half aloud)
“ Sinned he or sinned he not? ‘ Outrageous sin ! ’

Shuddered our elders, 'Pallas should be clothed:
He carved her naked.' 'But more beautiful!'
Answers this generation: 'Wisdom formed
For love not fear!' And there the statue stands,
Entraps the eye severer art repels.
Moreover, Pallas wields the thunderbolt,
Yet has not struck the artist all this while.
Pheidias and Aischulos? Euripides
And Lachares? But youth will have its way!
The ripe man ought to be as old as young —
As young as old. I too have youth at need.
Much may be said for stripping wisdom bare!

'And who's 'our best friend'? You play kottabos;
Here's the last mode of playing. Take a sphere
With orifices at due interval,
Through topmost one of which, a throw adroit
Sends wine from cup, clean passage, from outside
To where, in hollow midst, a manikin
Suspended ever bobs with head erect
Right underneath whatever hole's a-top

When you set orb a-rolling : plumb, he gets
Ever this benediction of the splash.
An other-fashioned orb presents him fixed :
Of all the outlets, he fronts only one,
And only when that one, — and rare the chance, —
Comes uppermost, does he turn upward too :
He can't turn all sides with the turning orb.
Inside this sphere of life, — all objects, sense
And soul perceive, — Euripides hangs fixed,
Gets knowledge through the single aperture
Of High and Right : with visage fronting these
He waits the wine thence ere he operate,
Work in the world and write a tragedy.
When that hole happens to revolve to point,
In drops the knowledge, waiting meets reward.
But, duly in rotation, Low and Wrong —
When these enjoy the moment's altitude,
His heels are found just where his head should be !
No knowledge that way ! *I* am movable, —
To slightest shift of orb make prompt response,
Face Low and Wrong and Weak and all the rest,

And still drink knowledge, wine-drenched every turn, —
Equally favored by their opposites.
Little and Bad exist, are natural:
Then let me know them, and be twice as great
As he who only knows one phase of life!
So doubly shall I prove 'best friend of man,'
If I report the whole truth.— Vice, perceived
While he shut eyes to all but Virtue there.
Man's made of both: and both must be of use
To somebody: if not to him, to me.
While, as to your imaginary Third
Who, — stationed (by mechanics past my guess)
So as to take in every side at once,
And not successively, — may reconcile
The High and Low in tragicomic verse, —
He shall be hailed superior to us both
When born — in the Tin-Islands! Meantime, here
In bright Athenai, I contest the claim,
Call myself Iostephanos' 'best friend,'
Who took my own course, worked as I descried
Ordainment, stuck to my first faculty!

" For, listen! There's no failure breaks the heart,
 Whate'er be man's endeavor in this world,
 Like the rash poet's when he — nowise fails
 By poetizing badly, — Zeus or makes
 Or mars a man, so — at it, merrily!
 But when, — made man, — much like myself, — equipped
 For such and such achievement, — rash he turns
 Out of the straight path, bent on snatch of feat
 From — who's the appointed fellow born thereto, —
 Crows take him! — in your Kassiterides?
 Half-doing his work, leaving mine untouched,
 That were the failure! Here I stand, heart-whole,
 No Thamuris!

" Well thought of, Thamuris!

Has zeal, pray, for 'best friend' Euripides
 Allowed you to observe the honor done
 His elder rival, in our Poikilé?
 You don't know? Once and only once, trod stage,
 Sang and touched lyre in person, in his youth,
 Our Sophokles, — youth, beauty, dedicate

To Thamuris who named the tragedy.
The voice of him was weak ; face, limbs and lyre,
These were worth saving : Thamuros stands yet
Perfect as painting helps in such a case.
At least you know the story, for 'best friend'
Enriched his 'Rhesos' from the Blind Bard's store ;
So haste and see the work, and lay to heart
What it was struck me when I eyed the piece !
Here stands a poet punished for rash strife
With Powers above his power, who see with sight
Beyond his vision, sing accordingly
A song, which he must needs dare emulate !
Poet, remain the man nor ape the Muse !

" But — lend me the psalterion ! Nay, for once —
Once let my hand fall where the other's lay !
I see it, just as I were Sophokles,
That sunrise and combustion of the east ! "

And then he sang — are these unlike the words ?

Thamuris marching, — lyre and song of Thrace —
(Perpend the first, the worst of woes that were,
Allotted lyre and song, ye poet-race !)

'Thamuris from Oichalia, feasted there
By kingly Eurutus of late, now bound
For Dorion at the uprise broad and bare

Of Mount Pangaios, (ore with earth enwound
Glittered beneath his footstep) — marching gay
And glad, Thessalia through, came, robed and crowned,

From triumph on to triumph, 'mid a ray
Of early morn, — came, saw and knew the spot
Assigned him for his worst of woes, that day.

Balura — happier while its name was not —
Met him, but nowise menaced ; slipped aside
Obsequious river, to pursue its lot

Of solacing the valley—say, some wide
Thick busy human cluster, house and home,
Embanked for peace, or thrift that thanks the tide.

Thamuris, marching, laughed "Each flake of foam"
(As sparkingly the ripple raced him by)
"Mocks slower clouds adrift in the blue dome!"

For Autumn was the season; red the sky
Held morn's conclusive signet of the sun
To break the mists up, bid them blaze and die.

Morn had the mastery as, one by one
All pomps produced themselves along the tract
From earth's far ending to near heaven begun.

Was there a ravaged tree? it laughed compact
With gold, a leaf-ball crisp, high-brandished now,
Tempting to onset frost which late attacked.

Was there a wizened shrub, a starveling bough,
A fleecy thistle filched from by the wind,
A weed, Pan's trampling hoof would disallow?

Each, with a glory and a rapture twined
About it, joined the rush of air and light
And force: the world was of one joyous mind.

Say not the birds flew! they forbore their right —
Swam, revelling onward in the roll of things.
Say not the beasts' mirth bounded! that was flight —

How could the creatures leap, no lift of wings?
Such earth's community of purpose, such
The ease of earth's fulfilled imaginings, —

So did the near and far appear to touch
I' the moment's transport, — that an interchange
Of function, far with near, seemed scarce too much:

And had the rooted plant aspired to range
With the snake's license, while the insect yearned
To glow fixed as the flower, it were not strange —

No more than if the fluttery tree-top turned
To actual music, sang itself aloft ;
Or if the wind, impassioned chantress, earned

The right to soar embodied in some soft
Fine form all fit for cloud-companionship,
And, blissful, once touch beauty chased so oft.

Thamuris, marching, let no fancy slip
Born of the fiery transport ; lyre and song
Were his, to smite with hand and launch from lip —

Peerless recorded, since the list grew long
Of poets (saith Homeros) free to stand
Pedestalled 'mid the Muses' temple-throng,

A statued service, laurelled, lyre in hand,
(Ay, for we see them) — Thamuris of Thrace
Predominating foremost of the band.

Therefore the morn-ray that enriched his face,
If it gave lambent chill, took flame again
From flush of pride ; he saw, he knew the place.

What wind arrived with all the rhythms from plain,
Hill, dale, and that rough wildwood interspersed?
Compounding these to one consummate strain,

It reached him, music ; but his own outburst
Of victory concluded the account,
And that grew song which was mere music erst.

Be my Parnassos, thou Pangaian mount !
And turn thee, river, nameless hitherto !
Famed shalt thou vie with famed Pieria's fount !

Here I await the end of this ado:
Which wins — Earth's poet or the Heavenly Muse." . . .

But song broke up in laughter. "Tell the rest,
Who may! *I* have not spurned the common life,
Nor vaunted mine a lyre to match the Muse
Who sings for gods, not men! Accordingly,
I shall not decorate her vestibule —
Mute marble, blind the eyes and quenched the brain,
Loose in the hand a bright, a broken lyre!
— Not Thamuris but Aristophanes!

"There! I have sung content back to myself,
And started subject for a play beside.
My next performance shall content you both.
Did 'Prelude-Battle' maul 'best friend' too much?
Then 'Main-Fight' be my next song, fairness' self!
Its subject — Contest for the Tragic Crown.
Ay, you shall hear none else but Aischulos
Lay down the law of Tragedy, and prove
'Best friend' a stray-away, — no praise denied

His manifold deservings, never fear —
Nor word more of the old fun! Death defends!
Sound admonition has its due effect.
Oh, you have uttered weighty words, believe!
Such as shall bear abundant fruit, next year,
In judgment, regular, legitimate.
Let Bacchos' self preside in person! Ay —
For there's a buzz about those 'Bacchanals'
Rumor attributes to your great and dead
For final effort: just the prodigy
Great dead men leave, to lay survivors low!
— Until we make acquaintance with our fate
And find, fate's worst done, we, the same, survive
Perchance to honor more the patron-god,
Fitlier inaugurate a festal year.
Now that the cloud has broken, sky laughs blue,
Earth blossoms youthfully! Athenai breathes!
After a twenty-six years' wintry blank
Struck from her life, — war-madness, one long swoon,
She wakes up: Arginousai bids good cheer!
We have disposed of Kallikratidas;

Once more will Sparté sue for terms,— who knows?
Cede Dekeleia, as the rumor runs :
Terms which Athenai, of right mind again,
Accepts—she can no other! Peace declared,
Have my long labors borne their fruit or no?
Grinned coarse buffoonery so oft in vain?
Enough— it simply saved you! saviors—praise
Theoria's beauty and Oporia's breadth!
Nor, when Peace realizes promised bliss,
Forget the Bald Bard, Envy! but go burst
*As the cup goes round, and the cates abound,
Collops of hare, with roast spinks rare!*
Confess my pipings, dancings, posings served
A purpose: guttlings, guzzlings, had their use!
Say whether light Muse, Rosy-finger-tips,
Or 'best friend's' Heavy-hand, Melpomené,
Touched lyre to purpose, played Amphion's part,
And built Athenai to the skies once more!
Farewell, brave couple! Next year, welcome me!"

No doubt, in what he said that night, sincere!
One story he referred to, false or fact,
Was not without adaptability.

They do say — Lais the Corinthian once
Chancing to see Euripides (who paced
Composing in a garden, tablet-book
In left hand, with appended stulos prompt)

“Answer me,” she began, “O Poet, — this!
What didst intend by writing in thy play
Go hang, thou filthy doer?” Struck on heap,
Euripides, at the audacious speech —
“Well now,” quoth he, “thyself art just the one
I should imagine fit for deeds of filth!”

She laughingly retorted his own line
“What’s filth, — unless who does it, thinks it so?”

So might he doubtless think. “Farewell,” said we.

And he was gone, lost in the morning-gray,
Rose-streaked and gold to eastward. Did we dream?
Could the poor twelve hours hold this argument

We render durable from fugitive,
As July at each sunset's droop of sail,
Delay of oar, submission to sea-might,
I still remember, you as duly dint
Remembrance, with the punctual rapid style,
Into — what calm cold page!

Thus soul escapes

From eloquence made captive: thus mere words
— Al, would the lifeless body stay! But no:
Change upon change till, — who may recognize
What did soul service, in the dusty heap?
What energy of Aristophanes
Inflames the wreck Balaustion saves to show?
Ashes be evidence how fire — and smoke —
All night went lamping on! But morn must rise.
The poet — I shall say — burned up and, blank,
Smouldered this ash, now white and cold enough.

Nay, Euthukles! for best, though mine it be,
Comes yet! Write on, write ever, wrong no word!

Add, first, — he gone, if jollity went too,
Some of the graver mood, which mixed and marred,
Departed likewise. Sight of narrow scope
Has this meek consolation: neither ills,
We dread, nor joys, we dare anticipate,
Perform to promise. Each soul sows a seed —
Euripides and Aristophanes;
Seed bears crop, scarce within our little lives;
But germinates, — perhaps enough to judge, —
Next year?

Whereas, next year brought harvest-time!
For, next year came, and went not, but is now,
Still now, while you and I are bound for Rhodes
That's all but reached! — and harvest has it brought,
Dire as the homicidal dragon-crop!
Sophokles had dismissal ere it dawned,
Happy as ever; though men mournfully
Plausive, — when only soul could triumph now,
And Iophon produced his father's play, —
Crowned the consummate song where Oidipous

Dared the descent 'mid earthquake-thundering,
And hardly Theseus' hands availed to guard
Eyes from the horror, as their grove disgorged
Its dread ones, while each daughter sank to ground.

Then Aristophanes, on heel of that,
Triumphant also, followed with his "Frogs:"
Produced at next Lenaia, — three months since, —
The promised Main-Fight, loyal, license-free!
As if the poet, primed with Thasian juice,
(Himself swore — wine that conquers every kind
For long abiding in the head) could fix
Thenceforward any object in its truth,
Through eyeballs bathed by mere Castalian dew,
Nor miss the borrowed medium, — vinous drop
That colors all to the right crimson pitch
When mirth grows mockery, censure takes the tinge
Of malice!

All was Aristophanes:

There blazed the glory, there shot black the shame!
Ay, Bacchos did stand forth, the Tragic God

In person! and when duly dragged through mire,—
 Having lied, filched, played fool, proved coward,
 flung

The boys their dose of fit indecency,
 And finally got trounced to heart's content,
 At his own feast, in his own theatre
 (— Oh, never fear! 'Twas consecrated sport,
 Exact tradition, warranted no whit
 Offensive to instructed taste,—indeed,
 Essential to Athenai's liberty,
 Could the poor stranger understand!) why, then—
 He was pronounced the rarely-qualified
 To rate the work, adjust the claim to worth,
 Of Aischulos (of whom, in other mood,
 This same appreciative poet pleased
 To say "He's all one stiff and gluey piece
 Of back of swine's neck!")—and the Chatterbox
 Who, "twisting words like wool," usurped his seat
 In Plouton's realm: "the arch-rogué, liar, scamp
 That lives by snatching-up of altar-orts,"
 — Who failed to recognize Euripides?

Then came a contest for supremacy —
Crammed full of genius, wit and fun and freak.
No spice of undue spite to spoil the dish
Of all sorts, — for the Mystics matched the Frogs
In poetry, no Seiren sang so sweet ! —
Till, pressed into the service (how dispense
With Phaps-Elaphion and free foot-display?)
The Muse of dead Euripides danced frank,
Rattled her bits of tile, made all too plain
How baby-work like “ Herakles ” had birth !
Last, Bacchos, — candidly disclaiming brains
Able to follow finer argument, —
Confessed himself much moved by three main facts :
First, — if you stick a “ Lost his flask of oil ”
At pause of period, you perplex the sense —
Were it the Elegy for Marathon !
Next, if you weigh two verses, “ car ” — the word,
Will outweigh “ club ” — the word, each word-packed
line !
And — last, worst fact of all ! in rivalry
The younger poet dared to improvise

Laudation less distinct of Triphales —

(Nay, that served when ourself abused the
youth!)

Pheidippides — (nor that's appropriate now!)

Then, — Alkibiades, our city's hope,

Since times change and we Comics should change
too!

These three main facts, well weighed, drew judgment
down,

Conclusively assigned the wretch his fate —

“Fate due” admonished the sage Mystic choir,

“To sitting, prate-apace, with Sokrates,

Neglecting music and each tragic aid!”

— All wound-up by a wish “We soon may cease
From certain griefs, and warfare, worst of them!”

— Since, deaf to Comedy's persistent voice,

War still raged, still was like to rage. In vain

Had Sparté cried once more “For granted Peace

We give you Dekeleia back!” Too shrewd

Was Kleophon to let escape, forsooth,

The enemy — at final gasp, besides!

So, Aristophanes obtained the prize,
And so Athenai felt she had a friend
Far better than her "best friend," lost last year;
And so, such fame had "Frogs" that, when came
round

This present year, those Frogs croaked gay again
At the great Feast, Elaphebolion-month.

Only — there happened Aigispotamoi!

And, in the midst of the frog-merriment,

Plump o' the sudden, pounces stern King Stork

On the light-hearted people of the marsh!

Spartan Lusandros swooped precipitate,

Ended Athenai, rowed her sacred bay

With oars which brought a hundred triremes back

Captive!

And first word of the conqueror

Was "Down with those Long Walls, Peiraios' pride!

Destroy, yourselves, your bulwarks! Peace needs
none!"

And "We obey" they shuddered in their dream.

But, at next quick imposition of decree —
“No longer democratic government!
Henceforth such oligarchy as ourselves
Please to appoint you!” — then the horror stung
Dreamers awake; they started up a-stare
At the half-helot captain and his crew
— Spartans, “men used to let their hair grow long,
To fast, be dirty, and just — Socratize” —
Whose word was “Trample on Themistokles!”

So, as the way is with much misery,
The heads swam, hands refused their office, hearts
Sunk as they stood in stupor. “Wreck the Walls?
Ruin Peiraios? — with our Pallas armed
For interference? — Herakles apprised,
And Theseus hasting? Lay the Long Walls low?”

Three days they stood, stared, — stonier than their walls.

Whereupon, sleep who might, Lusandros woke:
Saw the prostration of his enemy,

Utter and absolute beyond belief,
Past hope of hatred even. I surmise
He also probably saw fade in fume
Certain fears, bred of Bakis-prophecy,
Nor apprehended any more that gods
And heroes, — fire, must glow forth, guard the
ground

Where prone, by sober day-dawn, corpse-like lay
Powerless Athenai, late predominant
Lady of Hellas, — Sparté's slave-prize now !
Where should a menace lurk in those slack limbs?
What was to move his circumspection? Why
Demolish just Peiraios?

“Stay!” bade he:

“Already promise-breakers? True to type,
Athenians! past, and present, and to come, —
The fickle and the false! No stone dislodged,
No implement applied, yet three days' grace
Expire! Forbearance is no longer lived.
By breaking promise, terms of peace you break —

Too gently framed for falsehood, fickleness!
All must be reconsidered — yours the fault!"

Wherewith, he called a council of allies.
Pent-up resentment used its privilege, —
Outburst at ending: this the summed result.

"Because we would avenge no transient wrong
But an eternity of insolence,
Aggression, — folly, no disasters mend,
Pride, no reverses teach humility, —
Because too plainly were all punishment,
Such as comports with less obdurate crime,
Evdible by falsehood, fickleness —
Experience proves the true Athenian type, —
Therefore, 'tis need we dig deep down into
The root of evil; lop nor bole nor branch.
Look up, look round and see, on every side,
What nurtured the rank tree to noisome fruit!
We who live hutted (so they laugh) not housed,
Build barns for temples, prize mud-monuments,

Nor show the sneering stranger aught but — men, —
Spartans take insult of Athenians just
Because they boast Akropolis to mount,
And Propulaia to make entry by,
Through a mad maze of marble arrogance
Such as you see — such as let none see more !
Abolish the detested luxury !
Leave not one stone upon another, raze
Athenai to the rock ! Let hill and plain
Become a waste, a grassy pasture-ground
Where sheep may wander, grazing goats depend
From shapeless crags once columns ! so at last
Shall peace inhabit there, and peace enough."

Whereon, a shout approved "Such peace bestow !"
Then did a Man of Phokis rise — O heart !
Rise — when no bolt of Zeus disparted sky,
No omen-bird from Pallas scared the crew,
Rise — when mere human argument could stem
No foam-fringe of the passion surging fierce,
Baffle no wrath-wave that o'er barrier broke —

Who was the Man of Phokis rose and flung
A flower i' the way of that fierce foot's advance,
Which — stop for? — nay, had stamped down sword's
assault!

Could it be *He* stayed Sparté with the snatch
“Daughter of Agamemnon, late my liege,
Elektra, palaced once, a visitant
To thy poor rustic dwelling, now I come?”

Ay, facing fury of revenge, and lust
Of hate, and malice moaning to appease
Hunger on prey presumptuous, prostrate now —
Full in the hideous faces — last resource,
He flung that choric flower, my Euthukles!

And see, as through some pinhole, should the wind
Wedgingly pierce but once, in with a rush
Hurries the whole wild weather, rends to rags
The weak sail stretched against the outside storm —
So did the power of that triumphant play
Pour in, and oversweep the assembled foe!

Triumphant play, wherein our poet first
Dared bring the grandeur of the Tragic Two
Down to the level of our common life,
Close to the beating of our common heart.
Elektra? 'Twas Athenai, Sparté's ice
Thawed to, while that sad portraiture appealed —
Agamemnonian lady, lost by fault
Of her own kindred, cast from house and home,
Despoiled of all the brave inheritance,
Dowered humbly as befits a herdsman's mate,
Partaker of his cottage, clothed in rags,
Patient performer of the poorest chares,
Yet mindful, all the while, of glory past
When she walked darling of Mukenai, dear
Beyond Orestes to the King of Men!

So, because Greeks are Greeks, though Sparté's brood,
And hearts are hearts, though in Lusandros' breast,
And poetry is power, and Euthukles
Had faith therein to, full-face, fling the same —
Sudden, the ice-thaw! The assembled foe,

Heaving and swaying with strange friendliness,
Cried "Reverence Elektra!" — cried "Abstain
Like that chaste Herdsman, nor dare violate
The sanctity of such reverse! Let stand
Athenai!"

Mindful of that story's close,
Perchance, and how, — when he, the Herdsman chaste,
Needs apprehend no break of tranquil sleep, —
All in due time, a stranger, dark, disguised,
Knocks at the door: with searching glance, notes
 keen,
Knows quick, through mean attire and disrespect,
The ravaged princess! Ay, right on, the clutch
Of guiding retribution has in charge
The author of the outrage! While one hand,
Elektra's, pulls the door behind, made fast
On fate, — the other strains, prepared to push
The victim-queen, should she make frightened pause
Before that serpentining blood which steals
Out of the darkness where, a pace beyond,

Above the slain Aigisthos, bides his blow
Dreadful Orestes !

Klutaimnestra, wise
This time, forbore ; Elektra held her own ;
Saved was Athenai through Euripides,
Through Euthukles, through — more than ever — me,
Balaustion, me, who, Wild-pomegranate-flower,
Felt my fruit triumph, and fade proudly so !

But next day, as ungracious minds are wont,
The Spartan, late surprised into a grace,
Grew sudden sober at the enormity,
And grudged, by daybreak, midnight's easy gift ;
Splenetically must repay its cost
By due increase of rigor, doglike snatch
At aught still left dog to concede like man.
Rough sea, at flow of tide, may lip, perchance,
Smoothly the land-line reached as for repose —
Lie indolent in all unquestioned sway ;
But ebbing, when needs must, all thwart and loath,

Sea claws at sand relinquished strugglingly.
 So, harsh Lusandros — pinioned to inflict
 The lesser penalty alone — spoke harsh,
 As minded to imbitter scathe by scorn.

“ Athenai’s self be saved then, thank the Lyre!
 If Tragedy withdraws her presence — quick,
 If Comedy replace her, — what more just?
 Let Comedy do service, frisk away,
 Dance off stage these indomitable stones,
 Long Walls, Peiraian bulwarks! Hew and heave,
 Pick at, pound into dust each dear defence!
 Not to the Kommos — *eleleleleu*
 With breast bethumped, as Tragic lyre prefers,
 But Comedy shall sound the flute, and crow
 At kordax-end — the hearty slapping-dance!
 Collect those flute-girls — trash who flattered ear
 With whistlings, and fed eye with caper-cuts,
 While we Lakonians supped black broth or crunched
 Sea urchin, conchs and all, unpricked — coarse brutes!
 Command they lead off step, time steady stroke

To spade and pickaxe, till demolished lie
Athenai's pride in powder!"

Done that day—

That sixteenth famed day of Munuchion-month!
The day when Hellas fought at Salamis,
The very day Euripides was born,
Those flute-girls—Phaps-Elaphion at their head—
Did blow their best, did dance their worst, the while
Sparté pulled down the walls, wrecked wide the works,
Laid low each merest molehill of defence,
And so the Power, Athenai, passed away!

We would not see its passing! Ere I knew
The issue of their counsels,—crouching low
And shrouded by my peplos,—I conceived,
Despite the shut eyes, the stopped ears,—by count
Only of heart-beats, telling the slow time,—
Athenai's doom was signed and signified
In that assembly,—ay, but knew there watched
One who would dare and do, nor bate at all

The stranger's licensed duty, — speak the word
Allowed the Man from Phokis! Nought remained
But urge departure, flee the sights and sounds,
Hideous exultings, wailings worth contempt,
And press to other earth, new heaven, by sea
That somehow ever prompts to 'scape despair.
Help rose to heart's wish; at the harbor-side,
The old gray mariner did reverence
To who had saved his ship, still weather-tight
As when with prow gay-garlanded she praised
The hospitable port and pushed to sea.
“Convoy Balaustion back to Rhodes, for sake
Of her and her Euripides!” laughed he.
Rhodes, — shall it not be there, my Euthukles,
Till this brief trouble of a life-time end,
That solitude — two make so populous! —
For food finds memories of the past suffice,
May be, anticipations, — hope so swells, —
Of some great future we, familiar once
With who so taught, should hail and entertain?
He lies now in the little valley, laughed

And moaned about by those mysterious streams,
Boiling and freezing, like the love and hate
Which helped or harmed him through his earthly
course.

They mix in Arethousa by his grave.
The warm spring, traveller, dip thine arms into,
Brighten thy brow with! Life detests black cold!

I sent the tablets, the psalterion, so
Rewarded Sicily; the tyrant there
Bestowed them worthily in Phoibos' shrine.
A gold-graved writing tells—"I also loved
The poet, Free Athenai cheaply prized—
King Dionusios, — Archelaos-like!"

And see if young Philemon, — sure one day
To do good service and be loved himself, —
If he too have not made a votive verse!
"Grant, in good sooth, our great dead, all the same,
Retain their sense, as certain wise men say,
I'd hang myself — to see Euripides!"

Hands off, Philemon! nowise hang thyself,
But pen the prime plays, labor the right life,
And die at good old age as grand men use, —
Keeping thee, with that great thought, warm the
while, —

That he does live, Philemon! Ay, most sure!
“He lives!” hark, — waves say, winds sing out the
same,

And yonder dares the citted ridge of Rhodes
Its headlong plunge from sky to sea, disparts
North bay from south, — each guarded calm, that guest
May enter gladly, blow what wind there will, —
Boiled round with breakers, to no other cry!
All in one chorus, — what the master-word
They take up? — hark! “There are no gods, no gods!
Glory to God — who saves Euripides!”

PACCHIAROTTO

AND OTHER POEMS.

PROLOGUE.

1.

O the old wall here! How I could pass
Life in a long Midsummer day,
My feet confined to a plot of grass,
My eyes from a wa'l not once away!

2.

And lush and lithe do the creepers clothe
Yon wall I watch, with a wealth of green:
Its bald red bricks draped, nothing loath,
In lappets of tangle they laugh between.

3.

Now, what is it makes pulsate the robe?
Why tremble the sprays? What life o'erbrims
The body, — the house, no eye can probe, —
Divined as, beneath a robe, the limbs?

4.

And there again! But my heart may guess
 Who tripped behind; and she sang perhaps:
 So, the old wall throbbed, and its life's excess
 Died out and away in the leafy wraps!

5.

Wall upon wall are between us: life
 And song should away from heart to heart!
 I — prison-bird, with a ruddy strife
 At breast, and a lip whence storm-notes start —

6.

Hold on, hope hard in the subtle thing,
 That's spirit: though cloistered fast, soar free;
 Account as wood, brick, stone, this ring
 Of the rueful neighbors, and — forth to thee!

OF PACCHIAROTTO, AND HOW HE
WORKED IN DISTEMPER.

I.

QUERY: was ever a quainter
Crotchet than this of the painter
Giacomo Pacchiarotto
Who took "Reform" for his motto?

2.

He, pupil of old Fungaio,
Is always confounded (heigho!)
With Pacchia, contemporaneous
No question, but how extraneous
In the grace of soul, the power
Of hand, — undoubted dower
Of Pacchia who decked (as *we* know,
My Kirkup!) San Bernardino,

Turning the small dark Oratory
 To Siena's Art-laboratory,
 As he made its straightness roomy
 And glorified its gloomy,
 With Bazzi and Beccafumi.
 (Another heigho for Bazzi:
 How people miscall him Razzi !)

3.

This Painter was of opinion
 Our earth should be his dominion
 Whose Art could correct to pattern
 What Nature had slurred — the slattern !
 And since, beneath the heavens,
 Things lay now at sixes and sevens,
 Or, as he said, *sopra-sotto* —
 Thought the painter Pacchiarotto
 Things wanted reforming, therefore.
 "Wanted it" — ay, but wherefore?
 When earth held one so ready
 As he to step forth, stand steady

In the middle of God's creation
And prove to demonstration
What the dark is, what the light is,
What the wrong is, what the right is,
What the ugly, what the beautiful,
What the restive, what the dutiful,
In Mankind profuse around him?
Man, devil as now he found him,
Would presently soar up angel
At the summons of such evangel,
And owe — what would Man *not* owe
To the painter Pacchiarotto?
Ay, look to thy laurels, Giotto!

4.

But Man, he perceived, was stubborn,
Grew regular brute, once cub born;
And it struck him as expedient —
Ere he tried to make obedient,
By piping advice in one key,
The wolf, fox, bear and monkey —

That his pipe should play a prelude
To something heaven-tinged not hell-hued,
Something not harsh but docile,
Man-liquid, not Man-fossil —
Not fact, in short, but fancy.
By a laudable necromancy
He would conjure up ghosts — a circle
Deprived of the means to work ill
Should his music prove distasteful,
And pearls to the swine go wasteful.
To be rent of swine — that *was* hard!
With fancy he ran no hazard:
Fact might knock him o'er the mazard.

5.

So, the painter Pacchiarotto
Constructed himself a grotto
In the quarter of Stalloreggi —
As authors of note allege ye.
And on each of the whitewashed sides of it
He painted — (none far and wide so fit

As he to perform in fresco) —
He painted nor cried *quiesco*
Till he peopled its every square foot
With Man — from the Beggar barefoot
To the Noble in cap and feather :
All sorts and conditions together.
The Soldier in breastplate and helmet
Stood frowningly — hail fellow well met —
By the Priest armed with bell, book and candle,
Nor did he omit to handle
The Fair Sex, our brave distemperer :
Not merely King, Clown, Pope, Emperor —
He diversified too his Hades
Of all forms, pinched Labor and paid Ease,
With as mixed an assemblage of Ladies.

6.

Which work done, dry, — he rested him,
Cleaned palette, washed brush, divested him
Of the apron that suits *frescanti*,
And, bonnet on ear stuck jaunty,

This hand upon hip well planted,
That, free to wave as it wanted,
He addressed in a choice oration
His folk of each name and nation
On the duties of every station.
The pope was declared an arrant
Impostor at once, I warrant.
The Emperor — truth might tax him
With ignorance of the maxim
“Shear sheep but nowise flay them!”
And the Vulgar that obey them,
The Ruled, well-matched with the Ruling,
They failed not of wholesome schooling
On their knavery and their fooling.
As for Art — where’s decorum? Pooh-poohed it is
By Poets that plague us with lewd ditties,
And Painters that pester with nudities!

7.

Now, your rater and debater
Is balked by a mere spectator

Who simply stares and listens
Tongue-tied, while eye nor glistens
Nor brow grows hot and twitchy,
Nor mouth, for a combat itchy,
Quivers with some convincing
Reply — that sets him wincing?
Nay, rather — reply that furnishes
Your debater with just what burnishes
The crest of him, all one triumph,
As you see him rise, hear him cry “Humph!
Convinced am I? This confutes me?
Receive the rejoinder that suits me!
Confutation of vassal for prince meet —
Wherein all the powers that convince meet,
And mash my opponent to mincemeat!”

8.

So, off from his head flies the bonnet,
His hip loses hand planted on it,
While t’other hand, frequent in gesture,
Slinks modestly back beneath vesture,

As, — hop, skip and jump, — he's along with
Those weak ones he late proved so strong with!
Pope, Emperor, lo he's beside them,
Friendly now, who late could not abide them,
King, Clown, Soldier, Priest, Noble, Burgess ;
And his voice, that out-roared Boanerges,
How minikin-mildly it urges
In accents how gentled and gingered
Its word in defence of the injured !
“ O call him not culprit, this Pontiff !
Be hard on this Kaiser ye won't if
Ye take into con-si-de-ration
What dangers attend elevation !
The Priest — who expects him to descant
On duty with more zeal and less cant ?
He preaches but rubbish he's reared in.
The Soldier, grown deaf (by the mere din
Of battle) to mercy, learned tippling
And what not of vice while a stripling.
The Lawyer — ~~his~~ lies are conventional.
And as for the Poor Sort — why mention all

Obstructions that leave barred and bolted
Access to the brains of each dolt-head?"

9.

He ended, you wager? Not half! A bet?
Precedence to males in the alphabet!
Still, disposed of Man's A. B. C., there's X.
Y. Z. want assistance,—the Fair Sex!
How much may be said in excuse of
Those vanities—males see no use of—
From silk shoe on heel to laced poll's-hood!
What's their frailty beside our own falsehood?
The boldest, most brazen of . . . trumpets,
How kind can they be to their dumb pets!
Of their charms—how are most frank, how few
venal!

While as for those charges of Juvenal—

Quæ nemo dixisset in toto

Nisi (ædepol) ore illoto—

He dismissed every charge with an '*Apage!*'

10.

Then, cocking (in Scotch phrase) his cap a-gee,
Right hand disengaged from the doublet
— Like landlord, in house he had sublet
Resuming of guardianship gestion,
To call tenants' conduct in question—
Hop, skip, jump, to inside from outside
Of chamber, he lords, ladies, louts eyed
With such transformation of visage
As fitted the censor of this age.
No longer an advocate tepid
Of frailty but champion intrepid
Of strength, — not of falsehood but verity, —
He, one after one, with asperity
Stripped bare all the cant-clothed abuses,
Disposed of sophistic excuses,
Forced folly each shift to abandon,
And left vice with no leg to stand on.
So crushing the force he exerted,
That Man at his foot lay converted!

11.

True — Man bred of paint-pot and mortar
But why suppose folks of this sort are
More likely to hear and be tractable
Than folks all alive and, in fact, able
To testify promptly by action
Their ardor, and make satisfaction
For misdeeds *non verbis sed factis*?
“With folks all alive be my practice
Henceforward! O mortar, paint-pot O,
Farewell to ye!” cried Pacchiarotto,
“Let only occasion intéropose!”

12.

It did so: for, pat to the purpose
Through causes I need not examine,
There fell upon Siena a famine.
In vain did the magistrates busily
Seek succor, fetch grain out of Sicily,
Nay, throw mill and bakehouse wide open —

Such misery followed as no pen
Of mine shall depict ye. Faint, fainter,
Waxed hope of relief: so, our painter,
Emboldened by triumph of recency,
How could he do other with decency
Than rush in this strait to the rescue,
Play schoolmaster, point as with fescue
To each and all slips in Man's spelling
The law of the land?—slips now telling
With monstrous effect on the city,
Whose magistrates moved him to pity
As, bound to read law to the letter,
They minded their hornbook no better.

13.

I ought to have told you, at starting,
How certain, who itched to be carting
Abuses away clean and thorough
From Siena, both province and borough,
Had formed themselves into a company
Whose swallow could bolt in a lump any

Obstruction of scruple, provoking
The nicer throat's coughing and choking.
Fit Club, by as fit a name dignified
Of "Freed Ones" — "*Bardotti*" — which signified
"Spare-Horses" that walk by the wagon
The team has to drudge for and drag on.
This notable Club Pacchiarotto
Had joined long since, paid scot and lot to,
As free and accepted "*Bardotto*."
The Bailiwick watched with no quiet eye
The outrage thus done to society,
And noted the advent especially
Of Pacchiarotto their fresh ally.

14.

These Spare-Horses forthwith assembled:
Neighed words whereat citizens trembled
As oft as the chiefs, in the Square by
The Duomo, proposed a way whereby
The city were cured of disaster.
"Just substitute servant for master,

Make Poverty Wealth and Wealth Poverty,
 Unloose Man from overt and covert tie,
 And straight out of social confusion
 True Order would spring!" Brave illusion —
 Aims heavenly attained by means earthy!

15.

Off to these at full speed rushed our worthy, —
 Brain practised and tongue no less tutored,
 In argument's armor accoutred, —
 Sprang forth, mounted rostrum and essayed
 Proposals like those to which "Yes" said
 So glibly each personage painted
 O' the wall-side wherewith you're acquainted.
 He harangued on the faults of the Bailiwick:
 "Red soon were our State-candle's paly wick,
 If wealth would become but interfluous,
 Fill voids up with just the superfluous;
 If ignorance gave way to knowledge
 — Not pedantry picked up at college
 From Doctors, Professors *et cætera* —

(They say: '*kai ta loipa*' — like better a
 Long Greek string of *kappas, taus, lambdas*,
 Tacked on to the tail of each damned ass) —
 No knowledge we want of this quality,
 But knowledge indeed — practicality
 Through insight's fine universality!
 If you shout '*Bailiffs, out on ye all! Fie,*
Thou Chief of our forces, Amalfi,
Who shieldest the rogue and the clotpoll!'
 If you pounce on and poke out, with what pole
 I leave ye to fancy, our Siena's
 Beast-litter of sloths and hyenas —"
 (Whoever to scan this is ill able
 Forgets the town's name's a dissyllable)
 "If, this done, ye did — as ye might — place
 For once the right man in the right place,
 If you listened to me . . ."

16.

At which last "If"
 There flew at his throat like a mastiff

One Spare-Horse — another and another!
Such outbreak of tumult and pother,
Horse-faces a-laughing and fleeing,
Horse-voices a-mocking and jeering,
Horse-hands raised to collar the caitiff
Whose impudence ventured the late “If” —
That, had not fear sent Pacchiarotto
Off tramping, as fast as could trot toe,
Away from the scene of discomfiture —
Had he stood there stock-still in a dumb fit — sure
Am I he had paid in his person
Till his mother might fail to know her son,
Though she gazed on him never so wistful,
In the figure so tattered and tristful.
Each mouth full of curses, each fist full
Of cuffings — behold, Pacchiarotto,
The pass which thy project has got to,
Of trusting, nigh ashes still hot — tow!
(The paraphrase — which I much need — is
From Horace ‘*per ignes incedis.*’)

17.

Right and left did he dash helter-skelter
In agonized search of a shelter.
No purlieu so blocked and no alley
So blind as allowed him to rally
His spirits and see — nothing hampered
His steps if he trudged and not scampered
Up here and down there in a city
That's all ups and downs, more the pity
For folks who would outrun the constable.
At last he stopped short at the one stable
And sure place of refuge that's offered
Humanity. Lately was coffered
A corpse in its sepulchre, situate
By St. John's Observance. "Habituate
Thyself to the strangest of bedfellows,
And, kicked by the live, kiss the dead fellows!
So Misery counselled the craven.
At once he crept safely to haven
Through a hole left unbricked in the structure.
Ay, Misery, in have you tucked your

Poor client and left him conterminous
 With — pah! — the thing fetid and verminous!
 (I gladly would spare you the detail,
 But History writes what I retail.)

18.

Two days did he groan in his domicile:
 “Good Saints, set me free and I promise I’ll
 Abjure all ambition of preaching
 Change, whether to minds touched by teaching
 — The smooth folk of fancy, mere figments
 Created by plaster and pigments, —
 Or to minds that receive with such rudeness
 Dissuasion from pride, greed and lewdness,
 — The rough folk of fact, life’s true specimens
 Of mind — ‘*haud in posse sed esse mens*’
 As it was, is and shall be forever
 Despite of my utmost endeavor.
 O live foes I thought to illumine,
 Henceforth lie untroubled your gloom in!
 I need my own light, every spark, as
 I couch with this sole friend — a carcass!”

19.

Two days thus he maundered and rambled ;
Then, starved back to sanity, scrambled
From out his receptacle loathsome.
“A spectre !” — declared upon oath some
Who saw him emerge and (appalling
To mention) his garments a-crawling
With plagues far beyond the Egyptian.
He gained, in a state past description
A convent of monks, the Observancy.

20.

Thus far is a fact : I reserve fancy
For Fancy's more proper employment :
And now she waves wing with enjoyment,
To tell ye how preached the Superior
When somewhat our painter's exterior
Was sweetened. He needed (no mincing
The matter) much soaking and rinsing,
Nay, rubbing with drugs odoriferous,

Till, rid of his garments pestiferous
 And robed by the help of the Brotherhood
 In odds and ends, — this gown and t'other hood, —
 His empty inside first well-garnished, —
 He delivered a tale round, unvarnished.

21.

“ Ah, Youth ! ” so might run the admonishment,
 “ Thine error scarce moves my astonishment.
 For — why shall I shrink from asserting? —
 Myself have had hopes of converting
 The foolish to wisdom, till, sober,
 My life found its May grow October.
 I talked and I wrote, but, one morning,
 Life's Autumn bore fruit in this warning:
*' Let tongue rest, and quiet thy quill be !
 Earth is earth and not heaven, and ne'er will be.'*
 Man's work is to labor and leaven —
 As best he may — earth here with heaven ;
 'Tis work for work's sake that he's needing:
 Let him work on and on as if speeding

Work's end, but not dream of succeeding!
Because if success were intended,
Why, heaven would begin ere earth ended.
A Spare-Horse? Be rather a thill-horse,
Or — what's the plain truth — just a mill-horse!
Earth's a mill where we grind and wear mufflers
A whip awaits shirkers and shufflers
Who slacken their pace, sick of lugging
At what don't advance for their tugging.
Though round goes the mill, we must still post
On and on as if moving the mill-post.
So, grind away, mouth-wise and pen-wise,
Do all that we can to make men wise!
And if men prefer to be foolish,
Ourselves have proved horse-like not mulish:
Sent grist, a good sackful, to hopper,
And worked as the Master thought proper.
Tongue I wag, pen I ply, who am Abbot;
Stick, thou, Son, to paint-brush and dab-pot!
But, soft! I scratch hard on the scab hot?
Though cured of thy plague, there may linger

A pimple I fray with rough finger?
 So soon could my homily transmute
 Thy brass into gold? Why, the man's mute!"

22.

"Ay, Father, I'm mute with admiring
 How Nature's indulgence untiring
 Still bids us turn deaf ear to Reason's
 Best rhetoric — clutch at all seasons
 And hold fast to what's proved untenable!
 Thy maxim is — Man's not amenable
 To argument: whereof by consequence —
 Thine arguments reach me: a non-sequence!
 Yet blush not discouraged, O Father!
 I stand unconverted, the rather
 That nowise I need a conversion.
 No live man (I cap thy assertion)
 By argument ever could take hold
 Of me. 'Twas the dead thing, the clay-cold,
 Which grinned '*Art thou so in a hurry*
That out of warm light thou must scurry

*And join me down here in the dungeon
Because, above, one's Jack and one — John,
One's swift in the race, one — a hobbler,
One's a crowned king and one — a capped cobbler,
Rich and poor, sage and fool, virtuous, vicious?
Why complain? Art thou so unsuspecting
That all's for an hour of essaying
Who's fit and who's unfit for playing
His part in the after-construction
— Heaven's Piece whereof Earth's the Induction?
Things rarely go smooth at Rehearsal.
Wait patient the change universal,
And act, and let act, in existence!
For, as thou art clapped hence or hissed hence,
Thou hast thy promotion or otherwise.
And why must wise thou have thy brother wise
Because in rehearsal thy cue be
To shine by the side of a booby?
No polishing garnet to ruby!
All's well that ends well — through Art's magic,
Some end, whether comic or tragic,*

The Artist has purposed, be certain!
Explained at the fall of the curtain —
In showing thy wisdom at odds with
That folly: he tries men and gods with
No problem for weak wits to solve meant,
But one worth such Author's evolvment.
So, back nor disturb play's production
By giving thy brother instruction
To throw up his fool's-part allotted!
Lest haply thyself prove besotted
When stript, for thy pains, of that costume
Of sage, which has bred the imposthume
I prick to relieve thee of, — Vanity!

23.

“So, Father, behold me in sanity!
 I'm back to the paint-brush and mahlstick:
 And as for Man — let each and all stick
 To what was prescribed them at starting!
 Once planted as fools — no departing

From folly one inch, *sæculorum*
In sæcula! Pass me the jorum,
And push me the platter — my stomach
Retains, through its fasting, still some ache —
And then, with your kind *Benedicite*,
Good-by!”

24.

I have told with simplicity
My tale, dropped those harsh analytics,
And tried to content you, my critics,
Who greeted my early uprising!
I knew you through all the disguising,
Droll dogs, as I jumped up, cried “Heyday
This Monday is — what else but May-day
And these in the drabs, blues and yellows
Are surely the privileged fellows.
So, saltbox and bones, tongs and bellows!”
(I threw up the window) “Your pleasure?”

25.

Then he who directed the measure —
An old friend — put leg forward nimbly,
“We critics as sweeps out your chimbley!
Much soot to remove from your flue sir!
Who spares coal in kitchen an’t you, sir!
And neighbors complain it’s no joke, sir,
— You ought to consume your own smoke, sir!”

26.

Ah, rogues, but my housemaid suspects you —
Is confident oft she detects you
In bringing more filth into my house
Than ever you found there! I’m pious
However: ’twas God made you dingy
And me — with no need to be stingy
Of soap, when ’tis sixpence the packet.
So, dance away, boys, dust my jacket,
Bang drum and blow fife — ay, and rattle
Your brushes, for that’s half the battle!

Don't trample the grass, — hocus-pocus
With grime my Spring snow-drop and crocus, —
And, what with your rattling and tinkling,
Who knows but you give me an inkling
How music sounds, thanks to the jangle
Of regular drum and triangle?
Whereby, tap-tap, chink-chink, 'tis proven
I break rule as bad as Beethoven.
“That chord now — a groan or a grunt is't?
Schumann's self was no worse contrapuntist.
No ear! or if ear, so tough-gristled —
He thought that he sung while he whistled!”

27.

So, this time I whistle, not sing at all,
My story, the largess I fling at all
And every the rough there whose *aubade*
Did its best to amuse me, — nor *so* bad!
Take my thanks, pick up largess, and scamper
Off free, ere your mirth gets a damper:

You've Monday, your one day, your fun-day,
While mine is a year that's all Sunday.
I've seen you, times — who knows how many? —
Dance in here, strike up, play the zany,
Make mouths at the Tenant, hoot warning
You'll find him decamped next May-morning;
Then scuttle away, glad to 'scape hence
With — kicks? no, but laughter and ha'pence!
Mine's freehold, by grace of the grand Lord
Who lets out the ground here, — my landlord:
To him I pay quit-rent — devotion;
Nor hence shall I budge, I've a notion,
Nay, here shall my whistling and singing
Set all his street's echoes a-ringing
Long after the last of your number
Has ceased my front-court to encumber
While, treading down rose and ranunculus,
You *Tommy-make-room-for-your-Uncle* us!
Troop, all of you — man or homunculus,
Quick march! for Xanthippe, my housemaid,
If once on your pates she a souse made

With what, pan or pot, bowl or *skoramis*
First comes to her hand — things were more amiss!
I would not for worlds be your place in —
Recipient of slops from the basin!
You, Jack-in-the-Green, leaf-and-twigginess
Won't save a dry thread on your priggishness!
While as for Quilp-Hop-o'-my-thumb there,
Banjo-Byron that twangs the strum-strum there —
He'll think, as the pickle he curses,
I've discharged on his pate his own verses!
"Dwarfs are saucy," says Dickens: so, sauced in
Your own sauce, . . .*

28.

But, back to my Knight of the Pencil,
Dismissed to his fresco and stencil!
Whose story — begun with a chuckle,
And throughout timed by raps of the knuckle, —

* No, please! For

“Who would be satirical

On a thing so very small?” — **PRINTER'S DEVIL.**

To small enough purpose were studied
If it ends with crown cracked or nose bloodied.
Come, critics, — not shake hands, excuse me!
But — say have you grudged to amuse me
This once in the forty-and-over
Long years since you trampled my clover
And scared from my house-eaves each sparrow
I never once harmed by that arrow
Of song, *karterotaton belos*,
(Which Pindar declares the true *melos*)
I was forging and filing and finishing,
And no whit my labors diminishing
Because, though high up in a chamber
Where none of your kidney may clamber
Your hullabaloo would approach me?
Was it “grammar” wherein you would “coach” me —
You, — pacing in even that paddock
Of language allotted you *ad hoc*,
With a clog at your fetlocks, — you — scorners
Of me free of all its four corners?
Was it “clearness of words which convey thought?”

Ay, if words never needed enswathe aught
 But ignorance, impudence, envy
 And malice — what word-swathe would then vie
 With yours for a clearness crystalline?
 But had you to put in one small line
 Some thought big and bouncing — as noddle
 Of goose, born to cackle and waddle
 And bite at man's heel as goose-wont is,
 Never felt plague its puny *os frontis* —
 You'd know, as you hissed, spat and sputtered,
 Clear "quack-quack" is easily uttered!

29.

Lo, I've laughed out my laugh on this mirth-day!
 Beside, at week's end, dawns my birth-day,
 That *hebdome, hieron emar* —
 (More things in a day than you deem are!)
 — *Tei gar Apollona chrusaora*
Egeinato Leto. So, gray or ray
 Betide me, six days hence, I'm vexed here

By no sweep, that's certain, till next year!
"Vexed?"—roused from what else were insipid ease
Leave snoring a-bed to Pheidippides!
We'll up and work! won't we, Euripides?

AT THE 'MERMAID.'

The figure that thou here seest . . . Tut!
Was it for gentle Shakespeare put?

B. JONSON. (*Adapted.*)

I.

I—"Next Poet?" No, my hearties,
I nor am nor fain would be!
Choose your chiefs and pick your parties,
Not one soul revolt to me!
I, forsooth, sow song-sedition?
I, a schism in verse provoke?
I, blown up by bard's ambition,
Burst—your bubble-king? You joke.

2.

Come, be grave! The sherris mantling
Still about each mouth, mayhap,
Breeds you insight—just a scantling—
Brings me truth out—just a scrap.

Look and tell me! Written, spoken,
 Here's my life-long work: and where
 — Where's your warrant or my token
 I'm the dead king's son and heir?

3.

Here's my work: does work discover
 What was rest from work — my life?
 Did I live man's hater, lover?
 Leave the world at peace, at strife?
 Call earth ugliness or beauty?
 See things there in large or small?
 Use to pay its Lord my duty?
 Use to own a lord at all?

4.

Blank of such a record, truly,
 Here's the work I hand, this scroll,
 Yours to take or leave; as duly,
 Mine remains the unproffered soul.

So much, no whit more, my debtors—
How should one like me lay claim
To that largess elders, betters
Sell you cheap their souls for—fame?

5.

Which of you did I enable
Once to slip inside my breast
There to catalogue and label
What I like least, what love best,
Hope and fear, believe and doubt of,
Seek and shun, respect—deride?
Who has right to make a rout of
Rarities he found inside?

6.

Rarities or, as he'd rather,
Rubbish such as stocks his own:
Need and greed (O strange) the Father
Fashioned not for him alone!

Whence — the comfort set a-strutting,
 Whence — the outcry — “Haste, behold!
 Bard’s breast open wide, past shutting,
 Shows what brass we took for gold!”

7.

Friends, I doubt not he’d display you
 Brass — myself call oreichalch, —
 Furnish much amusement; pray you
 Therefore, be content I balk
 Him and you, and bar my portal!
 Here’s my work outside: opine
 What’s inside me mean and mortal!
 Take your pleasure, leave me mine!

8.

Which is — not to buy your laurel
 As last king did, nothing loath.
 Tale adorned and pointed moral
 Gained him praise and pity both.

Out rushed sighs and groans by dozens,
Forth by scores oaths, curses flew.
Proving you were cater-cousins,
Kith and kindred, king and you!

9.

Whereas do I ne'er so little
(Thanks to sherris) leave ajar
Bosom's gate—no jot nor tittle
Grow we nearer than we are.
Sinning, sorrowing, despairing,
Body-ruined, spirit-wrecked,—
Should I give my woes an airing,—
Where's one plague that claims respect?

10.

Have you found your life distasteful?
My life did and does smack sweet.
Was your youth of pleasure wasteful?
Mine I saved and hold complete.

Do your joys with age diminish?
When mine fail me, I'll complain.
Must in death your daylight finish?
My sun sets to rise again.

11.

What, like you, he proved — your Pilgrim —
This our world a wilderness,
Earth still gray and heaven still grim,
Not a hand there his might press,
Not a heart his own might throb to,
Men all rogues and women — say,
Dolls which boys' heads duck and bob to,
Grown folk drop or throw away?

12.

My experience being other,
How should I contribute verse
Worthy of your king and brother?
Balaam-like I bless, not curse.

I find earth not gray but rosy,
 Heaven not grim but fair of hue.
 Do I stoop? I pluck a posy.
 Do I stand and stare? All's blue.

13.

Doubtless I am pushed and shoved by
 Rogues and fools enough: the more
 Good luck mine, I love, am loved by
 Some few honest to the core.
 Scan the near high, scout the far low!
 "But the low come close:" what then?
 Simpletons? My match is Marlowe;
 Sciolists? My mate is Ben.

14.

Womankind — "the cat-like nature,
 False and fickle, vain and weak" —
 What of this sad nomenclature
 Suits my tongue, if I must speak?

Does the sex invite, repulse so,
 Tempt, betray, by fits and starts?
 So becalm but to convulse so,
 Decking heads and breaking hearts?

15.

Well may you blaspheme at fortune!
 I "threw Venus" (Ben, expound!)
 •Never did I need importune
 Her, of all the Olympian round.
 Blessings on my benefactress!
 Cursings suit — for aught I know —
 Those who twitched her by the back tress,
 Tugged and thought to turn her — so!

16.

Therefore, since no leg to stand on
 Thus I'm left with, — joy or grief
 Be the issue, — I abandon
 Hope or care you name me Chief!

Chief and king and Lord's anointed,
 I? — who never once have wished
 Death before the day appointed:
 Lived and liked, not poohed and pished!

17.

“Ah, but so I shall not enter,
 Scroll in hand, the common heart —
 Stopped at surface: since at centre
 Song should reach *Welt-schmerz*, world-smart!”
 “Enter in the heart?” Its shelly
 Cuirass guard mine, fore and aft!
 Such song “enters in the belly
 And is cast out in the draught.”

18.

Back then to our sherris-brewage!
 “Kingship” quotha? I shall wait —
 Waive the present time: some new age . . .
 But let fools anticipate!

Meanwhile greet me — “friend, good fellow,
Gentle Will,” my merry men!
As for making Envy yellow
With “Next Poet” — (Manners, Ben!)

HOUSE.

1.

SHALL I sonnet-sing you about myself?

Do I live in a house you would like to see?
Is it scant of gear, has it store of pelf?
“Unlock my heart with a sonnet-key?”

2.

Invite the world, as my betters have done?

“Take notice: this building remains on view,
Its suites of reception every one,
Its private apartment and bedroom too;

3.

“For a ticket, apply to the Publisher.”

No: thanking the public, I must decline.
A peep through my window, if folks prefer;
But, please you, no foot over threshold of mine!

4.

I have mixed with a crowd and heard free talk
In a foreign land where an earthquake chanced
And a house stood gaping, nought to balk
Man's eye wherever he gazed or glanced.

5.

The whole of the frontage shaven sheer,
The inside gaped: exposed to day,
Right and wrong and common and queer,
Bare, as the palm of your hand, it lay.

6.

The owner? Oh, he had been crushed, no doubt!
"Odd tables and chairs for a man of wealth!
What a parcel of musty old books about!
He smoked, — no wonder he lost his health!

7.

“I doubt if he bathed before he dressed.

A brazier?— the pagan, he burned perfumes!

You see it is proved, what the neighbors guessed:

His wife and himself had separate rooms.”

8.

Friends, the goodman of the house at least

Kept house to himself till an earthquake came:

'Tis the fall of its frontage permits you feast

On the inside arrangement you praise or blame.

9.

Outside should suffice for evidence:

And whoso desires to penetrate

Deeper, must dive by the spirit-sense—

No optics like yours, at any rate!

10.

“Hoity toity! A street to explore,
Your house the exception! ‘*With this same key
Shakespeare unlocked his heart,*’ once more!”
Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he!

SHOP.

I.

So, friend, your shop was all your house !
Its front, astonishing the street,
Invited view from man and mouse
To what diversity of treat
Behind its glass — the single sheet !

2.

What gimcracks, genuine Japanese :
Gape-jaw and goggle-eye, the frog ;
Dragons, owls, monkeys, beetles, geesè ;
Some crush-nosed human-hearted dog :
Queer names, too, such a catalogue !

3.

I thought "And he who owns the wealth
Which blocks the window's vastitude,
— Ah, could I peep at him by stealth
Behind his ware, pass shop, intrude
On house itself, what scenes were viewed!

4.

"If wide and showy thus the shop,
What must the habitation prove?
The true house with no name a-top —
The mansion, distant one remove,
Once get him off his traffic-grove!

5.

"Pictures he likes, or books perhaps;
And as for buying most and best,
Commend me to these city chaps!
Or else he's social, takes his rest
On Sundays, with a Lord for guest.

6.

“Some suburb-palace, parked about
And gated grandly, built last year:
The four-mile walk to keep off gout;
Or big seat sold by bankrupt peer:
But then he takes the rail, that's clear.

7.

“Or, stop! I wager, taste selects
Some out o' the way, some all-unknown
Retreat: the neighborhood suspects
Little that he who rambles lone
Makes Rothschild tremble on his throne!”

8.

Nowise! Nor Mayfair residence
Fit to receive and entertain, —
Nor Hampstead villa's kind defence
From noise and crowd, from dust and drain, —
Nor country-box was soul's domain!

9.

Nowise! At back of all that spread
 Of merchandise, woe's me, I find
 A hole i' the wall where, heels by head,
 The owner couched, his ware behind,
 — In cupboard suited to his mind.

10.

For why? He saw no use of life
 But, while he drove a roaring trade,
 To chuckle "Customers are rife!"
 To chafe "So much hard cash outlaid
 Yet zero in my profits made!"

11.

"This novelty costs pains, but — takes?
 Cumbers my counter! Stock no more!
 'This article, no such great shakes,
 Fizzes like wild fire? Underscore
 The cheap thing — thousands to the fore!"

12.

'Twas lodging best to live most nigh
 (Cramp, coffinlike as crib might be)
 Receipt of Custom; ear and eye
 Wanted no outworld: "Hear and see
 The bustle in the shop!" quoth he.

13.

My fancy of a merchant-prince
 Was different. Through his wares we groped
 Our darkling way to — not to mince
 The matter — no black den where moped
 The master if we interloped!

14.

Shop was shop only: household-stuff?
 What did he want with comforts there?
 "Walls, ceiling, floor, stay blank and rough,
 So goods on sale show rich and rare!
 '*Sell and scud home,*' be shop's affair!"

15.

What might he deal in? Gems, suppose!
Since somehow business must be done
At cost of trouble, — see, he throws
You choice of jewels, every one
Good, better, best, star, moon and sun!

16.

Which lies within your power of purse?
This ruby that would tip aright
Solomon's sceptre? Oh, your nurse
Wants simply coral, the delight
Of teething baby, — stuff to bite!

17.

Howe'er your choice fell, straight you took
Your purchase, prompt your money rang
On counter, — scarce the man forsook
His study of the "Times," just swang
Till-ward his hand that stopped the clang, —

18.

Then off made buyer with a prize,
Then seller to his "Times" returned,
And so did day wear, wear, till eyes
Brightened apace, for rest was earned :
He locked door long ere candle burned.

19.

And whither went he? Ask himself,
Not me! To change of scene, I think.
Once sold the ware and pursed the pelf,
Chaffer was scarce his meat and drink,
Nor all his music — money-chink.

20.

Because a man has shop to mind
In time and place, since flesh must live,
Needs spirit lack all life behind,
All stray thoughts, fancies fugitive,
All loves except what trade can give?

21.

I want to know a butcher paints,
A baker rhymes for his pursuit,
Candlestick-maker much acquaints
His soul with song, or, haply mute,
Blows out his brains upon the flute!

22.

But—shop each day and all day long!
Friend, your good angel slept, your star
Suffered eclipse, fate did you wrong!
From where these sorts of treasures are,
There should our hearts be—Christ, how far!

PISGAH-SIGHTS. I.

I.

OVER the ball of it,
Peering and prying,
How I see all of it,
Life there, outlying!
Roughness and smoothness,
Shine and defilement,
Grace and uncouthness:
One reconciliation.

2.

Orbed as appointed,
Sister with brother
Joins, ne'er disjointed
One from the other.

All's lend-and-borrow ;
 Good, see, wants evil,
 Joy demands sorrow,
 Angel weds devil !

3.

“Which things must — *why* be?”
 Vain our endeavor !
 So shall things aye be
 As they were ever.
 “Such things should *so* be !”
 Sage our desistence !
 Rough-smooth let globe be,
 Mixed — man's existence !

4.

Man — wise and foolish,
 Lover and scorner,
 Docile and mulish —
 Keep each his corner !

Honey yet gall of it!
There's the life lying,
And I see all of it,
Only, I'm dying!

PISGAH-SIGHTS. 2.

1.

COULD I but live again,
Twice my life over,
Would I once strive again?
Would not I cover
Quietly all of it—
Greed and ambition—
So, from the pall of it,
Pass to fruition?

2.

“Soft!” I’d say, “Soul mine!
Three-score and ten years,
Let the blind mole mine
Digging out deniers!

Let the dazed hawk soar,
Claim the sun's rights too!
Turf 'tis thy walk's o'er,
Foliage thy flight's to."

3.

Only a learner,
Quick one or slow one,
Just a discerner,
I would teach no one.
I am earth's native:
No re-arranging it!
I be creative,
Chopping and changing it?

4.

March, men, my fellows!
Those who, above me,
(Distance so mellows)
F'ancy you love me:

Those who, below me,
 (Distance makes great so)
 Free to forego me,
 Fancy you hate so!

5.

Praising, reviling,
 Worst head and best head,
 Past me defiling,
 Never arrested,
 Wanters, abounders,
 March, in gay mixture,
 Men, my surrounders!
 I am the fixture.

6.

So shall I fear thee,
 Mightiness yonder!
 Mock-sun — more near thee.
 What is to wonder?

So shall I love thee,
Down in the dark,—lest
Glowworm I prove thee,
Star that now sparklest!

FEARS AND SCRUPLES.

1.

HERE'S my case. Of old I used to love him,
This same unseen friend, before I knew:
Dream there was none like him, none above him,—
Wake to hope and trust my dream was true.

2.

Loved I not his letters full of beauty?
Not his actions famous far and wide?
Absent, he would know I vowed him duty,
Present, he would find me at his side.

3.

Pleasant fancy! for I had but letters,
Only knew of actions by hearsay:
He himself was busied with my betters;
What of that? My turn must come some day.

4.

“Some day” proving—no day! Here’s the puzzle.
 Passed and passed my turn is. Why complain?
 He’s so busied! If I could but muzzle
 People’s foolish mouths that give me pain!

5.

“Letters?” (hear them!) “You a judge of writing?
 Ask the experts! How they shake the head
 O’er these characters, your friend’s inditing—
 Call them forgery from A. to Z.!”

6.

“Actions? Where’s your certain proof” (they bother)
 “He, of all you find so great and good,
 He, he only, claims this, that, the other
 Action—claimed by men, a multitude?”

7.

I can simply wish I might refute you,
 Wish my friend would,—by a word, a wink,—
 Bid me stop that foolish mouth,—you brute you!
 He keeps absent,—why, I cannot think.

8.

Never mind! Though foolishness may flout me,
 One thing's sure enough: 'tis neither frost,
 No, nor fire, shall freeze or burn from out me
 Thanks for truth — though falsehood, gained —
 though lost.

9.

All my days, I'll go the softer, sadder,
 For that dream's sake! How forget the thrill
 Through and through me as I thought "The gladlier
 Lives my friend because I love him still!"

10.

Ah, but there's a menace some one utters!
 "What and if your friend at home play tricks?
 Peep at hide-and-seek behind the shutters?
 Mean your eyes should pierce through solid bricks?"

11.

"What and if he, frowning, wake you, dreamy
 Lay on you the blame that bricks — conceal?
 Say '*At least I saw who did not see me,
 Docs see now, and presently shall feel?*'"

12.

“Why, that makes your friend a monster!” say you:

“Had his house no window? At first nod,
Would you not have hailed him?” Hush, I pray
you!

What if this friend happen to be—God?

NATURAL MAGIC.

I.

ALL I can say is — I saw it !

The room was as bare as your hand.

I locked in the swarth little lady, — I swear,

From the head to the foot of her — well, quite as
bare !

“No Nautch shall cheat me,” said I, “taking my
stand

At this bolt which I draw !” And this bolt — I
withdraw it,

And there laughs the lady, not bare, but embowered
With — who knows what verdure, o'erfruited, o'er
flowered ?

Impossible ! Only — I saw it !

2.

All I can sing is — I feel it!
This life was as blank as that room;
I let you pass in here. Precaution, indeed?
Walls, ceiling and floor, — not a chance for a weed!
Wide opens the entrance: where's cold now, where's
gloom?
No May to sow seed here, no June to reveal it,
Behold you enshrined in these blooms of your bring-
ing,
These fruits of your bearing — nay, birds of your
winging!
A fairy-tale! Only — I feel it!

MAGICAL NATURE.

1.

FLOWER — I never fancied, jewel — I profess you!
Bright I see and soft I feel the outside of a
flower.
Save but glow inside and — jewel, I should guess
you,
Dim to sight and rough to touch: the glory is
the dower.

2.

You, forsooth, a flower? Nay, my love, a jewel —
Jewel at no mercy of a moment in your prime!
Time may fray the flower-face: kind be time or
cruel,
Jewel, from each facet, flash your laugh at time!

BIFURCATION.

WE were two lovers ; let me lie by her,
My tomb beside her tomb. On hers inscribe —
“ I loved him ; but my reason bade prefer
Duty to love, reject the tempter’s bribe
Of rose and lily when each path diverged,
And either I must pace to life’s far end
As love should lead me, or, as duty urged,
Plod the worn causeway arm in arm with friend.
So, truth turned falsehood : ‘ *How I loathe a flower,
How prize the pavement !* ’ still caressed his ear —
The deafish friend’s — through life’s day, hour by
hour,
As he laughed (coughing) ‘ *Ay, it would appear !* ’
But deep within my heart of hearts there hid
Ever the confidence, amends for all,
That heaven repairs what wrong earth’s journey did,
When love from life-long exile comes at call.

Duty and love, one broadway, were the best —
 Who doubts? But one or other was to choose.
 I chose the darkling half, and wait the rest
 In that new world where light and darkness fuse."

Inscribe on mine — "I loved her: love's track lay
 O'er sand and pebble, as all travellers know.

Duty led through a smiling country, gay
 With greensward where the rose and lily blow.

'*Our roads are diverse: farewell, love!*' said she:

'*'Tis duty I abide by: homely sward*

And not the rock-rough picturesque for me!

Above, where both roads join, I wait reward.

Be you as constant to the path whereon

I leave you planted!' But man needs must move,

Keep moving — whither, when the star is gone

Whereby he steps secure nor strays from love?

No stone but I was tripped by, stumbling-block

But brought me to confusion. Where I fell,

There I lay flat, if moss disguised the rock,

Thence, if flint pierced, I rose and cried '*All's well,*

*Duty be mine to tread in that high sphere
Where love from duty ne'er disparts, I trust,
And two halves make that whole, whereof—since here
One must suffice a man—why, this one must!”*

Inscribe each tomb thus: then, some sage acquaint
The simple—which holds sinner, which holds saint!

NUMPHOLEPTOS.

STILL you stand, still you listen, still you smile!
Still melts your moonbeam through me, white awhile,
Softening, sweetening, till sweet and soft
Increase so round this heart of mine, that oft
I could believe your moonbeam-smile has past
The pallid limit and, transformed at last,
Lies, sunlight and salvation — warms the soul
It sweetens, softens! Would you pass that goal,
Gain love's birth at the limit's happier verge,
And, where an iridescence lurks, but urge
The hesitating pallor on to prime
Of dawn! — true blood-streaked, sun-warmth, action-
time,
By heart-pulse ripened to a ruddy glow
Of gold above my clay — I scarce should know

From gold's self, thus suffused! For gold mean-
love.

What means the sad slow silver smile above
My clay but pity, pardon?—at the best,
But acquiescence that I take my rest,
Contented to be clay, while in your heaven
The sun reserves love for the Spirit-Seven
Companioning God's throne they lamp before,
—Leaves earth a mute waste only wandered o'er
By that pale soft sweet disempassioned moon
Which smiles me slow forgiveness! Such, the boon
I beg? Nay, dear, submit to this—just this
Supreme endeavor! As my lips new kiss
Your feet, my arms convulse your shrouding robe,
My eyes, acquainted with the dust, dare probe
Your eyes above for—what, if born, would blind
Mine with redundant bliss, as flash may find
The inert nerve, sting awake the palsied limb,
Bid with life's ecstasy sense overbrim
And suck back death in the resurging joy—
Love, the love whole and sole without alloy!

Vainly! The promise withers! I employ
Lips, arms, eyes, pray the prayer which finds the
word,
Make the appeal which must be felt, not heard,
And none the more is changed your calm regard:
Rather, its sweet and soft grow harsh and hard —
Forbearance, then repulsion, then disdain.
Avert the rest! I rise, see!—make, again
Once more, the old departure for some track
Untried yet through a world which brings me back
Ever thus fruitlessly to find your feet,
To fix your eyes, to pray the soft and sweet
Which smile there — take from his new pilgrimage
Your outcast, once your inmate, and assuage
With love — not placid pardon now — his thirst
For a mere drop from out the ocean erst
He drank at! Well, the quest shall be renewed.
Fear nothing! Though I linger, unimbued
With any drop, my lips thus close. I go!
So did I leave you, I have found you so,
And doubtlessly, if fated to return,

So shall my pleading persevere and earn
Pardon — not love in that same smile, I learn,
And lose the meaning of, to learn once more,
Vainly!

What fairy track do I explore?
What magic hall return to, like the gem
Centuply-angled o'er a diadem?
You dwell there, hearted; from your midmost home
Rays forth — through that fantastic world I roam
Ever — from centre to circumference,
Shaft upon colored shaft: this crimsons thence,
That purples out its precinct through the waste.
Surely I had your sanction when I faced,
Fared forth upon that untried yellow ray
Whence I retrack my steps? They end to-day
Where they began, before your feet, beneath
Your eyes, your smile: the blade is shut in sheath,
Fire quenched in flint; irradiation, late
Triumphant through the distance, finds its fate,
Merged in your blank pure soul, alike the source

And tomb of that prismatic glow: divorce
Absolute, all-conclusive! Forth I fared,
Treading the lambent flamelet: little cared
If now its flickering took the topaz tint,
If now my dull-caked path gave sulphury hint
Of subterranean rage — no stay nor stint
To yellow, since you sanctioned that I bathe,
Burnish me, soul and body, swim and swathe
In yellow license. Here I reek suffused
With crocus, saffron, orange, as I used
With scarlet, purple, every dye o' the bow
Born of the storm-cloud. As before, you show
Scarce recognition, no approval, some
Mistrust, more wonder at a man become
Monstrous in garb, nay — flesh disguised as well,
Through his adventure. Whatsoe'er befell,
I followed, wheresoe'er it wound, that vein
You authorized should leave your whiteness, stain
Earth's sombre stretch beyond your midmost place
Of vantage, — trode that tinct whereof the trace
On garb and flesh repel you! Yes, I plead

Your own permission — your command, indeed,
That who would worthily retain the love
Must share the knowledge shrined those eyes above,
Go boldly on adventure, break through bounds
O' the quintessential whiteness that surrounds
Your feet, obtain experience of each tinge
That bickers forth to broaden out, impinge
Plainer his foot its pathway all^l distinct
From every other. Ah, the wonder, linked
With fear, as exploration manifests
What agency it was first tipped the crests
Of unnamed wildflower, soon protruding grew
Portentous mid the sands, as when his hue
Betrays him and the burrowing snake gleams
through ;
Till, last . . . but why parade more shame and pain?
Are not the proofs upon me? Here again
I pass into your presence, I receive
Your smile of pity, pardon, and I leave . . .
No, not this last of times I leave you, mute,
Submitted to my penance, so my foot

May yet again adventure, tread, from source
To issue, one more ray of rays which course
Each other, at your bidding, from the sphere
Silver and sweet, their birthplace, down that drear
Dark of the world,—you promise shall return
Your pilgrim jewelled as with drops o' the urn
The rainbow paints from, and no smatch at all
Of ghastliness at edge of some cloud-pall
Heaven cowers before, as earth awaits the fall
O' the bolt and flash of doom. Who trusts your
word

Tries the adventure: and returns—absurd
As frightful—in that sulphur-steeped disguise
Mocking the priestly cloth-of-gold, sole prize
The arch-heretic was wont to bear away
Until he reached the burning. No, I say:
No fresh adventure! No more seeking love
At end of toil, and finding, calm above
My passion, the old statuesque regard,
The sad petrific smile!

O you—less hard

And hateful than mistaken and obtuse
Unreason of a she-intelligence !
You very woman with the pert pretence
To match the male achievement ! Like enough !
Ay, you were easy victors, did the rough
Straightway efface itself to smooth, the gruff
Grind down and grow a whisper,—did man's truth
Subdue, for sake of chivalry and ruth,
Its rapier-edge to suit the bulrush-spear
Womanly falsehood fights with ! O that ear
All fact pricks rudely, that thrice-superfine
Femininity of sense, with right divine
To waive all process, take result stain-free
From out the very muck wherein . . .

Ah me !

The true slave's querulous outbreak ! All the rest
Be resignation ! Forth at your behest
I fare. Who knows but this — the crimson-quest —
May deepen to a sunrise, not decay
To that cold sad sweet smile ? — which I obey.

APPEARANCES.

I.

AND so you found that poor room dull,
Dark, hardly to your taste, my dear?
Its features seemed unbeautiful:
But this I know — 'twas there, not here,
You plighted troth to me, the word
Which — ask that poor room how it heard.

2.

And this rich room obtains your praise
Unqualified — so bright, so fair,
So all whereat perfection stays? .
Ay, but remember — here, not there,
The other word was spoken! — Ask
This rich room how you dropped the mask!

ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER.

I.

No protesting, dearest !

Hardly kisses even !

Don't we both know how it ends,

How the greenest leaf turns searest,

Bluest outbreak — blankest heaven,

*Lovers — friends ?

2.

You would build a mansion,

I would weave a bower

— Want the heart for enterprise.

Walls admit of no expansion :

Trellis-work may haply flower

Twice the size.

3.

What makes glad Life's Winter?
New buds, old blooms after.
Sad the sighing "How suspect
Beams would ere mid-Autumn splinter,
Roof-tree scarce support a rafter,
Walls lie wrecked?"

4.

You are young, my princess!
I am hardly older:
Yet — I steal a glance behind!
Dare I tell you what convinces
Timid me that you, if bolder,
Bold — are blind?

5.

Where we plan our dwelling
Glooms a graveyard surely!
Headstone, footstone moss may drape, —

Name, date, violets hide from spelling,—
But, though corpses rot obscurely,
Ghosts escape.

6.

Ghosts! O breathing beauty,
Give my frank word pardon!
What if I — somehow, somewhere —
Pledged my soul to endless duty
Many a time and oft? Be hard on
Love — laid there?

7.

Nay, blame grief that's fickle,
Time that proves a traitor,
Chance, change, all that purpose warps,—
Death who spares to thrust the sickle
Laid Love low, through flowers which later
Shroud the corpse!

8.

And you, my winsome lady,
Whisper me with like frankness!
Lies nothing buried long ago?
Are you — which shimmer mid the shady
Where moss and violet run to rankness —
Tombs or no?

9.

Who taxes you with murder?
My hands are clean — or nearly!
Love being mortal needs must pass.
Repentance? Nothing were absurder.
Enough: we felt Love's loss severely;
Though now — alas! .

10.

Love's corpse lies quiet therefore,
Only Love's ghost plays truant,
And warns us have in wholesome awe

Durable mansionry; that's wherefore
I weave but trellis-work, pursuant
— Life, to law.

11.

The solid, not the fragile,
Tempt rain and hail and thunder.
If bower stand firm at Autumn's close,
Beyond my hope, — why, boughs were agile;
If bower fall flat, we scarce need wonder
Wreathing — rose!

12.

So, truce to the protesting,
So, muffled be the kisses!
For, would we but avow the truth,
Sober is genuine joy. No jesting!
Ask else Penelope, Ulysses —
Old in youth!

13.

For why should ghosts feel angered?

Let all their interference

Be faint march-music in the air!

“Up! Join the rear of us the vanguard!

Up, lovers, dead to all appearance,

Laggard pair!”

14.

The while you clasp me closer,

The while I press you deeper,

As safe we chuckle, — under breath,

Yet all the slyer, the jocoser, —

“So, life can boast its day, like leap-year,

Stolen from death!”

15.

Ah me — the sudden terror!

Hence quick — avaunt, avoid me,

You cheat, the ghostly flesh-disguised!

Nay, all the ghosts in one! Strange error!

So, 'twas Death's self that clipped and coyed me!

Loved — and lied!

16.

Ay, dead loves are the potent!

Like any cloud they used you,

Mere semblance you, but substance they!

Build we no mansion, weave we no tent!

Mere flesh — their spirit interfused you!

Hence, I say!

17.

All theirs, none yours the glamour!

Theirs each low word that won me,

Soft look that found me Love's, and left

What else but you — the tears and clamor

That's all your very own! Undone me —

Ghost-bereft!

A FORGIVENESS.

I AM indeed the personage you know.
As for my wife, — what happened long ago —
You have a right to question me, as I
Am bound to answer.

“Son, a fit reply!”

The monk half spoke, half ground through his
clenched teeth,
At the confession-grate I knelt beneath.

Thus then all happened, Father! Power and place
I had as still I have. I ran life's race,
With the whole world to see, as only strains
His strength some athlete whose prodigious gains
Of good appall him: happy to excess, —
Work freely done should balance happiness

Fully enjoyed; and, since beneath my roof
Housed she who made home heaven, in heaven's
 behoof

I went forth every day, and all day long
Worked for the world. Look, how the laborer's song
Cheers him! Thus sang my soul, at each sharp
 thro

Of laboring flesh and blood—"She loves me so!"

One day, perhaps such song so knit the nerve
That work grew play and vanished. "I deserve
Haply my heaven an hour before the time!"

I laughed, as silverly the clockhouse-chime
Surprised me passing through the postern-gate
— Not the main entry where the menials wait
And wonder why the world's affairs allow
The master sudden leisure. That was how
I took the private garden-way for once.

Forth from the alcove, I saw start, ensconce
Himself behind the porphyry vase, a man.

My fancies in the natural order ran :

“ A spy, — perhaps a foe in ambushade, —
A thief, — more like, a sweetheart of some maid
Who pitched on the alcove for tryst perhaps ”

“ Stand there ! ” I bid.

Whereat my man but wraps
His face the closelier with uplifted arm
Whereon the cloak lies, strikes in blind alarm
This and that pedestal as, — stretch and stoop, —
Now in, now out of sight, he thrids the group
Of statues, marble god and goddess ranged
Each side the pathway, till the gate's exchanged
For safety: one step thence, the street, you know !

Thus far I followed my gaze. Then, slow,
Near on admiringly, I breathed again,
And — back to that last fancy of the train —
“ A danger risked for hope of just a word
With — which of all my nest may be the bird
This poacher covets for her plumage, pray ?

Carmen? Juana? Carmen seems too gay
For such adventure, while Juana's grave
—Would scorn the folly. I applaud the knave!
He had the eye, could single from my brood
His proper fledgling!"

As I turned, there stood
In face of me, my wife stone-still stone-white.
Whether one bound had brought her, — at first sight
Of what she judged the encounter, sure to be
Next moment, of the venturous man and me, —
Brought her to clutch and keep me from my prey;
Whether impelled because her death no day
Could come so absolutely opportune
As now at joy's height, like a year in June
Stayed at the fall of its first ripened rose;
Or whether hungry for my hate — who knows? —
Eager to end an irksome lie, and taste
Our tingling true relation, hate embraced
By hate one naked moment: — anyhow
There stone-still stone-white stood my wife, but now

The woman who made heaven within my house.
Ay, she who faced me was my very spouse,
As well as love — you are to recollect!

“Stay!” she said. “Keep at least one soul unspecked
With crime, that’s spotless hitherto — your own!
Kill me who court the blessing, who alone
Was, am and shall be guilty, first to last!
The man lay helpless in the toils I cast
About him, helpless as the statue there
Against that strangling bell-flower’s bondage: tear
Away and tread to dust the parasite,
But do the passive marble no despite!
I love him as I hate you. Kill me! Strike
At one blow both infinitudes alike
Out of existence — hate and love! Whence love?
That’s safe inside my heart, nor will remove
For any searching of your steel, I think.
Whence hate? The secret lay on lip, at brink
Of speech, in one fierce tremble to escape,
At every form wherein your love took shape,

At each new provocation of your kiss.
Kill me!"

We went in.

Next day after this,
I felt as if the speech might come. I spoke —
Easily, after all.

“The lifted cloak
Was screen sufficient: I concern myself
Hardly with laying hands on who for pelf —
Whate'er the ignoble kind — may prowl and brave
Cuffing and kicking proper to a knave
Detected by my household's vigilance.
Enough of such! As for my love-romance —
I, like our good Hidalgo, rub my eyes
And wake and wonder how the film could rise
Which changed for me a barber's basin straight
Into — Mambrino's helm? I hesitate
Nowise to say — God's sacramental cup!

Why should I blame the brass which, burnished up,
Will blaze, to all but me, as good as gold?
To me — a warning I was overbold
In judging metals. The Hidalgo waked
Only to die, if I remember, — staked
His life upon the basin's worth, and lost :
While I confess torpidity at most
In here and there a limb ; but, lame and halt,
Still should I work on, still repair my fault
Ere I took rest in death, — no fear at all !
Now, work — no word before the curtain fall !”
The “curtain ?” That of death on life, I meant :
My “word” permissible in death's event,
Would be — truth, soul to soul ; for, otherwise,
Day by day, three years long, there had to rise
And, night by night, to fall upon our stage —
Ours, doomed to public play by heritage —
Another curtain, when the world, perforce
Our critical assembly, in due course
Came and went, witnessing, gave praise or blame
To art-mimetic. It had spoiled the game

If, suffered to set foot behind our scene,
The world had witnessed how stage-king and queen,
Gallant and lady, but a minute since
Enarming each the other, would evince
No sign of recognition as they took
His way and her way to whatever nook
Waited them in the darkness either side
Of that bright stage where lately groom and bride
Had fired the audience to a frenzy-fit
Of sympathetic rapture — every whit
Earned as the curtain fell on her and me,
— Actors. Three whole years, nothing was to see
But calm and concord: where a speech was due
There came the speech; when smiles were wanted
too

Smiles were as ready. In a place like mine,
Where foreign and domestic cares combine,
There's audience every day and all day long;
But finally the last of the whole throng
Who linger lets one see his back. For her —
Why, liberty and liking: I aver,

Liking and liberty! For me—I breathed,
Let my face rest from every wrinkle wreathed
Smile-like about the mouth, unlearned my task
Of personation till next day bade mask,
And quietly betook me from that world
To the real world, not pageant: there unfurled
In work, its wings, my soul, the fretted power.
Three years I worked, each minute of each hour
Not claimed by acting:—work I may dispense
With talk about, since work in evidence,
Perhaps in history; who knows or cares?

After three years, this way, all unawares,
Our acting ended. She and I, at close
Of a loud night-feast, led, between two rows
Of bending male and female loyalty,
Our lord the king down staircase, while, held high
At arm's length did the twisted tapers' flare
Herald his passage from our palace where
Such visiting left glory evermore.
Again the ascent in public, till at door

As we two stood by the saloon — now blank
And disencumbered of its guests — there sank
A whisper in my ear, so low and yet
So unmistakable!

“I half forget

The chamber you repair to, and I want
Occasion for one short word — if you grant
That grace — within a certain room you called
Our ‘*Study*,’ for you wrote there while I scrawled
Some paper full of faces for my sport.
That room I can remember. Just one short
Word with you there, for the remembrance’ sake!”

“Follow me thither!” I replied.

We break

The gloom a little, as with guiding lamp
I lead the way, leave warmth and cheer, by damp
Blind disused serpentine ways afar
From where the habitable chambers are, —

Ascend, descend stairs tunnelled through the stone, —
Always in silence, — till I reach the lone
Chamber sepulchred for my very own
Out of the palace-quarry. When a boy,
Here was my fortress, stronghold from annoy,
Proof-positive of ownership ; in youth
I garnered up my gleanings here — uncouth
But precious relics of vain hopes, vain fears ;
Finally, this became in after years
My closet of intrenchment to withstand
Invasion of the foe on every hand —
The multifarious herd in bower and hall,
State-room, — rooms whatsoe'er the style, which call
On masters to be mindful that, before
Men, they must look like men and something more.
Here, — when our lord the king's bestowment ceased
To deck me on the day that, golden-fleeced,
I touched ambition's height, — 'twas here, released
From glory (always symbolled by a chain !)
No sooner was I privileged to gain
My secret domicile than glad I flung

That last toy on the table — gazed where hung
On hook my father's gift, the arquebuss —
And asked myself "Shall I envisage thus
The new prize and the old prize, when I reach
Another year's experience? — own that each
Equalled advantage — sportsman's — statesman's tool?
That brought me down an eagle, this — a fool!"

Into which room on entry, I set down
The lamp, and turning saw whose rustled gown
Had told me my wife followed, pace for pace.
Each of us looked the other in the face,
She spoke. "Since I could die now . . ."

(To explain

Why that first struck me, know — not once again
Since the adventure at the porphyry's edge
Three years before, which sundered like a wedge
Her soul from mine, — though daily, smile to smile,
We stood before the public, — all the while
Not once had I distinguished, in that tace

I paid observance to, the faintest trace
Of feature more than requisite for eyes
To do their duty by and recognize :
So did I force mine to obey my will
And pry no further. There exists such skill, —
Those know who need it. What physician shrinks
From needful contact with a corpse? He drinks
No plague so long as thirst for knowledge, — not
An idler impulse, — prompts inquiry. What,
And will you disbelieve in power to bid
Our spirit back to bounds, as though we chid
A child from scrutiny that's just and right
In manhood? Sense, not soul, accomplished sight,
Reported daily she it was — not how
Nor why a change had come to cheek and brow.)

“Since I could die now of the truth concealed,
Yet dare not, must not die, — so seems revealed
The Virgin's mind to me, — for death means peace,
Wherein no lawful part have I, whose lease
Of life and punishment the truth avowed

May haply lengthen,—let me push the shroud
Away, that steals to muffle ere is just
My penance-fire in snow! I dare—I must
Live, by avowal of the truth—this truth—
I loved you! Thanks for the fresh serpent's tooth
That, by a prompt new pang more exquisite
Than all preceding torture, proves me right!
I loved you yet I lost you! May I go
Burn to the ashes, now my shame you know?"

I think there never was such—how express?—
Horror coquetting with voluptuousness,
As in those arms of Eastern workmanship—
Yataghan, kandjar, things that rend and rip,
Gash rough, slash smooth, help hate so many ways,
Yet ever keep a beauty that betrays
Love still at work with the artificer
Throughout his quaint devising. Why prefer,
Except for love's sake, that a blade should writhe
And bicker like a flame?—now play the scythe
As if some broad neck tempted,—now contract

And needle off into a fineness lacked
For just that puncture which the heart demands?
Then, such adornment! Wherefore need our hands
Enclose not ivory alone, nor gold
Roughened for use, but jewels? Nay, behold!
Fancy my favorite — which I seem to grasp
While I describe the luxury. No asp
Is diapered more delicate round throat
Than this below the handle! These denote
— These mazy lines meandering, to end
Only in flesh they open — what intend
They else but water-purlings — pale contrast
With the life-crimson where they blend at last?
— And mark the handle's dim pellucid green,
Carved, the hard jadestone, as you pinch a bean,
Into a sort of parrot-bird! He pecks
A grape-bunch; his two eyes are ruby-specks
Pure from the mine: seen this way, — glassy blank.
But turn them, — lo the inmost fire, that shrank
From sparkling, sends a red dart right to a m!
Why did I choose such toys? Perhaps the game

Of peaceful men is warlike, just as men
War-wearied get amusement from that pen
And paper we grow sick of—statesfolk tired
Of merely (when such measures are required)
Dealing out doom to people by three words,
A signature and seal: we play with swords
Suggestive of quick process. That is how
I came to like the toys described you now,
Store of which glittered on the walls and strewed
The table, even, while my wife pursued
Her purpose to its ending. “Now you know
This shame, my three years’ torture, let me go,
Burn to the very ashes! You—I lost,
Yet you—I loved!”

The thing I pity most
In men is—action prompted by surprise
Of anger: men? nay, bulls—whose onset lies
At instance of the firework and the goad!
Once the foe prostrate,—trampling once bestowed,—
Prompt follows placability, regret,

Atonement. Trust me, blood-warmth never yet
Betokened strong will! As no leap of pulse
Pricked me, that first time, so did none convulse
My veins at this occasion for resolve.
Had that devolved which did not then devolve
Upon me, I had done—what now to do
Was quietly apparent.

“Tell me who
The man was, crouching by the porphyry vase!”
“No, never! All was folly in his case,
All guilt in mine. I tempted, he complied.”

“And yet you loved me?”

“Loved you. Double-dyed
In folly and in guilt, I thought you gave
Your heart and soul away from me to slave
At statecraft. Since my right in you seemed lost,
I stung myself to teach you, to your cost,
What you rejected could be prized beyond

Life, heaven, by the first fool I threw a fond
Look on, a fatal word to."

"And you still
Love me? Do I conjecture well or ill?"
"Conjecture — well or ill! I had three years
To spend in learning you."

"We both are peers
In knowledge, therefore: since three years are spent
Ere thus much of yourself I learn — who went
Back to the house, that day, and brought my mind
To bear upon your action, uncombined
Motive from motive, till the dross, deprived
Of every purer particle. survived
At last in native simple hideousness,
Utter contemptibility, nor less
Nor more. Contemptibility — exempt
How could I, from its proper due — contempt?
I have too much despised you to divert
My life from its set course by help or hurt

Of your all-despicable life — perturb
The calm I work in, by — men's mouth to curb,
Which at such news were clamorous enough —
Men's eyes to shut before my broidered stuff
With the huge hole there, my emblazoned wall
Blank where a scutcheon hung, — by, worse than all,
Each day's procession, my paraded life
Robbed and impoverished through the wanting wife
— Now that my life (which means — my work) was
grown

Riches indeed! Once, just this worth alone
Seemed work to have, that profit gained thereby
Of good and praise would — how rewardingly! —
Fall at your feet, — a crown I hoped to cast
Before your love, my love should crown at last.
No love remaining to cast crown before,
My love stopped work now: but contempt the more
Impelled me task as ever head and hand,
Because the very fiends weave ropes of sand
Rather than taste pure hell in idleness.
Therefore I kept my memory down by stress

Of daily work I had no mind to stay
For the world's wonder at the wife away.
Oh, it was easy all of it, believe,
For I despised you! But your words retrieve
Importantly the past. No hate assumed
The mask of love at any time! There gloomed
A moment when love took hate's semblance, urged
By causes you declare; but love's self purged
Away a fancied wrong I did both loves
—Yours and my own: by no hate's help, it proves,
Purgation was attempted. Then, you rise
High by how many a grade! I did despise —
I do but hate you. Let hate's punishment
Replace contempt's! First step to which ascent —
Write down your own words I re-utter you!
*'I loved my husband and I hated — who
He was, I took up as my first chance, mere
Mud-ball to fling and make love foul with!' Here
Lies paper!"*

“Would my blood for ink suffice!”

“It may: this minion from a land of spice,
Silk, feather — every bird of jewelled breast —
This poniard’s beauty, ne’er so lightly prest
Above your heart there . . .”

“Thus?”

“It flows, I see
Dip there the point and write!”

“Dictate to me!
Nay, I remember.”

And she wrote the words.
I read them. Then — “Since love, in you, affords
License for hate, in me, to quench (I say)
Contempt — why, hate itself has passed away
In vengeance — foreign to contempt. Depart
Peacefully to that death which Eastern art
Imbued this weapon with, if tales be true!
Love will succeed to hate. I pardon you —
Dead in our chamber!”

True as truth the tale.

She died ere morning; then, I saw how pale
Her cheek was ere it wore day's paint-disguise,
And what a hollow darkened 'neath her eyes,
Now that I used my own. She sleeps, as erst
Beloved, in this your church: ay, yours!

Immersed

In thought so deeply, Father? Sad, perhaps?
For whose sake, hers or mine or his who wraps
— Still plain I seem to see! — about his head
The idle cloak, — about his heart (instead
Of cuirass) some fond hope he may elude
My vengeance in the cloister's solitude?
Hardly, I think! As little helped his brow
The cloak then, Father — as your grate helps now!

CENCIAJA.

Ogni cencio vuol entrare in bucato. — *Italian Proverb.*

MAY I print, Shelley, how it came to pass
 That when your Beatrice seemed — by lapse
 Of many a long month since her sentence fell —
 Assured of pardon for the parricide, —
 By intercession of stanch friends, or, say,
 By certain pricks of conscience in the Pope
 Conniver at Francesco Cenci's guilt, —
 Suddenly all things changed and Clement grew
 "Stern," as you state, "nor to be moved nor bent
 But said these three words coldly '*She must die;*'
 Subjoining '*Pardon? Paolo Santa Croce*
Murdered his mother also yestereve,
And he is fled: she shall not flee at least!'
 — So, to the letter, sentence was fulfilled?

Shelley, may I condense verbosity
That lies before me, into some few words
Of English, and illustrate your superb
Achievement by a rescued anecdote,
No great things, only new and true beside?
As if some mere familiar of a house
Should venture to accost the group at gaze
Before its Titian, famed the wide world through,
And supplement such pictured masterpiece
By whisper "Searching in the archives here,
I found the reason of the Lady's fate,
And how by accident it came to pass
She wears the halo and displays the palm:
Who, haply, else had never suffered — no,
Nor graced our gallery, by consequence."
Who loved the work would like the little news
Who lauds your poem lends an ear to me
Relating how the penalty was paid
By one Marchese dell' Oriolo, called
Onofrio Santa Croce otherwise,
For his complicity in matricide

With Paolo his own brother, — he whose crime
And flight induced “those three words — She must
die.”

Thus I unroll you then the manuscript.

“God’s justice” — (of the multiplicity
Of such communications extant still,
Recording, each, injustice done by God
In person of his Vicar-upon-earth,
Scarce one but leads off to the self-same tune) —
“God’s justice, tardy though it prove perchance,
Rests never on the track until it reach
Delinquency. In proof I cite the case
Of Paolo Santa Croce.”

Many times

The youngster, — having been importunate
That Marchesine Costanza, who remained
His widowed mother, should supplant the heir
Her elder son, and substitute himself
In sole possession of her faculty, —

And meeting just as often with rebuff,—
Blinded by so exorbitant a lust
Of gold, the youngster straightway tasked his wits,
Casting about to kill the lady—thus.

He first, to cover his iniquity,
Writes to Onofrio Santa Croce, then
Authoritative lord, acquainting him
Their mother was contamination—wrought
Like hell-fire in the beauty of their House
By dissoluteness and abandonment
Of soul and body to impure delight.
Moreover, since she suffered from disease,
Those symptoms which her death made manifest
Hydroptic, he affirmed were fruits of sin
About to bring confusion and disgrace
Upon the ancient lineage and high fame
O' the family, when published. Duty bound,
He asked his brother—what a son should do?

Which when Marchese dell' Oriolo heard

By letter, being absent at his land
Oriolo, he made answer, this, no more
“It must behoove a son,—things haply so,—
To act as honor prompts a cavalier
And son, perform his duty to all three,
Mother and brothers”—here advice broke off.

By which advice informed and fortified
As he professed himself—the bound by birth
To hear God’s voice in primogeniture—
Paolo, who kept his mother company
In her domain Subiaco, straightway dared
His whole enormity of enterprise
And, falling on her, stabbed the lady dead;
Whose death demonstrated her innocence,
And happened,—by the way,—since Jesus Christ
Died to save man, just sixteen hundred years.
Costanza was of aspect beautiful
Exceedingly, and seemed, although in age
Sixty about, to far surpass her peers
The coëtaneous dames, in youth and grace.

Done the misdeed, its author takes to flight,
Foiling thereby the justice of the world :
Not God's however, — God, be sure, knows well
The way to clutch a culprit. Witness here !
The present sinner, when he least expects,
Snug-cornered somewhere i' the Basilicate,
Stumbles upon his death by violence.
A man of blood assaults the man of blood
And slays him somehow. This was afterward :
Enough, he promptly met with his deserts,
And, ending thus, permits we end with him,
And push forthwith to this important point —
His matricide fell out, of all the days,
Precisely when the law-procedure closed
Respecting Count Francesco Cenci's death
Chargeable on his daughter, sons and wife.
"Thus patricide was matched with matricide,"
A poet not inelegantly rhymed :
Nay, fratricide — those Princes Massimi ! —
Which so disturbed the spirit of the Pope
That all the likelihood Rome entertained

Of Beatrice's pardon vanished straight,
And she endured the piteous death.

Now see

The sequel — what effect commandment had
For strict inquiry into this last case,
When Cardinal Aldobrandini (great
His efficacy — nephew to the Pope!)
Was bidden crush — ay, though his very hand
Got soil i' the act — crime spawning everywhere!
Because, when all endeavor had been used
To catch the aforesaid Paolo, all in vain —
“Make perquisition” quoth our Eminence,
“Throughout his now deserted domicile!
Ransack the palace, roof and floor, to find
If haply any scrap of writing, hid
In nook or corner, may convict — who knows? —
Brother Onofrio of intelligence
With brother Paolo, as in brotherhood
Is but too likely: crime spawns everywhere!”

And, every cranny searched accordingly,
There comes to light — O lynx-eyed Cardinal! —
Onofrio's unconsidered writing-scrap,
The letter in reply to Paolo's prayer,
The word of counsel that — things proving so,
Paolo should act the proper knightly part,
And do as was incumbent on a son,
A brother — and a man of birth, be sure!

Whereat immediately the officers
Proceeded to arrest Onofrio — found
At foot-ball, child's play, unaware of harm,
Safe with his friends, the Orsini, at their seat
Monte Giordano ; as he left the house
He came upon the watch in wait for him
Set by the Barigel, — was caught and caged.

News of which capture being, that same hour,
Conveyed to Rome, forthwith our Eminence
Commands Taverna, Governor and Judge,
To have the process in especial care,

Be, first to last, not only president
In person, but inquisitor as well,
Nor trust the by-work to a substitute:
Bids him not, squeamish, keep the bench, but scrub
The floor of Justice, so to speak, — go try
His best in prison with the criminal;
Promising, as reward for by-work done
Fairly on all-fours, that, success obtained
And crime avowed, or such connivancy
With crime as should procure a decent death —
Himself will humbly beg — which means, procure —
The Hat and Purple from his relative
The Pope, and so repay a diligence
Which, meritorious in the Cenci-case,
Mounts plainly here to Purple and the Hat!

Whereupon did my lord the Governor
So masterfully exercise the task
Enjoined him, that he, day by day, and week
By week, and month by month, from first to last
Deserved the prize: now, punctual at his place,

Played Judge, and now, assiduous at his post,
Inquisitor — pressed cushion and scoured plank,
Early and late. Noon's fervor and night's chill,
Nought moved whom morn would, purpling, make
amends!

So that observers laughed as, many a day,
He left home, in July when day is flame,
Posted to Tordinona-prison, plunged
Into the vault where daylong night is ice,
There passed his eight hours on a stretch, content,
Examining Onofrio: all the stress
Of all examination steadily
Converging into one pin-point, — he pushed
Tentative now of head and now of heart.
As when the nuthatch taps and tries the nut
This side and that side till the kernel sound, —
So did he press the sole and single point
— What was the very meaning of the phrase
'Do what beseems an honored cavalier?'

Which one persistent question-torture, — plied

Day by day, week by week, and month by month,
Morn, noon and night, — fatigued away a mind
Grown imbecile by darkness, solitude,
And one vivacious memory gnawing there
As when a corpse is confined with a snake :
— Fatigued Onofrio into what might seem
Admission that perchance his judgment groped
So blindly, feeling for an issue — aught
With semblance of an issue from the toils
Cast of a sudden round feet late so free,
He possibly might have envisaged, scarce
Recoiled from — even were the issue death
— Even her death whose life was death and worse !
Always provided that the charge of crime,
Each jot and tittle of the charge were true.
In such a sense, belike, he might advise
His brother to expurgate crime with . . well,
With blood, if blood must follow on '*the course*
Taken as might beseem a cavalier.'

Whereupon process ended, and report

Was made without a minute of delay
To Clement who, because of those two crimes
O' the Massimi and Cenci flagrant late,
Must needs impatiently desire result.

Result obtained, he bade the Governor
Summon the Congregation and despatch.
Summons made, sentence passed accordingly
— Death by beheading. When his death-decree
Was intimated to Onofrio, all
Man could do—that did he to save himself.
'Twas much, the having gained for his defence
The Advocate o' the Poor, with natural help
Of many noble friendly persons fain
To disengage a man of family,
So young too, from his grim entanglement.
But Cardinal Aldobrandini ruled
There must be no diversion of the law.
Justice is justice, and the magistrate
Bears not the sword in vain. Who sins must die.

So, the Marchese had his head cut off
In Place Saint Angelo beside the Bridge,
With Rome to see, a concourse infinite ;
Where, demonstrating magnanimity
Adequate to his birth and breed, — poor boy ! —
He made the people the accustomed speech,
Exhorted them to true faith, honest works,
And special good behavior as regards
A parent of no matter what the sex,
Bidding each son take warning from himself.
Truly, it was considered in the boy
Stark staring lunacy, no less, to snap
So plain a bait, be hooked and hauled a-shore
By such an angler as the Cardinal !
Why make confession of his privity
To Paolo's enterprise? Mere sealing lips —
Or, better, saying "When I counselled him
' *To do as might beseem a cavalier,*'
What could I mean but '*Hide our parent's shame*
As Christian ought, by aid of Holy Church !
Bury it in a convent — ay, beneath

Enough dotation to prevent its ghost
From troubling earth !” Mere saying thus, — ’tis
plain,

Not only were his life the recompense,
But he had manifestly proved himself
’True Christian, and in lieu of punishment
Been praised of all men ! — So the populace.

Anyhow, when the Pope made promise good
(That of Aldobrandini, near and dear)
And gave Taverna, who had toiled so much,
A Cardinal’s equipment, some such word
As this from mouth to ear went saucily :
“ Taverna’s cap is dyed in what he drew
From Santa Croce’s veins !” So joked the world.

I add : Onofrio left one child behind,
A daughter named Valeria, dowered with grace
Abundantly of soul and body, doomed
To life the shorter for her father’s fate.
By death of her, the Marquisate returned

To that Orsini House from whence it came :
Oriolo having passed as donative
To Santa Croce from their ancestors.

And no word more? By all means! Would you
know

The authoritative answer, when folks urged
“What made Aldobrandini, hound-like stanch,
Hunt out of life a harmless simpleton?”
The answer was — “Hatred implacable,
By reason they were rivals in their love.”
The Cardinal’s desire was to a dame
Whose favor was Onofrio’s. Pricked with pride,
The simpleton must ostentatiously
Display a ring, the Cardinal’s love-gift,
Given to Onofrio as the lady’s gage ;
Which ring on finger, as he put forth hand
To draw a tapestry, the Cardinal
Saw and knew, gift and owner, old and young ;
Whereon a fury entered him — the fire
He quenched with what could quench fire only —
blood.

Nay, more: "there want not who affirm to boot,
The unwise boy, a certain festal eve,
Feigned ignorance of who the wight might be
That pressed too closely on him with a crowd,
And struck the Cardinal a blow: and then,
To put a face upon the incident,
Dared next day, smug as ever, go pay court
I' the Cardinal's antechamber. Mark and mend,
Ye youth, by this example how may greed
Vainglorious operate in worldly souls!"

So ends the chronicler, beginning with
"God's justice, tardy though it prove perchance,
Rests never till it reach delinquency."
Ay, or how otherwise had come to pass
That Victor rules this present year, in Rome?

FILIPPO BALDINUCCI ON THE PRIVILEGE OF BURIAL.

A Reminiscence of A.D. 1676.

I.

“No, boy, we must not” — so began
My Uncle (he’s with God long since)
A-petting me, the good old man!
“We must not” — and he seemed to wince,
And lost that laugh whereto had grown
His chuckle at my piece of news,
How cleverly I aimed my stone —
“I fear we must not pelt the Jews!

2.

“When I was young indeed, — ah, faith
Was young and strong in Florence too!
We Christians never dreamed of scathe
Because we cursed or kicked the crew.

But now — well, well! The olive-crops
Weighed double then, and Arno's pranks
Would always spare religious shops
Whenever he o'erflowed his banks!

3.

"I'll tell you" — and his eye regained
Its twinkle — "tell you something choice!
Something may help you keep unstained
Your honest zeal to stop the voice
Of unbelief with stone-throw — spite
Of laws, which modern fools enact,
That we must suffer Jews in sight
Go wholly unmolested! Fact!

4.

"There was, then, in my youth, and yet
Is, by San Frediano, just
Below the Blessed Olivet,
A wayside ground wherein they thrust

Their dead, — these Jews, — the more our shame
 Except that, so they will but die,
 We may perchance incur no blame
 In giving hogs a hoist to sty.

5.

“There, anyhow, Jews stow away
 Their dead ; and, — such their insolence, —
 Slink at odd times to sing and pray
 As Christians do — all make-pretence ! —
 Which wickedness they perpetrate
 Because they think no Christians see.
 They reckoned here, at any rate,
 Without their host : ha, ha, he, he !

6.

“For, what should join their plot of ground
 But a good Farmer’s Christian field?
 The Jews had hedged their corner round
 With bramble-bush to keep concealed

Their doings : for the public road
Ran betwixt this their ground and that
The Farmer's, where he ploughed and sowed,
Grew corn for barn and grapes for vat.

7.

“ So, properly to guard his store
And gall the unbelievers too,
He builds a shrine and, what is more,
Procures a painter whom I knew,
One Buti (he's with God) to paint
A holy picture there — no less
Than Virgin Mary free from taint
Borne to the sky by angels : yes !

8.

“ Which shrine he fixed, — who says him nay? —
A-facing with its picture-side
Not, as you'd think, the public way,
But just where sought these hounds to hide

Their carrion from that very truth
Of Mary's triumph : not a hound
Could act his mummeries uncouth
But Mary shamed the pack all round !

9.

“ Now, if it was amusing, judge !
— To see the company arrive,
Each Jew intent to end his trudge
And take his pleasure (though alive)
With all his Jewish kith and kin
Below ground, have his venom out,
Sharpen his wits for next day's sin,
Curse Christians, and so home, no doubt !

10.

“ Whereas, each phiz upturned beholds
Mary, I warrant, soaring brave !
And in a trice, beneath the folds
Of filthy garb which gowns each knave,

Down drops it — there to hide grimace,
Contortion of the mouth and nose
At finding Mary in the place
They'd keep for Pilate, I suppose!

II.

“At last, they will not brook — not they! —
Longer such outrage on their tribe:
So, in some hole and corner, lay
Their heads together — how to bribe
The meritorious Farmer's self
To straight undo his work, restore
Their chance to meet, and muse on pelf —
Pretending sorrow, as before!

12.

“Forthwith, a posse, if you please,
Of Rabbi This and Rabbi That
Almost go down upon their knees
To get him lay the picture flat.

The spokesman, eighty years of age,
 Gray as a badger, with a goat's
 — Not only beard but bleat, 'gins wage
 War with our Mary. Thus he dotes:—

13.

*“ Friends, grant a grace! How Hebrews toil
 Through life in Florence—why relate
 To those who lay the burden, spoil
 Our paths of peace? We bear our fate.
 But when with life the long toil ends,
 Why must you—the expression craves
 Pardon, but truth compels me, friends!—
 Why must you plague us in our graves?*

14.

*“ Thoughtlessly plague, I would believe!
 For how can you—the lords of ease
 By nurture, birthright—e'en conceive
 Our luxury to lie with trees*

*And turf, — the cricket and the bird
 Left for our last companionship:
 No harsh deed, no unkindly word,
 No frowning brow nor scornful lip!*

15.

*“ ‘Death’s luxury, we now rehearse
 While, living, through your streets we fare
 And take your hatred: nothing worse
 Have we, once dead and safe, to bear!
 So we refresh our souls, fulfil
 Our works, our daily tasks; and thus
 Gather you grain — earth’s harvest — still
 The wheat for you, the straw for us.*

16.

*“ ‘What flouting in a face, what harm,
 In just a lady borne aloft
 By boys’ heads, wings for leg and arm?’
 You question. Friends, the harm is here—*

*That just when our last sigh is heaved,
And we would fain thank God and you
For labor done and peace achieved,
Back comes the Past in full review!*

17.

*“ At sight of just that simple flag,
Starts the foe-feeling serpent-like
From slumber. Leave it lulled, nor drag —
Though fangless — forth, what needs must strike
When stricken sore, though stroke be vain
Against the mailed oppressor! Give
Play to our fancy that we gain
Life's rights when once we cease to live!*

18.

*“ Thus much to courtesy, to kind,
To conscience! Now to Florence folk!
There's core beneath this apple-rind,
Beneath this white-of-egg there's yolk!*

*Beneath this prayer to courtesy,
 Kind, conscience—there's a sum to pouch!
 How many ducats down will buy
 Our shame's removal, sirs? Avouch!*

19.

*“Removal, not destruction, sirs!
 Just turn your picture! Let it front
 The public path! Or memory errs,
 Or that same public path is wont
 To witness many a chance befall
 Of lust, theft, bloodshed—sins enough,
 Wherein our Hebrew part is small.
 Convert yourselves!’—he cut up rough.*

20.

*“Look you, how soon a service paid
 Religion yields the servant fruit!
 A prompt reply our Farmer made
 So following: ‘Sirs, to grant your suit*

*Involves much danger! How? Transpose
 Our Lady? Stop the chastisement,
 All for your good, herself bestows?
 What wonder if I grudge consent?*

21.

*“ — Yet grant it: since, what cash I take
 Is so much saved from wicked use.
 We know you! And, for Mary's sake,
 A hundred ducats shall induce
 Concession to your prayer. One day
 Suffices: Master Buti's brush
 Turns Mary round the other way,
 And deluges your side with slush.*

22.

*“ ‘Down with the ducats therefore!’ Dump,
 Dump, dump it falls, each counted piece,
 Hard gold. Then out of door they stump,
 These dogs, each brisk as with new lease*

Of life, I warrant, — glad he'll die
Henceforward just as he may choose,
Be buried and in clover lie!
Well said Esaias — '*stiff-necked Jews!*'

23.

“Off posts without a minute's loss
Our Farmer, once the cash in poke,
And summons Buti — ere its gloss
Have time to fade from off the joke —
To chop and change his work, undo
The done side, make the side, now blank,
Recipient of our Lady — who,
Displaced thus, had these dogs to thank!

24.

“Now, boy, you're hardly to instruct
In technicalities of Art!
My nephew's childhood sure has sucked
Along with mother's-milk some part

Of painter's-practice — learned, at least,
 How expeditiously is plied
 A work in fresco — never ceased
 When once begun — a day, each side

25.

“So, Buti—(he's with God)—begins:
 First covers up the shrine all round
 With hoarding; then, as like as twins,
 Paints, t'other 'side the burial-ground,
 New Mary, every point the same;
 Next, sluices over, as agreed,
 The old; and last—but, spoil the game
 By telling you? Not I, indeed!

26.

“Well, ere the week was half at end,
 Out came the object of this zeal,
 This fine alacrity to spend
 Hard money for mere dead men's weal!

How think you? That old spokesman Jew
Was High Priest, and he had a wife
As old, and she was dying too,
And wished to end in peace her life!

27.

“And he must humor dying whims,
And soothe her with the idle hope
They'd say their prayers and sing their hymns
As if her husband were the Pope!
And she did die—believing just
This privilege was purchased! Dead
In comfort through her foolish trust!
‘Stiff-necked ones,’ well Esaias said!

28.

“So, Sabbath morning, out of gate
And on to way, what sees our arch
Good Farmer? Why, they hoist their freight—
The corpse—on shoulder, and so, march!

'*Now for it, Buti!*' In the nick
 Of time 'tis pully-haully, hence
 With hoarding! O'er the wayside-quick
 There's Mary plain in evidence!

29.

"And here's the convoy halting: right!
 O they are bent on howling psalms
 And growling prayers, when opposite!
 And yet they glance, for all their qualms,
 Approve that promptitude of his,
 The Farmer's — duly at his post
 To take due thanks from every phiz,
 Sour smirk — nay, surly smile almost!

30.

"Then earthward drops each brow again;
 The solemn task's resumed; they reach
 Their holy field — the unholy train:
 Enter its precinct, all and each,

Wrapt somehow in their godless rites ;
Till, rites at end, up-waking, lo
They lift their faces ! What delights
The mourners as they turn to go ?

31.

“ Ha, ha, he, he ! On just the side
They drew their purse-strings to make quit
Of Mary, — Christ the Crucified
Fronted them now — these biters bit !
Never was such a hiss and snort,
Such screwing nose and shooting lip !
Their purchase — honey in report —
Proved gall and verjuice at first sip !

32.

“ Out they break, on they bustle, where,
A-top of wall, the Farmer waits
With Buti : never fun so rare !
The Farmer has the best : he rates

The rascal, as the old High Priest
 Takes on himself to sermonize —
 Nay, sneer, '*We Jews supposed, at least,
 Theft was a crime in Christian eyes!*'

33.

“*‘Theft?’* cries the Farmer, '*Eat your words!*
*Show me what constitutes a breach
 Of faith in aught was said or heard!*
*I promised you in plainest speech
 I'd take the thing you count disgrace
 And put it here — and here 'tis put!*
*Did you suppose I'd leave the place
 Blank therefore, just your rage to glut?*'

34.

“*‘I guess you dared not stipulate
 For such a damned impertinence!*
*So, quick, my graybeard, out of gate
 And in at Ghetto! Haste you hence!*'

*As long as I have house and land,
To spite you irreligious chaps
Here shall the Crucifixion stand—
Unless you down with cash, perhaps !'*

35.

“So snickered he and Buti both.
The Jews said nothing, interchanged
A glance or two, renewed their oath
To keep ears stopped and hearts estranged
From grace, for all our Church can do ;
Then off they scuttle: sullen jog
Homewards, against our Church to brew
Fresh mischief in their synagogue.

36.

“But next day — see what happened, boy !
See why I bid you have a care
How you pelt Jews ! The knaves employ
Such methods of revenge, forbear

No outrage on our faith, when free
To wreak their malice! Here they took
So base a method — plague o' me
If I record it in my Book!

37.

“For, next day, while the Farmer sat
Laughing, with Buti in his shop,
At their successful joke, — rat-tat, —
Door opens, and they're like to drop
Down to the floor as in there stalks
A six-feet-high herculean-built
Young he-Jew with a beard that balks
Description. ‘*Help ere blood be spilt!*’

38.

— “Screamed Buti: for he recognized
Whom but the son, no less no more,
Of that High Priest his work surprised
So pleasantly the day before!

Son of the mother, then, whereof
The bier he lent a shoulder to,
And made the moans about, dared scoff
At sober Christian grief — the Jew !

39.

“‘*Sirs, I salute you ! Never rise !
No apprehension !*’ (Buti, white
And trembling like a tub of size,
Had tried to smuggle out of sight
The picture’s self — the thing in oils,
You know, from which a fresco’s dashed
Which courage speeds while caution spoils)
‘Stay and be praised, sir, unabashed !

40.

“‘*Praised, — ay, and paid too : for I come
To buy that very work of yours.
My poor abode, which boasts — well, some
Few specimens of Art, secures*

*Haply, a masterpiece indeed
 If I should find my humble means
 Suffice the outlay. So, proceed!
 Propose—ere prudence intervenes!*

41.

“On Buti, cowering like a child,
 These words descended from aloft,
 In tones so ominously mild,
 With smile terrifically soft
 To that degree—could Buti dare
 (Poor fellow) use his brains, think twice?
 He asked, thus taken unaware,
 No more than just the proper price!

42.

“‘Done!’ cries the monster. ‘I disburse
 Forthwith your moderate demand.
 Count on my custom—if no worse
 Your future work be, understand,

*Than this I carry off! No aid!
My arm, sir, lacks nor bone nor thews:
The burden's easy, and we're made,
Easy or hard, to bear — we Jews!*

43.

“Crossing himself at such escape,
Buti by turns the money eyes
And, timidly, the stalwart shape
Now moving doorwards; but, more wise,
The Farmer, — who, though dumb, this while
Had watched advantage, — straight conceived
A reason for that tone and smile
So mild and soft! The Jew — believed!

44.

“Mary in triumph borne to deck
A Hebrew household! Pictured where
No one was used to bend the neck
In praise or bow the knee in prayer!

Borne to that domicile by whom?

The son of the High Priest! Through what?
An insult done his mother's tomb!

Saul changed to Paul — the case came pat!

45.

“*Stay, dog-few . . . gentle sir, that is!*

*Resolve me! Can it be, she crowns, —
Mary, by miracle, — Oh bliss! —*

*My present to your burial-ground?
Certain, a ray of light has burst*

*Your veil of darkness! Had you else,
Only for Mary's sake, disbursed*

So much hard money? Tell — oh, tell's!”

46.

“Round — like a serpent that we took

For worm and trod on — turns his bulk
About the Jew. First dreadful look

Sends Buti in a trice to skulk

Out of sight somewhere, save — alack !
But our good Farmer faith made bold :
And firm (with Florence at his back)
He stood, while gruff the gutturals rolled —

47.

“ *Ay, sir, a miracle was worked
By quite another power, I trow,
Than ever yet in canvas lurked,
Or you would scarcely face me now !
A certain impulse did suggest
A certain grasp with this right-hand,
Which probably had put to rest
Our quarrel, — thus your throat once spanned !*

48.

“ *But I remembered me, subdued
That impulse, and you face me still !
And soon a philosophic mood
Succeeding (hear it, if you will !)*

*Has altogether changed my views
 Concerning Art. Blind prejudice!
 Well may you Christians tax us Jews
 With scrupulosity too nice!*

49.

*“ For, don't I see, — let's issue join! —
 Whenever I'm allowed pollute
 (I — and my little bag of coin)
 Some Christian palace of repute, —
 Don't I see stuck up everywhere
 Abundant proof that cultured taste
 Has Beauty for its only care,
 And upon Truth no thought to waste?*

50.

*“ “ Jew, since it must be, take in pledge
 Of payment ” — so a Cardinal
 Has sighed to me as if a wedge
 Entered his heart “ this best of all*

My treasures!" *Leda, Ganymede*
Or Antiope: swan, eagle, ape,
 (Or what's the beast of what's the breed)
And Jupiter in every shape!

51.

"Whereat if I presume to ask,
 "But, Eminence, though Titian's whisk
 Of brush have well performed its task,
 How comes it these false godships frisk
 In presence of—what yonder frame
 Pretends to image? Surely, odd
 It seems, you let confront The Name
 Each beast the heathen called his god!"

52.

"Benignant smiles me pity straight
The Cardinal. "'Tis Truth, we prize!
 Art's the sole question in debate!
 These subjects are so many lies."

We treat them with a proper scorn
 When we turn lies — called gods forsooth —
 To lies' fit use, now Christ is born.
 Drawing and coloring are Truth.

53.

““Think you I honor lies so much
 As scruple to parade the charms
 Of Leda — Titian, every touch —
 Because the thing within her arms
 Means Jupiter who had the praise
 And prayer of a benighted world?
 He would have mine too, if, in days
 Of light, I kept the canvas furled!”

54.

““*So ending, with some easy gibe.*
What power has logic! I, at once,
Acknowledged error in our tribe
So squeamish that, when friends ensconce

*A pretty picture in its niche
 To do us honor, deck our graves,
 We fret and fume and have an itch
 To strangle folk — ungrateful knaves!*

55.

*“No, sir! Be sure that — what’s its style,
 Your picture? — shall possess ungrudged
 A place among my rank and file
 Of Ledas and what not — be judged
 Just as a picture! and (because
 I fear me much I scarce have bought
 A Titian) Master Buti’s flaws
 Found there, will have the laugh flaws ought!”*

56.

*“So, with a scowl, it darkens door —
 This bulk — no longer! Buti makes
 Prompt glad re-entry; there’s a score
 Of oaths, as the good Farmer wakes*

From what must needs have been a trance,
 Or he had struck (he swears) to ground
 The bold bad mouth that dared advance
 Such doctrine the reverse of sound!

57.

“Was magic here? Most like! For, since,
 Somehow our city’s faith grows still
 More and more lukewarm, and our Prince
 Or loses heart or wants the will
 To check increase of cold. ’Tis ‘*Live*
And let live! Languidly repress
The Dissident! In short—contrive
Christians must bear with Jews: no less!”

58.

“The end seems, any Israelite
 Wants any picture, — pishes, poohs,
 Purchases, hangs it full in sight
 In any chamber he may choose!

In Christ's crown, one more thorn we rue !

In Mary's bosom, one more sword !

No, boy, you must not pelt a Jew !

O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord?"

EPILOGUE.

μεστοὶ . . .

οἱ δ' ἀμφορῆς οἶνον μέλανος ἀνθοσμίων.

I.

“The poets pour us wine —”

Said the dearest poet I ever knew,

Dearest and greatest and best to me.

You clamor athirst for poetry —

We pour. “But when shall a vintage be” —

You cry — “strong grape, squeezed gold from
screw,

Yet sweet juice, flavored flowery-fine?

That were indeed the wine!”

2.

One pours your cup — stark strength,

Meat for a man; and you eye the pulp

Strained, turbid still, from the viscous blood

Of the snaky bough: and you grumble “Good!

For it swells resolve, breeds hardihood ;
Despatch it, then, in a single gulp !”
So, down, with a wry face, goes at length
The liquor : stuff for strength.

3.

One pours your cup — sheer sweet,
The fragrant fumes of a year condensed :
Suspicion of all that's ripe or rathe,
From the bud on branch to the grass in swathe.
“We suck mere milk of the seasons,” saith
A curl of each nostril — “dew, dispensed
Nowise for nerving man to feat :
Boys sip such honeyed sweet !”

4.

And thus who wants wine strong,
Waves each sweet smell of the year away ;
Who likes to swoon as the sweets suffuse
His brain with a mixture of beams and dews

Turned sirupy drink — rough strength eschews:

“What though in our veins your wine-stock stay?
The lack of the bloom does our palate wrong.

Give us wine sweet, not strong!”

5.

Yet wine is — some affirm —

Prime wine there is in the world somewhere,
Of portable strength with sweet to match.
You double your heart its dose, yet catch —
As the draught descends — a violet-smatch,
Through drops expressed by the fire and worm:
Strong sweet wine — some affirm.

6.

Body and bouquet both?

'Tis easy to ticket a bottle so;
But what was the case in the cask, my friends?
Cask? Nay, the vat — where the maker mends

His strong with his sweet (you suppose) and blends
His rough with his smooth, till none can know
How it comes you may tipple, nothing loath,
Body and bouquet both.

7.

“You” being just — the world.

No poets — who turn, themselves, the winch
Of the press ; no critics — I’ll even say,
(I am flustered and easy of faith, to-day)
Who for love of the work have learned the way
Till themselves produce home-made, at a pinch :
No! You are the world, and wine ne’er purled
Except to please the world !

8.

“For, oh the common heart !
And, ah the irremissible sin
Of poets who please themselves, not us !
Strong wine yet sweet wine pouring thus,

How please still — Pindar and Æschylus! —

Drink — dipt into by the bearded chin
Alike and the bloomy lip — no part
Denied the common heart!

9.

“And might we get such grace,

And did you moderns but stock our vault
With the true half-brandy half-attar-gul,
How would seniors indulge at a hearty pull
While juniors tossed off their thimbleful!

Our Shakespeare and Milton escaped your fault,
So, they reign supreme o'er the weaker race
That want the ancient grace!”

10.

If I paid myself with words

(As the French say well) I were dupe indeed!
I were found in belief that you quaffed and bowed
At your Shakespeare the whole day long, caroused

In your Milton pottle-deep nor drowsed
A moment of night—toped on, took heed
Of nothing like modern cream-and-curds!
Pay me with deeds, not words!

II.

For—see your cellarage!
There are forty barrels with Shakespeare's brand.
Some five or six are abroach: the rest
Stand spigoted, fauceted. Try and test
What yourselves call best of the very best!
Why is it that still untouched they stand?
Why don't you try tap, advance a stage
With the rest in cellarage?

12.

For—see your cellarage!
There are four big butts of Milton's brew.
How comes it you make old drips and drops
Do duty, and there devotion stops?

Leave such an abyss of malt and hops
Embellied in butts which bungs still glue?
You hate your bard! A fig for your rage!
Free him from cellarage!

13.

'Tis said I brew stiff drink,
But the deuce a flavor of grape is there.
Hardly a May-go-down, 'tis just
A sort of a gruff Go-down-it-must—
No Merry-go-down, no gracious gust
Commingles the racy with May, the rare!
“What wonder,” say you “we cough, and blink
October’s heady drink?”

14.

Is it a fancy, friends?
Mighty and mellow are never mixed,
Though mighty and mellow be born at once.
Sweet for the future, — strong for the nonce!

Stuff you should stow away, ensconce
In the deep and dark, to be found fast-fixed
At the century's close: such time strength spends
A-sweetening for my friends!

15.

And then — why, what you quaff
With a smack of lip and a cluck of tongue,
Is leakage and leavings — just what haps
From the tun some learned taster taps
With a promise “Prepare your watery chaps!
Here's properest wine for old and young!
Dispute its perfection — you make us laugh!
Have faith, give thanks, but — quaff!”

16.

Leakage, I say, or worse,
Leavings suffice pot-valiant souls.
Somebody, brimful, long ago,
Frothed flagon he drained to the dregs; and lo,

Down whisker and beard what an overflow!

Lick spilth that has trickled from classic jowls.

Sup the single scene, sip the only verse —

Old wine, not new and worse!

17.

I grant you: worse by much!

Renounce that new where you never gained

One glow at heart, one gleam at head,

And stick to the warrant of age instead!

No dwarf's-lap! Fatten, by giants fed!

You fatten, with oceans of drink undrained?

You feed — who would choke did a cobweb smutch

The Age you love so much?

18.

A mine's beneath a moor:

Acres of moor roof fathoms of mine

Which diamonds dot where you please to dig:

Yet who plies spade for the bright and big?

Your product is — truffles, you hunt with a pig!
Since bright-and-big, when a man would dine,
Suits badly: and therefore the Koh-i-noor
May sleep in mine 'neath moor!

19.

Wine, pulse in might from me!
It may never emerge in must from vat,
Never fill cask nor furnish can,
Never end sweet, which strong began —
God's gift to gladden the heart of man;
But spirit's at proof, I promise that!
No sparing of juice spoils what should be
Fit brewage — mine for me.

20.

Man's thoughts and loves and hates!
Earth is my vineyard, these grew there:
From grape of the ground, I made or marred
My vintage; easy the task or hard,

Who set it — his praise be my reward !

Earth's yield ! Who yearn for the Dark Blue Sea's
Let them "lay, pray, bray" — the addle-pates,
Mine be Man's thoughts, loves, hates !

21.

But some one says "Good Sir !"

('Tis a worthy versed in what concerns
The making such labor turn out well)

"You don't suppose that the nosegay-smell
Needs always come from the grape? Each bell

At your foot, each bud that your Honor spurns,
The very cowslip would act like myrrh

On the stiffest brew — good Sir !

22.

"Cowslips, abundant birth

O'er meadow and hillside, vineyard too,
— Like a schoolboy's scrawlings in and out
Distasteful lesson-book — all about

Greece and Rome, victory and rout —
 Love-verses instead of such vain ado!
 So, fancies frolic it o'er the earth
 Where thoughts have rightlier birth.

23.

“Nay, thoughtlings they themselves:
 Loves, hates — in little and less and least!
 Thoughts? ‘*What is a man beside a mount!*’
 Loves? ‘*Absent — poor lovers the minutes count!*’
 Hates? ‘*Fie — Pope’s letters to Martha Blount!*’
 These furnish a wine for a children’s-feast:
 Insipid to man, they suit the elves
 Like thoughts, loves, hates themselves.”

24.

And, friends, beyond dispute
 I too have the cowslips dewy and dear.
 Punctual as Springtide forth peep they:
 I leave them to make my meadow gay.

But I ought to pluck and impound them, eh?
Not let them alone, but deftly shear
And shred and reduce to—what may suit
Children, beyond dispute?

25

And, here's May-month, all bloom,
All bounty: what if I sacrifice?
If I out with shears and shear, nor stop
Shearing till prostrate, lo, the crop?
And will you prefer it to ginger-pop
When I've made you wine of the memories
Which leave as bare as a churchyard tomb
My meadow, late all bloom?

26.

Nay, what ingratitude
Should I hesitate to amuse the wits
That have pulled so long at my flask, nor grudged
The headache that paid their pains, nor budged

From bunghole before they sighed and judged
“ Too rough for our taste, to-day, befits
The racy and right when the years conclude ! ”
Out on ingratitude !

27.

Grateful or ingrate — none,
No cowslip of all my fairy crew
Shall help to concoct what makes you wink,
And goes to your head till you think you think
I like them alive : the printer's ink
Would sensibly tell on the perfume too.
I may use up my nettles, ere I've done ;
But of cowslips — friends get none !

28.

Don't nettles make a broth
Wholesome for blood grown lazy and thick ?
Maws out of sorts make mouths out of taste.
My Thirty-four Port — no need to waste

On a tongue that's fur and a palate — paste!

A magnum for friends who are sound! the sick—
I'll posset and cosset them, nothing loath,

Henceforward with nettle-broth!





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