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Title: Erechtheus

Author: Algernon Charles Swinburne

Release date: June 11, 2006 [EBook #18550]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Thierry Alberto, Taavi Kalju and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ERECHTHEUS ***

ERECHTHEUS:

A TRAGEDY.

BY

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

ὦ τὰ λιπαρὰ καὶ ἰοστέφανοι καὶ ἀοίδιμοι
Ἑλλάδος ἔρεισμα, κλεινὰ Ἀθᾶναι δαιμόνιον πτολίεθρον.

PIND. *Fr.* 47.

ΑΤ. τίς δὲ ποιμάνωρ ἔπεστι κάμπδεσπόζει στρατοῦ;
ΧΟ. οὔτινος δοῦλοι κέκληνται φωτὸς οὐδ' ὑπηκόοι.

ÆSCH. *Pers.* 241-2.

A NEW EDITION.

London:
CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY.
1881.

PERSONS.

ERECHTHEUS.
CHORUS OF ATHENIAN ELDERS.
PRAXITHEA.
CHTHONIA.
HERALD OF EUMOLPUS.
MESSENGER.
ATHENIAN HERALD.
ATHENA.

ERECHTHEUS.

ERECHTHEUS.

Mother of life and death and all men's days,
 Earth, whom I chief of all men born would bless,
 And call thee with more loving lips than theirs
 Mother, for of this very body of thine
 And living blood I have my breath and live,
 Behold me, even thy son, me crowned of men,
 Me made thy child by that strong cunning God
 Who fashions fire and iron, who begat
 Me for a sword and beacon-fire on thee,
 Me fosterling of Pallas, in her shade 10
 Reared, that I first might pay the nursing debt,
 Hallowing her fame with flower of third-year feasts,
 And first bow down the bridled strength of steeds
 To lose the wild wont of their birth, and bear
 Clasp of man's knees and steerage of his hand,
 Or fourfold service of his fire-swift wheels
 That whirl the four-yoked chariot; me the king
 Who stand before thee naked now, and cry,
 O holy and general mother of all men born,
 But mother most and motherliest of mine, 20
 Earth, for I ask thee rather of all the Gods,
 What have we done? what word mistimed or work
 Hath winged the wild feet of this timeless curse
 To fall as fire upon us? Lo, I stand
 Here on this brow's crown of the city's head
 That crowns its lovely body, till death's hour
 Waste it; but now the dew of dawn and birth
 Is fresh upon it from thy womb, and we
 Behold it born how beauteous; one day more
 I see the world's wheel of the circling sun 30
 Roll up rejoicing to regard on earth
 This one thing goodliest, fair as heaven or he,
 Worth a God's gaze or strife of Gods; but now
 Would this day's ebb of their spent wave of strife
 Sweep it to sea, wash it on wreck, and leave
 A costless thing contemned; and in our stead,
 Where these walls were and sounding streets of men,
 Make wide a waste for tongueless water-herds
 And spoil of ravening fishes; that no more
 Should men say, Here was Athens. This shalt thou 40
 Sustain not, nor thy son endure to see,
 Nor thou to live and look on; for the womb
 Bare me not base that bare me miserable,
 To hear this loud brood of the Thracian foam
 Break its broad strength of billowy-beating war
 Here, and upon it as a blast of death
 Blowing, the keen wrath of a fire-souled king,
 A strange growth grafted on our natural soil,
 A root of Thrace in Eleusinian earth
 Set for no comfort to the kindly land, 50
 Son of the sea's lord and our first-born foe,
 Eumolpus; nothing sweet in ears of thine
 The music of his making, nor a song
 Toward hopes of ours auspicious; for the note
 Rings as for death oracular to thy sons
 That goes before him on the sea-wind blown
 Full of this charge laid on me, to put out
 The brief light kindled of mine own child's life,
 Or with this helmsman hand that steers the state
 Run right on the under shoal and ridge of death 60
 The populous ship with all its fraughtage gone
 And sails that were to take the wind of time
 Rent, and the tackling that should hold out fast
 In confluent surge of loud calamities
 Broken, with spars of rudders and lost oars
 That were to row toward harbour and find rest
 In some most glorious haven of all the world
 And else may never near it: such a song
 The Gods have set his lips on fire withal
 Who threatens now in all their names to bring 70
 Ruin; but none of these, thou knowest, have I
 Chid with my tongue or cursed at heart for grief,
 Knowing how the soul runs reinless on sheer death
 Whose grief or joy takes part against the Gods.
 And what they will is more than our desire,

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[Pg 3]

[Pg 4]

And their desire is more than what we will.
 For no man's will and no desire of man's
 Shall stand as doth a God's will. Yet, O fair
 Mother, that seest me how I cast no word
 Against them, plead no reason, crave no cause, 80
 Boast me not blameless, nor beweepe me wronged,
 By this fair wreath of towers we have decked thee with,
 This chaplet that we give thee woven of walls,
 This girdle of gate and temple and citadel
 Drawn round beneath thy bosom, and fast linked
 As to thine heart's root—this dear crown of thine,
 This present light, this city—be not thou
 Slow to take heed nor slack to strengthen her,
 Fare we so short-lived howsoe'er, and pay
 What price we may to ransom thee thy town, 90
 Not me my life; but thou that diest not, thou,
 Though all our house die for this people's sake,
 Keep thou for ours thy crown our city, guard
 And give it life the lovelier that we died.

CHORUS.

Sun, that hast lightened and loosed by thy might
 Ocean and Earth from the lordship of night,
 Quickening with vision his eye that was veiled,
 Freshening the force in her heart that had failed,
 That sister fettered and blinded brother
 Should have sight by thy grace and delight of each other, 100
 Behold now and see
 What profit is given them of thee;
 What wrath has enkindled with madness of mind
 Her limbs that were bounden, his face that was blind,
 To be locked as in wrestle together, and lighten
 With fire that shall darken thy fire in the sky,
 Body to body and eye against eye
 In a war against kind,
 Till the bloom of her fields and her high hills whiten
 With the foam of his waves more high. 110
 For the sea-marks set to divide of old
 The kingdoms to Ocean and Earth assigned,
 The hoar sea-fields from the cornfields' gold,
 His wine-bright waves from her vineyards' fold,
 Frail forces we find
 To bridle the spirit of Gods or bind
 Till the heat of their hearts wax cold.
 But the peace that was stablished between them to stand
 Is rent now in twain by the strength of his hand
 Who stirs up the storm of his sons overbold 120
 To pluck from fight what he lost of right,
 By council and judgment of Gods that spake
 And gave great Pallas the strife's fair stake,
 The lordship and love of the lovely land,
 The grace of the town that hath on it for crown
 But a headband to wear
 Of violets one-hued with her hair:
 For the vales and the green high places of earth
 Hold nothing so fair,
 And the depths of the sea bear no such birth 130
 Of the manifold births they bear.
 Too well, too well was the great stake worth
 A strife divine for the Gods to judge,
 A crowned God's triumph, a foiled God's grudge,
 Though the loser be strong and the victress wise
 Who played long since for so large a prize,
 The fruitful immortal anointed adored
 Dear city of men without master or lord,
 Fair fortress and fostress of sons born free,
 Who stand in her sight and in thine, O sun, 140
 Slaves of no man, subjects of none;
 A wonder enthroned on the hills and sea,
 A maiden crowned with a fourfold glory
 That none from the pride of her head may rend,
 Violet and olive-leaf purple and hoary,
 Song-wreath and story the fairest of fame,

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[Pg 7]

Flowers that the winter can blast not or bend;
 A light upon earth as the sun's own flame,
 A name as his name,
 Athens, a praise without end. 150

A noise is arisen against us of waters, [Str. 1.
 A sound as of battle come up from the sea.
 Strange hunters are hard on us, hearts without pity;
 They have staked their nets round the fair young city,
 That the sons of her strength and her virgin daughters
 Should find not whither alive to flee.

And we know not yet of the word unwritten, [Ant. 1.
 The doom of the Pythian we have not heard;
 From the navel of earth and the veiled mid altar
 We wait for a token with hopes that falter, 160
 With fears that hang on our hearts thought-smitten
 Lest her tongue be kindled with no good word.

O thou not born of the womb, nor bred [Str. 2.
 In the bride-night's warmth of a changed God's bed,
 But thy life as a lightning was flashed from the light of thy father's
 head,

O chief God's child by a motherless birth,
 If aught in thy sight we indeed be worth,
 Keep death from us thou, that art none of the Gods of the dead
 under earth.

Thou that hast power on us, save, if thou wilt; [Ant. 2.
 Let the blind wave breach not thy wall scarce built;
 But bless us not so as by bloodshed, impute not for grace to us guilt, 170
 Nor by price of pollution of blood set us free;
 Let the hands be taintless that clasp thy knee,
 Nor a maiden be slain to redeem for a maiden her shrine from the
 sea.

O earth, O sun, turn back [Str. 3.
 Full on his deadly track
 Death, that would smite you black and mar your creatures,
 And with one hand disroot
 All tender flower and fruit,

With one strike blind and mute the heaven's fair features, 180
 Pluck out the eyes of morn, and make
 Silence in the east and blackness whence the bright songs break.

Help, earth, help, heaven, that hear [Ant. 3.
 The song-notes of our fear,
 Shrewd notes and shrill, not clear or joyful-sounding;
 Hear, highest of Gods, and stay
 Death on his hunter's way,

Full on his forceless prey his beagles hounding;
 Break thou his bow, make short his hand,
 Maim his fleet foot whose passage kills the living land. 190

Let a third wave smite not us, father, [Str. 4.
 Long since sore smitten of twain,
 Lest the house of thy son's son perish
 And his name be barren on earth.

Whose race wilt thou comfort rather
 If none to thy son remain?
 Whose seed wilt thou choose to cherish
 If his be cut off in the birth?

For the first fair graft of his grafting [Ant. 4.
 Was rent from its maiden root 200

By the strong swift hand of a lover
 Who fills the night with his breath;
 On the lip of the stream low-laughing
 Her green soft virginal shoot

Was plucked from the stream-side cover
 By the grasp of a love like death.

For a God's was the mouth that kissed her
 Who speaks, and the leaves lie dead, [Str. 5.
 When winter awakes as at warning
 To the sound of his foot from Thrace. 210

Nor happier the bed of her sister
 Though Love's self laid her abed
 By a bridegroom beloved of the morning
 And fair as the dawn's own face.

For Procris, ensnared and ensnaring [Ant. 5.
 By the fraud of a twofold wile,
 With the point of her own spear stricken

By the gift of her own hand fell.
 Oversubtle in doubts, overdaring
 In deeds and devices of guile, 220
 And strong to quench as to quicken,
 O Love, have we named thee well?
 By thee was the spear's edge whetted [Str. 6.
 That laid her dead in the dew,
 In the moist green glens of the midland
 By her dear lord slain and thee.
 And him at the cliff's end fretted
 By the grey keen waves, him too,
 Thine hand from the white-browed headland
 Flung down for a spoil to the sea. 230
 But enough now of griefs grey-growing [Ant. 6.
 Have darkened the house divine,
 Have flowered on its boughs and faded,
 And green is the brave stock yet.
 O father all-seeing and all-knowing,
 Let the last fruit fall not of thine
 From the tree with whose boughs we are shaded,
 From the stock that thy son's hand set.

ERECHTHEUS.

O daughter of Cephisus, from all time
 Wise have I found thee, wife and queen, of heart 240
 Perfect; nor in the days that knew not wind
 Nor days when storm blew death upon our peace
 Was thine heart swoln with seed of pride, or bowed
 With blasts of bitter fear that break men's souls
 Who lift too high their minds toward heaven, in thought
 Too godlike grown for worship; but of mood
 Equal, in good time reverent of time bad,
 And glad in ill days of the good that were.
 Nor now too would I fear thee, now misdoubt
 Lest fate should find thee lesser than thy doom, 250
 Chosen if thou be to bear and to be great
 Haply beyond all women; and the word
 Speaks thee divine, dear queen, that speaks thee dead,
 Dead being alive, or quick and dead in one
 Shall not men call thee living? yet I fear
 To slay thee timeless with my proper tongue,
 With lips, thou knowest, that love thee; and such work
 Was never laid of Gods on men, such word
 No mouth of man learnt ever, as from mine
 Most loth to speak thine ear most loth shall take 260
 And hold it hateful as the grave to hear.

PRAKITHEA.

That word there is not in all speech of man,
 King, that being spoken of the Gods and thee
 I have not heart to honour, or dare hold
 More than I hold thee or the Gods in hate
 Hearing; but if my heart abhor it heard
 Being insubmissive, hold me not thy wife
 But use me like a stranger, whom thine hand
 Hath fed by chance and finding thence no thanks
 Flung off for shame's sake to forgetfulness. 270

ERECHTHEUS.

O, of what breath shall such a word be made,
 Or from what heart find utterance? Would my tongue
 Were rent forth rather from the quivering root
 Than made as fire or poison thus for thee.

PRAKITHEA.

But if thou speak of blood, and I that hear
 Be chosen of all for this land's love to die
 And save to thee thy city, know this well,
 Happiest I hold me of her seed alive.

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ERECHTHEUS.

O sun that seest, what saying was this of thine,
God, that thy power has breathed into my lips?
For from no sunlit shrine darkling it came.

280

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PRAXITHEA.

What portent from the mid oracular place
Hath smitten thee so like a curse that flies
Wingless, to waste men with its plagues? yet speak.

ERECHTHEUS.

Thy blood the Gods require not; take this first.

PRAXITHEA.

To me than thee more grievous this should sound.

ERECHTHEUS.

That word rang truer and bitterer than it knew.

PRAXITHEA.

This is not then thy grief, to see me die?

ERECHTHEUS.

Die shalt thou not, yet give thy blood to death.

PRAXITHEA.

If this ring worse I know not; strange it rang.

290

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ERECHTHEUS.

Alas, thou knowest not; woe is me that know.

PRAXITHEA.

And woe shall mine be, knowing; yet halt not here.

ERECHTHEUS.

Guiltless of blood this state may stand no more.

PRAXITHEA.

Firm let it stand whatever bleed or fall.

ERECHTHEUS.

O Gods, that I should say it shall and weep.

PRAXITHEA.

Weep, and say this? no tears should bathe such words.

ERECHTHEUS.

Woe's me that I must weep upon them, woe.

PRAXITHEA.

What stain is on them for thy tears to cleanse?

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ERECHTHEUS.

A stain of blood unpurgeable with tears.

PRAXITHEA.

Whence? for thou sayest it is and is not mine. 300

ERECHTHEUS.

Hear then and know why only of all men I
That bring such news as mine is, I alone
Must wash good words with weeping; I and thou,
Woman, must wail to hear men sing, must groan
To see their joy who love us; all our friends
Save only we, and all save we that love
This holiness of Athens, in our sight
Shall lift their hearts up, in our hearing praise
Gods whom we may not; for to these they give
Life of their children, flower of all their seed, 310
For all their travail fruit, for all their hopes
Harvest; but we for all our good things, we
Have at their hands which fill all these folk full
Death, barrenness, child-slaughter, curses, cares,
Sea-leaguer and land-shipwreck; which of these,
Which wilt thou first give thanks for? all are thine.

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PRAXITHEA.

What first they give who give this city good,
For that first given to save it I give thanks
First, and thanks heartier from a happier tongue,
More than for any my peculiar grace 320
Shown me and not my country; next for this,
That none of all these but for all these I
Must bear my burden, and no eye but mine
Weep of all women's in this broad land born
Who see their land's deliverance; but much more,
But most for this I thank them most of all,
That this their edge of doom is chosen to pierce
My heart and not my country's; for the sword
Drawn to smite there and sharpened for such stroke
Should wound more deep than any turned on me. 330

CHORUS.

Well fares the land that bears such fruit, and well
The spirit that breeds such thought and speech in man.

ERECHTHEUS.

[Pg 19]

O woman, thou hast shamed my heart with thine,
To show so strong a patience; take then all;
For all shall break not nor bring down thy soul.
The word that journeying to the bright God's shrine
Who speaks askance and darkling, but his name
Hath in it slaying and ruin broad writ out,
I heard, hear thou: thus saith he; There shall die
One soul for all this people; from thy womb 340
Came forth the seed that here on dry bare ground
Death's hand must sow untimely, to bring forth
Nor blade nor shoot in season, being by name
To the under Gods made holy, who require
For this land's life her death and maiden blood
To save a maiden city. Thus I heard,
And thus with all said leave thee; for save this
No word is left us, and no hope alive.

CHORUS.

He hath uttered too surely his wrath not obscurely, nor wrapt as in [Str.
mists of his breath,
The master that lightens not hearts he enlightens, but gives them 350
foreknowledge of death.
As a bolt from the cloud hath he sent it aloud and proclaimed it

afar,
 From the darkness and height of the horror of night hath he
 shown us a star.
 Star may I name it and err not, or flame shall I say,
 Born of the womb that was born for the tomb of the day?
 O Night, whom other but thee for mother, and Death for the father, [*Ant.*
 Night,
 Shall we dream to discover, save thee and thy lover, to bring such a
 sorrow to sight?
 From the slumberless bed for thy bedfellow spread and his
 bride under earth
 Hast thou brought forth a wild and insatiable child, an
 unbearable birth.
 Fierce are the fangs of his wrath, and the pangs that they
 give;
 None is there, none that may bear them, not one that would
 live.

360

CHTHONIA.

Forth of the fine-spun folds of veils that hide
 My virgin chamber toward the full-faced sun
 I set my foot not moved of mine own will,
 Unmaidenlike, nor with unprompted speed
 Turn eyes too broad or doglike unabashed
 On reverend heads of men and thence on thine,
 Mother, now covered from the light and bowed
 As hers who mourns her brethren; but what grief
 Bends thy blind head thus earthward, holds thus mute,
 I know not till thy will be to lift up
 Toward mine thy sorrow-muffled eyes and speak;
 And till thy will be would I know this not.

370

PRAXITHEA.

Old men and childless, or if sons ye have seen
 And daughters, elder-born were these than mine,
 Look on this child, how young of years, how sweet,
 How scant of time and green of age her life
 Puts forth its flower of girlhood; and her gait
 How virginal, how soft her speech, her eyes
 How seemly smiling; wise should all ye be,
 All honourable and kindly men of age;
 Now give me counsel and one word to say
 That I may bear to speak, and hold my peace
 Henceforth for all time even as all ye now.
 Dumb are ye all, bowed eyes and tongueless mouths,
 Unprofitable; if this were wind that speaks,
 As much its breath might move you. Thou then, child,
 Set thy sweet eyes on mine; look through them well;
 Take note of all the writing of my face
 As of a tablet or a tomb inscribed
 That bears me record; lifeless now, my life
 Thereon that was think written; brief to read,
 Yet shall the scripture sear thine eyes as fire
 And leave them dark as dead men's. Nay, dear child,
 Thou hast no skill, my maiden, and no sense
 To take such knowledge; sweet is all thy lore,
 And all this bitter; yet I charge thee learn
 And love and lay this up within thine heart,
 Even this my word; less ill it were to die
 Than live and look upon thy mother dead,
 Thy mother-land that bare thee; no man slain
 But him who hath seen it shall men count unblest,
 None blest as him who hath died and seen it not.

380

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400

CHTHONIA.

That sight some God keep from me though I die.

PRAXITHEA.

A God from thee shall keep it; fear not this.

CHTHONIA.

Thanks all my life long shall he gain of mine.

PRAXITHEA.

Short gain of all yet shall he get of thee.

CHTHONIA.

Brief be my life, yet so long live my thanks.

PRAXITHEA.

So long? so little; how long shall they live?

CHTHONIA.

Even while I see the sunlight and thine eyes.

PRAXITHEA.

Would mine might shut ere thine upon the sun.

410

CHTHONIA.

For me thou prayest unkindly; change that prayer.

PRAXITHEA.

Not well for me thou sayest, and ill for thee.

CHTHONIA.

Nay, for me well, if thou shalt live, not I.

PRAXITHEA.

How live, and lose these loving looks of thine?

CHTHONIA.

It seems I too, thus praying, then, love thee not.

PRAXITHEA.

Lov'st thou not life? what wouldst thou do to die?

CHTHONIA.

Well, but not more than all things, love I life.

PRAXITHEA.

And fain wouldst keep it as thine age allows?

CHTHONIA.

Fain would I live, and fain not fear to die.

PRAXITHEA.

That I might bid thee die not! Peace; no more.

420

CHORUS.

A godlike race of grief the Gods have set
For these to run matched equal, heart with heart.

PRAXITHEA.

Child of the chief of Gods, and maiden crowned,
Queen of these towers and fofress of their king,
Pallas, and thou my father's holiest head,
A living well of life nor stanch'd nor stained,
O God Cephisus, thee too charge I next,
Be to me judge and witness; nor thine ear
Shall now my tongue invoke not, thou to me
Most hateful of things holy, mournfullest 430
Of all old sacred streams that wash the world,
Ilissus, on whose marge at flowery play
A whirlwind-footed bridegroom found my child
And rapt her northward where mine elder-born
Keeps now the Thracian bride-bed of a God
Intolerable to seamen, but this land

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Finds him in hope for her sake favourable,
A gracious son by wedlock; hear me then
Thou likewise, if with no faint heart or false
The word I say be said, the gift be given, 440
Which might I choose I had rather die than give
Or speak and die not. Ere thy limbs were made
Or thine eyes lightened, strife, thou knowest, my child,
'Twi'x God and God had risen, which heavenlier name
Should here stand hallowed, whose more liberal grace
Should win this city's worship, and our land
To which of these do reverence; first the lord
Whose wheels make lightnings of the foam-flowered sea
Here on this rock, whose height brow-bound with dawn

Is head and heart of Athens, one sheer blow 450
Struck, and beneath the triple wound that shook
The stony sinews and stark roots of the earth
Sprang toward the sun a sharp salt fount, and sank
Where lying it lights the heart up of the hill,
A well of bright strange brine; but she that reared
Thy father with her same chaste fostering hand
Set for a sign against it in our guard

[Pg 27]

The holy bloom of the olive, whose hoar leaf
High in the shadowy shrine of Pandrosus
Hath honour of us all; and of this strife 460
The twelve most high Gods judging with one mouth
Acclaimed her victress; wroth whereat, as wronged
That she should hold from him such prize and place,
The strong king of the tempest-rifted sea
Loosed reinless on the low Thriasian plain
The thunders of his chariots, swallowing stunned
Earth, beasts, and men, the whole blind foundering world
That was the sun's at morning, and ere noon
Death's; nor this only prey fulfilled his mind;

For with strange crook-toothed prows of Carian folk 470
Who snatch a sanguine life out of the sea,
Thieves keen to pluck their bloody fruit of spoil
From the grey fruitless waters, has their God
Furrowed our shores to waste them, as the fields
Were landward harried from the north with swords
Aonian, sickles of man-slaughtering edge
Ground for no hopeful harvest of live grain
Against us in Bœotia; these being spent,

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Now this third time his wind of wrath has blown
Right on this people a mightier wave of war, 480
Three times more huge a ruin; such its ridge
Foam-rimmed and hollow like the womb of heaven,
But black for shining, and with death for life
Big now to birth and ripe with child, full-blown
With fear and fruit of havoc, takes the sun
Out of our eyes, darkening the day, and blinds
The fair sky's face unseasonably with change,
A cloud in one and billow of battle, a surge
High reared as heaven with monstrous surf of spears
That shake on us their shadow, till men's heads

Bend, and their hearts even with its forward wind 490
Wither, so blasts all seed in them of hope
Its breath and blight of presage; yea, even now
The winter of this wind out of the deeps
Makes cold our trust in comfort of the Gods
And blind our eye toward outlook; yet not here,
Here never shall the Thracian plant on high

For ours his father's symbol, nor with wreaths
 A strange folk wreath it upright set and crowned 500
 Here where our natural people born behold
 The golden Gorgon of the shield's defence
 That screens their flowering olive, nor strange Gods
 Be graced, and Pallas here have praise no more.
 And if this be not I must give my child,
 Thee, mine own very blood and spirit of mine,
 Thee to be slain. Turn from me, turn thine eyes
 A little from me; I can bear not yet
 To see if still they smile on mine or no,
 If fear make faint the light in them, or faith 510
 Fix them as stars of safety. Need have we,
 Sore need of stars that set not in mid storm,
 Lights that outlast the lightnings; yet my heart
 Endures not to make proof of thine or these,
 Not yet to know thee whom I made, and bare
 What manner of woman; had I borne thee man,
 I had made no question of thine eyes or heart,
 Nor spared to read the scriptures in them writ,
 Wert thou my son; yet couldst thou then but die
 Fallen in sheer fight by chance and charge of spears 520
 And have no more of memory, fill no tomb
 More famous than thy fellows in fair field,
 Where many share the grave, many the praise;
 But one crown shall one only girl my child
 Wear, dead for this dear city, and give back life
 To him that gave her and to me that bare,
 And save two sisters living; and all this,
 Is this not all good? I shall give thee, child,
 Thee but by fleshly nature mine, to bleed
 For dear land's love; but if the city fall 530
 What part is left me in my children then?
 But if it stand and thou for it lie dead,
 Then hast thou in it a better part than we,
 A holier portion than we all; for each
 Hath but the length of his own life to live,
 And this most glorious mother-land on earth
 To worship till that life have end; but thine
 Hath end no more than hers; thou, dead, shalt live
 Till Athens live not; for the days and nights
 Given of thy bare brief dark dividual life,
 Shall she give thee half all her agelong own 540
 And all its glory; for thou givest her these;
 But with one hand she takes and gives again
 More than I gave or she requires of thee.
 Come therefore, I will make thee fit for death,
 I that could give thee, dear, no gift at birth
 Save of light life that breathes and bleeds, even I
 Will help thee to this better gift than mine
 And lead thee by this little living hand
 That death shall make so strong, to that great end
 Whence it shall lighten like a God's, and strike 550
 Dead the strong heart of battle that would break
 Athens; but ye, pray for this land, old men,
 That it may bring forth never child on earth
 To love it less, for none may more, than we.

CHORUS.

Out of the north wind grief came forth, [Str. 1.
 And the shining of a sword out of the sea.
 Yea, of old the first-blown blast blew the prelude of this last,
 The blast of his trumpet upon Rhodope.
 Out of the north skies full of his cloud, 560
 With the clamour of his storms as of a crowd
 At the wheels of a great king crying aloud,
 At the axle of a strong king's car
 That has girded on the girdle of war—
 With hands that lightened the skies in sunder
 And feet whose fall was followed of thunder,
 A God, a great God strange of name,
 With horse-yoke fleeter-hoofed than flame,
 To the mountain bed of a maiden came,

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Oreithyia, the bride mismated,
Wofully wed in a snow-strewn bed 570
With a bridegroom that kisses the bride's mouth dead;
Without garland, without glory, without song,
As a fawn by night on the hills belated,
Given over for a spoil unto the strong.
From lips how pale so keen a wail [Ant. 1.]

At the grasp of a God's hand on her she gave,
When his breath that darkens air made a havoc of her hair,
It rang from the mountain even to the wave;
Rang with a cry, *Woe's me, woe is me!*

From the darkness upon Hæmus to the sea: 580
And with hands that clung to her new lord's knee,
As a virgin overborne with shame,
She besought him by her spouseless fame,
By the blameless breasts of a maid unmarried
And locks unmaidenly rent and harried,

And all her flower of body, born
To match the maidenhood of morn,
With the might of the wind's wrath wrenched and torn.
Vain, all vain as a dead man's vision

Falling by night in his old friends' sight, 590
To be scattered with slumber and slain ere light;
Such a breath of such a bridegroom in that hour
Of her prayers made mock, of her fears derision,
And a ravage of her youth as of a flower.

With a leap of his limbs as a lion's, a cry from his lips as of thunder, [Str. 2.]
In a storm of amorous godhead filled with fire,
From the height of the heaven that was rent with the roar of his
coming in sunder,

Sprang the strong God on the spoil of his desire.
And the pines of the hills were as green reeds shattered,
And their branches as buds of the soft spring scattered, 600
And the west wind and east, and the sound of the south,
Fell dumb at the blast of the north wind's mouth,

At the cry of his coming out of heaven.
And the wild beasts quailed in the rifts and hollows
Where hound nor clarion of huntsman follows,
And the depths of the sea were aghast, and whitened,
And the crowns of their waves were as flame that lightened,
And the heart of the floods thereof was riven.

But she knew not him coming for terror, she felt not her wrong that [Ant. 2.]
he wrought her,

When her locks as leaves were shed before his breath, 610
And she heard not for terror his prayer, though the cry was a God's
that besought her,

Blown from lips that strew the world-wide seas with death.
For the heart was molten within her to hear,
And her knees beneath her were loosened for fear,
And her blood fast bound as a frost-bound water,
And the soft new bloom of the green earth's daughter

Wind-wasted as blossom of a tree;
As the wild God rapt her from earth's breast lifted,
On the strength of the stream of his dark breath drifted, 620
From the bosom of earth as a bride from the mother,
With storm for bridesman and wreck for brother,
As a cloud that he sheds upon the sea.

Of this hoary-headed woe [Epode.]
Song made memory long ago;
Now a younger grief to mourn
Needs a new song younger born.

Who shall teach our tongues to reach
What strange height of saddest speech,
For the new bride's sake that is given to be
A stay to fetter the foot of the sea, 630
Lest it quite spurn down and trample the town,
Ere the violets be dead that were plucked for its crown,

Or its olive-leaf whiten and wither?
Who shall say of the wind's way
That he journeyed yesterday,
Or the track of the storm that shall sound to-morrow,
If the new be more than the grey-grown sorrow?
For the wind of the green first season was keen,
And the blast shall be sharper than blew between

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HERALD OF EUMOLPUS.

Old men, grey borderers on the march of death,
 Tongue-fighters, tough of talk and sinewy speech,
 Else nerveless, from no crew of such faint folk
 Whose tongues are stouter than their hands come I
 To bid not you to battle; let them strike
 Whose swords are sharper than your keen-tongued wail,
 And ye, sit fast and sorrow; but what man
 Of all this land-folk and earth-labouring herd
 For heart or hand seems foremost, him I call
 If heart be his to hearken, him bid forth
 To try if one be in the sun's sight born
 Of all that grope and grovel on dry ground
 That may join hands in battle-grip for death
 With them whose seed and strength is of the sea.

650

CHORUS.

Know thou this much for all thy loud blast blown,
 We lack not hands to speak with, swords to plead,
 For proof of peril, not of boisterous breath,
 Sea-wind and storm of barren mouths that foam
 And rough rock's edge of menace; and short space
 May lesson thy large ignorance and inform
 This insolence with knowledge if there live
 Men earth-begotten of no tenderer thews
 Than knit the great joints of the grim sea's brood
 With hasps of steel together; heaven to help,
 One man shall break, even on their own flood's verge,
 That iron bulk of battle; but thine eye
 That sees it now swell higher than sand or shore
 Haply shall see not when thine host shall shrink.

660

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS.

Not haply, nay, but surely, shall not thine.

CHORUS.

That lot shall no God give who fights for thee.

670

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS.

Shall Gods bear bit and bridle, fool, of men?

CHORUS.

Nor them forbid we nor shalt thou constrain.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS.

Yet say'st thou none shall make the good lot mine?

CHORUS.

Of thy side none, nor moved for fear of thee.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS.

Gods hast thou then to baffle Gods of ours?

CHORUS.

Nor thine nor mine, but equal-souled are they.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS.

Toward good and ill, then, equal-eyed of soul?

CHORUS.

Nay, but swift-eyed to note where ill thoughts breed.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS.

Thy shaft word-feathered flies yet far of me.

CHORUS.

Pride knows not, wounded, till the heart be cleft.

680

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HERALD OF EUMOLPUS.

No shaft wounds deep whose wing is plumed with words.

CHORUS.

Lay that to heart, and bid thy tongue learn grace.

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS.

Grace shall thine own crave soon too late of mine.

CHORUS.

Boast thou till then, but I wage words no more.

ERECHTHEUS.

Man, what shrill wind of speech and wrangling air
Blows in our ears a summons from thy lips
Winged with what message, or what gift or grace
Requiring? none but what his hand may take
Here may the foe think hence to reap, nor this
Except some doom from Godward yield it him.

690

HERALD OF EUMOLPUS.

King of this land-folk, by my mouth to thee
Thus saith the son of him that shakes thine earth,
Eumolpus; now the stakes of war are set,
For land or sea to win by throw and wear;
Choose therefore or to quit thy side and give
The palm unfought for to his bloodless hand,
Or by that father's sceptre, and the foot
Whose tramp far off makes tremble for pure fear
Thy soul-struck mother, piercing like a sword
The immortal womb that bare thee; by the waves
That no man bridles and that bound thy world,
And by the winds and storms of all the sea,
He swears to raze from eyeshot of the sun
This city named not of his father's name,
And wash to deathward down one flood of doom
This whole fresh brood of earth yeaned naturally,
Green yet and faint in its first blade, unblown
With yellow hope of harvest; so do thou,
Seeing whom thy time is come to meet, for fear
Yield, or gird up thy force to fight and die.

700

710

ERECHTHEUS.

To fight then be it; for if to die or live,
No man but only a God knows this much yet
Seeing us fare forth, who bear but in our hands
The weapons not the fortunes of our fight;
For these now rest as lots that yet undrawn
Lie in the lap of the unknown hour; but this
I know, not thou, whose hollow mouth of storm
Is but a warlike wind, a sharp salt breath
That bites and wounds not; death nor life of mine
Shall give to death or lordship of strange kings

720

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The soul of this live city, nor their heel
 Bruise her dear brow discrowned, nor snaffle or goad
 Wound her free mouth or stain her sanguine side
 Yet masterless of man; so bid thy lord
 Learn ere he weep to learn it, and too late
 Gnash teeth that could not fasten on her flesh,
 And foam his life out in dark froth of blood
 Vain as a wind's waif of the loud-mouthed sea
 Torn from the wave's edge whitening. Tell him this;
 Though thrice his might were mustered for our scathe 730
 And thicker set with fence of thorn-edged spears
 Than sands are whirled about the wintering beach
 When storms have swoln the rivers, and their blasts
 Have breached the broad sea-banks with stress of sea,
 That waves of inland and the main make war
 As men that mix and grapple; though his ranks
 Were more to number than all wildwood leaves
 The wind waves on the hills of all the world,
 Yet should the heart not faint, the head not fall,
 The breath not fail of Athens. Say, the Gods 740
 From lips that have no more on earth to say
 Have told thee this the last good news or ill
 That I shall speak in sight of earth and sun
 Or he shall hear and see them: for the next
 That ear of his from tongue of mine may take
 Must be the first word spoken underground
 From dead to dead in darkness. Hence; make haste,
 Lest war's fleet foot be swifter than thy tongue
 And I that part not to return again
 On him that comes not to depart away 750
 Be fallen before thee; for the time is full,
 And with such mortal hope as knows not fear
 I go this high last way to the end of all.

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CHORUS.

Who shall put a bridle in the mourner's lips to chasten them, [Str. 1.
 Or seal up the fountains of his tears for shame?
 Song nor prayer nor prophecy shall slacken tears nor hasten them,
 Till grief be within him as a burnt-out flame;
 Till the passion be broken in his breast
 And the might thereof molten into rest, 760
 And the rain of eyes that weep be dry,
 And the breath be stilled of lips that sigh.
 Death at last for all men is a harbour; yet they flee from it, [Ant. 1.
 Set sails to the storm-wind and again to sea;
 Yet for all their labour no whit further shall they be from it,
 Nor longer but wearier shall their life's work be.
 And with anguish of travail until night
 Shall they steer into shipwreck out of sight,
 And with oars that break and shrouds that strain
 Shall they drive whence no ship steers again.
 Bitter and strange is the word of the God most high, [Str. 2. 770
 And steep the strait of his way.
 Through a pass rock-rimmed and narrow the light that gleams
 On the faces of men falls faint as the dawn of dreams,
 The dayspring of death as a star in an under sky
 Where night is the dead men's day.
 As darkness and storm is his will that on earth is done, [Ant. 2.
 As a cloud is the face of his strength.
 King of kings, holiest of holies, and mightiest of might,
 Lord of the lords of thine heaven that are humble in thy sight,
 Hast thou set not an end for the path of the fires of the sun, 780
 To appoint him a rest at length?
 Hast thou told not by measure the waves of the waste wide sea, [Str. 3.
 And the ways of the wind their master and thrall to thee?
 Hast thou filled not the furrows with fruit for the world's
 increase?
 Has thine ear not heard from of old or thine eye not read
 The thought and the deed of us living, the doom of us dead?
 Hast thou made not war upon earth, and again made
 peace?
 Therefore, O father, that seest us whose lives are a breath, [Ant. 3.
 Take off us thy burden, and give us not wholly to death.

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For lovely is life, and the law wherein all things live, 790
And gracious the season of each, and the hour of its kind,
And precious the seed of his life in a wise man's mind;
But all save life for his life will a base man give.
But a life that is given for the life of the whole live land, [Str. 4.
From a heart unspotted a gift of a spotless hand,
Of pure will perfect and free, for the land's life's sake,
What man shall fear not to put forth his hand and take?
For the fruit of a sweet life plucked in its pure green prime [Ant. 4.
On his hand who plucks is as blood, on his soul as crime.
With cursing ye buy not blessing, nor peace with strife, 800
And the hand is hateful that chaffers with death for life.
Hast thou heard, O my heart, and endurest [Str. 5.
The word that is said,
What a garland by sentence found surest
Is wrought for what head?
With what blossomless flowerage of sea-foam and blood-coloured
foliage inwound
It shall crown as a heifer's for slaughter the forehead for marriage
uncrowned?
How the veils and the wreaths that should cover [Ant. 5.
The brows of the bride
Shall be shed by the breath of what lover 810
And scattered aside?
With a blast of the mouth of what bridegroom the crowns shall be
cast from her hair,
And her head by what altar made humble be left of them naked and
bare?
At a shrine unbeloved of a God un beholden a gift shall be given for [Str. 6.
the land,
That its ramparts though shaken with clamour and horror of
manifold waters may stand;
That the crests of its citadels crowned and its turrets that thrust up
their heads to the sun
May behold him unblinded with darkness of waves overmastering
their bulwarks begun.
As a bride shall they bring her, a prey for the bridegroom, a flower [Ant. 6.
for the couch of her lord;
They shall muffle her mouth that she cry not or curse them, and
cover her eyes from the sword.
They shall fasten her lips as with bit and with bridle, and darken the 820
light of her face,
That the soul of the slayer may not falter, his heart be not molten,
his hand give not grace.
If she weep then, yet may none that hear take pity; [Str. 7.
If she cry not, none should hearken though she cried.
Shall a virgin shield thine head for love, O city,
With a virgin's blood anointed as for pride?
Yet we held thee dear and hallowed of her favour, [Ant. 7.
Dear of all men held thy people to her heart;
Nought she loves the breath of blood, the sanguine savour,
Who hath built with us her throne and chosen her part.
Bloodless are her works, and sweet [Epode. 830
All the ways that feel her feet;
From the empire of her eyes
Light takes life and darkness flies;
From the harvest of her hands
Wealth strikes root in prosperous lands;
Wisdom of her word is made;
At her strength is strength afraid;
From the beam of her bright spear
War's fleet foot goes back for fear;
In her shrine she reared the birth 840
Fire-begotten on live earth;
Glory from her helm was shed
On his olive-shadowed head;
By no hand but his shall she
Scourge the storms back of the sea,
To no fame but his shall give
Grace, being dead, with hers to live,
And in double name divine
Half the godhead of their shrine.

But now with what word, with what woe may we meet 850
The timeless passage of piteous feet,
Hither that bend to the last way's end

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They shall walk upon earth?
What song be rolled for a bride black-stoled
And the mother whose hand of her hand hath hold?
For anguish of heart is my soul's strength broken
And the tongue sealed fast that would fain have spoken,
To behold thee, O child of so bitter a birth
That we counted so sweet,
What way thy steps to what bride-feast tend,
What gift he must give that shall wed thee for token
If the bridegroom be goodly to greet.

860

CHTHONIA.

People, old men of my city, lordly wise and hoar of head,
I a spouseless bride and crownless but with garlands of the dead
From the fruitful light turn silent to my dark unchilded bed.

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CHORUS.

Wise of word was he too surely, but with deadlier wisdom wise,
First who gave thee name from under earth, no breath from upper
skies,
When, foredoomed to this day's darkness, their first daylight filled
thine eyes.

PRAXITHEA.

Child, my child that wast and art but death's and now no more of
mine,
Half my heart is cloven with anguish by the sword made sharp for
thine,
Half exalts its wing for triumph, that I bare thee thus divine.

870

CHTHONIA.

Though for me the sword's edge thirst that sets no point against thy
breast,
Mother, O my mother, where I drank of life and fell on rest,
Thine, not mine, is all the grief that marks this hour accurst and
blest.

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CHORUS.

Sweet thy sleep and sweet the bosom was that gave thee sleep and
birth;
Harder now the breast, and girded with no marriage-band for girth,
Where thine head shall sleep, the namechild of the lords of under
earth.

PRAXITHEA.

Dark the name and dark the gifts they gave thee, child, in childbirth
were,
Sprung from him that rent the womb of earth, a bitter seed to bear,
Born with groanings of the ground that gave him way toward
heaven's dear air.

880

CHTHONIA.

Day to day makes answer, first to last, and life to death; but I,
Born for death's sake, die for life's sake, if indeed this be to die,
This my doom that seals me deathless till the springs of time run
dry.

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CHORUS.

Children shalt thou bear to memory, that to man shalt bring forth
none;
Yea, the lordliest that lift eyes and hearts and songs to meet the
sun,
Names to fire men's ears like music till the round world's race be
run.

PRAXITHEA.

I thy mother, named of Gods that wreak revenge and brand with
blame,
Now for thy love shall be loved as thou, and famous with thy fame,
While this city's name on earth shall be for earth her mightiest
name.

CHTHONIA.

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That I may give this poor girl's blood of mine 890
Scarce yet sun-warmed with summer, this thin life
Still green with flowerless growth of seedling days,
To build again my city; that no drop
Fallen of these innocent veins on the cold ground
But shall help knit the joints of her firm walls
To knead the stones together, and make sure
The band about her maiden girdlestead
Once fastened, and of all men's violent hands
Inviolable for ever; these to me
Were no such gifts as crave no thanksgiving, 900
If with one blow dividing the sheer life
I might make end, and one pang wind up all
And seal mine eyes from sorrow; for such end
The Gods give none they love not; but my heart,
That leaps up lightened of all sloth or fear
To take the sword's point, yet with one thought's load
Flags, and falls back, broken of wing, that halts
Maimed in mid flight for thy sake and borne down,
Mother, that in the places where I played
An arm's length from thy bosom and no more 910
Shalt find me never, nor thine eye wax glad
To mix with mine its eyesight and for love
Laugh without word, filled with sweet light, and speak
Divine dumb things of the inward spirit and heart,
Moved silently; nor hand or lip again
Touch hand or lip of either, but for mine
Shall thine meet only shadows of swift night,
Dreams and dead thoughts of dead things; and the bed
Thou strewedst, a sterile place for all time, strewn
For my sleep only, with its void sad sheets 920
Shall vex thee, and the unfruitful coverlid
For empty days reproach me dead, that leave
No profit of my body, but am gone
As one not worth being born to bear no seed,
A sapless stock and branchless; yet thy womb
Shall want not honour of me, that brought forth
For all this people freedom, and for earth
From the unborn city born out of my blood
To light the face of all men evermore
Glory; but lay thou this to thy great heart 930
Whereunder in the dark of birth conceived
Mine unlit life lay girdled with the zone
That bound thy bridal bosom; set this thought
Against all edge of evil as a sword
To beat back sorrow, that for all the world
Thou brought'st me forth a saviour, who shall save
Athens; for none but I from none but thee
Shall take this death for garland; and the men
Mine unknown children of unsounded years, 940
My sons unrisen shall rise up at thine hand,
Sown of thy seed to bring forth seed to thee,
And call thee most of all most fruitful found
Blessed; but me too for my barren womb
More than my sisters for their children born
Shall these give honour, yea in scorn's own place
Shall men set love and bring for mockery praise
And thanks for curses; for the dry wild vine
Scoffed at and cursed of all men that was I
Shall shed them wine to make the world's heart warm,
That all eyes seeing may lighten, and all ears 950
Hear and be kindled; such a draught to drink
Shall be the blood that bids this dust bring forth,
The chaliced life here spilt on this mine earth,

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Mine, my great father's mother; whom I pray
Take me now gently, tenderly take home,
And softly lay in his my cold chaste hand
Who is called of men by my name, being of Gods
Charged only and chosen to bring men under earth,
And now must lead and stay me with his staff
A silent soul led of a silent God,
Toward sightless things led sightless; and on earth
I see now but the shadow of mine end,
And this last light of all for me in heaven.

960

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PRAXITHEA.

Farewell I bid thee; so bid thou not me,
Lest the Gods hear and mock us; yet on these
I lay the weight not of this grief, nor cast
Ill words for ill deeds back; for if one say
They have done men wrong, what hurt have they to hear,
Or he what help to have said it? surely, child,
If one among men born might say it and live
Blameless, none more than I may, who being vexed
Hold yet my peace; for now through tears enough
Mine eyes have seen the sun that from this day
Thine shall see never more; and in the night
Enough has blown of evil, and mine ears
With wail enough the winds have filled, and brought
Too much of cloud from over the sharp sea
To mar for me the morning; such a blast
Rent from these wide void arms and helpless breast
Long since one graft of me disbranched, and bore
Beyond the wild ways of the unwandered world
And loud wastes of the thunder-throated sea,
Springs of the night and openings of the heaven,
The old garden of the Sun; whence never more
From west or east shall winds bring back that blow
From folds of opening heaven or founts of night
The flower of mine once ravished, born my child
To bear strange children; nor on wings of theirs
Shall comfort come back to me, nor their sire
Breathe help upon my peril, nor his strength
Raise up my weakness; but of Gods and men
I drift unsteered on ruin, and the wave
Darkens my head with imminent height, and hangs
Dumb, filled too full with thunder that shall leave
These ears death-deafened when the tide finds tongue
And all its wrath bears on them; thee, O child,
I help not, nor am holpen; fain, ah fain,
More than was ever mother born of man,
Were I to help thee; fain beyond all prayer,
Beyond all thought fain to redeem thee, torn
More timeless from me sorrowing than the dream
That was thy sister; so shalt thou be too,
Thou but a vision, shadow-shaped of sleep,
By grief made out of nothing; now but once
I touch, but once more hold thee, one more kiss
This last time and none other ever more
Leave on thy lips and leave them. Go; thou wast
My heart, my heart's blood, life-blood of my life,
My child, my nursling; now this breast once thine
Shall rear again no children; never now
Shall any mortal blossom born like thee
Lie there, nor ever with small silent mouth
Draw the sweet springs dry for an hour that feed
The blind blithe life that knows not; never head
Rest here to make these cold veins warm, nor eye
Laugh itself open with the lips that reach
Lovingly toward a fount more loving; these
Death makes as all good lesser things now dead,
And all the latter hopes that flowered from these
And fall as these fell fruitless; no joy more
Shall man take of thy maidenhood, no tongue
Praise it; no good shall eyes get more of thee
That lightened for thy love's sake. Now, take note,
Give ear, O all ye people, that my word

970

980

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990

1000

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1010

1020

May pierce your hearts through, and the stroke that cleaves
 Be fruitful to them; so shall all that hear
 Grow great at heart with child of thought most high
 And bring forth seed in season; this my child,
 This flower of this my body, this sweet life,
 This fair live youth I give you, to be slain,
 Spent, shed, poured out, and perish; take my gift
 And give it death and the under Gods who crave
 So much for that they give; for this is more,
 Much more is this than all we; for they give
 Freedom, and for a blast, an air of breath,
 A little soul that is not, they give back
 Light for all eyes, cheer for all hearts, and life
 That fills the world's width full of fame and praise
 And mightier love than children's. This they give,
 The grace to make thy country great, and wrest
 From time and death power to take hold on her
 And strength to scathe for ever; and this gift,
 Is this no more than man's love is or mine,
 Mine and all mothers'? nay, where that seems more,
 Where one loves life of child, wife, father, friend,
 Son, husband, mother, more than this, even there
 Are all these lives worth nothing, all loves else
 With this love slain and buried, and their tomb
 A thing for shame to spit on; for what love
 Hath a slave left to love with? or the heart
 Base-born and bound in bondage fast to fear,
 What should it do to love thee? what hath he,
 The man that hath no country? Gods nor men
 Have such to friend, yoked beast-like to base life,
 Vile, fruitless, grovelling at the foot of death,
 Landless and kinless thralls of no man's blood,
 Unchilded and unmothered, abject limbs
 That breed things abject; but who loves on earth
 Not friend, wife, husband, father, mother, child,
 Nor loves his own life for his own land's sake,
 But only this thing most, more this than all,
 He loves all well and well of all is loved,
 And this love lives for ever. See now, friends,
 My countrymen, my brothers, with what heart
 I give you this that of your hands again
 The Gods require for Athens; as I give
 So give ye to them what their hearts would have
 Who shall give back things better; yea, and these
 I take for me to witness, all these Gods,
 Were their great will more grievous than it is,
 Not one but three, for this one thin-spun thread
 A threefold band of children would I give
 For this land's love's sake; for whose love to-day
 I bid thee, child, fare deathward and farewell.

1030

1040

A thing for shame to spit on; for what love
 Hath a slave left to love with? or the heart
 Base-born and bound in bondage fast to fear,
 What should it do to love thee? what hath he,
 The man that hath no country? Gods nor men
 Have such to friend, yoked beast-like to base life,
 Vile, fruitless, grovelling at the foot of death,
 Landless and kinless thralls of no man's blood,
 Unchilded and unmothered, abject limbs
 That breed things abject; but who loves on earth
 Not friend, wife, husband, father, mother, child,
 Nor loves his own life for his own land's sake,
 But only this thing most, more this than all,
 He loves all well and well of all is loved,
 And this love lives for ever. See now, friends,
 My countrymen, my brothers, with what heart
 I give you this that of your hands again
 The Gods require for Athens; as I give
 So give ye to them what their hearts would have
 Who shall give back things better; yea, and these
 I take for me to witness, all these Gods,
 Were their great will more grievous than it is,
 Not one but three, for this one thin-spun thread
 A threefold band of children would I give
 For this land's love's sake; for whose love to-day
 I bid thee, child, fare deathward and farewell.

1050

1060

1070

CHORUS.

O wofullest of women, yet of all
 Happiest, thy word be hallowed; in all time
 Thy name shall blossom, and from strange new tongues
 High things be spoken of thee; for such grace
 The Gods have dealt to no man, that on none
 Have laid so heavy sorrow. From this day
 Live thou assured of godhead in thy blood,
 And in thy fate no lowlier than a God
 In all good things and evil; such a name
 Shall be thy child this city's, and thine own
 Next hers that called it Athens. Go now forth
 Blest, and grace with thee to the doors of death.

1080

CHTHONIA.

O city, O glory of Athens, O crown of my father's land, farewell.

CHORUS.

For welfare is given her of thee.

CHTHONIA.

O Goddess, be good to thy people, that in them dominion and
freedom may dwell.

CHORUS.

Turn from us the strengths of the sea.

1090

CHTHONIA.

Let glory's and theirs be one name in the mouths of all nations made
glad with the sun.

CHORUS.

For the cloud is blown back with thy breath.

CHTHONIA.

With the long last love of mine eyes I salute thee,
O land where my days now are done.

CHORUS.

But her life shall be born of thy death.

CHTHONIA.

I put on me the darkness thy shadow, my mother, and symbol, O
Earth, of my name.

CHORUS.

For thine was her witness from birth.

CHTHONIA.

In thy likeness I come to thee darkling, a daughter whose dawn and
her even are the same.

CHORUS.

Be thine heart to her gracious, O Earth.

CHTHONIA.

To thine own kind be kindly, for thy son's name's sake.

CHORUS.

That sons unborn may praise thee and thy first-born son.

1100

CHTHONIA.

Give me thy sleep, who give thee all my life awake.

CHORUS.

Too swift a sleep, ere half the web of day be spun.

CHTHONIA.

Death brings the shears or ever life wind up the weft.

CHORUS.

Their edge is ground and sharpened; who shall stay his hand?

CHTHONIA.

The woof is thin, a small short life, with no thread left.

CHORUS.

Yet hath it strength, stretched out, to shelter all the land.

CHTHONIA.

Too frail a tent for covering, and a screen too strait.

CHORUS.

Yet broad enough for buckler shall thy sweet life be.

CHTHONIA.

A little bolt to bar off battle from the gate.

CHORUS.

A wide sea-wall, that shatters the besieging sea.

1110

[Pg 65]

CHTHONIA.

I lift up mine eyes from the skirts of the shadow,
From the border of death to the limits of light;

[Str.

O streams and rivers of mountain and meadow
That hallow the last of my sight,
O father that wast of my mother
Cephisus, O thou too his brother
From the bloom of whose banks as a prey
Winds harried my sister away,
O crown on the world's head lying

Too high for its waters to drown,

1120

Take yet this one word of me dying,

O city, O crown.

Though land-wind and sea-wind with mouths that blow slaughter

[Ant.

Should gird them to battle against thee again,

New-born of the blood of a maiden thy daughter,

The rage of their breath shall be vain.

For their strength shall be quenched and made idle,

And the foam of their mouths find a bridle,

And the height of their heads bow down

At the foot of the towers of the town.

1130

Be blest and beloved as I love thee

Of all that shall draw from thee breath;

Be thy life as the sun's is above thee;

I go to my death.

[Pg 66]

CHORUS.

Many loves of many a mood and many a kind
Fill the life of man, and mould the secret mind;
Many days bring many dooms, to loose and bind;
Sweet is each in season, good the gift it brings,

[Str. 1.

Sweet as change of night and day with altering wings,

Night that lulls world-weary day, day that comforts night,

1140

Night that fills our eyes with sleep, day that fills with light.

None of all is lovelier, loftier love is none,

[Ant. 1.

Less is bride's for bridegroom, mother's less for son,

Child, than this that crowns and binds up all in one;

Love of thy sweet light, thy fostering breast and hand,

Mother Earth, and city chosen, and natural land;

Hills that bring the strong streams forth, heights of heavenlier air,

Fields aflower with winds and suns, woods with shadowing hair.

But none of the nations of men shall they liken to thee,

[Str. 2.

Whose children true-born and the fruit of thy body are we.

1150

The rest are thy sons but in figure, in word are thy seed;

We only the flower of thy travail, thy children indeed.

Of thy soil hast thou fashioned our limbs, of thy waters their blood,

And the life of thy springs everlasting is fount of our flood.

No wind oversea blew us hither adrift on thy shore,

None sowed us by land in thy womb that conceived us and bore.

[Pg 67]

[Pg 68]

But the stroke of the shaft of the sunlight that brought us to birth
 Pierced only and quickened thy furrows to bear us, O Earth.
 With the beams of his love wast thou cloven as with iron or fire, 1160
 And the life in thee yearned for his life, and grew great with desire.
 And the hunger and thirst to be wounded and healed with his dart
 Made fruitful the love in thy veins and the depth of thine heart.
 And the showers out of heaven overflowing and liquid with love
 Fulfilled thee with child of his godhead as rain from above.
 Such desire had ye twain of each other, till molten in one [Ant. 2.]
 Ye might bear and beget of your bodies the fruits of the sun.

[Pg 69]

And the trees in their season brought forth and were kindled anew
 By the warmth of the moisture of marriage, the child-bearing dew.
 And the firstlings were fair of the wedlock of heaven and of earth;
 All countries were bounteous with blossom and burgeon of birth, 1170
 Green pastures of grass for all cattle, and life-giving corn;
 But here of thy bosom, here only, the man-child was born.
 All races but one are as aliens engrafted or sown,
 Strange children and changelings; but we, O our mother, thine own.
 Thy nurslings are others, and seedlings they know not of whom;
 For these hast thou fostered, but us thou hast borne in thy womb.
 Who is he of us all, O beloved, that owe thee for birth,
 Who would give not his blood for his birth's sake, O mother, O
 Earth?

What landsman is he that was fostered and reared of thine hand
 Who may vaunt him as we may in death though he die for the land? 1180

[Pg 70]

Well doth she therefore who gives thee in guerdon
 The bloom of the life of thy giving; [Epode.]
 And thy body was bowed by no fruitless burden,
 That bore such fruit of thee living.
 For her face was not darkened for fear,
 For her eyelids conceived not a tear,
 Nor a cry from her lips craved pity;
 But her mouth was a fountain of song,
 And her heart as a citadel strong
 That guards the heart of the city. 1190

MESSENGER.

[Pg 71]

High things of strong-souled men that loved their land
 On brass and stone are written, and their deeds
 On high days chanted; but none graven or sung
 That ever set men's eyes or spirits on fire,
 Athenians, has the sun's height seen, or earth
 Heard in her depth reverberate as from heaven,
 More worth men's praise and good report of Gods
 Than here I bring for record in your ears.

For now being come to the altar, where as priest
 Death ministering should meet her, and his hand 1200
 Seal her sweet eyes asleep, the maiden stood,
 With light in all her face as of a bride
 Smiling, or shine of festal flame by night
 Far flung from towers of triumph; and her lips
 Trembled with pride in pleasure, that no fear
 Blanched them nor death before his time drank dry
 The blood whose bloom fulfilled them; for her cheeks
 Lightened, and brighter than a bridal veil
 Her hair enrobed her bosom and enrolled

From face to feet the body's whole soft length 1210
 As with a cloud sun-saturate; then she spake
 With maiden tongue words manlike, but her eyes
 Lit mildly like a maiden's: *Countrymen,*
With more goodwill and height of happier heart
I give me to you than my mother bare,
And go more gladly this great way to death
Than young men bound to battle. Then with face
 Turned to the shadowiest part of all the shrine
 And eyes fast set upon the further shade,

Take me, dear Gods; and as some form had shone 1220
 From the deep hollow shadow, some God's tongue
 Answered, *I bless you that your guardian grace*
Gives me to guard this country, takes my blood,
Your child's by name, to heal it. Then the priest
 Set to the flower-sweet snow of her soft throat

The sheer knife's edge that severed it, and loosed
 From the fair bondage of so spotless flesh
 So strong a spirit; and all that girt them round
 Gazing, with souls that hung on that sad stroke,
 Groaned, and kept silence after while a man 1230
 Might count how far the fresh blood crept, and bathed
 How deep the dark robe and the bright shrine's base
 Red-rounded with a running ring that grew
 More large and duskier as the wells that fed
 Were drained of that pure effluence: but the queen
 Groaned not nor spake nor wept, but as a dream
 Floats out of eyes awakening so past forth
 Ghost-like, a shadow of sorrow, from all sight
 To the inner court and chamber where she sits
 Dumb, till word reach her of this whole day's end. 1240

CHORUS.

More hapless born by far [Str.
 Beneath some wintrier star,
 One sits in stone among high Lydian snows,
 The tomb of her own woes:
 Yet happiest was once of the daughters of Gods, and divine by her
 sire and her lord,
 Ere her tongue was a shaft for the hearts of her sons, for the heart
 of her husband a sword.

For she, too great of mind, [Ant.
 Grown through her good things blind.
 With godless lips and fire of her own breath 1250
 Spake all her house to death;
 But thou, no mother unmothered, nor kindled in spirit with pride of
 thy seed,
 Thou hast hallowed thy child for a blameless blood-offering, and
 ransomed thy race by thy deed.

MESSENGER.

As flower is grafted on flower, so grief on grief
 Engrafted brings forth new blossoms of strange tears,
 Fresh buds and green fruits of an alien pain;
 For now flies rumour on a dark wide wing,
 Murmuring of woes more than ye knew, most like
 Hers whom ye hailed most wretched; for the twain
 Last left of all this house that wore last night
 A threefold crown of maidens, and to-day 1260
 Should let but one fall dead out of the wreath,
 If mad with grief we know not and sore love
 For this their sister, or with shame soul-stung
 To outlive her dead or doubt lest their lives too
 The Gods require to seal their country safe
 And bring the oracular doom to perfect end,
 Have slain themselves, and fallen at the altar-foot
 Lie by their own hands done to death; and fear
 Shakes all the city as winds a wintering tree,
 And as dead leaves are men's hearts blown about 1270
 And shrunken with ill thoughts, and flowerless hopes
 Parched up with presage, lest the piteous blood
 Shed of these maidens guiltless fall and fix
 On this land's forehead like a curse that cleaves
 To the unclean soul's inxpiate hunted head
 Whom his own crime tracks hotlier than a hound
 To life's veiled end unsleeping; and this hour
 Now blackens toward the battle that must close
 All gates of hope and fear on all their hearts
 Who tremble toward its issue, knowing not yet 1280
 If blood may buy them surety, cleanse or soil
 The helpless hands men raise and reach no stay.

CHORUS.

Ill thoughts breed fear, and fear ill words; but these
 The Gods turn from us that have kept their law.
 Let us lift up the strength of our hearts in song, [Str. 1.
 And our souls to the height of the darkling day.

If the wind in our eyes blow blood for spray,
 Be the spirit that breathes in us life more strong,
 Though the prow reel round and the helm point wrong,
 And sharp reefs whiten the shoreward way. 1290
 For the steersman time sits hidden astern, [Ant. 1.
 With dark hand plying the rudder of doom,
 And the surf-smoke under it flies like fume
 As the blast shears off and the oar-blades churn
 The foam of our lives that to death return,
 Blown back as they break to the gulping gloom.
 What cloud upon heaven is arisen, what shadow, what sound, [Str. 2.
 From the world beyond earth, from the night underground,
 That scatters from wings un beholden the weight of its darkness
 around?

For the sense of my spirit is broken, and blinded its eye, [Ant. 2. 1300
 As the soul of a sick man ready to die,
 With fear of the hour that is on me, with dread if an end be not nigh.
 O Earth, O Gods of the land, have ye heart now to see and to [Str. 3.
 hear
 What slays with terror mine eyesight and seals mine ear?
 O fountains of streams everlasting, are all ye not shrunk up and
 withered for fear?
 Lo, night is arisen on the noon, and her hounds are in quest by [Ant. 3.
 day,
 And the world is fulfilled of the noise of them crying for
 their prey,
 And the sun's self stricken in heaven, and cast out of his course as a
 blind man astray.

From east to west of the south sea-line [Str. 4. 1310
 Glitters the lightning of spears that shine;
 As a storm-cloud swoln that comes up from the skirts of the sea
 By the wind for helmsman to shoreward ferried,
 So black behind them the live storm serried
 Shakes earth with the tramp of its foot, and the terror to be.
 Shall the sea give death whom the land gave birth? [Ant. 4.
 O Earth, fair mother, O sweet live Earth,
 Hide us again in thy womb from the waves of it, help us or hide.
 As a sword is the heart of the God thy brother,
 But thine as the heart of a new-made mother,
 To deliver thy sons from his ravin, and rage of his tide. 1320
 O strong north wind, the pilot of cloud and rain, [Str. 5.
 For the gift we gave thee what gift hast thou given us again?
 O God dark-winged, deep-throated, a terror to forth-faring ships by
 night,
 What bride-song is this that is blown on the blast of thy breath?
 A gift but of grief to thy kinsmen, a song but of death,
 For the bride's folk weeping, and woe for her father, who finds thee
 against him in fight.

Turn back from us, turn thy battle, take heed of our cry; [Ant. 5.
 Let thy dread breath sound, and the waters of war be dry;
 Let thy strong wrath shatter the strength of our foemen, the sword
 of their strength and the shield;
 As vapours in heaven, or as waves or the wrecks of ships, 1330
 So break thou the ranks of their spears with the breath of
 thy lips,
 Till their corpses have covered and clothed as with raiment the face
 of the sword-ploughed field.
 O son of the rose-red morning, O God twin-born with the day, [Str. 6.
 O wind with the young sun waking, and winged for the same
 wide way,
 Give up not the house of thy kin to the host thou hast marshalled
 from northward for prey.
 From the cold of thy cradle in Thrace, from the mists of the [Ant. 6.
 fountains of night,
 From the bride-bed of dawn whence day leaps laughing, on fire
 for his flight,

Come down with their doom in thine hand on the ships thou hast
 brought up against us to fight.
 For now not in word but in deed is the harvest of spears begun, [Str. 7. 1340
 And its clamour outbellows the thunder, its lightning outlightens the
 sun.
 From the springs of the morning it thunders and lightens across and
 afar
 To the wave where the moonset ends and the fall of the last low
 star.

With a trampling of drenched red hoofs and an earthquake of men
that meet,
Strong war sets hand to the scythe, and the furrows take fire from
his feet.
Earth groans from her great rent heart, and the hollows of rocks are
afraid,
And the mountains are moved, and the valleys as waves in a storm-
wind swayed.
From the roots of the hills to the plain's dim verge and the dark loud
shore,
Air shudders with shrill spears crossing, and hurtling of wheels that
roar.

As the grinding of teeth in the jaws of a lion that foam as they gnash
Is the shriek of the axles that loosen, the shock of the poles that
crash.

1350

The dense manes darken and glitter, the mouths of the mad steeds
champ,
Their heads flash blind through the battle, and death's foot rings in
their tramp.

For a fourfold host upon earth and in heaven is arrayed for the
fight,

Clouds ruining in thunder and armies encountering as clouds in the
night.

Mine ears are amazed with the terror of trumpets, with darkness
mine eyes,

At the sound of the sea's host charging that deafens the roar of the
sky's.

White frontlet is dashed upon frontlet, and horse against horse reels
hurled,

And the gorge of the gulfs of the battle is wide for the spoil of the
world.

And the meadows are cumbered with shipwreck of chariots that
founder on land,

[*Ant. 7.*

And the horsemen are broken with breach as of breakers, and
scattered as sand.

1360

Through the roar and recoil of the charges that mingle their cries
and confound,

Like fire are the notes of the trumpets that flash through the
darkness of sound.

As the swing of the sea churned yellow that sways with the wind as
it swells

Is the lift and relapse of the wave of the chargers that clash with
their bells;

And the clang of the sharp shrill brass through the burst of the
wave as it shocks

Rings clean as the clear wind's cry through the roar of the surge on
the rocks:

And the heads of the steeds in their headgear of war, and their
corseleted breasts,

Gleam broad as the brows of the billows that brighten the storm
with their crests,

Gleam dread as their bosoms that heave to the shipwrecking wind
as they rise,

Filled full of the terror and thunder of water, that slays as it dies.

1370

So dire is the glare of their foreheads, so fearful the fire of their
breath,

And the light of their eyeballs enkindled so bright with the
lightnings of death;

And the foam of their mouths as the sea's when the jaws of its gulf
are as graves,

And the ridge of their necks as the wind-shaken mane on the ridges
of waves:

And their fetlocks afire as they rear drip thick with a dewfall of
blood

As the lips of the rearing breaker with froth of the manslaying flood.

And the whole plain reels and resounds as the fields of the sea by
night

When the stroke of the wind falls darkling, and death is the
seafarer's light.

But thou, fair beauty of heaven, dear face of the day nigh dead,
What horror hath hidden thy glory, what hand hath muffled thine
head?

[*Epode.*

1380

O sun, with what song shall we call thee, or ward off thy wrath
by what name,

[Pg 80]

[Pg 81]

[Pg 82]

With what prayer shall we seek to thee, soothe with what incense,
assuage with what gift,
If thy light be such only as lightens to deathward the seaman adrift
With the fire of his house for a beacon, that foemen have wasted
with flame?
Arise now, lift up thy light; give ear to us, put forth thine hand,
Reach toward us thy torch of deliverance, a lamp for the night of
the land.

[Pg 83]

Thine eye is the light of the living, no lamp for the dead;
O, lift up the light of thine eye on the dark of our dread.
Who hath blinded thee? who hath prevailed on thee? who hath
ensnared?

Who hath broken thy bow, and the shafts for thy battle
prepared? 1430

Have they found out a fetter to bind thee, a chain for thine arm that
was bared?

Be the name of thy conqueror set forth, and the might of thy master
declared.

O God, fair God of the morning, O glory of day,
What ails thee to cast from thy forehead its garland away?
To pluck from thy temples their chaplet enwreathed of the light,
And bind on the brows of thy godhead a frontlet of night?

Thou hast loosened the necks of thine horses, and goaded their
flanks with affright,

To the race of a course that we know not on ways that are hid from
our sight.

As a wind through the darkness the wheels of their chariot are
whirled,

[Pg 84]

And the light of its passage is night on the face of the world. 1400

And there falls from the wings of thy glory no help from on high,
But a shadow that smites us with fear and desire of thine eye.

For our hearts are as reeds that a wind on the water bows down and
goes by,

To behold not thy comfort in heaven that hath left us untimely to
die.

But what light is it now leaps forth on the land
Enkindling the waters and ways of the air

From thy forehead made bare,

From the gleam of thy bow-bearing hand?

Hast thou set not thy right hand again to the string,
With the back-bowed horns bent sharp for a spring

And the barbed shaft drawn,

Till the shrill steel sing and the tense nerve ring
That pierces the heart of the dark with dawn,

O huntsman, O king,

When the flame of thy face hath twilight in chase

As a hound hath a blood-mottled fawn?

He has glanced into golden the grey sea-strands,

And the clouds are shot through with the fires of his hands,

And the height of the hollow of heaven that he fills

As the heart of a strong man is quickened and thrills;

High over the folds of the low-lying lands,

On the shadowless hills

As a guard on his watchtower he stands.

All earth and all ocean, all depth and all height,

At the flash of an eyebeam are filled with his might:

The sea roars backward, the storm drops dumb,

And silence as dew on the fire of the fight

Falls kind in our ears as his face in our sight

With presage of peace to come.

Fresh hope in my heart from the ashes of dread

Leaps clear as a flame from the pyres of the dead,

That joy out of woe

May arise as the spring out of tempest and snow,

With the flower-feasted month in her hands rose-red

Borne soft as a babe from the bearing-bed.

Yet it knows not indeed if a God be friend,

If rescue may be from the rage of the sea,

Or the wrath of its lord have end.

For the season is full now of death or of birth,

To bring forth life, or an end of all;

And we know not if anything stand or fall

That is girdled about with the round sea's girth

As a town with its wall;

But thou that art highest of the Gods most high,

[Pg 85]

1420

[Pg 86]

1440

That art lord if we live, that art lord though we die,
Have heed of the tongues of our terror that cry
For a grace to the children of Earth.

ATHENIAN HERALD.

Sons of Athens, heavy-laden with the holy weight of years,
Be your hearts as young men's lightened of their loathlier load of
fears;
For the wave is sunk whose thunder shoreward shook the
shuddering lands,
And unbreached of warring waters Athens like a sea-rock stands.

1450

CHORUS.

Well thy word has cheered us, well thy face and glittering eyes, that
spake
Ere thy tongue spake words of comfort: yet no pause, behoves it
make
Till the whole good hap find utterance that the Gods have given at
length.

[Pg 87]

ATHENIAN HERALD.

All is this, that yet the city stands unforced by stranger strength.

CHORUS.

Sweeter sound might no mouth utter in man's ear than this thy
word.

ATHENIAN HERALD.

Feed thy soul then full of sweetness till some bitterer note be heard.

CHORUS.

None, if this ring sure, can mar the music fallen from heaven as
rain.

ATHENIAN HERALD.

If no fire of sun or star untimely sear the tender grain.

CHORUS.

Fresh the dewfall of thy tidings on our hopes reflowering lies.

1460

[Pg 88]

ATHENIAN HERALD.

Till a joyless shower and fruitless blight them, raining from thine
eyes.

CHORUS.

Bitter springs have barren issues; these bedew grief's arid sands.

ATHENIAN HERALD.

Such thank-offerings ask such altars as expect thy suppliant hands.

CHORUS.

Tears for triumph, wail for welfare, what strange godhead's shrine
requires?

ATHENIAN HERALD.

Death's or victory's be it, a funeral torch feeds all its festal fires.

CHORUS.

Like a star should burn the beacon flaming from our city's head.

[Pg 89]

ATHENIAN HERALD.

Like a balefire should the flame go up that says the king is dead.

CHORUS.

Out of heaven, a wild-haired meteor, shoots this new sign,
scattering fear.

ATHENIAN HERALD.

Yea, the word has wings of fire that hovered, loth to burn thine ear.

CHORUS.

From thy lips it leapt forth loosened on a shrill and shadowy wing.

1470

ATHENIAN HERALD.

Long they faltered, fain to hide it deep as death that hides the king.

CHORUS.

Dead with him blind hope lies blasted by the lightning of one sword.

[Pg 90]

ATHENIAN HERALD.

On thy tongue truth wars with error; no man's edge hath touched
thy lord.

CHORUS.

False was thine then, jangling menace like a war-steed's brow-
bound bell?

ATHENIAN HERALD.

False it rang not joy nor sorrow; but by no man's hand he fell.

CHORUS.

Vainly then good news and evil through so faint a trumpet spake.

ATHENIAN HERALD.

All too long thy soul yet labours, as who sleeping fain would wake,
Waking, fain would fall on sleep again; the woe thou knowest not
yet,
When thou knowest, shall make thy memory thirst and hunger to
forget.

[Pg 91]

CHORUS.

Long my heart has hearkened, hanging on thy clamorous ominous
cry,

1480

Fain yet fearful of the knowledge whence it looks to live or die;
Now to take the perfect presage of thy dark and sidelong flight
Comes a surer soothsayer sorrowing, sable-stoled as birds of night.

PRAXITHEA.

Man, what thy mother bare thee born to say
Speak; for no word yet wavering on thy lip
Can wound me worse than thought forestalls or fear.

ATHENIAN HERALD.

I have no will to weave too fine or far,

O queen, the weft of sweet with bitter speech,
Bright words with darkling; but the brief truth shown
Shall plead my pardon for a lingering tongue, 1490
Loth yet to strike hope through the heart and slay.
The sun's light still was lordly housed in heaven
When the twain fronts of war encountering smote
First fire out of the battle; but not long
Had the fresh wave of windy fight begun
Heaving, and all the surge of swords to sway,
When timeless night laid hold of heaven, and took
With its great gorge the noon as in a gulf,
Strangled; and thicker than the shrill-winged shafts
Flew the fleet lightnings, held in chase through heaven 1500
By headlong heat of thunders on their trail
Loosed as on quest of quarry; that our host
Smit with sick presage of some wrathful God
Quailed, but the foe as from one iron throat
With one great sheer sole thousand-throated cry
Shook earth, heart-staggered from their shout, and clove
The eyeless hollow of heaven; and breached therewith
As with an onset of strength-shattering sound
The rent vault of the roaring noon of night
From her throned seat of usurpation rang 1510
Reverberate answer; such response there pealed
As though the tide's charge of a storming sea
Had burst the sky's wall, and made broad a breach
In the ambient girth and bastion flanked with stars
Guarding the fortress of the Gods, and all
Crashed now together on ruin; and through that cry
And higher above it ceasing one man's note
Tore its way like a trumpet: *Charge, make end,
Charge, halt not, strike, rend up their strength by the roots,
Strike, break them, make your birthright's promise sure,
Show your hearts hardier than the fenced land breeds
And souls breathed in you from no spirit of earth,
Sons of the sea's waves;* and all ears that heard
Rang with that fiery cry, that the fine air
Thereat was fired, and kindling filled the plain
Full of that fierce and trumpet-quickening breath
That spake the clarions silent; no glad song
For folk to hear that wist how dire a God
Begot this peril to them, what strong race
Fathered the sea-born tongue that sang them death, 1530
Threatening; so raged through the red foam of fight
Poseidon's son Eumolpus; and the war
Quailed round him coming, and our side bore back,
As a stream thwarted by the wind and sea
That meet it midway mouth to mouth, and beat
The flood back of its issue; but the king
Shouted against them, crying, *O Father-God,
Source of the God my father, from thine hand
Send me what end seems good now in thy sight,
But death from mine to this man;* and the word
Quick on his lips yet like a blast of fire 1540
Blew them together; and round its lords that met
Paused all the reeling battle; two main waves
Meeting, one hurled sheer from the sea-wall back
That shocks it sideways, one right in from sea
Charging, that full in face takes at one blow
That whole recoil and ruin, with less fear
Startle men's eyes late shipwrecked; for a breath
Crest fronting crest hung, wave to wave rose poised,
Then clashed, breaker to breaker; cloud with cloud 1550
In heaven, chariot with chariot closed on earth,
One fourfold flash and thunder; yet a breath,
And with the king's spear through his red heart's root
Driven, like a rock split from its hill-side, fell
Hurled under his own horsehoofs dead on earth
The sea-beast that made war on earth from sea,
Dumb, with no shrill note left of storming song,
Eumolpus; and his whole host with one stroke
Spear-stricken through its dense deep iron heart
Fell hurtling from us, and in fierce recoil 1560
Drew seaward as with one wide wail of waves,
Resorbed with reluctance; such a groan

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Rose from the fluctuant refluece of its ranks,
 Sucked sullen back and strengthless; but scarce yet
 The steeds had sprung and wheels had bruised their lord
 Fallen, when from highest height of the sundering heaven
 The Father for his brother's son's sake slain
 Sent a sheer shaft of lightning writhen and smote
 Right on his son's son's forehead, that unhelmed
 Shone like the star that shines down storm, and gave 1570
 Light to men's eyes that saw thy lord their king
 Stand and take breath from battle; then too soon
 Saw sink down as a sunset in sea-mist
 The high bright head that here in van of the earth
 Rose like a headland, and through storm and night
 Took all the sea's wrath on it; and now dead
 They bring thee back by war-forsaken ways
 The strength called once thy husband, the great guard
 That was of all men, stay of all men's lives,
 They bear him slain of no man but a God, 1580
 Godlike; and toward him dead the city's gates
 Fling their arms open mother-like, through him
 Saved; and the whole clear land is purged of war.
 What wilt thou say now of this weal and woe?

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PRAXITHEA.

I praise the Gods for Athens. O sweet Earth,
 Mother, what joy thy soul has of thy son,
 Thy life of my dead lord, mine own soul knows
 That knows thee godlike; and what grief should mine,
 What sorrow should my heart have, who behold 1590
 Thee made so heavenlike happy? This alone
 I only of all these blessed, all thy kind,
 Crave this for blessing to me, that in theirs
 Have but a part thus bitter; give me too
 Death, and the sight of eyes that meet not mine.
 And thee too from no godless heart or tongue
 Reproachful, thee too by thy living name,
 Father divine, merciful God, I call,
 Spring of my life-springs, fountain of my stream,
 Pure and poured forth to one great end with thine,
 Sweet head sublime of triumph and these tears, 1600
 Cephisus, if thou seest as gladly shed
 Thy blood in mine as thine own waves are given
 To do this great land good, to give for love
 The same lips drink and comfort the same hearts,
 Do thou then, O my father, white-souled God,
 To thy most pure earth-hallowing heart eterne
 Take what thou gavest to be given for these,
 Take thy child to thee; for her time is full,
 For all she hath borne she hath given, seen all she had
 Flow from her, from her eyes and breasts and hands 1610
 Flow forth to feed this people; but be thou,
 Dear God and gracious to all souls alive,
 Good to thine own seed also; let me sleep,
 Father; my sleepless darkling day is done,
 My day of life like night, but slumberless:
 For all my fresh fair springs, and his that ran
 In one stream's bed with mine, are all run out
 Into the deep of death. The Gods have saved
 Athens; my blood has bought her at their hand,
 And ye sit safe; be glorious and be glad 1620
 As now for all time always, countrymen,
 And love my dead for ever; but me, me,
 What shall man give for these so good as death?

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CHORUS.

From the cup of my heart I pour through my lips along [Str. 1.
 The mingled wine of a joyful and sorrowful song;
 Wine sweeter than honey and bitterer than blood that is poured
 From the chalice of gold, from the point of the two-edged sword.
 For the city redeemed should joy flow forth as a flood,
 And a dirge make moan for the city polluted with blood.
 Great praise should the Gods have surely, my country, of thee, [Ant. 1. 1630

Were thy brow but as white as of old for thy sons to see,
 Were thy hands as bloodless, as blameless thy cheek divine;
 But a stain on it stands of the life-blood offered for thine.
 What thanks shall we give that are mixed not and marred with
 dread
 For the price that has ransomed thine own with thine own child's
 head?

For a taint there cleaves to the people redeemed with blood, [Str. 2.
 And a plague to the blood-red hand.

The rain shall not cleanse it, the dew nor the sacred flood
 That blesses the glad live land.

In the darkness of earth beneath, in the world without sun, [Ant. 2. 1640

The shadows of past things reign;
 And a cry goes up from the ghost of an ill deed done,
 And a curse for a virgin slain.

ATHENA.

Hear, men that mourn, and woman without mate,
 Hearken; ye sick of soul with fear, and thou
 Dumb-stricken for thy children; hear ye too,
 Earth, and the glory of heaven, and winds of the air,
 And the most holy heart of the deep sea,
 Late wroth, now full of quiet; hear thou, sun,
 Rolled round with the upper fire of rolling heaven
 And all the stars returning; hills and streams,
 Springs and fresh fountains, day that seest these deeds.
 Night that shalt hide not; and thou child of mine,
 Child of a maiden, by a maid redeemed,
 Blood-guiltless, though bought back with innocent blood,
 City mine own; I Pallas bring thee word,
 I virgin daughter of the most high God

Give all you charge and lay command on all
 The word I bring be wasted not; for this
 The Gods have stablished and his soul hath sworn, 1660

That time nor earth nor changing sons of man
 Nor waves of generations, nor the winds
 Of ages risen and fallen that steer their tides
 Through light and dark of birth and lovelier death
 From storm toward haven inviolable, shall see
 So great a light alive beneath the sun

As the awless eye of Athens; all fame else
 Shall be to her fame as a shadow in sleep
 To this wide noon at waking; men most praised
 In lands most happy for their children found 1670

Shall hold as highest of honours given of God
 To be but likened to the least of thine,
 Thy least of all, my city; thine shall be

The crown of all songs sung, of all deeds done
 Thine the full flower for all time; in thine hand
 Shall time be like a sceptre, and thine head
 Wear worship for a garland; nor one leaf
 Shall change or winter cast out of thy crown
 Till all flowers wither in the world; thine eyes
 Shall first in man's flash lightning liberty, 1680

Thy tongue shall first say freedom; thy first hand
 Shall loose the thunder terror as a hound
 To hunt from sunset to the springs of the sun
 Kings that rose up out of the populous east
 To make their quarry of thee, and shall strew
 With multitudinous limbs of myriad herds
 The foodless pastures of the sea, and make
 With wrecks immeasurable and unsummed defeat
 One ruin of all their many-folded flocks

Ill shepherded from Asia; by thy side 1690

Shall fight thy son the north wind, and the sea
 That was thine enemy shall be sworn thy friend
 And hand be struck in hand of his and thine
 To hold faith fast for aye; with thee, though each
 Make war on other, wind and sea shall keep
 Peace, and take truce as brethren for thy sake
 Leagued with one spirit and single-hearted strength
 To break thy foes in pieces, who shall meet
 The wind's whole soul and might of the main sea

Full in their face of battle, and become 1700
 A laughter to thee; like a shower of leaves
 Shall their long galleys rank by staggering rank
 Be dashed adrift on ruin, and in thy sight
 The sea deride them, and that lord of the air
 Who took by violent hand thy child to wife
 With his loud lips bemock them, by his breath
 Swept out of sight of being; so great a grace
 Shall this day give thee, that makes one in heart
 With mine the deep sea's godhead, and his son
 With him that was thine helmsman, king with king, 1710
 Dead man with dead; such only names as these
 Shalt thou call royal, take none else or less
 To hold of men in honour; but with me
 Shall these be worshipped as one God, and mix
 With mine the might of their mysterious names
 In one same shrine served singly, thence to keep
 Perpetual guard on Athens; time and change,
 Masters and lords of all men, shall be made
 To thee that knowest no master and no lord
 Servants; the days that lighten heaven and nights 1720
 That darken shall be ministers of thine
 To attend upon thy glory, the great years
 As light-engraven letters of thy name
 Writ by the sun's hand on the front of the earth
 For world-beholden witness; such a gift
 For one fair chaplet of three lives enwreathed
 To hang for ever from thy storied shrine,
 And this thy steersman fallen with tiller in hand
 To stand for ever at thy ship's helm seen,
 Shall he that bade their threefold flower be shorn 1730
 And laid him low that planted, give thee back
 In sign of sweet land reconciled with sea
 And heavenlike earth with heaven; such promise-pledge
 I daughter without mother born of God
 To the most woful mother born of man
 Plight for continual comfort. Hail, and live
 Beyond all human hap of mortal doom
 Happy; for so my sire hath sworn and I.

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PRAXITHEA.

O queen Athena, from a heart made whole
 Take as thou givest us blessing; never tear 1740
 Shall stain for shame nor groan untune the song
 That as a bird shall spread and fold its wings
 Here in thy praise for ever, and fulfil
 The whole world's crowning city crowned with thee
 As the sun's eye fulfils and crowns with sight
 The circling crown of heaven. There is no grief
 Great as the joy to be made one in will
 With him that is the heart and rule of life
 And thee, God born of God; thy name is ours,
 And thy large grace more great than our desire. 1750

CHORUS.

From the depth of the springs of my spirit a fountain is poured of
 thanksgiving,
 My country, my mother, for thee,
 That thy dead for their death shall have life in thy sight and a name
 everliving
 At heart of thy people to be.
 In the darkness of change on the waters of time they shall turn from
 afar
 To the beam of this dawn for a beacon, the light of these pyres for a
 star.
 They shall see thee who love and take comfort, who hate thee shall
 see and take warning,
 Our mother that makest us free;
 And the sons of thine earth shall have help of the waves that made
 war on their morning,
 And friendship and fame of the sea. 1760

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NOTES.

[v. 497-503](#). Cf. Eurip. Fr. *Erechtheus*, 46-49.

[v. 522-530](#). Id. 32-40.

[v. 778](#). Æsch. *Supp.* 524-6.

[v. 983](#). Soph. Fr. (*Oreithyia*) 655.

ὕπέρ τε πόντον πάντ' ἐπ' ἔσχατα χθονὸς
νυκτός τε πηγὰς οὐρανοῦ τ' ἀναπτυχὰς,
φοίβου παλαιὸν κῆπον.

[v. 1163](#). Æsch. Fr. (*Danaides*) 38.

ὄμβρος δ' ἀπ' εὐνάεντος οὐρανοῦ πεσὼν
ἔκυσε γαῖαν.

[v. 1168](#). Id.

δενδρῶτις ὥρα δ' ἐκ νοτίζοντος γάμου
τέλειός ἐστι

[v. 1749](#). '*God born of God*.' Soph. *Ant.* 834. θεός τοι καὶ θεογεννής.

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