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Fig. 1. A woman playing a harp.





Sappho

A

TRAGEDY IN FIVE ACTS.

AFTER THE GERMAN OF

Franz Grillparzer,

BY

EDDA MIDDLETON.



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Dramatis Personae.



SAPPHO, A Grecian Poetess.

PHAON, Her lover.

EUCHARIS, } Female attendants of Sappho.
MELITTA, }

RHAMNES, Superintendent of Sappho's household.
Country people, maidens, slaves, &c.

SCENE—Island of Lesbos.



SAPPHO.



A C T F I R S T .

SCENE I.

Open scenery. The sea forms the back-ground, bounded on the left by lofty mountains. Near the shore, stands an altar dedicated to APHRODITE.¹ To the right, is seen the entrance to a grotto, half concealed with flowers. At a little distance, a colonnade of Grecian pillars forms the vestibule to the palace of SAPPHO. On the left, above a grassy bank, is a bower of roses. Sounds of flutes and cymbals, mingled with shouts of the people, are heard in the distance.

RHAMNES.

(Coming hastily from the palace, and addressing the assembled attendants.)

Awake from sleep! arise! she comes! she comes!
Oh! that my eager wishes had but wings,
To bear me onward, as my heart dictates!
Make haste, ye idle maidens! why delay?

(EUCCHARIS, MELITTA, and other female attendants advance from the colonnade.)

MELITTA.

Why blame us thus? We all are here.

RHAMNES.

She comes!

MELITTA.

Who comes! Ye Gods!

RHAMNES.

Sappho!²

(Shouts from within.)

Hail! Sappho! Hail!

RHAMNES.

Thrice welcome, Sappho! Hail! all hail!

MELITTA.

(Surprised.)

What means—

RHAMNES.

Now by the Gods, the maiden feigns surprise!
What dost thou ask, that seems so wonderful?

Returns she not from high Olympia,³
Bearing the envied wreath of victory?
The palm of poetry, hath she not gained,
In sight and presence of assembled Greece?
Joyous to her, the people shout a welcome,
And bear to Heav'n the tidings of her triumph.
They sing aloud, whose hand it was, whose lip,
That first unlocked the enchantments of the lyre,
And bade the freedom of her song, submit
In gentle discipline of harmony.

(Shouts from within.)

Hail! SAPPHO! Hail!

RHAMNES.

'Tis well that they rejoice.

(To MELITTA.)

See'st thou the wreath upon her noble brow?

MELITTA.

SAPPHO alone I see! To her I fly!

RHAMNES.

Remain! Remain! What tribute dost thou think

Such joy as thine can bring to one like her?
Far nobler praise hath she been wont to hear.
Rather make ready all within her house.
By service only, should the slave applaud.

MELITTA.

See'st thou another by her side?

RHAMNES.

Ah! who?

MELITTA.

A lofty, radiant form stands by her side.
'Tis thus they paint the God of Lyre and Bow.⁴

RHAMNES.

I see! Begone!

MELITTA.

'Tis but a moment since,
Thou call'dst us forth.

RHAMNES.

I called ye, that is true,
To warn ye only of her loved approach.

But now your duty is within the house ;
For in your service lies your truest joy.

MELITTA.

But let us only—

RHAMNES.

No ! Begone ! Away !

(They retire.)

Now may she come, and no rude merriment,
Or childish joy disturb the festival.

SCENE II.

SAPPHO appears magnificently attired, seated in a car drawn by white horses. In her hands she holds a golden lyre, and on her brow she wears a wreath of laurel. PHAON in shepherd's garb stands by her side. Crowds follow them with joyful acclamations.

THE PEOPLE.

Hail ! SAPPHO ! Hail !

RHAMNES.

(Mingling with the crowd.)

Hail ! Noblest of women !

SAPPHO.

Thanks, my true friends and loyal countrymen.
For ye alone this laurel crown is dear ;
And here within the bosom of my home,
I first shall claim it only as my own.
Here, where the visions of my youth began,
The girlish dreams of my awak'ning soul,
And the wild feverish pulse of womanhood,
With recent joy, they fill my enraptured heart.
Here, the dark cypress shades my parents' grave.
I hear it whisper love to me—their child.
Here, my young muse first met th' approving smile.
Here only can I proudly wear this wreath,
And revel in the joy its honor brings.

(ONE OF THE PEOPLE.)

We call thy glory OURS ! 'Tis all our pride !
More than assembled GREECE, we prize thy fame,
And listen to each faithful, truthful word.

RHAMNES.

(Pressing forward.)

Greatest and best ! I welcome thee again.

SAPPHO.

(Descends from her chariot and salutes kindly the friends around her.)

My faithful RHAMNES, welcome ! ANTANDER
Thou here, spite of the burthen of thine age !
CALISTO ! RHODOPE ! What ! weeping now !
Yes ! faithful to the dictates of the heart,
Thine eyes return a pledge of truthfulness.
For tears, take tears.

(She weeps.)

Forgive my gushing heart.

ONE OF THE PEOPLE.

Welcome again to this thine ancient home.
Welcome to hearts that proudly own thy worth.

SAPPHO.

'Tis not in vain ye greet your citizen.
Another friend, her gratitude hath brought,
To give ye heartfelt thanks. PHAON his name.
Of noble origin, and proudly by
The noblest in the land he well may stand.
Altho' his years are few, still hath he proved
Himself a hero, both in word and deed.
And should ye stand in need of warrior's arm,

Of temperate counsel, or of eloquence,
Invoke but him, and seek no other aid.

PHAON.

Mock not my inexperienced youth, oh! SAPPHO.
How can I merit such unbounded praise?
Why feign a worth I dare not call my own.

SAPPHO.

Who sees thy blushes, will believe my words.

PHAON.

I stand o'erwhelmed in all humility.

SAPPHO.

Humility and worth are sisters ever.
Thy modest heart gives them a fitting home.

(Turning to her friends.)

Yes, friends! Hear the fond secret of my life.
PHAON I love! On him hath fall'n my choice.
His rare endowments could alone allure
Me from the height, to which my ardent soul
Had winged its way, down to the smiling earth,
To share with him a bliss, I dreamed not of.
And at his side, surrounded by my friends,

The tranquil happiness of rural peace
I shall enjoy, and live a simple life.
The laurel for the myrtle I will change,
And only strike the soul-responsive lyre,
Which once could fill your hearts with rapturous awe,
In single praise of still domestic joy.

THE PEOPLE.

Glory to thee, our Queen! Hail! SAPPHO! Hail!

SAPPHO.

It is enough! again accept my thanks.
My servants will prepare a gen'rous feast,
To gaily celebrate with wine and song,
This happy, happy day. And now farewell.

(To her friends.)

And thou—and thou—all—all of ye farewell.

(The people retire with RHAMNES.)

SCENE III.

(SAPPHO and PHAON alone.)

SAPPHO.

Thus, dear one, lives thy SAPPHO. Ever thus
She lives alone for love and gratitude.

Thus, hath she ever learned to pass her days,
And be contented with her peaceful lot.
But now a more than mortal bliss is mine.
Oh PHAON! Give me back but half of that,
My heart hath lent to thine, and I'm content.
And yet withal, my heart hath had its woes.
Early the grave closed o'er my parents fond,
And one by one, capricious Destiny
Laid all my brothers quickly by their side.
I've learned, ere this, how base ingratitude
Doth wound the trusting heart—I know full well
The treachery of friendship. Aye! of love.
To lose and to regret, I've oft been taught.
Yet there is THAT I could not bear to lose.
It is THY love! Without it—I must die.
Examine well thy heart, and prove thyself.
Thou little know'st the power that sways this soul.
Oh! never, PHAON, let me lean this head
In trusting confidence upon thy breast,
And only find therein a vacant heart.

PHAON.

Noblest of women!

SAPPHO.

Dearest, say not so.
Doth not thine heart dictate some fonder name?

PHAON.

Of what I speak, or do, I scarcely know.
Borne from the darkness of my humble lot,
To dazzling heights, that others could not reach,
My brain bewildered, dimly knows its joy.
The hills and valleys vaguely stand before me.
The lowly cottages flit past my sight.
The very ground beneath me seems to move,
And I am borne upon the tide of bliss.

SAPPHO.

Thou flatterest sweetly, yet dost thou flatter !

PHAON.

(With passionate enthusiasm.)

And SAPPHO art thou then ? Thy wide-spread fame
Hath filled the distant boundaries of PELOPS' isle,
On to the Westward, where the THRACIAN hills,
Tower far above proud HELLAS'^s fertile shores,
And nod their lofty summits to the waves.
Wherever GRECIAN accents have been heard,
E'en unto ASIA's sunny skies and vales,
There hath thy name been sung, and there thy fame
Hath reached to Heav'n, and to the list'ning stars.
How fell proud SAPPHO's eyes upon poor PHAON ?

Whose only fortune was his simple lyre,
Whose only merit was his simple song,
Which feebly flowed, in mystic harmony,
To sounds that SAPPHO had immortalized.

SAPPHO.

Not so! Have then these ill-tuned strings been taught
No other echo than their mistress' praise?

PHAON.

Believe me, since the hour this feeble hand
First touched in trembling awe its magic chords,
The image which my soul had traced of thee,
Like unto a goddess, rose before me.
When seated in the circle of my home,
Beneath whose humble roof my father lived,
THEANO, my dear sister, sang of thee:
The noisy children quickly left their play;
The youths and maidens near and nearer drew,
That not one note of so much golden song,
Should fall forever lost upon the air.
And when like thee, she sadly sang of love;
Of lonely sorrowing nights in weeping passed;
The sports of ATHIS and ANDROMEDA;
How anxiously each maiden bosom heaved,

Fearful lest some fond word should fall unheard.
Then did my penfive sister murmur low,
Amid the gathering darkness of the night,
“What form of beauty doth this Goddess wear?
“By all the Gods! Methinks I see her now!
“Amid a thousand, I should know her well.”
Thus was the silence broken. Each one traced
In fancy’s eye, the glories of thy form,
Seeking perfection where they prized it most.
One gave MINERVA’s brow, one JUNO’s arm,
One girt thee with the CESTUS’ magic charm.⁶
But I alone, in thoughtful silence rose,
And sought the tranquil solitude of night.
There with no witness of my soul’s desire,
Amid the sacred stillness of the hour,
I, in wild longing, stretched my arms to thee.
And when the sighing wind from mountain height,
The zephyr’s breath, the perfume of the hills,
The silvery radiance of the pallid moon,
Blended in one, played o’er my fevered brow,
Then wert thou mine. I felt thy presence near;
Thy image floated in the balmy air.

SAPPHO.

Haft thou not taken from thine own rich store,

The merit thou hast fondly lent to me ?
Ah ! if thou shouldst take back what thou hast lent !

PHAON.

Sent by my father to OLYMPIA's games,
To try my fortune in the chariot race,
Along the path, the tidings winged their way,
That SAPPHO would contest the prize of song.
Then swelled my longing heart with silent joy.
Impatient to arrive, I urged my steed.
The way half won, he sank to rise no more.
At length arrived, the wrestler's manly art,
The chariot's fleetness, and the discus' throw,⁷
Possessed no power to move my thirsting soul.
I asked not who had lost, or who had won.
I seemed alone to have attained the goal.
I felt the long expected hour was near,
When on the queen of women I should glance.
Then came the day, to judge the prize of song.
In vain the muse of ALCAEUS and ANACREON.⁸
Unheeded fell their notes upon mine ear :
My maddened spirit could not feel their sway.
When hark ! A sudden murmur from the crowd,
Proclaimed with rapture, th' approach of SAPPHO.
In her right hand she held a golden lyre,

A flowing garment white as driven snow,
The hem with palm and laurel leaves adorned,
(Fit emblem of the poet's peaceful fame)
Concealed with modesty, her ankles' grace.
A mantle of the deepest Tyrian dye,⁹
Like gorgeous morning clouds about the sun,
Hung from her shoulders fair. Above her brow,
Amid the tresses of her raven hair,
Rested a diadem of moon-like ray,
An orient pearl upon the brow of night.
My throbbing heart then told me who it was.
But ere the thought had yet escaped my lips,
A thousand voices rent the liquid air,
With SAPPHO's name.

But of thy magic song!
Bewildered with applause, the conquering lyre,
Fell from thy trembling grasp. Spell-bound I stood,
Abashed beneath thy gaze. Still half entranced,
I scarce can tell, how much I may HAVE dreamed,
How much may YET be true, of my wild dream.

SAPPHO.

Full well do I remember, how thou stood'st
Before me, trembling, pale and wrapt in thought.
Thy life seemed centred in thy glowing eyes,

As ever and anon, thou gazed on me.
I bade thee follow, and thou did'st obey,
Overwhelmed with doubt, yet trusting in thy fate.

PHAON.

Who would have dreamed, that HELLAS' noblest muse
On HELLAS' humblest son, would cast her eyes.

SAPPHO.

Thou art unjust, both to thyself and fate.
Mistrust not, what the Gods do thee award.
Gifts that are wisely destined to complete
Life's full enjoyment, forth they freely pour,
On cheek and brow, filling the soul with bliss.
The gift of beauty is a joy forever.
Existence is itself, a precious thing.
Prized be undaunted courage, strength of frame,
Calm resignation to all earthly woe,
Philosophy to bear whatever is,
In the fond trusting hope of what MAY BE.
For after all, the highest aim of life,
Is to live WISELY, as the Gods decree.
Not without meaning, did the muses choose
The bare and fruitless laurel for their own.
Scentless and cold, it weighs upon the brow,

Emblem of sacrifice, and sterile fame.
Is not the poet's talent doomed, alas !

(Stretching her arms towards PHAON.)

To seek some other source of earthly bliss ?

PHAON.

Whate'er thou say'st, Enchantress, must be truth.

SAPPHO.

Let us then strive to make each other blest.
Around our brows, one common garland twine.
Here in this happy, peaceful spot, we'll rest,
Where all seems destined but for love alone.
From the full brimming cup of life we'll drink.
Behold this site, environed half with land,
Half resting in the ocean's stormy arms.
Silence and peace reign o'er its meadows green.
Beneath these bowers of roses, we will sit.
Within the shelter of these marble halls,
Like the immortals, we will quaff of life.
All here is mine—and thine. If used by thee,
'Twill henceforth have new value in mine eyes.
Gaze all around. PHAON, thou art AT HOME.
To my attendants, I will show their Lord.
By my example, teach them to obey.

(To her attendants.)

Maidens and flaves, come forth ! Your mistress calls.

PHAON.

A weight of gratitude is on my heart.
Such love as this I never can repay.

SCENE IV.

(Enter RHAMNES, MELITTA, and other attendants.)

RHAMNES.

We heard thy call.

SAPPHO.

Behold your future Lord.

Approach !

RHAMNES.

(With hesitation.)

Said'st thou OUR Lord ?

SAPPHO.

(Angrily.)

Who was it spoke ?

What meant thou ?

RHAMNES.

(Drawing back.)

Nothing.

SAPPHO.

Be silent then.

Ye here behold your Lord. His flightest wish
Demands obedience, the same as mine.
Woe be to him who faileth to obey,
Or giveth cause for clouds upon that brow.
Neglect towards ME, perhaps I can forgive,
But his displeasure will ensure disgrace.
And now, dear PHAON, trust thee to their care.
I see thou art fatigued and travel-worn.
Of SAPPHO'S hospitality, enjoy the right.
'Tis her first gift to thee, thou weary one.

PHAON.

Could I but cast from me my former life,
E'en as these dusty garments, change for new,
And thus become more worthy of thy love,
And gain in merit all I would desire,
My highest aim were answered.

Fare thee well,

For a brief space.

SAPPHO.

I fhall await thee here.

(To MELITTA.)

Remain, MELITTA.

(Exeunt PHAON and attendants.)

SCENE V.

SAPPHO.

(Silent and gazing after PHAON.)

Well ! (fighting.)

MELITTA.

What is thy wifh?

SAPPHO.

Rufhes the warm blood only in MY breaft ?
 Freezes its current in all OTHER hearts ?
 THOU saw'ft him—heard the foun of his dear voice,
 The air that fanned his brow was breathed by thee,
 And yet—the only utterance thou bringeft forth—
 “ Thy wifh, my miftrefs.”

I could hate thee ! Go !

(MELITTA is about to depart silently. SAPPHO seats herself upon a grassy bank.)

Yet stay, MELITTA. Canst thou nothing say,

(Tenderly.)

To give me joy and pleasure, dearest child?
Thou saw'st him, didst thou not? And yet so dumb!
Where were thine eyes? Maiden, didst nothing mark
Worthy to tell me of in after hours?

(Taking MELITTA gently by the hand.)

MELITTA.

Thou knowest well, how often thou hast said,
A maiden's eyes on strangers should not fall.

SAPPHO.

Was it for this, thy glances swept the ground?
Poor girl!

(Kissing her.)

The lesson was not meant for thee.
What suits the child, befits not womanhood.
'Twas only meant for older—wilder hearts.

(Looking penetratingly at MELITTA.)

And yet thou'rt strangely changed, since last we met.
Thou hast grown taller and—

Yes, dearest child,

(Kissing her again.)

Thou art quite right. The lesson suits thee too.

(Rises.)

Why art thou now so sad and silent grown?
Thou wert not wont to be so. Why dost tremble?
Not unto SAPPHO, as thy mistress look.
A tender friend, MELITTA, speaks with thee.
One who has cast aside her former faults,
And learned to curb ambition, pride of place,
All else unworthy of a noble heart.
I thrust them deep into the waves' abyss,
When wafted to my home, by PHAON'S side.
Such is the wondrous, magic power of love.
It purifies whate'er it breathes upon,
E'en as the sun, the frowning thunder-cloud
Can tinge with living hues of molten gold.
If ever I have pained thee by quick speech,
Or hasty deed, forgive me now, sweet girl.
We'll in the future live as sisters dear,
Close to HIS side, equals in every thing,
Save in the fond possession of his love.
Like thee, I will be gentle, kind and good.

MELITTA.

Thou art and ever hast been, kind and good.

SAPPHO.

Ah yes ! If to be good, thou mean'st NOT BAD.
Too ill and sad my life for such reward.
Yet tell me, child, will HE be happy here ?

MELITTA.

Who could be aught but happy near to thee.

SAPPHO.

And yet, with what can I repay his love ?
He stands before me, in the pride of youth,
His brow adorned with all the flowers of life ;
His op'ning mind, unconscious of its power,
Darts keenly forward, to embrace at once,
All that is noble, beautiful, and good,
Soaring to highest heaven with eagle eye.
The world is his—with all its weal and woe.
But I—oh ye all-powerful Gods above !
Give me but back again the vanished past.
Extinguish in my heart each deep-worn trace,
That former joys and sorrows have impressed.
Whatever I have suffered, felt, or done,
Oh ! let it be, as tho' it ne'er had been.
Let me recall the happy days of youth,

When still, unknowing of the task of life,
I looked upon the world as bright and good.
When no presentiment of ill, drew tones
Of drooping sadness from my plaintive lyre.
When love itself was still for me a dream,
A far-off, unknown fairy paradise.

(She leans sadly upon MELITTA.)

MELITTA.

Dear mistress! Thou art ill? Oh! Speak to me.

SAPPHO.

My brain is giddy, and methinks I stand
Upon the brink of some wide, gaping gulf,
A black abyss, that yawns 'twixt him and me.
Beyond I see a golden land of joy.
My eye can reach it, but my footsteps never.
Woe be to all who quit their peaceful home,
In search of phantoms, such as honor—fame.
In a frail skiff, they sail a troubled sea;
Or find a desert, without tree or flower,
Naught but illimitable, vacant space.
Far, far away, the verdant shore is seen:
While all confused, with ocean's hollow din,
They catch the sound of voices that are dear.

But if indeed they reach their home again,
 Alas ! their former joys—their friends are gone.
 Spring is no more—its flowers are faded—dead,

(She plucks off her wreath in sadness.)

Nothing is left, save autumn's rustling leaves.

MELITTA.

That envied wreath ! That noble recompense !
 By thousands sought for ! But in vain—in vain !

SAPPHO.

'Tis true, dear girl. Alas ! in vain—in vain !

(Replacing the wreath.)

Yet honor is no vain, no empty sound.
 It fills the breast, with conscious Godlike power.
 At least, I am not poor, for in this wreath,
 Behold a treasure, that can equal his.
 Amid its leaves, the Past and Future live.

* * * * *

Thou comprehendest not. 'Tis well for thee.
 Oh ! may my meaning never reach thy heart.

MELITTA.

And art thou angry with me ?

SAPPHO.

No, dear child.
Go now and join the rest, and let me know
When PHAON waits thy mistress.

SCENE VI.

SAPPHO alone. She remains lost in thought, her head resting on her hand. Taking her lyre, she seats herself on the grassy bank, and chants the following hymn to Aphrodite, accompanying herself with a few chords.

SAPPHO.

Listen Aphrodite, the golden-throned
Daughter of Jove, so full of wiles and art !
No more my throbbing bosom load with care.
Come once again, if ever music soft
Swept from this lyre, floated upon thy soul ;
If e'er delighted, thou didst leave thy home,
And in thy light car, swiftly borne along
By thy glad doves, prompt at thy loved command,
E'en as the lightning flashes, to the earth.
Voluptuous smiles played o'er thy heavenly lips,
As with compassionate and tender voice,
Thou deign'dst to ask the cause of SAPPHO's pain.

“ Why is thy song so sad and fraught with grief?
“ What is thy earnest spirit yearning for ?
“ Whom dost thou long to clasp within thine arms,
“ A prif’ner in love’s fetters, past release ?
“ Who is he ? Will he turn away from thee ?
“ Soon will he seek again thy trusting love.
“ Scorns he thy gifts ? He’ll give thee gifts himself.
“ Loves he not yet ? Soon will he love thee dear,
“ And be a slave to every glance of thine.”
Thus come again, and drive away the care
That rends my heart. Remove this anxious doubt.
Thou on my side, love’s battle I shall win.

(She leans back her head exhausted. Curtain falls.)

SAPPHO.



A C T S E C O N D .

SCENE I.

Open country as in 1st Act. Enter PHAON alone.

PHAON.

Here then I find tranquillity and rest.
The banquet's revelry, the cymbal's din,
The loud rejoicing of the festive crowds,
Reach me not here, within this quiet vale.
The murmuring music of the rustling leaves,
Invites to contemplation and repose.

* * * * * * *

Let me recall the changes of my life,
Since first I left my aged parent's roof,
And towards Olympia turned my gallant steed.

There was a time, when with a lightning glance
 The complex web of my entangled thoughts
 I could unravel. Now, upon my soul
 Broods misty darkness, like a thunder-cloud.
 Uneasy dreams now haunt my troubled brain,
 And flit like spectres, into vacant space.
 A heavy veil seems thrown upon the past.
 The joy of yesterday, I trace no more.
 The passing hour itself, so strange my doubt,
 Counts not the bliss its predecessor brought.
 I ask myself, can I in truth be he,
 Who at Olympia stood by SAPPHO'S side,
 And as an equal, shared proud SAPPHO'S fame?

* * * * *

'Twere madness still to doubt, yet doubt I must.

* * * * *

How full of mystery the human heart!
 The object of its fondest dreams, once gained,
 Is quickly robbed of all its promised bliss.
 Before we met, no one in earth or Heaven,
 Could paint the glowing fairy paradise,
 My fancy revelled in by SAPPHO'S side.
 For one kind word, one loving glance of hers,
 I would have flung my maddened life away,
 And on her smile, the value of my soul.

But now that she is mine—I hesitate.
 My hopes have thrust aside their winter shell.
 Like golden butterflies, they round me play,
 And yet I pause and tremble!

Woe is me!

Spell-bound, I have forgot my very self,
 All else—my parents—

Oh! my poor parents!

Why have I not had time, to think of ye?
 Why have I failed, amid bewildering thoughts,
 Till now, to ease your fond anxiety?
 Perhaps already, do ye mourn my death.
 Perchance already, busy rumor's tongue
 Hath whispered that your son, he whom ye sent
 In search of glory on Olympia's plains,
 Sought but one prize—'twas love—in SAPPHO's arms.

* * * * *

Ha! who shall dare to lightly breathe that name?
 Noblest of women, crown of all thy sex!
 What tho' the shafts of envy point at thee!
 My arm shall fling defiance to the world.
 The fight of SAPPHO quickly would efface,
 Within my father's breast, all prejudice,
 His innate sense of virtue had imbibed,

'Gainst one, that he in rustic innocence,
Supposed the songstrefs of licentious love.

(Pauses lost in thought. Sounds of approaching footsteps.)

Who comes? Perchance the noisy crowd draws near.
I will away, but whither?

Why not here?

(Entering the grotto.)

SCENE II.

(EUCCHARIS, MELITTA, and female slaves with flowers.)

EUCCHARIS. (Playfully.)

Haste, maidens. Bring more flowers, whole heaps
of flowers,
That we may decorate with fitting grace,
The house, the hall, the vestibule and doors.
E'en the parterre, we'll decorate with flowers.
To-day we celebrate the feast of love.

MAIDENS. (Displaying flowers.)

See here!

(They begin to hang the porticos and trees with garlands.)

EUCCHARIS.

Well done.

(Turning to MELITTA.)

MELITTA, how is this?
Where are thy flowers?

MELITTA.

Mine?

EUCCHARIS.

Yes, MELITTA, thine!
Alone thou comest here with empty hands.

MELITTA.

I too will gather—

EUCCHARIS.

Gather! dost thou say?
And yet thou doth not stir a single step.
Thou little hypocrite, at once confests,
What is it ails thee? At the feast to-day,
I saw our mistress, with peculiar smile,
Glance often at thee, yet at times her eyes
On meeting thine, would quickly sweep the ground.

Oft as ſhe did ſo, I could ſee thee bluſh,
And trembling with confuſion and diſmay,
Forget thy ſervice at the feſtal board.
And when at her command, thou bor'ſt the cup,
Ere to the gentle ſtranger it had paſſed,
And ere thy lip had preſſed it, ſhe cried out,
“Caſt down thine eyes, MELITTA.” In thy fear,
And as ſhe ſpoke, half of the purple draught
Was ſpilt by thee, upon the marble floor.
E'en SAPPHO laughed. Now tell me what this means?
Confefs—confefs! Let truth be only thine.

MELITTA.

Oh! leave me—

EUCHARIS.

Not I indeed. No mercy
Can I ſhow thee, until thou tell'ſt us all.
Within thine eyes, already ſprings a tear!
Well! Well! poor child, I will not preſs thee more.
Yet do not weep. I cannot bear thy tears.
Is it indeed, becauſe thou haſt no flowers?
Then we will go and gather ſome for thee,
And in our abſence, thou canſt twine theſe wreaths.
But liſten, deareſt child, thou muſt not weep.

(EUCHARIS and the maidens go out.)

SCENE III.

MELITTA alone. She seats herself upon a grassy bank, and begins to weave a garland.
She soon lays it aside and shakes her head mournfully.

MELITTA.

I can no more. Ah! me. This head will burst.
My heart beats wildly in my aching breast.
Here must I live, deserted and alone,
Far from my parents, in a foreign land,
To whom I cannot raise my fettered hands.
Alas! I am forgotten and alone,
Without one sympathizing bosom near.
With tearful eyes, I see around me those,
Who have their friends and kin to share their grief.
For me no feeling heart responsive throbs;
For those that fondly love me, dwell not here.
Children I see, climbing their father's knee,
Craving a kiss, his silvery locks caress:
My father's love can never reach his child:
A broad sea intervenes 'twixt him and me.
Yet some appear to love me even here,
And now and then confer a gentle word.

'Tis pity ! Such, the slave may well excite.
Their gentle words oft turn to bitter scorn.
The place for me, is by the lowly hearth,
Where thought cannot arrive, nor eye can reach.

(Kneeling.)

Hear, oh ye Gods ! again my humble prayer,
And turn ye not from one so sadly placed.
Restore me to my native land once more.
Oh ! let me lay, upon some friendly breast,
This aching head, and cool this burning brow,
Or take me, oh ye Gods ! to rest in Heav'n.

SCENE IV.

PHAON comes forward from the grotto, and lays his hand gently on MELITTA's shoulder.

PHAON.

So young and yet so sad—poor girl !

MELITTA. (Starting.)

Ah ! me.

PHAON.

Did I not hear thee ask of Heav'n a friend ?

Thy prayer is heard. A friend behold in me.
 One common sorrow binds our hearts in one.
 The weary wretched ever are akin.
 I also weep my parents and my friends,
 And long once more to reach my native land.
 Let us together make exchange of grief;
 By mutual pity soothe each other's pain.
 What! silent? Why art thou trustless, maiden?
 Uplift thy gentle eyes to mine, and see
 Sincerity of purpose in my heart.

(He raises her head with his hand.)

Thou art the little Hebe of the feast,¹⁰
 Whose trembling hand let fall the purple wine.
 Well, 'twas an accident. Thou need'st not fear;
 Thy mistress and myself were much amused.

(MELITTA raises her eyes to PHAON, and immediately hastens to retire.)

PHAON. (Detaining her.)

Did I say aught, my child, to give offence?
 Thy gentle eyes cannot with anger flash.
 Thou must stay with me! Nay! Thou must remain.
 I had already marked thee at the feast,
 And watched thy timid silence at the board.
 Who art thou, then? And wherefore art thou here?

I'm sure I saw thee serving at the feast,
And heard the maidens call thee fellow slave.

MELITTA.

I am a slave—

(Going.)

PHAON. (Detaining her.)

Maiden ! Nay go not yet.

MELITTA.

What wouldst thou with a slave ? Let her seek rest,
Upon the bosom of another slave,
Or (with emotion.)
take her to rest in Heaven, ye Gods !

PHAON.

Why this emotion ! Be composed, dear child.
The slavish fetter binds the hands alone.
The soul cannot be crushed by slavish chains.
SAPPHO is good and kind. A word from me,
And without ransom, she will set thee free.
She will rejoice to send thee to thy home.

(MELITTA shakes her head sadly.)

Believe me that she will, or has the wish
To see again thy country, left thy breast ?

MELITTA.

Where is my father land ?

PHAON.

Doſt thou not know ?

MELITTA.

From its loved ſhelter, I was early torn.
Within my memory dwell its fruits and flowers,
But not its name. And yet methinks it lay
Far to the Eaſt, beneath the burning ſun,
Where all is bright, and beautiful, and clear.

PHAON.

Is it then far from here ?

MELITTA.

Oh, very far.

Not trees, and fruits, and flowers like theſe grew there.
The ſtars ſhone brighter in the midnight ſkies,
And gentler friends dwelt there, and kinder hearts.
With happy children too, I played in youth.
A venerable man, with ſnow-white hair,
I called him father, did careſs me oft.

Another too was there, so beautiful—
With eyes and hair, as dark as thine.

PHAON.

This man—

MELITTA.

He too—

PHAON.

Careffed thee !

(Seizing her hands.)

MELITTA. (Softly.)

Yes ! I was a child.

PHAON.

In truth a sweet and lovely child. Go on.

MELITTA.

So far my life was joy and happiness.
One night I was awakened by loud cries.
My nurse, in terror, bore me from the house,
Amid the darkness, to a neighboring wood.
Afar I saw the dwellings wrapt in flames,
And men and women hastening to and fro.

All was confusion, death and dire dismay.
A ruffian seized me, 'mid wild shrieks and cries,
And then I found myself on board a ship,
That glided swiftly through the waters dark.
Children and maidens round about me wept.
We saw our native shores retreating fast,
And one by one, our number smaller grew.
And many days, and nights, and months were passed,
Till I alone, of all that childish band,
Survived to reach the strand of Lesbos' Isle.
There SAPPHO saw and bought me for her slave.

PHAON.

And hath thy lot been sad, in SAPPHO's hands ?

MELITTA.

Oh no ! With pity she bewailed my fate,
And dried my tears. Then as I older grew,
She gave me kind instruction and advice,
For tho' impetuous and quick of speech,
SAPPHO is kind and good. Yes, great and good.

PHAON.

Yet thou canst not forget thy native home ?

MELITTA.

Too soon, alas! I have forgotten it.
The dance, and childish sports, and household cares,
Have oft effaced the mem'ry of the loved.
But when oppressed with anxious care and grief,
Ah! then returns a longing for my home,
And fond remembrance with a faithful hand,
Lifts up the curtain from the shadowy past.
So sad was I to-day—I scarce knew why,
That all I heard, seemed said to give me pain,
And fell with mournful echo on mine ear.
But that is past. Once more I'm glad again.

(The maidens call MELITTA from within.)

PHAON.

Hark! thou art called!

MELITTA.

Who calls me? I will go.

(She hastily gathers up her flowers.)

PHAON.

What hast thou here?

MELITTA.

Why, flowers!

PHAON.

For whom are they?

MELITTA.

For thee—for thee and SAPPHO.

PHAON.

Then stay here.

MELITTA.

But I was called!

PHAON.

Thou must not leave so sad.
Show me thy flowers.

MELITTA.

Thou see'st them.

PHAON. (Taking a rose.)

Take this rose,
And keep it in remembrance of this hour.

(He places it in her bosom.)

In other lands and here, 'twill be a pledge
That in this world at least, thou hast one friend.

(MELITTA, who had shrunk from his touch, now stands with drooping arms, and eyes cast down. PHAON regards her attentively. Voices from within again call MELITTA. She starts, and turning to PHAON, says)

Didst thou call me ?

PHAON.

'Twas some one from within.

MELITTA.

(Again gathering up her flowers.)

I come.

PHAON.

Why art thou sparing of thy flowers ?
Doth not my offering warrant some return ?

MELITTA.

Return from me ? What have I then to give ?

PHAON.

The vain and proud give gold. Friendship and love
May give a simple flower, and thou hast flowers.

MELITTA.

(Throwing them away.)

What these! Plucked by rude hands? No! never
these.

(Looking at the rose bushes.)

They have quite stripped the branches. Not a flower---
Yes—there I see a solitary rose,
But yet so high. It is beyond my reach.

PHAON.

Then let me help thee!

MELITTA.

Oh no—no!

PHAON.

But why?

Not thus so easily I yield my claim.

MELITTA.

(Ascending a bank.)

Let me then bend this branch to thee.

PHAON

So do.

MELITTA.

(Standing on tip-toe and bending down the branch.)

Canst thou not reach it yet?

PHAON.

(Without regarding the rose, he looks at MELITTA.)

Not yet.

MELITTA.

Now then—

Oh! Heavens! I flip! I fall!

PHAON.

I'll hold thee fast.

(The branch escapes her grasp, and flipping, she falls into PHAON's arms.)

MELITTA.

Release me—

PHAON.

(Holding her against his heart.)

MELITTA!

MELITTA.

Leave me, I pray.

PHAON.

MELITTA !

(He kisses her.)

SCENE V.

Enter SAPPHO, simply dressed without lyre or wreath.

SAPPHO.

(To PHAON.)

I have sought thee everywhere.

But ah ! What do I see ?

MELITTA.

My mistress here !

PHAON. (Releasing MELITTA.)

What ! SAPPHO !

(A pause.)

SAPPHO.

MELITTA ? Ha !

MELITTA.

My mistress—

SAPPHO.

What seek'st thou here?

MELITTA.

I only sought for flowers.

SAPPHO.

And not in vain 'twould seem!

MELITTA.

This simple rose—

SAPPHO.

Is burning on thy cheek—

MELITTA.

It hangs too high—

SAPPHO.

Not high enough perhaps! Go.

MELITTA.

Shall I not—

SAPPHO.

Begone!

(Exit MELITTA.)

SCENE VI.

SAPPHO and PHAON.

SAPPHO. (After a pause.)

PHAON !

PHAON.

SAPPHO !

SAPPHO.

Thou left too soon.
Thy absence from the table marred its joy.

PHAON.

I love not wine, nor loud festivity.

SAPPHO.

Nor loud festivity ! mean'st thou reproach ?
Then I have erred in making our return,
A time of happiness and festival ?

PHAON.

To wound thee, SAPPHO, was not my intent.

SAPPHO.

Oft doth the happy heart seek mirth and noise,
The better to enjoy its inward blifs,
Unheeded and alone.

PHAON.

Perhaps 'tis true.

SAPPHO.

Then too, I anxious felt to make return,
To my kind friends, for all the love they've shown ;
They at the banquet's revelry were glad.
But for the future, shall no noisy mirth,
Displeasing to us both, disturb our rest.

PHAON.

For this accept my thanks.

(Moving from her.)

SAPPHO.

And wouldst thou go ?

PHAON.

Shall I remain ?

SAPPHO.

To go or stay—thou'rt free.

PHAON.

Art thou then angry ?

SAPPHO. (With emotion.)

Phaon !

PHAON.

Wouldst thou then—

SAPPHO.

Nothing—and yet—

(With control.)

Did I not see thee now

Toy with Melitta ?

PHAON. (Abstractedly.)

Melitta ! Ah yes !

Perhaps—Go on.

SAPPHO.

She is a lovely child.

PHAON.

Yes, so she seems.

SAPPHO.

She is the favored one

Of all my slaves, or I may almost say

Of all my children, for as my children,
I have loved them. And if the flavish chain,
I have not loofed, 'tis that the tender age
Of these poor orphans, still demands from me,
A mother's ever watchful care and love.
In Mytilene¹¹ full many a joyous heart,
Ascribes its happiness to SAPPHO'S love.

PHAON.

'Tis well ! 'tis well.

SAPPHO.

Of all the maiden band,
That fate capricious, trusted to my care,
None is so dear to me, as this poor child.
Though lowly both in nature and in gifts,
Yet she to me is dearer than the rest.
Her timid modesty and gratitude,
Seem ever anxious to declare themselves ;
Yet fearful to intrude, like to the snail
That at the slightest touch, sinks in its shell,
Yet clings so closely, that it drops in death.

PHAON.

How beautiful !

SAPPHO.

And it would grieve me much,
(Forgive me, friend), if e'er a careless word,
Should waken in that maiden's youthful soul,
Feelings and hopes, that unfulfilled, would pain.
I would to her the sad experience spare
Of unrequited faith, nor let her know
How love disdained, preys on the aching heart.
My friend !

PHAON.

What saidst thou ?

SAPPHO.

Then thou heardst me not.

PHAON.

I hear—Love pains—

SAPPHO.

Yes, thou art right. It doth.
But now thy mood is dull. Another time
We will resume this point.

PHAON.

Another time !

'Tis well.

SAPPHO.

And now farewell. This is the hour,
I dedicate to study and repose,
In yonder silent grotto. Though the muse
To-day may prove unkind, still may I hope,
To find repose within its peaceful walls.
And thou, meanwhile, farewell.

PHAON.

Wouldst thou leave me ?

SAPPHO.

Wouldst thou I stay ?

PHAON.

Farewell.

SAPPHO. (Turning hastily away.)

Again farewell.

(She enters the grotto.)

SCENE VII.

PHAON. (Looking around.)

'And hast thou really—

She is gone indeed.

I am bewildered and my mind confused—

(Looks at the grassy bank.)

'Twas here she sat, that lovely blooming girl ;

(He seats himself.)

Here also will I seek repose and peace.

(He sadly covers his face with his hands. Curtain falls.)

SAPPHO.



A C T T H I R D .

SCENE I.

Country as in preceding act. PHAON lies slumbering on the grassy bank.

SAPPHO.

(Entering from grotto.)

'Tis all in vain ! Rebellious to my will,
Thought wanders and returns, void of all sense :
Whilst ever and anon, whate'er I do,
Before me stands that horrid, hated sight
I fain would flee from, e'en beyond this earth.
How he upheld her !—How she clasped his arm !
Till gently yielding to its soft embrace,
She on his lips—Away ! away ! the thought !
For in that thought, are deaths innumerable.

* * * * * * *

But why torment myself, and thus complain
 Of what perhaps is after all a dream ?
 Who knows what transient feeling, soon forgot,
 What momentary impulse led him on,
 Which quickly passed; e'en as it quickly came,
 Unheeded—undeferving of reproach ?
 Who bade me seek the measure of HIS love,
 Within my own impassioned, aching breast ?

* * * * *

Ye, who have studied life with earnest care,
 By man's affection, judge not woman's heart.
 A restless thing is his impetuous soul—
 The slave of change—and changing with each change.

* * * * *

Boldly man enters on the path of life,
 Illumined by the morning ray of hope :
 Begirt with sword and shield, courage and faith,
 Impatient to commence a glorious strife.
 Too narrow seems to him domestic joy.
 His wild ambition overleaps repose,
 And hurries madly on through endless space :
 And if upon his wayward path, he meets
 The humble beautiful flower called love,
 And should he stoop to raise it from the earth,

He coldly places it upon his helm.
 He knoweth not, what holy ardent flame,
 It doth awaken in a woman's heart.
 How all her being—every thought—each wish—
 Revolve forever on this single point.
 Like to the young bird, round its mother's nest
 While fluttering, doth her anxious boding care
 Watch o'er her love—her cradle and her grave.
 Her whole of life—a jewel of rich price—
 She hangs upon the bosom of her faith.

* * * * *

Man loves—'tis true—but his capacious heart
 Finds room for other feelings than his love;
 And much that woman's purity condemns,
 He deems amusement, or an idle jest.
 A kiss from other lips, he takes at will.
 Alas! that this is so; yet so it is.

(Turns and sees PHAON sleeping.)

* * * * *

Ha! see! Beneath the shadow of yon rose,
 The faithless dear one slumbers. Aye! He sleeps,
 And quiet rest hath settled on his brow.
 Thus only slumbers gentle innocence.
 Alone thus gently breathes th' unburdened breast.

* * * * *

Yes, dearest! I will trust thy peaceful sleep,
 Whate'er thy waking, painful may disclose.
 Forgive me then, if I have injured thee
 By unjust doubt; or if I dared to think,
 That falsehood could approach a shrine so pure.

* * * * *

A smile plays o'er his mouth! His lips divide!
 A name is hovering in his burning breath!
 Awake! and call thy SAPPHO! She is near!
 Her arms are clasped about thee!

(She kisses his brow. PHAON awakes and with half opened eyes exclaims.)

PHAON.

MELITTA!

SAPPHO.

(Starting back.)

Ha!

PHAON.

Who hath disturbed me? What envious hand
 Hath driven from my soul, the happy dream?

(Recollecting himself.)

Thou! SAPPHO! welcome. Well I knew indeed,
 That something beautiful must be near my side,
 To lend such glowing colors to my dream.

But why so sad? I am quite happy now.
The anxious care that lay upon my breast,
Hath disappeared, and I am glad again.
Like to some wretch, who hath been headlong
 plunged
Into some deep abyss, where all was dark,
When lifted upward by a friendly arm,
So that once more, he breathes the air of Heav'n,
And in the golden sun-light bathes again,
He heareth happy voices sounding near.
Thus in the wild excitement of my heart,
I feel it overflow with happiness,
And with half-finking 'neath the weight of joy,
For keener senses, or for less of bliss.

SAPPHO.

(Loft in thought.)

MELITTA !

PHAON.

Be gay and happy, dear one.
All 'round us here, is beautiful and fair.
On weary wings, the summer evening finks,
In placid rest upon the quiet earth.
The sea heaves timidly her billowy breast,
The bride expectant of the Lord of Day,
Whose fiery steeds have almost reached the West.

The gentle breeze sighs thro' the poplar boughs,
And far and near, all nature whispers love.
Is there no echo in our hearts—we love?

SAPPHO. (Aside.)

Oh! I could trust again this faithless one.
But no! Too deeply have I read his heart.

PHAON.

The feverish spell that pressed upon my brain,
Hath vanished quite, and ah! believe me, dear
SAPPHO! I ne'er have loved thee till this hour.
Let us be happy—

But tell me, loved one,
What faith hast thou in dreams?

SAPPHO.

They always lie,
And I hate liars.

PHAON.

For as I slept just now,
I had a heavenly dream. I thought myself
Again—again—upon Olympia's height,
As when I saw thee first, the queen of song.
Amid the voices of the noisy crowd,

The clang of chariot wheels, and warrior shouts,
 A strain of music, stole upon mine ear.
 'Twas thou ! again thou sweetly sang of love,
 And deep within my soul, I felt its power.
 I rushed impetuous towards thee, when behold !
 It seemed at once, as tho' I knew thee not !
 And yet the Tyrian mantle clasped thy form ;
 The lyre still lay upon thy snow-white arm.
 Thy face alone was changed. Like as a cloud
 Obscures the brightness of a summer sky,
 The laurel wreath had vanished from thy brow.
 Upon thy lips, from which immortal sounds
 Had scarcely died away, sat nought but smiles ;
 And in the profile of proud PALLAS' face,¹²
 I traced the features of a lovely child.
 It was thyself—and yet 'twas not—

It was—

SAPPHO.

(Almost shrieking.)

MELITTA !

PHAON. (Starting.)

Thou well nigh hadst frightened me.
 Who said that it was she ? I knew it not !
 Oh ! SAPPHO ! I have grieved thee—

(SAPPHO motions him to leave.)

Ah! what now?
Thou wish'st me to be gone? Let me first say—

(She again motions him to leave.)

Must I indeed then go? Then fare thee well.

(Exit PHAON.)

SCENE II.

SAPPHO alone.

SAPPHO. (After a pause.)

The bow hath sprung—

(Pressing her hands to her breast.)

The arrow rankles HERE!

'Twere vain to doubt! It is—it must be so.
'Tis SHE, that dwells within his perjured heart.
Her image ever floats before his eyes:
His very dreams enshrine that one loved form.

* * * * *

SAPPHO despised! Aye, true! And for a slave!
Am I no more that SAPPHO, at whose feet,
E'er kings were wont to kneel, whilst as a toy
She proudly spurned their proffered jewelled crowns?
Fool that I was, to leave Parnassus' height,

For this poor faithless earth, where there is nought,
Save poverty, and falsehood, and deceit.

THERE, high above the clouds—THERE—was my place.

HERE, there is none for me, except the grave.

Oh ye ! ordained by Heaven to rank with Gods,

Seek not the haunts of men—for in one cup,

Divine and mortal ne'er can mingled be.

Of the two worlds, thou mayest choose but one,

And having chosen there is no return.

The golden fruit of fame, if once thou taste,

It will devote thee to the shades of death.

No more to life shalt thou again belong,

E'en tho' it lure thee, with its flattering sounds ;

Or woo thee by its friendship, or its love.

Beware, unblest one ! wouldst thou pluck the rose,

And press instead, its thorn within thy breast ?

* * * * *

I will again behold this beauty strange,
That boasts such conquest, over SAPPHO's soul ;
Or do I dream, when I in memory trace,

(Scornfully.)

The image of a filly, awkward girl,
With eyes forever bent upon the ground,
And pouting lips, that lip but childish words ;

Whose joy is play—whose pain, is dread of blame ;
Or did my eyes pass heedless o'er the charms,
That wrapt HIS soul ! MELITTA ! I will see.
Yes ! I will see her—(She calls.)

— Come ! MELITTA ! come !

SCENE III.

EUCCHARIS—SAPPHO.

EUCCHARIS.

Didst thou call, Lady ?

SAPPHO.

I called MELITTA.

Where is she ?

EUCCHARIS.

I think within her chamber.

SAPPHO.

Seeks she then solitude ? What doth she there ?

EUCCHARIS.

Indeed I know not, but her ways of late

Are very strange. This morning, she was sad
And silent, and her eyes were bathed in tears.
This eve, she met me with a joyous air,
While bearing household linen to the brook,
Which flows like crystal, thro' the myrtle grove.

SAPPHO.

(Bitterly.)

She glories in her triumph!—Well! Go on!

EUCHARIS.

Anxious to know what she was seeking there,
I followed gently thro' the quiet woods.
And found her—

SAPPHO.

With him?

EUCHARIS.

With whom?

SAPPHO.

Well! Go on.

EUCHARIS.

I found her standing in the limpid stream;

Her clothing scattered on the shady shore.
She feared no watcher—thought herself alone,
And with her little hands bathed face and arms.
The setting sun glowed on her polished limbs,
And shed a rose-tint o'er her beauteous form.
She looked like Dian's youngest fairest nymph.

SAPPHO. (Haughtily.)

I asked for information—not for praise.

EUCHARIS.

Then when the duties of the bath were o'er,
And breast, and brow, and blushing cheeks were dry,
She hastened, finging gladly to the house,
Yet so absorbed and lost in her own thoughts,
She did not see the little leaves I threw,
As if to startle her. On reaching home,
She locked her chamber door, and after that,
I hardly know, save that she seemed to search
Her closets, finging gayly all the while.

SAPPHO.

She fings—and SAPPHO—

No! I will not weep.

Bring her to me.

EUCHARIS.

MELITTA ?

SAPPHO.

Yes. Who else ?

MELITTA ! 'tis a sweet and tender name,
So full of music, and so fraught with love.

MELITTA ! SAPPHO !—

Go bring her to me.

(Exit EUCHARIS.)

SCENE IV.

SAPPHO alone. She sits upon the bank, and leans her head on her hand. A pause.

SAPPHO.

I cannot. Woe is me ! In vain I call
On pride, and love, alas ! alone replies.

(She sinks back in thought.)

SCENE V.

MELITTA—SAPPHO.

MELITTA enters simply and carefully dressed, with roses in her hair and bosom. She stands still on entering, but as SAPPHO does not move, she approaches nearer.

MELITTA.

Here I am.

SAPPHO.

(Turning quickly and starting back.)

Ah! by Heaven how beautiful!

(Hides her face in her hands. A pause.)

MELITTA.

Didst thou not send for me?

SAPPHO. (Musing.)

How well adorned—

The faithless one, to please her lover's eyes!

I scarce can check the wrath, that burns within.

(To MELITTA.)

What festival to-day, demands this dress?

MELITTA.

Festival!

SAPPHO.

Why such care, and why those flowers ?

MELITTA.

Thou oft hast blamed me, that I seldom wear,
The clothes thou hast provided for my use.
But I was anxious to take care of them,
Until some joyful moment should arrive.
To celebrate this day, we all had leave,
And so I dressed myself with greater care.

SAPPHO.

A joyful day ! Indeed I know not why !

MELITTA.

Why ? Because home to-day, thou hast returned—
Because that thou—

I know not really why,
Yet I am glad !

SAPPHO.

Ha ! false one !

MELITTA.

What saidst thou ?

SAPPHO. (Controlling herself.)

Come here, MELITTA ! Let us calmly speak.
How many summers dost thou count of life ?

MELITTA.

Thou know'st, what melancholy lot befell
My infant, tender years. No mother's heart
Recorded them with loving, faithful care ;
Yet I believe, that nearly o'er my head,
Some sixteen summer suns have passed.

SAPPHO.

Thou liest.

MELITTA.

I ?

SAPPHO.

Thou speakst not truth.

MELITTA.

I do ! my mistress.

SAPPHO.

Thy years in number, count not quite fifteen.

MELITTA.

It may be so.

SAPPHO.

So young in years! And yet
So ripe in art. No! No! It cannot be!
Nature in her cannot belie herself.
MELITTA! Canst thou still recall the day,
Already twelve years past, when in my charge
I first received thee? Cruel men had torn
Thee ruthlessly from 'midst thy quiet home.
Thy tears awoke compassion in my breast,
I gave the sum required. Myself a child,
With fervent love, I pressed thee to my heart,
And round my neck, thou clasped thy little arms,
Until thou fell asleep, consoled and glad.
Canst thou, MELITTA, recollect that day?

MELITTA.

I never can forget the hour we met.

SAPPHO.

And when soon after, fever's serpent coils,
With poisoned breath, had round about thee twined,
Who was it watched thee thro' the weary nights?

Who pillowed on her breast, thy burning head?
 Who self-forgetting, wrestled hard with death,
 Intent to save from him, her precious child,
 And worn with pain and sorrow, snatched thee back?

MELITTA.

'Twas thou, oh SAPPHO! Thou hast done all this.
 To thee I owe whatever I possess.
 How can I ever thank thee as I ought?

SAPPHO.

Not so, MELITTA. To my bosom come.
 I knew full well, thou couldst not me betray.
 Let then our hearts together fondly beat:
 Our eyes look only into sisters' eyes:
 Our words be blended in one loving breath,
 So that one common pulse, ear, every thing---
 Shall mark us both, as if a single soul.

MELITTA.

Oh, SAPPHO!

SAPPHO. (Musing.)

I deceived myself---'tis true!

MELITTA.

What?

SAPPHO.

And yet---how couldst thou? No ! thou couldst not.

MELITTA.

My mistress---what ?

SAPPHO.

'Tis true ! Thou couldst ! Well---go
And lay aside this foolish, gay attire.
In truth, I do not like to see thee thus.
Simplicity becomes a simple girl.
These gaudy robes offend the modest eye ;
In other garments, let me see thee clad.
Now go---yet stay. Where go'st thou ? Stay I say.
Look in mine eyes ! Why THINE upon the ground ?
Dost thou then fear to meet thy mistress' gaze ?
Thou wert not timid, when with PHAON late---
Ha ! Dost thou blush ? Betrayer is betrayed.
Thy burning cheeks alone, I will believe ;
They faithfully reflect the ardent flame,
Which fiercely burns, within thy treacherous breast.
Unhappy girl ! This then, the reason why,
Thy conduct at the table was so strange !
That which I took for youthful innocence,

'Twas but a cunning snare. A snare it proved,
 Such as the spider weaves around his prey.
 So young, and yet so artful ! Blooming fair,
 But yet with guilt, within thy faithless heart.
 Why art thou dumb ? Hast thou then lack of words ?
 The tongue that wounds, hath surely power to hiss !
 Answer at once !

MELITTA.

I know not what thou mean'st.

(Bursts into tears.)

SAPPHO.

Silent ! What tears ! (Moved.)

Poor child ! Ah, do not weep.

Tears are a sacred right, that sorrow claims.
 Answer with words, altho' they false have been.
 Use not the silent speech of innocence.

(Again with bitterness.)

Bedecked with flowers ! as if a bride thou wert !
 Away those flowers ! They do but ill conceal
 The venom'd serpent, that lies coiled beneath.

(MELITTA removes the flowers from her hair.)

Give me those flowers. In memory of this day,
 I'll treasure them, and should their leaves decay,
 They will remain, the emblem of THY truth,

And of my—faded happiness,—

—But why—

Retain that rose, that blooms upon thy breast?

Throw it away!

(MELITTA draws back.)

A pledge of love, perhaps?

Away with it!

MELITTA.

(Folding her arms over the rose.)

Never!

SAPPHO.

In vain resist!

The rose!

MELITTA.

(Drawing farther back, but pressing her hands closer upon her breast.)

Rather my life!

SAPPHO.

Thou treach'rous snake,

I too can sting.

(Drawing a dagger.)

Give me the rose!

MELITTA.

Ye Gods!

Protect me.

SCENE VI.

Enter PHAON.

Who calleth? MELITTA, thou!

(To SAPPHO.)

AWAY that dagger! (A pause.)

SAPPHO, what is this?

SAPPHO.

Demand of her!

PHAON.

MELITTA, hast thou then—

MELITTA.

The fault is mine. Unlike a slave I spoke.

SAPPHO.

Load not thyself with undeserved reproach.

(To herself.)

Too heavy weighs the fault upon this heart.

Alas! That I should need a slave's excuse.

(In a firmer tone.)

I asked her for the rose upon her breast,
And she refused.

PHAON.

She did! By all the gods!
She hath done well. No one shall take that flower.
'Twas I who gave it to her as a pledge,
A token dear, of a too happy hour;
A proof that in all hearts, love is not quenched;
Nor sympathy for undeserved distress;
A drop of honey in the bitter cup,
That arrogance hath pressed upon her lip;
A sign of my belief, that gentleness
Is woman's noblest grace, and that the wreath
That decks the brow of blooming innocence,
Is better far, than fame's dark laurel leaves.

(Looking at MELITTA.)

She weeps! Nay! weep not! Thou! MELITTA, child!

(To SAPPHO.)

Didst THOU perchance, pay also for THESE TEARS,
When with thy gold, thou purchas'dst this poor slave?
Her BODY is thine own. Take then her LIFE,
But do not wring a tear from her sad soul.

(To MELITTA.)

Thou listest up thy soft blue eyes to mine,
As if in pity for the merciless.
Thou know'st her not. Thou knowest not her pride.

Seest thou the dagger, glittering in her hand?
There are two others, hid beneath her eyes.—

(SAPPHO drops the dagger. PHAON picks it up.)

Be mine this steel; and I will wear it *HERE*,
Upon this warm, yet disappointed heart.
And if perchance, some sweet and pleasing thought
Of bye-gone days, on me should e'er intrude,
One hasty glance upon this shining blade,
Will quickly flame away the dream.

SAPPHO.

(Raising her eyes.)

PHAON!

PHAON.

(To MELITTA.)

Heed not again, that soft delusive voice.
It lures but to the dagger's deadly point.
I too have heard it, and—alas!—too oft,
And long before we met I was enslaved.
Her spell of melody was round me flung.
Her Syren charms within their magic power,¹³
Closer and closer drew me, till at last
Beyond escape, I was her captive bound.
And when we met, delirious passion seized

Upon my soul, and threw it at her feet.
The fight of THEE, recalled me to myself.
I shuddering, saw around me Circe's halls.
I felt my golden fetters weigh me down.
I sought not for release. 'Twas she herself;
Her own enchantments were by her dissolved.

SAPPHO. (Looking at him.)

PHAON !

PHAON.

Look not upon her ! Hear her not !
For in her eyes, as in her hand, lurks death.

MELITTA.

(Imploringly.)

She weeps !

PHAON.

Away ! There's magic in those tears !

MELITTA.

I cannot see my mistress suffer thus !

PHAON.

The spell works on me too ! Away ! away !
Before her poisoned toils enfold us both.—

(He is about to lead MELITTA away.)

MELITTA.

I cannot—SAPPHO !

SAPPHO.

(With emotion.)

Who spoke ? MELITTA ?

MELITTA.

(Falling on her knees.)

Yes, SAPPHO, it was I.—Here take the rose—

(Offering the rose.)

My life !—take both !—Where is thy dagger now ?

PHAON.

(Seizing the rose, and raising MELITTA.)

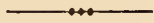
'Tis only thine. From thee, no God shall dare
To take it. Come—

Quick from her presence ; COME !

(He drags away MELITTA.)

(SAPPHO with outstretched arms calls "PHAON." Curtain falls.)

SAPPHO.



A C T F O U R T H .

SCENE I.

Open country as in former act. Moonlight.

(SAPPHO enters lost in thought. A pause.)

SAPPHO.

Do I exist? Doth any thing exist?
Was not the world, in that dread, fearful hour,
In one wild, frantic chaos overthrown?

(As if recollecting herself.)

This brooding darkness, that surrounds me here,
Belongs to night—not to the silent grave.
And yet 'tis said, excess of pain can kill.
Alas! Not so!—

* * * * *

Around me all is peace.
 The busy hum of life is hushed to rest.
 No breath is stirring through the autumn leaves,
 And lonely, like a homeless, sorrowing child,
 My voice of weeping, wanders thro' the night.
 Oh! for the gentle sleep of yonder birds,
 Rocked by the sighing breeze. But deeper far—
 And long—much longer—never waking more.
 Then would this weary, feverish pulse be still:
 The beams of morning would not rouse to pain:
 This heart would throb no more, nor feel the sting
 Of base Ingratitude—

—Beware that snake!

(With choked utterance.)

To murder, is indeed a deadly crime:
 And robbery—and falsehood—all are crimes:
 All hydra-headed—all by hell begot:
 Their blasting, poisonous breath infects the world.
 Yet there is one amongst them all, so black,
 That by its side, the others fade away.
 The basest of them all—Ingratitude.

* * * * *

It hath more power of ill than all the rest,
 And doth alone, plunder, betray, and kill.
 Ingratitude!

(A pause.)

Protect me, oh ! ye Gods !
 Protect me from myself. Within my soul
 Dark thoughts arise, and struggle to be free.
 From destiny, I sought alone for him.
 Of mortal men alone I chose but him. .
 I would have placed him on the lofty height
 Of fame and glory, with a deathless name,
 And graced his brow, with never-fading flowers.
 For this, I only asked a gentle word—
 Yet he—

Immortal Gods ! Live ye there still ?

(Struck by a sudden thought.)

Ah ! ye do live ! From Heav'n the happy thought
 That flashes 'mid the darkness of my soul.
 Let me then seize thee—messenger divine !
 Ye whisper to my ear of Chio's isle.¹⁴
 To Chios let it be ! Torn from his arms,
 She there shall learn repentance for her love,
 By all the pangs, that love alone can know.
 It shall be so !

(Calling.)

RHAMNES ! What ho ! RHAMNES !
 Ye Gods ! I thank ye for this voice from Heaven.
 I will obey it—

SCENE II.

Enter RHAMNES.

RHAMNES.

What dost thou command?

SAPPHO.

(Still lost in thought.)

She is my work. Without me, what were she?
Who can deprive the sculptor of his power,
To break the statue, he himself hath wrought?
To break—but can I this? Ah! me! Her bliss
Is placed perhaps, far—far above my reach.
For if to Chios should his love pursue,
Is she not happier 'mid a herd of slaves,
Than I—in splendor here—if all alone?
How sweet to suffer for the one we love!
Memory and Hope are roses on one tree,
Beneath whose leaves, no thorns are ever found.
Oh! Banish me to some surf-beaten rock,
With no companions, save the wailing winds,
So I but carry with me, PHAON's love.
Then would I bless my weary solitude;

And should the sharp thorns pierce my tender feet,
I'd think how he would grieve to see them bleed.
For every wound, this thought would prove a balm.

RHAMNES.

My Mistress called her slave.

SAPPHO.

(Still abstracted.)

PHAON ! PHAON !

What have I done to thee ? Before we met,
I stood so calm amid Parnassian fields ;¹⁵
My golden lyre alone awoke my soul.
I saw far—far beneath me, human joys ;
Yet human sorrows could not reach me there.
Not by the hours, but by the blossoms fair,
Enwoven in the poet's peaceful wreath,
Alone I marked the flight of rapid time.
What to my song I gave, it gave me back,
And youth eternal, sat upon my brow.
Then came the traitor, who with daring hand
Tore off the golden veil, and dragged me down,
Into a desert wild, a trackless waste,
Where friendly footsteps never echo back.
No form, save his, illumed that dreary space.
Yet HE withdraws his hand, and Ah ! he flies !

RHAMNES.

My mistress, why in gloom dost thou remain?
The night advances and the breeze is chill.

SAPPHO.

Know'st thou a heart more black, than one ingrate?

RHAMNES.

Ah! no---

SAPPHO.

Or more envenomed?

RHAMNES.

None indeed.

SAPPHO.

Worthy of curses, and of punishment?

RHAMNES.

It is indeed accursed.

SAPPHO.

'Tis true. Most true.

All other vices are hyenas—wolves—
Tigers and lions—but Ingratitude—
It is the snake—so beautiful and smooth,
Yet so envenomed—oh—

RHAMNES.

Come in with me.

Thou wilt be better—calmer in the house,
Where all is carefully prepared for thee.
Where PHAON waits—

SAPPHO.

What! PHAON waits for me?

RHAMNES.

Yes! my mistress. 'Tis but a moment since,
I saw him walking thoughtful to and fro.
Sometimes he'd stop, and mutter to himself.
And then before the window, he would stand,
As if to trace some object thro' the night.

SAPPHO.

He waits for me? Kind RHAMNES—said he so?
He waits for ME? For SAPPHO?

RHAMNES.

Not in words

He spoke, but still he waits and stands.
Whom should he wait for?

SAPPHO.

Whom? Aye, whom indeed?
He waits me not. Yet shall he wait in vain.
RHAMNES !

RHAMNES.

My mistress.

SAPPHO.

Thou know'st at Chios,
Dwells my father's friend.

RHAMNES.

I know him well.

SAPPHO.

Prepare yon boat, now moored upon the shore,
And keep it ready in the nearest creek.
This night—thou must to Chios.

RHAMNES.

What ! alone ?

SAPPHO.

No !

(Pause.)

RHAMNES.

With whom ?

SAPPHO.

What saidst thou ?

RHAMNES.

Who to Chios—

SAPPHO.

(Drawing him aside.)

Come ! Be cautious, prudent—But dost thou hear ?
Go then in silence to MELITTA'S room,
And bid her come to me. But yet beware,
Lest HE doth hear thee.

RHAMNES.

Who ?

SAPPHO.

Who ? PHAON—yet—

Should he follow—

(Hesitating.)

RHAMNES.

What !

SAPPHO.

Bring her to the boat,
Willingly if possible—else by force.
To Chios then away.

RHAMNES.

And when arrived?

SAPPHO.

There give her to the friend of whom I spoke,
And let him guard her, till he hears from me.
He need not be severe. Severe enough,
Away from HIM, will be her punishment.

RHAMNES.

I go—

SAPPHO.

Delay not.

RHAMNES.

Farewell! oh! SAPPHO!

The morning's dawn will find us far from here.
Thou shalt approve thy faithful servant's zeal.

(Exit RHAMNES.)

SCENE III.

SAPPHO alone.

SAPPHO.

He goes—Yet—no ! How weary is the chain
Of habit, binding us to what we hate.

(Loft in thought.)

Listen ! A footstep ! No ! 'twas but the wind !
How beats my heart within my storm-tossed breast !
Hush ! voices ! Ha ! She comes—and willingly !
She little thinks that she—

But I must hence.

I cannot see her ! I will—yet no ! no !

(Hurries away.)

SCENE IV.

MELITTA—RHAMNES.

MELITTA.

'Twas here thou saidst, I should my mistress find.
She is not here.

RHAMNES.

(Looking anxiously around.)

Indeed I left her here.

Come !

MELITTA.

Where ?

RHAMNES.

Perchance she may have wandered down
Near to the creek, or on the sea-girt shore.

MELITTA.

She never goes there.

RHAMNES.

Yet perhaps to-night—

MELITTA.

But why to-night ?

RHAMNES.

Why ? Why—because—

(Afide.)

Alas !

That such a charge should be imposed on me.
I cannot bear the fight. What shall I say ?

MELITTA.

Thou art so strange ! Thou turn'ft away from me !
As tho' thine eyes would but belie thy words.
Why art thou agitated and confused ?
Tell me where SAPPHO is, and I will go ;
Or if thou know'ft not, let me then depart.

RHAMNES.

Not so. Thou muft remain.

MELITTA.

Why ?

RHAMNES.

Then follow.

MELITTA.

Where ?

RHAMNES.

To—Come down with me upon the beach
And thou fhalt know.

MELITTA.

Ye Gods ! Oh ! what is this !

RHAMNES.

Come ! maiden, come. Midnight is well nigh past.
Time flies. We muft away---

MELITTA.

What meanest thou?
 Away and where? To some strange distant shore?

RHAMNES.

Be tranquil, child. Some strange and distant shore?
 Why, thou art dreaming. Chios is not far.

MELITTA.

To Chios! Never.

RHAMNES.

Yes! It must be so.
 Thy mistress wills it.

MELITTA.

SAPPHO? Sayest thou?
 Away! I will to her—

RHAMNES.

It cannot be.

MELITTA.

She'll hear and judge me, prostrate at her feet.

RHAMNES.

Stir not a step—

(Seizing her.)

MELITTA.

What ! RHAMNES—thou—

RHAMNES.

Poor child !

I can nought else. My orders I obey.

MELITTA.

Let me implore thee—

RHAMNES.

All thy prayers are vain ;

(*Afide.*)

E'en tho' the tears are standing in my eyes,

It must be done. (*Aloud.*)

Come child. Away ! away !

MELITTA.

Here at thy feet I kneel. Listen to prayer !

Is there then no one, who will hear and save ?

RHAMNES.

In vain. Thou wilt arouse the house—away—

MELITTA.

Away ! Never ! Dwells pity in no heart ?

SCENE V.

PHAON rushes forward.

PHAON.

That is MELITTA'S voice! Ha! ruffian—what?
And hast thou dared to raise thy hand 'gainst her?

(RHAMNES releases her.)

My strange forebodings then deceived me not.
E'en now I saw thee with a stealthy glance,
Creep like a wolf, toward MELITTA'S door.
Ha! villain! Thou hast missed thy treach'rous aim!
The shepherd was awake—thy death is near!

RHAMNES.

By SAPPHO'S orders, I have acted thus.

PHAON.

By SAPPHO'S orders? She commanded thus?
Oh! SAPPHO! SAPPHO! now I know thee well.
But yet, alas, too late. Too late! and why?
There yet is time, to throw these fetters off.
By Heaven, I will!

(To RHAMNES.)

Thou minister of crime !

(To MELITTA.)

Trembling and pale thou art—MELITTA—child !

MELITTA.

I now am well—

PHAON.

(To RHAMNES.)

Thank thou the Gods—thou slave !
That not a stone hath bruised her tender feet.
By Heaven ! thou shouldst have paid for every wound ;
By gasps of agony for every tear.

(To MELITTA.)

Thou seemest weary. Lean on me, beloved.
Than me, thou wilt not find a firmer stay.

(To RHAMNES.)

Look, madman, look upon the lovely form
Thou wouldst have injured—

RHAMNES.

I would not injure—

PHAON.

What !

RHAMNES.

Only—but forgive ! I cannot speak,
Nor tell my purpose. Therefore let me go.

PHAON.

(Disengaging himself from MELITTA.)

No! By all the Gods! Not until I know,
The measure of thy contemplated crime.
What was thy purpose? Speak—

RHAMNES.

—That she should go—

PHAON.

Where?

RHAMNES.

To—But no! The secret is not mine.

PHAON.

Thou wilt not speak it?

RHAMNES.

No. SHE placed it here;

(Laying his hand on his breast.)

A breast that never yet betrayed its trust.

PHAON.

This steel shall open it. Thanks, SAPPHO! thanks.
Thou gavest me this weapon, 'gainst thyself.

(Drawing the dagger.)

No more concealment, for I am prepared,
To force the secret with this dagger's point.

MELITTA.

Oh spare him ! I was to go to Chios—

PHAON.

To Chios ?

MELITTA.

A friend of SAPPHO lives there.
He would protect MELITTA.

PHAON.

Cross the sea ?

MELITTA.

A boat e'en now is waiting on the shore.

PHAON.

A boat ?

MELITTA.

He said a boat, didst not, father ?

RHAMNES.

Call me not father—thou ungrateful child,
Who could betray thy mistress.

PHAON.

What! a boat?

MELITTA.

(To RHAMNES.)

What have I done, that I should thus be blamed?
He asked—

PHAON.

A boat! a boat! so let it be.
I hail the sign. This omen is from Heav'n!
I have been slow this warning to perceive.
It is MELITTA—or no one on earth,
That bears within her breast, one half the heart,
That yearning towards her, wildly throbs in mine.

(Addressing the Gods.)

Ye! point the way to which my steps should tend.
MELITTA! Yes! thou shalt to Chios go—
But not alone—with me, and by my side.

MELITTA.

With thee?

PHAON.

Forfake this cold and hostile land,
Where hate—revenge, with its Medusa-head,
And jealousy are crowding on thy steps;

Where deadly snares are placed across thy path.
Come ! There the boat—here—courage, strength
and skill,
To shield thee safely tho' against a world.

(Clasping her.)

MELITTA. (Anxiously.)

RHAMNES.

RHAMNES.

Reflect—my Lord.

PHAON.

Reflect thyself.
Within my hand, now rests thy odious life.

RHAMNES.

To SAPPHO she belongs.

PHAON.

Liar, she is mine.

(To MELITTA.)

Come ! follow me.

RHAMNES.

The dwellers of this isle,
All honor SAPPHO as their queenly head,

And at her call, are ready to arise
 In arms, to guard her threshold, if need be.
 One word from me, and thousands will appear.

PHAON.

Thou warnest wisely. I almost forgot,
 With whom I am, and where. Thou go'st with us.

RHAMNES.

I—my Lord?

PHAON.

Yes thou! Onward! to the beach.
 I do not envy SAPPHO, such a slave.
 When once in safety, then thou may'st return—
 Relate our flight—and all—but 'tis enough.
 Thou go'st!

RHAMNES.

No—never!

PHAON.

(Drawing the dagger.)

Yet methinks I hold,
 What will enforce obedience to my will.

RHAMNES.

(Retreating to the house.)

Help! Help!

PHAON.

(Intercepting him with the dagger.)

Then down to Hell if so thou will'ft !
Small price, the death of such a slave as thou,
To save and free this child.

MELITTA.

PHAON ! Forbear.

PHAON.

If he obey—

RHAMNES.

(Retreating to the other side.)

Oh ! woe is me ! Old age
That hath the will—but not the power to do !

PHAON.

Now, maiden, come.

MELITTA.

But where ?

PHAON.

Down to the boat.

MELITTA.

(Rushing to the foreground.)

Shall I ? Ye Gods !

PHAON.

Away ! The darkness lends
To us the safety of its sheltering wing.
The wide protecting distance calls us hence,
Beyond old Ocean's hoary, furrowed breast,
Where dwell security, and peace and love.
There, where the linden shades my father's roof,
Shall rise a temple of unceasing bliss.

(Embracing her.)

Why dost thou tremble ?—Tremble not, betrothed !
A bridegroom's arm is 'round about thee cast.
Come with me, dearest ! If thou hesitate,
By all the Gods, these hands shall bear thee hence,
Onward—and onward—to the end of earth.

MELITTA.

Oh ! PHAON—

PHAON.

Come ! The stars look smiling down.
The sea is murmuring, and the breezes blow,
For Amphytrite is the lover's friend.¹⁶

(To RHAMNES.)

Onward—

RHAMNES.

My Lord—

PHAON.

Thy life's at stake, I say!

(Forcing him—exeunt omnes.)

SCENE VI.

A pause. Then EUCHARIS appears on the steps.

EUCHARIS.

RHAMNES!

(She descends.)

Surely I thought I heard his voice!
No—! There is no one here. I was deceived.
Strange! O'er this house, since SAPPHO hath returned,
It seems that evil spirits hold their sway.
Mistrust and care now weigh on every brow;
I seek MELITTA!—find her chamber void;
E'en SAPPHO wanders lonely thro' the night;
And RHAMNES—tho' I thought I heard him near,
Yet he is not. Oh for the daylight! Hark!

RHAMNES.

(At a distance.)

Help !

EUCHARIS.

He calls !

RHAMNES.

(Nearer.)

Here !

EUCHARIS.

Ha ! RHAMNES !

RHAMNES.

(Close by.)

Follow, slaves !

EUCHARIS.

He is exhausted ! RHAMNES ! What is this ?

SCENE VII.

Enter RHAMNES running.

RHAMNES.

Up ! from your idle beds, and onward, friends !
Pursue the fugitives—Help—Help !

EUCHARIS.

Why this—

RHAMNES.

Ask me not now. Call SAPPHO, and her slaves.

EUCHARIS.

Wherefore ?

RHAMNES.

Waste not your time in words. Hence ! Hence !
Awake the household, and then haste to save !

EUCHARIS.

What may this mean ?

(Running off.)

RHAMNES.

I can no more. Traitor !
Exult not yet ! The gods that rule the sea,
Will sure avenge so horrible a crime.

(The people and slaves enter.)

Haste to the valley ! Wake the people there !
Ask not for what ! Let the alarm bell sound !

(Exeunt slaves.)

SCENE VIII

SAPPHO enters.

SAPPHO.

What frightful noise disturbs the quiet night,
Chafing away the sleep-destroyer—grief?
Who here hath reason to lament save I?

RHAMNES.

I—mistress—

SAPPHO.

What! RHAMNES! And where is she?

RHAMNES.

MELITTA?

SAPPHO.

Yes!

RHAMNES.

Gone!

SAPPHO.

Gone?—and THOU art here.

RHAMNES.

Gone, and with—

SAPPHO.

Cease!—

RHAMNES.

—Gone with PHAON.

APPHO.

Oh! no!

RHAMNES.

Yet so it is. He overpowered my age,
And in the very boat—for me prepared,
He bears his captive o'er the foaming waves.

SAPPHO.

Thou lie'st.

RHAMNES.

Would, in this instance, that I did.

SAPPHO.

Where are your thunderbolts? Almighty Gods!
Have ye no torture, but for SAPPHO's heart?
Lame is the arm of vengeance, deaf its ear?
Hurl down your lightnings, on their trait'rous heads,
And blast them, Gods! as ye have blasted me.

* * * * *

In vain—

—No flash divides the quiet air.
The breeze sighs gently thro' the rustling leaves ;
The sea upheaves its broad and billowy breast,
And wafts the bark of love to other shores.
Is there no help?—

—Then, SAPPHO, help thyself.

(The stage gradually becomes covered with people, and slaves bearing torches.)

Ha! These here! True friends! Thanks! Accept
my thanks.

Man then will give me what the Gods deny.
Haste, my dear friends! Revenge your SAPPHO's
wrongs.

If ye have ever loved her, prove it now.

(Going amongst them.)

Thou, MYRON! oft hast sworn—TERPANDER, thou!
LYCHAS! Bethink thee of our ancient songs.
PHERES—And thou XENARCHUS! All are true.
Haste to the shore! Unmoor the boats! Set sail!
Pursue with steady oar, the traitors' track.
Think that I wait alone in anguish here ;
That every moment until ye return,
Drives deep a hundred daggers in my heart.
Who brings him back—but gives to me the joy
Of gazing on him, with my searching eyes,

And asking once, “ What have I done to thee

(Bursts into tears.)

“ That thou shouldst kill me ? ”

(More calmly.)

No ! Revenge alone !

To him who brings him back, I'll give my gold—
My life—Away ! Forth on the rushing winds—

ONE OF THE PEOPLE.

To thee without him, we will not return.

SAPPHO.

Thank ye !

(To those going out.)

My life now lies within your hands.
Would that my wishes could but lend ye wings,
And my revenge add strength to every arm !
But haste ! But haste ! By all the Gods ! Haste !
Haste !

(Exeunt slaves and people.)

SAPPHO.

(Pressing her hands to her heart.)

They go—Now I am well. Now will I rest.

EUCHARIS.

Thou tremblest—

RHAMNES.

See ! She falls ! Oh SAPPHO !

EUCHARIS.

(Supporting her in her arms.)

Gods !

SAPPHO.

(In the arms of EUCHARIS.)

Oh ! let me sink. Wherefore support me thus ?

(Curtain falls.)

SAPPHO.



A C T F I F T H .

SCENE I.

Open country as in former act. Daybreak.

(SAPPHO is seen reclining on a grassy bank, with her eyes fixed upon the sea. EUCHARIS stands near her, the other slaves at a little distance. RHAMNES enters.)

EUCHARIS.

(Putting her finger to her lip.)

Hush! Be still!

RHAMNES.

Sleeps she?

EUCHARIS.

Her eyes are open—

Yet, tho' her body is indeed awake,

Her saddened spirit only seems to sleep.
Thus without motion, hath she lain three hours.

RHAMNES.

Yet should she not be led within the house?

EUCHARIS.

I tried, but she refused—

What sign as yet?

RHAMNES.

Far as the eye can reach are clouds and sea,
But of a vessel not the lightest trace.

SAPPHO.

(Starting up.)

A vessel! Where?

RHAMNES.

We have not seen one yet.

SAPPHO.

(Sinking back.)

Not yet! Not yet!

RHAMNES.

The morning air is chill.

Permit us to affix thee to the house.

(SAPPHO shakes her head in token of refusal.)

Yet list to our entreaties—Come with us.

(She again refuses.)

RHAMNES.

(Stepping back.)

Thou wilt not? Thus to see thee, wounds our hearts.

EUCHARIS.

But look! What means yon crowd?

RHAMNES.

Let me then see!

EUCHARIS.

They hurry from the beach—perhaps they come—

SAPPHO.

(Springing up.)

Ha!

(She leans forward as if listening.)

EUCHARIS. (To RHAMNES.)

Ascend yon rock and—Perhaps thou'lt see.

RHAMNES.

(Ascending the rock.)

I go.

EUCHARIS.

But haste ! But haste ! What see'st thou now ?

RHAMNES.

Thanks, ye Gods ! They come.

SAPPHO.

Ha !

RHAMNES.

Yon cedar grove
That stretches to the sea, far to the left,
Concealed from me till now, the welcome sight.
A fleet of boats is ploughing to the shore.
They press each other close, with hasty oars.

EUCHARIS.

But are the fugitives among the throng ?

RHAMNES.

The rising sun dazzles my feeble sight—
I cannot yet discern—but stay ! A boat
Before the rest, hath gained the shore—it grounds—
A shepherd from the neighboring vale it bears—
He waves his staff ! They surely have been found.
Hither ! my friend. Come here !—

Now he is here.

(He descends.)

EUCCHARIS.

Dear mistress, calm thyself. Be self-possessed.

SCENE II.

The SHEPHERD enters.

SHEPHERD.

Hail! SAPPHO! Hail!

EUCCHARIS.

And hast thou taken him?

SHEPHERD.

We have.

RHAMNES.

But where?

EUCCHARIS.

And how?

SHEPHERD.

They had the start.
A skilful rower is he? Once I thought,

That we should not o'ertake his rapid flight.
 Until at length, far out upon the sea,
 We spied his boat—and then the chase began.
 Soon was he reached, and soon by us enclosed.
 We bade him change his course, but he refused.
 His left arm pressed the maiden to his heart,
 His right hand grasped a dagger—

My mistress !

What aileth thee ?

(SAPPHO motions him to continue.)

Raising the glittering blade,
 He threat'ning turned against us. By mistake,
 An oar stroke aimed at him, fell short its mark,
 And struck the little maiden on the brow.

(SAPPHO covers her face with her hands.)

She sank. He clasped her in his arms, while we
 Seizing the chance, at once approached his boat.
 We took them prisoners. We have brought them back.
 Already they have landed. See them both !
 The little maiden walks with tottering step.

SAPPHO.

Ha ! Not hither—

RHAMNES.

Where else ? They now are here.

SAPPHO.

Who'll hide me from their fight? Aphrodite!
Protect me.

(She hurries back, and clasps the altar. Her attendants surround her.)

SCENE III.

Enter PHAON supporting MELITTA.

PHAON.

Let none amongst ye dare to touch this child.
Altho' unarmed, defenceless I am not.
To guard her well, my arm shall prove a sword,
And every limb of mine become an arm.
Hither, MELITTA, hither! Tremble not!
No one shall dare to harm thee, whilst I breathe.
Can there be men so base, as thus to wound
The head of childish, feeble innocence?
I thought a woman, only cruel thus;
A woman—cowardly—full of revenge!

(Looking among the people, and addressing one of them.)

'Twas thou who struck her! Now I know thee well.

Begone! thou wretch! Left I do rob the Gods
Of vengeance of their prey.

(Turning to MELITTA.)

How art thou now?

MELITTA.

Better.

PHAON.

Thou lookeſt ill. Why tremble then?
This pallor doth betray—thou art not well.
Here fit thee down upon this moſſy bank,
Where firſt upon me ſhone thoſe mild blue eyes,
That like the roſy, golden rays of dawn,
Chafing away the clouds that hide the earth,
So chafed from me, the ſpell the Syren flung.
Here, where the gentle work of love began,
Here let it be fulfilled.

(Turning to the ſlaves.)

Where is SAPPHO?

MELITTA.

Nay! Call her not.

PHAON.

Be calm. I am no ſlave.

Who gave to her the right to stop my way ?
There still is justice in the land of Greece.
This, shall the proud one learn. To SAPPHO, come.

ONE OF THE PEOPLE.

Thou must remain.

PHAON.

Who holds me ? Who ?

PEOPLE.

We all !

PHAON.

I am no slave.

ONE OF THE PEOPLE.

Once thou wert free, but now
Thou owest duty to the island's laws.

PHAON.

A duty, and for what ?

THE SAME.

The stolen slave
Must answer for thee only to the law.

PHAON.

Let SAPPHO ask a ransom for this child,

And I will pay it, tho' 'twere Croesus' wealth.¹⁷

THE SAME.

Thou must not dictate. She alone can ask.

PHAON.

And are ye then so tame to lend your power
To aid a woman's hate—serve her caprice?
Why not stand by me? I—a prisoner here!

THE SAME.

Or right, or wrong, SAPPHO alone can say.

PHAON.

Doft thou not blush, old man, to speak such words?
Who is this SAPPHO, that thou shouldst esteem
Her sentence greater than the law's decree?
Is she the sovereign of this land?

THE SAME.

She is.

She rules, not in her right—yet we obey.

PHAON.

Hath she then flung her witchcraft over all?

* * * * *

Once more I'll prove how far her spell extends.

(He advances towards the house.)

We'll go.

THE PEOPLE.

Stand back.

PHAON.

In vain are all your threats.
I must to her! Now, SAPPHO, show thyself!
Where art thou? Dost thou tremble at my fight?
Ha! At yon altar, hemmed in by thy slaves!
Yes—there thou art! Thou'lt not escape me now!

(He forces his way through the crowd. SAPPHO is seen prostrate before the altar.)

ONE OF THE PEOPLE.

And wouldst thou dare? Presumptuous youth, stand
back!

PHAON.

(To SAPPHO.)

What wouldst thou at this altar, ask from Heaven?
The Gods are deaf to wicked prayers. Arise!

(He approaches to grasp her. She rises without looking at him, and hurries to the foreground.)

PHAON.

(Following her.)

And wouldst thou shun me? Thou must with me
speak.

Thou tremblest! Ha! 'Tis now thy turn to fear!
Knowst thou what thou hast done? And by what
right,

Hast thou placed fetters on a free born man,
Who owns no other master than himself?

Look at these slaves in unaccustomed arms!

Didst thou not send them forth? What! No reply?

Is then the tongue of the enchantress dumb?

SAPPHO.

(Raising her eyes to Heaven.)

This is too much!

PHAON.

Thy cheeks are blushing deep—
The flame of anger reddens in thine eyes.

Right! Throw the mask away! Be what thou art,
And kill—aye kill thou trait'rous sorcerers!

SAPPHO.

This is indeed too much. Courage my heart!

PHAON.

Yet thou muſt anfwer. Didſt thou ſend them forth ?

SAPPHO.

(To RHAMNES.)

Go bring MELITTA. She alone I ſought.

PHAON.

Let no one venture to approach this child.
Demand a ranſom ! Though I am not rich,
Yet have I parents—friends—who will be glad
To purchaſe from thy avarice, my bliſs.

SAPPHO.

I aſk not gold. She's mine—and ſhe muſt ſtay.

PHAON.

She ſhall not ſtay. By all the Gods, I ſwear !
Thy right to her was forfeited, when thou
Againſt her breaſt, didſt draw thy dagger's point.
Her ſervice thou didſt buy, but not her life.
Think'ſt thou, that I would leave her in thy hands ?
No ! Name the ranſom, and then let us go.

SAPPHO.

(To RHAMNES.)

Obeſy what I have told thee.

PHAON.

Back I say.

If thou but touch her, thou shalt meet thy end.

(To SAPPHO.)

Is then thy heart so dead to human woe,
 That grief like this, can never move it more?
 Thou, glittering, venom'd serpent! Break thy lyre!
 Let song no longer on thy lips be heard!
 The gift of poetry thou hast misused;
 Its sacred name, never again profane.
 The flowers, that would have rais'd thee to the stars,
 Within thy hands, have prov'd a hemlock draught,
 With which thou sought to bring thy foes to death.
 How different from this, did I—poor fool—
 Paint SAPPHO, in those earlier, happier days.
 Gentle her song—her soul with feeling full,
 Spotless her heart, as were the strains she sung;
 The harmony that from her lips flow'd forth,
 Had its pure source within an ardent breast.
 Her very life to me was melody.

* * * * *

What sudden witchcraft now hath changed her thus?

(To SAPPHO.)

Turn not thine eyes, so timidly from me.

Look up! I would once more gaze on thy face,
That I may know, that 'tis indeed thyself.
If these the lips, that I once pressed to mine—
If these the eyes, that fondly beamed with love—
If SAPPHO, art thou—

(He takes her by the arm and turns her. She looks up and their eyes meet.)

SAPPHO.

(Shuddering.)

Woe is me!

PHAON.

Yes, yes!

Thou art the same, and that was SAPPHO'S voice!

(Softening.)

What I have said, the winds shall bear from hence,
And leave no bitterness in any heart.
Now all is clear—all clear—before my sight,
E'en as the sun, when thunder storms have passed,
Glow thro' the Present's fleeting, fading clouds;
So in its glory, beams the Past once more.
I greet thee, mem'ry of a happier time!

(To SAPPHO.)

Again thou art to me, what once thou wert,
When in my dreams, I traced a form divine.

Be thou again a Goddess. Bless us! Bless!

SAPPHO.

Deceiver!

PHAON.

No! In truth, that I am not.
When I swore love to thee, 'twas not deceit.
I loved thee truly, as the Gods are loved;
Or as the good and beautiful are loved.
With the Immortals then, thou held'st converse.
None can descend unpunished from those spheres,
Into the circle of mere mortal joys.
The arm on which reposed the golden lyre
Is sacred—and may not touch earthly things.

SAPPHO.

Then down to ocean depths, that golden lyre,
If its possession is thus dearly bought.

PHAON.

I staggered on as if in frenzy wild,
At strife both with the world and with myself.
In vain I sought to rouse my heart, which lay
As if in slumber—But in vain—in vain.
Thou stoodst before me, a mysterious form,

Towards whom—away from whom, with equal force
 I was attracted, by an unknown power.
 Thou wert too humble, for a pride like mine—
 Too noble, reason said, for love like mine.
 Only the equal should united be.

* * * * *

And then I saw this child, and high towards Heaven,
 The deepest fountains of my soul upsprung.
 Come here, MELITTA. Come—to SAPPHO here.
 Nay, be not timid! She is good and kind!
 Uplift the lashes of thy crystal eyes,
 That she within thy spotless heart may look,
 And all thy guileless innocence perceive.

MELITTA.

(Approaching timidly.)

My Mistress!

SAPPHO.

(Motioning her away.)

No! away!

MELITTA.

Ah! She's displeas'd!

PHAON.

Then she is all I dreaded to believe.

Come here, MELITTA—Child! come to my side.
Thou shalt not kneel to her! Before mine eyes
At least, the proud one shall not scorn thy prayer.
Thou shalt not kneel! She knoweth not thy worth,
Or else to thee she'd bow, as if to give
The homage, guilt should pay to innocence.
Hither to me!

MELITTA.

No! Rather let me kneel,
A child repentant at its mother's feet.
I'll bear the punishment she may impose:
I will not even murmur 'gainst her will.

PHAON.

Thou art no slave, or if a slave—thou'rt mine!
By such submission thou wilt humble me.
But there are other means to force the wish,
Which in her pride, she thus doth us deny.

MELITTA.

But were it so, I never could enjoy
A gift obtained by force. E'en bliss itself
Would prove a burthen, gained by aught but love.
Here will I kneel, until one gentle look,

One gracious word, shall say I am forgiven.
How often have I knelt, as now I kneel,
And never rose, but with a tranquil heart ;
Nor will she now refuse to dry my tears.
Beloved mistress—look upon thy child !

(SAPPHO stands with her face covered with her hands, supported by EUCHARIS.)

PHAON.

(To SAPPHO.)

And canst thou cold and silent thus remain ?

MELITTA.

She is not cold, although her lips are mute.
I feel her heart is speaking to my heart.
Be judge, oh SAPPHO ! between him and me.
Bid me to follow him, and I'll obey.
Bid me to leave him—Gods ! I will ! I will !
Thou tremblest, mistress. Ah ! she hears me not.

PHAON.

(Clasping MELITTA, and kneeling with her.)

Love give to men, and reverence to the Gods !
Give us our own, and SAPPHO, take thine own !
Reflect on what thou art, and what thou dost !

(SAPPHO starts, looks intently at him, turns quickly, and hurries away.)

MELITTA.

Ah! Woe is me! She hath difowned her child.

(Excunt EUCHARIS and flaves.)

SCENE IV.

PHAON.

My child! Implore no longer human aid:
Our hopes must be in Heaven and in ourselves.

MELITTA.

I cannot live, if thus she doth condemn.
Her eyes have ever been to me a glass,
In which my thoughts and actions I beheld.
They show me now, my own deformity.
How thou must suffer, injured mistress dear!

PHAON.

Thy feelings, dost thou lend her? Other waves
Of stormy passion, reign within her breast.

MELITTA.

If proud she seems, she hath been kind to me ;
Or if severe, the harshness but concealed,
What was intended only for my good.
Alas ! That I could ever this forget !

RHAMNES.

Alas indeed ! That thou didst this forget.

PHAON.

Why tremblest thou, if thus she gentle is ?

RHAMNES.

E'en now she went in anger, and her wrath
Is boundless as her love. Woe unto thee !

PHAON.

What can she threaten ?

RHAMNES.

Death to the flying slave.

PHAON.

Who says this ?

RHAMNES.

Who? Thus doth the law decree.

PHAON.

I will defend—

RHAMNES.

Thou! Who will THEE defend?

PHAON.

Aye! Were the earth to yawn beneath my feet,
And ocean foaming, to engulph my form;
Though all the powers of nature, should combine
In one fell league of enmity 'gainst me,
Firm would I hold this child, and laugh to scorn
The rage of SAPPHO—all her threats despise!

RHAMNES.

Despise! What, SAPPHO? And who then art thou,
That dar'st to cast thy voice within the scale
In which is weighed, the noblest of us all?
Who dares to speak, when Greece herself hath spoke?
Thou frantic fool! Thou deem'st her worthless then,
Because thou hast no measure for her worth!
Call'st thou the jewel dull, 'cause thou art blind?

That she should love thee, raise thee from the dust!
Thou thankless serpent, that e'en now would drive
Thy venom'd tooth, deep—deep within her breast!
That she on thee, should lavish all her wealth!
On thee—who hath no heart to feel her worth!
This is the only stain upon her life;
None other, e'en can Envy's eye find out.
Speak not! The very courage that sustains thee now,
Is not thine own—yet in thy vulgar pride,
Thou dar'st to warfare with the Queen of Greece!
That she looked on thee, 'twas that gave thee pride,
Which thus enables thee to brave her now.

PHAON.

I cannot equal her in gift of song—

RHAMNES.

(Derisively.)

Thou canst not? What indeed? As if thou couldst!
Among the stars, she high hath wrote her name
In diamond letters, bright and clear to all,
And with the stars, 'twill only fade away.
In distant times, in strange and foreign lands,
When e'en these bodies, shall have gone to dust,
Nor of our graves, a single trace remains,

Shall SAPPHO'S songs be heard on every tongue—
 Her name forever live, and with it—THINE.
 Yes, thine! Be proud of the undying fame
 Which guilt and falsehood shall surround thy head.
 Aye! In strange distant lands, 'mid future ranks of
 men,
 When centuries, still within the womb of time,
 Have passed away,—her name shall echo back
 From every tongue—"SAPPHO it was that sung—
 "Her murderer—PHAON"

MELITTA.

Oh, PHAON!

PHAON.

Peace, peace!

RHAMNES.

A wretched comforter, that calleth peace,
 With pallid lips, and trembling, troubled voice!
 Full well she knows her crime—full well she fears.
 SAPPHO at least will fail not of revenge.
 "Thou canst not equal her in gift of song!"
 And in what else, art thou her equal then?
 Dar'st thou to doubt, the goodness of her heart?
 Look all around thee here! Thou'lt not find one
 But boasts her kindness. None that do not show

In house, or field, in goods—whatever else,
Rich traces of her gentle, bounteous hand ;
Not one whose heart doth not more proudly beat,
When named a citizen of Lesbos' isle,
Or called by SAPPHO, fellow-countryman.
Demand of her, who trembleth at thy side,
A partner of thy deed, but not thy guilt,
What conduct hath her mistress to her held ?
What hath this slave to offer of her own ?
If she hath charmed thee, then 'twas SAPPHO'S work ;
The mother's gentle spirit spoke to thee.
Aye ! Press thy brow ! But 'tis in vain—in vain !
The memory of thy crime, shall ne'er be lost.
What would'st thou ? Would'st thou flee ? Alas !
for thee

There is no refuge on this wide-spread earth.
In every feeling human heart will rise,
A foe 'gainst him, who proved himself a foe.
Before thy path, the fame of thy foul deed,
Shall cry aloud in every startled ear,
“ This SAPPHO'S murderer ! This the foe of Heav'n ! ”
Free as thou art to wander on with her,
To whom thou givest ruin, not defence,
No Greek shall welcome thee, within his door ;
No God permit thee to approach his shrine.

Trembling, thou must away from altar steps,
 To where the Priest doth banish things unblest.
 Yet 'midst thy flight, the fierce Eumenides—¹⁸
 Avenging Furies—thee shall follow on,
 And shake their serpent tresses round thy head—
 Shall shriek out SAPPHO's name to fright thine ear,
 Until the grave shall ope, which thou hast dug—

MELITTA.

Hold, hold!

PHAON.

Forbear! Wilt thou then drive me mad?

RHAMNES.

Aye! Mad thou wert, when thou didst quit her side.
 Eat now the fruit, which thou thyself didst plant.

MELITTA.

Let us to her—

PHAON.

How shall I end this grief?

SCENE V.

EUCCHARIS enters.

EUCCHARIS.

RHAMNES, where art thou? Hither, come! oh! come.

RHAMNES.

Where?

EUCCHARIS.

To SAPPHO.

RHAMNES.

What—

EUCCHARIS.

She is ill I fear.

RHAMNES.

The Gods forbid!

EUCCHARIS.

I followed her afar,
Until she reached the entrance of the Hall,
Watching her every act with careful eye.

Once there—she stopped—against a column leaned,
And gazed in silence on the distant sea,
Which foams and roars upon our rock-bound coast.
Speechless and motionless, she stood and gazed
With staring eyes, and cheeks as marble pale,
Among the statues, as if one herself.
Again at times she moved, and threw the flowers,
And gold, and ornaments within her reach,
Into the ocean's wild and hungry waves,
Watching with eager eye, their swift descent.
At once—a strain of music swept the Hall,
And all her being, quivered at the sound.
It was her lyre, suspended on the wall,
Amongst whose strings, the rising sea-breeze played.
Then—as if thrilled by some mysterious power,
She fixed her gaze upon its well-loved chords;
A saddened smile played o'er her pallid mouth;
Her lips compressed before, were parted then,
And words came forth of dread and solemn sound.
Yet tho' from her, they were not SAPPHO'S words.
She said, "Thou then hast called me, faithful friend!
"I know thy warning voice. I know it well!
"Thou wouldst remind me of the buried past!
"For this all thanks."

But how she reached the wall

And seized the breathing lyre, suspended high—
I cannot tell. A lightning flash it seemed.
When next I looked, it lay upon her arm—
She pressed its strings against her storm-tossed breast,
Which uttered sounds, as if in agony.
And then her crown, won at Olympia's games,
That hung upon the altar, next she seized,
And placed it on her brow, and then she threw
The Tyrian mantle round her shoulders fair.
Who first had seen her thus, with lyre in hand,
Standing upon the altar's lofty steps,
With eyes inspired, and glance to heaven upraised,
With form majestic, wrapped in radiant light,
He would have thought her, of the Immortals, one,
And would have bent in prayer his trembling knees.
And as she stood there, motionless and mute,
A sense of terror seized upon my heart.
I quailed beneath her look of living death,
And hurried here.

RHAMNES.

And didst thou leave her thus ?
Return—but see ! Approach not. She is here.

SCENE VI.

SAPPHO enters richly dressed as in the first act, the Tyrian mantle on her shoulders, the Laurel crown upon her head, and the Golden Lyre in her hand. Surrounded by her people, she slowly and solemnly descends the steps. A long pause.

MELITTA.

Oh! SAPPHO! Oh, my mistress!

SAPPHO.

(Calmly and gravely.)

What wouldst thou?

MELITTA.

Now is the darkness fallen from mine eyes.
Oh! Let me be to thee again a slave;
Again what once I was, and—oh! forgive!

SAPPHO.

(In the same tone.)

Thinkst thou that SAPPHO hath become so poor,
As to have need of gifts from one like thee?
That which is mine, I shall ere long possess.

PHAON.

Hear me but once! Oh! SAPPHO!

SAPPHO.

Touch me not!

I am henceforth devoted to the Gods.

PHAON.

If ere with loving eyes, thou didst behold—

SAPPHO.

Thou speakst of things forever past and gone.
I sought for THEE—and I have found—MYSELF.
Thou couldst not understand my heart. Farewell.
On firmer ground than thee, my hopes must rest.

PHAON.

And dost thou hate me now?

SAPPHO.

To love—to hate!

Is there no other feeling? Thou WERT dear,
And art so still—and so shalt ever be.
Like to some pleasant fellow-traveller,
Whom accident hath brought a little way
In the same bark, until the goal be reached,
When parting, each pursues a different road:
Yet often in some strange and distant land,

Remembrance will recall that traveller still.

(Her voice falters.)

PHAON.

(Moved.)

SAPPHO !

SAPPHO.

Be still and let us part in peace.

(To her people.)

Ye, who have seen your SAPPHO weak, forgive.

For SAPPHO's weakness, well will I atone.

Alone when bent, the bow's full power is shown.

(Pointing to the altar in the back-ground.)

Kindle the flames at Aphrodite's shrine,

Till up to Heaven they mount, like morning beams !

(They obey her.)

And now retire, and leave me here alone.

I would seek counsel, only from the Gods.

RHAMNES.

(To the people.)

It is her wish. Let us obey. Come all.

(They retire.)

SAPPHO.

(Advancing.)

Gracious, immortal Gods ! List to my prayer.

Forbid, that e'er your Priestess should become
 The scorn of those, who dare despise your power ;
 The sport of fools, in their own folly wife.
 Ye broke the blossom, now then break the bough.
 Let my life close, e'en as it once began.
 From this soul-struggle, quickly set me free.
 I am too weak, to bear a further strife.
 Give me the triumph, but the conflict spare.

(As if inspired.)

The flames are kindled, and the sun ascends !
 I feel that I am heard ! I thank ye, Gods !
 PHAON ! MELITTA ! Hither come to me !

(She kisses the brow of PHAON.)

A friend from other worlds doth greet thee thus.

(She embraces MELITTA.)

'Tis thy dead mother sends this kiss to thee.

* * * * *

Upon yon altar consecrate to Love,
 Be love's mysterious destiny fulfilled.

(She hurries to the altar.)

RHAMNES.

What is her purpose ? Glorified her form !
 The radiance of the Gods, doth round her shine !

SAPPHO.

(Ascending a high rock, and stretching her hands over PHAON and MELITTA.)

Give love to mortals—Reverence to the Gods.
Enjoy what blooms for ye, and—think of me.
Thus do I pay the last great debt of life.
Bless them, ye Gods ! and bear ME hence to Heaven !

(Throws herself from the rock into the sea.)

PHAON.

Hold, SAPPHO ! Hold !

MELITTA.

Alas ! she falls—she dies !

PHAON.

(Supporting MELITTA.)

Help ! Help ! Down to the shore at once to save !

RHAMNES.

(Running down.)

Ye Gods avert ! If from yon cliff she falls,
All is forever lost—and if beyond—
Alas ! Too late ! Too late ! All is now done !

PHAON.

What say'st thou ? Hence ! A boat ! A boat to save !

RHAMNES.

Hold ! Hold ! It is too late ! Grudge not the grave,
Which she, far from the faithless breast of earth,
Hath chosen in the ocean's purer wave.

PHAON.

Dead !

MELITTA.

Dead !

PHAON.

Ah no ! It cannot be !

RHAMNES.

Alas—

Withered the laurel—mute the soul of song.
Upon this earth, she could not find a home.

(With upraised hands.)

Her kindred gods have called her to themselves.

(Curtain falls.)

FINIS.

NOTES.

N O T E S .

NOTE 1. PAGE 1.

“APHRODITE,” the Grecian name for Venus. .

NOTE 2. PAGE 2.

“SAPPHO.”

Sappho was the most celebrated poetess of all Greece, and in view of her great excellence was sometimes called the “Tenth Muse.” She was born in Mytilene in the island of Lesbos, about the year 612 B. C. Her history rests in much obscurity, and but few of her productions are extant. These, however, are of a high character, and fully sustain the reputation which was bestowed upon her, by the most refined and intellectual nations of antiquity.

Contemporary with the poetess, was a courtesan of the same name, a native of Erefos in the same island. She is frequently confounded with Sappho of Mytilene, much to the prejudice of the latter. An ancient medal brought from Greece in 1822, having on it a female head, with the names “Sappho,” and “Erefos,” first definitely settled the fact, that there were two persons of that name, contemporary with each other and living on the same island, but in different cities. The distinction, however, had been previously noted by Nymphis the historian, Athenæus, Ælian, Suidas and others among the ancients, and by Visconti and others among the moderns.

The most remarkable events in her history, were her reputed fatal passion for a youth

called Phaon, and her death by leaping from the promontory of Leucadia. It may now be considered as well settled, that this leap was not taken by the poetess, but if at all, by her namesake of Eresos. It is true that Sappho of Mytilene in her odes, makes frequent mention of a youth, to whom she had given her whole heart, while he requited her tender passion with cold indifference. But nowhere do we find the name of this person, and certainly the name of Phaon is not mentioned in any of her writings. Grillparzer appears to have assumed, that the leap was taken by the poetess, and upon that idea founded the very beautiful tragedy, which is the subject of the present translation. On merely poetic grounds, he may be justified in this violation of historic truth. Some further extenuation may also be found in the fact, that his tragedy had appeared some time before the discovery of the Grecian medal above mentioned. Prior to 1822, it was a matter simply of conjecture, as to the identity of the two Sapphos. He was at liberty to adopt either version of the story, but had he known the truth, and availed himself of it, he would have been robbed of the incident and plot of his present excellent classic play.

In regard to Phaon, the supposed lover of Sappho, nothing is positively known. His name is mentioned by Suidas, who speaks of Sappho's passion, and its fatal consequences, and who distinguishes between the poetess and the courtesan, attributing the leap to the latter. By some mistake, he makes the courtesan a native of Mytilene, and the poetess of Eresos. So remarkable a death, had it really occurred, could scarcely have escaped *positive* traditional notice, and in such case history would have placed, in some way, the whole matter beyond mere conjecture. The best modern scholars now attribute the death at Leucadia to the courtesan, and not to Sappho of Mytilene. It is true that Ovid in his *Heroides* confounds the two, but this can be readily explained by the fact of their possessing similar names, and the natural confusion arising therefrom. Herodotus, who was nearly contemporary with the poetess, does not mention such a catastrophe. Antipater of Sidon in an epigram asserts that she died in the usual course of nature, and was buried in her native island.

The rock from which this leap is said to have taken place, is situated in the island of Leucadia, now the modern Santa-Maura, one of the Ionian islands, off Acarnania on the west coast of Greece. Lesbos, now the modern Mytilene, lies off the west coast of Asia Minor, at the entrance of the Gulf of Adramyttium. How or why either of the Sapphos living in Lesbos, could or should have thrown herself off a promontory on the south-western extremity of an island many hundred leagues distant, is not clearly apparent. Even if true, one or the other of them must have left her native Lesbos, and sailed for Leucadia in order to perpetrate the act. The motive for such a voyage could not have been simply a choice of spots, because many bold and lofty precipices could have been easily found in Lesbos suitable for such a purpose; nor could it have been because the rock in question had obtained a reputation for lovers' leaps, inasmuch as Sappho of Mytilene (according to the poet Menander) is said to have been the first to try such a

violent remedy for her passion. The remoteness of Leucadia from Lesbos would also militate against the idea, that either of the Sapphos committed such an act. The rock is shown to this day, and is described as a white perpendicular cliff of considerable elevation. An excellent picture of it may be found in Sir William Gell's "Geography and Antiquities of Ithaca." Byron calls it the "last resort of fruitless love." On its summit was a temple dedicated to Apollo. A custom at that time prevailed of throwing down a criminal every year on the festival of that God. In order to break his fall, birds were attached to him, and if he reached the water alive, boats were stationed to pick him up, after which he was allowed to depart unmolested from the territory of Leucadia. This religious custom may account for the tradition of Sappho's leap, and if so, the whole story would wear rather the aspect of a poetical fiction than a real event.

The accounts which have reached us of the licentious character of Sappho's writings, have come only from writers long subsequent to the age in which she lived. There is nothing in her existing productions, which would justify such an idea. Grillparzer very nobly defends his heroine from such an imputation, and in the first scene of the second act of his tragedy, causes Phaon expressly to repudiate the aspersions. The Lesbians themselves (and in fact all Greece) were enthusiastic in their admiration of her talents and virtues. She was regarded as a Goddess, her image was stamped on their coins, and after her death divine honors were paid to her. Had she been a woman of doubtful reputation, or her writings of a licentious character, clearly no such homage or respect would have been paid. Sicily erected a statue to her memory, and although her entire works are said to have been extant in the days of Horace, that poet does not intimate that either her life, or her poems, were of such a character as to warrant the accusation brought against her. It appears, moreover, that she was honorably married to Cercolus, a wealthy gentleman of Andros, by whom she had one daughter, Cleis. The other Sappho must also have been a woman of considerable note, inasmuch as a similar medal was struck in her honor. Grillparzer very properly makes the poetess almost Queen of Lesbos, and supposes all the people her subjects, and her will the supreme law of the land, superior even to the decrees of the Grecian courts. In spite of all this she was banished to Sicily, along with Alcæus and others, for an alleged participation in a political conspiracy against Pittacus the Governor of Mytilene. Apart from the authority of Antipater of Sidon, and from the fact that but little farther is known of her history, it might be legitimately presumed that her decease took place in Sicily. In any event, however, all tradition goes clearly to prove, that she could not have jumped from the rock of Leucadia, because there is not a single particle of proof beyond the doubtful story of her death that she ever *visited* that island. Grillparzer himself, probably with a view of preserving the *unities* of his play, rather than a strict adherence to historic truth, supposes the rock to be situated in Lesbos.

But whatever may be the opinion of scholars, as to the character of her life,

writings, or death, her name has now become immortal. No other writer leaving such scanty remains, can boast of such deathless fame. Her memory has received a graceful tribute in this tragedy from Grillparzer, and also in the memoir from the pen of Mrs. Mary Cowden Clark in a still more recent publication entitled, "World Noted Women."

NOTE 3. PAGE 3.

"Returns she not from high Olympia,
Bearing the envied wreath of victory?"

The Olympic games were the chief of the four great national festivals of the Greeks, celebrated every fifth year at Olympia, a sacred spot on the banks of the river Alpheus. The games consisted of horse and foot-races, throwing the quoit and javelin, wrestling, boxing, and other similar athletic exercises. There were also contests in music and poetry. No one was admitted to contend, unless he could prove himself a freeman of pure Hellenic blood and of irreproachable character. A victory was considered the highest honor which a Greek could obtain, and in many instances triumphal processions, banquets, odes, statues, and even sacrifices awaited his return to his native city. These games exercised an important influence upon the progress of the arts and sciences, and upon the bodily vigor and mental energy which characterized the Hellenic race. The prizes consisted simply of garlands of wild olive, cut from trees in the sacred grove of Olympia. Palm leaves were also placed in the hands of the victors and their names proclaimed by a herald.

NOTE 4. PAGE 4.

"'Tis thus, they paint the God of Lyre and Bow."

APOLLO—The God of music, archery, and prophecy, and the ancient type of manly grace and beauty. He is generally represented bearing a Lyre or Bow.

NOTE 5. PAGE 11.

"Tower far above proud Hellas' fertile shores."

HELLAS—A name originally applied to Thessaly, but finally made a general appellation for the whole of Greece.

NOTE 6. PAGE 13.

"One gave Minerva's brow, one Juno's arm,
One girt thee with the Cestus' magic charm."

MINERVA—The Goddess of Wisdom and Skill, and the patroness of Arts and Industry, is said to have sprung full-armed from the brain of her sire Jupiter.

JUNO was the sister and wife of Jove, and is represented as a woman of dignified and matronly appearance, with a broad forehead, large eyes, and finely formed arms.

The "CESTUS" or girdle of Venus, was supposed by the poets to inspire the feeling or passion of love. Thus Juno is said to have borrowed it on a certain occasion, in order to try its influence on Jupiter, who was somewhat indifferent to her.

NOTE 7. PAGE 14.

"At length arrived, the wrestler's manly art,
The chariot's fleetness, or the Discus' throw."

Wrestling, chariot racing, and throwing the quoit and javelin as before stated, were Olympian games. The discus or quoit was a round ring of metal. The game is practised to this day, and is too well known to require description.

NOTE 8. PAGE 14.

"In vain the muse of Alcaeus and Anacreon."

ALCAEUS was a celebrated poet of Lesbos and the friend and contemporary of Sappho, who accompanied her in her banishment to Sicily. He testifies to her virtues and accomplishments. In his "Fragments" he speaks of her as "velvet-crowned, pure, sweetly smiling Sappho."

ANACREON was also a celebrated Greek poet, who sang of wine and pleasure, and whose productions are well known, through the admirable paraphrastic translation of Tom Moore.

NOTE 9. PAGE 15.

"A mantle of the deepest Tyrian dye."

A kind of murex or shell fish abounded near ancient Tyre, from which was made the celebrated purple. Hence the term "Tyrian dye" is synonymous with that color. The secret of its manufacture is said to be lost. Purple was the symbol of regal and sacerdotal dignity. The process of giving this color was chiefly practised in Tyre, and with such success that it became the principal occupation, the staple of commerce and the source of the wealth and grandeur of that city.

NOTE 10. PAGE 36.

"Thou art the little Hebe of the feast."

HEBE, the Goddess of Youth, was the daughter of Jupiter and Juno. In Olympus,

she appears as a sort of maid-servant handing round nectar at the banquets of the Gods. Like Melitta in the tragedy, she too spilt wine on one occasion, and for her carelessness was superseded by Ganymedes, a boy remarkable for his beauty.

NOTE 11. PAGE 51.

“In Mytilene, full many a joyous heart.”

MYTILENE was the capital city of Lesbos, situated in the south-eastern portion of the island, facing the coast of Myfia. In ancient times, it was a large and powerful city, and gave birth to many eminent persons. It has now degenerated into a place of comparative insignificance, containing about seven hundred Greek houses and four hundred Turkish, situated in narrow filthy streets.

NOTE 12. PAGE 61.

“And in the profile of proud Pallas’ face.”

PALLAS—An appellation given to the Goddess Minerva, whose face is supposed to be the perfect type of strict classical beauty.

NOTE 13. PAGE 78.

“Her Syren charms, within their magic power.”

The Syrens were two maidens celebrated in fable, who lived on an isle in the ocean, and with their melodious voices so charmed those who were sailing by, that they forgot home and every thing else, and abode with the maidens until they perished. Homer narrates that Ulysses once passed the island of the Syrens, but saved himself and his companions by stopping their ears with wax.

NOTE 14. PAGE 83.

“Ye whisper to my ear of Chios’ isle.”

CHIOS, now the modern Scio, is an island in the Ægean sea, between Lesbos and Samos on the west coast of Asia Minor, not far from the gulf of Smyrna.

NOTE 15. PAGE 85.

“I stood so calm, amid Parnassian fields.”

PARNASSUS was a mountain in Phocis, from which flowed the celebrated Castalian fount sacred to the Muses.

NOTE 16. PAGE 104.

“For Amphytrite is the lover’s friend.”

AMPHYTRITE was the daughter of Nereus and Doris, the wife of Neptune, and mother of Triton, one of the sea-deities.

NOTE 17. PAGE 122.

“And I will pay it, tho’ ’twere Cræsus’ wealth.”

CRÆSUS was a king of Lydia, distinguished for his conquests, his munificence, and his wealth. He is said to have been the richest man in the ancient world. He was also the patron of men of letters.

NOTE 18. PAGE 138.

“Yet midst thy flight the fierce Eumenides.”

The Eumenides or Furies were Goddesses whose business was to avenge murder on earth. They are commonly represented as bearing a torch in one hand, and a scourge of snakes in the other.

R E M A R K S .



The purely classic or ancient drama, (the writer refers more particularly to the Greek,) has never been popular, or even understood in England, or the United States. Necessarily diluted and weakened, through the vapid medium of translation, it either invariably failed to interest, or from its peculiar construction (so widely different from a modern play) was nearly unintelligible. About fifteen years ago the *Antigone* of Sophocles was revived with Mendelssohn's music, at London and Edinburgh, with Miss Helen Faucit as the heroine, but only met with empty benches, much to the dismay of a worthy manager, and the utter disgust of all true Greek scholars.

The modern classic drama (i. e., drama founded on some subject taken from classical history, and written after the manner of the ancients, in simple classic style) has been more successful, owing to the modern mode of treatment in the matter of construction, and the growing patronage of the lovers of a classic school of art. Much perhaps is due to the admirable acting of Rachel, Ristori, and others, who have infused the old dry bones of the dead dramatists with life and animation. In the United States, the introduction of the classic drama was mainly due to the advent of the great French tragedienne, a few years since. For the first time in the history of this country, did a woman, and that too in a strange tongue, enchain the attention of an American audience, by her marvellous recitation and action of plays, that had been allowed to slumber untouched almost for centuries, and which were confessedly too tedious for perusal in the closet. Was it that there was a hidden genius in their pages, which Rachel Felix alone eliminated? or was it solely her wonderful power, which garlanded and galvanized every thing she said or did

with strength and beauty? Affuredly the former, for the best action and recitation could not revive a play, of which solemn togas and monotonous unmeaning sentences constituted the entire material.

The wake of Rachel has been followed here by several promising actresses, and the influence of her classic spirit still pervades, and will, it is to be hoped, ever continue to pervade, every acre on which the English tongue is spoken. Strange as it may appear to the lovers of the melodramatic and comic schools, audiences *are* found, who can fit out and even enjoy a classic play—one full of severity, simplicity, and heroic sentiment. Certainly the Church would have little to find fault with, if the Theatre was only the scene of such drama. Honor, Fidelity, Love, and Patriotism are Christian, as well as Roman virtues, and their inculcation may date alike from the stage, or the pulpit.

Francis Grillparzer, the author of this work, was born in 1790, and is now (or was, not many years since) living in Vienna as a government official. He wrote several plays, among others “Sappho,” which made its appearance in 1818. It may be properly considered one of the very few successful modern classic dramas, as it still preserves its place on the German stage, and has never failed to delight the reader in the closet. Rachel often expressed her high appreciation of this tragedy, and her pleasure in the role of the poetic heroine. I am not aware of its ever having been produced in England or the United States, but the sooner it is, (not *my* translation,) the sooner I shall believe in the march of intelligence and good taste. It has also furnished the libretto of an opera of the same name, by a distinguished modern composer.

I find in Lord Byron’s Diary the following tribute to Grillparzer’s merit in the composition of this tragedy. The italicized passages are in the poet’s own writing.

“JANUARY 12TH, 1821.

“Read the Italian translation by Guido Sorelli of the German Grillparzer—a devil of a name for posterity; but they *must* learn to pronounce it, *with* all the allowance for a *translation*, and above all an *Italian* translation (they are the very worst of translators except from the classics—Annibale Caro for instance—and there the bastardy of their language helps them, as by way of *looking legitimate* they ape their fathers’ tongue)—but with every allowance for such a disadvantage, the tragedy of Sappho is superb and sublime. There is no denying it. The man has done a great thing in writing that play. And *who is he?* I know him not; but *ages will*. ’Tis a high intellect.”

* * * * *

“Grillparzer is grand—antique—not *so simple* as the ancients; but very simple for a modern—too Madame de Staëliſh now and then—but altogether a great and goodly writer.”

* * * * *

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"JANUARY 13TH, 1821.

"I carried Teresa (*Countess Guiccioli*) the Italian translation of Grillparzer's Sappho, which she promises to read. She quarrelled with me because I said that love was *not the loftiest* theme for true tragedy, and having the advantage of her native language, and natural female eloquence, she overcame my fewer arguments. I believe she was right—I must put more love into "Sardanapalus" than I intended."

So far as regards the present translation, I have (of course) the usual amount of apology to tender to the reader. I admit *in limine*, that it is a *free* translation, for I conceive any other precisely similar to attempting to make a Choctaw talk English and Choctaw at the same time. Under the mask of this confession I hope to be spared a very large amount of scholarly criticism. It was made when I was younger, and when, in fact, I knew more German than I do now. I can safely say the same of my Latin and Greek—for all have grown rusty beneath the withering influence of worldly cares and private griefs; nor could I summon up courage enough to plunge again into philological studies, with a view of correcting my previous errors. I preferred rather to let my light shallop take its chance among the billows, well knowing that its appearance or disappearance would cause but one more bubble on the great sea of books and then be lost forever.

My work is printed in very large type, in order to comport in size with the admirable plate of "Sappho," which was furnished for this volume by Messrs. Appleton & Co., the eminent publishers. Altogether, I hope it will not be condemned as a Brobdingnagian affair. I have not adopted this style from pretension. If I used the plate, I was compelled to increase the size of the book, and I preferred to do so rather than omit it. The classic character of the tragedy will be deemed, no doubt, a sufficient apology for the selection of the ancient form of type.

The use of "thou" and "ye," as required by the solemn style appropriate to classic tragedy, instead of "you," leads in many instances to impossible pronunciations. Grammarians however justify a judicious departure in such cases from the strict rule, with a view to euphony. The translator has encountered many of these difficulties in preparing the present volume for the press, but in no instance has she taken any license or liberty in this behalf, not justified by the best writers, or not approved by the best grammatical authorities.

E. M.

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