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THE

TRAGEDIES OF SOPHOCLES,

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

J. M. RICHARDSON, CORNHILL.

1824.

TO THE
REV. ARTHUR WILLIAM TROLLOPE, D.D.
HEAD MASTER OF CHRIST'S HOSPITAL,

This Translation

OF THE

TRAGEDIES OF SOPHOCLES;

AS A SINCERE, THOUGH INADEQUATE, ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
OF EARLY AND ESSENTIAL OBLIGATIONS,

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY HIS GRATEFUL PUPIL

AND

OBEDIENT SERVANT,

THOMAS DALE.

INTRODUCTION.

To trace the gradual progress of any art or science, from the infancy of its institution to the perfection of its maturity ;—to behold the rude and shapeless materials, passing through successive stages of improvement, till, like the rough marble under the hands of the experienced sculptor, they are polished into beauty and moulded into symmetry ;—is one of the most interesting speculations that can occupy the reflecting mind. This remark applies with peculiar force to the Greek Tragic Drama ; which, though mean almost beyond credibility

in its origin, attained, after the lapse of less than a century, the highest degree of splendour and magnificence. Indeed, if we may judge either from the avidity with which dramatic spectacles were anticipated by the Athenians—or from the immense expense which attended their celebration—it may fearlessly be pronounced, that in Tragedy, as well as in Painting, Sculpture, and Music, the moderns were far excelled by their predecessors of antiquity.

Two sources are assigned for the origin of the Greek drama. By some it is referred back to the Rhapsodists, or wandering bards, who were accustomed, in very remote ages, to travel from city to city, not only reciting their own compositions, but accompanying the recitation with correspondent gestures. Others, with greater probability, ascribe it to the festivals of Bacchus, at which, particularly in the villages, certain hymns were chanted in honour of the God. In these the authors were accustomed to indulge in the keenest personal

invective against the wealthy and the covetous; and their compositions, thus flattering the democratic, and, if we may be allowed the expression, the *levelling* spirit of the Athenian populace, were received with general applause. In process of time, these hymns, which were, at first, only an adventitious appendage, became an integral part of the ceremony; and, for the sake of exciting competition, a goat (*τράγος*) was awarded as a prize to the composer of the best song (*ὠδή*), whence arose the name, as well as the art, of Tragedy.

These hymns, however, did not long continue to be simply lyrical. Their wild and unconnected strains were gradually reduced to some degree of harmony and order; a regular narrative of the exploits of the God was introduced; and even this narrative was soon varied by the occasional substitution of an interlocutory personage. The intent of this new performer was, by diverting the attention of the audience from the immediate subject of

the recitation, to keep awake their interest, and afford, at the same time, some interval of relief to the singer. It was at this era of the dramatic art, that Thespis, a native of a small borough in Attica, named Icaria, (cir. 540 A.C.) gave the first distinguishing feature to Tragedy, by the introduction of an actor whose office it should be to *personate some particular character*; the interlocutor before-mentioned being merely a kind of low jester or buffoon. By this means, the Chorus became subordinate to the actor, instead of the actor to the Chorus. As yet, however, the only stage was a temporary scaffold, erected on the cart of Thespis; and the only disguise of the actor or actors was the lees of wine, with which their faces were besmeared.

During the ensuing half century, little or no improvement appears to have been effected in the composition and exhibition of dramatic spectacles. The names,—and scarcely any thing beyond the names,—of some Tragedians

are recorded, among whom we may particularize Phrynichus. He changed the dithyrambics into a species of verse more suitable to Tragedy, and made a few other alterations; none, however, of sufficient importance to invalidate the claim of Æschylus to the honourable appellation of ‘Father of the Drama.’

This great man was born of an illustrious family, in or about the sixty-third Olympiad, 528 B.C. We are not informed of the circumstances that first directed his attention to the dramatic art; but it is recorded, that, before he attained his thirtieth year, he had both conceived and executed the arduous enterprize of redeeming Tragedy from the degraded state in which he found it, and exalting it to one of the highest pinnacles in the temple of literary fame. He first introduced a second and afterwards a third actor, thus varying the monotony of the former representations by dialogue; he adorned the stage with suitable scenery, and arrayed the performers in appropriate habits.

In compliance with popular tradition, which assigned to the heroes of the 'olden time' a loftier stature and more commanding aspect, he elevated his actors by the buskin, disguised them in the mask, and invested them with the insignia of royalty. He increased the number and prescribed the office of the Chorus; procured the erection of a spacious and commodious theatre, and reduced the drama nearly to that form in which it has descended to modern times.

But Sophocles, the son of Sophilus, an Athenian, the date of whose birth is fixed at about thirty years posterior to that of Æschylus, was destined one day to rival, if not to eclipse, this great luminary. Endowed by nature with superior personal attractions, which were heightened and improved by the judicious management of his education, he became, in very early life, the object of popular attention and admiration. Among a chorus of chosen youths, who were celebrating

around a trophy the battle of Salamis, he was pre-eminently conspicuous both for the elegance of his person, and the melody of his lyre. His skill in music seems to have presaged the harmony of those beautiful compositions which he was one day to produce; and his dexterity in the exercises of the Palæstra might well qualify him for that office, which necessarily devolved on all the Grecian dramatists of those ages—to regulate the movements of the person, and direct the modulations of the voice, in their respective actors. He pursued, for a season, the track of lyric poetry; but the bent of his genius directing him to a nobler species of composition, he boldly entered into competition with Æschylus, then in exclusive possession of the stage, and was declared victor by a plurality of voices in his very first attempt, when he was not more than twenty-five years of age. It is said, though there are substantial reasons for discrediting the account, that Æschylus, fired with indignation

at the preference thus given to his rival, withdrew himself into Sicily.

The improvements introduced by Sophocles into the drama, consisted principally in the superior dexterity with which he formed the plots of his tragedies, and the relation which he made the Chorus bear to the main action of the piece. The plots of Æschylus were extremely rude and inartificial; often at war with nature, and sometimes scarcely reconcilable with possibility. Sophocles studied nature. If he was not so conversant as his predecessor with the imaginary world; if he did not invest with such superhuman attributes the heroes whom a superstitious veneration had exalted into Gods; at least he approached nearer to the true standard of mortality, and raised his characters to that precise elevation, where they would neither be too lofty to excite sympathy, nor so familiar as to incur contempt. He never violates probability to produce effect;

and if his heroes are less imposing and sublime, they are, at the same time, more interesting and natural than those of Æschylus. The part, also, which he causes the Chorus to sustain in the action imparts a peculiar finish to the piece. In short, whoever would contemplate the Greek drama in the meridian of its perfection must contemplate it in the Tragedies of Sophocles.

For, whatever be the merits of Euripides, (who was born about fourteen years after Sophocles, and commenced his theatrical career at the early age of eighteen,) however high be his reputation for pathos and purity of moral sentiment, he can hardly be said to have contributed, in any degree, towards the perfection of the drama. His method of opening his plays by a species of Prologue, in which one of the principal characters tells the audience what may be very proper for them to know, but is not quite so proper for him or her to communicate, cannot be called an *improvement* ; in fact, generally

speaking, nothing can be more unnatural and extravagant. His plots are sometimes even more barren and improbable than those of Æschylus ; his catastrophe occasionally feeble, and not seldom ridiculous. He is, it must be acknowledged, full of solemn and sententious maxims, but even these are frequently introduced in so awkward a manner, that their effect is materially invalidated, if not totally lost; while, by Sophocles, though of rarer occurrence, they are invariably displayed to the greatest advantage. Euripides interrupts the progress of his action, for the sole purpose of obtruding a prolix and unseasonable moral dissertation. Sophocles, with better judgement and more striking effect, deduces the moral from the event. In short, respecting the rival merits of these three great poets, we can hardly venture to differ from Aristophanes, who, in compliance with the common sentiment of the people, assigned the first place to Æschylus, the second to Sophocles, and the last to Euripides ; though we

may, perhaps, be pardoned for suggesting a doubt whether Æschylus would have been considered the greatest, had he not been the first.

It has already been intimated by what circumstances the Chorus;—a branch of the Grecian drama, which the English reader will find some difficulty in tolerating;—assumed so conspicuous a part. It is a relic, and, in fact, the sole surviving relic of the original poems. The complement of the Chorus varied at different periods. On one occasion Æschylus introduced no less than fifty upon the stage; but by a subsequent edict, the Chorus was limited to twelve; to which number, at the instance of Sophocles, were afterwards added three more. These fifteen persons were arranged five in depth and three in front; their motions were regulated by a flute-player, and their sentiments were communicated, on all occasions, by their leader, denominated Coryphæus or Choregus. Hence arises that apparent incon-

gruity, which will strike the English reader, that the Chorus are frequently addressed, and return their answer in the singular number. The first instance of this seeming anomaly occurs in the *Œdipus Tyrannus*, p. 29, where the Choregus, for himself and his associates, disclaims all participation in the death of Laius—

Mighty King!

So will I speak, as in thy curse involved;

I slew him not—

While the choral odes were singing, the Chorus performed certain evolutions, marching with a kind of military step, and in the order above mentioned, first from right to left, whence the former division of the ode itself is called “Strophe;” and then from left to right, whence the corresponding division is called “Antistrophe.” During the “Epode,” they stood still in the middle of the stage, on which they remained during the whole time of the representation, except when their absence was

indispensably required; as in the *Ajax*, where the hero falls upon his sword, which occurrence could not take place in the presence of any witnesses. On the whole, however the Chorus may be at variance with the notions of the moderns, there can be no doubt that it was rather an ornament than an incumbrance to the ancient stage. It was generally the vehicle of those beautiful moral sentiments in which the Tragic poets delighted, and which justly elevated the dramatic performances of Greece to the dignity of a religious festival.¹

It being the principal, or rather the exclusive design of these introductory remarks, to

¹ The Chorus, Francklin observes, as introduced by Sophocles, is composed of such persons as might naturally be supposed present on the occasion; whose situations might so far interest them in the events of the Fable, as to render their presence useful and necessary; and yet not so deeply concerned as to render them incapable of offering useful reflections and giving advice, an office for which they were particularly appointed.

clear up such difficulties as may present themselves to a reader who is unacquainted with the peculiar customs of the Ancients, we shall not consider it necessary to enter into a minute examination of the Greek Theatres. A full and satisfactory account of these, and all particulars connected with them, may be found either in Francklin's "Dissertation on Ancient Tragedy," or in the Travels of Anacharsis. We shall confine ourselves to a few concise remarks respecting the division and recitation of the plays, with a brief explanation of the "Unities."

The division into five acts; though, as we learn from the canon of Horace,

Neve minor, neu sit quinto productior actu,

it was prevalent among the Latins, appears to have been altogether unknown to the Greeks. The action was uniform and uninterrupted from the commencement to the catastrophe.

This is evident, as well from the constant continuance of the Chorus upon the stage, as from the difficulty of dividing any of the remaining Greek dramas into five acts, which shall bear any reasonable proportion to one another. The more natural division, and that which is sanctioned by the authority of Aristotle, is into Prologue, which extends from the opening of the drama to the first interlude or chorus; Episode, which includes all between the first and last interludes; Exode, which comprises the remainder from the last interlude to the close. Considering, however, the different acceptation in which the word prologue is *now* used, it will perhaps be more intelligible to an English reader, if the whole drama be regarded as one long piece of a single act.

It cannot be decidedly pronounced whether the Ἰαμβοί (which, in the following translation, are rendered by the usual metre of tragedy, blank heroic verse,) were accompanied with music or not. The former supposition seems

the more probable, since music, according to Aristotle, was one of the essential parts of Tragedy. The recitation may possibly have been a kind of slow and solemn chant;—and wherever it is observed that sudden and abrupt transitions occur in the metre, a question or answer being frequently conveyed in a single word, there it may be supposed that the music was suddenly changed. It is certain that the Greek music possessed, in a peculiar degree, the power of expressing the passions; love, hatred, joy, sorrow, hope, fear, frenzy, jealousy, despair, were alternately depicted by its magic influence; and that too in such perfection, that the effect of even dramatic illusion would not for an instant be impeded or impaired.

It will appear somewhat singular, that, with very little exception, the entire action of the play is supposed to pass in one and the same place: in the *Œdipus Tyrannus*, the *Antigone*, the *Trachiniæ*, and the *Electra*, before the vestibule of a palace; in the *Œdipus Coloneus*, on

the verge of a grove dedicated to the Furies ; in the *Philoctetes*, near a cave on the coast of Lemnos. This arises from the extreme rigour of the rules which the ancient dramatists prescribed to themselves, respecting what are called the Unities. These Unities are threefold,—of Action, of Time, and of Place. We may define the Unity of Action to be, a concentration of the interest into one or two principal characters, with such a continuity of it through the whole drama, that the spectators' thoughts may be exclusively directed to the developement of one catastrophe. Thus the detection of the guilt of *Œdipus* in one tragedy and his death in another; the execution of *Creon's* tyrannical edict on the generous and devoted *Antigone*; the destruction of *Hercules* by the malignant subtilty of the Centaur; the liberation of *Philoctetes* from his captivity in Lemnos; and the triumph of *Electra* and *Orestes* over the murderers of their father ;—*these* are the points on which our attention is riveted from the first ; and, in the tendency of

every incident to produce the anticipated result, the Unity of Action is exemplified. The only instance in which Sophocles has violated it appears in the *Ajax*, where the action is continued after the death of the hero. This, however, may be accounted for by the peculiarity of the heathen superstition respecting the interment of the dead. The Unity of Time requires that the whole action should be comprised within the space between the rising and the setting of the sun. This rule Sophocles has disregarded in his *Trachiniæ*, where the voyage to Eubœa and back is performed during the representation, even in the short interval while the Chorus is singing an ode. The Unity of Place, as we have already intimated, confines the action to a single place; the exception to which rule occurs also in the *Ajax*, where indeed the nature of the action requires it, as the Chorus separates into two parties, each headed by a leader, in search of Ajax. It is, nevertheless, possible that the scene here may open, and discover Ajax be-

hind.—The observance of these rules, it will readily be seen, must have been an oppressive and almost intolerable restraint on the “free flights” of genius; yet it is a circumstance highly creditable to Sophocles, that while he is more attentive to the Unities than either of his rival dramatists, his plots are more conformable to probability,—his incidents more consistent with the tenor of real life.

The Greeks had a great aversion to the introduction of many characters upon the stage at the same time. The general restriction in this respect,—we are not prepared to say that it may not have been violated in particular instances,—seems to have been, that there should not be more than *three*² actors, beside the Chorus, actually engaged in the dialogue; and that, if the appearance of a greater number on the

² Nec quarta loqui peronsa laboret.—Hor. Ars. Poet.

stage be absolutely indispensable, they should be merely “*Mutæ Personæ*,” taking no part in the action. Such are Eurysaces in the *Ajax*, and Pylades in the *Electra*. It is evidently one of the principal reasons for this arrangement, that the favourite actor frequently supported, in the representation, more than one character. Thus, in the *Œdipus Tyrannus*, the same actor might have performed Creon and the Corinthian, who never appear together; in the *Ajax*, Agamemnon and Menelaus;—by only changing the masks. The necessity for the use of masks will be doubly apparent, when it is remembered that the Greeks never admitted women on the stage; though it must seem wonderful how male performers could successfully imitate that voice—

Ever soft,

Gentle, and low; an excellent thing in woman.—

But it is time that we return to Sophocles.

We have already seen that Sophocles com-

menced his poetical career by a victory over Æschylus. He pursued it with distinguished, though not invariable success, and, if one account be credited, expired in the very arms of triumph. Though the number of his compositions, to which the prize was awarded, is not stated to be the same by all authors, it is yet generally admitted, that he was more successful in proportion than either of his competitors. He is said to have produced on the whole one hundred and twenty tragedies, eighteen of which, or, according to others, twenty-four, were honoured with the palm; while but thirteen out of the hundred tragedies of Æschylus were equally fortunate, and five only out of the eighty dramas which are attributed to Euripides.

It is not, however, as a Poet alone that Sophocles is illustrious in the annals of his country; he was scarcely less eminent as a warrior. He was the companion in arms of Thucydides and of Pericles, with whom he

was associated in reducing to obedience the island of Samos. It is affirmed, that he was afterwards complimented with the government of this new conquest on the representation of his *Antigone*.—Sophocles was the only one of the three great Tragedians, who succeeded in preserving the attachment of a people so characteristically fickle as the Athenians. *Æschylus* and *Euripides* both died in exile, while *Sophocles*, in full enjoyment of the love of his fellow-citizens, and with unabated poetical fervour, survived in the bosom of his country to an extreme old age. The only bitter ingredient which mingled in his overflowing cup of happiness was the ingratitude of his children, who accused him before the magistrates of being incompetent, by reason of the decay of his faculties, to the management of his own affairs. This accusation he triumphantly refuted by reading to the judges his *Œdipus at Colonos*, one of the most interesting of his productions, and full of that calm and gentle beauty which might be expected from his age

and habits. The ³marvellous incidents which are related by Plutarch, Cicero, and others, however unworthy of credit or repetition, are at least sufficient to prove that Sophocles, on account of the excellence of his character, was considered the peculiar favourite of the Gods. And as this great man had been fortunate in his life, so was he happy in his death; he had witnessed the glories of his country in the zenith of her grandeur, but he was spared the bitter pang of beholding her degradation. He expired but a short time before Athens was taken by Lysander, choked, as some relate, by a grapestone, or overpowered, according to others, by excess of joy on having obtained the prize. This latter account we are inclined to question, because his rivals Æschylus and

³ Plutarch mentions that the God Æsculapius dwelt with Sophocles; and Cicero relates, that a goblet having been stolen from the temple of Hercules, the thief was made known to the poet in a vision of the night, which was thrice repeated, till the booty was restored.

Euripides were already deceased, and had left behind them no antagonist over whom Sophocles could be *honoured* by a triumph. So high was the estimation in which this great man was held throughout Greece, that even the rough and perfidious Lysander intermitted for a short period the siege of Athens, that he might afford her citizens an opportunity of celebrating the obsequies of the last and most venerated of their bards.

The most popular poetical translations of Sophocles are those of Francklin and of Potter. Both are possessed of merit, though in a very different degree. The former translation, which appeared in 1759, is in many parts extremely loose and inaccurate. The pathetic simplicity of the original degenerates, in the translation, into a rude and insipid familiarity; nor does the translator seem to be aware, that a very literal rendering may be a very incorrect one. In the Choral Odes, Dr. Francklin has been

particularly unfortunate. Nevertheless, his work is entitled to considerable praise, as being the first successful attempt to clothe Sophocles "in an English habit," and thus recommend him to the perusal of those who were unacquainted with the language of the original. The notes, it may be added, convey much valuable information.

The translation of Potter is highly finished and correct, and he may justly be said, in reference to his great original, to have been

" True to his sense, but truer to his fame."

It is in those very points, where Dr. Francklin had most conspicuously failed, that Potter most decidedly excels. His Choral Odes are distinguished by a judicious adaptation of metre, and a close adherence to the sense of the original; nor does he ever deviate from the dignified tone of Tragedy. He is simple, without being familiar; faithful, without being

insipid. He may perhaps be occasionally considered deficient in spirit and animation; but if he rarely soars, at least he never sinks. In short, it may be pronounced,—and there can be no higher praise,—that the Translator is not unworthy of the Author.

The reasons which prompted this new translation, and the particulars in which it professes to differ from those which have preceded it, have already been submitted to the Public in a Prospectus; and, judging from the number and respectability of the Subscribers, it is presumed that they have not been unsatisfactory. The main object was there stated to be, “to render the diversified metres of the original by measures as nearly corresponding as the genius of our language will permit.” How far this object has been accomplished, it will remain for the Public to decide.

Of the Notes which are appended to the pre-

sent Translation, it may be necessary to state, that they are designed principally for the information of the English reader. The greater part of them are borrowed from various authors;⁴ and wherever a distinct acknowledgement has been accidentally omitted, it is hoped that this general recognition will redeem the Translator from the imputation of attempting to profit by the labours of others, without confessing his obligations. The few which are original have no pretensions to depth of erudition or acuteness of conjecture; they are merely intended as illustrative or explanatory; and their brevity will, it is trusted, be excused, by a consideration of the facility with which they might have been multiplied and enlarged.

This Translation, originally undertaken merely

⁴ The edition which has been taken for the basis of the present Work is that of Erfurdt; though the text and annotations of Brunck, Lobeck, and other Commentators have been diligently considered and compared.

as an exercise for study in earlier days, was commenced and carried forward in the quiet seclusion of a College ; but, after having been abandoned for reasons which it is unnecessary to state, was resumed and completed in the few brief intervals which could be snatched from the avocations of a laborious profession. Could the difficulties have been foreseen, which have since obstructed its progress, it is probable that the work would never have been presented to the Public. But the highly respectable list of Subscribers at once invited and encouraged the best exertions of the Translator to redeem his pledge ; and, for this purpose, he has spared no pains in revising and correcting his first sketch, and endeavouring to express the sense of the original as closely as the idiom of the English language will allow. The time which has been devoted to the prosecution of his task has passed pleasantly, and, he would gladly persuade himself, not unprofitably ; for it is assuredly matter of more than mere curiosity to observe, what opinions were entertain-

ed by the most enlightened people upon earth on the great subjects of Religion and Morality, centuries before the ‘ day-spring from on high’ arose with the Gospel. If the polished Athenians are found to have mixed the most absurd puerilities with their civil and religious solemnities, and occasionally to have combined pure and philosophical principles of morals with the most impure and inconsistent system of Polytheism; this consideration ought not only to excite our gratitude, for the transcendent advantages which we enjoy, but to awaken humility, when we reflect how grossly we have perverted, or how negligently improved them. And he who thus compares the heathen code of morals with the divine institutes of Christianity will, we venture to predict, rise with no inconsiderable benefit from the perusal of the “ *Tragedies of Sophocles.*”

ŒDIPUS TYRANNUS.

ŒDIPUS TYRANNUS.

WHEN Laius, King of Thebes, upon his marriage with Jocasta, implored the Gods to bless their union with a numerous and happy offspring, it was replied by the oracle, that Jupiter, incensed by the crimes of his ancestors, had assigned to him an only son, by whose hand the Fates had decreed that he should one day perish. The King, appalled by this inauspicious response, formed a solemn resolution never to approach Jocasta. In the reckless hardihood of intoxication, this resolution was disregarded or forgotten, and Jocasta became the mother of a son, predestined, ere his birth, to be the murderer of his father.

Though deterred by the natural yearnings of maternal tenderness from executing in its full extent the mandate of Laius, who had enjoined her to destroy the infant as soon as it was born, the Queen, nevertheless, delivered it to a confidential domestic, with a charge to expose it upon the mountains. The slave, in obedience to this cruel and unnatural command, bored the infant's feet, and suspended it by the heels from a tree in the wild and unfrequented forests of Cithæron. In this condition the child was found by one of the shepherds of Polybus, King of Corinth, who, moved with compassion, unbound the babe, carried it to Corinth, and presented it to the King, his master. Peribœa, the wife of Polybus, prevailed upon her husband, as they were childless, to adopt the infant; who being, accordingly, received into the palace, was educated with the utmost care and tenderness, as the son of Polybus and Peribœa, and the destined inheritor of the crown of Corinth.

It is unnecessary, even for the information of the English reader, to pursue the narrative beyond this point, since all the subsequent events of the life of Œdipus are incidentally developed by him-

self in the progress of the drama. Suffice it, therefore, to premise, that, at the period from which the action commences, Œdipus is supposed to have swayed the sceptre of Thebes for many years, loving his people, and not less beloved by them, happy in an affectionate consort, a flourishing race of children, a loyal and devoted friend. But a dark and lowering cloud has begun to overcast this hitherto calm and unclouded sky: Thebes is visited by a pestilential disorder, universally ascribed to the anger of the Gods; though the cause of their indignation is enveloped in a mysterious and total obscurity. The baleful effects of this penal visitation are most pathetically described in the opening scene. Henceforth, the history of Œdipus proceeds collaterally with the business of the piece.

This tragedy has been honoured with the concurrent approbation of the most acute and judicious critics of every age: it was adopted by Aristotle as a perfect model of dramatic excellence, and few of the modern commentators have been less enthusiastic in their encomiums. It is affirmed to bear the same relation to tragic, which the Iliad

bears to epic poetry. It is said to stand alone and unrivalled, while all other efforts of tragic writers can only be successful in proportion as they approximate more or less to this, their common standard and criterion.

Indeed, when we consider the admirable dexterity which is evinced in the mechanism of the piece, the mutual consistency and harmonious combination of its parts, the gradual and progressive developement of the various circumstances which unite to elicit the catastrophe, it must be acknowledged that this tragedy is absolutely perfect. Not an incident occurs, however trivial in appearance, which does not conduce to some appropriate and important end; not a character is introduced which does not sustain some part of vital and essential interest in the grand business of the drama. The poet never loses sight of the *end* in the prosecution of the *means*. If a momentary hope be excited, it tends but to deepen the impending and inevitable despair; if a ray of light dart rapidly athwart the gloom, it only displays, in all its horror, the approaching "blackness of darkness." The denunciations of Œdipus against the criminal, so worded

from the first as to apply peculiarly to himself; the ambiguous response brought by Creon from the oracle of Delphi; the reluctant compliance of Tiresias with the first summons of the monarch, as though he were constrained by some mighty and mysterious agency, which he vainly struggled to control; his subsequent vehemence of prophetic indignation; the profane and arrogant exultation which bursts from Jocasta on the apparent confutation of the oracle by the death of Polybus; the faint solitary hope, to which the shuddering monarch clings in that pause of agonizing suspense, while he is awaiting the arrival of the Theban slave; the resistless and overwhelming conviction which flashes upon his soul at the clear unequivocal testimony of this last fatal witness; all these circumstances are successively described in a manner so lively and natural, that the interest never languishes for an instant. We are prepossessed from the first in favour of the unhappy prince; we feel with him and for him; we are continually agitated between hope and fear; and, though we know from the beginning that the catastrophe is inevitable, we are scarcely less startled and surprised by

the appalling discovery, than if it had been totally unexpected and unforeseen.

Another point in which the poet has displayed his consummate acquaintance with the nicest refinement of his art, is the delineation of the character of Œdipus. Had this devoted monarch been represented altogether without blemish, we might have pitied his sorrows, but we could not have sympathised with them: had he been portrayed as an utterly abandoned criminal, we could neither have sympathised with him nor pitied him. We feel, comparatively, but little interest in characters which rise far above, or sink greatly below, the common level of mankind; the former excite our indifference,—the latter, our disgust. But Œdipus, unlike the heroes of modern tragedy, neither sins like a demon, nor suffers like a God.¹ He is in all things a perfectly *human* character, a being of like passions with ourselves, not free from faults, yet “ more sinned against

¹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, xxv.

than sinning,"—not wholly undeserving of censure, yet far more unfortunate than culpable. Such is man. *Mentem mortalia tangunt.*

We cannot, however, forbear to record our dissent from one eulogy of Sophocles, which, notwithstanding, has been pronounced by no mean authority. "Never," it has been said, "was there a tale more affecting than that of Œdipus, and never was it told more pathetically than by Sophocles."² In the former part of this panegyric we cannot acquiesce; on the contrary, we consider the tale, on which the drama is founded, as altogether repugnant and revolting to the best and finest feelings of our nature; and in no one instance is the genius of Sophocles so transcendently triumphant, as in the consummate address with which he has treated a subject calculated, in less powerful hands, to awaken only the strongest emotions of horror, indignation, and disgust. But the master-spirit of the great poet has tempered the revolting details of his plot with so much pure human feeling, such

² Knox's Essays, No. clxxvi.

pathetic and redeeming benevolence, that our sympathy is never for an instant checked by abhorrence, or superseded by disgust. We forget the crimes of Œdipus in his misfortunes ; nor do we so much regard the murderer, the parricide, the τῷ πατρὸς ὀμόσπορος, as the dethroned monarch, — the blind, self-devoted, and despairing outcast,—the affectionate and miserable father, who, though his children survive, is yet worse than childless, for they only survive to misery, and of that misery *he* is the cause !

But it would be unpardonable in a Christian writer, while commenting upon this drama, to pass lightly over that which Sophocles himself claimed as the brightest ornament of his native Athens,³ and which constitutes not the least interesting feature in his own immortal dramas,—a pious and devout reverence for the Gods. The chorus in this tragedy nobly sustain their dignified character. Venerable alike for age and virtue, they will not suffer to pass unnoticed or unreprieved the unguarded exclamations

³ Œdip. Colon. 1005.

even of the monarch whom they revere and love. The choral hymns breathe a beautiful spirit of meek and holy feeling, coupled with the most poetic elevation of sentiment, and interspersed with pathetic appeals to Heaven to avert its vengeance from their country and their King. And we trust it will not be deemed intrusive or irrelevant, if we seize the opportunity of drawing, not from this drama alone, but from the collective works of Sophocles, the following moral conclusion: that if, under the disadvantages of a confused and complicated mythology, and at a period when, with respect to religious truth, "darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people,"—if a heathen poet could then inculcate the fear of the Gods as the most exalted virtue and the most imperative duty, how ought WE to evince, by our more rigid and enlightened observance of the same precept, that "the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth,"—that, as our knowledge is more extensive than was that of the heathen, so is our piety more fervent, our morality more pure, our practice more virtuous and irreproachable.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ŒDIPUS, KING OF THEBES.

PRIEST OF JUPITER.

CREON, BROTHER OF JOCASTA.

TIRESIAS.

JOCASTA, WIFE OF ŒDIPUS.

CORINTHIAN.

HERDSMAN.

MESSENGER.

CHORUS OF AGED THEBANS.

ŒDIPUS TYRANNUS.

SCENE—THEBES, *before the Palace of ŒDIPUS.*

ŒDIPUS. THEBANS.

Œd. Why, O my children, from the ancient stock
Of Cadmus sprung, why haste ye to these seats
Bearing the suppliant branches? ¹ Incense breathes
Through all the town, and votive pæans blend
With deep and bitter wailings. O my people,
I could not learn your woes from other lips,

¹ Suppliants, whether they addressed themselves to Gods or men, were accustomed to bear in their hands olive-branches tipped with wool, called, by the Greeks, *τέμματα*, by the Latins, *velamina*.

But came in person, Œdipus, your King!
 A name to all illustrious. Say, old man—
 Thine age demands such reverence—wherefore thus
 Ye bend imploring? Dread ye future ills,
 Or strive with present griefs? My will is prompt
 To aid in all:—obdurate were my heart
 Could I behold a sight like this unmoved.

Pr. O Œdipus, imperial lord of Thebes!
 Thou seest our sad estate, and how we sit
 Before thine altars;² some, whose callow wings
 Refuse a lengthened flight;—some, bowed with age,
 Priests of the Gods—myself the Priest of Jove,
 And some, the flower of all our Theban youth.
 Another band their suppliant boughs extend
 At the two fanes of Pallas,³ and the shrine
 Oracular, by fair Ismenus' stream.
 The state—as thou may'st witness—with the storm

² The altars here intended were not consecrated to Œdipus, but simply erected before the doors of his palace, and, most probably, dedicated to Apollo.

³ In Thebes, there were two temples of Minerva erected to her under the names of *Onœa* and *Ismenia*. Apollo had a temple on the banks of the Ismenus, and from the flames and ashes of its altars his priests drew prophecies; hence *Ἰσμῆνις σποδῶν*, the prophetic ashes of Ismenus.

Is struggling, and in vain essays to rear
 Her head emergent from the blood-stained wave.
 Her fruits are blasted in the opening bud ;
 Her herds, infected, perish ; her weak births
 Are blighted immature. The fiery God,⁴
 Loathed Pestilence, o'er this devoted city
 Hangs imminent, and desolates th' abode
 Of Cadmus, while in shrieks and piercing groans
 Dark Pluto richly revels. Hence I bend,
 With these sad youths, a suppliant at thine altars ;
 Not that we deem thee equal to the Gods,
 But in the sad vicissitudes of life,
 Or visitations of the angry Gods,
 Account thee first of men. At Thebes arriving,
 Thou didst redeem us from the tax imposed
 By that relentless monster,⁵ uninformed,
 Untaught of us ; by pitying Heaven alone
 We deem thee sent our glory to restore.

⁴ The "fiery God," according to Musgrave, is Mars. The ground of his conjecture is the application of the epithet *πυρόεις* to the planet bearing the name of that divinity. It appears more probable, however, that the expression poetically denotes a personification of Pestilence.

⁵ Ἀοιδόϋ, literally, songstress ; so called, because her enigmas were propounded in verse.

Now, worthiest Œdipus! on thee we fix
 Our supplicating eyes,—O find us aid,
 Or from the sure responses of the Gods,
 Or man's experienced wisdom. Oft we see
 That prudent counsels, e'en in deadliest ills,
 Impart returning life. Noblest of men
 Arise, once more the drooping state revive,
 Arise, and wisdom guide thee! Though our realm
 Hails thee her great Deliverer for the deeds
 Of other days, no more can we recall
 Thy happier sway—if, once by thee preserved,
 Again we sink in ruin. Then restore
 Our rescued state to safety; and as erst
 With happiest omens thou didst rise and save,
 So be again thyself. Still o'er this land
 Wouldst thou bear sway,—'tis better far to rule
 O'er peopled cities, than deserted realms.
 °Nought can strong tower or stately ship avail,
 If nobler man, the soul of each, be wanting.

° The same thought has been beautifully imitated, we might almost say translated, by Sir William Jones.

What constitutes a state?

Not high-raised battlements, or laboured mound,

Thick wall, or moated gate:

Not cities proud, with spires and turrets crowned,

Œd. O my afflicted people, but too well
 I know the purport of your prayers ; I know
 Your common sufferings ; yet, 'mid all your woes,
 None mourns so deeply as your pitying monarch :
 Each o'er his own peculiar misery weeps,
 Nor thinks of others' pain ;—*my* heart is wrung
 At once for you, the city, and myself.
 Nor do ye rouse me now from reckless sleep ;
 Know, many tears your King hath shed for you,
 And traversed many a path in thought's wild maze.
 One remedy alone my search discerned ;
 This I at once applied. The noble Creon,
 Menœceus' son, my kinsman,⁷ have I sent
 To Phœbus' Pythian shrine, charged to demand
 How I may save the state by word or deed.
 Now, as I reckon the revolving days,
 The strange delay alarms me ; for his stay
 Hath passed the allotted term. When he arrives,

Not bays, and broad-armed ports
 Where, laughing at the storm, rich navies ride :
 No ;—men, high-minded men.

⁷ Γαμβρός. The Greeks restrict this term, in its proper and peculiar sense, to those who are connected by ties of affinity, but not by blood, though it is occasionally taken, in a general sense, to express both.

If I perform not all the God ordains,
Account your monarch basest of mankind.

Pr. Well hast thou said, O King! These youths
proclaim

The wished approach of Creon.

Œd. Royal Phœbus,
Grant he return with tidings not less glad,
Than the fair promise of his brightening eye.

Pr. He seems indeed exultant, or his brow
With the rich laurel were not thus enwreathed.⁸

Œd. Soon shall we learn; our voice can reach
him now.

Enter CREON.

ŒDIPUS, CREON, PRIEST, THEBANS.

Œd. Prince, our loved kinsman, great Meneceus'
son,

What answer bring'st thou from the God to Thebes?

Cr. Auspicious tidings; e'en our present ills,
If guided well, may yield a prosperous issue.

⁸ Those who returned from the oracle of Delphi, with an auspicious answer, were crowned with wreaths of laurel.

Œd. What mean thy words? Nor livelier hope
I draw,

Nor added terrors, from a speech like this.

Cr. If 'mid this concourse thou wouldst hear, I
stand

Prepared to speak; if not, to pass within.

Œd. Nay, speak to all. I count not life itself
Of equal interest with my people's sorrow.

Cr. Let me then tell the bidding of the God.
Phœbus hath straitly charged us to expel
Our state's pollution, nurtured in its bosom;
Nor harbour guilt that cannot be forgiven.

Œd. What, then, is this mysterious guilt, and what
The due atonement?

Cr. Exile from the land,
Or death requiting death, since guiltless blood
Troubles the state.

Œd. To whose disastrous fate
Points this response?

Cr. O King, ere yet thy hand
Assumed the helm of empire in our state,
Laius was lord in Thebes.

Œd. Thus fame hath told me:—
I ne'er beheld the monarch.

Cr. He was slain;

And with no dubious voice the God enjoins
On the fell murderers to avenge his death.

Œd. Where do they lurk? and where shall we
explore

The path, so hard to trace, of guilt like this?

Cr. E'en in this land, he said, pursuit may soon
Detect the deed, by slow neglect concealed.

Œd. Died Laius in the palace, or the field,
Or by assassins in a foreign land?

Cr. To seek a distant oracle, 'tis said,
He left the home to which he ne'er returned.

Œd. Did then no herald, no attendant view
His fall, of whom we may demand the truth?

Cr. All died, save one, who fled in wild dismay,
And of the scene he witnessed could recount
One circumstance alone.

Œd. Repeat that one.
If the first light of hope be well improved,
A full disclosure may requite our toil.

Cr. He said that ruffians met the King, who fell
Oppressed by numbers, not by single hand.

Œd. How could a robber, if unbribed by traitors
Within the city, dare this desperate deed?

Cr. Such was suspicion's comment; but there rose
No bold avenger, 'mid our ills, to Laius!

Æd. But, when your monarch was thus basely
slain,

What cause withheld you from a strict inquiry?

Cr. The Sphynx, propounding charms in mystic
verse,

Turned all our thoughts from dubious ills away
To instant evils.

Æd. From their very source

Soon will I drag to light these deeds of darkness :

Such inquisition for a murdered King

Is worthy both of Phœbus and of you ;

I too, confederate in this righteous cause,

Will vindicate at once the state and heaven.

Swayed by no distant interests, do I rise

To crush this foul pollution,—'tis *my* cause ;

Who shed the blood of Laius would embrue,

With equal daring, his bold hand in mine ;

Your King avenging, thus I guard myself.

But from your seats, my children, rise with speed ;

Bear hence your suppliant boughs. And let a herald

Convoke the Theban people to our presence ;

Nought will I leave untraced ;—Phœbus my guide,

To gladness will we soar, or sink to ruin.

Pr. Arise, my sons ; the end for which we came

Is now accomplished, for the King hath said it.

And may the God, who sent this dark response,
Shine forth our saviour, and this plague arrest.

[*Exit* ŒDIPUS, &c.

Chorus.

STROPHE I.

Sweet-breathing voice of Jove, what fateful word
Bring'st thou to Thebes from Delphi's golden shrine?
Troubled in soul, I quake with awe divine!

O Pæan, Power of healing, most adored
In Delos' hallowed isle, THOU wak'st my fear!
What dread decree, remote or near,
Shall thy prophetic voice proclaim?
Say, child of golden Hope, imperishable Fame!

ANTISTROPHE I.

Daughter of Jove, immortal Pallas! hear
The suppliant vows that first to thee are paid;
Thy sister Dian next, earth-ruling maid,
Who 'mid the forum her proud throne doth rear;
And the far-darting Phœbus! Mighty Three!
Appear—avert our misery!
If from our Thebes her former woe
Your guardian-care dispelled, O come to aid us now!

STROPHE II.

Alas ! unnumbered ills we bear ;
 Dismay and anguish reign
 Through all our state ; and wisdom's care
 Strives, 'mid dejection and despair,
 To bring relief in vain.
 Nor ripen now the fruits of earth,
 Nor mothers, in th'untimely birth,
 The struggling throes sustain.
 Swift as the wild bird's rapid flight,
 Or flames that flash through circling night,
 Unnumbered spectres sink, a joyless train,
 To the dark shores of Pluto's dreary reign.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Thus doth th' unpeopled city sigh,
 Wide o'er whose pavements spread
 The lifeless heaps unheeded lie,
 Ungraced with pious obsequy,
 Or tear in pity shed.
 Matrons and wives, a mournful band,
 Suppliant around the altars stand ;
 With groans of piercing dread,
 Their votive strains to Heaven ascend,
 And sighs with louder pæans blend.

Bright daughter of the Mightiest ! fair-eyed Maid,
Rise in thy might, and send thy people aid !

STROPHE III.

This ruthless power, who, raging round,
Clad in no panoply of war,⁹
Inflicts a deeper, deadlier wound—

O drive him from our land afar
In backward flight, or where the wave
Hides Amphitrite's trackless cave ;
Or where the restless whirlwinds roar
On Thracia's bleak and barbarous shore.

If aught survives the baleful night
'Tis blasted by the morning-light.

Oh Thou, who roll'st red lightnings in thine ire,
Smite with thy vengeful bolt the foe, Eternal Sire !

ANTISTROPHE III.

And from thy bright and golden bow
Speed the keen shafts, Lycæan King !

⁹ *Αρεά τὸν μαλερόν*, Martem ustivum, the same with ὁ πυρφόρος Θεός, above-mentioned. *Ἀχαλκος ἀσπίδων*, not equipped in panoply; the ravages of pestilence being more desolating than the violence of war.

The shafts that ever strike the foe,
 These in thy people's succour wing ;
 Thou, Dian, lift thy beams of light
 On us, as on Lycæum's height ;
 Thee too, with golden mitre crowned,
 Whose name exalts thy Thebes renowned ;
 Thee, Bacchus, flushed with wine's deep hue,
 Whose path th'infuriate Nymphs pursue ;
 On thee I call ; be thy red torches driven
 To crush this fatal Pest, this Power abhorred in heaven.

Re-enter ŒDIPUS.

ŒDIPUS. CHORUS.

Œd. I hear thy prayers, nor are they breathed
 in vain—

If thou wilt heed my counsels, and observe
 Whate'er the crisis claims, thou mayst achieve
 A remedy or respite from thy ills.

I, as a stranger to the tale, will speak ;
 A stranger to the deed. I cannot hope
 To search it far with not a track to guide me ;
 Yet, last enrolled among the sons of Thebes,
 This is my charge to all her citizens :

Whoe'er is conscious of the murderous hand
 That shed the blood of Laius, I ordain
 He do forthwith reveal to me the whole :
 And lest, by fear withheld, he shrink to own
 His latent guilt, no heavier doom awaits him,
 Than to retire uninjured into exile ;
 Or if one know th' assassin, and he draw
 His breath from foreign soil, still let him speak,—
 With gifts and added thanks will we requite him.
 If yet ye all are silent, and there be
 One, for his own life or his friend's appalled,
 Who still shall slight our mandate, hear ye next
 The solemn edict we will then proclaim.
 This man, whoe'er he be, let none that owns
 Our sceptre and our sway presume to grant
 The shelter of a home ; let none accost him ;
 Let none associate with him in the vows
 And victims of the Gods, or sprinkle o'er him
 The lustral stream ;¹⁰ let all, from every roof,

¹⁰ *Χέρυβς*. This word does not, as Potter has translated it, imply the laver itself; but denotes, according to Athenæus, water in which was dipped a firebrand taken from the altar where the sacrifice had been offered; sprinkling with this all who were present at the sacrifice, they performed the lustration.

Chase far the dire pollution, as the word
 Of Phœbus by his oracle enjoined.
 Thus will I be confederate with the God,
 And with the murdered monarch. On the wretch
 Who wrought this impious deed, or if alone,
 Or leagued with more, he shroud his head in darkness,
 I imprecate my curse; may he consume
 His joyless years in misery and despair,
 Torn from the common blessings of mankind.
 Yea, on myself,¹ if, conscious of the deed,
 I grant the wretch asylum in my home,
 The same dread curse, in all its vengeance, fall!
 Ye too I charge, our solemn word obey,
 Both for your King, the God, and this poor land,
 Now parched and withering in the wrath of Heaven.
 Nay, had the Gods their warning voice withheld,
 It ill became you unatoned to leave
 A crime like this,—a warrior, and a King,
 Cut off by traitorous guilt. 'Twas then your part

¹ Brunck proposes to read this passage, γένοιτο μὴ ἔξυνειδότης, “I imprecate the same curse upon him, even if resident in my own family;” but the common reading, ἐμοῦ ξυνειδότης, which we have adopted in the text, seems preferable.

To press a strict inquiry,² now 'tis mine.

Mine is the realm which once his sceptre swayed ;

Mine is his nuptial couch, and mine his wife ;

Mine too had been his children, but that Heaven

Willed not to bless him with a prosperous seed ;

And fate in ruin burst upon his head.—

Therefore, in his behalf, as in a father's,³

Will I arise, and every path explore,

To seize the dark assassin of the son

Of Labdacus, the heir of Polydore,

Cadmus, and old Agenor. And I pray,

² It has been objected by the severity of criticism, that so long a period could scarcely have elapsed since the death of Laius, without some inquiry into the circumstances which had occasioned it. We might reply, in defence of the poet, With whom could such an inquiry be expected to originate? Jocasta, without any violation of probability, may be rather supposed anxious to suppress than to revive the memory of her former husband; and if even Œdipus had been apprized of the circumstances, why should he feel so intense an interest in the fate of a stranger, as to institute an inquiry into a crime, which does not even appear to have been perpetrated within the jurisdiction of Thebes?

³ We cannot but notice here the consummate address of the poet, in causing Œdipus to assume the character and relation which rightfully belong to him, but of which he is so fatally unconscious.

That Earth, though tilled in sorrow, may deny
 Her kindly fruits to all who slight our charge ;
 Their marriage-bed be childless ; may they sink
 In anguish keen as that we now deplore,
 Yea, meet a deadlier doom. To you, my friends,
 And all the Thebans who approve our will,
 May justice lend her aid, and the good Gods
 Accord their favouring presence.

Ch. Mighty King!

So will I speak, as in thy curse involved ;
 I slew him not, nor yet can I disclose
 The murderer. Phœbus, who this search ordained,
 Alone can guide it to unveil the guilty.

Æd. True are thy words ; but who can force the
 Gods
 To swerve from their high pleasure ?

Ch. What my breast

Inspires, would I a second time propose.

Æd. Though it be thrice, forbear not thou to speak.

Ch. The seer Tiresias, in prophetic skill,
 Is scarce, I know, by Phœbus self excelled ;
 Ask thou of him, O King, he will resolve thee.

Æd. Nor on this hope have I been slow to act.
 Counsell'd by Creon, twice have we required
 His presence, and much marvel why he comes not.

Ch. Vague and most dubious are the ancient rumours.

Œd. What are they? I would weigh e'en rumour well.

Ch. 'Tis said some travellers slew him!

Œd. This I heard;

But none can say who saw it.

Ch. If he be

Alive to fear, he will not calmly bear

Thy stern and solemn curse.

Œd. Who trembled not

To do such deed, will never quake at words.

Ch. One now draws nigh, whose voice shall soon convict him.

They lead the reverend prophet, in whose breast

Alone of mortals shines inherent truth.

Enter TIRESIAS.

ŒDIPUS, TIRESIAS, CHORUS.

Œd. Tiresias, whose expansive mind surveys

All man can learn, or solemn silence seal,

The signs of heaven, and secrets of the earth;

Though sight is quenched in darkness, well thou
 know'st

The fatal plague that desolates our Thebes ;
 From which, O Prince, we hope to find in thee
 Our help and sole preserver. List, if yet
 Thou hast not heard his mandate,—the response
 Returned by Phœbus. Never shall this pest
 Cease its wide desolation, till we seize,
 And on th' assassins of the murdered King
 Avenge his fall by exile or by death.

O then refuse not thou, if thou hast aught
 Of augury or divination sure,
 To save thyself, thy country, and thy King,
 And ward this foul pollution of the dead.
 We trust in thee. Of all our earthly toils
 The best and noblest is to aid mankind.

Ti. ⁴Ah! woe is me! for wisdom is but woe,
 When to be wise avails not. This I knew,
 But ill remembered, or I ne'er had come.

⁴ We have, in this scene, a fine and impressive comment on the evil consequences of prying into futurity. Tiresias would gladly exchange this baleful knowledge for the bliss of ignorance.

Æd. What may this mean! and whence this
strange dismay?

Ti. Dismiss me to my home: this grace conferred,
Thou wilt endure thy griefs, I mine, more lightly.

Æd. It were unjust, ungrateful to the state,
Which hath sustained thee, to withhold thy counsel.

Ti. Thy words are most untimely to thyself.
Let me beware, lest I too swerve from caution.

Ch. Oh, by the Gods, refuse not what thou canst.
In one assenting prayer we all implore thee.

Ti. For ye are all unwise. Be well assured,
I will not speak, and publish thy despair.

Æd. Dost thou then know and wilt not speak
the truth?

Wilt thou betray us, and subvert thy country?

Ti. I would not injure thee, nor wound myself.
Why urge me thus? Nought shalt thou hear from me.

Æd. Basest of villains! for thou wouldst excite
The insensate rock to wrath, wilt thou not speak?
Still dost thou seem unpitying and unmoved?

Ti. Thou hast reprov'd my warmth, yet little
know'st

What dwells in thine own bosom, though on me
Thou heap'st reproach.

Œd. And who could calmly hear
Such words, so shameful to thine injured country?

Ti. Soon will these things appear, though I be
silent.

Œd. Doth it not then behove thee to declare
What soon shall come to light?

Ti. I'll speak no more.
Indulge this lawless passion at thy will.

Œd. Nought will I now suppress, since anger
prompts

My unreservèd speech. I do suspect thee
Accomplice of the deed, save that thy hand
Struck not the mortal blow; had sight been thine,
I then had chargèd thee as the only villain!

Ti. Ha! Is it thus? Nay, then, I tell thee, King!
Adhere to thine own edict; from this hour
No more hold converse or with these or me.
THOU art the sole polluter of our land.

Œd. Art thou so lost to shame, as to indulge
A taunt like this. Think'st thou to 'scape unscathed?

Ti. I have escaped: the might of truth is mine.

Œd. By whom informèd?—not through thy pre-
scient art.

Ti. By thee; thy will constrained me thus to speak,
Though most reluctant.

Œd. What? Repeat thy words,
That I may learn more clearly.

Ti. Knew'st thou not
Before, or wouldst thou tempt me to speak on?

Œd. I have not caught thy purport. Speak again.

Ti. I say thou art the murderer whom thou seekest.

Œd. Thou shalt not vent that slander twice unpunished.

Ti. Shall I proceed, and fire thy rage to frenzy?

Œd. Speak what thou wilt, it will be said in vain.

Ti. Thou dost not know what guilty ties unite thee
To those thou deem'st most dear ; thou dost not see
The ills that close thee round.

Œd. And dost thou hope
Again to triumph in thy vaunt unharmed ?

Ti. If there be aught of potency in truth.

Œd. There is, but not for thee. Thou hast it not ;
Dark in thine eye, in heart and ear yet darker.

Ti. Wretched art thou in thus upbraiding me,
Whom all, ere long, shall urge with like reproach.

Œd. Nurtured in night alone, thou canst not harm
The man who views the living light of heaven.

Ti. 'Tis not thy doom to fall by me ; for this
Phœbus is mighty, who will work the whole.

Œd. Didst thou, or Creon, frame these sage inventions?

Ti. Not Creon wrongs thee, thou dost wrong thyself.

Œd. O wealth, O empire, and thou nobler art,⁵
 Potent o'er all to brighten life with joy,
 What baleful envy on your splendour waits!
 Since for these regal honours, which the state
 Confided to my hand, a boon unsought,
 Creon, my first and once most faithful friend,
 By traitorous cunning saps my rightful sway,
 And hath suborned this dark designing wizard,
 This scheming specious sorcerer, skilled alone
 To seek his profit, sightless in his art.
 When didst thou ever prove a faithful prophet?
 Why, when the Monster⁶ screamed her mystic charm,

⁵ Τέχνη τέχνης. Literally, the art of arts, *ars ceteris artibus præstans*. What are we to understand by this? The word is conjectured in this passage to denote generally *wisdom*, and, in particular, that wisdom, or subtlety, which Œdipus had evinced in resolving the enigma of the Sphynx.

⁶ ΠΑΥΩΔΟΣ ΚΥΩΝ. The Greeks applied the term ΚΥΩΝ to several of their mythological monsters, particularly the Furies, who are called by Orestes, in the Chœphori of Æschylus, μητρός ἄγκοτοι κύνες; so our own Shakspeare,

“Cry havoc! and let slip the dogs of war.”

Didst thou not break it to redeem thy country ?
 To solve th' enigma was no chance emprise,
 Well might such task demand the prophet's aid !
 Yet nought from divination couldst thou learn ;
 Nought did the Gods inform thee : then I came,
 This inexperienced Œdipus, and, led
 By reason, not by auguries, quelled the foe ;—
 Whom now thou seek'st to banish, deeming thus
 To stand in state usurped near Creon's throne ;
 But thou, with him who shared thy base designs,
 Shalt feel our righteous vengeance. Save that age
 Some reverence claims, now would I teach thee
 wisdom.

Ch. If we conjecture right, the prophet spake
 In vehement wrath ; thus too, O King, thou spakest.
 Such ill beseems our state : 'twere best to seek
 How we may trace the pleasure of the God.

Ti. Though thou art monarch, yet with like
 reproach
 Thy slanders will I quit, for this I can ;
 To thee I am no vassal, but to Phœbus ;
 Nor will I look to Creon as my patron.
 Know, since my blindness wakes thy keen reproach,
 Clear-sighted as thou art, thou dost not see
 What ills enclose thee—where thou hast thy home—

With whom that home is shared. Art thou apprized
 Who gave thee birth? Thou art th' unconscious foe
 Of thine own race on earth, and in the tomb.

Soon shall thy father's, soon thy mother's curse,
 With fearful stride expel thee from the land;
 Now blest with sight,—then, plunged in endless
 gloom.

Ere long what shore shall not attest thy cries?
 How will they echo from Cithæron's⁷ brow,
 When thou shalt learn that marriage, where impelled,
 As with propitious gales, in evil port
 Thy heedless bark hath anchored. Seest thou not
 A gathering storm of miseries, doomed ere long
 To burst alike on thee and on thy children?
 Vent now on Creon and my prescient word
 Thy keen upbraidings. None of mortal race

⁷ This, observes Brumoy, is an allusion to the past, which could not be preserved in the translation. Why not? The ignorance of Œdipus does not affect the validity of the prophet's denunciation. The obscurity of Tiresias has been objected to; but obscurity is the necessary and appropriate language of prophecy; its clearest and most satisfactory explanation is the event.

Διμήν, properly, portus, a haven, a strand, should here be used in the sense of ἀγορά, as Mount Cithæron was situated inland, between Phocis and Bœotia.

Hath ever fallen so low as thou shalt fall.

Œd. Must I then brook such shameless taunts
from thee ?

A curse light on thee, babbler ! to thy home
Away, and rid us of thy hateful presence.

Ti. But for thy summons, I had never come.

Œd. I little deemed that thou wouldst prate so
weakly,

Or never had I sought thy presence here.

Ti. Though to thy better wisdom void of sense
We seem, thy parents once esteemed us wise.

Œd. Who are they ? Stop, and tell who gave
me birth.

Ti. This day will show thy birth, and seal thy ruin.

Œd. How wild, and how mysterious are thy words !

Ti. Art thou not skilled t' unriddle *this* enigma ?

Œd. Reproach the path that led me up to greatness.

Ti. That very path hath led thee to perdition.

Œd. I reckon not that, so I preserved the state.

Ti. Then I depart. Thou, boy, conduct me hence.

Œd. Aye, let him lead thee. Thou dost mar
our counsels ;

When absent, thou wilt trouble us no more.

Ti. I go ; but first will do mine errand here,
By thy stern looks unawed. Thou canst not harm me.

I tell thee, King, the man whom thou hast sought
 With fearful menaces, denouncing death
 On Laius' murderer, THAT MAN IS HERE.
 In word he seems an alien, yet shall prove
 By birth a Theban, nor in this disclosure
 Shall long exult. From sight reduced to blindness,
 To penury from wealth, he shall go forth
 To foreign climes by a frail staff directed
 Then to his children shall be proved at once
 A brother and a father; and to her
 Who gave him birth a husband and a son,
 Corrival^s of the father whom he slew.
 Seek now thy palace, and reflect on this;
 And, if thou find my bodings unfulfilled,
 Deem me untutored in prophetic lore.

[*Exeunt* TIRESIAS and ŒDIPUS.]

^s Ὀμόσπορος, if taken in a passive sense, signifies "born of the same mother," and is synonymous with ἄμαιμος; if used actively, it denotes a man who has children by the same woman who had children by another person referred to. The present translator, in common with his predecessors, feels and acknowledges his inability to convey the idea adequately in English. The word *corrival*, used by Shakspeare, can hardly be said to afford even a distant resemblance to the original.

Chorus.

STROPHE I.

Whom did the fate-unfolding word
From Delphi's rock-hewn shrine proclaim,
The wretch who wrought with ruthless sword
The deed we dare not name?
Now let him seek, in frantic speed,
To emulate the foaming steed;
The Son of Jove, arrayed in arms of light,
With vengeful flames is gaining on his flight,
And still the Fates, resistless in their wrath,
Track the base murderer's path.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Bright the prophetic word hath shone
From hoar Parnassus' snow-crowned brow,
To trace the guilty wretch, unknown,
And hid in darkness now.
Aye, let him range the lonely wood,
Lurk, like the bull, in cavern rude,
Or with tired steps a weary wanderer roam—
Ne'er can he shun the presage of his doom

From Delphi's shrine⁹ denounced,—where'er he fly,
The Living Curse is nigh.

STROPHE II.

Dire were the bodings of the seer ;
And doubt and dread distract my breast,
Nor all he told, nor all suppressed.
I yield in turn to hope and fear,
And trace the present and the past,
Each with impervious gloom o'er cast.
No mortal feud arose
Between our monarch and the royal line
Of Thebes ; nor now, nor then can I divine
The Kings were ever foes.

¹⁰How should I then adopt the Seer's decree

⁹ Delphi's shrine. In the original τὰ μεσόμφαλα γᾶς, literally, umbilicum terræ, the centre of the earth, in which the ancients supposed Delphi to be situated ; so line 889, γᾶς ἐπ' ὀμφαλὸν, " the central shrine."

¹⁰ Musgrave proposes to read in this passage ἐπίκερον for ἐπίκερος, thereby referring the word to Œdipus. But there does not appear any ground for rejecting the version of Brunck, who has, " unde conjecturam faciens explorem, an propter vatis evulgatum responsum, contra Œdipodem Labdacidis auxilium laturus sim, ultionemque cædis obscuræ suscepturus."

To aid the house of Laius, and on thee,
O Œdipus, avenge this deed of mystery?

ANTISTROPHE II.

Though Jove and Phœbus still are wise,
And still to them mankind are known,
Yet that the prophet views alone
Things unrevealed to mortal eyes—
I cannot judge: in wisdom's lore
Beyond his fellow man may soar;
But ne'er, till in my sight
His truth be proved, on those who slight his word
By me can censure or reproach be poured.
When, with destroying flight,
To Œdipus the fell Enchantress came,
His sage response redeemed my country's shame,
Then let my grateful heart such hideous charge
disclaim.

Enter CREON.

CREON. CHORUS.

Cr. O citizens, of that atrocious crime

With which the King doth charge me, late apprized,
Such charge I cannot brook. If, in the hour
Of general suffering, he suspect that I
Have sought to wrong him, or in word or act,
E'en life itself were valueless to me,
Thus coupled with dishonour; for this charge
Involves no trivial detriment, but seems
Of gravest import, were I deemed by thee
And by my friends a traitor to my country.

Ch. Nay, but from vehemence of wrath this charge
Burst rashly forth, not cool deliberate thought.

Cr. Whence could it seem, that, by our wiles
suborned,
The prophet framed these falsehoods?

Ch. So, indeed,
The King affirmed; but on what grounds, I know not.

Cr. With mind unwarped, and unperverted eye,
Did he thus charge me?

Ch. Sooth I cannot tell;
I do not scrutinize the acts of princes.
But lo! himself approaches from the palace.

Enter ŒDIPUS.

ŒDIPUS. CREON. CHORUS.

Œd. Ha! wherefore cam'st thou hither? Is thy
brow

So armed with bold presumption, that thou dar'st
Still tread our courts, a false convicted traitor,
Convicted in thy scheme to shed our blood,
And steal into a throne? Say, by the Gods,
What folly, what supineness, hast thou marked
In me, to form an enterprise like this?
Or didst thou think I had no eye to trace
Thy wiles — when traced, no firmness to revenge
them?

Doth not thy rash attempt proclaim thee senseless,
Without or friends or forces, to affect
The throne, by armies and by wealth attained?

Cr. Know'st thou what thou wouldst do? To
our reply

Grant first impartial audience; learn, then judge.

Œd. Aye, thou art mighty in the strife of words;
But I am slow to learn of one like thee,
Whom I have proved rebellious and perverse.

Cr. First do thou hear what I would fain reply.

Æd. So thou reply not thus, " I am no villain."

Cr. If thou dost deem this self-willed senseless
pride

Will aught avail thee, thou art most unwise.

Æd. And if thou deem'st to work thy kinsman
wrong,

And 'scape unpunished, thou art most unwise.

Cr. Thy words have show of justice; but explain
Wherein I thus have wronged thee.

Æd. Didst thou then,
Or didst thou not, persuade me here to summon
This holy and most venerable prophet?

Cr. I did, and still my counsel is the same.

Æd. How long a space hath now elapsed since
Laius —

Cr. What act performed? I cannot see thy drift.

Æd. Fell thus obscurely by a ruffian hand?

Cr. We must retrace a length of years obscure.

Æd. Did this sage prophet then profess his art?

Cr. Unmatched, as now, in wisdom, and esteemed
With equal reverence.

Æd. Did he, at that time,
Make mention of my name?

Cr. Never; at least,
Not in my presence.

Æd. 'Did ye not enforce
Strict inquisition for your murdered Lord?

Cr. How could we pass it by? Our search was
vain.

Æd. Why spake not then this sage diviner thus?

Cr. I know not, and strict silence would preserve
On points unknown.

Æd. One point, at least, thou know'st;
And, if true wisdom guide thee, wilt disclose it.

Cr. Name it! I will not aught I know deny.

Æd. Were not the prophet basely leagued with
thee,

He had not charged me with the death of Laius.

Cr. If thus he speaks, thou know'st. I claim in
turn

To ask of thee as thou hast asked of me.

Æd. Ask what thou wilt, I never shall be proved
A base assassin.

Cr. Is my sister thine,
Thine by the nuptial tie?

¹ This passage furnishes another refutation of the objection noticed above. It had never even entered into the mind of Œdipus, that the inquiry into the death of Laius could possibly be neglected; hence his ardour in the investigation, otherwise inexplicable, is satisfactorily accounted for.

Æd. To such a question

I cannot give denial.

Cr. Dost thou not

Divide with her the empire of the land ?

Æd. 'Tis my chief pride to grant her every wish.

Cr. Do not I hold an equal rank with both ?

Æd. Thence dost thou seem indeed a faithless
friend.

Cr. Not if thou weigh my words, as I weighed
thine,

With cool and temperate judgment. First reflect,

Who would prefer the terrors of a throne

To fearless sleep, with equal power combined ?

Nor I, nor any whom true wisdom guides,

Would seek the empty pageant of a crown,

Before the real potency of Kings.

Now, void of fears, I gain my wish from thee ;

Were I a King, full oft must I renounce it.

How, then, could empire be to me more dear

Than this serene, yet not less potent sway ?

I am not thus by flattering hope beguiled,

To quit substantial good for empty honour.

All now is pleasure ; all men court me now ;

They who desire thy favour seek my aid

To advocate their cause ; through me they gain

The boon solicited. And should I then
 Renounce such pleasures for the pomp of empire?
 So wild a scheme the prudent soul discards.
 Such plots I never loved, and would disdain
 To mingle with the guilty band who frame them.
 If thou dost seek a proof, to Delphi send,
 Ask if aright the oracle I brought thee.
 Shouldst thou detect me leaguings with the Seer
 To work thee wrong, be instant death my meed,
 Twice doomed,—by thy decree, and by mine own;
 But tax me not with guilt on vague suspicion.
 To deem the good unworthy, or account
 Alike the base and noble, is unjust.
 The man who drives an upright friend to exile,
 Doth wound himself no less, than if he struck
 At his own valued life. Of this, in time,
 Shalt thou be well convinced; long space it asks
 To prove the stainless honour of the just,
 One day suffices to detect a traitor.

Ch. Well hath he said, O King, to one forewarned
 Of falling; quick resolves are rarely safe.

Œd. When one is quick to frame insidious plots,
 I too have need of quickness to repel him.
 If I remain inactive, he will gain
 His traitorous end, while my slow cares avail not.

Cr. What is thy will?—To force me into exile?

Œd. Nay, exile shall not be thy doom, but death.

Cr. When thou hast proved what merits such a sentence.

Œd. Speak'st thou as one who meditates resistance?

Cr. I see thee swerve from wisdom.

Œd. Not unwise

In mine own cause.

Cr. Nor shouldst thou be in mine.

Œd. Thou art a villain.

Cr. If thou know'st no crime?—

Œd. Yet will I rule.

Cr. Thou shalt not tyrannize.

Œd. Thebes! Thebes!

Cr. ²And I, too, have a part in Thebes;

It is not thine alone.

Ch. Princes, forbear!

In happy moment, lo! from out the palace

² The validity of Creon's defence will be more duly appreciated, if we reflect that he had actually been raised to the throne upon the death of Laius, though he afterwards voluntarily resigned the crown in favour of the destroyer of the Sphinx, and deliverer of his country.

Jocasta comes ; her presence may appease
The growing rancour of this desperate strife.

Enter JOCASTA.

JOCASTA, ŒDIPUS, CREON, CHORUS.

Jo. Why, O unhappy princes! have ye raised
This unadvisèd strife, nor blush to wake
Your private feuds when public woes distract us?
Wilt thou not home, my lord, and thou, too, Creon,
Nor from slight cause excite severer ills?

Cr. My sister; Œdipus, thy husband, wills me
A dreadful doom. ³Two ills await my choice;
Or death, or exile from my native land.

Æd. I own it, Lady, since with basest arts
Have I exposed him plotting for my life.

³ Two ills await my choice. Yet Œdipus had refused the election, and peremptorily denounced the severer penalty;

Exile shall not be thy doom, but death.

We must suppose that the fiery arrogance of Œdipus is more strikingly displayed by its contrast to the mildness and forbearance of Creon.

Cr. If I have done it, if the charge be true,
May Heaven's dread curse descend at once to blast me.

Jo. Oh, by the Gods, my Œdipus, believe him ;
Revere the solemn test that seals his truth ;
Regard me, too, and these thy faithful friends.

STROPHE I.

Ch. ⁴ By prompt reflection swayed,
O King! I pray thee, yield.

Œd. Wherein shall I accord thy prayer?

Ch. Revere the prince, before
Not senseless proved, now bound by solemn oath.

Œd. Know'st thou what thou wouldst ask ?

Ch. I know.

Œd. Then speak.

Ch. Forbear to charge a friend with crimes un-
proved,
⁵ Who calls the Gods to witness for his truth.

⁴ This is the first variation of metre in the original. What difference was hereby occasioned in the recitation, it is perhaps vain to inquire. The probability appears, that the dialogue was accompanied with music, somewhat analogous to our own serious opera.

⁵ *Εναγῆν*: some read *αναγῆν*, *purum, labis expertem*. The word itself signifies " qui jurejurando se obstrinxit."

Œd. In such request, know well, thou dost but
seek

Thy monarch's death, or exile from the land.

STROPHE II.

Ch. No! by yon radiant Sun,
°Prince of the Powers above,
Low may I fall, a godless, friendless wretch,
If e'er my bosom harboured thought like this.
'Tis my poor country's woe
That rankles in my breast,
And now must strike a deeper blow,
If to our common ills be added yours.

Œd. Then let him hence, though certain death
ensue,

Or I be thrust with infamy to exile.
Thy plea awakes my sympathy, not his;
Go where he will, my quenchless hate attend him.

Cr. Even in relenting art thou stern; thy wrath
Too far indulged, most fearful. Souls like thine
Are the just authors of their own remorse.

Œd. Wilt thou not leave me, and depart?

° Προμοσ, dux, antesignanus.

Cr. I go,
Unknown by thee, but still by these deemed righteous.

[*Exit* CREON.]

ŒDIPUS, JOCASTA, CHORUS.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Ch. Why, Lady, dost thou pause
To lead thy lord away ?

Jo. First tell me what inflamed their wrath ?

Ch. Suspicion from dark words
Arose, and e'en a groundless charge offends.

Jo. By both preferred ?

Ch. Even so.

Jo. And what the cause ?

Ch. Enough, enough I deem it, when the state
Is plunged in grief, to cease where they too ceased.

Œd. Mark how thy speech, although I know
thee worthy,
Tends but to trouble and depress my heart !

ANTISTROPHE II.

Ch. My Lord, I spake not once
Unmeaning words alone,
But deem me void of wisdom, and bereft

Of sage reflection, if I fall from thee,
 Who, when in adverse storms
 My much-loved country strove,
 Didst steer her to a prosperous port.
 O, if thou canst, be thus our pilot now !

Jo. Nay, by the Gods, inform me too, O King !
 What to such rancour first inflamed thy wrath ?

Œd. I will, for I revere thee more than these ;
 'Twas Creon, who hath framed a treacherous wilè.

Jo. Say, if thou canst convict him of the crime.

Œd. He dares to tax me with the death of Laius.

Jo. Himself th' accuser, or apprized by others ?

Œd. He hath suborned that false malignant seer,
 Who claims free license for his slanderous tongue.

Jo. Dispel the thoughts that agitate thy breast.
 Hear me, and learn, that none of mortal birth
 Can trace the future by prophetic skill.

The proof of this concisely will I show.

An oracle to Laius once came forth,

(I will not say by Phœbus self denounced,

But by his ministers,) that fate ordained him

To perish by a son whom I should bear ;—

And yet, as rumour tells, where three ways meet,

By foreign ruffians was the monarch slain.

Our child was born, but ere three days had past,

Piercing the joints, he bound the infant's feet,
 And cast him forth by menial hands to die
 On an untrodden rock. In nought the word
 Of Phœbus was fulfilled ;—nor was the child
 His father's murderer, nor did Laius meet
 The doom he dreaded from a filial hand ;
 Yet thus the doughty oracles declared.
 Then heed them not. If Phœbus wills the search,
 He will himself the latent truth disclose.

Œd. O Lady, as I listen, how my thoughts
 Distempered wander, and my soul is torn!

Jo. What strange solicitude prompts words like
 these ?

Œd. I heard, or seemed to hear, that Laius fell
 Beneath the ruffian-band, where three ways meet.

Jo. So rumour whispered then, and still pro-
 claims.

Œd. What region was the scene of this dark
 deed ?

Jo. ⁷ Phocis the realm is called, the parted road
 From Delphi and from Daulia blends in one.

Œd. What time hath now elapsed since this befel ?

⁷ Delphi and Daulia are separated by Mount Parnassus in Phocis, between the Gulf of Crissa and the Gulf of Opus.

Jo. 'Twas through the state divulged, short time
ere thou

Didst rise in glory to the throne of Thebes.

Œd. Almighty Jove! to what hast thou reserved
me?

Jo. My Œdipus, what means this wild dismay?

Œd. Oh, ask not, ask not, tell me of this Laius.
What was his aspect, what his age, O speak!

Jo. His port was lofty, the first snows of age
Had tinged his locks, his form resembled thine.

Œd. Wretch that I am, on mine own head, it
seems,
Have I called down this dread destroying curse.

Jo. How say'st thou, King! I tremble to behold
thee.

Œd. I fear the prophet saw, alas! too clearly.
One question more, and all will be disclosed.

Jo. I tremble—but will truly tell thee all.

Œd. Went the King private, or with many guards
Encompassed, as became his regal sway?

Jo. His followers were but five—a herald one;
Sole rode the monarch in a single car.

This passage confirms our conjecture, page 28, that the crime was not committed within the territories of Thebes.

Œd. Alas! alas! 'tis all too evident;

But, Lady, who this sad narration brought?

Jo. A slave, the sole survivor of the train.

Œd. Is he now present in the palace?

Jo. No.

Returning thence, when he beheld thee crowned
 Monarch in Thebes, and Laius now no more,
 Clasp my hand, with suppliant prayers, he craved
 Some rural charge to tend our herds afar,
 Where never more might he behold the city.
 Such charge I gave assenting; though a slave,
 He well deserved a richer recompense.

Œd. How can we bid his instant presence hither?

Jo. Soon shall he come. Yet wherefore seek'st
 thou this?

Œd. I tremble, Lady, for myself, and much
 Hath now been said to wake my wish to see him.

Jo. He will arrive ere long. Meanwhile, O
 King,

I, too, am worthy to partake thy cares.

Œd. I will not this deny thee, to such height
 Of expectation raised; to whom more dear
 Could I confide my fortunes, than to thee?

My sire was Polybus, fair Corinth's Lord,
 My mother Merope, of Doric race;

I, too, was counted noblest of the state,
Till chanced a strange event that claimed my wonder,
Though scarce deserving of the care it caused.

One at a banquet in a drunken mood
Reviled me, as not sprung from Polybus.
Oppressed with weighty thoughts, throughout the
day

I scarce could curb my wrath, and on the next,
From both my parents warmly asked the truth.
They heard my tale, incensed with deepest rage
Against th' inebriate babbler. Though with them
I was delighted, yet th' opprobrious taunt
Burnt in my breast, and rankled in my soul.
Unknown to both I hastened to the shrine
Of Delphi; Phœbus, reckless of my prayer,
Dismissed me thence dishonoured; but denounced
A long, long train of dark and fearful sorrows;—
That I, in wedlock to my mother bound,
Should bring to light a race accursed of men,
And in a father's blood my hands embrue.
Hearing these bodings dire, I bade farewell
To the loved realm of Corinth, by the stars
My wandering course directing far away,
That never, never might I see the shame
Of those dread oracles fulfilled in me.

I passed those very regions in my course
Where fell the murdered monarch. To thee, Lady,
I will reveal the truth. As I pursued
My onward journey, nigh the triple path,
A herald there encountered me, with one
Borne, as thou said'st, in single car sublime.
The leader then, and that old chieftain too,
With violent impulse thrust me from the path ;
I struck the rude aggressor in mine anger,
But the old man observing, when I passed
Beside his chariot, with his double goad
Smote on my brow. Unequal was the meed
My hand returned. ⁸ I raised my vengeful staff,
And straight he rolled expiring from the car.
I slew the whole. But if this stranger prove
The murdered Laius, who of all mankind
Exists more deeply wretched than myself,
Oh ! who more hateful to th' avenging Gods ?
Nor citizen nor stranger to my need

⁸ Œdipus though, as we observed, much more unfortunate than guilty, cannot be wholly vindicated. When he had been apprised that he was destined to be the murderer of his father, ought he, on so trivial a provocation, to have revenged the insult with death? The plea of self-defence may palliate, but cannot justify, the deed.

Henceforth may grant the refuge of a home ;
 None may accost, but all must spurn me from them ;
 And I, O how unconscious, on myself
 Invoked the withering curse. I, by whose hand
 His blood was shed, pollute his nuptial couch—
 Am I not all abandoned, all defiled ?
 If I must fly, and, flying, ne'er behold
 My best-loved friends, or tread my natal earth,
 Or else am doomed, in most unnatural ties,
 To wed my mother, and my father slay,
 Good Polybus, who gave me life and nurture,
 Would he not rightly judge who deemed these woes
 The work of some inexorable God ?
 Never, O never, ye most holy Powers,
 May I behold that day. Oh may I sink
 To death's more friendly darkness, ere my life
 Be marked and sullied by a stain so foul.

Ch. Thy words, O King ! are fearful ; yet retain
 Thy hope, till from this herdsman thou hast
 learned.

Œd. I but await his presence, for in him
 Concentres all the hope that now is left me.

Jo. When he arrives, what is thy purpose next ?

Œd. I will inform thee ; if his tale agree
 With thine in all things, I escape the crime.

Jo. What of such moment did my words imply ?

Œd. Thou saidst, the man ascribed the death
of Laius

To banded ruffians ; if he still adhere
To this report, I am at once absolved ;—
The deed of numbers is no deed of one :
If he but name a single murderer,
'Tis but too plain the deadly act was mine.

Jo. But this, be well convinced, he then affirmed,
Nor can he now retract his former tale—
Not I alone, th' assembled state is witness.
If aught he change the tenour of his words,
Still, my good Lord, it cannot thence appear
That Laius fell, as Phœbus' voice foretold,
Slain by my son. Alas ! my hapless child
Slew not,—but perished ere his father fell.
⁹ So lightly do I hold each oracle,
No longer would I waste a thought on either.

⁹ It should here be remarked, that, to this period, nothing has occurred to criminate Jocasta. It was necessary, for the sake of reconciling the audience to her subsequent miseries and death, that she should not be altogether guiltless. With judgement not less discerning than the moral he inculcates is impressive, the poet has represented her indifferent to the

Œd. Nor can I blame thee, but with speed despatch
A summons to this herdsman,—linger not.

Jo. Straight will I send. But pass we now within.
Nought of thy pleasure shall be left undone.

[*Exeunt* JOCASTA and ŒDIPUS

Chorus.

STROPHE I.

O! be the lot for ever mine
Un sullied to maintain,
In act and word, with awe divine,
What potent laws ordain.
Laws spring from purer realms above,
Their father is th' Olympian Jove ;
Nor is their heaven-born might controuled
By aught of meaner mortal mould.
Ne'er shall oblivion veil their front sublime ;
Th' indwelling God is great, nor dreads the waste
of time.

Gods. Characters of unmixed good, as Shakspeare's Cordelia, and even our author's Antigone, have been found too affecting for representation.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Pride forms the Tyrant. If elate
 With power increased in vain,
 On which no prosperous issues wait,—
 Pride leads him on to gain
 The steep ascent,—then from the brow,
 Hurls him to ruin's gulf below.
 But ah! if aught of counsel sage
 May yet my country's wound assuage,
 By the kind Gods be favouring issue given—
 I will not cease to ask the bounteous aid of
 Heaven.

STROPHE II.

But if a haughty wretch proceed
 To vaunting word or daring deed,
 Who nor avenging Justice fears,
 Nor the pure shrines of Heaven reveres,
 Destruction be his meed,
 To guilt's ill-omened transports due ;—
 Unless in justice he pursue
 Just gains, from impious deeds refrain,—
 Nor madly grasp, with hand profane,
 When Heaven forbids the deed.

¹⁰ Who yet will curb in due controul
 The wildest wishes of his soul,
 If glory crown the guilty head;
 And why do I this hallowed chorus lead?

ANTISTROPHE II.

And never to the central shrine
 Will I repair with rites divine,
 Nor bend at Abæ's hallowed fane,
 Nor tread Olympia's courts again,
 Till this mysterious word
 To all its certain truth approve.—
 O Lord of Heaven, eternal Jove!
 If by thy sceptre all are swayed,
 Let not Oblivion's trackless shade
 Conceal this crime abhorred.—
 They spurn the prescient word of Heaven,
 In years long past, to Laius given,

¹⁰ Τίς ἔτι ποτ' ἐν τοῖσδ' ἀνῆρ
 Θυμῷ βέλη δέξεται
 Ψυχᾶς ἀμύνειν;

Quisnam, si ita se res habet, cupiditatum tela ab animo
 arcere volet.—Erfurdt.

No reverence is to Phœbus paid,
And the due honours of th' Immortals fade.

Re-enter JOCASTA.

JOCASTA. CHORUS.

Jo. Princes of Thebes, we deemed it meet to seek
The temples of the Gods, and in our hands
These votive wreaths, this odorous incense bear.
The soul of Œdipus on a wild sea
Of anxious care is tossed;—nor, as becomes
The prudent, weighs by former oracles
This late response, but lends a willing ear
To all who speak of terrors. Since my voice
Avails no more, Lycæan King, to thee
I fly, for thou art¹ nearest to our need,
And come in prayer a suppliant to thy shrine,

¹ "Αγκιστος γὰρ ἐστίν. Dr. Francklin renders these words in a metaphorical sense, "Near to help the wretched." There is no occasion to depart from the literal sense. The temple of Phœbus was probably situated nearest to the palace.

That thou mayst grant us thine auspicious aid ;
 Since all now tremble, when we thus behold
 Our very Pilot shuddering and appalled.

Enter CORINTHIAN.

JOCASTA, CORINTHIAN, CHORUS.

Co. Can ye inform me, strangers, where your
 King,

Great Œdipus, his regal state maintains ;
 Or, if ye know, where I may find the Monarch ?

Ch. These are th' imperial halls—he is within,—
 This is his wife, the mother of his children.

Co. Blest may she be, and ever with the blest
 Hold glad communion ; to her royal lord

² A most accomplished consort.

² Παντελής τέκνα ἔχουσα. Perfection in the marriage-state is when the nuptial bed is blessed with children. Hence the ἄνδρὸς τέλει δῶμα, and the Ζεὺ τέλει of Æschylus.—Potter.

This is the commencement of that περιπετεία, so highly extolled by the critics ; nothing can be more finely imagined, or more judiciously executed.

Jo. Equal joy

Attend thee, stranger,—thy kind greeting claims
This due return of courtesy. But say,
Whence cam'st thou to our Thebes, and what thy
tidings?

Co. Joy to thine house, O Lady! and thy Lord.

Jo. What joy?—and from what region art thou
come?

Co. From Corinth. At my words thou wilt rejoice;
Why should'st thou not—yet fond regrets will rise.

Jo. What dost thou mean, and whence this two-
fold influence?

Co. The assembled states of Isthmus, rumour tells,
Will choose thy Lord to mount the vacant throne.

Jo. How vacant? Reigns not Polybus in Corinth?

Co. No more,—his only kingdom is the tomb.

Jo. Mean'st thou, old man, that Polybus is dead?

Co. May I, too, perish if my words be false!

Jo. Haste, haste, attendant, and convey with speed
These tidings to your lord. Vain oracles!

Where are your bodings now? My Œdipus,
Fearing to slay this man, forsook his country;
Now Fate, and not *his* hand, hath laid him low.

Enter ŒDIPUS.

ŒDIPUS, JOCASTA, CORINTHIAN, CHORUS.

Œd. Why, my beloved Jocasta, hast thou sent
To bid my presence hither?

Jo. Hear this man—
Attend his tidings, and observe the end
Of these most true and reverend oracles.

Œd. Who is this stranger—with what message
charged?

Jo. He is from Corinth, thence despatched to tell
thee
That Polybus, thy father, is no more.

Œd. What sayst thou, stranger? Be thyself the
speaker.

Co. If in plain terms I first must tell thee, King,
Know, he hath gone the pathway to the tomb.

Œd. Died he by treason, or the chance of sickness?

Co. Slight ills dismiss the aged to their rest.

Œd. Then by disease, it seems, the monarch died.

Co. And bowed beneath a withering weight of
years.

Œd. Ha! is it thus? Then, Lady, who would
heed

The Pythian shrine oracular, or birds

Clanging in air, by whose vain auspices
 I was fore-doomed the murderer of my father?
 In the still silence of the tomb he sleeps,
 While I am here—the fatal sword untouched—
 Unless he languished for his absent child,
 And I was thus the author of his doom.
 Now in the grave he lies, and with him rest
 Those vain predictions, worthy of our scorn.

Jo. Did I not tell thee this before?

Œd. Thou didst—

But terror urged me onward.

Jo. Banish now

This vain solicitude.

Œd. Should I not fear

The dark pollution of my mother's bed?

Jo. Oh why should mortals fear, when fortune's
 sway

Rules all, and wariest foresight nought avails.

Best to live on unheeding, as thou mayst.

And dread not thou thy mother's lawless couch;

Oft is the soul dismayed by hideous dreams

Of guilt like this,—but life's rough path is found

Smoothest to him, who spurns these wild illusions.

Œd. I should admit the justice of thy plea,

Save that my mother lives ; while she survive,
Though thou speak'st well, I cannot choose but fear.

Jo. Proof strong and sure thy father's fate affords.

Œd. Strong, I confess ;—my fears are for the living.

Co. And by what woman are these terrors roused ?

Œd. By Merope, the wife of Polybus.

Co. And what, to her relating, thus alarms thee ?

Œd. Stranger, a dark and hideous oracle.

Co. May it be told ?—or shouldst thou not disclose it

To other ears ?

Œd. I may and will disclose it.

Phœbus foretold that I should wed my mother,
And shed with impious hand a father's blood.

For this I fled my own Corinthian towers

To seek a distant home—that home was blest ;

Though still I languished to embrace my parents.

Co. This fear then urged thee to renounce thy
country ?

Œd. Old man, I would not be a father's murderer.

Co. Then wherefore, since thy welfare I regard,
Should I forbear to rid thee of this terror ?

Œd. Do so, and rich shall be thy recompense.

Co. This hope impelled me here, that when our
state

Hails thee her monarch, I might win thy favour.

Œd. Ne'er will I seek the authors of my birth.

Co. 'Tis plain, my son, thou know'st not what
thou doest!

Œd. How! how! old man, by Heaven! unfold
thy meaning.

Co. If this preclude thee from returning home—

Œd. I fear lest Phœbus saw, alas! too clearly!

Co. If thou dost dread pollution from thy parents—

Œd. That restless dread for ever haunts my soul.

Co. Know, then, thy terrors all are causeless here.

Œd. How so? if of these parents I was born?

Co. But Polybus is nought allied to thee.

Œd. How say'st thou? was not Polybus my father?

Co. No more than I—our claims are equal here.

Œd. Had he who gave me life no nearer claim
Than thou, a stranger?

Co. Nor to him nor me

Ow'st thou thy birth.

Œd. Then wherefore did he grant

A son's beloved name?

Co. He from my hand

Received thee as a gift.

Œd. With such fond love

How could he cherish thus an alien child?

Co. His former childless state to this impelled him.

Œd. Gav'st thou a purchased slave, or thine own
child?

Co. I found thee in Cithæron's shadowy glades.

Œd. Why didst thou traverse those remoter vales?

Co. It was my charge to tend the mountain herds.

Œd. Wert thou a herdsman, and engaged for hire?

Co. I was, my son, but thy preserver too.

Œd. From what afflictions didst thou then pre-
serve me?

Co. This let thy scarred and swollen feet attest.

Œd. Ah! why dost thou revive a woe long passed?

Co. I loosed thy bound and perforated feet.

Œd. Such foul reproach mine infancy endured.

Co. From this event arose the name thou bear'st.

Œd. Was it a father's or a mother's act?

By the good Gods inform me!

Co. This I cannot—

He may know more, perchance, who gave thee to me.

Œd. Thou didst receive me then from other
hands,

Nor find me as by chance?

Co. No, to my hand

Another herdsman gave thee.

Œd. Who was he?

Canst thou inform me this?

Co. He was believed

A slave of Laius.

Œd. What! of him who erst

Ruled o'er this land?

Co. The same—this man to him

Discharged a herdsman's office.

Œd. Lives he yet

That I may see him?

Co. Ye—his countrymen—

Are best prepared this question to resolve.

Œd. Is there of you who now attend our presence

One who would know the herdsman he describes,

Familiar erst or here, or in the field?

Speak—for the time demands a prompt disclosure.

Ch. He is, I deem, no other than the man

Whom thou before didst summon from the fields.

This none can know more clearly than the Queen.

Œd. Think'st thou, O Queen, the man whose

presence late

We bade, is he of whom this stranger speaks?

Jo. Who—spake of whom?—Regard him not, nor dwell,

With vain remembrance, on unmeaning words!

Œd. Nay, Heaven forefend, when traces of my birth

Are thus unfolding, I should cease to follow.

Jo. Nay, by the Gods I charge thee! search no more, If life be precious still. Be it enough That I am most afflicted.

Œd. Cheer thee, lady!

⁴Though my descent were proved e'en trebly servile, No stain of infamy would light on thee.

Jo. Ah yield, I do conjure thee—seek no more.

Œd. I will not yield, till all be clearly known.

Jo. 'Tis for thy peace I warn thee—Yet be wise.

Œd. That very wisdom wounds my peace most deeply.

Jo. Unhappy—never mayst thou know thy birth.

⁴ Though my descent were proved e'en trebly servile. In the original, ἐὰν τρίτης ἐγὼ μητρὸς φανῶ τρίδελος, not if I were thrice a slave from a third mother; i. e. not if my mother, with her mother and grandmother, for three generations back, had been slaves.—Francklin.

Œd. Will none conduct this shepherd to our presence?

Leave her to triumph in her lordly race.

Jo. Woe, woe, unhappy! henceforth by that name
Alone can I address thee, and by that
Alone for ever.

[*Exit* JOCASTA.]

Ch. Whither, my good Lord,
Hath the Queen parted, urged by wild dismay?
I fear, I fear, lest this portentous silence
Be but the prelude to impending woe.

Œd. Let the storm burst, I reckon not. I will on
To trace my birth, though it be most obscure.
Pride swells her thus, for in a woman's breast
Pride reigns despotic, and she thinks foul scorn
Of my ignoble birth. I deem myself
The child of Fortune, in whose favouring smile
I shall not be dishonoured. She alone
Hath been my fostering parent; from low state
My kindred months have raised me into greatness.
Sprung from such lineage, none I heed beside,
Nor blush reluctant to explore my birth.

[*Exit* ŒDIPUS.]

Chorus.

STROPHE I.

If prophetic skill be mine,
 If aright my soul divine,
 By Olympus' brow I swear,
 Thou, Cithæron, shalt declare
 (Soon as mid to-morrow's sky
 Shines the rounded moon on high)
 The mystic word, and proudly own
 Great Œdipus thy fostered son !
 Then would we in sportive measure
 Lead to thee the dance of pleasure,
 For thy bounties richly poured,
 On our country's honoured Lord.
 Phœbus, Healing Power, to thee
 Pleasing may my presage be !

ANTISTROPHE I.

Which of all th' immortal host,
 Can, my son, thy lineage boast ?
 Did some ⁵ Mountain-Dryad fair,
 Thee to Pan the wanderer bear,

⁵ Ουγάτηρ Λοξίη. Ουγάτηρ does not here denote filia, a

Pan who roams the sylvan height ; —
 Or to Phœbus, Lord of Light,
 For the young God delighted roves
 O'er green hills crowned with shadowy groves.
 Did the King, Cyllene swaying,
 Did gay Bacchus ever straying
 Woods and lofty crags among,
 With the maids of sweetest song,
 Greet thee, his illustrious son,
 From some fair nymph of Helicon ?

Re-enter ŒDIPUS, CORINTHIAN.

ŒDIPUS, CORINTHIAN, CHORUS.

Œd. If aught I may conjecture, friends, of one
 With whom I ne'er held converse, I behold
 Th' expected herdsman : for his lengthened years
 Accord ; and those who lead him, I discern,
 For mine own menial train. But haply thou,
 To whom familiar erst his face hath been,
 Canst speak with more assurance.

daughter, but simply a maiden—" puella." So ἄλοχοι, simply *mulieres*.

Ch. Yea, I know him—

The herdsman he of Laius, in his charge
Proved to his Lord most faithful.

Œd. First, I ask

Of thee, Corinthian—is this man the same
Whom thou didst now describe?

Co. This is the man.

Enter HERDSMAN.

ŒDIPUS, CORINTHIAN, HERDSMAN, CHORUS.

Œd. Approach, old man! look on me, and reply
To my demand. Wert thou the slave of Laius?

Herd. I was his slave—bred in his house—not
purchased.

Œd. What office didst thou hold? what task^d dis-
charge?

Herd. My better part of life was passed in
tending

The monarch's flocks.

Œd. What regions wert thou then
Wont to frequent?

Herd. Cithæron, and the meads
Adjacent.

Œd. Dost thou e'er remember there
To have beheld this man?

Herd. What task performing—
Which man dost thou intend?

Œd. I mean this man
Here present; hadst thou converse with him there?

Herd. Not such, that I can instantly retrace it.

Co. No marvel this, O King! But I will soon
Revive events forgotten, for I know
He cannot but recal what time he fed
Two flocks, I one, in green Cithæron's vales.

⁶Three months we thus consorted, from the Spring
Till cold Arcturus brings the wintry blast.

To mine own stalls I then drove back my herds,
He to the stalls of Laius led his charge.

Say, are my words unwarranted by fact?

Herd. Thy tale is true, though told of times long
passed.

Co. Then answer. Dost thou recollect the babe

⁶ Three months, &c. Yet from Spring to the rising of Arcturus, which occurs, according to Pliny, eleven days before the autumnal equinox, there is an interval of six months. Can we reconcile this by supposing *ἑμμήνας χρόνος* to mean *seasons*?

Thou gav'st me there, as mine own child to cherish?

Herd. What wouldst thou? Whither do thy questions tend?

Co. This is that child, my friend, who stands before thee.

Herd. A curse light on thee! wilt thou not be silent?

Œd. Reprove him not, old man, for thine own words,

Far more than his, demand a stern reprover.

Herd. In what do I offend thee, my good Lord?

Œd. In that thou speak'st not plainly of the child Of whom he asks thee.

Herd. But he speaks in darkness,
Mere empty babbling.

Œd. If thou wilt not answer
To mild persuasion, force shall soon compel thee.

Herd. Oh! for the love of Heaven, respect mine age.

Œd. Will ye not seize and instant bind his hands?

Herd. Alas! what is my crime? what wouldst thou learn?

Œd. Didst thou commit to him the child he spake of?

Herd. I did:—O, had that moment been my last!

Œd. This shall be, if thou wilt not speak the truth.

Herd. And if I speak it, I am trebly lost.

Œd. This man, it seems, still struggles to elude us.

Herd. No, I confessed long since I gave the child.

Œd. And whence received? thine own, or from another?

Herd. No, not mine own; I from another's hand
Bare him.

Œd. And from what Theban, from what roof?

Herd. O, by the Gods! my Lord, inquire no further.

Œd. If I repeat th' inquiry, thou art lost.

Herd. The palace of King Laius gave him birth.

Œd. Sprung from a slave, or of the royal stock?

Herd. Ah! how I shrink to breathe the fatal truth.

Œd. And I to hear it; yet it must be heard.

Herd. The child was called the son of Laius; here
Thy royal consort can inform thee better.

Œd. Didst thou from her receive him?

Herd. Yea, O King!

Œd. And for what purpose?

Herd. That I might destroy him.

Œd. What—the unnatural mother?

Herd. She was awed

By woe-denouncing oracles.

Œd. What woe?

Herd. That he should prove the murderer of his
parents.

Œd. Why, then, to this old man thy charge
consign?

Herd. From pity, O my Lord. I deemed that he
To his own land would bear the child afar.
He saved him to despair. If thou art he
Of whom he spake, how dark a doom is thine!

Œd. Woe! woe! 'tis all too fatally unveiled.
Thou Light! O may I now behold thy beams
For the last time! Unhallowed was my birth,
In closest ties united, where such ties
Were most unnatural;—with that blood defiled,
From whose pollution most the heart recoils.

Exit ŒDIPUS.

Chorus.

STROPHE I.

Sad generations of mankind,
How oft your fleeting date I deem
Of vanity and woe combined!
For what is transport but a dream

That seems awhile to beam and bless,
Then wanes away to wretchedness ?
Thy fortunes, my unhappy lord,
Thy woes the mournful proof afford ;
And henceforth never shall my breast
Deem mortal blest.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Raised by strong hand and daring aim,
Sublime to glory's proudest height,
Who erst—Eternal Jove!—o'ercame
The harpy-taloned Maid of night
Chaunting dark strains—and stood the tower
Of Thebes in death's impending hour ;—
For this, O King, thy wisdom's meed,
My country's crown adorns thy head ;
For this her stately towers obey
Thy regal sway.

STROPHE II.

But now thy tale I hear,
Ah ! who so deeply sunk as thou ?
What horrors are thy portion now,
What hopeless toil severe ?
Alas for thee ! O King renowned !

'To one dark couch the son and sire
 Alike the nuptial union bound ;—
 How could that couch, in silence so profound,
 Bear such pollution dire ?

ANTISTROPHE II.

Time with all-searching eye
 Dragged thee reluctant into light,
 And doth on son and sire requite
 This foul unnatural tie.
 O had it ne'er been mine to see
 The son of Laius !—o'er thy doom
 I pour the plaints of sympathy.
 By thee, O Prince ! I rose to life ;—by thee
 Have closed mine eyes in gloom !

Enter MESSENGER.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Mess. O chiefs, most honoured of my native
 land,

¹ In the original, “ Cui unus et idem suffecit portus, quo filius et pater et sponsus exciperentur.”—Brunck. It is trusted, that the classical reader will excuse the absence of a *literal* translation in this passage, as he will readily appreciate the motives which occasioned its omission.

What horrors will ye hear, what woes behold,
 What pitying anguish suffer, if indeed
 Ye still revere the house of Labdacus.

²Did Phasis blend with Ister's mighty flood,
 Both could not wash the deadly taint away
 Of those dark deeds, which, latent in yon towers,
 Soon shall burst forth to day's abhorrent light,
 Spontaneous, unconstrained. Ills self-imposed
 With keener anguish wound the bleeding heart.

Ch. There wanted nought to aggravate the woes
 We knew already. What remains to tell?

Mess. What may be quickly told, and learnt as
 soon.

Hear, first,—the loved Jocasta is no more.

Ch. Ill-fated Queen! what caused her hapless
 doom?

Mess. She was herself the cause. Of these dark
 deeds

The worst is latent, since no eye beheld

² Crimes were imagined by the ancients to be expiated by river or sea water. So Æneas, in Virgil:

Me bello e tanto digressum et cæde recenti
 Attrectare nefas, donec me flumine vivo
 Abluero.

Its horrors; yet the tenour of her woes,
As memory can retrace them, thou shalt hear.

When, frantic with despair, she wildly rushed
Within the portal, to the nuptial couch,
Rending her hair with ruthless hands, she fled;
Then, entering, closely barred the doors within,
And on the long-departed Laius calls,
Making sad mention of that earlier son
By whom her Lord should perish, leaving her
To her own child to bear a lawless race;—
Then o'er that couch bewailed, where she brought
forth

A husband from a husband, sons from sons;
And then and there, I know not how, she perished.
For with wild clamours Œdipus rushed in,
Nor longer thought we of the hapless Queen;
For every eye on him was riveted.
On, on he hurried, raving for a sword,
Raving for her, his wife,—yet not his wife,
The mother of his children, and himself.
Infuriate thus, some demon urged him on,
We, who were present, spake not. With deep groans
Led by that viewless guide, he madly rushed
Against the two-fold portals, and beat down
The massive bolts, and burst into the chamber.

Suspended there his wretched wife we saw,
 Wreathed in the twisted cord. Soon as he marked
 Th' appalling sight, with agonizing groans
 He loosed the strangling noose ; but when on earth
 Her breathless corpse was laid,—oh, then ensued
 A hideous scene of horror. From her robe
 Tearing the golden clasps that bound her zone,
 Deep in his eyes the piercing point he plunged,
 Exclaiming thus,—that never, never more,
 Her should they see, the sufferings he endured,
 Or the dire deeds he wrought,—that, henceforth
 quenched

In outer darkness, ne'er should they behold
 Those whom to see beseemed him now no more ;—
 Nor know the forms he most desired to know.
 Thus, imprecating curses on his head,
 Again, again, and yet again, he struck,
 Raising his eye-lids, till the bleeding balls
 His cheek empurpled, nor in scanty flood
 Gushed the quick drops, but from his brow poured
 down

A shower of tears and crimson gore combined.
 Such storms of fate have burst alike on both—
 The wife, the husband, in one ruin whelmed—
 Their former state, which heretofore we deemed,

And justly too, most blessed ;—on this day
Is changed to wailing, horror, death, and worse
Than death, dishonour. Misery hath no name
For aught that blends not in his cup of sorrow.

Ch. Is there no pause of respite from his pangs ?

Mess. He calls aloud, with clamours wild and
shrill,

T' unbar the portals, and to all the Thebans,
Expose the guilty murderer of his father,
His mother's—Oh, I cannot, dare not breathe
His heart-appalling words : he bids them drive him
Far, far from Thebes, nor refuge still afford
To him, th' accursed, by himself condemned.
Yet ah, a guide and added strength he needs ;
His agony is more than he can bear.
Soon wilt thou see him. Lo ! the close-barred gates
Are bursting now asunder. Thou wilt soon
Behold a sight, that well might wake relenting
E'en in the bosom of remorseless hate.

Enter ŒDIPUS.

ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

Ch. O sight of grief to human eye—

The most appalling far of all
 On which I e'er have gazed.—Ill-fated King!
 What frenzy seized thee—what indignant God
 Hath heaped this sad extremity of woe
 On thy devoted head?—
 Alas, alas, unhappy! But mine eye
 Recoils to meet thee, though of much I pant
 To ask, and much to hear and to behold,
 Such dread thy pangs inspire.—

Æd. Woe! woe! unutterable woe!

I am indeed most wretched. Where, oh where
 Is the lost wanderer borne, and whence that voice
 That breaks upon mine ear?—

Where, Fortune, hast thou plunged me now?—

Ch. In horrors, from which eye and ear recoil.

STROPHE I.

Æd. O thou dense cloud

Of black and baleful darkness, deepening round,
 Boundless, eternal, and by hope uncheered!

Oh wretch, wretch, wretch! How piercing is the
 sting

Of frenzy, and the memory of the past!

Ch. No marvel if, in agonies like thine,
 Redoubled ills inflict a double wound.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Œd. What! thou, my friend,
 Thou only firm and faithful, who art still
 Regardful of the blind?—O misery!
 Though all is dark around me, still I hear,
 I know thy friendly accents through my darkness.

Ch. O wildly-daring, how couldst thou endure
 To mangle thus thine eyes,—what God impelled
 thee?

STROPHE II.

Œd. 'Twas Phœbus, Phœbus, O my friends, alone
 Who wrought my doom of woe,
 My hopeless agony;—
 But this dark deed no hand, save mine, hath dared.
³Yet what were sight to me,
 For whom all Nature wears one hue of blackness?

Ch. Alas! I can but own thy words most true.

STROPHE III.

Œd. What now remains to court

³ Shuddering I shrunk from Nature's face,
 Where every hue that charmed before,
 The blackness of my bosom wore.—BYRON.

My gaze, or wake my love,
 Henceforth what voice shall gladden my dull ear?
 Drive me to instant exile from your land,
 Drive me, O friends! this widely-blasting pest,
 This most accursed of men,
 And trebly hateful to the Powers above!

Ch. Wretched alike in soul as in thy doom!
 Would to the Gods that I had never known thee!

ANTISTROPHE II.

Œd. Perdition seize the wretch, in the wild wood,
 Who first my feet unbound,
 And from impending fate
 Released and rescued me,—unwelcome care!
 O had I perished then,
 Nor brought this ruin on myself,—my kindred!

Ch. Fain must I breathe an echo to thy prayer.

ANTISTROPHE III.

Œd. I had not then been doomed
 The murderer of my sire,
 Nor by mankind for lawless nuptials scorned—
 Now I am most defiled—the child of guilt—
 The sire of sons to her who calls *me* son.
 Whate'er of heavier woe,

In woe exists, that Œdipus must bear.

Ch. I know not how thy counsel to commend ;—
Better to die at once than pine in darkness.

Œd. If void of wisdom I have done this deed,
Spare now reproof and counsel ; both are vain.
Descending to the dead, I know not how
I could have borne to gaze upon my sire,
Or my unhappy mother ; for to them
Crimes dark as mine, not death can e'er atone.
And could the sight of my fair budding offspring,
Springing from whence they sprung, be sweet to me ?
Oh never with these eyes ! I could not gaze
On this fair city, these imperial towers,
Or e'en the hallowed temples of the Gods,
Of which, though once the noblest in our Thebes,
My own stern sentence hath for ever reft me !
Myself enjoining all to spurn afar
The wretch, proclaimed accursed by the Gods,
And sprung from Laius' stock. When I disclosed
Mine own dishonour, could I still behold
These with bold front and firm undrooping eye ?
Oh never, never ! Could I e'en obstruct
The avenues of sound, I would not cease
To rend this wretched body, till with sight
The power of hearing fled ; 'tis some relief

To lose the bitter sense of agony.
Oh why, Cithæron, didst thou yield me refuge,
Nor grant me swift destruction, that to men
I ne'er had shown the secret of my birth?
Oh Polybus, oh Corinth, and the home
Once fondly deemed my father's, what a form
Of specious glory but of latent ills
In me ye cherished, who am now revealed
The guilty child of parents not less guilty!
Ye triple ways, thou lone secluded dell,
Thou grove, and dark recess in that trine path,
Which from my hand imbibed a father's blood,
Ah do ye still remember the foul deeds
I wrought in your deep shade? then, here arriving,
What added guilt incurred? Thou fatal marriage,
Alas, most fatal, whence I drew my birth,
Whence sprung again a vile promiscuous brood,
Exposed to light, of fathers, brothers, sons;—
Whence too of kindred blood came sisters, wives,
And mothers—all that man accounts most guilty!
Yet, since to speak is evil, where to act
Was most unseemly, hide me, by the Gods,
Far from this land, or doom my instant death,
Or cast me to the deep—I reck not where—
So I may never blast your sight again.

Come, nor disdain to touch a hapless wretch ;—
 Comply, and fear not : these unequalled woes
 I, I alone, of all mankind, must bear.

Ch. He comes, to whom thy prayers were best
 preferred,

Creon—to counsel and to act are his,
 Who now is left sole monarch of the land.

Œd. Ah me ! and in what words shall I accost
 him ?

How can he yield due credence to my prayer,
 Who hath himself already proved me worthless ?

Enter CREON.

CREON, ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

Cr. I come not to insult thee, Œdipus,
 Or add recrimination to thy sorrows.
 But you, if nought of reverence ye retain
 For those of mortal birth, at least respect
 The all-sustaining flame of yon fair sun,
 Nor drag the dire pollution into light,
 Which nor the earth, nor heaven-descending rain,
 Nor day's broad light can evermore endure.
 Haste, and immure him instantly within,

For decency demands that kindred ears
Alone should listen to a kinsman's woes.

Æd. Now by the Gods, since thou hast passed
my hopes,

And, best thyself of men, dost freely come
To me the most abandoned, grant *one* boon—
Not for myself, but thee, I ask.—

Cr. What boon

Would'st thou of me so fervently implore?

Æd. Drive me from Thebes afar, where never
more

May I e'er hold communion with mankind.

Cr. This had I done, be well assured, but first
'Tis meet to ask the pleasure of the God.

Æd. That pleasure hath already been declared;
He dooms the impious parricide to death.

Cr. Thus hath he willed; yet in so dark a crisis
'Tis better far again to ask his pleasure.

Æd. Wilt thou consult him for a wretch like me?

Cr. Thy fall hath taught us to revere his truth.

Æd. I charge and will adjure thee to entomb
With decent rites the dead who lies within—
Such office best beseems thy kindred blood.
Nor longer let my native city deign
To grant me refuge in her friendly walls;

But drive me hence, to dwell on that wild mount,
My own Cithæron called, which erst my parents,
While yet I lived, designed my sepulchre;—
As they my death ordained, so let me die.

Too well I know, nor blight of keen disease,
Nor other ill could slay me. I was snatched
From death, to dare this more than deadly deed.
But as our fate began, so let us on.—

As for my children—for my sons, O Creon,
Take no solicitude—for they are men—

Where'er they roam, they cannot feel the pangs
Of piercing penury.—But, O! my daughters!—

My much loved daughters!—in the weak estate
Of virgin helplessness—who never dwelt

Apart from their loved father, and with whom
I ever shared my pomp—my joy—my all,—

Be these thy constant care, and grant me now
To clasp them, and bewail our common woes.

Assent, O King!—

O generous Monarch, while my hand may touch them,
I seem to hold, as though I saw them still.

What do I say?—

Ye Gods! my much loved children do I hear,
Wailing our woes?—hath pitying Creon sent
The dearest pledges of my love to bless me?

Are my words true?

Cr. They are. My care provided this delight,
Assured of old what joy their presence gave thee.

Œd. O be thou blest for this, and mayst thou find
The God a better guard than I have found him.
Where are ye, my sweet children? Come, O come,
To mine embrace, as to a brother's hands,
Which yet have quenched a father's eyes in darkness.
Your father, my poor children, (though unseen,
Unknown the deed,) by *her* who gave me life.
O'er you I weep—though never more, alas!
Can I behold you,—yet I know too well
That ye must linger on through life in sorrow,
While bitterest anguish waits you with mankind.
To what assembled crowds will ye resort,
What festive scenes, from which with downcast looks
Ye will not steal dejected to your home,
Yourselves more wept than that ideal woe?
And when in Beauty's vernal pride ye bloom,
Ah who, my daughters, who in nuptial tie
Will lead you to his house, nor heed the stain
Fixed on my wretched parents, and on yours?
What taint is wanting? First, your father slew
His father; then, in guilty wedlock linked
To his own mother, gave you birth, my children,

From the same source whence his own life he drew.
Thus will ye be reproached. Who then will wed
you?

None, none, my daughters—ye must pine, alas!
Deserted, and with nuptial rites unblessed.
Son of Meneceus, since thou now art left
Sole parent to these orphans, (we, who once
Bore that beloved name, in ruin whelmed,)
Ah leave them not, for they are still thy kindred,
To roam in friendless penury, unwedded ;—
Let not their misery equal their lost father's.
Ah pity them, so young, so innocent,
By every friend deserted, save by thee.
Assent, most noble Monarch, pledge thy hand.
And ye, my children, were your age mature
To heed instruction, much would I exhort you.—
Now would I breathe alone this parting prayer,
Where'er your destined home, may Heaven assign
A happier lot than your most wretched father's.

TROCHAICS.

Cr. Hold, for where doth grief transport thee?
to the palace now retreat.

Æd. I obey, though most reluctant.

Cr. All is well in season meet.

Æd. Knowst thou now my wish?

Cr. Unfold it—I due audience will accord.

Æd. Drive me from this land to exile.

Cr. To the God this prayer be poured.

Æd. To the Gods I am most hateful.

Cr. Thence thy wish thou soon shalt gain.

Æd. Meanst thou thus?

Cr. The word I mean not; but to speak
I would disdain.

Æd. Lead me hence without delaying.

Cr. Go—but leave thy children still.

Æd. Do not, do not tear them from me.

Cr. Aim not to achieve thy will,

What before thou didst accomplish, failed to bless
thy waning day.

Ch. Sons of Thebes, my native city, this great
Œdipus survey,

Who resolved the famed enigma, who for virtue far
renowned,

Nought of favour recked or fortune, with transcen-
dant glory crowned.

Mark him now, dismayed, degraded, tost on waves
of wildest woes;—

Think on this, short-sighted mortal, and till life's
deciding close,

Dare not to pronounce thy fellow truly happy, truly
blest,
Till the bounds of life passed over, yet unharmed,
he sinks to rest.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS.

THAT sublime sentiment of Sophocles, respecting
“Laws,” which occurs in the preceding tragedy,

Μέγας ἔν τέτοις Θεός, ἔδὲ γηράσκει,

“The Divinity is mighty within them, and waxes not old,”

may be applied, with the strictest propriety, to his own admirable genius, as displayed in the plan and execution of the drama now under consideration. The “Œdipus at Colonos” is indeed a phenomenon without rival or parallel in the records of literature. Though composed, if we admit the testimony of Cicero and Valerius Maximus, after the poet had completed his ninetieth year;—at an

age, when, in ordinary instances, as the corporeal powers of man become only “labour and sorrow,” so his mental energies are merged in imbecility and forgetfulness; this tragedy is inferior to none of our author’s productions in animation and interest, while for unaffected pathos and impressive morality it is superior to all. It constitutes a most satisfactory and appropriate sequel to the “Œdipus Tyrannus,” inasmuch as it supplies that *moral* effect, in which its precursor is unquestionably deficient. To behold an individual, like Œdipus, suffering on account of crimes into which he had been unconsciously betrayed by the very means which he had taken to avoid them, is a painful, if not an unnatural spectacle; and we derive little or no instruction from the calamities of one, who is punished rather from the caprice of the Gods, than for actual and deliberate transgression. But when we contemplate the same individual, as in the succeeding drama, enduring with patient resignation the unmerited anger of the Deities, and looking only to a future state of existence for deliverance and repose, we are admonished in the most forcible manner, that, as it is the first duty of man to avoid the perpetration of crime, so the most accep-

table expiation of guilt, is a meek and unrepining submission to its penalty.

It may also be added, that if, according to the trite proverb, example be the most impressive and useful mode of instruction, then is this drama more than commonly instructive. For the characters which it delineates are of universal occurrence. If there are few monarchs, on whom it can devolve to imitate the dignified magnanimity of Theseus, there are many sufferers, who may practise the resignation of Œdipus, and many daughters, who may emulate the piety of Antigone. In reference to the last-mentioned character, indeed, we may unhesitatingly affirm, that in no one uninspired composition is there presented a more natural and affecting delineation of filial virtue, than is here depicted in the daughter of Œdipus.

But though the softer emotions—love, and tenderness, and pity—are the predominant characteristics of this tragedy, the poet, in his management of the catastrophe, has soared to the loftiest elevation of grandeur and sublimity. As the life of Œdipus had been extraordinary and eventful,

so was his death to be awful and mysterious. He had not lived, neither could he die, like an ordinary mortal. He bore a " charmed life ;" a life exempted, as it were, from the common assaults of mortality, and only to be terminated by some signal and unprecedented interposition of Divinity. Such is indeed the "*dignus vindice nodus*," which sanctions supernatural interference. Accordingly, the earth convulsed and trembling, the appalling and incessant thunder, the glare of lightning, and the howling of the storm, the solemn intervals of silence, in which the voice of some invisible messenger is heard to murmur from beneath a summons to the devoted monarch, the consternation even of the resolute and intrepid Theseus, all these tend to produce a scene, which, for loftiness of conception and magnificence of execution, is not excelled by any relic of the Grecian drama, even in the compositions of the wild and terrific Æschylus.

This drama is also peculiarly valuable, on account of the light which it throws upon the religious observances of antiquity, of which the expiatory homage of Œdipus in the grove of the Fu-

ries is a conspicuous instance. Should the English reader consider these descriptions somewhat too tedious and circumstantial, he may perhaps be conciliated by the reflection, that the ancient drama,—how unlike the modern!—was the popular vehicle of religious as well as moral instruction. He will at least be recompensed for the labour of perusal, if the contemplation of the rigid devotion with which the heathen performed the services of *their* religion, should furnish him with an additional motive for the more zealous and conscientious fulfilment of the duties of his *own*.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ŒDIPUS.

ANTIGONE, }
ISMENE, } DAUGHTERS OF ŒDIPUS.

THESEUS, KING OF ATHENS.

CREON.

POLYNICES, SON OF ŒDIPUS.

ATHENIAN.

MESSENGER.

CHORUS OF AGED INHABITANTS OF COLONOS.

ŒDIPUS AT COLONOS.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

Œd. Say, daughter of a blind and aged sire,
Antigone, what region have we reached,
Or whose the city? Who will here extend
A scanty pittance for the passing day
To the poor wandering Œdipus, who asks
But for a little, and receiving less
Ev'n than that little, counts the boon enough.
For stern afflictions, long-protracted years,
And fortitude of soul, have taught me patience.
But now, my child, if haply thou discern
One resting on unconsecrated seats,

Or by the hallowed groves, there rest my steps,
 And seat me there, that thus we may inquire
 What land hath given us refuge? Strangers here
 We seek the natives of the state, to learn,
 And what we hear, perform.

Ant. O Œdipus,
 My much-afflicted father, the high towers,
 Which girt the city, rise in distant view :
 The spot on which we stand, I deem, is holy.
 Here laurels, olives, vines, in one green shade
 Are close inwoven ; and within the grove
 The nightingales make frequent melody.
 Rest now thy faltering limbs on this rude stone ;
 Such lengthened wanderings ill befit thine age.

Œd. Then seat me here, and watch beside the
 blind.

Ant. That mournful office time too well hath
 taught me.

Œd. Canst thou then tell me on what place we stand ?

Ant. The land is that of Athens ; but the spot
 I know not ; this each passing traveller
 Hath told already. Wilt thou I depart
 To question of the place ?

Œd. Yea, if there be
 Inhabitants, my daughter, to inform thee.

Ant. There are inhabitants ; but now my task
Is needless, for I see a stranger near us.

Œd. And with quick pace is he advancing hither?

Ant. The man e'en now hath reached us ; what
thou wilt

Demand ;—for he is present to inform thee.

Enter an ATHENIAN.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ATHENIAN.

Œd. Stranger, apprised by her, whose sight alone
Guides both herself and me, that thou art here
Arrived in welcome moment to unfold
What much we long to know—

Ath. Ere thou dost urge
Inquiry further, quit that sacred seat ;
No foot of man may tread this hallowed soil.

Œd. What is the place,—devoted to what Power?

Ath. From mortal touch and mortal dwelling pure
Is that mysterious grove ; ¹the awful Powers,

¹ Εμφόβοι Θεαί, the venerable Goddesses, or Furies ; by name, Alecto, Tisiphone, and Megæra. They were also

Daughters of Earth and Darkness, dwell within.

Œd. By what most holy name should I invoke
 them?

Ath. We call them in this land th' Eumenides,
 The all-beholding Powers; in other lands,
 By various lofty titles men adore them.

Œd. Propitious now may they receive their
 suppliant,
 That never may I quit their fated seat.

Ath. What may this mean?

Œd. A symbol of my doom.

Ath. 'Twere bold in me to force thee from the
 spot,

Ere thus the mandate of the state enjoin.

Œd. O stranger, by the Gods, disdain thou not
 To answer all a wretched wanderer asks thee.

Ath. Speak; and from me thou shalt not meet
 disdain.

Œd. What is the region, then, which now re-
 ceives us?

styled the Eumenides, or "Benevolent." The reader, who is curious to learn in what manner they acquired an appellation so incongruous with the offices usually ascribed to them, may consult the "Eumenides" of Æschylus.

Ath. Far as I know, thou too shalt hear the whole.
 The place is holy all. Here reigns supreme
 The mighty Neptune; here the Power of Flame,²
 The Titan-God, Prometheus; where thy feet
 Are resting now, is called the brazen way,
 The bulwark of great Athens; while the fields
 Adjacent claim for their illustrious Lord
 Colonus the equestrian, and from him
 The circling regions all deduce their name.
 Such are the things I tell thee; not alone
 By words ennobled, but familiar use.

Œd. Do any dwell around this hallowed spot?

Ath. Yes, they who from the God their name derive.

*Œd.*³ Is there a king, or bear the people sway?

Ath. The King who rules the city rules here also.

² Πυρφόρος Θεός. This appellation is peculiarly applicable to Prometheus; because, as we are told by Pausanias, the youths, who contended in the race, called ἀγών λαμπαδέχως, lighted their torches at his altar here mentioned, and ran towards the city.—Potter.

³ It may seem surprising, that Œdipus, who had so long been Monarch of Thebes, should not know whether a neighbouring state was a republic or a monarchy; but it will afterwards appear, that Œdipus only asks this question for a feint, that he may not be known, and in order to gain fuller intelligence.—Brumoy.

Œd. Stands his high throne in equity and might?

Ath. His name may answer this. 'Tis Theseus, son
Of Ægeus, late our Lord.

Œd. Is there of you

One who will bear our message to his ear?

Ath. Aught to recount, or ask his presence hither?

Œd. That for a trivial succour he may reap
A rich reward.

Ath. Reward! and what reward

Can a blind wanderer on a king confer?

Œd. The things we would reveal are not less clear
Than if our sight had traced them.

Ath. Know'st thou, stranger,

That thou art not deceived? and yet thou seem'st
In all, except thy fortunes, truly noble.

Remain where now I see thee, till I seek

Those who inhabit the encircling meads,

Not the far city, and relate my tale.

Be it their task to judge, if in this grove

Thou mayst remain, or must again depart.

[*Exit* ATHENIAN.]

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

Œd. My daughter, is the stranger now departed?

Ant. He is, my father; all around is still.

Speak what thou list, for I alone am nigh thee.

Œd. Dread Powers of fearful aspect, since *your*
seats

Have lent my wearied limbs their first repose,
Be not relentless or to me or Phœbus,
Who, when his voice my countless woes denounced,
Foretold a welcome though a distant end,
When I should reach the destined realm—where find
A rest and refuge in the sheltering grove
Of venerable Powers—that there my course
Of sorrow and of agony should close;
With rich reward to those who should receive me,
To those, who thrust me from their land, destruction;
And that undoubted signals should proclaim
The hour ordained by fate—or earthquake's roar,
Thunders, or lightnings of Almighty Jove.
Hence well I know 'twas your own augury,
That to this hallowed grove my wanderings led.
I had not else thus lighted first on you,

4The wine-aborring, pure myself from wine,
 And on this rude yet awful seat reclined.
 Now, gracious Powers, Apollo's word confirm,
 And grant at length a limit to my woes,
 If I have felt enough of wretchedness,—
 The slave of miseries far beyond the lot
 To man's sad race assigned. Come, then, O come,
 Propitious daughters of primeval Night;
 And thou, from thine own patron Pallas named,
 Fair Athens, noblest of our Grecian states;
 Pity the shade of wretched Œdipus;
 Alas! I am not now what I have been.

Ant. Cease, cease. I see some aged men advance,
 Perchance with purpose to explore thy seat.

Œd. I will forbear. Conduct me from the path,
 And screen me in the grove, that I may learn
 Their secret conference. Knowledge thus obtained
 May best direct us how to act with prudence.

[*Exeunt* ŒDIPUS and ANTIGONE.]

4 Ἀοίνοις. Wine was never used in the sacrifices offered to the Furies. Hence the Chorus, in enjoining Œdipus to propitiate the Goddesses, expressly command him, μηδὲ προσφέρειν μέθυ, not to present wine.

Chorus.

STROPHE.

Look ! look ! who was he ? where abides he now ?
 Or whither from the spot hath fled,
⁵ Restless, most restless of mankind ?
 Dost thou behold him ? Search around,
 And shout on every side.
 Who—who is this sad aged wanderer ?
 Doubtless of foreign land, or his rash foot
 Had never trod the grove
 Of those unconquered Virgin-Powers,
 Whose name we tremble but to breathe,
 Whose mystic shrine we pass
 With far-averted eye,
 And pondering, silent and devout,
 On happier omens there.

⁵ Ἀκορέσιτος. Literally, according to Brunck's interpretation, most insatiable. The translator confesses himself at a loss to comprehend the full meaning of this epithet; he has therefore adopted the rendering of Potter, "most restless," in preference to that of Francklin, who has "most prophane."

But rumour tells that one hath now arrived,
 Revering not the laws,
 Whom I have sought with keen observant glance
 Throughout the sacred grove,
 Yet still he mocks my search.

Enter ŒDIPUS and ANTIGONE.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

Œd. Behold him here ; for by your words I know
 I am the man ye seek.

Ch. Ah me ! to hear and to behold how fearful !

Œd. O deem me not a °scorner of your laws.

Ch. Protector Jove, who is this aged man ?

Œd. One on whose lot no favouring Power hath
 smiled

Ye rulers of the land !

⁶ "Ανόμων. The term "outlaw," which Francklin has selected as peculiarly appropriate, does not appear to give the precise signification of the original word. It refers not so much to one "whom the laws of his country have expelled from all the benefits and privileges of society," as to one who does not recognise or regard the sanction of the laws. It would, perhaps, be more appropriately rendered by the word "lawless."

Be this the proof,—I had not wandered else,
 Led by another's eye,
 Or leaned, though weighty, on so frail a stay.

ANTISTROPHE.

Ch. Woe! woe! unhappy! thou, it seems, art
 doomed
 To pine with sightless orbs, oppressed
 By years, and bowed with wretchedness.
 Yet, if my power avail, to woe
 Thou shalt not add *this* curse;
 For thou hast passed, far passed, the bound assigned.
 Ah! tread not thou that green and hallowed grove,
 Where with the honied draught
 Commingling, its pure limpid stream
 The full and flowing goblet pours.
 This, hapless stranger, this
 With cautious step beware.
 Recede—depart—a lengthened space
 Remains between us still.
 Dost thou not hear, unhappy wanderer?
 If thou hast aught to ask
 In conference, quit that sacred spot,
 And where the laws allow
 Demand; till then refrain.

Œd. What, O my daughter! should we now
resolve?

Ant. Father, we must obey the citizens,
And yield, as fits our state, without reluctance.

Œd. Sustain me then.

Ant. My hand e'en now sustains thee.

Œd. O strangers, wrong me not,
Since, yielding now, I quit the sacred seat.

Ch. Nay, from that very seat, old man,
Know, none shall force thee.

Œd. Should I yet advance?

Ch. Yea, forward.

Œd. Forward still?

Ch. Maiden, do thou his footsteps onward guide.
Thou seest the bound prescribed.

Ant. Follow me then, with dark and faltering step;
Follow, my father, whither now I lead thee.

A stranger in a foreign land,

O thou of many woes!

Whate'er the state abhors

Endure to hate, and what it wills, reverse.

Œd. Then lead me, O my child, where guiltless all

We may securely speak,

And unoffending hear,

Nor strive we more with stern necessity.

Ch. Stop ! nor beyond the rocky pavement aught
Thy venturous foot advance.

Œd. Thus far ?

Ch. Enough ; thou hear'st—enough !

Œd. May I now sit ?

Ch. On the crag's sloping verge
Cautious with reverent awe thy form incline.

Ant. Father, 'tis mine, in silent tenderness,
Alas ! how sad a task !

To guide thy dark and dubious steps.

On my beloved hand

Rest thy weak powerless frame.

Œd. O doom of abject misery !

Ch. Since thou hast now obeyed, ill-fated man,
Disclose who gave thee birth,
What mighty woe constrains thee thus to roam,
And where thy country ?—

Œd. Strangers, I have no country—Ask no more.

Ch. Why thus evade, old man ?

Œd. Ask not, I pray thee, ask not of my race,
Nor question aught beyond.

Ch. Ha ! what means this ?

Œd. Dire is my race.

Ch. Yet speak.

Œd. Ah me, my daughter, how can I reply ?

Ch. Say of what line thou cam'st,

Who, stranger, was thy sire ?

Œd. What shall I do, my daughter? Woe is me !

Ant. Speak ; since the hand of fate lies heavy
on thee.

Œd. Then will I speak ; concealment 'vails not now.

Ch. Thou tarriest long ; but speed—at once reply.

Œd. Know ye a certain child of Laius ?

Ch. Ha !

Œd. Sprung from the race of Labdacus ?

Ch. Great Jove !

Œd. The hapless Œdipus ?—

Ch. Art thou that wretch ?

Œd. Oh, start not thus appalled. I am, I am.

Ch. Alas !

Œd. I am most wretched.

Ch. Gracious Heaven !

Œd. What darker doom, my daughter, now
impends ?

Ch. Away, away, and quit my land for ever.

Œd. What thou hast promised how wilt thou fulfil ?

Ch. Nay, Heaven's avenging justice smites not him

Who wreaks but wrong for wrong ;

And fraud repaid with fraud,

On the false wretch, who first deceived,

ἀπὸ τῆς δ' αἰτίας
πᾶσι σπέρματι σπέρμα παρὰ βυλλομῆ-
να πόνον ἐν χερσὶν ἀπιπύλλου ἐ-
χεν.

Brings sorrow, not success.

Thou from these seats, once more
An outcast, speed thee—speed thee from the land,
Lest thine unhallowed presence blast the city.

Ant. O venerable strangers, though ye shrunk
Recoiling from the tale

Of my poor aged sire,
Speaking of dark involuntary deeds ;
I do conjure you, turn not thus from me,
Me, while in suppliant anguish, I implore
Compassion for a father, and regard
Your steadfast gaze with unaverted eye.

Ah! deem me now as one
Of your own kindred, and let pity wake
To aid the lost. On you, as on the Gods,
Our hopes depend. Oh! then relent, and grant
This unexpected boon.

I here adjure you by each hallowed tie,
Your child, your wife, your duty, and your God.
Where will ye find the man who can escape,
When Fate's stern hand constrains him to despair?

Ch. Know, child of Œdipus, we pity thee,
Nor gaze relentless on thy woe-worn sire ;
But we revere the Gods, nor dare rescind
The firm decision of our former mandate.

Œd. What then doth Glory's vaunted name avail,
What the fair honours of illustrious fame,
Unproved by deeds as noble? Rumour boasts
Of Athens, most observant of the Gods,
Athens alone, of all our states, the first
To save the stranger, and the lost to aid.
What are those vaunts to me? Ye from those seats
Allured, and now expel me from your land,
Awed by a name alone. It is not me,
Nor yet my deeds ye fear; for in those deeds
I have but suffered—not inflicted—wrong,
If I may dare my wretched parents name,
For whom ye thus contemn me. This I know
Full well. And shall I then be foully branded
Base e'en by nature, when my sole offence
Is—to have borne injustice, and revenged it?
Nay, had I e'en been conscious of the crime,
I were not thus abandoned. But I went,
Oh how unconscious of the path I trod!
But much have I endured from those who knew
The fearful wreck they wrought. By the great Gods,
I now adjure you, strangers, at your will
Hither removed, O save me, save me here,
Nor, while ye think to venerate your Gods,
Contemn their holiest laws. Know, while they gaze

Approving on the righteous, they behold
 The impious too, and guilt shall never win
 Escape or shelter from the wrath of Heaven.
 O then forbear to dim the radiant fame
 Of generous Athens, leaguings with the lawless ;
 But as, relying on thy plighted faith,
 Thou hast received me, save and shield me still,
 Nor spurn with cold contempt this abject frame,
 Thus worn and wasted by consuming woes.
 Sacred I come, and pious, charged alone
 With blessings to your state; and when your King,
 Whoe'er he be, is present to my tale,
 I will inform thee all;—till he arrive
 Insult me not.

Ch. Thine arguments, old man,
 Are urged by weighty reasonings, and constrain me
 Much to revere thee. Things of import high
 Thy words involve. Be it enough for me
 To wait the wise decision of our monarch.

Œd. Where, strangers, doth your monarch hold
 his court?

Ch. In his ancestral city; and the man
 Who saw thee first, and bade my presence here,
 Passed with like tidings to the monarch charged.

Œd. Will he then deem me worthy of regard,

And deign his audience to a blind old man?

Ch. Doubtless, when he shall hear thy name.

Œd. And who

Will be the bearer of a word like this?

Ch. ⁷Long have thy wanderings been, and travellers soon
vellers soon

Diffuse their tales afar; these he will hear,

And, be assured, will come. Widely, old man,

Thy fame is blazoned; though his step were slow,

Thy name would urge him to redoubling speed.

Œd. O! be his coming prosperous to his state,
Prosperous to me. What man of virtuous deeds
Befriendeth not himself?

Ant. Almighty Jove!

What shall I say, and whither lead my thoughts?

Œd. What mean'st thou, my Antigone?

Ant. I see

A woman, on a fleet Sicilian steed,

Advancing hither; from the sun's full beams

A close Thessalian bonnet shades her brow.

⁷ Μακρὰ κέλευθος. Potter interprets these words to signify, that Œdipus had advanced far into the Athenian territories. Certainly they cannot refer to the distance between Colonos and Athens, which did not exceed ten stadia.

What shall I say? Oh! is it she indeed,
 Or do my fond imaginings deceive me?
 Again I doubt and am assured by turns,
 Uncertain what to think.—My doubts are o'er;
 I know her now; that sweet and welcome smile
 Hath scattered all misgivings, and I see
 'Tis she, my dear, my ever-loved Ismene.

Œd. What hast thou said, my daughter?

Ant. That I see

Thy child, my father, my dear sister too;
 A moment—and her accents will assure thee.

Enter ISMENE.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

Is. O ye, the names most treasured in my heart,
 My father and my sister, though in pain
 I traced your wanderings, now a keener grief
 Dims my sad eye while gazing on your sorrows.

Œd. And art thou here, my child?

Is. Unhappy father!

Œd. Sprung from my blood—

Is. To share thy miseries!

Œd. And art thou come?

Is. Not without desperate peril.

Œd. Embrace me, dearest child.

Is. In one fond clasp

I thus embrace you both.

Œd. Her, too, and me.

Is. Myself the third in sorrow.

Œd. O my child,

What brought thee hither?

Is. Anxious thought for thee.

Œd. Concern for *me*!

Is. Yea, fraught with weighty tidings,

And unattended, save by this true slave,

Alone of all yet faithful.

Œd. Where are now

Thy brothers, nerved by youth for martial toils?

Is. They are, where Fate constrains, in darkest
peril!

Œd. How have they bowed their manners and
their mind

To the base customs of inglorious Egypt!

Where men, immured at home, direct the loom,

While in the field their women still procure

The sustenance of life. Thus too of you,

My children, those whom best such toil behoved

Like timid maids, rest idly in their home ;
While ye, my daughters, in their stead partake
A wretched father's sorrows. She, indeed,

[To ANTIGONE.

Since feebler childhood passed, and blooming youth
Breathed vigour through her frame, still on my path
Attendant, ever wanders where I roam,
Guides my weak steps, and oft through pathless wilds
Strays with unsandalled foot, bereft of food,
Endures the frequent showers and sultry sun,
Nor heeds the splendours of a kingly board,
So her fond care may tend a father's need.

Thou too, Ismene, oft unknown to Thebes
Hast left thy home, to tell thy wandering sire
The oracles relating to his doom ;
And when they thrust me from my native land,
Didst thou stand forth, my firm and faithful guide.
And now, beloved daughter, to thy sire
What errand dost thou bear ? what weighty cause
Moved thee to quit thy home ? Thou dost not come,
Full well I know, with serious charge unfraught,
And much I fear lest new alarms impend.

Is. I will not tell thee, father, all the toils,
The ills I bore in seeking thine abode ;

These now are vanquished,—and 'twere worse than
vain

Once more to waken, by recounting, woes.
My errand here was to relate the ills
In which thy hapless sons are now immersed.
It seemed at first their only wish to yield
The throne to Creon, nor pollute the state,
Weighing the curse entailed on all their race,
Which plunged in ruin thy devoted house.
Now by some God, or frenzy of the mind,
Unhappy pair! perverted, mutual strife
Fires them to rancour, struggling for the throne.
Reckless of natural rights, the younger spurns
His elder, Polynices, and expels him
Both from his rightful throne and father-land.
He, as the voice of Rumour widely tells,
Fled to the vales of Argos, and contracts
A new alliance; arms his martial friends;
And vaunts that Argos shall requite his wrongs
On guilty Thebes, and raise his name to heaven.
No vague and vain reports are these, my father,
But facts too surely proved. But when the Gods
Will look in mercy on thy lengthened woes,
Alas! I cannot learn.

Œd. Hast thou then hope,
That Heaven will yet regard, and save me still?

Is. I have, my father; for I firmly trust
The recent voice oracular.

Œd. What voice?
What, daughter, hath it presaged?

Is. That an hour
Will come when Thebes shall seek thee, living still,
Or dead, for her deliverance.

Œd. Who can look
For prosperous fortune to a wretch like me?

Is. The oracles proclaim *thou* art their might.

Œd. I deemed that I was nothing; am I then
Once more a man?

Is. The Gods exalt thee now;
Before—they willed thy downfall.

Œd. What avails it
To raise in age the wretch whose youth they blasted?

Is. Know, for this cause will Creon quickly come.

Œd. With what intent, my daughter? tell me all.

Is. That near the Theban confines they may hold
thee,
Though ne'er allowed to pass the sacred bound.

Œd. What can one prostrate at their gate avail
them?

Is. Thy tomb, if reared in other lands, to them
Would prove most fatal.

Œd. Though the God withheld
His certain presage, this were promptly learnt.

Is. And therefore seek the Thebans to confine thee
Near their own realms, not thine own master there.

Œd. Would they inter me too in Theban ground?

Is. This must not be; the kindred blood forbids.

Œd. Then never, never, shall they work their will.

Is. An hour must come when Thebes shall rue
thy vengeance.

Œd. What strange event, my child, shall work
this marvel?

Is. Thy quenchless wrath, when round thy tomb
they stand.

Œd. From whom didst thou these oracles receive?

Is. From those who late returned from Delphi's
shrine.

Œd. Hath then Apollo thus foretold of me?

Is. So those declared, who came but now to Thebes.

Œd. Which of my shameless sons heard aught
of this?

Is. Each heard alike, and both must know it well.

Œd. Yet those degenerate wretches, warned of this,
Could grasp at empire, and neglect a father.

Is. I grieve to hear such tidings,—yet I bear them.

Œd. Ne'er may the Gods extinguish the fierce flames

Of this dread fatal strife ; but to my will
Award the issue of that deadly feud,
Which now with equal weapons they prepare :
So should the proud usurper vaunt no more
His sceptre and his throne, nor e'er to Thebes
Should he, who left his native towers, return.
They, they at least, nor succoured nor retained
Their wretched father, from his country spurned
With foul dishonour ; but assenting joined
In the stern edict which proclaimed me exile.
Thou wilt reply, to mine own earnest prayer
The state that melancholy boon assigned :
But 'tis not thus ;—on that disastrous day,
When frenzy fired my soul, and all I asked
Was but to die, and hide my shame for ever,
Crushed by o'erwhelming rocks ;—no friendly hand
Was stretched to rid me of the life I hated ;
But when the lenient hand of time had soothed
Despair to resignation, and I learned
That mine own desperate frenzy had inflicted
A wound more piercing than the crime deserved ;

Then, then, the city thrust me sternly forth
To most reluctant exile ; and these sons,
My noble offspring, who had power to aid
Their father in his need, that power withheld,
Deigned not to raise a word in my defence ;
But drove me out a poor unfriended outcast.
While by these virgins, far as their weak sex
Avails to aid me, all hath been supplied,—
Meet sustenance, serene though lowly rest,
And all the tender cares of duteous love ;
⁸ While my base sons with impious ardour grasp
Crowns, sceptres, kingdoms, and forget a father.
But never shall they gain support from me,
Nor shall they flourish on the throne of Thebes
In glad and prosperous grandeur ; this I know,
Hearing these oracles, and pondering well
The sure response by Phœbus breathed of old.
And let them send their Creon, or some chief
As potent and as base, to seek me here ;

⁸ In extenuation of the rancorous malediction of Œdipus, it should be observed, that the godlike doctrine of the forgiveness of injuries obtained no place in the heathen systems of morality, where revenge was accounted natural, or even laudable.

If ye, O strangers, with these awful Powers,
Your tutelary Gods, will here stand forth
To grant me succour, much will ye promote
Your country's welfare and my foes' despair.

Ch. Thou, Œdipus, and these thy daughters, claim
Our warmest, liveliest pity; but since thou
Hast pledged thyself my country's saviour, first
Would I inform thee what involves thy good.

Œd. Speak, friend, to one who will in all obey thee.

Ch. Make due atonement to those awful Powers,
Whose hallowed grove thy footsteps first have trod.

Œd. And with what rites? my friends, inform
me all.

Ch. ⁹First, from yon sacred ever-gushing stream,
Drawn with pure hands, the due libations bring.

Œd. What follows, when th' unsullied stream is
drawn?

Ch. Goblets are there, by nicest art enchased,
Whose brim and double handles thou must crown—

Œd. With boughs, or slender threads? or with
what rites?

⁹ This is the commencement of that scene alluded to in our introductory remarks, which so minutely develops the religious ceremonies of the ancients. The reader must endeavour to judge of it as it would appear to an Athenian audience, not as it appears to himself.

Ch. Wreathe round the soft wool of a new-shorn lamb.

Œd. 'Tis well; what next befits me to discharge?

Ch. Turn to the orient morn, and pour the stream—

Œd. From the same goblets thou hast just described?

Ch. Yea, pour libations trine; drain with the third
The consecrated bowl.

Œd. Instruct me yet;

What should the bowl contain?

Ch. The simple stream

With honey tempered—wine be absent thence!

Œd. And when the soil's dark verdure drinks the
stream?

Ch. With both thy hands place fresh-plucked
olive-boughs,

Thrice nine;—then invoke the Powers in prayer.

Œd. I joy to hear; for this is solemn all.

Ch. Since here we call them "Powers Benevolent,"

That with propitious minds they may accept

And aid the lowly suppliant, for thyself

Implore their mercy, or in thy behalf

Another. Let thy prayers be brief, and breathed

In low and whispered tone. Then from the spot

Retire—and turn not back. These rites performed,

I shall stand forth undaunted at thy side;

If not, old man, I can but tremble for thee.

Œd. Hear ye the natives of this land, my daughters?

Ant. We hear—what should be done do thou command.

Œd. These rites *I* cannot now discharge, debarred
By twofold ills—infirmity and blindness.
Of you, my daughters, one the homage pay.
I deem *one* soul, with pious feeling fraught,
Meet as a thousand for a task like this.
Then be the hallowed rites discharged with speed.
Yet leave me not alone; these faltering limbs
Refuse to bear me onward unsustained,
Nor dare I move without a watchful guide.

Is. The task enjoined be mine; but tell me first
Where is the spot—where all the rite demands?

Ch. Far in the grove retired. There one resides,
O virgin, to provide whate'er thou need.

Is. For this I now depart. My sister, thou
Remain to watch our father; toil is light,
When we but labour in a parent's cause.

[*Exit* ISMENE.]

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

Ch. Stranger, 'tis painful to awake

Griefs that have long and calmly slept,
Yet do I long to ask—

Œd. Ah! what?

Ch. Whence this interminable woe,
That rankles in thy breast?

Œd. By all the reverence which a guest may claim,
Explore it not. Foul deeds have I endured.

Ch. Wide hath the rumour spread, nor yet hath
ceased,
And I would learn the truth.

Œd. Ah me!

Ch. Assent, I pray thee.

Œd. Woe is me!

Ch. Yield, for I too will grant whate'er thou ask.

Œd. Strangers, dire evils have I borne,
Borne how reluctantly, let Heaven attest!
Involuntary all.

Ch. And from what cause?—

Œd. To an unhallowed couch
The city linked me, guiltless of the crime.

Ch. And hast thou then profaned
The kindred couch I tremble but to name?

Œd. 'Tis death to hear you, strangers;—but these two
Sprung from my blood—

Ch. Ha! whence?

Œd. My daughters these, and pledges of my
crime—

Ch. Almighty Jove!

Œd. Both born of her who gave
Their father life—

Ch. Are these thy daughters then,
Daughters at once and sisters of their sire?—

Œd. Alas!

Ch. Yes; thou dost well to weep.
The woes thou hast endured are infinite.

Œd. And e'en oblivion's solace is denied me.

Ch. And thou hast done—

Œd. I have not *done*.

Ch. What then?

Œd. A gift the state conferred, and I received,
Wretch that I was! oh had I ne'er deserved it!
Thence all my woes.

Ch. How thus, unhappy man!—
Didst thou not shed the blood?—

Œd. Why this demand? what dost thou seek to
trace?

Ch. A father's blood?—

Œd. Alas!

Thy words revive the pangs that seemed to sleep.

Ch. Didst thou then slay?—

Œd. I slew him, yet I had—

Ch. What?

Œd. A most righteous plea.

Ch. Speak it.

Œd. I will.

Since all unconscious on the crime I rushed,
And struck the blow in ignorance, by the law
I am absolved, unknowing what I did.

Ch. But lo! great Theseus, Ægeus' royal son,
Hastes to the spot, excited by thy fame.

Enter THESEUS.

THESEUS, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

Thes. Long by the voice of general fame apprised
Of thy sad tale, and that infuriate deed
Which quenched thy visual orbs in utter gloom,
I knew thee, son of Laius ; as I came,
Much have I heard, and know thee now more surely.
Thine abject garb and aspect of despair
Too plainly speak thy fortunes. Hapless King,
Thou wak'st my pity ; and I would but ask
What boon thou seek'st from me or from my state,

Thou and the sad associate of thy sorrows.
 Unfold thy wish ; and arduous were th' emprise
 Where thou shouldst ask my utmost aid in vain.

¹⁰I too was nurtured in a foreign land,
 As thou art now ; an exile's woes to me,
 An exile's perils, are familiar all.
 Then never, never, from the stranger's prayer,
 Who comes like thee, relentless will I turn,
 Or needful aid withhold. I am a man,
 As thou art ; and *my* power to rule th' events
 To-morrow may bring forth transcends not thine.

Œd. Theseus ! in these brief words thy generous
 soul

Hath shone conspicuous ; hence a brief reply
 May well suffice me. Who I am, and who
 My father, what my country, thou hast said.
 Nought then remains, save to prefer my prayer
 For all I need, and then our conference close.

Thes. Speak, then, at once, that I may know thy
 wish.

Œd. I come to proffer thee this withered frame,

¹⁰ Theseus was educated in the court of Pittheus, King of Trœzene.

A gift to sight unseemly ; yet endowed
With costlier treasures than the loveliest form.

Thes. What rich requital dost thou bring me here ?

Œd. This mayst thou learn in time—thou canst not
now.

Thes. When shall thy proffered good approve its
worth ?

Œd. When I am dead, and thou hast reared my
tomb.

Thes. The last and saddest boon of life is all
Thy prayer regards. The care of all between
Is unremembered, or contemned by thee.

Œd. In this one prayer are these concentrated all.

Thes. Yet light and trivial is the grace implored.

Œd. Mark me ! no trivial contest shall ensue.

Thes. Of me, or of thy children, dost thou pre-
sage ?

Œd. They would constrain me to return to Thebes.

Thes. If such their wish, it ill becomes thee thus
To roam a willing exile.

Œd. When I sought
Such refuge, they refused.

Thes. Oh, most unwise !
How vain is wrath in wretchedness like thine !

Œd. Forbear reproaches, till thou hear my plea.

Thes. Speak—I were wrong to judge thee uninformed.

Œd. O Theseus ! I have suffered woes on woes
Exhaustless heaped.

Thes. Dost thou by this intend
The ancient ruin of thy fated house ?

Œd. Ah no ! in this the general voice of Greece
Hath left me nought to tell thee.

Thes. Do thy griefs
Transcend the common sufferings of our race ?

Œd. They do, indeed. By mine own heartless sons
To exile thrust, like some loathed parricide,
Ne'er may I tread my native soil again.

Thes. Why, then, recall thee, if consigned to
dwell
For evermore apart ?

Œd. The voice of Heaven
Constrains them thus to act.

Thes. And of what ills
Do these predictions wake the boding dread ?

Œd. Discomfiture and death from this fair land.

Thes. Whence shall such fatal feud between us rise ?

Œd. Most honoured son of Ægeus, the great Gods
Alone the high prerogative may claim
To shun the blight of age, the stroke of death ;

All else must yield to Time's unconquered sway.
The vigour of the earth, man's martial might,
Are doomed alike to fade ; fair faith expires,
And falsehood springs florescent. So in men
By dearest ties united, and in states
By firmest leagues to amity constrained,
The same true soul remains not. What we now
Delight to cherish, in the lapse of time,
Or wakes abhorrence, or revives desire.
Thus now, though all is peace with thee and Thebes,
Thanks to thy generous faith, revolving time,
Which in its ceaseless course gives constant birth
To countless days and nights, shall yet produce
The fated season, when for trivial wrongs,
Your plighted concord shall dissolve in air :
Then this cold body, in the sleep of death
Entombed, shall drink their warm and vital blood,
If Jove be mightiest still, and Jove-born Phœbus
Retain his truth unbroken. But I pause—
Let me not breathe what Heaven has veiled in
darkness.

Guard thou thy proffered faith, nor shalt thou say
In Œdipus thy hospitable land
A vain and useless habitant received,
Unless in this the Gods themselves deceive me.

Ch. Before, O King! to thee and to the state
Such promises he proffered to fulfil.

Thes. Oh, who would spurn the warm benevolence
Of one like him, to whom this altar first,
Common to all, its friendly refuge lends?
Then, though a suppliant to these Powers he came,
To me and to my people doth repay
No trivial recompense. Whom I, impressed
With deepest reverence, never will repulse;
But in my realms a safe asylum grant.
If here it please the stranger to remain,
To guard him be *your* charge. If thou prefer
With me to quit the spot, O Œdipus,
Choose which thou wilt, and my assent command.

Œd. Pour down thy richest blessings on such men,
Almighty Jove!

Thes. What, then, dost thou resolve?
Say, wilt thou to the palace?

Œd. Would to Heaven
I might attend thee, but the spot is here—

Thes. Destined for what? I will in nought oppose
thee.

Œd. Here shall I triumph o'er the foes who
wronged me.

Thes. Great recompense thou nam'st for thine
abode

In these our realms.

Œd. If to thy purpose true,

Thou dost remain unchanged, till all be o'er.

Thes. Distrust me not, I never will betray thee.

Œd. I would not bind thee, like the base, by oath.

Thes. I count no oath more binding than a pro-
mise.

Œd. How wilt thou act?

Thes. What terror thus alarms thee?

Œd. Men will approach—

Thes. That charge belongs to these.

Œd. Beware, lest if thou leave me—

Thes. Tell me not

What is my duty.

Œd. He who fears must tell thee.

Thes. Fear is a stranger to my breast.

Œd. And yet

Thou little know'st what threats—

Thes. One thing I know ;

No mortal hand shall force thee from this spot,

In my despite. The impotence of Wrath

Vents its wild rage in vain and vehement threats,

Which, when cool Thought its sober sway resumes,
 Unheeded pass away. Thus, too, for these;
 Though now they proudly menace, should they strive
 To drag thee hence by violence, such emprise
 Will prove a stormy ocean, where immersed,
 Their shattered bark will sink. Take courage then—
 If Phœbus hither was indeed thy guide,
 Without my feebler aid his arm can save thee;
 And though ourselves be distant, yet our name
 Shall still avail from insult to protect thee.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Well did Fate thy wanderings lead,
 Stranger, to this field of fame,
 Birth-place of the generous steed,
 Graced by white Colonus' name.¹
 Frequent in the dewy glade
 Here the nightingale is dwelling;

¹ The sincerity of these encomiums on the beauties of Colonus will not be questioned, if we admit the common notion, that it was the birth-place of Sophocles.

Through embowering ivy's shade,
 Here her plaintive notes are swelling ;
 Through yon grove, from footsteps pure,
 Where unnumbered fruits are blushing—
 From the summer sun secure,
 Screened from wintry whirlwinds rushing ;
 Where, with his fostering nymphs, amid the grove,
 The sportive Bacchus joys to revel or to rove.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Bathed in heaven's ambrosial dew,
 Here the fair narcissus flowers,
 Graced each morn with clusters new,
 Ancient crown of Mightiest Powers ;
 Here the golden crocus blows ;
 Here exhaustless fountains gushing,
 Where the cool Cephisus flows,
 Restless o'er the plains are rushing ;
 Ever as the crystal flood
 Winds in pure transparent lightness ;
 Fresher herbage decks the sod,
 Flowers spring forth in lovelier brightness ;
 Here dance the Muses ; and the Queen of Love
 Oft guides her golden car through this enchanting
 grove.

STROPHE II.

What nor Asia's rich domain,
 Nor, by Pelops' ancient reign
 Famed afar, the Doric coast
 Through its thousand vales can boast,—
 Here, by mortal hands unsown,
 Here, spontaneous and alone,
 Mark the hallowed plant expand,
 Terror of each hostile band !
 Here, with kindly fruit mature,
 Springs the azure olive pure ;
 Youth and hoary age combine
 To revere the plant divine ;
² Morian Jove, with guardian care,
 Watches ever wakeful there ;
 And Athena's eye of blue
 Guards her own loved olive too.

² The sacred olives in the Academia were called *Mopias* ;
 hence Jupiter, who had an altar there, as protector of the
 place, had the name of Morian.—Potter.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Let me still my country's fame,
 Still her matchless praise proclaim,
 Sing the wondrous gifts bestowed,
 By her potent Patron-God,
 Steeds in fleetness ne'er outvied,
 And the gallant navy's pride.
 Son of Saturn, King, whose sway
 Ocean's restless waves obey,
 Thou to this transcendant praise
 Didst thy favoured Athens raise ;
 Taught by thee the courser's flame
 By the golden curb to tame—
 While the light oar, framed by thee,
 Speeds the swift bark o'er the sea,
 Bounding through the foaming main
 Fleeter than the ³Nereid train.

Ant. O most renowned land ! 'tis now the time
 To prove by action thy transcendant praise.

Œd. What wakes new terrors in thy breast, my
 daughter ?

³ Literally, follower of the hundred-footed daughters of Nereus.

Ant. Creon approaches, not unguarded, hither.

Œd. Most honoured strangers, in your aid alone
My anxious eye must seek the goal of safety.

Ch. Be calm ; I will not fail thee, though mine arm
Be weak and withered by a weight of years,
Age hath not palsied yet the might of Athens.

Enter CREON.

CREON, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

Cr. Ye citizens, and children of the soil,
Your looks, I see, betray at mine approach
The sudden impulse of awakening fears.
Your fears are causeless :—be vain threats forborne.
I come not here to compass aught by force,
For I am old ; and this most potent state
Transcends, I know, the mightiest in our Greece ;
But, bent with age, I come but to restore
This hapless outcast to his native land ;
A charge no private voice, but the whole state
Imposed on me, by kindred blood constrained
To feel most deeply for a kinsman's woe.
List to mine errand then, unhappy King,
And to thy home return ; the state recalls thee ;
I beyond all by closest ties impelled,
Who were indeed the basest of mankind,

Did not thy miseries wring my inmost soul,—
Viewing thee thus, a friendless, homeless exile,
A wanderer and a fugitive on earth,
Led by one feeble guide, and that thy daughter.
Ah! never thought I to behold her thus,
Sunk in the depth of wretchedness and shame,
On thee attendant, and in thy behalf
A scant relief imploring;—in the flower
Of ripened youth from nuptial honours torn,
To scorn and ruffian outrage still exposed.
What dark and deep reproach, unhappy me!
On mine own head, and thine, and all our race,
Have I not charged? Yet, since in vain we strive
To shroud that shame, which all must know too well,
By thy paternal Gods, O Œdipus,
Yield to my warm persuasions; hide thy woes
In thine own city and ancestral halls.
Bid to this generous state a kind farewell,
She well deserves it; but the land that bore
And gave thee nurture claims superior love.

Œd. O thou in all audacious, basely skilled
E'en from the words of truth to frame deceit,
Why seek to lure me to those scenes again,
Where, if beguiled, severest woes await me?
When, sunk and struggling with domestic ills,
My only solace was the hope of exile,

Thou wouldst not then that mournful boon bestow ;
But when the frenzy of my soul was calmed,
And I had joyed to linger out my days
In my once happier home ; then didst thou drive,
And spurn me forth to exile. Where was then
The kindred tie so much regarded now ?
Now, when thou seest this hospitable state
And her kind sons concede a welcome refuge,
Wouldst thou delude me hence, veiling thy fraud
In smooth dissembling words. Thy proffered love,
What joy imparts it to the heart that loathes thee ?
If from thy prayer, in utmost need preferred,
Unheeding one should turn, nor will to aid,
But, when thy soul were sated with its wish,
Should then obtrude his slow and worthless help,
Say—would such empty succour aught delight thee ?
Such grace thou bring'st to me ; specious in word,
False in itself, and fruitless. I will speak,
That to these strangers I may prove thee villain.
Thou com'st to lure me—not to mine own home,
But to your confines, there to pine, that Thebes
May shun th' impending vengeance of this land.
It shall not be ; such vengeance still awaits thee.
There shall my spirit dwell, a blighting curse
To your devoted state. And for my sons,

Of all the rich domain their father swayed,
 Be the scant tomb their sole inheritance.
 Is not my presage of the doom of Thebes
 More sure than thine ;—yea, 'tis e'en trebly sure,
 As drawn from truer prophets, Phœbus 'self,
 And his dread sire, the all-controlling Jove !
 And hither hast thou come with specious words
 And most delusive ; but, for thy smooth tongue,
 Defeat and shame, not safety, shalt thou reap.
 Since, then, thy toils are spread in vain, away !
 Leave us to sojourn here ; sunk as we are,
 Here to reside, we were not wholly wretched.

Cr. And dost thou think severer woes impend
 O'er me from these wild ravings, or thyself ?

Œd. Much will it glad me, if in vain thou seek'st
 Me to persuade, or these my friendly guards.

Cr. Thou wretch, not time itself can teach thee
 wisdom ;

But frenzy makes thee hateful e'en in age.

Œd. Practised art thou in eloquence ; but one
 Who smoothly talks on right and wrong alike—
 Can such a man be virtuous ?

Cr. To speak much,
 And speak in fitting season, differ widely.

Œd. How briefly and how wisely dost *thou* speak.

Cr. Not so to one whose soul is warped like thine.

Œd. I charge thee, hence! nor thus observe
where most

Befits me sojourn.

Cr. I attest, not thee,

But these most friendly strangers, in what terms
Thou dost reply. If I should force thee!—

Œd. Ha!—

And who dare force me, if my guards assent not?

Cr. Nay, though I use no force, thou shalt
repent.

Œd. From what base deed arise these menaces?

Cr. One of thy daughters is my captive now,
And this shall be ere long.

Œd. Unhappy me!

Cr. Ah! thou shalt soon have cause for heavier
sorrow.

Œd. Hast thou my child?

Cr. Aye; and design ere long
To force the other from thee.

Œd. Oh! my friends,
What will ye do? Will ye, too, thus betray me?
Will ye not spurn the villain from your land?

Ch. Stand off, bold stranger;—justice disallows
The deeds thou late hast done, and still art doing.

Cr. This is the moment ; do your office, slaves ;
Quick,—force her hence, if she refuse to follow.

Ant. Ah ! whither shall I fly ? where shall I look,
To earth or heaven for rescue ?

Ch. Wretch ! what dost thou ?

Cr. The man I shall not touch, the maid is mine.

Œd. O Princes of the land !

Ch. Presumptuous stranger,
Thy deeds are most unjust.

Cr. Most just.

Ch. And say,
Where is their justice ?

Cr. I but seize mine own.

Ant. O Athens ! Athens !

Ch. Stranger, how is this ?

Wilt thou not loose her ? quickly shalt thou feel
The vengeance of mine hand.

Cr. Off with thine hand !

Ch. Never from thee, if such thy venturous aim.

Œd. If thou wrong me, thou dost incense the
state.

Ch. Have I not told thee thus ?

Cr. Straight from thy clasp ;
Release the virgin.

Ch. Dictate not to those

Who do not own thy power.

Cr. Again I bid thee loose her.

Ch. And again

I bid thee swift depart. Haste, hither haste,

O citizens ! the state is foully wronged ;

My country's rights are outraged ; haste to help me !

Ant. Oh strangers, strangers, I am torn away.

Œd. My child, my child, where art thou ?

Ant. Hurried hence

By lawless violence.

Œd. Stretch forth thy hand,

My hapless child !

Ant. Alas ! I have no power.

Cr. Will ye not drag her hence ?

Œd. Unhappy me !

Cr. Henceforth, unaided by these props at least,
Shalt thou roam forth, since thus thy stubborn mood
Rejects thy country, and thy friends, and me,
Commissioned forth, although a King, to bring thee.
Time will, I know, convince thee, that such deeds
Will ne'er conduce to work thy lasting good,
Spurning thy friends, and nurturing that wild rage
Which plunged, and still doth plunge thee, in
despair.

Ch. Hold, stranger, hold !

Cr. I warn thee, touch me not.

Ch. I will not loose thee, while of these bereft.

Cr. Then on thy state wilt thou entail revenge
For heavier wrongs ; I seize not these alone.

Ch. What is thy purpose now ?

Cr. To drag *him* hence.

Ch. High words are these.

Cr. Like deeds will soon ensue,
Unless the monarch of this land prevent me.

Œd. Oh ! shameless boaster ! wilt thou seize
me too ?

Cr. Silence ! I charge thee.

Œd. Did these Awful Powers
Enjoin me silence from the curse that now
Is trembling on my lips, I would not then
Forbear to curse thee, ruffian ! who hast rent
From the blind wanderer his last dearest guide.
For this, on thee and thy devoted race
May yon bright Sun, All-seeing God, repay
A dark and dreary age, fraught to the last
With miseries keen as mine.

Cr. Behold ye this,
Ye natives of the land ?

Œd. Thee they behold
And me ; they know what wrongs I have endured,

While but in words I vent my powerless vengeance.

Cr. I will not curb my anger ; but alone,
Though age-enfeebled, straight will drag thee hence.

Œd. Unhappy me !

Ch. What insolence is thine,
If thou but deem'st to dare a deed like this !

Cr. I deem.

Ch. Then Athens is no more a city.

Cr. In a just cause the weak subdue the mighty.

Œd. Hear you his vaunts ?

Ch. They shall not end in action.

Cr. This Jove may know, thou canst not.

Ch. Is not this
Atrocious wrong ?

Cr. 'Tis wrong ; yet thou must bear it.

Ch. Ho citizens!—ho rulers of the land !
Advance with speed,—advance ; far, far e'en now
They pass the bounds of right.

Enter THESEUS.

THESEUS, ŒDIPUS, CREON, CHORUS.

Thes. ³ Why this clamour? what the outrage?

Urged by what unwonted dread,

Call ye thus your King adoring where the votive
steer hath bled

To the Ocean-King whose altar decks Colonus?

Quickly say,

Wherefore from the shrine ye urge me with un-
welcome speed away?

Œd. O noble friend, for well thy voice I know,
Foul wrongs from this base ruffian have I borne.

Thes. What are those wrongs,—how hath he
injured thee?

³ Though the abrupt transition in the metre may sound harshly to the reader, it would have been inconsistent with the main principle of the present translation to have rendered these four lines in heroic measure, as they are trochaics in the original. If, however, according to Pope's celebrated canon,

The sound must seem an echo to the sense,

it must be acknowledged, that no metre is better adapted to convey the idea of hurried indignation and impetuous surprise.

Œd. This Creon, whom thou seest, hath forced away
My last and only comfort, my loved daughters.

Thes. What dost thou say?

Œd. My sufferings thou hast heard.

Thes. Let one of those who in our presence wait
Speed instant to the altars, and proclaim
This mandate to our people, horse and foot,
To quit the sacred rites, and with all haste
Secure the passage where the double ways
Converge in one, ere the lost virgins pass,
And I, by lawless force discomfited,
Be held in scorn by my much-injured guest.
Away, as I have charged thee! For this wretch,
Did I but feel the wrath his guilt deserves,
He should not 'scape uninjured from my vengeance.
Now, by the very laws himself imposed,
By those same laws, impartial will I judge him.
Hence never shalt thou part, till thou restore
The ravished virgins to our presence here;
For thou hast done a deed, that shames not me
Alone, but thine own lineage, and thy country;
Since on a state, by law and justice swayed,
And of its faith observant—on *this* state,
Thou hast intruded with unlicensed might,
To work thy will, and bear away the spoil,

Deeming our land, perchance, of manly hearts
 Devoid,—some haughty despot's crouching slave,
 Or me an abject and degenerate coward.

Thebes never taught thee this degrading lesson,
 She is not wont to form and nurture baseness ;
 Nor will she praise nor vindicate the deed,
 When she shall learn, that on the sacred rights
 Of me and of my Gods thou hast transgressed,
 Forcing the wretched suppliant from our altars.

I had not thus intruded on thy state,
 (Though rigid justice sanctified the deed,)
 And lured, or led, a wretched captive thence,
 Without the King's assent, whoe'er he were,
 Knowing too well what to the sheltering state
 Becomes a stranger in a foreign land.

Thy deeds have shamed thy country, of such shame
 Most undeserving, and protracted years
 Have left thee aged and bereft of wisdom.
 But now our former menace we repeat ;
 Let the lost virgins be at once restored,
 Or in this land will I detain thee, bound
 A slave reluctant—till thou set them free.
 Our will in this accords but with our words.

Ch. Seest thou thy peril, stranger ? first I thought
 thee

Generous and noble, as became thy race ;
Now in thy guilt thou art at once convicted.

Cr. It was not, Theseus, that I deemed thy state
Devoid of martial might or counsel sage,
As thou hast said, that I have done this deed ;
But from my firm conviction, of thy realms
That none would will to harbour and retain
In my despite a kinsman ;—for I deemed
Ye could not cherish a polluted wretch
Stained with a father's blood, from whose dark couch
Sprung an incestuous progeny. And I knew
The long-revered tribunal of your land,
Throned on the Mount of Mars, would never deign
To grant asylum in her sheltering walls
To such degraded outcasts. Urged by this,
I came confiding to arrest my prey ;
Nor had I gone thus far, save that on me
And on my race a bitter curse he poured,
Whence, having suffered wrong, I thus repaid it.
Resentment knows no soothing balm of age,
Calmed but in death, it only fails to rouse
The long departed. Act, then, as thou wilt ;
I am alone before thee, with no plea
But justice ;—that in weakness nought avails me—

Yet know, whate'er thy deeds, thus weak with age,
With equal deeds will I essay to quite thee.

Œd. Unblushing villain ! dost thou think to pour
Contempt on mine old age or on thy own
With these upbraidings, while thou tell'st a tale
Of murder, incest, misery, and despair,
Which I, oh how unwillingly ! endured.
Such was the will of Heaven, against my house
Incensed, perchance, for unrepented crimes.
Thou canst not prove, that by a wilful deed
I merited such evil, or involved
Myself, my race, in guilt so dark as this.
Say, if thou canst, since by the voice divine
I was foredoomed a father's murderer,—
Say, how can Justice brand me with such deed,
Whose doom was presaged ere my life began ?
If—born to woe—as I, alas ! was born,
In chance encounter met, I slew my sire,
Unknowing what I did, or whom I slew,
Canst thou revile me for unconscious crimes ?
And, oh thou wretch ! doth it not shame even thee
Thus to constrain me but to speak of her,
My wife, my mother, and THY sister too.
Now I WILL speak ;—no longer will I veil

The tale in silence, since thy shameless tongue
 Hath forced it from me. Yes—she gave me birth ;
 I here avow it—Oh accursed doom !
 Unthinking of her fate as I of mine ;—
 She gave me birth ; then to her son she bore
 Fresh sons, and to herself eternal shame.
 This too I know, though thou with willing mind
 On me and her hast heaped this keen reproach,
 Unwillingly I wedded her, and tell
 This tale with like reluctance. Not for this
 Shall infamy for ever brand my name ;
 Nor for my father's blood, though at this deed
 Are aimed the keenest arrows of thy wrath.
 And answer truly what I now demand ;—
 Should one rush forward to attempt thy life,
 Thou paragon of justice, wouldst thou ask
 If he who sought to slay thee were thy father ?
 Or take an instant vengeance ? Sooth I deem,
 If thou lov'st life, thou wouldst repel the assault
 With equal force, and think of justice after !
 To these unconscious crimes the will of Heaven
 Constrained my path ; and couldst thou from the
 grave
 Evoke the spirit of my murdered sire,
 This plea he would not question. But for thee,

Oh lost to justice! thou hast dared to speak
 While Honour warned to silence; and to charge
 Me in this presence with calumnious blame;
 Yet hast thou deemed it worthy on this state,
 Renowned Athens, and her generous King,
 To fawn with hollow and unmeaning praise;
 How is it thou hast passed her worthiest fame,
 Her proud pre-eminence, of all our states
 In virtue first and reverence to the Gods?
 Yet from this noble land hast thou essayed
 Meanly to steal a wretched suppliant,
 And bear to bondage my unhappy daughters.
 Wherefore I now implore the potent arm
 Of these dread Powers, and bend in earnest prayer
 For their resistless aid, that thou mayst learn
 What manly hearts defend this generous city.

Ch. The stranger is most worthy, good my Lord,
 And though his woes are countless, they but lend
 A stronger title to thy friendly succour.

Thes. Enough of words;—the lawless ruffians
 speed,
 While we, the injured, stand inactive here.

Cr. What task to my weak age wouldst thou
 prescribe?

Thes. That thou precede, and guide me to the spot,

That if the captive maidens near this grove
 Are yet detained, thou mayst at once reveal them,
 Though, if thy band be fled, this toil avails not.
 Others are now abroad, whose sure pursuit
 They never shall escape—to thank the Gods
 For villany successful. Go before ;
 The doom for others destined now is thine,
 And Fate, at length, in thine own toils hath snared
 thee;—

Brief are the triumphs gained by guilty fraud.
 Nor rest on other aid. I know full well,
 By thine insulting vaunts, thou didst not come
 Unarmed or unattended to this outrage ;
 Some power upholds thee in this bold emprise.
 But this demands our care, nor must we leave
 Our state thus baffled by a single villain.
 This dost thou comprehend, or is it said
 In vain, as when this insult first was planned ?

Cr. Nay, spare thy threats, I cannot beard thee
 here ;

At home we too shall know what best beseems us.

Theo. Away, and, threaten as thou wilt. Do thou,
 O Œdipus, undaunted here remain ;
 And, save in death, I will not cease mine aid
 Till thou again embrace thy rescued daughters.

Œd. Most honoured Theseus, for thy generous soul,
 And ready succour to our helpless age,
 May the Gods crown thee with their choicest
 blessings. .

[*Exeunt* THESEUS and CREON.

ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

⁴ Oh! were I present 'mid the fray
 Where warriors meet in stern array,
 And clanging arms resound,
 Or by the hallowed Pythian shrine,
 Or where unnumbered torches shine
 The gleaming shores around ;

⁴ The chorus, concluding that an engagement must ensue, wish themselves with their brave countrymen, when they should overtake the forces of Creon, whether it were in the plains of Marathon, characterised by the temple there dedicated to the Pythian Apollo, or on the shores of Eleusis, or near Leucogeos, the domain of the tribe of Œa. The latter part of the strophe is an allusion to the silence observed in the Eleusinian mysteries ; the priests were called Eumolpidæ, from Eumolpus, the first hierophant.—Potter.

Where Awful Powers in mystery
Veil the dread rites, whose golden key
Locks deep in silent awe divine
Their priests, Eumolpus' honoured line.

Thither were borne the virgin pair,
There led the King his martial band,
There, sword to sword, and hand to hand,
The strife they soon shall dare.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Or westward do the warriors speed,
Where high o'er $\text{\textcircled{E}}$ a's fertile mead
The white rock rears its brow?
On fiery steed or rolling car,
Say, flock they to the deepening war?

For Mars is wakening now
His legions ardent for the fight,
And Athens pours her martial might.
From every rein the lightnings glance,
As high on glittering steeds advance
The youthful bands, who proudly own
Athena, thy superior sway,
Or, grateful, votive homage pay
To Rhea's honoured son.

STROPHE II.

Say, do they fight, or linger still ?

Glad hopes my bounding breast inflame ;
The virgins, wronged by causeless ill,
Wronged by a haughty kinsman's will,
Soon shall my King reclaim.

Jove, Jove, to-day will aid the right,
And I forebode a prosperous fight.
Oh ! could I seize the wild dove's wing,
And to yon clouds my pinions fling,
That my glad eye might beam to see
The combat and the victory !

ANTISTROPHE II.

Thou of the all-pervading eye !

In Heaven by subject Gods adored,
Jove ! from thy radiant throne on high
Send might, and joy, and victory,
To grace my country's Lord !
Daughter of Jove, Athena ! hear ;
Thou, Phœbus, lift thy fatal spear,
With thy chaste sister, skilled to slay
With certain aim the forest-prey,
Oh come, with prompt and potent hand,
To aid my people and my land.

Thou wilt not, wandering stranger, in this hope
 Count me a faithless prophet ; for I see
 Thy rescued daughters swift advancing here.

Œd. Where, where, what say'st ?—what said'st
 thou ?

Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE.

THESEUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

Ant. Oh, my father !

My dearest father ! would some pitying God
 Grant thee to gaze on this most generous monarch,
 Who hath restored us to thy welcome arms.

Œd. My child—and are ye near me ?

Ant. Yea ; the hands

Of Theseus and his gallant band have saved us.

Œd. Come, O my children, to a father's arms,
 Who never, never, thought again to feel
 Your loved embrace.

Ant. That transport, then, be thine ;—
 With equal joy we share it.

Œd. Where, indeed,
 Where are ye ?—

Ant. Here, together we approach thee.

Œd. My dearest blossoms !

Ant. To a father's breast

His offspring all are dear.

Œd. Ye loved supports

Of my weak age !

Ant. Sad guardians of the wretched !

Œd. I clasp my best-beloved, nor can die
Hapless in all, while ye are left to bless me.
Press, then, my daughters, to a father's side ;
Grow to the parent-breast ; and close, at length,
My dark and dreary pilgrimage in peace.
But first the manner of your rescue tell ;
Brief be the tale, as fits your modest years.

Ant. Here stands our great preserver. Ask of him,
So will my tale be brief, and quickly told.

Œd. O marvel not, dear stranger ! though I dwell
With prolix transport on my children, saved
Beyond my hope ;—well do I know from thee
Springs this delight, the boon is only thine,
Thou hast preserved them ; yea, and thou alone.
For this, on thee and on thy state may Heaven
Pour down such blessings as my warm heart prays,
Since in your state alone of all mankind
Have I discerned unsullied piety,
Justice unwarped, and sacred truth unstained.

Oh could my grateful thanks attest thy worth !
 For all my blessings flow from thee alone.
 Stretch forth, oh noble King, the hand that saved us,
 That I may clasp it, and confess thy grace
 With the warm kiss of ardent gratitude.
 Yet what have I implored ! should a lost wretch
 Dare but to touch the unpolluted form
 Of virtue pure as thine ? It may not be ;
 Didst thou assent, I would not thus defile thee.
 They, they alone, whom bitterest woes have wrung,
 Aright can pity wretchedness like mine.
 Farewell, my Lord ; yet, while I linger here,
 Still let thy friendship, still thine aid be mine.

Thes. I marvel not, that in the first warm thrill
 Of heartfelt transport for thy rescued daughters,
 Thou didst not promptly speak the thanks our aid
 Might seem to merit, nor doth such delay
 In aught displease us. Not from empty words
 Would we seek honour, but from manly deeds.
 I prove it thus : in all our promise pledged,
 That pledge hath been redeemed ; I here restore
 Thy daughters, living, from his threats unharmed.
 And why should I recount, in vaunting words,
 How conquest crowned our arms, when thou mayst
 learn

From these thy daughters? But direct thy thoughts
 To what befel me as I hasted hither ;
 Brief to recount, yet worthy of surprise.
 Events, though trivial, prudence duly weighs.

Œd. What is it, son of Ægeus? for thy words
 Are dark to me, nor can I guess their import.

Theb. They say a man, no citizen of Thebes,
 Yet to thy blood allied, in suppliant guise
 At Neptune's altar sits, where I performed
 The sacred rites, when summoned to the rescue.

Œd. Whence doth he come? what boon implore
 of me?

Theb. I know but this; they tell me—at thy hand
 He seeks brief audience, and no greater grace.

Œd. Why this? nought trivial doth that seat
 portend!

Theb. They say he asks but to confer with thee
 A few brief moments, and return in safety.

Œd. Who can he be, thus suppliant at the altar?

Theb. Bethink thee, is there none of kindred blood
 At Argos, who may crave a boon like this?

Œd. Cease, cease, most honoured Monarch.

Theb. What means this?

Œd. Entreat me not.

Theb. And wherefore not entreat thee?

Œd. Too well I know the stranger-suppliant now.

The. And who is he? and why should I rebuke
him?

Œd. My son, my foul abhorrence: but to hear
His voice, O King! would deeply gall my breast.

The. Yet wherefore? Though thou hear his
prayer, thy will

Is free to spurn it; can it harm thee aught

To grant him audience?

Œd. O, my Lord, his voice

Is harsh and hateful to a father's ear!

Then urge me not to grant request like this.

The. But first beware; doth not his suppliant seat,
And the high sanction of the Gods constrain thee?

Ant. O yield to me, my father, though by years
Unschool'd in wisdom I presume to speak;
And to thy suppliant grant the grace he asks.

Revere the Power in whose high name he prays thee,
Relent to us, and bear my brother's presence;
His words, though uncongenial, are not fraught
With power to force thee from thy fixed design.

What ill can rise from listening but to words
By which the noblest counsels are declared?

Art thou not still his father? For this cause,

Though most unnatural were his deeds to thee,
 It is not meet that thou shouldst thus repay
 Evil for evil. Yield, then, to his prayer ;
 Others have felt the curse of thankless children,
 And burnt with equal anger,—till, appeased
 By mild remonstrances of mutual friends,
 Once more the father in their breasts revived.
 Ah ! dwell not now on those unnumbered woes,
 Which thou hast borne for deeds unconscious wrought
 Against thy parents, though I know too well,
 If that on these thou look, 'twill prove at once
 What pregnant sufferings spring from rage indulged ;
 My truth, alas ! is too severely proved
 By those dark eye-balls,—dark in endless night.
 Relent, then, to our prayers. It ill beseems
 That they should ask so oft who ask for justice,
 Or that thine heart, itself by kindness soothed,
 Knows not by kindness to requite the grace.

Œd. Thou hast prevailed, my daughter, though
 assent,

While pleasing, is reluctant—take thy wish.
 This I forewarn thee, stranger ; if he come,
 Let not his ruffian-hand attempt my life.

Thes. Enough—my honour needs no second pledge.

Old man, I scorn to boast ; but while the Gods
Still grant me life and safety, thou art safe.

Exit THESEUS.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

Chorus.

STROPHE I.

Estranged from wisdom's rule appears
The man, whose restless mind
Aspires to life beyond the years
To mortal date assigned.
Years linger on ; but in their train
Lead cares more restless, keener pain ;
And when beyond Hope's utmost bound
Thy wish is won, ah what can cheer
The joyless breast, when hovering near
Relentless Death has frowned ?
No festive dance, or nuptial wreath,
Or magic of the melting lyre,
Can wake in age the stifled fire,
Or charm the sleep of death.

ANTISTROPHE I.

O better were it not to be ;—
 Or when the infant-eye
 Opens on light and misery,
 To pass in that first sigh
 Whence first we came. Youth onward speeds,
 And in his train of folly leads
 Delusive pleasures, light and vain—
 What restless toils are absent there,
 What woes, swift darkening to despair?—
 In that disastrous train
 Are Strife, Sedition, Envy, Wrath ;—
 While Age, morose with countless woes,
 Dark, cheerless, friendless, waits to close
 The drear and downward path.

EPODE.

Nor mine alone these ills to bear,
 Thou, too, the mournful lot must share.
 As the wild billows fiercely roar
 Round the white crags and northern shore ;
 So fierce on thy devoted brow
 The waves of woe are beating now,
 And sorrows round thee pour ;—

Some from the sinking orb of day,
 Some where he darts his orient ray,
 Some from the sultry noontide beam,
 And some from Midnight's starry gleam.

Ant. Hither, it seems, the stranger comes, my
 father,

All unattended, and dissolved in tears.

Œd. Who is he?

Ant. 'Tis the same we deemed before,
 And Polynices stands before thee now.

Enter POLYNICES.

POLYNICES, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE,
 CHORUS.

Pol. Ah me! what shall I do? Shall my first tears
 Gush forth for mine own sorrows, or for those
 Which now I see my aged sire endure?
 Whom, a sad exile in a stranger-land,
 By you alone, my sisters, have I found
 Attended, and arrayed in this mean garb,
 Whose squalid vestments, worn by wandering bare,

Defile his aged form, while o'er his brow,
 Reft of its visual orbs, the matted locks
 Stream to each passing gale ; with such vile garb,
 Too well, it seems, his scanty food accords.
 Late, late I learn the measure of thy woes,
 And, though of men most worthless, I attest
 The Gods, I come but to relieve thy need.
 Ah ! seek not this from others. By the throne
 Of mighty Jove, associate of his sway,
 Sits gentle Mercy, judge of human deeds ;
 Let her be present to thy soul, my father.
 The guilt we have incurred may be redeemed,
 Though keen remorse can nought avail us now.
 Why art thou silent?—
 Speak to me, O my father, one kind word ;
 Repulse me not. Wilt thou not deign reply,
 But sternly thrust me forth, dishonoured, shamed
 With mute contempt, unknowing whence thy wrath
 Burns thus relentless ? Aid me, O my sisters,
 Ye are his children too ; O seek to move
 Th' obdurate sternness of my angry father,
 Nor let him thus, without one answering word,
 Dismiss in scorn the suppliant of the God.

Ant. Speak, my unhappy brother, speak thy
 wish ;

Oft words are armed with mild persuasive power ;
And if they rouse resentment, or awake
The dormant pity, oft compel reply
From the closed lips of deep and angry silence.

Pol. Then will I speak ; for thou hast counselled
well.

Imploring first the God (from whose dread shrine
The King despatched me hither, granting first
A free communion and a safe return,)
To be the great auxiliar of my prayer.
Such grace, kind strangers, I implore from you,
From these, my sisters, from my sire himself.
Now, O my father, will I tell the cause
Why thus I sought thee. From my native land
I have been driven to exile ; for no crime,
Save that I claimed to mount thy royal throne,
By birth my fair and free inheritance.
For this Eteocles, thy younger son,
Forced me from Thebes, not by superior plea
Of solid reasoning, or by nobler deeds
Of conquering arms triumphant, but the state
By fraudulent arts persuading. The fell cause
Of all our feud was thine avenging curse ;
This, too, prophetic oracles confirm.
Then to the Doric Argos I repaired,

Espoused Adrastus' daughter, and received,
As friends and comrades in my righteous cause,
The best and bravest of the Apian chiefs.
With these allied, a seven-fold troop I lead
To hostile Thebes, in this good cause prepared
To die, or hurl th' usurper from his throne.
Enough of this. Then wherefore came I hither?
To breathe, my father, fervent prayers to thee,
Both for myself and my confederate friends,
Who in seven bands, by seven bold chieftains led,
Are now encircling all the Theban plain.
Mighty to wield the spear, and skilled to trace
The flight of birds, Amphiaraus is there;
Ætolian Tydeus next, great Œneus' son;
Eteoclus the Argive leads the third;
The fourth Hippomedon, sent to the fight
By Taläus his sire; then Capaneus,
Who vaunts ere long that his victorious arm
Shall raze to earth the haughty Theban towers;
Parthenopæus of Arcadian birth
Springs to the contest, from his mother's fame
His name deriving, proved the noble son
Of Atalanta, who so long maintained
Her virgin-beauty, matchless in the chase;
And I, thy son,—or, if not thine, the son

Of angry Fortune, yet who bear thy name,—
Conduct to Thebes the fearless Argive band.
Now, by thy daughters, by thy life, my father,
We all accord in one assenting prayer ;
Heap not on me the burthen of thy wrath,
Seeking due vengeance on a brother's head,
Who drove me forth, and robbed me of a throne.
If faith be due to Heaven's prophetic voice,
Whom thou shalt succour, them must victory grace.
Now by thy native fountains, by the Gods
Who guard the rights of kindred, I implore thee
Yield to my prayer, remit thy rooted wrath ;
I, too, am poor and exiled, e'en as thou.
Consigned to equal miseries, both must bow
To a strange master in a stranger-land,
While he, exultant in his royal halls,
Derides our common doom of bitterness ;
Whom, so thou aid my purpose, with brief toil
Soon will I hurl degraded from his throne.
Then to thy regal state will I restore thee,
Restore myself, and drive the wretch to exile.
This, if thou aid, is no unmeaning vaunt ;—
Without thy help I hope not ev'n for safety.

Ch. Now, for his sake, who sent the suppliant here,
Deign, Œdipus, meet answer to his prayer,

Whate'er thou wilt, and let him part from hence.

Œd. Save that the honoured Monarch of these
realms

Hath sent him hither, and esteemed it just
That we should deign reply, I tell ye, friends,
He never should have heard my voice again.
That grace accorded, let him hearken now
Our firm response, and triumph as he may.
Oh most abandoned ! when the very throne
Was thine, which now in Thebes thy brother holds,
Thou didst thyself expel thy wretched sire,
Didst spurn me from my country, and consign me
To this most abject penury, which now
Excites thy tears ; but never did *my* woes
Inflict one pang, till they became thine own.
Those ills I may not weep, but must endure ;
And ever, ever must remembrance wake
Thy worse than parricide. Thou didst enfold me
In all this web of misery ; by thy will
Constrained, I wandered sadly forth to crave
The slender pittance of my daily food.
Save that the care of duteous daughters soothed me,
Long since, for thee, should I have ceased to live ;
But they have saved me, they sustain me still ;
Unlike their weaker sex, with manly hearts

They toil unwearied in a father's cause ;—
 Ye are not *mine*, but aliens from my blood.
 Wherefore with other eyes will Heaven look down
 On this emprise ere long, when these thy troops
 Are marched to Thebes. It shall not be thy lot
 To win the city ;—rather shall thy blood
 And thy base brother's stain her fatal plain.
 Such were the curses of my first despair ;
 Such now with keener hatred I invoke
 To wreak my vengeance, that ye late may learn
 The reverence due to parents ; nor, though blind,
 With causeless insult wound a powerless father.
 My gentle daughters never acted thus.
 For this, on thy proud throne and royal seat
 Shall sit th' avenging curse, if Justice, famed
 Of old, by Jove's august tribunal throned,
 Maintain the ancient laws unbroken still.
 Hence to thy doom, Accursed ! I disclaim
 A father's part in thee, thou scorn of men ;
 And with thee bear the curse I call to blast thee :
 That thou mayst ne'er thy rightful throne regain,
 And never to the Argive vales return ;
 But fall unpitied by a kindred hand,
 Requiring first thine exile by his death.
 Thus do I curse thee : and I here invoke

Dark Erebus, the hated Sire of Hell,
To give thee dwelling in his deepest gloom ;—
These venerable Powers, and mighty Mars,
Whose anger cursed thee with this deadly feud.
Depart with this mine answer. Hence, and tell
Th' assembled Thebans and thy bold allies,
Such is the meed which Œdipus repays
To his abhorred and most unnatural offspring.

Ch. I cannot greet thee for thy prosperous way,
O Polynices! now return with speed.

Pol. O most ill-omened journey! fatal close!
Oh my devoted friends! was it for this
We left the Argive towers? Unhappy me!
I will not to my faithful friends impart
These dire predictions, nor renounce th' emprize,
But rush in silence on my certain doom.
Oh my beloved sisters! by the Gods!
Since ye have heard my father's ruthless curse,
Should that fell curse in all its fury fall,
If ere ye visit your paternal Thebes,
Ah! spurn me not dishonoured; but inter
My sad remains with due funereal rites:
So shall the praise ye have most justly earned
For duteous labour in a father's cause
Be crowned with added lustre, if ye pay

The last kind office to a brother's corpse.

Ant. O Polynices, I implore thee yield
To mine impassioned prayer.

Pol. Antigone,
My best-beloved sister, speak thy will.

Ant. O lead thy bold confederates back to Argos,
Nor plunge thy country and thyself in ruin.

Pol. It cannot be. If here I doubt or pause,
My gallant friends renounce the cause for ever.

Ant. My dearest brother! wherefore wilt thou
yield
To unavailing fury? Canst thou reap
Renown or profit from thy country's ruin?

Pol. To fly were baseness, and I will not fly.
Mine is the birth-right; and I cannot brook
The insults of my brother.

Ant. Seest thou not
His³ boding stern; too plain, alas! he spake it,
That death impends o'er both?

Pol. Such was his presage;
But never, never shall this feud be staunch'd.

Ant. Ah! woe is me!—Yet say, will they who
hear

³ The malediction of Œdipus.

These fateful omens, aiding still thy cause,
Rush headlong on destruction ?

Pol. None shall hear them.

A prudent general fans enlivening hope,
But wisely veils the omen of ill-fortune.

Ant. Is this thy sad and stern resolve, my brother ?

Pol. Detain me not. To this high enterprise,
Though dark and hopeless from a father's curse,
Be all my thoughts directed. But may Jove
With favouring eye behold you, so ye grant
My last request, and honour me in death ;
In life ye cannot aid me. Now, my sister,
Now let me go, and take a fond farewell,
A last farewell ! we meet in life no more.

Ant. Then am I lost indeed.

Pol. Mourn not for me.

Ant. My dearest brother, can I check these tears,
If frantic thus thou rush on open death ?

Pol. If fate so wills, I perish.

Ant. Yet,—oh yield—
Yield to a sister's prayer.

Pol. Persuade me not
To deeds of baseness.

Ant. But if thou shalt perish,
I am most wretched.

Pol. By the hand of Heaven
 Our doom must be decided. But from you
 May Heaven, propitious to my prayer, avert
 Sadness or suffering. Ye are most unworthy
 To mourn the blighting influence of despair.

Exit POLYNICES.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Ch. Redoubling sorrows to me now,
 This sightless stranger bears,
 Laden with heavier doom,
 If fate achieve no remedy.
 But never can I deem Heaven's high decree
 Is breathed in vain.
 Time, all-beholding Time,
 Looks on, and hastens still
 To fill the destined measure of his woes--
 Great Jove! what sudden thunders peal?

Œd. My daughters, O my daughters, is there nigh
 One who will speed to call the noble Theseus?

Ant. Why, dearest father, should the King be
 called?

Œd. This winged thunder peals from lofty Jove
To bear me to the grave. Send, send with speed.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Ch. Lo! yet again the mighty peal,
Rolled by the hand of Jove,
Grows louder; and mine hair
With thrilling horror stands erect.
My soul is troubled; for the lightning blaze
Again flames high.
What end is thus foretold?—
I tremble—Not in vain,
Nor void of dark event, these thunders roll;—
O mighty thunders! mightier Jove!

Œd. This, O my daughters, is the hour fore-
doomed
To close mine ills;—there is no respite now.

Ant. How know'st thou this? whence is such
presage drawn?

Œd. I know it well; but haste, once more I bid
thee,
Require thy Monarch's instant presence hither.

STROPHE II.

Ch. Hark!--hark!

Again the ceaseless thunder rolls
 In unabated wrath.
 Be merciful, dread Power ! be merciful.
 If o'er my mother-land thy wrath impends,
 Avert the wrathful stroke from me,
 Though on this wretch, oppressed with woes,
 I gazed,—and, gazing, pitied his despair.
 Dread Jove, on thee I call.

Œd. Is not the monarch nigh ? Still will he find me,
 My children, living, nor of sense bereft ?

Ant. What secret wouldst thou to his faith confide ?

Œd. For all his goodness, I would now repay
 The proffered recompense I pledged before.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Ch. Haste—haste,
 Speed, speed thy pace, my son, my son,
 Though on the utmost shore,
 To the dread Monarch of the Main thy hand
 Present the votive victim, come, O come !
 To thee, thy state, and martial friends,
 The grateful stranger would repay
 A guerdon meet for your kind courtesy.
 Come, my good Lord, O come.

Enter THESEUS.

THESEUS, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

Thes. Again this general shout and wild dismay?—
I hear your voices, and the stranger's too.
Did the red lightnings or tempestuous hail
Burst o'er your heads? When Jove's indignant voice
Is heard in thunder, such may well be dreaded.

Œd. Well art thou come, my Lord. Some fa-
vouring God

In happy moment sped thy footsteps hither.

Thes. What new event hath fallen, O son of Laius?

Œd. The close of my sad pilgrimage draws on ;
But let me first to thee and to thy land
Perform my promise ; then I die with honour.

Thes. What symbols presage thine impending fate?

Œd. The Gods themselves are heralds of my doom,
In none of all the former signs proved faithless.

Thes. How say'st thou, stranger, these are plainly
shown?

Œd. The fierce and frequent thunders, the red flames
Hurled by th' unconquered hand of lofty Jove !

Thes. Thy words demand my credence ; for I see
They have proved false in nought. Declare thou then
What duty now demands.

Œd. Great son of Ægeus,
I will inform thee what awaits thy state,
What lasting glories, never to decay.
Now will I lead thee, by no friendly hand
Sustained or guided, where my life must close ;
But never, never breathe to mortal ear
The place of that mysterious sepulchre ;—
Then shall it guard thy land with firmer might
Than myriad shields and mercenary spears.
There too alone, secluded, shalt thou learn
Unuttered mysteries, which I dare not breathe
To these thy subjects, no, nor my loved daughters,
Though dearest to my soul. Do thou maintain
Inviolatè silence till thine hour is nigh ;
Then breathe them only to the noblest chief ;
Bid him disclose them to the next alone ;
Thus ever shall ye hold your royal seat
Impregnable to Thebes. Unnumbered states,
Though swayed by wise and righteous laws, decline
To wrong and foul oppression. Yet the Gods
Behold unerringly, though late, when man
Turns from their hallowed awe to lawless pride ;
Beware, O Theseus, lest such fall be thine.
Yet why teach virtue to the heart that loves it ?
Now the strong impulse of th' inspiring God

Leads to the spot ; then let us onward now,
 Nor shrink in awe-struck reverence. O my daughters !
 Follow me thither ; I am now your guide,
 As ye so long have been your wretched father's.
 Advance—yet touch me not ; unaided all,
 That long and last asylum shall I find,
 Where this worn frame is fated to repose.
 This—this way pass ; for Hermes in that path
 Directs me, and the Queen of those dark realms.
 O light, dear light, long from mine eyes obscured,
 Thy last, last beam now warms this nerveless frame.
 Onward I pass to hide life's waning ray
 In death's chill darkness. Most illustrious King,
 Blessings on thee, thy state, thy faithful friends ;
 Oft in the hour of conquest and of fame
 Revere my memory, prosper by my doom.

[*Exeunt* ŒDIPUS, THESEUS, ANTIGONE,
and ISMENE.

Chorus.

STROPHE.

If to thee, Eternal Queen,
 Empress of the worlds unseen ;
 Mighty Pluto, if to thee,
 Hell's terrific Deity,

Lips of mortal mould may dare
 Breathe the solemn suppliant prayer,
 Grant the stranger swift release,
 Bid the mourner part in peace,
 Guide him where in silence deep
 All that once were mortal sleep.
 Since relentless Fate hath shed
 Sorrows o'er thy guiltless head,
 In thy pangs let mercy stay thee,
 In the grave let rest repay thee.

ANTISTROPHE.

Powers of Night! Infernal Maids!
 Monster-guardian of the shades!
 Who, as antique legends tell,
 Keep'st the brazen porch of Hell,
 And with ceaseless yell dost rave
 Fearful from thy gloomy cave;
 Thou, whose mighty bulk of yore
 Earth to sable Tartarus bore;
 Veil thy terrors, quell thine anger,
 Gently meet the passing stranger,
 Sinking now with welcome speed
 To the dwellings of the dead.

Thou, the ward of Hell who keepest !

Thou, the guard who never sleepest !

Enter a COLONIANTE.

COLONIANTE, CHORUS.

Col. Brief words, my countrymen, may tell the
tale,

That Œdipus is dead ; but *how* he died,
With what most strange and solemn circumstance,
Admits no brief recital.

Ch. Is he then,
Th' unhappy ! now at rest ?

Col. Yea. Know thou well
The sorrows of his heart are hushed for ever.

Ch. How—by celestial aid and calm release ?

Col. Much wilt thou marvel, when this too thou
hearest.

Thou know'st, for thou wert present, how from
hence

He walked, supported by no friendly hand,
But to us all a sure unfaltering guide.

Soon as he gained the rough and steep descent,
With brazen steps deep-rooted in the earth,
He stood, where varying paths converge in one,
Beside the caverned gulf, where yet remain
The fixed memorials of that mutual faith
Of old by Theseus and Pirithous pledged ;
And standing midway there, betwixt that spot
And the Thorician rock, the hollow thorn
And sepulchre of stone—he sate ; and there
His squalid weeds ungirding, to his side
He called his daughters, charging them to bring
A pure libation from the living stream,
And holy lavers ; they to Ceres' hill,
Clad with fresh-glistening verdure, haste with speed
To do his bidding ; then with lavers cleanse,
And in a decent robe their sire array,
As ancient custom's funeral rites enjoin.
These sadly-pleasing rites at length discharged,
Nor aught unfinished of their sire's command,
The Infernal Jove deep thundered from beneath.
The timid virgins trembled as they heard,
Then clasped their father's knees, dissolved in tears,
And smote their breasts with wailings long and loud.
He, when he heard that strange and sudden sound,

Pressed them in fond embrace ; and “ O my
children,”
He said, “ to-day ye have no more a father ;
The grave hath closed o’er all that once was mine ;
And your long painful task is now fulfilled—
Painful I know, my daughters, though one thought
Still soothes and sweetens these protracted toils ;
For never, never in a father’s breast
Glowed fonder love than I have felt for you ;
Of this bereft, on what remains of life
Shall better fortune smile.” With frequent sobs,
Locked in each other’s arms, they thus bewailed ;
But when their piercing cries an instant ceased,
And the first thrill was hushed, silence ensued,—
A silence, oh how awful !—From beneath,
With deep mysterious voice, called one unseen,
While our damp hair in stiffening horror stood.
Again, and yet again, the God exclaimed,
“ Come, Œdipus, why pause we to depart ?
Come, Œdipus ; for thou hast tarried long.”
Soon as he heard the summons of the God,
He called the royal Theseus to his side,
And thus addressed him, “ Dear and noble King !
Thy hand, th’ unbroken pledge of spotless faith,

Give to my children ; ye, my daughters, too,
Like pledge return ; and promise me, O King,
That thou wilt ne'er betray them ; but perform
Whate'er thy soul, benevolent, may deem
Congenial to their welfare." Our good Lord,
Like a true King, the promise promptly gave,
And stamped it with an oath. Accomplished this,
Straight in his feeble arms did Œdipus
Embrace his daughters, and thus bade farewell ;—
“ Ye, my loved children, yield with generous hearts
To stern necessity, and hence retire.
Seek not to see what mortal may not gaze on,
Or hear what never mortal sense may hear.
Away with speed ; for to the King alone
To rest, and mark the dread event, is given.”
We heard in wonder, and departed all ;
And with the sorrowing virgins from the spot
Receded ; backward in short space we gazed,
To seek the stranger ; but he was not there.
We marked the King alone, with close-pressed hands
Shading his brow, as if appalled by forms
More terrible than human sight could bear.
A few short moments ;—and we saw him bowed
Prostrate—adoring in one prayer the Earth,
And high Olympus, dwelling of the Gods.

But what the vanished stranger's wondrous fate,
 Save royal Theseus, man can never tell.
 For neither red and angry bolts of Jove
 Consumed him as he stood; nor maddening storm
 Hath swept his relics to the rolling sea;
 Some God conveyed him hence, or yawning earth
 Oped a new passage through her pathless caves,
 A painless passage to the realms of peace.
 Such doom demands no wailing; for he fell
 By slow disease unwithered, of mankind
 Most wondrous in his doom. Though this my tale
 Excite suspicion of my cooler sense,
 I will not yield to those who count me senseless.

Ch. Where are the maidens, with the friends
 who led them?

Col. They are not far; the sound of wailing wild
 Proclaims too well that they approach us now.

Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE.

ANTIGONE, ISMENE, COLONATE, CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Ant. Ah! 'tis no common or familiar grief
 That wounds us now—we mourn not now alone

Our guilty birth from that unhappy sire,
 For whose beloved sake,
 Serene and patient, countless toils we bore ;
 Now are we plunged in ills unspeakable,
 Which we behold and bear. †

Ch. What is it ?

Ant. 'Twere vain, my friends, to tell—
 'Tis past the imagining of one who feels not.

Ch. Hath he departed ?

Ant. He hath passed as thou
 Wouldst most desire his miseries should close.
 And wherefore ? Nor destroying war
 Nor ocean wrought his doom ;
 But earth in terror opened wide,
 And snatched him to his rest—
 Ah me ! and o'er our eyes
 A deadly night hath closed.
 Henceforth, alas ! in what far-distant clime,
 Wandering o'er what wild billowy sea,
 A refuge shall we find ?

STROPHE II.

Is. Alas ! I know not.

O that remorseless death
 Would grant the hapless child

To share her father's tomb. Henceforth, to me,
Life is but lingering death.

Ch. Oh best of daughters ! most beloved !
In resignation must ye bow
To Heaven's high will, nor thus indulge despair.
Who would contemn your lot ?

ANTISTROPHE I.

Ant. Then man, alas ! may long for woe itself :
What mortals deem most joyless was my joy,
While these fond arms his aged form embraced.
My father, my beloved,
Entombed for ever in the cheerless grave,
Dear to my heart wert thou when bowed in age,
And dear shalt ever be !

Ch. He hath accomplished—

Ant. Yea ; he hath indeed
Obtained the warmest wishes of his breast.

Ch. What wished he thus ?

Ant. He wished to breathe his last
In a strange land ; in a strange land indeed
He died ; and in eternal gloom
Now sleeps beneath the sod,
Leaving no transient woe ; for long,
My father, these sad eyes

Ceaseless shall weep. I know
 No hope that shall erase
 This woe. Alas! it was not well to die
 In a strange land, and dying leave
 Thy daughter desolate!

ANTISTROPHE II.

Is. Wretched Ismene!

What doom awaits me now,
 Forsaken, friendless all!
 Thee, too, beloved maid,—thee, as myself,
 Of a loved sire bereft.

Ch. Yet think how blessed was the close,
 Dear virgins, of his dreary course.
 Cease, cease your wailings; none of mortal birth
 From wretchedness are free.

STROPHE III.

Ant. Once more, dear sister, let us hence.

Is. And by what aim impelled?

Ant. My bosom burns to—

Is. What?

Ant. To see the funeral-bed—

Is. Of whom?

Ant. My father! wretched me.

Is. Would Heaven thy purpose sanction? Seest
thou not—

Ant. Why thus repress me?

Is. Think on this—

Ant. Why yet deter me?

Is. He lies unburied, and apart from all.

Ant. O lead, and slay me there.

Is. Woe, woe, unhappy! where
Again, deserted and forlorn,
Shall I in anguish pine?

ANTISTROPHE III.

Ch. Dear virgins, calm your anxious fears.

Ant. Ah! whither shall we fly?

Ch. Already have ye fled
Where wrong shall never fall.

Ant. I own it.

Ch. Wherefore then despond?

Ant. I know not how we shall return to Thebes.

Ch. Think not of that; 'tis plunged in ills.

Ant. It was before; yet—

The tide of misery ebbs and flows again.

Ch. Ah! ye are tossed upon a shoreless sea.

Ant. Shoreless indeed!

Ch. I know, and pity you.

Ant. Eternal Jove, ah whither shall we fly?
To what surviving hope
Will Heaven direct us now?

Enter THESEUS.

THESEUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

Thes. Cease, oh unhappy virgins, cease your
 plaints!
Ye should not weep for him, who oft invoked
Death, ere it came, to soothe him. 'Tis not well
To weep!

Ant. Great King, we supplicate thy grace.

Thes. What grace, poor maidens, would ye crave
 from me?

Ant. We but implore to gaze
On our dear father's tomb once more.

Thes. It cannot be; that spot ye must not tread.

Ant. What hast thou said, O King! the Lord of
 Athens?

Thes. Virgins, your dying father bade,
That none of mortal birth should e'er approach
That spot, or breathe funereal vows

O'er his mysterious tomb.

This charge observed with faith, he promised peace
And glory to our realm.

The God was conscious to my vows,
And the Infernal Jove, attesting all.

Ant. If such, indeed, be our lost father's will,
Be it his daughters' too. Yet grant us now
Safe conduct to Ogygian Thebes, if yet
We may avert the miseries that impend
O'er each doomed brother's head.

Thes. This will I do ; and all my power can reach
To soothe and aid you, for the love
Of him who rests late sepulchred in earth ;—
In such a task no labour will I shun.

Ch. But cease your sorrows, virgins, nor indulge
This wild impassioned woe.—

All hath been willed by Heaven's disposing hand.

[*Exeunt Omnes.*

ANTIGONE.



ANTIGONE.

IN forming our estimate of those productions of poetical genius, which have appeared in various countries and at different periods of time, it should ever be remembered, that similarity of conception and coincidence of design are totally distinct from, and unconnected with, *imitation*. The same character may indeed present itself, under the same aspect, to the contemplation of two minds, each gifted with superior powers; but it does not necessarily follow, that the more recent writer has been contented to pursue the track of his predecessor. Though there are several striking features of resemblance between the Cordelia of Shakspeare and

the Antigone of Sophocles,—both eminent for filial piety, both summoned to evince it under the most trying circumstances, and both, instead of receiving the recompense of virtue, consigned to an early and miserable doom,—it cannot be imagined, that the Prince of the Modern Drama was indebted to his Greek precursor for that idea of female excellence, which he has so beautifully embodied in the daughter of Lear. The simple fact is, that nature is the same at every age and in every clime; and these great masters of dramatic poetry acknowledged no other guide. They knew, that prosperity is not always the reward of virtue; and that no spectacle could be at once more natural and affecting, than the sight of beauty and excellence descending prematurely to the tomb.

To us, however, who are but imperfectly acquainted with the customs of the Ancients, and disqualified from allowing them due consideration by the diversity of our own, the Greek poet must necessarily appear under very material disadvantage. The very principle on which this drama is founded possesses comparatively little interest to us; it can neither excite sympathy nor commiseration.

tion in our minds. It is difficult for us fully to comprehend ;—it is impossible for us adequately to feel ;—*why* Antigone should be required to sacrifice her own life to the mere interment of her brother's corpse. We are indeed aware, that the privation of sepulture was esteemed by the Greeks a heavier calamity than the loss of life itself,—that the surviving kindred were enjoined, by the most solemn obligations, to pay the last sad offices to their departed relative,—and that even the 'casual traveller, who should pass a dead body without sprinkling over it three handfuls of dust, subjected himself to a penalty of the most tremendous execration. But, though we *know* all this, we cannot *feel* it; and, consequently, to our minds, the great interest of the drama is irreparably lost.

These remarks are introduced—not, it is hoped, without some reference to the subject—to obviate any disappointment which might be experienced

¹ Precibus non linquar inultis;

Teque piacula nulla resolvent.

Quanquam festinas, non est mora longa ; licebit

Injecto ter pulvere curras.

Horat. Lib. I. Od. 28.

on the perusal of this tragedy, particularly by those whose expectations are founded on the commendations of critics, and not derived from acquaintance with the original. Yet, under all its disadvantages, it will be found highly interesting and pathetic. That the Athenians, who were the most competent judges of its excellence, and among whose national defects has never been numbered the faculty of being *easily pleased*, honoured it with peculiar approbation, may be collected from two facts;² that it was represented thirty-two times without intermission, and that they requited its author with the government of Samos.

The chorus, indeed, by their servile submission to the arbitrary commands of the Tyrant Creon, seem to deviate somewhat from the canon prescribed by Horace :

Actoris partes chorus officiumque virile !
Defendat ;

² The authority for this fact is the expression of the Scholiast, *Λέλεκται δὲ τὸ δράμα τοῦτο τριακοσὸν δεύτερον*: which, however, may also signify, This drama was the thirty-second in order written by Sophocles.

Ille bonis faveatque, et concilietur amicis,
Et regat iratos, et amet peccare timentes ;
Ille dapas laudet mensæ brevis ; ille salubrem
Justitiam, legesque, et apertis otia portis ;
Ille tegat commissa ; Deosque precetur et oret,
Ut redeat miseris, abeat fortuna superbis.

Horat. Ars Poet. 193-201.

But this discrepancy is so judiciously accounted for by Potter, that we cannot do better than transcribe his words. “ In the Persian war Thebes had deserted the cause of glory and of Greece, and was, besides, hostile to the Athenian state ; therefore, to this generous people, animated with resentment, conscious of their own merit, and glowing with all the enthusiasm of civil liberty, nothing could be more pleasing than a representation of their hated enemies, under the most contemptible of all circumstances, as slaves to a tyrant.”

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ANTIGONE.

ISMENE.

CHORUS OF AGED THEBANS.

CREON, KING OF THEBES.

MESSENGERS.

HÆMON, SON OF CREON.

TIRESIAS.

EURYDICE, WIFE OF CREON.

ANTIGONE.

ANTIGONE, ISMENE.

Ant. Ismene, sister of my fondest love,
Know'st thou, of those unnumbered ills that sprung
From our devoted father, *one* which Jove
Heaps not on us, who now alone survive him ?
There is no grief or suffering, nought of shame
Or keen dishonour, which I cannot trace
Centred in thy afflictions and mine own.
E'en now, what new decree doth rumour blaze
Through all the city, by the King proclaimed ?
Know'st thou its import ? hast thou heard ? or yet

Are the fresh wrongs, designed by ruthless foes
³Against our dearest friends, concealed from
thee ?

Is. No tidings of our friends, Antigone,
Have reached me, sad or joyous, since the hour
When of our brethren we were both bereft,
On the same day by mutual rancour slain ;
Save that to-night the routed Argive host
Speeds its reluctant flight ; nought know I more
To wake our hopes or aggravate our fears.

Ant. I knew too well ; and, therefore, summoned
thee

Beyond the palace-gates to hear alone.

Is. And what ? Thy words bespeak a troubled
soul.

Ant. For hath not Creon, honouring with a tomb
One of our brethren, in dishonour held
Another not less dear ? He hath entombed,
As Fame reports, with due sepulchral rites,

³ As Polynices was the elder son of $\text{\textcircled{C}}$ edipus, and, consequently, the rightful inheritor of the crown of Thebes, he had already been wronged by the opposition which was made to his ascending the throne. Hence the prohibition of Creon, that his remains should be interred, was a new and additional injury.

Eteocles, among the Gods below
 An honourable shade. But his decree
 Sternly enjoins the city not to grace
 The wretched Polynices with a grave,
 Nor o'er his relics shed the pitying tear ;
 But leave him unlamented, unentombed,
⁴A welcome banquet to the birds of death,
 Fierce swooping to their prey. Such things, 'tis
 said,
 To you and me, for I must name myself,
 Ordains this worthy Creon, and approaches
 Here too the same stern edict to proclaim,
 Lest any yet plead ignorance. Nor account
 This charge of trivial import. Death awaits
 Him, who shall do the deed,—a public death,
 By stoning from the people. Such is now
 Our perilous state ; and quickly must thou prove
 Whether thy soul is noble as thy birth,
 Or thou degenerate from thy lofty line.

⁴ The common reading, *εἰσορῶσι*, rendered by Potter
 “ whose keen eye marks their prey,” appears altogether in-
 admissible. The emendation which we have adopted,
εἰσορμῶσιν, has been proposed and approved by the most eminent
 commentators.

Is. What then, unhappy ! could I more avail,
 5 Who cannot sanction, nor repeal the law ?

Ant. Reflect awhile. Wilt thou partake my toils ?

Is. In what emprise ? what is thy wild design ?

Ant. Wilt thou unite with me to bear away
 The lifeless body ?

Is. And wilt *thou* presume
 To give him burial, though the state forbid ?

Ant. He is my brother ; aye, and thine ; though
 thou

Art thus reluctant, I will ne'er betray him.

Is. Too daring sister ! when the King forbids ?

Ant. He hath no power to hold me from mine
 own.

Is. O think, dear sister ! think on our poor father ;
 How, by a doom inglorious and abhorred,
 He fell ;—and, maddened by detected crimes,

5 The common reading, remarks Erfurd on this passage, “ λύεις ἂν ἢ θάπτεις,” is evidently incorrect, since the opposition, which ought to exist between the two verbs, does not occur here, λύνει τον νόμον being exactly the same in signification as θάπτειν. He, therefore, proposes to read λέσσεια. The reader may form his own opinion respecting this emendation, which we have contented ourselves with stating, and not ventured to adopt.

Tore out his eyes with self-avenging hand.
Think how his wife and mother too—she bore
That twofold name—by the suspended cord
Her course of suffering closed. Reflect, once more,
How in one day our hapless brothers slain,
Each by the other's spear, received alike
From fratricidal hands their common doom.
We now are left unfriended and alone :
And oh, bethink thee, how we must incur
A doom more dark and fearful, if we dare
To spurn by force the mandate of our tyrant.
And weigh this also ;—nature formed us women,
Weak and unfit to cope with mightier man ;
Since, therefore, we are swayed by stronger lords,
Submit we meekly, though to keener wrongs.
First will I ask forgiveness of the dead,
That force constrains me to obey the mighty ;
Then bow to those who hold the sovereign sway.
To dare a deed so far beyond our strength,
What is it but distraction ?—

Ant. I forbear

To urge thee more ; nay, did thy spirit burn
To share mine enterprise, I would not now
Accept thine aid. Act as thy prudence guides thee.
I will entomb him. For a deed like this,

Oh what were death but glory? I shall rest
 Beloved with him I love, my last sad duty
 Boldly discharged. Our latest, longest home
 Is with the dead; and therefore would I please
 The lifeless, not the living. I shall rest
 For ever there; but thou, if such thy pleasure,
 Trample in scorn on those most sacred rites,
 Which the Gods reverence.

Is. Nay, I do not hold
 Those rites in scorn; but, when the state forbids,
 I am not framed by nature to resist.

Ant. Still feign such fair pretences; I will hence
 To heap a mound o'er my beloved brother.

Is. Alas, my sister! how I tremble for thee.

Ant. Fear not for me; but look to thine own
 safety.

Is. At least, to none impart thy bold design;
 Veil it in darkness; I too will be silent.

Ant. Nay, but declare it; I shall hate thee more,
 If thou forbear my purpose to divulge.

Is. ⁶Thou'rt warm; and yet methinks a deed
 like this

⁶ Θερμὴν ἐπὶ ψυχροῖσι καρδίαν ἔχεις; literally, you have a warm heart in a cold business. This idiomatic expression is difficult to be preserved in a translation.

Might damp thy zeal.

Ant. I know that those I please,
Whom most to please becomes me.

Is. Couldst thou *do* it—
It far transcends thy power.

Ant. I will forbear,
Whene'er my power shall fail me.

Is. 'Tis unseemly
To aim at objects which transcend thy reach.

Ant. Nay, if thou still persist to answer thus,
I cannot choose but hate thee ; and thy words
Will make thee no less hateful to the dead.
Leave me, and my presumption, as thou deem'st it,
To dare the menaced evil. I can suffer
No heavier penalty than not to die
An honourable death.

Is. If such thy purpose,
Go ; void of prudence do I deem the deed,
Though fond and faithful to the friends thou lovest.

[*Exeunt* ANTIGONE and ISMENE.]

Chorus.

STROPHE I.

Beam of the sun ! the brightest ray
 That ever shot from yon blue heaven,
 To gild our stately portals seven ;
 Eye of the golden day !
 At length thine orient splendours glancing
 O'er Dirce's hallowed stream are dancing,
 Urging to swifter, wilder flight
⁷The chief with argent buckler bright ;
 Who, from proud Argos' distant towers,
 Led to our land his martial powers,
 And to the dubious field of fame
 With vengeful Polynices came.
 As the swift eagle spreads her snow-white wing,
 And downward swoops impetuous to the strand ;
 So, with reverberant arms, and casques that fling
 Their floating crests in air, he led the Argive
 band.

⁷ Adrastus, King of Argos, and father-in-law of Polynices.

ANTISTROPHE I.

High o'er our towers the chieftain stood,
 With spears in carnage deeply dyed,
 Circling our portals in his pride ;—
 But ere in Theban blood
 His wrath was quenched, ere flames were curling
 Around the destined turrets furling ;
 In swift retreat, dismayed he fled ;—
 Such wild alarm and withering dread
 Full on his rear our troops impelled,
⁸ And all his dragon-frenzy quelled.
 For Jove, with just abhorrence fired,
 Hears lofty vaunts by pride inspired ;
 He marked, as onward rushed the adverse powers,
 Radiant with gold, with armour's echoing clang,
 And hurled the brandished bolt, as to our towers,
 With conquest's maddening shout, th' infuriate
 boaster sprang.

⁸ Ἀντίπαλῳ δυσχέρῳμα δράκοντι. The exact signification of the word *δυσχέρῳμα* has excited some discussion. It denotes properly, “*res ægre superabilis.*” *Δράκοντι* is applied by most commentators to the Thebans. There is, however, no necessity for such an application, as the expression may be used, in a general sense, to denote the violent hostility

STROPHE II.

⁹ Armed with devouring flames, at once he fell
 A blackening corpse to earth, whose rancour past
 Swift as the winged blast
 When rising whirlwinds darkly swell.
 But other ills befel ;—
 For mighty Mars the storm of battle guided,
 And still to each his doom divided.
 At the seven gates, seven chiefs of martial might,
 With seven bold Thebans matched in equal fight,
 Left their bright spoils to grace Tropæan Jove ;
 Save that devoted pair—who, from one sire,
 One guilty mother sprung—in mortal ire
 With ruthless spears in stern encounter strove,
 Victorious each, and doomed an equal fate to prove.

ANTISTROPHE II.

But Conquest comes, with noblest names renowned,
 To grace her Thebes, whose sons control the car ;

of the Argives against the Thebans. The word *bellua* occurs among Latin authors in a similar sense.

⁹ Capaneus, struck down by a thunderbolt, while attempting to scale the walls.

Now be the woes of war
 Henceforth in glad oblivion drowned,
 And let each fane resound
 With joyous vigils, Bacchus first adoring,
 To Bacchus first the glad strain pouring.—
 But lo! the King whose rule we now revere,
 Menœceus' late-crowned son, advances here ;
 Raised to imperial sway by favouring Fate ;—
 Now weighty cares seem labouring in his breast,
 And hence I deem the Monarch's high behest
 Bade the swift heralds summon to debate
 This chosen conclave,—these, the sages of the state.

Enter CREON.

CREON, CHORUS.

Cr. Thebans, the Gods, who willed our struggling
 state.

To be the sport of many an adverse wave,
 Once more have reared it vigorous from the storm.
 I sent the heralds to convene you here,
 Apart from all, for well I ever knew
 Your firm allegiance to the house of Laius ;

While Ædipus bore sway, ye nobly proved it ;
And on the wreck of all his prouder fortunes
Firm were ye still, and loyal to his sons.
Since in one day they met an equal doom,
By mutual hate destroying and destroyed,
On me devolve the sceptre and the sway,
As to the dead by nearest ties allied.
Vain were the task to trace man's secret soul,
The latent thoughts and judgements of his mind,
Till proved by empire—practised in the laws.
For me, the man who guides the helm of state,
Nor to the sagest counsels firmly cleaves,
But curbs the natural current of his thoughts,
By servile fear constrained ; such do I deem,
Such ever deemed, most worthless. Lightly, too,
That man I value, who regards his friend
Beyond his country's welfare. For myself ;—
All-seeing Jove attest my stainless truth !—
I will not tamely and in silence mark
Peril and ruin o'er the state impend,
In place of safety ; never will I deem
That man my friend who is my country's foe.
Experience tells me, on the state alone
Our weal depends ; and while in steady course
Her bark is steered, we cannot fail of friends.

By rules like these will I exalt the city ;
And now, with these concurring, this decree
Have I proclaimed to all our citizens,
Touching the sons of Œdipus. We will
To lay the youth, who in his country's cause
Died nobly fighting, first by valorous deeds
Ennobled, in an honourable tomb,
With all sepulchral splendours, which are wont
To grace the mighty dead. But for his brother—
I speak of Polynices—who, returned
To his paternal realms and Patron-Gods
From distant exile, panted to subvert
His native city with devouring flame ;—
To sate his vengeful thirst with Theban blood,
And bear his captive countrymen to bondage ;—
We will that none commit him to the tomb
With hallowed rites, or mourn above his bier,
But leave his corpse unburied ; let the dogs
And wild birds batten on his loathed remains.
Such is our will ; for never shall the base
Receive from me like reverence with the virtuous ;
But the good man, who seeks my country's welfare,
In life or death, shall ever win from me
Unvarying honour due.

Ch. If such thy pleasure,
 Son of Meneceus, towards the ruthless foe
 And gallant friend of Thebes ; enforce the law
 Thy kingly mandate sanctions, on the dead,
 As on ourselves, whoe'er are living still.

Cr. Ye then attend to see our will obeyed.

Ch. A task like this befits more vigorous youth.

Cr. Guards are already set to watch the dead.

Ch. What more than this wouldst thou command ?

Cr. That ye

Concede no grace to those who dare transgress.

Ch. Who is so senseless as to long for death ?

Cr. Aye, death shall be the meed ; but men too oft
 By hope of treacherous gain are lured to ruin.

Enter MESSENGER.

CREON, CHORUS, MESSENGER.

Mess. I dare not say, my Lord ! with breathless
 speed

And hurried step I sought thy royal presence,
 For ponderings of dark presage long detained me,
 And oft I turned as to retrace my path,

Long unresolved—for various were the pleas
My soul suggested;—“ Wherefore dost thou speed,
Unhappy man ! where woe and wrath await thee ?
Yet what avails to linger ? Should the King
Learn thine unwelcome errand from another,
How wouldst thou rue thy rashness !” Musing thus,
I came with steps irresolute and slow.

Thus a short path becomes a lengthened way.
At length my final sentence here impelled me ;
And, though mine errand gall thee, I must speak.
I come confiding in this only hope,
Nought can I suffer more than Heaven ordains.

Cr. And what excites this strange solicitude ?

Mess. First of myself indulge a brief remark.
Nor have I done the deed, nor can I tell
Who did it ; vengeance therefore on my head
Would fall unjustly.

Cr. Well dost thou evade,
And raise a cautious rampart round thy cause ;
Thine errand seems of something new and strange.

Mess. Unwonted perils wake unusual fear.

Cr. Wilt thou not speak, and hie thee hence
absolved ?

Mess. Now, then, I speak. Some one hath just
interred

The corpse, and fled; first sprinkling o'er the dead
The loose dry dust, all decent rites discharged.

Cr. Ha! sayst thou so? Who, then, hath done
the deed?

Mess. I know not;—not a stroke of axe was there,
Nor mark of delving spade; the earth around
Was solid and unbroken, and by track
Of wheel unfurrowed; not a trace betrayed
The viewless workman. When the earliest watch
Of morn revealed it, it awoke in all
A sad astonishment. No mound was raised,
And yet the corpse had vanished; the light dust
Was sprinkled o'er it, as by one who shunned
Pollution from the dead. No track appeared
Of beast or ravening dog, who might have torn
The lifeless relics for his bloody fare.

Then rose the interchange of keen reproach,
Guard criminating guard. Nay, had the strife
Increased to mortal rancour, none was there
To quell the rising madness. Each accused
His fellow of the deed, yet visible guilt
Attached to none, and each repelled the charge.

¹⁰We stood prepared to lift the glowing mass

¹⁰ This singular allusion proves the antiquity of the trial by ordeal, so prevalent in the monkish ages.

Of heated metal, through the living flame
 To pass, and call to witness the great Gods,
 That all were most unconscious of the deed,
 Unknowing who devised or who performed it.
 At last, when all our scrutiny was vain,
 One spake, whose sentence bowed us to the earth
 With wild o'ermastering terror, for we could not
 Refute his reasoning, nor devise a scheme
 Less fraught with peril :—thus its purport ran :
 That this bold deed be straight disclosed to thee ;
 It could not be concealed. His voice prevailed ;
 The lots were cast ; on me, alas ! it fell,
 To bear these ¹ *welcome* tidings. I am come
 Unwilling herald to reluctant hearers ;—
 None greet with joy the messenger of ill.

Ch. O King ! already have my thoughts ascribed
 This strange event to interposing Gods.

Cr. Cease, ere mine anger kindle at thy words ;—
 Lest thou be found at once unwise and aged.
 Who can endure thy babbling, when thou sayst

¹ Spoken ironically. The expression in the original is *τοῦτο ταγαθόν*, which might be accurately rendered by “ this precious intelligence,” a phrase evidently altogether inadmissible into tragic poetry.

The Gods revere a wretch accursed as this ?
Would they entomb with honourable rites,
As of such meed deserving, one who came
To fire their columned fanes and costly shrines,
Their land to ravage, and subvert their laws ?
Seest thou the Gods requiting guilt with glory ?
It is not thus. A rebel faction lurks
Within the state, who murmur at our sway,
Muttering their spleen in secret, and disdain
To stoop the lofty crest beneath our yoke
In due submission. They, I know full well
By fraudulent arts of bribery have suborned
Their hirelings to the deed. Ne'er sprung device
So fraught with evils to mankind as gold.
This lays imperial cities in the dust;—
Drives men to exile from their native land ;—
'Tis this instructs and turns the generous soul
From honour's onward road to deeds of baseness;—
This paves a path to artifice and fraud,
And every nameless ill that shames mankind.
But they, whom lucre to the deed hath led,
Have sealed their doom, and shall endure the death ;
And oh ! if yet I fear th' Eternal Jove,
Be well assured, for by His name I swear,
Unless ye find, and bring before our presence,

The authors of this outrage, death alone
Shall not suffice for vengeance ; ye shall hang
Alive, till ye reveal th' atrocious wrong,
That, well apprised whence profit should arise,
Ye may hereafter seek it there, and learn,
That not from every source may gain accrue.
Far more by lawless lucre wilt thou mark
Consigned to ruin, than from ill preserved.

Mess. May I now speak, or must I thus depart ?

Cr. Know'st thou not yet how odious are thy words ?

Mess. Harsh to thine ear, or hateful to thy soul ?

Cr. Why dost thou scan the nature of my pain ?

Mess. The author of the deed hath galled thy soul ;
I but offend thine ear.

Cr. Wretch ! thou wert born
A most inveterate babbler.

Mess. Of this deed,
At least, I am not guilty.

Cr. Thou hast bartered
Thy life for worthless gold.

Mess. Alas ! how keenly
Suspensions, though unfounded, wound the guiltless.

Cr. Aye, prate upon suspicion ; but unless
Ye find the criminal, soon shall ye own
On lawless gain a fearful vengeance waits.

Mess. Soon be the guilty found ; yet be it thus,

[*Exit* CREON.

Or not, (for this must fate alone decide,)

No more shalt thou behold me here return ;

And now, preserved beyond or hope or thought,

I owe glad praises to protecting Heaven.

[*Exit* MESSENGER.

Chorus.

STROPHE I.

Mid nature's countless wonders none is found
 More marvellous than MAN ! O'er the white wave
 He speeds his daring course, while foam around
 The swelling surges, and loud whirlwinds rave,
 Fearless the billows and the blast to brave.
 Man, year by year, the labouring steed constrains
 To urge the rolling plough, a docile slave,
 O'er Earth, Supreme of Gods ;—whose teeming veins
 Nor countless years exhaust, nor ceaseless labour
 drains.

ANTISTROPHE I.

The feathered tribes that cut the yielding air,
 The wilder race who prowl the pathless wood,
 Alike can man's inventive skill ensnare

In fine-wove toils ; nor less the watery brood
 Who sport secure in ocean's trackless flood.
 Man, by superior art, can curb and chain
 The brute, wild ranging o'er the mountains rude ;
 The haughty steed elate with flowing mane,
 And the fierce mountain-bull beneath his yoke
 restrain.

STROPHE II.

The might of eloquence he taught,
 The rapid train of counselled thought,
 The social ties that link mankind ;—
 He taught the sheltering roof to form,
 And from the “²arrows of the storm”
 A safe asylum find.
 Skilful in all things, no surprise
 Finds him unwarned or unprepared ;—
 One art alone his skill defies,
 The shaft of death to ward :
 Though man for many a woe hath found
 Relief, and balm for many a wound.

² Δύσομβρα φεύγειν βέλη. Sophocles terms hail “the arrows of the storm.” Milton (and after him Gray) has inverted the metaphor, and termed thick flying arrows “sleet of arrowy shower.”—Potter.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Unfettered springs his active mind
High o'er the range by Hope assigned ;
To virtue soars, or sinks to shame ;
Him who the sacred laws reveres,
And Heaven's avenging justice fears,
His country crowns with fame ;—
But instant from her breast be driven
The wretch accursed, whose guilty soul,
From impious deeds, nor fear of Heaven
Nor earthly laws control.
Far from my hearth let such remove,
Nor share my counsel and my love.

Ha ! what new wonders burst upon my sight ?
How—known too well—can I deny
This is the young Antigone ?—
Oh, thou unhappy child
Of an unhappy father ! wherefore thus ?—
Why do they drag thee here ?—
Not as a rebel to the royal laws,
And in thy rashness seized ?—

ANTIGONE is brought in by the MESSENGER.

CHORUS, MESSENGER, ANTIGONE.

Mess. This is the daring author of the deed.
We seized her in the act of sepulture—
But where is Creon ?

Ch. At thy need again,
From out the palace, lo ! the Monarch comes.

Enter CREON.

CREON, MESSENGER, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

Cr. What make ye here ? What timely chance
hath fallen ?

Mess. Nought, O my Lord, should man by oath
forswear,

Lest calmer thought confute the rash resolve.
I vowed, by thy stern menaces appalled,
Long should it be ere hither I returned ;
But joy is doubly sweet, when hope itself
Hath ceased to look for gladness. I am come,—
Though bound by strongest oath to come no more,—
Leading this virgin, whom we found in act
The body to entomb. In this, at least,

No lot was thrown ; the unexpected prize
 Is all mine own. Now, Monarch, at thy will
 Receive—convict—condemn the conscious maid.—
 Approve mine innocence, and send me hence
 Acquitted and absolved.

Cr. Whence bring'st thou her,
 And wherefore ?—Speak.

Mess. She hath interred the dead ;
 Thou hear'st the whole.

Cr. And art thou well assured
 Of thine assertion ? Canst thou prove the charge ?

Mess. I saw her hand entomb the corpse, by thee
 Denied a grave. Speak I not plainly now ?

Cr. How didst thou see her ?—where detect and
 seize her ?

Mess. I will recount the whole. Soon as we
 reached

The spot, by thine indignant threats appalled,
 From the pale corpse we swept the covering dust,
 Laid bare the putrid relics, and sate down
 Upon a loftier mound, in the free air,
 To shun the fetid odours of the corpse.
 While each his comrade urged with keen reproach,
 Denounced on him who first shrunk back from toil.
 Thus rolled the hours, till now the noon-day sun

In the mid arch of Heaven resplendent flamed,
And the full rays beat fiercely on our heads ;
When sudden from the earth a whirlwind rose—
Troubled the clear blue sky, o'er the far plain
Impetuous swept, and of their foliage dense
The waving woods divested. The hot air
Was choked with dusty clouds, and we, with eyes
Deep-closed, this Heaven-inflicted pest endured.
The blast at length subsided. Then we saw
This maid, who wailed with loud and bitter cry,
As the poor bird, that hastens to her young,
And finds her nest deserted,—thus the virgin,
Soon as uncovered she discerned the corpse,
Redoubled her shrill wailings, and invoked
Dire imprecations on the heads of all
Who wrought this sacrilege. Then in her hands
She brought the light dry dust, and from a vase
With nicest art ensculptured, on the dead
Poured due libations trine. We at the sight
Rushed onward and secured her—nought appalled ;
Then straightly taxed her with the former deed,
As with the present ; she confessed the whole.
Welcome, yet painful, was her frank avowal.
To shun impending evil is most welcome ;

Painful to work the woe of those we honour.
 Yet all regrets are fruitless, and must yield
 To mine own preservation.

Cr. Answer thou,
 Bending thy head to earth,—dost thou confess,
 Or canst deny the charge?

Ant. I do confess it
 Freely ; I scorn to disavow the act.

Cr. *Thou*, from the threatened penalty absolved,
 [To MESSENGER.
 Go where thou wilt, acquitted. But for *thee*,
 [To ANTIGONE.

Reply with answer brief to one plain question,
 Without evasion. Didst thou know the law,
 That none should do this deed ?

Ant. I knew it well ;
 How could I fail to know, it was most plain.

Cr. Didst thou then dare transgress our royal
 mandate ?

Ant. Ne'er did eternal Jove such laws ordain,
 Or Justice, throned amid th' Infernal Powers,
 Who on mankind these holier rites imposed ;—
 Nor can I deem thine edict armed with power
 To contravene the firm unwritten laws

Of the just Gods, thyself a weak frail mortal!
These are no laws of yesterday,—they live
For evermore, and none can trace their birth.
I would not dare, by mortal threat appalled,
To violate their sanction, and incur
The vengeance of the Gods. I knew before
That I must die, though thou hadst ne'er pro-
claimed it;

And if I perish ere th' allotted term,
I deem that death a blessing. Who that lives,
Like me, encompassed by unnumbered ills,
But would account it blessedness to die?
If then I meet the doom thy laws assign,
It nothing grieves me. Had I left my brother,
From mine own mother sprung, on the bare earth
To lie unburied, *that* indeed might grieve me;
But for this deed I mourn not. If to thee
Mine actions seem unwise, 'tis thine own soul
That errs from wisdom when it deems me senseless.

Ch. This maiden shares her father's stubborn soul
And scorns to bend beneath misfortune's power.

Cr. Yet thou mightst know, that loftiest spirits
oft
Are bowed to deepest shame; and thou mightst mark
The hardest metal soft and ductile made

By the resistless energy of flame ;
Oft, too, the fiery courser have I seen
By a small bit constrained. High arrogant thoughts
Beseem not one, whose duty is submission.
In this presumption she was lessoned first,
When our imperial laws she dared to spurn,
And to that insolent wrong fresh insult adds,
In that she glories vaunting in the deed.
Henceforth no more deem mine a manly soul ;—
Concede that name to hers, if from this crime
She shall escape unpunished. Though she spring
From our own sister ;—were she sprung from one
³ Dearer than all whom Hercian Jove defends,
She and her sister shall not now evade
A shameful death ; for I accuse her, too,
And deem her privy to these lawless rites.
Hence, call her hither ; late within I marked
Her frenzied ravings and distempered mood.
The mind that broods in darkness o'er its guilt
By starts of frenzy is betrayed to light.
I hate the wretch, who, when convicted, strives

³ In the original, from one more near of blood than all under the protection of Hercian Jove. This Jupiter was the guardian of the house, in the court of which his altar stood.

To veil detected guilt in honour's garb.

Ant. And wouldst thou aught beyond my death?

Cr. No more;

'Tis all I seek.

Ant. Then wherefore dost thou pause?—

For all thy words are hateful to mine ear,
 And ever will be hateful; nor my speech
 To thee is less unwelcome. Whence could I
 Obtain a holier praise, than by committing
 My brother to the tomb? These, too, I knew,
 Would all approve the action, but that fear
 Curbs their free thoughts to base and servile silence.
 But 'tis the noble privilege of tyrants
 To say and do whate'er their lordly will,
 Their only law, may prompt.

Cr. Of all the Thebans,

Dost thou alone see this?

Ant. They too behold it;

But fear constrains them to an abject silence.

Cr. Doth it not shame thee to dissent from these?

Ant. I cannot think it shame to love my brother.

Cr. Was not he too, who died for Thebes, thy
 brother?

Ant. He was; and of the self-same parents born.

Cr. Why then dishonour him to grace the guilty?

Ant. The dead entombed will not attest thy words.

Cr. Yes ; if thou honour with an equal doom
That impious wretch—

Ant. He did not fall a slave ;
He was my brother.

Cr. Yet he wronged his country ;
The other fought undaunted in her cause.

Ant. Still Death at least demands an equal law.

Cr. Ne'er should the base be honoured like the
noble.

Ant. Who knows, if this be holy in the shades ?

Cr. Death cannot change a foe into a friend.

Ant. My nature tends to mutual love, not hatred.

Cr. Then to the grave, and love them, if thou
must ;—

But while I live, no woman shall bear sway.

Ch. Lo ! at the portal fair Ismene stands,
Dissolved in tears at her loved sister's peril.

The cloud of heartfelt sorrow lowers

O'er her dejected brow,

And dims the radiance of her loveliness.

ISMENE is brought in.

CREON, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

Cr. O thou false viper! stealing through my house
To prey upon my vitals; till this hour
I knew not I had nurtured two such furies,
Leagued to subvert my throne. Approach, and
tell me,—

Art thou accomplice in this venturous deed,
Or wilt thou swear thine innocence of the charge?

Is. The deed, so she deny not, I have shared.
I shared the crime, and will partake the vengeance.

Ant. Such an assertion justice will disclaim;
Nor wouldst thou give, nor I accept thine aid.

Is. Yet in this deep extremity of woe,
I do not blush to share thy destiny.

Ant. Whose deed is this, let Hell's dark Powers
attest;

I value not a friend who loves in words.

Is. Ah! do not—do not spurn me thus, my sister;
Let me partake thy doom; and thus in death
Revere my brother.

Ant. No; die not with me,
Nor claim a deed thou didst not; 'tis enough
That I must perish.

Is. Yet, bereft of thee,

What still hath life to charm me ?

Ant. Ask thy Creon ;

Thou court'st his royal favour.

Is. Wherefore thus

Wound me, dear sister, when it nought avails thee ?

Ant. I mourn, although I mock thee.

Is. Is there nought

In which I yet may aid thee ?

Ant. Save thyself ;

I do not envy thine escape.

Is. Ah me !

Am I forbidden e'en to share thy doom ?

Ant. It was thy choice to live ;—'tis mine to die.

Is. Alas ! thou dost not fall unwarned by me.

Ant. Thy words to thee seemed weighty ; I esteemed it

True wisdom thus to act.

Is. And yet our share

Is equal in this crime.

Ant. Be of good cheer—

Thou yet mayst live ;—my life hath long been vowed
To reverence thus the dead.

Cr. Of these two maidens,

The one hath gone distracted, and the other

Was born an idiot.

Is. Oh, my Lord ! the mind,
Is bowed by misery from its native strength,
And changed to utter weakness.

Cr. Such was thine,
When thou wert aiding in a deed like this.

Is. What charm hath life's bleak solitude for me,
If I must lose my sister ?

Cr. Name her not ;
She hath ALREADY perished.

Is. Wilt thou slay
Thy son's affianced bride ?

Cr. Aye ; for a race
May spring from other nuptials.

Is. None, at least,
So dear to him and her.

Cr. I scorn to wed
My son to a base woman.

Is. Dearest Hæmon !
How doth thy father pour contempt on thee.

Cr. Thou and thy nuptials are to me most hateful.

Is. Wilt thou then rob thy Hæmon of his bride ?

Cr. Death shall ere long dissolve these hated
nuptials.

Is. Alas ! it seems the stern decree is fixed ;
And she must perish.

Cr. So must thou, and I.

Quick, slaves!—delay no longer—lead them in.

It ill beseems that maidens thus should roam

At large; and e'en the boldest will recede,

When they discern the swift approach of Death.

[*Exeunt* ANTIGONE and ISMENE, guarded.]

Chorus.

STROPHE I.

What blessedness is theirs, whose earthly date

Glides unembittered by the taste of woe!

But when a house is struck by angry Fate,

Through all its line what ceaseless miseries flow!

As when from Thrace rude whirlwinds sweep,

And in thick darkness wrap the yawning deep,

Conflicting surges on the strand

Dash the black mass of boiling sand

Rolled from the deep abyss;—the rocky shore,

Struck by the swollen tide, reverberates the roar.

ANTISTROPHE I.

I see the ancient miseries of thy race,

O Labdacus! arising from the dead

With fresh despair ; nor sires from sons efface
The curse some angry Power hath rivetted
For ever on thy destined line !
Once more a cheering radiance seemed to shine
O'er the last relic of thy name ;—
This, too, the Powers of Darkness claim,
Cut off by Hell's keen scythe, combined
With haughty words unwise, and frenzy of the mind.

STROPHE II.

Can mortal arrogance restrain
Thy matchless might, Imperial Jove !
Which all-subduing sleep assaults in vain,
And months celestial, as they move
In never-wearied train ;—
Spurning the power of age, enthroned in might,
Thou dwell'st mid Heaven's broad light.
This was, in ages past, thy firm decree,
Is now, and must for ever be ;
That none of mortal race on earth shall know,
A life of joy serene, a course unmarked by woe.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Hope beams with ever-varying ray ;
Now fraught with blessings to mankind,

Now with vain dreams that lure but to betray ;—
 And man pursues, with ardour blind,
 Her still deluding way,
 Till on the latent flame he treads dismayed.
 Wisely the Sage hath said,
 And time hath proved his truth, that when by
 Heaven
 To woe Man's darkened soul is driven,
 Evil seems good to his distorted mind,
 Till soon he meets and mourns the doom by Fate
 assigned.

But lo ! the youngest of thy sons,
 Hæmon advances—comes he wrung with grief
 For the impending doom
 Of his fair plighted bride, Antigone,
 And mourning much his blasted nuptial joys?—

Enter HÆMON.

HÆMON, CREON, CHORUS.

Cr. We soon shall need no prophet to inform us.—
 Hearing our doom irrevocably past
 On thy once-destined bride, com'st thou, my son,
 Incensed against thy father ? Or, thus acting,

Still do we share thy reverence ?

Hæ. I am thine ;

And thou, my father, dost direct my youth
By prudent counsels, which shall ever guide me ;
Nor any nuptials can with me outweigh
A father's just command.

Cr. 'Tis well, my son.

A mind like this befits thee, to esteem
All else subservient to a father's will.
Hence 'tis the prayer, the blessing of mankind,
To nourish in their homes a duteous race,
⁴Who on their foes may well requite their wrongs,
And, as their father, honour friends sincere.
But he who to a mean and dastard race
Gives life, engenders to himself regret,
And much derision to his taunting foes.
Then do not thou, my son, by love betrayed,
Debase thy generous nature for a woman ;
But think how joyless is the cold embrace
Of an unworthy consort. Is there wound

⁴ Like as the arrows in the hand of the giant, even so are young children. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them, they shall not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate.—Ps. cxxvii. 5, 6.

Which galls more keenly than a faithless friend ?
Spurn, then, this maiden, as a foe abhorred,
To seek in Hell a more congenial bridegroom.
Since her have I convicted,—her alone
Of all the city daring to rebel,
My people shall not brand their King a liar !
She dies ! And let her now invoke her Jove,
Who guards the rights of kindred. If I brook
Rebellion thus from those allied by blood,
How strong a plea may strangers justly urge !
He who upholds the honour of his house,
By strict, impartial justice, will be proved
True to the public weal. Nor can I doubt
The man who governs well, yet knows no less
To render due obedience, will be found
A just and firm confederate in the storm
Of peril and of war. Who dares presume
With insolent pride to trample on the laws,
Shall never win from me the meed of praise.
He whom the state elects should be obeyed
In all his mandates, trivial though they seem,
Or just or unjust. Of all human ills,
None is more fraught with woes than anarchy ;
It lays proud states in ruin, it subverts
Contending households, 'mid the battle strife

Scatters the serried ranks, while to the wise,
Who promptly yield, obedience brings success.
Still, then, by monarchs this should be maintained,
Nor e'er surrendered to a woman's will.

'Tis better far, if we must fall, to fall
By man, than thus be branded the weak prey,
The abject prey, of female conquerors.

Ch. To us, unless our soul be dull with age,
Thy words, O King, seem well and wisely urged.

Hæ. The Gods, my father, have on man bestowed
Their noblest treasure—Reason. To affirm,
That in thy words from prudence thou hast
swerved,

Nor power have I, nor knowledge to maintain.
Such task were meeter from a stranger's lips.

'Tis mine to guard thine interests ;—to explore
How each may think, and act, and vent on thee
His cutting censure. Thine indignant eye
Appals the people, when their uttered thoughts
Might haply wound thine ear. But to observe
These darkly-whispered murmurs is my office.

“ How the whole state laments this hapless maid,

“ Of all her sex least worthy of such doom

“ As waits her now for deeds most truly noble ;

“ Who could not brook to leave her brother, slain

“ In fight, without a tomb, nor cast his corpse

“ A prey to ravening dogs and birds obscene.

“ Doth she not merit glory’s brightest meed?”

Such is the general sentence. O my father,

No treasure can be dearer to thy son,

Than thine own prosperous honours. What reflects

Such pride on children as a generous sire,

Such joy on parents as a noble offspring ?

O, then, indulge not thou this mood alone,

To deem no reasoning cogent save thine own ;

For he who vaunts himself supremely skilled

In speech and judgement o’er his fellow men,

When weighed in wisdom’s balance, is found
wanting.

It cannot shame a mortal, though most wise,

To learn much from experience, and in much

Submit. Thou seest the pliant trees, that bow

Beneath the rushing torrent, rise unstripped ;

But all that stem erect its onward course,

Uprooted fall and perish. So the pilot,

Who with full sail meets strong-opposing blasts,

O’ersets his bark, and on the shivered planks

Floats on the random wave. Pause — quell thy
wrath—

Unbend to softer feelings. If one ray

Of wisdom's light my younger breast illum'd,
 I deem the man, whose vast expansive mind
 Grasps the whole sphere of knowledge—noblest far;
 But, since such boon is rare, the second praise
 Is this, to learn from those whose words are wise.

Ch. If he hath spoken wisely, my good Lord,
 'Tis fit to weigh his reasoning. Thou, too, youth,
 [To HÆMON.

Regard thy father's. Both have argued well.

Cr. And must we stoop, in this our cooler age,
 Thus to be lessoned by a beardless boy?

Hæ. Not stoop to learn injustice. I am young.
 But thou shouldst weigh mine actions, not my years.

Cr. Thou deem'st it justice, then, to favour rebels?

Hæ. Ne'er would I ask thy favour for the guilty.

Cr. Is not this maiden stained with manifest guilt?

Hæ. The general voice of Thebes repels the
 charge.

Cr. Shall then the city dictate laws to me?

Hæ. Do not thy words betray a very youth?

Cr. Should I or should another sway the state?

Hæ. That is no state, which crouches to one
 despot!

Cr. Is not a monarch master of his state?

Hæ. How nobly wouldst thou lord it o'er a desert!

Cr. Behold, I pray you, how this doughty warrior
Strives in a woman's cause.

Hæ. Art *thou* a woman?
I strive for none, save thee.

Cr. Oh thou most vile!
Wouldst thou withstand thy father?

Hæ. When I see
My father swerve from justice.

Cr. Do I err,
Revering mine own laws?

Hæ. Dost thou revere them,
When thou wouldst trample on the laws of Heaven?

Cr. O thou degenerate wretch! thou woman's
slave!

Hæ. Ne'er shalt thou find me the vile slave of
baseness.

Cr. Still, as it seems, his words are all for her.

Hæ. For thee, for me, and for th' Infernal Gods.

Cr. Thou ne'er shalt wed her living.

Hæ. If she die,
Her death shall crush another.

Cr. Daring villain!
Dost thou proceed to threats?

Hæ. And does he threat,
Who but refutes vain counsels?

Cr. At thy cost

Shalt thou reprove me, void thyself of sense.

Hæ. Now, but thou art my father, I would say
That thou art most unwise.

Cr. Hence, woman's slave !
And prate no more to me.

Hæ. Wouldst thou then speak
Whate'er thou list, and not endure reply ?

Cr. Aye, is it true ? Then, by Olympian
Jove,

I swear thou shalt not beard me thus unpunished !
Ho ! bring that hated thing, that she may die,
E'en in the presence of her doting bridegroom.

Hæ. Believe it not. Before mine eyes, at least,
She shall not die, nor thou such dream indulge ;
I quit thy sight for ever. They who list
May stand the tame spectators of thy madness.

[*Exit* HÆMON.

CREON, CHORUS.

Ch. The youth has passed, my Lord, in desperate
wrath.

A soul like his may rush from rankling grief
To deeds of frenzy.

Cr. Let him do, and dare
Beyond the power of man, he shall not save
These virgins from the death.

Ch. Dost thou then purpose
An equal doom for both?

Cr. No; not for her
Who hath not touched the corpse. Thy words
are just.

Ch. What death dost thou design her?

Cr. To a spot
By mortal foot untrodden, will I lead her;
And deep immure her in a rocky cave,
Leaving enough of sustenance to provide
A due atonement, that the state may shun
Pollution from her death. There let her call
On gloomy Hades, the sole Power she owns,
To shield her from her doom; or learn, though late,
At least this lesson; 'tis a bootless task
To render homage to the Powers of Hell.

Chorus.

STROPHE.

Love! unsubdued, unconquerable Love!
 On wealth descending;⁵—whose repose
 Is in the virgin's cheeks of rose;—
 Alike o'er trackless ocean dost thou rove,
 Or 'mid the lowly dwellings of the grove.
 None of th' Immortals throned on high,
 From thy pervading power can fly;
 Nor man, frail being of a fleeting day!
 The heart that feels thee yields to frenzy's sway.

ANTISTROPHE.

Thy spells delusive turn the just aside
 To baseness—and attendant shame;
 Thine arts this mortal strife inflame
 In men, by nature's dearest ties allied.
 From the soft glances of his lovely bride

⁵ “On wealth descending.” In the original, *ὅς ἐπὶ κτήμασι πίπτεις*, the true signification of which has tortured and exhausted the ingenuity of the commentators.

Revealed, desire subdues his soul ;
 Desire, usurping high control
 O'er Heaven's primordial laws ; matchless in might
 °In sport like this fair Venus takes delight.

[ANTIGONE is brought in guarded.

I, too, beyond controlling laws
 Am hurried ; for I cannot check
 The gushing tears, as I behold
 Antigone thus borne away
 To share our common couch, the joyless tomb.

ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Ant. Behold me, Princes of my native land !
 Treading the last sad path,
 And gazing on the latest beam
 Of yon resplendent sun—
 To gaze no more for ever ! The stern hand

° Sic visum Veneri ; cui placet impares
 Formas atque animos sub juga ahenea
 Sævo mittere cum joco.—Hor. Lib. I. Od. 33.

Of all-entombing Death
Impels me—living still—
To Acheron's bleak shore—ungraced
By nuptial rites ;—no hymeneal strain
Hath hymned my hour of bliss,
And joyless Death will be my bridegroom now.

Ch. Therefore, with endless praise renowned,
To those drear regions wilt thou pass ;
Unwasted aught by slow disease,
Unwounded by avenging sword.
Spontaneous, living, sole of mortal birth,
Shalt thou to Death descend.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Ant. Yes ! I have heard by how severe a doom
The Phrygian stranger died
On Sipylus' bleak brow sublime ;
Whom, in its cold embrace,
The creeping rock, like wreathing ivy, strained.
Her, in chill dews dissolved,
As antique legends tell,
Ne'er do th' exhaustless snows desert,
Nor from her eyes do trickling torrents cease
To gush. A doom like her's,
Alas, how like ! hath fate reserved for me.

Ch. A Goddess she, and sprung from Gods ;—
 We, mortal as our fathers were.
 What matchless fame is thine ! to fall like those
 Of ancestry divine !

STROPHE II.

Ant. Ah me ! I am derided. Why, oh why,
 By my ancestral Gods,
 Why do ye mock me, ere the tomb
 Hath veiled me from your sight ?
 O my loved Thebes ! and ye,
 Her lordly habitants !
 O ye Dircaean streams !
 Thou sacred grove of car-compelling Thebes !
 I here invoke you to attest my wrongs,
 How, by my friends unwept, and by what laws,
 I sink into the caverned gloom
 Of this untimely sepulchre !
 Me miserable !
 Outcast from earth, and from the tomb,
 I am not of the living or the dead.

Ch. Hurried to daring's wild excess,
 Deeply, my daughter, hast thou sinned
 Against th' exalted Throne of Right.
 The woes that crushed thy father, fall on thee.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Ant. Ah ! thou hast probed mine anguish to the
quick,

The source of all my pangs,
My father's widely-blazoned fate ;
And the long train of ills,
Which crushed, in one wide wreck,
The famed Labdacidæ !
Woe for the withering curse
Of those maternal nuptials, which impelled
My sire, unconscious, to a parent's couch !
From whom I sprung, by birth a very wretch :
To whom accursed, unwedded, now
I sink to share their drear abode.

Alas, my brother !

Ill-omened were thy nuptials ! Thou,
Though dead, dost hurl me, living, to the tomb.

Ch. Religion bids us grace the dead ;
But might, when regal might bears sway,
Must never, never, be contemned.
Thine own unbending pride hath sealed thy doom.

Ant. Unmourned, unfriended, 'reft of bridal joys,
Despairingly I tread
The path too well prepared.

No more for ever must I hail thy beams,
Thou glad and holy sun !
Yet to my doom no sorrowing friend accords
The tribute of a tear.

Enter CREON.

CREON, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

Cr. What, know ye not, that none, ere death
arrive,
Would ever cease their plaints, could words avail
them ?

Instant conduct her hence ; and, as I bade,
Immure her in the deep sepulchral cave ;
There leave her lone and desolate, or to die
Or live imprisoned in that drear abode.
We from her death shall thus be pure ; and she
Shall hold no more communion with the living.

Ant. O tomb ! O bridal bed ! O dark abode !
My ever-during prison ! whither now
I sink to join my kindred, a sad train,
Whom Proserpine among the silent dead
Hath long received ;—of whom the last in time,
The first in sorrow, I to Death descend,

Ere mine allotted earthly term be past.
Yet e'en in death I cherish one warm hope,
That dear to my loved father I shall come,
Dear to thee, mother ! and most dear to thee,
My brother ! for in death my hand received you,
Your relics laved, your lifeless limbs composed,
And o'er your tomb libations poured. And now,
Dear Polynices, I have honoured thee
With funeral rites, and thus do they requite me.
Yet will not justice blame my pious care ;
Since, had I been a mother or a wife,
And my loved child or wedded lord had lain
Unsepulchred on earth, not e'en for them
Would I have braved the state to do this deed.
Ask ye what motive sways me thus to think ?
Had but my husband or my child been slain,
7 Haply I might have wed another lord,

⁷ Our English ladies are entreated to make allowance for a mode of thinking and reasoning so opposite to their own. A similar principle, according to Herodotus, was acted upon by the wife of Intaphernes, a noble Persian, who, when allowed by Darius to save from death whichever of her kindred she preferred, selected her brother, for precisely the same reason as that assigned to Antigone.

Or joyed in other children ; but the tomb
 Hath closed above my parents, and from hence
 A brother could no more be born to me.

Since, swayed by thoughts like these, I honoured
 thee

Beyond all other kindred, dearest brother,
 This Creon counts me guilty and perverse :
 And now he leads me with remorseless hand,
 Severed from nuptial joys, and bridal hymns,
 And wedlock's dearest bliss, a mother's pride,
 In the fond nurture of a smiling offspring ;
 But friendless now, deserted, desolate,
 I seek in life the dwellings of the dead.

Which of your laws, ye Powers, have I transgressed?—
 Yet wherefore do I turn me to the Gods?—
 Whom shall I call to aid me, since I meet
 For pious deeds the vengeance of the guilty ?
 If acts like these are sanctioned by the Gods,
 I will address me to my doom in silence ;
 If not, and these offend, may Heaven requite
 On them such evils as they wreak on me.

Ch. The same wild storms of frenzied rage
 Distract th' unhappy maiden still.

Cr. For this the lingering slaves ere long
 Shall learn in tears to mourn their vain delay.

Ant. Alas ! death cannot be dissevered far
From that appalling threat.

Cr. Aye, I would warn thee not to hope
The doom, once sealed, may be reversed.

Ant. O Thebes, proud city of my sires !
O tutelary Gods !
They force me hence, and respite is denied.
Behold, ye rulers of imperial Thebes,
The last sad daughter of a royal line,
What fearful wrongs I suffer, and from whom ;—
My only crime a pious deed.

[ANTIGONE *is led off.* *Exit* CREON.]

Chorus.

STROPHE I.

Thus, long in brazen cell immured,
To change day's genial light for cheerless gloom,
To pine enshrouded in a living tomb,
Fair Danae erst endured ;—
Yet, O my child ! my child ! of lineage high
She came, and to immortal Jove
Cherished the golden pledge of love ;—
But matchless is the might of destiny :

⁸ Nor storm, nor martial might, nor stately tower,
Nor wave-repelling fleets escape the tameless Power.

ANTISTROPHE I.

So Dryas' haughty son was bound,
Edonia's Lord, for words of wrathful pride,
Chained by th'⁹ Avenging Power his taunts defied
In rocky cave profound ;—
And thus the venom of his maddening breast
Still flows afresh. Too late he knew
How rage had fired him to pursue
A GOD with keen reproach. His wrath repressed

⁸ On this passage an ingenious conjectural emendation is proposed by Erfurdt, ἄλβος for ἄμβρος ;—a conjecture, as he justly remarks, not only recommended by its accordance with the general sense of the sentence, but by a parallel passage, of exactly similar construction, in Bacchylides.

Θνατοῖς δ' οὐκ αὐθαίρετοι
 "Ουτ' ὈΛΒΟΣ, ὄντ' ἀκαμπτos" ἈΡΗΣ
 "Ουτε πάμφθερσις στάσις — ἀλλ' ἐπιχρίμπτει
 Νέφος ἄλλοτ' ἐπ' ἄλλαν γᾶν
 Ἐ πάνδωρος Λῆσα.

⁹ Th' avenging Power. Ἐκ Διόνυσου, by Bacchus. The story of Lycurgus, who was punished by Bacchus for expelling the Bacchanalians from his territories, is differently related by various authors.

The raving Virgins ;—quenched the Evcean fire ;—
 And mocked with impious taunts the Sisters of the
 Lyre.

STROPHE II.

Where the Cyanean rocks divide
 In double sea the rushing tide,
 And rise the high Bosphorean shores,
 And Thracian Salmydessus towers ;
 There Mars, the guardian of the realms around,
 Beheld a raging ¹⁰ step-dame's deadly deed.
 He saw your mangled eyeballs bleed,
 O sons of Phineus ! by that fatal wound
 Consigned to night profound !—
 That wound, alas ! no spear of warrior brave,
 But woman's blood-stained hand, and woman's
 weapon gave.

¹⁰ Phineus married Cleopatra, the daughter of Boreas and Orithyia, by whom he had two sons, Crambis and Orythus. He afterwards repudiated her, and married Idaia, who put out the eyes of Crambis and Orythus. Cleopatra, to escape her cruelty, concealed herself among the rocks, where she died. To this circumstance the Chorus alludes.—Potter.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Pining in anguish and in gloom,
 They mourned their mother's hapless doom;
 Wedded with evil omens she
 To bear a wretched progeny!
 She sprung from high Erectheus' ancient seed,—
 Yet, ah! though nursed where wild in dreary cave,
 Storms of her father Boreas rave,
 Bounding o'er lofty hills, her winged speed
 Outstripped the fiery steed;—
 What recked her race of Gods? Their firm decree,
 On her the Fates fulfilled, my daughter! as on thee.

Enter TIRESIAS, conducted by a Youth.

TIRESIAS, CREON, CHORUS.

Ti. Princes of Thebes, we tread our wonted path,
 One sight directing both; this mode alone
 Remains to guide the wanderings of the blind.

Cr. Hath aught occurred of import new or strange,
 Aged Tiresias?

Ti. I will tell thee, King !

Do thou obey the Prophet.

Cr. Never yet

Thy warning did I slight.

Ti. Thence hast thou steered

Aright the helm of empire.

Cr. I confess

Thy counsels oft have led me to success.

Ti. Then heed them now. Thou art in desperate
peril.

Cr. What mean'st thou?—how I tremble at thy
words!

Ti. List, and the symbols of mine art shall tell
thee.

When on mine ancient stool of augury,
Where every bird flocks round me, I sat down,
Burst on mine ear a strange unwonted sound
Of birds, with shrill and dissonant screamings wild,
While with ensanguined talons I perceived
They tore each other ; this the flapping hoarse
Of wings betokened plainly. Struck with awe,
I next essayed the hallowed fires that burn
On the high blazing altars ; but the flame
Refused to shine upon the sacrifice ;
And, oozing from the limbs, the vapour flowed

Mid the loose ashes, where it fumed and hissed ;
The swollen entrails were dispersed ; the thighs,
Stripped of th' involving caul, lay bare around.
These fearful signs of import strange and dire
I learned from mine attendant—he recounts
To me the symbols I explain to others.
'Tis thy relentless soul that plagues thy country.
Our sacred altars and domestic hearths
Are strewed by dogs and birds with their foul prey,
The corpse of *Œdipus*' ill-fated son ;
For this the Gods reject our hallowed rites,
Our prayers, and votive victims,—while the birds,
Sated with human flesh and human blood,
Can only utter sounds of omen dire.
Therefore, my son, consider ; since to err
Is common to mankind ; nor is that man
Unhappy or unwise, who, when betrayed
To error, mourns his lapse, and doth not cleave
Inflexible to ill. Know, stubbornness
Doth ever argue folly. To the dead
Give way, nor trample on a fallen foe—
What courage needs it to insult the lifeless ?
I speak with soul benevolent to thee ;
'Tis sweet to learn from one who counsels well,
If he regard our welfare.

Cr. Aye, old man,

I am your butt ; ye all, like archers, aim
 Your wily shafts at me. I know you well,
 The venal tribe of prophets, and by them
 Too oft have I been bartered and betrayed.
 Go on ; pursue your traffic, and acquire
 The Sardian amber and the Indian gold,
 If so ye list ; but never shall ye shroud
 This wretch within the tomb, though Jove's swift
 bird

Should bear the mouldering relics as his prey,
 E'en to th' eternal throne. Yea, though I feared
 Pollution dire as this, I would not yield
 To honour him with sepulture ;—well I know
 That none of mortal birth can e'er pollute
 The holy Gods ! And mark me, old Tiresias !
 Oft do the sagest of our race incur
 The vilest shame, when, lured by sordid gain,
 They clothe base counsels in the garb of honour.

Ti. Ha ! is there one who knows—who thinks—

Cr. What wouldst thou ?

Are these thy words addressed alike to all ?

Ti. How much is wisdom man's most precious
 treasure ?

Cr. So much, as folly is his greatest bane !

Ti. It is, in truth, a malady which seems
Conspicuous in *thy* conduct.

Cr. I forbear
To shame the Prophet with a keen retort.

Ti. Yet this thou dost in charging me with
falsehood.

Cr. Ah ! ye are fond of gold, ye tribe of prophets.

Ti. The tribe of tyrants seems indeed to love
Dishonourable gains.

Cr. Know'st thou thy words
Are spoken to thy Monarch ?

Ti. Aye, I know it ;
'Twas by my counsels thou didst save thine empire.

Cr. Thou art a skilful prophet, but too prone
To deeds of baseness.

Ti. Wilt thou then provoke me
To speak the awful secrets of my soul ?

Cr. Well, speak them, so thou dost not ask
reward.

Ti. And seem I, in thy judgement, to demand it ?

Cr. Know first, thou shalt not traffic in my
purpose.

Ti. And know thou, too, proud Monarch, ere
the car

Of yon bright sun shall oft his course fulfil,

Thou of thine own loved offspring shalt repay
A just and equal ransom, dead for dead,
For one whom thou hast plunged from upper air
To dwell beneath, whom to the dark abodes,
Yet living, thou hast doomed ; nor less for one,
Whom of the honours due to Hell's dread Powers,
Of funeral rites, of sacred obsequies,
Thou hast bereft. Here no concern hast thou,
None have the Heavenly Powers ; but thou hast
wrought

These shameless deeds by lawless violence.
Wherefore the sure Avengers, who pursue
The track of Guilt, the Furies of the Shades,
Are ambushed round thy path, and soon will plunge
thee

In ruin hopeless as thy rage inflicted.
Mark now, if gold hath bribed me thus to presage ;—
Pass but a few short moments, and the shriek
Of men, and wail of women, through thy halls
Shall ring ; and all the hostile states, whose slain
The dogs, and beasts, and ravening birds, have torn,
Wafting their noisome odours o'er the plain,
Shall rise against thee. Such, then, are the shafts,
Which, archer-like, my hand hath now discharged,
For thou hast roused my wrath ; and from the wound

These shafts inflict, thou wilt not find relief.
 Boy, lead me to my home; and leave yon Tyrant
 To vent his impotent rage on younger heads;
 And let him learn to curb his tongue to silence,
 And hold a wiser mind than now he holds.

[*Exeunt TIRESIAS and Youth.*]

CREON, CHORUS.

Ch. The prophet hath departed, O my Lord,
 Denouncing dread events; and well I know,
 Since time's long round hath silvered my dark locks,
 The state hath never proved his presage faithless.

Cr. I know it too; and therefore doubts distract me.
 To yield bespeaks a coward, yet I fear
 To rush upon destruction, if I cross him.

Ch. Son of Menœceus, thou hast need of
 prudence.

Cr. What wouldst thou have me do? Give thine
 advice,
 And I will straight obey it.

Ch. Then away!—
 Release the virgin from her rock-hewn cave,
 And grace th' unburied corpse with sepulture.

Cr. Is this thy counsel? Dost thou bid me yield?

Ch. Without delay, my Lord! Th' avenging curse
Of Heaven is swift to crush the disobedient.

Cr. O but 'tis hard ;—yet I must fain submit—
To war with stern Necessity were madness.

Ch. Haste, then, perform thy purpose, nor entrust
The task to others.

Cr. With all speed I fly—
Haste—haste—attendants ! ye who here await,
And ye too at a distance ;—haste—and bring
Keen axes in your hands—fly to the cave—
I too, since my first sentence is repealed,
Who bound, will now release her ; for I fear
That, while we live, 'twill prove our truest wisdom
To venerate th' eternal laws of Justice.

[*Exit CREON with Attendants.*]

Chorus.

STROPHE I.

¹O Thou, by countless names renowned,

¹ The names of Bacchus, which were numerous, were derived chiefly from his attributes. Thus, he was called Lyæus,

Pride of the Theban nymph, and progeny
 Of Jove, whose thunders rend the sky!
 Who with thy favouring presence dost surround
²Italia's far-famed clime, and reign
 O'er Ceres' general bosom, the rich plain
 Of fair Eleusis—Bacchus, King divine!
 Who dwell'st in Thebes, thy fair and favoured shrine;
 Thebes, mother-town of Bacchanals, where flows
 Ismenus, and from earth the dragon-seed arose;—

ANTISTROPHE I.

³Thee saw the heaven-ascending fire,
 Which fierce and far from forked Parnassus glowed;
 Where to their tutelary God
 Roam in wild orgies the Corycian choir,
 And springs the pure Castalian fount;—
 Thee saw the vine-clad slopes of Nysa's mount
 Crowned with enwreathing ivy, where to Thee
 Breathe strains of more than mortal melody;

from *λίω*, because wine opens the heart (*aperit præcordia Liber*); *Lenæus*, from *ληνη*, a wine-press, &c.

² The Tuscans were great observers of the worship of Bacchus.

³ Euripides also mentions this fire, which was supposed to announce the presence of the God on Mount Parnassus.

Echoing through groves of rich-empurpled vine,
 To hail the Lord of Thebes, her honoured King
 divine ;—

STROPHE II.

Thebes, whose illustrious name
 By Thee with noblest honours is approved,
 Nor by thy beauteous Mother less beloved,
 The lightning-stricken dame.—
 Yet now, alas ! a dire disease pervades
 The drooping city. Come, O come,
 With life-imparting step, o'er sylvan shades
 Clothing Parnassus' sloping sides in gloom,
 Or o'er the sounding gulf where echoing billows
 foam !

ANTISTROPHE II.

Prince of each silver star,
 That breathes through darkness its celestial light ;—
 Lord of the train, who on the ear of night
 Swell their wild hymns afar ;—
 Blest youth ! high offspring of Eternal Jove !
 Haste, and thy fair attendants bring,
 Those Naxian nymphs the livelong night who
 rove,

Dancing around thy throne in festive ring,
 And shout Iacchus' name, their leader and their
 King.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Mess. Inhabitants of Thebes, where Cadmus erst
 And old Amphion reigned, I know not how,
 Whate'er it be, to censure or to praise
 The varying life of man;—since Fortune still
 Lifts, at her will, th' unhappy from the dust,
 Or dooms again the prosperous to despair,
 Nor can prophetic skill divine the future.
 I deemed the royal Creon greatly blessed,
 Who from her foes the Theban state preserved;
 Assumed the sole dominion of her realms;
 Bore sway, and flourished in a generous race.
 And now all—all is lost. For when the joys,
 The sweet delights of life are reft for ever,
 I scarce can say man lives;—though still he breathe,
⁴The soul of life is fled. Heap, if thou wilt,

⁴ Literally, ἔμψυχον ἠγοῦμαι νεκρόν, I account him a breathing corpse.

Vast treasures in thy house, and live enthroned
In regal splendour ; yet to this thy pomp,
If the heart's joy be wanting, all beside
I would not purchase with th' illusive cloud
Of unsubstantial smoke.

Ch. Of what new ills
Com'st thou a herald to the royal house ?

Mess. They are no more—those live who caused
their ruin.

Ch. Say, who hath wrought the deed, and who
hath perished ?

Mess. Bathed in his blood, the lifeless Hæmon
lies.

Ch. Slain by his own rash hand, or by his father's ?

Mess. Incensed against his father, for the death
Of his loved bride, by his own hand he fell.

Ch. How true, O prophet, was thy fearful
presage !

Mess. Since it is thus, the rest demands our
thought.

Ch. But lo ! I see the King's unhappy wife,
Eurydice, approach us ; in the palace
She heard us name her son, or comes by chance.

Enter EURYDICE.

EURYDICE, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Eu. Your conference we have heard, O citizens,
As we came forth, departing to prefer
Our suppliant prayers in chaste Athena's shrine.
While yet my hand was loosening the firm bars
Which close our palace-gates, the whispered voice
Of some domestic evil met mine ear;—
Trembling I sunk amidst my maids supine,
With sudden terror lifeless. Yet again
I bid thee tell thy tale—for I shall hear it,
Not unexperienced in severest woes.

Mess. As present there, dear Lady, all the tale
Will I disclose, nor aught of truth disguise.
Why should I soothe thee with evasive words,
When time must prove their falsehood and mine own?
The truth is ever best. Thy royal Lord
I, as his guide, attended to the verge
Of that far plain, where torn by ravening dogs
The corpse of Polynices lay defiled.
Here, first invoking Hecate, and the King
Of Hades, that by prayers propitiate now
They would avert their wrath, in the pure stream

We laved the relics,—on a recent pyre
Of boughs consumed them, and upreared a mound
Of his loved natal earth. We next repaired
To the sepulchral cave, the bridal couch
Of her espoused to Death. But of our train
A murmur of deep wailing from afar
Round that unhonoured tomb one haply heard,
And hastening told our Monarch. He approached,
And still the muttered moanings on his ear
Smote louder and less doubtful, till he groaned
In bitter agony, and thus sighed forth—
“ Unhappy me ! And is my presage true,
“ And do I tread the most ill-omened path
“ Of all my pilgrimage ? It is the voice
“ Of mine own son that meets me ! Haste, oh haste,
“ Attendants, to the sepulchre, and remove
“ The rock’s obstructing barrier ; look within ;—
“ I hear the voice of Hæmon, of my son,
“ Or am by Heaven deluded.” We obeyed
The bidding of our half distracted Lord,
And looked. Soon in the cavern’s dim recess
We see the virgin—lifeless—hanging there
In noose enwoven of her linen robe.
There too lay Hæmon, clasping his pale bride,
Mourning his plighted consort, to the Powers

Of Hell espoused—his father's act severe—
And his most joyless nuptials. When the King
Beheld him, deeply sighing—to the tomb
Entering, with loud lament he thus exclaimed :
“ O my unhappy child, what hast thou done ?
“ What fearful purpose sways thee ? By what woes
“ Art thou thus plunged in anguish ? O my son
“ Come forth, a suppliant father here conjures thee.”
But on his sire he turned his glaring eyes
With the stern air of mingled hate and scorn,
⁵ Nor answer deigned, but bared his two-edged brand ;
The King by flight evaded, and the blow
Fell impotent. Then the distracted youth,
Indignant with himself, stretched out the sword,
And sheathed it in his bosom. Conscious still
Around the lifeless maid his arms he threw
With fond embrace, and, breathing his last sigh,

⁵ This act of Hæmon is censured by Aristotle as causeless and unnatural. May it not, however, be urged in defence of the Poet, that a sudden impulse, on the first and unexpected sight of the author of his woes, might urge the unhappy youth to a deed of desperation ; particularly since he does not persevere in the attempt, but, as though in ungovernable distraction and remorse, immediately turns his fury upon himself ?

Tinged her pale cheek with crimson, for the blood
Came gushing with the fluttering sob of death ;
And lifeless now he sleeps beside the dead,
In Hell's dark gloom his nuptial rites completing,
A solemn, sad example to mankind,
How great an evil is unbridled rashness.

[*Exit* EURYDICE.]

CHORUS, MESSENGER.

Ch. What dost thou judge from this? The Queen
is gone

Without one word of patience, or despair.

Mess. I too am lost in wonder—but I still
Indulge a hope ; that, learning thus the doom
Of her lost son, she will not deign to wail
Throughout the city, but retired within,
Will vent her grief in secret with her maidens.
She is more prudent than to err in this.

Ch. I know not—yet I like not this deep silence,
It bodes some dark resolve—more clamorous grief
Vents all its force in words.

Mess. Soon shall we learn
If aught so desperate lurks within her breast,

By hastening to the palace ; well thou say'st
Deep silence is the herald of destruction.

Ch. And lo! the King himself appears,
Bearing the sad memorials of his woe
° Within his arms ; if we may justly speak,
He is the author of his own despair !

Enter CREON, bearing his Son's body.

CREON, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Cr. Woe for the errors of a frenzied mind,
Ruthless and fraught with death !
O mark, in kindred ties allied,
The slayers and the slain !
Such of my counsels is the bitter fruit !
Alas ! for thee, my son, my son,
Who, in youth's vernal prime
Art perished, and hast fled,
Through mine insensate rashness, not thine own.

° The entrance of Creon, bearing his son's corpse, will doubtless remind the reader of that scene in Shakspeare, where Lear comes in, carrying in his arms the lifeless body of Cordelia.

Ch. Alas! how late dost thou acknowledge, King,
The justice of the Gods.

STROPHE II.

Cr. Ah me! I learn it in mine own despair.
Then, then upon my head the wrath divine
Smote heaviest—to perdition urged me on,
And trod my joys in dust. Alas! the toils!
The hapless toils of man!

Enter SECOND MESSENGER.

2d Mess. Sorrows are deepening round thee, O
my Lord;—

One source of bitterest grief thy hands sustain,
One waits within which thou must soon behold.

Cr. What yet remains to dreg the cup of sor-
row?

2d Mess. Thy Queen, the mother of this lifeless
youth,
Hath died, unhappy, by a recent wound.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Cr. Oh! thou inexpiable home of death,
Why dost thou crush me thus?—
O herald of o'erwhelming woes
What horrors dost thou bring?—

Why, why press down a wretch already lost?
 What hast thou said? what new despair,
 Redoubling woes on woes?—

And to a murdered son

Dost thou then add my wife's destruction too?—

2d Mess. ⁷Thou mayst behold her, now no
 more, within.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Cr. Alas! I gaze upon a second woe.

What doom, ah! what awaits the victim still?

In these sad hands a lifeless son I bear,

There mark another recent corpse—Woe! woe!

Sad mother! wretched son!

2d. Mess. Before the hallowed altars, in wild wrath
 She fell—and closed her eyes in Death's dull
 night,

Deploring first indeed th' illustrious bed

Of ⁸Megareus—long since to death consigned;

⁷ The scene here opens, and discloses to view the remains of the Queen.

⁸ Commentators do not agree respecting this Megareus. Some make him a former husband of Eurydice; others suppose him to have been the same with Menœceus, son of Creon and Eurydice, whose patriotism and death are related in the *Phœnissæ* of Euripides.

Then this her hapless son,—last on thy head
 She imprecated curses, and proclaimed thee
 The murderer of thy child !

STROPHE III.

Cr. Woe ! woe is me !

I quake with horror. Will no friendly hand
 In mercy plunge deep, deep the two-edged sword ?
 I am a very wretch,
 Condemned to struggle with o'er-mastering woes !

2d Mess. Ere yet she perished, with her parting
 breath,

She charged on thee the fatal doom of both.

Cr. And by what means did death relieve her
 sorrows ?

2d Mess. Deep in her side she buried the keen
 sword,

Soon as her son's lamented doom she heard.

STROPHE IV.

Cr. Wretch that I am ! the guilt is all mine own,
 None shared the deadly deed !
 I am alone the blood-stained homicide ;
 'Tis all too clear O ! lead me hence,

Attendants, bear me hence ! away—away—
For I am nothing now !

Ch. Well dost thou judge, if in despair like thine
Aught can be well, for heaviest evils press
With lighter burden, when from sight removed.

ANTISTROPHE III.

Cr. Come, then, O come,
Shine forth, thou last and lightest of my woes,
Bringing the final and most welcome hour
Of suffering ! Come, O come,
That I may view the light of Heaven no more.

Ch. These cares respect the future—first befits
To weigh with prudent thought the present crisis.
Let those direct on whom such charge devolves.

Cr. What most my soul desires, I did but make
My first and warmest prayer.

Ch. Pray now for nothing—
There is no refuge for devoted man,
When fate consigns him to a doom of woe.

ANTISTROPHE IV.

Cr. Lead hence this lifeless shade, far, far away.
Who, though unwilling all,
Slew thee, my son ! thee, too, O wife beloved !

Ah! wretch! I know not where to look,
Or whither fly. All are against me now—
Fate is itself my foe.

Ch. There is no guide to happiness on earth,
Save wisdom; nor behoves it us to fail
In reverence to the Gods! High-sounding vaunts
Inflict due vengeance on the haughty head,
And teach late wisdom to its dark old age.

END OF VOL. I.

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