

I leave this light. Hear thou my vows, bright sun,
 And, though a slave's death be a little thing,
 Send thou the avenging hand with full requital,
 To pay my murderers back, as they have paid.
 Alas! the fates of men! their brightest bloom
 A shadow blights; and, in their evil day,
 An oozy sponge blots out their fleeting prints,
 And they are seen no more. From bad to worse
 Our changes run, and with the worst we end.⁸⁴

[Exit.]

Chorus. Men crave increase of riches ever
 With insatiate craving. Never
 From the finger-pointed halls
 Of envied wealth their owner calls,
 "Enter no more! I have enough!"
 This man the gods with honour crowned;
 He hath levelled with the ground
 Priam's city, and in triumph
 Glorious home returns;
 But if doomed the fine to pay
 Of ancient guilt, and death with death
 To guerdon in the end,
 Who of mortals will not pray,⁸⁵
 From high-perched Fortune's favour far,
 A blameless life to spend.

Aga. [From within.] O I am struck! struck with a mortal blow!

Chorus. Hush! what painful voice is speaking there of strokes
 and mortal blows?

Aga. O struck again! struck with a mortal blow!

Chorus. 'Tis the king that groans; the work, the bloody work,
 I fear, is doing.

Weave we counsel now together, and concert a sure design.⁸⁶

1st Chorus. I give my voice to lift the loud alarm,
 And rouse the city to besiege the doors.

2nd Chorus. Rather forthwith go in ourselves, and prove
 The murderer with the freshly-dripping blade.

3rd Chorus. I add my pebble to thine. It is not well
 That we delay. Fate hangs upon the moment.

4th Chorus. The event is plain, with this prelude blood
 They hang out signs of tyranny to Argos.

5th Chorus. Then why stay we? Procrastination they
 Tramp underfoot; they sleep not with their hands.

6th Chorus. Not so. When all is dark, shall we unwisely
 Rush blindfold on an unconsulted deed?

7th Chorus. Thou speakest well. If he indeed be dead,
Our words are vain to bring him back from Hades.

8th Chorus. Shall we submit to drag a weary life
Beneath the shameless tyrants of this house?

9th Chorus. Unbearable! and better far to die!
Death is a gentler lord than tyranny.

10th Chorus. First ask we this, if to have heard a groan
Gives a sure augury that the man is dead.

11th Chorus. Wisdom requires to probe the matter well:
To guess is one thing, and to know another.

12th Chorus. So wisely spoken.⁸⁷ With full-voiced assent
Inquire we first how Agamemnon fares.

[*The scene opens from behind, and discovers CLYTEMNESTRA
standing over the dead bodies of AGAMEMNON and
CASSANDRA.*]

Clytem. I spoke to you before; and what I spoke
Suited the time; nor shames me now to speak
Mine own refutation. For how shall we entrap
Our foe, our seeming friend, in scapeless ruin,
Save that we fence him round with nets too high
For his o'erleaping? What I did, I did
Not with a random inconsiderate blow,
But from old Hate, and with maturing Time.
Here, where I struck, I take my rooted stand,
Upon the finished deed:⁸⁸ the blow so given,
And with wise forethought so by me devised,
That flight was hopeless, and to ward it vain.
With many-folding net, as fish are caught,
I drew the lines about him, mantled round
With bountiful destruction; twice I struck him,
And twice he groaning fell with limbs diffused
Upon the ground; and as he fell, I gave
The third blow, sealing him a votive gift
To gloomy Hades, saviour of the dead.
And thus he spouted forth his angry soul,
Bubbling a bitter stream of frothy slaughter,
And with the dark drops of the gory dew
Bedashed me; I delighted nothing less
Than doth the flowery calix, full surcharged
With fruity promise, when Jove's welkin down
Distils the rainy blessing. Men of Argos,
Rejoice with me in this, or, if ye will not,

Then do I boast alone. If e'er 'twas meet
To pour libations to the dead, he hath them
In justest measure. By most righteous doom,
Who drugged the cup with curses to the brim,
Himself hath drunk damnation to the dregs.

Chorus. Thou art a bold-mouthed woman. Much we marvel
To hear thee boast thy husband's murder thus.

Clytem. Ye tempt me as a woman, weak, unschooled.
But what I say, ye know, or ought to know,
I say with fearless heart. Your praise or blame
Is one to me. Here Agamemnon lies,
My husband, dead, the work of this right hand—
The hand of a true workman. Thus it stands.

STROPHE.

Chorus. Woman! what food on wide earth growing
Hast thou eaten of? What draught
From the briny ocean quaffed,
That for such deed the popular breath
Of Argos should with curses crown thee,
As a victim crowned for death?
Thou hast cast off: thou hast cut off
Thine own husband:⁸⁹ thou shalt be
From the city of the free
Thyself a cast-off: justly hated
With staunch hatred unabated.

Clytem. My sentence thou hast spoken; shameful flight,
The citizens' hate, the people's vengeful curse:
For him thou hast no curse, the bloody man
Who, when the fleecy flocks innumerable pastured,
Passed the brute by, and sacrificed my child,
My best-beloved, fruit of my throes, to lull
The Thracian blasts asleep. Why did thy wrath,
In righteous guerdon of this foulest crime,
Not chase this man from Greece? A greedy ear
And a harsh tongue thou hast for me alone.
But mark my words,⁹⁰ threats I repay with threats;
If that thou canst subdue me in fair fight,
Subdue me; but if Jove for me decide,
Thou shalt be wise, when wisdom comes too late.

ANTISTROPHE.

Chorus. Thou art high and haughty-hearted,
And from lofty thoughts within thee

Mighty words are brimming o'er :
 For thy sober sense is madded
 With the purple-dripping gore ;
 And thine eyes with fatness swell⁹¹
 From bloody feasts : but mark me well,
 Time shall come, avenging Time,
 And hunt thee out, and track thy crime :
 Then thou, when friends are far, shalt know
 Stroke for stroke, and blow for blow.

Clytem. Hear thou this oath, that seals my cause with right :
 By sacred Justice, perfecting revenge,
 By Até, and the Erinnyes of my child,
 To whom I slew this man, I shall not tread
 The threshold of pale Fear, the while doth live
 Ægisthus, now, as he hath been, my friend,
 Stirring the flame that blazes on my hearth,
 My shield of strong assurance. For the slain,
 Here lieth he that wronged a much-wronged woman,
 Sweet honey-lord of Trojan Chryseids.
 And for this spear-won maid, this prophetess,
 This wise diviner, well-beloved bed-fellow,
 And trusty messmate of great Agamemnon,
 She shares his fate, paying with him the fee
 Of her own sin, and like a swan hath sung
 Her mortal song beside him. She hath been
 Rare seasoning added to my banquet rare.

STROPHE I.⁹²

Chorus. O would some stroke of Fate—no dull disease
 Life's strings slow-rending,
 No bed-bound pain—might bring, my smart to soothe,
 The sleep unending !
 For he, my gracious lord, my guide, is gone,
 Beyond recalling ;
 Slain for a woman's cause, and by the hands
 Of woman falling.

STROPHE II.

O Helen ! Helen ! phrenzied Helen,
 Many hearts of thee are telling !
 Damned destruction thou hast done,
 There where thousands fell for one
 'Neath the walls of Troy

ANTISTROPHE II.

Bloomed from thee the blossom gory
Of famous Agamemnon's glory ;
Thou hast roused the slumbering strife,
From age to age, with eager knife,
Watching to destroy.

STROPHE III.

Clytem. Death invoke not to relieve thee
From the ills that vainly grieve thee !
Nor, with ire indignant swelling,
Blame the many-murdering Helen !
Damned destruction did she none,
There, where thousands fell for one,
'Neath the walls of Troy.

ANTISTROPHE I.

O god that o'er the doomed Atridan halls⁹³
With might prevailest,
Weak woman's breast to do thy headlong will
With murder mailest !
O'er his dead body, like a boding raven,
Thou tak'st thy station,
Piercing my marrow with thy savage hymn
Of exultation.

ANTISTROPHE III.

Clytem. Nay, but now thou speakest wisely ;
This thrice-potent god precisely
Works our woe, and weaves our sorrow.
He with madness stings the marrow,
And with greed that thirsts for blood ;
Ere to-day's is dry, the flood
Flows afresh to-morrow.

STROPHE IV.

Chorus. Him, even him, this terrible god, to bear
These walls are fated ;
From age to age he worketh wildly there
With wrath unsated.
Not without Jove, Jove cause and end of all,
Nor working vainly.
Comes no event but with high sway the gods
Have ruled it plainly.

Agamemnon

STROPHE V.

Chorus. O the king! the king! for thee
Tears in vain my cheek shall furrow,
Words in vain shall voice my sorrow!
As in a spider's web thou liest;
Godless meshes spread for thee,
An unworthy death thou diest!

STROPHE VI.

Chorus. There, even there thou liest, woe's me, outstretched
On couch inglorious;
O'er thee the knife prevailed, keen-edged, by damned
Deceit victorious.

STROPHE VII.

Clytem. Nay, be wise, and understand;
Say not Agamemnon's wife
Wielded in this human hand
The fateful knife.
But a god, my spirit's master,
The unrelenting old Alastor⁹⁴
Chose this wife, his incarnation,
To avenge the desecration
Of foul-feasting Atreus; he
Gave, to work his wrath's completion
To the babes this grown addition.

ANTISTROPHE IV.

Chorus. Thy crime is plain: bear thou what thou hast merited,
Guilt's heavy lading;
But that fell Spirit, from sire to son inherited,
Perchance was aiding.
Black-mantled Mars through consanguineous gore
Borne onwards blindly,
Old horrors to atone, fresh Murder's store
Upheaps unkindly.

ANTISTROPHE V.

O the king! the king! for thee
Tears in vain my cheek shall furrow,
Words in vain shall voice my sorrow!
As in a spider's web thou liest;
Godless meshes spread for thee,
An unworthy death thou diest.

ANTISTROPHE VI.

Chorus. There, even there, thou liest, woe's me, outstretched
 On couch inglorious !
 O'er thee the knife prevailed, keen-edged, by damned
 Deceit victorious.

ANTISTROPHE VII.

Clytem. Say not thou that he did die
 By unworthy death inglorious ;
 Erst himself prevailed by damned
 Deceit victorious,
 Then when he killed the deep-lamented
 Iphigenia, nor relented
 When for my body's fruit with weeping
 I besought him. Springs his reaping
 From what seed he sowed. Not he
 In Hades housed shall boast to-day ;
 So slain by steel as he did slay.

STROPHE VIII.

Chorus. I'm tossed with doubt, on no sure counsel grounded,
 With fear confounded.
 No drizzling drops, a red ensanguined shower,
 Upon the crazy house, that was my tower,
 Comes wildly sweeping,
 On a new whetstone whets her blade the Fate
 With eyes unweeping.

STROPHE IX.

Chorus. O Earth, O Earth, would thou hadst yawned,
 And in thy black pit whelmed me wholly,
 Ere I had seen my dear-loved lord
 In the silver bath thus bedded lowly !
 Who will bury him ? and for him
 With salt tears what eyes shall brim ?
 Wilt thou do it—thou, the wife
 That slew thy husband with the knife ?
 Wilt thou dare, with blushless face,
 Thus to offer a graceless grace ?
 With false show of pious moaning,
 Thine own damned deed atoning ?

STROPHE X.

Chorus. What voice the praises of the godlike man
 Shall publish clearly ?

And o'er his tomb the tear from eyelids wan
Shall drop sincerely?

STROPHE XI.

Clytem. In vain thy doubtful heart is tried
With many sorrows. By my hand
Falling he fell, and dying died.⁹⁵
I too will bury him ; but no train
Of mourning men for him shall plain
In our Argive streets ; but rather
In the land of sunless cheer
She shall be his convoy ; she,
Iphigenía, his daughter dear.
By the stream of woes* swift-flowing,
Round his neck her white arms throwing,
She shall meet her gentle father,
And greet him with a kiss.

ANTISTROPHE VIII.

Chorus. Crime quitting crime, and which the more profanely
Were questioned vainly ;
'Tis robber robbed, and slayer slain, for, though
Oft-times it lag, with measured blow for blow
Vengeance prevaieth,
While great Jove lives.⁹⁶ Who breaks the close-linked woe
Which Heaven entaileth?

ANTISTROPHE IX.

Chorus. O Earth, O Earth, would thou hadst yawned,
And in thy black pit whelmed me wholly,
Ere I had seen my dear-loved lord
In the silver bath thus bedded lowly !
Who will bury him ? and for him
With salt tears, what eyes shall brim ?
Wilt thou do it ? thou, the wife
That killed thy husband with the knife ?
Wilt thou dare, with blushless face,
Thus to offer a graceless grace ?
With false show of pious moaning
Thine own damned deed atoning ?

* πόρθμευμ ἀχέων, whence Acheron, so familiar to English ears ; as in the same way *Cocytus*, from κωκυω, to avail, and the other infernal streams, with a like appropriateness.

ANTISTROPHE X.

Chorus. What voice the praises of the god-like man
 Shall publish clearly?
 And o'er his tomb the tear from eyelids wan
 Shall drop sincerely?

ANTISTROPHE XI.

Clytem. Cease thy cries. Where Heaven entaileth,
 Thyself didst say, woe there prevaieth.
 But for this tide enough hath been
 Of bloody work. My score is clean.
 Now to the ancient stern Alastor,
 That crowns the Pleisthenids* with disaster,
 I vow, having reaped his crop of woe
 From me, to others let him go,
 And hold with them his bloody bridal,
 Of horrid murders suicidal!
 Myself, my little store amassed
 Shall freely use, while it may last,
 From murdering madness healed.

Enter ÆGISTHUS.

Ægis. O blessed light! O happy day proclaiming
 The justice of the gods! Now may I say
 The Olympians look from heaven sublime, to note
 Our woes, and right our wrongs, seeing as I see
 In the close meshes of the Erinnyes tangled
 This man—sweet sight to see!—prostrate before me,
 Having paid the forfeit of his father's crime.
 For Atreus, ruler of this Argive land,
 This dead man's father—to be plain—contending
 About the mastery, banished from the city
 Thyestes, his own brother and my father.
 In suppliant guise back to his hearth again
 The unhappy prince returned, content if he
 Might tread his native acres, not besprent
 With his own blood. Him with a formal show
 Of hospitality—not love—received
 The father of this dead, the godless Atreus;
 And to my father for the savoury use
 Of festive viands gave his children's flesh
 To feed on; in a separate dish concealed

* The house of Atreus, so called from Pleisthenes, one of the ancestry of Agamemnon.

Were legs and arms, and the fingers' pointed tips,⁹⁷
 Broke from the body. These my father saw not ;
 But what remained, the undistinguished flesh,
 He with unwitting greed devoured, and ate
 A curse to Argos. Soon as known, his heart
 Disowned the unholy feast, and with a groan
 Back-falling he disgorged it. Then he vowed
 Dark doom to the Pelopidae, and woes
 Intolerable, while with his heel he spurned⁹⁸
 The supper, and thus voiced the righteous curse :
 THUS PERISH ALL THE RACE OF PLEISTHENES !
 See here the cause why Agamemnon died,
 And why his death most righteous was devised
 By me ; for I, Thyestes' thirteenth son,
 While yet a swaddled babe, was driven away
 To houseless exile with my hapless sire.
 But me avenging Justice nursed, and taught me,
 Safer by distance, with invisible hand
 To reach this man, and weave the brooded plot,
 That worked his sure destruction. Now 'tis done ;
 And gladly might I die, beholding him,
 There as he lies where Vengeance trapped his crimes.

Chorus. Ægisthus, that thou wantonest in the woe
 Worked by thy crime I praise not. Thou alone
 Didst slay this man, and planned the piteous slaughter
 With willing heart. So say'st thou : but mark well,
 Justice upon thy head the stony curse
 Shall bring avoidless from the people's hand.

Ægis. How ? Thou who sittest on the neathmost bench,
 Speak'st thus to me who ply the upper oar ?
 'Tis a hard task to teach an old man wisdom,
 And dullness at thy years is doubly dull ;
 But chains and hunger's pangs sure leeches are,
 And no diviner vends more potent balms
 To drug a doting wit.⁹⁹ Have eyes, and see,
 Kick not against the pricks, nor vainly beat
 Thy head on rocks.

Chorus [to CLYTEMNESTRA]. Woman, how couldst thou dare,
 On thine own hearth to plot thy husband's death ;
 First having shamed his bed, to welcome him
 With murder from the wars ?

Ægis. Speak on ; each word shall be a fount of tears,
 I'll make thy tongue old Orpheus' opposite.

He with sweet sounds led wild beasts where he would,
Thou where thou wilt not shalt be led, confounding
The woods with baby cries. Thou barkest now,
But, being bound, the old man shall be tame.

Chorus. A comely king wert thou to rule the Argives!
Whose wit had wickedness to plan the deed,
But failed the nerve in thy weak hand to do it.

Ægis. 'Twas wisely schemed with woman's cunning wit
To snare him. I, from ancient date his foe,
Stood in most just suspicion. Now, 'tis done;
And I, succeeding to his wealth, shall know
To hold the reins full tightly. Who rebels
Shall not with corn be fattened for my traces,
But, stiffly haltered, he shall lodge secure
In darkness, with starvation for his mate.

Chorus. Hear me yet once. Why did thy dastard hand
Shrink from the deed? But now his wife hath done it,
Tainting this land with murder most abhorred,
Polluting Argive gods. But still Orestes
Looks on the light; him favouring Fortune shall
Nerve with one stroke to smite this guilty pair.

Ægis. Nay, if thou for brawls art eager, and for battle, thou
shalt know—

Chorus. Ho! my gallant co-mates, rouse ye!¹⁰⁰ 'tis an earnest
business now!

Quick, each hand with sure embracement hold the dagger by
the hilt!

Ægis. I can also hold a hilted dagger—not afraid to die.

Chorus. DIE!—we catch the word thou droppest; lucky chance,
if thou wert dead!

Clytem. Not so, best-beloved! there needeth no enlargement to
our ills.

We have reaped a liberal harvest, gleaned a crop of fruitful
woes,

Gained a loss in brimming measure: blood's been shed
enough to-day.

Peacefully, ye hoary Elders, enter now your destined homes,
Ere mischance o'ertake you, deeming WHAT IS DONE HATH
SO BEEN DONE,

AS IT BEHOVED TO BE, contented if the dread god add no
more,

He that now the house of Pelops smiteth in his anger dire.
Thus a woman's word doth warn ye, if that ye have wit to hear.

Ægis. Babbling fools are they; and I forsooth must meekly
bear the shower,
Flowers of contumely cast from doting drivellers, tempting
fate!

O! if length of hoary winters brought discretion, ye should
know

Where the power is; wisely subject you the weak to me the
strong.

Chorus. Ill beseems our Argive mettle to court a coward on a
throne.

Ægis. Shielded now, be brave with words; my deeds expect
some future day.

Chorus. Ere that day belike some god shall bring Orestes to his
home.

Ægis. Feed, for thou hast nothing better, thou and he, on
empty hope.

Chorus. Glut thy soul, a lusty sinner, with sin's fatness, while
thou may'st.

Ægis. Thou shalt pay the forfeit, greybeard, of thy braggart
tongue anon.

Chorus. Oh, the cock beside its partlet now may crow right
valiantly!

Clytem. Heed not thou these brainless barkings. While to folly
folly calls,

Thou and I with wise command shall surely sway these
Argive halls.

CHOEPHORÆ
OR, THE LIBATION-BEARERS
A LYRICO-DRAMATIC SPECTACLE

Ἐκ γὰρ Ὀρέσταο τίσις ἔσσεται Ἀτρείδαο
Ὅπποτ' ἄν' ἠβήσῃ τε καὶ ἥς ἰμείρεται αἰης.

HOMER.

Think upon our father,
Give the sword scope—think what a man was he.

LANDOR.

PERSONS

ORESTES, Son of Agamemnon.

PYLADES, Friend of Orestes.

CHORUS OF CAPTIVE WOMEN.

ELECTRA, Sister of Orestes.

NURSE OF ORESTES.

CLYTEMNESTRA, Mother of Orestes.

ÆGISTHUS.

SERVANT.

*SCENE as in the preceding piece. The Tomb of Agamemnon in the
centre of the Stage.*

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

THE right of the avenger of blood, so familiar to us from its prominence in the Mosaic Law (see Numbers, chap. 35), is a moral phenomenon which belongs to a savage or semi-civilized state of society in all times and places ; and appears everywhere with the most distinct outline in the rich records of the early age of Greece, which we possess in the Homeric poems. No doubt, the most glowing intensity, and the passionate exaggeration of the feeling, from which this right springs, is found only among the hot children of the Arabian desert ;* and in no point of his various enactments were the wisdom and the humanity of their great Jewish lawgiver more conspicuous than in the appointment of sacerdotal cities of refuge, which set certain intelligible bounds of space and time to the otherwise interminable prosecution of family feuds, and the gratification of private revenge. But the great traits of the system of private revenge for manslaughter, stand out clearly in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* ; and the whole of the ancient heroic mythology of Greece is full of adventures and strange chances that grew out of this germ. Out of many, I shall mention only the following instance. In the twenty-third book of the *Iliad* (v. 82), when the shade of Patroclus appears at the head of his sorrowful, sleeping friend, after urging the necessity of instant funeral, for the peace of his soul, he proceeds to make a further request, as follows :—

“ This request I make, this strict injunction I on thee would lay,
Not apart from thine Achilles, place thy dear Patroclus’ bones ;
But together as, like brothers, in your father’s house we grew,
Then when me, yet young, Menoetius from the Locrian Opus guiding,
To the halls of Peleus brought because that I had slain a man,
Even thy son, Amphidamas, whom unwittingly of life I reft
In a brainish moment, foolishly, when we quarrelled o’er the dice ;
Then the horseman, Peleus, kindly took me to his house, and kindly
Reared me with his son, and bade me be thy comrade to the end ;
So my bones, when they are gathered, place where thine shall also be,
In the two-eared golden urn which gracious Thetis gave to thee.”

In these verses, we see the common practice of the heroic ages in Greece, with regard to manslaughter. No matter how slight the occasion might be out of which the lethal quarrel arose ; how

* See Niebuhr’s *Travels* (§ 25, c. 4) ; Michaelis’ *Commentaries on the Laws of Moses* (Art. 135) ; and Southey’s *Thalaba*.

innocent soever of all hostile intention the unhappy offender ; the only safety to him from the private revenge of the kinsman of the person unwittingly slain, was to flee to a country that acknowledged some foreign chief, and find both a friend and a country in a distant land. All this, too, in an era of civilization, when courts of law and regular judges (as from various passages of Homer is apparent) were not altogether unknown ; but nature is stronger than law, and passion slow to yield up its fiery right of summary revenge, for the cold, calculating retribution of an impartial judge.

The person on whom the duty of avenging shed blood, according to the heroic code of morals, fell, was the nearest of kin to the person whose blood had been shed ; and accordingly we find (as stated more at large by Gesenius and Michaelis*) that in the Hebrew language, the same word means both an avenger of blood and a kinsman, while in the cognate Arabic the term for an avenger means also a *survivor*—that is, the surviving kinsman. In the same way, when Clytemnestra, as we have just seen in the previous drama, had treacherously murdered her husband Agamemnon, the code of social morality then existing laid the duty of avenging this most unnatural deed on the nearest relation of the murdered chieftain, viz.—his son, Orestes ; a sore duty indeed, in this case, as the principal offender was his own mother : so that in vindicating one feeling of his filial nature the pious son had to do violence to another ; but a duty it still remained ; and there does not appear the slightest trace that it was considered one whit the less imperative on account of the peculiar relation that existed here between the dealer of the vengeful blow and the person on whom it was dealt. WHOSO SHEDDETH MAN'S BLOOD BY MAN SHALL HIS BLOOD BE SHED was the old patriarchal law on the subject, proclaimed without limitation and without exception ; and the cry of innocent blood rose to Heaven with peculiar emphasis when the sufferer was both a father and a king.

“ Good, how good, when one who dies unjustly leaves a son behind him
To avenge his death ! ”—ODYSS. iii. 196,

is the wisdom of old Nestor with regard to this subject and this very case : and the wise goddess Athena, the daughter of the Supreme Councillor, in whom “ all her father lives,” stamps her distinct approval on the deed of Orestes, by which Clytemnestra was murdered, and holds him up as an illustrious example to Telemachus, by which his own conduct was to be regulated in

* *Dictionary*—voce GOEL, and Commentaries, § 131.

reference to the insolent and unjust suitors who were consuming his father's substance.

“ This when thou hast done, and well accomplished, as the need demands,
Then behoves thee in thy mind with counsel rife to ponder well
How the suitors that obscenely riot in thy father's halls
Thou by force or fraud may'st slay : for surely now the years are come,
When too old thou art to trifle like a child with childish things.
Hast not heard what fair opinion the divine Orestes reaped
From the general voice consenting to the deed, then when he slew
The deceitful false Ægisthus, slayer of his famous sire.”

ODYSSEY i. 293.

Public opinion, therefore, to use a modern phrase, not only justified Orestes in compassing the death of his mother, but imperatively called on him to do so. Public opinion, however, could not control Nature, nor save the unfortunate instrument of paternal retribution from that revulsion of feeling which must necessarily ensue, when the hand of the son is once red with the blood of her whose milk he had sucked. Orestes finds himself torn in twain by two contrary instincts, the victim of two antagonist rights. No sooner are the Furies of the father asleep, than those of the mother awake ; and thus the bloody catastrophe of the present piece prepares the way for that tragic conflict of opposing moral claims set forth with such power in the third piece of this trilogy—the Eumenides.

The action of this play is the simplest possible, and will, for the most part, explain itself sufficiently as it proceeds. Clytemnestra, disturbed in conscience, and troubled by evil dreams, sends a chorus of young women to offer libations at the tomb of Agamemnon, which, in the present play, may fitly be conceived as occupying the centre of the stage.* These “ libation-bearers ” give the name to the piece. In their pious function, Electra, the daughter of Agamemnon, joins ; and as she is engaged in the solemn rite, her brother Orestes (who had been living as an exile in Phocis with Strophius, married to Anaxibia, the sister of Agamemnon) suddenly arrives, and making himself known to his sister, plans with her the murder of Ægisthus and Clytemnestra—which is accordingly executed. Scarcely is this done, when the Furies of the murdered mother appear, and commence that chase of the unhappy son from land to land, which is ended in the next piece only by the eloquent intercession of Apollo, and the deliberative wisdom of the blue-eyed virgin-goddess of the Acropolis.

As a composition, the Choephoræ is decidedly inferior both to

* Die Thymele in der Orchestra ist durch ein Aschenkrug als Agamemnon's Grab bezeichnet.—DROYSEN.

the Agamemnon which precedes, and the Eumenides which follows it; and the poet, as if sensible of this weakness, following the approved tactics of rhetoricians and warriors, has dexterously placed it in a position where its deficiencies are least observed. At the same time, in passing a critical judgment on this piece we must bear in mind two things—*first*, that some parts of this play that appear languid, long-drawn, and ineffective to us who read, may have been overflowing with the richest emotional power in their living musical exhibition; and, *secondly*, that many parts, especially of the choral chaunts, have been so maimed and shattered by time that the modern commentator is perhaps as much chargeable with the faults of the translation as the ancient tragedian.

CHOEPHORÆ

Enter ORESTES and PYLADES.

Orest. Hermes, that wieldest underneath the ground
What power thy father lent,¹ be thou my saviour
And my strong help, and grant his heart's request
To the returning exile ! On this mound,
My father's tomb, my father I invoke,
To hear my cry !

* * * * *

* * My early growth of hair
To Inachus I vowed ;² this later lock
The right of grief for my great sire demands.

* * * * *

But what is this ? what sad procession comes
Of marshalled maids in sable mantles clad ?
What mission brings them ? Some new woe that breaks
Upon our fated house ? Or, do they come
To soothe the ancient anger of the dead
With sweet libations for my father's tomb ?
'Tis even so : for lo ! Electra comes—
My sister—with them in unblissful grief
Pre-eminent. O Jove, be thou mine aid,³
And nerve my hand to avenge my father's wrong !
Stand we aside, my Pylades, that we
May learn the purpose of the murky pomp. [*They go aside.*]

CHORUS, *dressed in sable vestments, bearing vessels
with libations.*

STROPHE I.

Missioned from these halls I come
In the sable pomp of woe,
Here to wail and pour libations,
With the bosom-beating blow ;
And my cheeks, that herald sorrow,⁴
With the fresh-cut nail-ploughed furrow,
Grief's vocation show.

Choephoræ

See ! my rent and ragged stole
 Speaks the conflict of my soul ;
 My vex'd heart on grief is feeding,
 Night and day withouten rest ;
 Riven with the ruthless mourning,
 Hangs the linen vest, adorning
 Woefully my breast.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Breathing wrath through nightly slumbers,
 By a dream-encompassed lair,
 Prophet of the house of Pelops,
 Terror stands with bristling hair.
 Through the dark night fitful yelling,
 He within our inmost dwelling
 Did the sleeper scare.
 Heavily, heavily terror falls
 On the woman-governed halls !
 And, instinct with high assurance,
 Speak the wise diviners all ;
 "The dead, the earth-hid dead are fretful,
 And for vengeance unforgetful,
 From their graves they call."

STROPHE II.

This graceless grace to do, to ward
 What ill the dream portendeth
 This pomp—O mother Earth !—and me
 The godless woman sendeth.
 Thankless office ! Can I dare,
 Naming thee, to mock the air ?
 Blood that stains with purple track
 The ground, what price can purchase back ?
 O the hearth beset with mourning !
 O the proud halls' overturning !
 Darkness, blithe sight's detestation,
 Sunless sorrow spread
 Round the house of desolation,
 Whence the lord is fled.

ANTISTROPHE II.

The kingly majesty that was
 The mighty, warlike-hearted,
 That swayed the general ear and will,
 The unconquered, hath departed.

And now fear rules,⁵ and we obey,
 Unwillingly, a loveless sway.
 Who holds the key of plenty's portals
 Is god, and more than god to mortals;
 But justice from her watchful station,
 With a sure-winged visitation
 Swoops; and some in blazing noon
 She for doom doth mark,
 Some in lingering eve, and some
 In the deedless dark.

EPODE.

When mother Earth hath drunk black gore,
 Printed on the faithful floor,
 The staring blot remaineth;
 There the deep disease is lurking;
 There thrice double-guilt is working
 Woes that none restraineth.
 As virgin-chambers once polluted
 Never may be pure again,
 So filthy hands with blood bedabbled⁶
 All the streams of all the rivers
 Flow to wash in vain.
 For me I suffer what I must;
 By ordinance divine,
 Since Troy was levelled with the dust
 The bondman's fate is mine.
 What the masters of my fate
 In their strength decree,⁷
 Just or unjust, matters not,
 Is the law to me.
 I must look content; and chain
 Strongest hate with tightest rein;
 I for my mistress' woes must wail,
 And for my own, beneath the veil;⁸
 I must sit apart,
 And thaw with tears my frozen heart,
 When no eye may see.

Enter ELECTRA.

Elect. Ye ministering maids with dexterous heed
 That tend this household, as with me ye share

- This pomp of supplication, let me share
 In your good counsel. Speak, and tell me how,
 This flood funereal pouring on the tomb,
 I shall find utterance in well-omened words?
 Shall I declare me bearer of sweet gifts
 From a dear wife to her dear lord? I fear
 To mingle falsehood with libations pure,
 Poured on my father's tomb.⁹ Or shall I pray,
 As mortals wont to pray, that he may send
 Just retribution, and a worthy gift
 Of ill for ill to them that sent these garlands?
 Or shall I silent stand, nor with my tongue
 Give honour, as in dumb dishonoured death
 My father died, and give the Earth to drink
 A joyless stream, as who throws lustral ashes¹⁰
 With eyes averse, and flings the vase away?
 Your counsel here I crave; ye are my friends,
 And bear with me, within these fated halls
 A common burden. Speak, and no craven fear
 Lurk in your breasts! The man that lives most free,
 And him to sternest masterdom enthralled,
 One fate abides. Lend me your wisdom, friends.
- Chorus.* Thy father's tomb shall be to me an altar;
 As before God I'll speak the truth to thee.
- Elect.* Speak thus devoutly, and thou'lt answer well.
- Chorus.* Give words of seemly honour, as thou pourest,
 To all that love thy father.
- Elect.* Who are they?
- Chorus.* Thyself the first, and whoso hates Ægisthus.
- Elect.* That is myself and thou.
- Chorus.* Thyself may'st judge.
- Elect.* Hast thou none else to swell the scanty roll?
- Chorus.* One far away, thy brother, add—Orestes.
- Elect.* 'Tis well remembered, very well remembered.
- Chorus.* Nor them forget that worked the deed of guilt.
- Elect.* Ha! what of them? I'd hear of this more nearly.
- Chorus.* Pray that some god may come, or mortal man.
- Elect.* Judge or avenger?
- Chorus.* Roundly pray the prayer,
 Some god or man may come to slay the slayer.
- Elect.* And may I pray the gods such boon as this?
- Chorus.* Why not? What other quittance to a foe
 Than hate repaid with hate, and blow with blow?¹¹

Elect. [*approaching to the tomb of Agamemnon*]. Hermes, that
 swayest underneath the ground,*¹²

Of powers divine, Infernal and Supernal,
 Most weighty herald, herald me in this,
 That every subterranean god, and earth,
 Even mother earth, who gave all things their birth,
 And nurseth the reviving germs of all,
 May hear my prayer, and with their sleepless eyes
 Watch my parental halls. And while I dew
 Thy tomb with purifying stream, O father,
 Pity thou me, and on thy loved Orestes
 With pity look, and to our long lost home
 Restore us!—us, poor friendless outcasts both,
 Bartered by her who bore us, and exchanged
 Thy love for his who was thy murderer.
 Myself do menial service in this house;
 Orestes lives in exile; and they twain
 In riot waste the fruits of thy great toils.
 Hear thou my prayers, and quickly send Orestes
 With happy chance to claim his father's sceptre!
 And give thou me a wiser heart, and hand
 More holy-functioned than the mother's was
 That bore thy daughter. Thus much for myself,
 And for my friends. To those that hate my father,
 Rise thou with vengeance mantled-dark to smite
 Those justly that unjustly smote the just.
 These words of evil imprecation dire,¹³
 Marring the pious tenor of my prayer,
 I speak constrained: but thou for me and mine
 Send good, and only good, to the upper air,
 The gods being with thee, mother Earth, and Justice
 With triumph in her train. This prayer receive
 And these libations. Ye, my friends, the while
 Let your grief blossom in luxuriant wail,
 Lifting the solemn pæan of the dead.

*Chorus.*¹⁴ Flow! in plashing torrents flow!
 Wretched grief for wretched master!
 O'er this heaped mound freely flow,
 Refuge of my heart's disaster!
 O thou dark majestic shade,

* Hermes, or Mercury, in his capacity of guide of the dead (*ψυχοπομπός*) is here called *Xθόνιος*, or subterranean.

Hear, O hear me! While anear thee
 Pours this sorrow-stricken maid
 The pure libation,
 May the solemn wail we lift
 Atone the guilt that taints the gift
 With desecration!
 O that some god from Scythia far,
 To my imploring,
 Might send a spearman strong in war,
 Our house restoring!
 Come Mars, with back-bent bow, thy hail
 Of arrows pouring,
 Or with the hilted sword assail,
 And in the grapple close prevail,
 Of battle roaring!

*Elect.*¹⁵ These mild libations, earth-imbibed, my father
 Hath now received. Thy further counsel lend.

Chorus. In what? Within me leaps my heart for fear.

Elect. Seest thou this lock of hair upon the tomb?

Chorus. A man's hair is it, or a low-zoned maid's? ¹⁶

Elect. Few points there are to hit. 'Tis light divining.

Chorus. I am thine elder; yet I fain would reap
 Instruction from young lips.

Elect. If it was clipt
 From head in Argos, it should be my own. ¹⁷

Chorus. For they that should have shorn the mourning lock
 Are foes, not friends.

Elect. 'Tis like, O strange! how like!

Chorus. Like what? What strange conception stirs thy brain?

Elect. 'Tis like—O strange!—to these same locks I wear.
 And yet—

Chorus. Not being yours, there's none, I know,
 Can claim it but Orestes.

Elect. In sooth, 'tis like.

Trimmed with one plume Orestes was and I.

Chorus. But how should he have dared to tread this ground?

Elect. Belike, he sent it by another's hand,
 A votive lock to grace his father's tomb.

Chorus. Small solace to my grief, if that he lives,
 Yet never more may touch his native soil.

Elect. I, too, as with a bitter wave was lashed,
 And pierced, as with an arrow, at the sight
 Of this loved lock; and from my thirsty eyne

With troubled overflowings unrestrained
 The full tide gushes : for none here would dare
 To gift a lock to Agamemnon's grave ;
 No citizen, much less the wife that slew him.
 My mother most unmotherly, her own children
 With godless hate pursuing, evil-minded :
 And though to think this wandering lock have graced
 My brother's head—even his—my loved Orestes,
 Were bliss too great, yet will I hold the hope.
 O that this lock might with articulate voice
 Pronounce a herald's tale, and I no more
 This way and that with dubious thought be swayed !
 That I might know if from a hostile head
 'Twas shorn, and hate it as it hate deserves,
 Or, if from friends, my sorrows' fellow make it,
 The dearest grace of my dear father's tomb !
 But the gods know our woes ; them we invoke,
 Whirled to and fro in eddies of dark doubt,
 Like vessels tempest-tossed. If they will save us,
 They have the power from smallest seed to raise
 The goodliest tree. But lo ! a further proof¹⁸—
 Footsteps, a perfect print, that seem to bear
 A brotherhood with mine ! Nay, there are two—
 This claimed by him, and that by some true friend
 That shares his wanderings. See, the heel, the sole,
 Thus measured with my own, prove that they were
 Both fashioned in one mould. 'Tis very strange !
 I'm racked with doubt, my wits are wandering.

Orest. [*coming forward*]. Nay, rather thank the gods ! Thy first
 prayer granted,

Pray that fair end may fair beginning follow.¹⁹

Elect. Sayest thou ? What cause have I to thank the gods ?

Orest. Even here before thee stands thine answered prayer.

Elect. One man I wish to see : dost know him—thou ?

Orest. Thy wish of wishes is to see Orestes.

Elect. Even so : but wishing answers no man's prayer.

Orest. I am the man. No dearer one expect

That wears that name.

Elect. Nay, but this is some plot ?

Orest. That were to frame a plot against myself.

Elect. Unkind, to scoff at my calamities !

Orest. To scoff at thine, were scoffing at mine own.

Elect. And can it be ? Art thou indeed Orestes ?

Orest. My bodily self thou seest, and dost not know !
 And yet the votive lock shorn from my head,
 Being to thine, my sister's hair, conform,
 And my foot's print with curious ardour scanned,
 Could wing thy faith beyond the reach of sense,
 That thou didst seem to see me ! Take the lock,
 And match it nicely with this mother crop
 That bore it. More ; behold this web,²⁰ the fruit
 Of thine own toil, the strokes of thine own shuttle,
 The wild beasts of the woods by thine own hand
 Empictured ! Nay, be calm, and keep thy joy
 Within wise bounds. Too well I know that they
 Who should be friends here are our bitterest foes.

Elect. O of my father's house the chiefest care !
 Seed of salvation, hope with many tears
 Bewept, with thy strong arm thou shalt restore
 Thy father's house. O my life's eye, thou dost
 Four several functions corporate in one
 Discharge for me ! My father thou, and thine
 The gentler love that should have been my mother's,
 My justly hated mother ; and in her place,
 Who died by merciless immolation,* thou
 Must be my sister, so even as thou art
 My faithful brother, loved much and revered.
 May Power and Justice aid thee, mighty Twain,²¹
 And a third mightier, JOVE supremely great.

Orest. O Jove, great Jove, of all these things be thou
 Spectator ! And behold the orphan'd brood,
 Of eagle father strangled in the folds
 And deadly coil of loathly basilisk !
 Them sireless see in dire starvation's gripe,
 Too weak of wing to bear unto the nest
 Their father's prey. So we before thee stand,
 Myself and this Electra, sire-bereaved,
 And exiles both from our paternal roof.
 If we, the chickens of the pious father
 That crowned thee with much sacrifice, shall fail,
 Where shalt thou find a hand like his, to offer
 Gifts from the steaming banquet ? If the brood
 Of the eagle perish, where shall be thy signs,
 That speak from Heaven persuasive to mankind ?
 If all this royal trunk shall rot, say who,

* Iphigenia.

When blood of oxen flows on holidays,
Shall stand beside thine altar? O give ear,
And of this house so little now, and fallen
So low, rebuild the fortunes!

Chorus. Hush, my children!

If ye would save your father's house, speak softly,
Lest some one hear, and, with swift babblement,
Inform their ears who rule; whom may I see
Flayed on a fire, with streaming pitch well fed!

Orest. Fear not. The mighty oracle of Loxias,
By whose commands I dare the thing I dare,
Will not deceive me. He, with shrill-voiced warning,
Foretold that freezing pains through my warm liver
Should torturing shoot, if backward to avenge
My father's death, and even as he was slain,
To slay the slayers, exasperate at the loss²²
Of my so fair possessions. Thus to do
He gave me strict injunction: else myself
With terrible pains, of filial zeal remiss,
Should pay the fine. The evil-minded Powers
Beneath the Earth²³ would visit me in wrath,
A leprous tetter with corrosive tooth
Creep o'er my skin, and fasten on my flesh,
And with white scales the white hair grow, defacing
My bloom of health; and from my father's tomb
Ripe with avenging ire the Erinnyes
Should ruthlessly invade me. Thus he spake,
And through the dark his prescient eyebrow arched.²⁴
Sharp arrows through the subterranean night,
Shot by dear Shades that through the Infernal halls
Roam peaceless, madness, and vain fear o' nights,
Prick with sharp goads, and chase from street to street,
With iron scourge, the meagre-wasted form
Of the Fury-hunted sinner; him no share
In festal cup awaits, or hallowed drop
Of pure libation;²⁵ the paternal wrath,
Hovering unseen, shall drive him from the altar;
Him shall no home receive, no lodgment hold,
Unhonoured and unfriended he shall die,
Withered and mummied with the hot dry plague.
Such oracle divine behoves me trust
With single faith, or, be I faithless, still
The vengeance must be done. All things concur

To point my purpose ; the divine command
 My sore heart-grief for a loved father's death,
 The press of want, the spoiling of my goods,
 The shame to see these noble citizens,
 Proud Troy's destroyers, basely bent beneath
 The yoke of two weak women : for he hath
 A woman's soul : if not, the proof is near.

Chorus. Mighty Fates, divinely guiding
 Human fortunes to their end,
 Send this man, with Jove presiding,
 Whither Justice points the way.
 Words of bitter hatred duly
 Pay with bitter words : for thus
 With loud cry triumphant shouting
 Justice pays the sinner's debt.
 BLOOD FOR BLOOD AND BLOW FOR BLOW,
 THOU SHALT REAP AS THOU DIDST SOW ;
 Age to age with hoary wisdom
 Speaketh thus to men.²⁶

STROPHE I.

Orest. O father, wretched father, with what air
 Of word or deed impelling,
 Shall I be strong to waft the filial prayer
 To thy dim distant dwelling?
 There where in dark, the dead-man's day, thou liest,²⁷
 Be our sharp wailing
 (Grace of the dead, and Hades' honour highest),
 With thee prevailing !

STROPHE II.

Chorus. Son, the strong-jawed funeral fire
 Burns not the mind in the smoky pyre ;
 Sleeps, but not forgets the dead
 To show betimes his anger dread.
 For the dead the living moan,
 That the murderer may be known.
 They who mourn for parent slain
 Shall not pour the wail in vain,
 Bright disclosure shall not lack
 Who through darkness hunts the track.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Elect. Hear thou our cries, O father, when for thee
 The frequent tear is falling;
 The wailing pair o'er thy dear tomb to thee
 From their hearts' depths are calling;
 The suppliant and the exile at one tomb
 Their sorrow showering,
 Helpless and hopeless; mantled round with gloom,
 Woe overpouring!

Chorus. Nay, be calm; the god that speaks
 With voice oracular shall attune
 Thy throat to happier notes;
 Instead the voice of wail funereal,
 Soon the jubilant shout shall shake
 His father's halls with joy, and welcome
 The new friend to his home.

STROPHE III.

Orest. If but some Lycian spear, 'neath Ilium's walls,
 Had lowly laid thee,
 A mighty name in the Atridan halls
 Thou wouldst have made thee!
 Then hadst thou pitched thy fortune like a star,
 To son and grandson shining from afar;
 Beyond the wide-waved sea, the high-heaped mound
 Had told for ever
 Thy feats of battle, and with glory crowned
 Thy high endeavour.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Chorus. Ah! would that thou hadst found thy end
 There, where dear friend fell with friend,
 And marched with them to Hades dread,
 The monarch of the awful dead,²⁸
 Sitting beside the throne with might
 Of them that rule the realms of night;
 For thou in life wert monarch true,
 Expert each kingly deed to do,
 Leading, with thy persuasive rod,
 Submissive mortals like a god.

ANTISTROPHE III.

Elect. Thou wert a king, no fate it was for thee
 To die as others

'Neath Ilium's walls, far, far beyond the sea,
 With many brothers.
 Unworthy was the spear to drink thy blood,
 Where far Scamander rolls his swirling flood.
 Justly who slew had drawn themselves thy lot,
 And perished rather,
 And thou their timeless fate had welcomed, not
 They thine, my father.

Chorus. Child, thy grief begetteth visions
 Brighter than gold, and overtopping
 Hyperborean bliss.²⁹

Ah, here the misery rudely riots,
 With double lash. These twins, their help
 Sleeps beneath the ground; and they
 Who hold dominion here, alas!
 With unholy sceptre sway.
 Woe is me! but chiefly woe
 Children dear to you!

STROPHE IV.

Elect. Chiefly to me! Thy words shoot like an arrow,
 And pierce my marrow.
 O Jove, O Jove! that sendest from below³⁰
 The retribution slow,
 Against the stout heart and bold hand,
 That dared defy thy high command.
 Even though a parent feel the woe,
 Prepare, prepare the finished blow.

STROPHE V.

Chorus. Mine be soon to lift the strain,
 O'er the treacherous slayer slain,
 To shout with bitter exultation,
 O'er the murtherous wife's prostration!
 Why should I the hate conceal,
 That spurs my heart with promptest zeal,
 Bitter thoughts, that gathering grow,
 Like blustering winds, that beat the plunging vessel's prow?

ANTISTROPHE IV.

Orest. O thou that flourishest, and mak'st to flourish,
 By thy hands perish
 All they that hate me! Cleave the heads of those,
 That are Orestes' foes!

Pledge the land in peace to live,
 For injustice justice give;
 Ye that honoured reign below,³¹
 Furies! prepare the crowning blow.
Chorus. Wont hath been, and shall be ever,
 That when purple gouts bedash
 The guilty ground, then BLOOD DOTH BLOOD
 DEMAND, AND BLOOD FOR BLOOD SHALL FLOW.
 Fury to Havoc cries; and Havoc,
 The tainted track of blood pursuing,
 From age to age works woe.

STROPHE VI.

Elect. Ye powers of Hades dread!
 Fell Curses of the Dead,
 Hear me when I call!
 Behold! The Atridan hall,
 Dashed in dishonoured fall,
 Lies low and graceless all.
 O mighty Jove, I see
 Mine only help in thee!

ANTISTROPHE V.

Chorus. Thy piteous tale doth make my heart
 From its central hold back start;
 Hope departs, and blackening Fear
 Rules my fancy, while I hear.
 And if blithe confidence awhile³²
 Lends my dull faith the feeble smile,
 Soon, soon departs that glimpse of cheer,
 And all my map of things is desolate and drear.

ANTISTROPHE VI.

Orest. For why! our tale of wrong
 In hate of parents strong,
 Spurneth the flatterer's arm,
 Mocketh the soothing charm.
 The mother gave her child³³
 This wolfish nature wild;
 And I from her shall learn
 To be thus harsh and stern.

STROPHE VII.

Chorus. Like a Persian mourner³⁴
 Singing sorrow's tale,
 Like a Cissian wailer,
 I did weep and wail.
 O'er my head swift-oaring
 Came arm on arm amain,
 The voice of my deploring
 Like the lashing rain!
 Sorrow's rushing river
 O'er me flooding spread,
 Black misfortune's quiver
 Emptied on my head!

Elect. Mother bold, all-daring,
 On a bloody bier
 Thine own lord forth bearing
 Slain without a tear.
 Alone, unfriended he did go
 Down to the sunless homes below.

STROPHE VIII.

Orest. Thou hast named the dire dishonor;
 The gods shall send swift judgment on her.
 By Heaven's command,
 By her own son's hand,
 Slain she shall lie;
 And I, having dealt the fated death,
 Myself shall die!

ANTISTROPHE VII.

Elect. Be the butcher's work remembered,
 Mangled was he, and dismembered;
 Like vilest clay,
 She cast him away,
 With burial base;
 Mocking the son, the father branding
 With dark disgrace.

ANTISTROPHE VIII.

Orest. Thou dost tell too truly
 All my father's woe.
Elect. I, the while, accounted
 Lower than most low,

Like a dog, was sundered
 From my father's hearth,
 An evil dog, and wandered
 Far from seats of mirth;
 In my chamber weeping
 Tears of silent woe,
 From rude gazers keeping
 Grief too great for show.
 Hear these words; and hearing
 Nail them in thy soul,
 With steady purpose nearing,
 And noiseless pace, thy goal.
 Go where just wrath leads the way,
 With stout heart tread the lists to-day.

STROPHE IX.

Orest. O father, help thy friends, when helping thee!
Elect. My tears, if they can help, shall flow for thee.
Chorus. And this whole mingled choir shall raise for thee
 The sistered cry: O hear!
 In light of day appear,
 And help thy banded friends, to avenge thy foes for thee!

ANTISTROPHE IX.

Orest. Now might with might engage, and right with right!
Elect. And the gods justly the unjust shall smite.
*Chorus.*³⁶ The tremulous fear creeps o'er my frame to hear
 Thy words; for, though long-dated,
 The thing divinely fated
 Shall surely come at last, our cloudy prayers to clear.

STROPHE X.

Elect. O home-bred pain,
 Stroke of perdition that refuses
 Concord with the holy Muses!
 O burden more than heart can bear,
 Disease that no physician's care
 Makes sound again!

ANTISTROPHE X.

Orest. So; even so.
 No far-sent leech this tetter uses;
 A home-bred surgery it chooses.

I the red strife myself pursue,
 Pouring this dismal hymn to you,
 Ye gods below !

Chorus. Blessed powers, propitious dwelling,
 Deep in subterranean darkness,
 Hear this pious prayer ;
 May all trials end in triumph
 To the suppliant pair !

Orest. Father, who died not as a king should die,
 Give me to rule, as thou didst rule, these halls.

Elect. My supplication hear, thy strong help lend me,
 Scathless myself³⁷ to work Ægisthus' harm.

Orest. Thus of the rightful feasts that soothe the Shades
 Thou too shalt taste,³⁸ and not dishonoured lie,
 When savoury fumes mount to our country's dead.

Elect. And I my whole of heritage will offer,
 The blithe libations of my marriage feast.
 Thy tomb before all tombs I will revere.

Orest. O Earth, relax thy hold, and give my father
 To see the fight !

Elect. O Persephassa,* send
 The Atridan forth, in beauty clad and strength.

Orest. The bath that drank thy life remember, father.

Elect. The close-drawn meshes of thy death remember.

Orest. The chain, not iron-linked, that bound thee, then
 When to the death the kingly game was hunted.

Elect. Then when with treacherous folds they curtained thee.

Orest. Wake, father, wake to avenge thy speechless wrongs !

Elect. Lift, father, lift thy dear-loved head sublime !

Orest. Send justice forth to work the just revenge,
 Like quit with like, and harm with harm repay ;
 Thou wert the conquered then, rise now to conquer.

Elect. And hear this last request, my father, looking
 On thy twin chickens nestling by thy tomb ;
 Pity the daughter, the male seed protect,
 Nor let the name revered of ancient Pelops
 Be blotted from the Earth ! Thou art not dead,
 Though housed in Hades, while thy children live,
 For children are as echoes that prolong
 Their parents' fame ; the floating cork are they
 That buoyant bear the net deep sunk in the sea.
 Hear, father—when we weep, we weep for thee,
 And, saving us, thou savest thine own honour.

* Proserpine.

Chorus. Well spoken both:³⁹ and worthily fall the tears
On this dear tomb, too long without them. Now,
If to the deed thy purpose thou hast buckled,
Orestes, try what speed the gods may give thee.⁴⁰

Orest. I'll do the deed. Meanwhile not idly this
I ask of thee—what moved her soul to send
These late libations, limping remedy
For wounds that cannot heal? A sorry grace
To feed the senseless dead with sacrifice,
When we have killed the living. What she means
I scarce may guess, but the amend is less
Than the offence. All ocean poured in offering
For the warm life-drops of one innocent man
Is labour lost. Old truth thus speaks to all.
How was it?

Chorus. That I well may tell, for I
Was with her. Hideous dreams did haunt her sleep;
Night-wandering terrors scared her godless breast,
That she did send these gifts to soothe the Shades.

Orest. What saw she in her dream?

Chorus. She dreamt, she said,
She had brought forth a serpent.

Orest. A serpent, say'st thou?

Chorus. Ay! and the dragon birth portentous moved,
All swaddled like a boy.

Orest. Eager for food, doubtless, the new-born monster?

Chorus. The nurturing nipple herself did fearless bare.

Orest. How then? escaped the nipple from the bite?

Chorus. The gouted blood did taint the milk, that flowed
From the wounded paps.

Orest. No idle dream was this.

And he who sent it was my father.

Chorus. Then

She from her sleep up started, and cried out,
And many lamps, whose splendour night had blinded,
Rushed forth, to wait upon their mistress' word.
Straightway she sends us with funereal gifts,
A medicinal charm, if medicine be
For griefs like hers!

Orest. Now hear me, Earth profound,
And my dear father's tomb, that so this dream
May find in me completion! Thus I read it—
As left the snake the womb that once hid me,

And in the clothes was swathed that once swathed me,
 And as it sucked the breast that suckled me,
 And mingled blood with milk once sucked by me,
 And as she groaned with horror at the sight,
 Thus it beseems who bore a monstrous birth
 No common death to die. I am the serpent
 Shall bite her breast. It is a truthful dream.
 My seer be thou. Say have I read it well?

Chorus. Bravely. Now, for the rest, thy friends instruct
 What things to do, and what things to refrain.

Orest. 'Tis said in few. Electra, go within,
 And keep my counsels in wise secrecy;
 For, as they killed an honourable man
 Deceitfully, by cunning and deceit
 Themselves shall find the halter. Thus Apollo,
 A prophet never known to lie, foretold.
 Myself will come, like a wayfaring man
 Accoutred, guest and spear-guest of this house,*
 With Pylades, my friend, to the court gates.
 We both will speak with a Parnassian voice,
 Aping the Phocian tongue. If then it chance
 (As seems most like, for this whole house with ills
 Is sheer possessed)⁴¹ that with a welcome greeting
 No servant shall receive us, we will wait
 Till some one pass, and for their churlish ways
 Rate them thus sharply. "Sirs, why dare ye shut
 Inhospitable doors against the stranger,⁴²
 Making Ægisthus sin against the gods?"
 When thus I pass the threshold of his courts,
 And see him sitting on my father's throne,
 When he shall scan me face to face, and seek
 To hear my tale; ere he may say the word,
Whence is the stranger? I will lay him dead,
 Dressing him trimly o'er with points of steel.
 The Fury thus, not scanted of her banquet,
 Shall drink unmingled blood from Pelops' veins,
 The third and crowning cup.⁴³ Now, sister, see to 't
 That all within be ordered, as shall serve
 My end most fitly. Ye, when ye shall speak,
 Speak words of happy omen; teach your tongue
 Both to be silent, and to speak in season.
 For what remains, his present aid I ask,
 Who laid on my poor wits this bloody task.⁴⁴

[*Exeunt.*

* See Note 64 to Agamemnon.

CHORAL HYMN.

STROPHE I.

Earth breeds a fearful progeny,⁴⁵
To man a hostile band,
With finny monsters teems the sea,
With creeping plagues the land;
And winged portents scour mid-air,
And flaring lightnings fly,
And storms, sublimely coursing, scare
The fields of the silent sky.

ANTISTROPHE I.

But Earth begets no monster dire
Than man's own heart more dreaded,
All-venturing woman's dreadful ire,⁴⁶
When love to woe is wedded.
No mate with mate there gently dwells,
There peace and joy depart,
Where loveless love triumphant swells,
In fearless woman's heart.

STROPHE II.

This the light-witted may not know,
The wise shall understand,
Who hear the tale from age to age,
How Thestios' daughter, wild with rage,⁴⁷
Lighted the fatal brand,
The brand that burned with conscious flashes
At the cry of her new-born son;
And, when the brand had burned to ashes,
His measured course was run.

ANTISTROPHE II.

And yet a tale of bloody love
From hoary eld I know,
How Scylla gay, in gold arrayed,⁴⁸
The gift of Minos old, betrayed
Her father to the foe.
Sleeping all careless as he lay,
She cut the immortal hair,
And Hermes bore his life away,
From the bold and blushless fair.

Choephoræ

STROPHE III.

Ah me! not far needs fancy range
 For tales of harshest wrong:
 Here, even here, damned wedlock thrives,
 And lawless loves are strong.
 Within these halls, where blazes now
 No holy hearth, a bloody vow
 Against her liege lord's life
 She vowed; and he, the king divine,
 Whose look back-drove the bristling line,
 Bled by a woman's knife.

ANTISTROPHE III.

O woman! woman! Lemnos saw⁴⁹
 Your jealous fountains flow,
 And, when the worst of woes is named,
 It is a Lemnian woe.
 From age to age the infected tale,
 Far echoed by a wandering wail,
 To East and West shall go;
 And honor from the threshold hies,
 On which the doom god-spoken lies;⁵⁰
 Speak I not wisely so?

STROPHE IV.

Right through the heart shall pierce the blow,
 When Justice is the sinner's foe,
 With the avenging steel;
 In vain with brief success they strove,
 Who trampled on the law of Jove,
 With unregarding heel.

ANTISTROPHE IV.

Firm is the base of Justice. Fate,
 With whetted knife, doth eager wait
 At hoary Murder's door;
 The Fury, with dark-bosomed ire,
 Doth send the son a mission dire,
 To clear the parent's score.

Enter ORESTES.

Orest. What, ho! dost hear no knocking? boy! within!
 Is none within, boy? ho! dost hear me call

The third time at thy portal? Is Ægisthus
 A man, whose ears are deaf to the strangers' cry?
Ser. [*appearing at the door*]. Enough. I hear thee. Who art
 thou, and whence?

Orest. Tell those within that a poor stranger waits
 Before the gate, bearer of weighty news.
 Speed thee; night's dusky chariot swoopeth down,
 And the dark hour invites the travelling man
 To fix his anchor 'neath some friendly roof.
 Thy mistress I would see, if here a mistress
 Rules, or thy master rather, if a master.
 For with a man a man may plainly deal,
 But nice regard for the fine feeling ear⁵¹
 Oft mars the teller's tale, when women hear.

Enter CLYTEMNESTRA.

Clytem. Strangers, speak your desire. Whate'er becomes
 This house to give is free to you to share.
 Hot baths,⁵² a couch to soothe your travelled toil,
 Blithe welcoming eyes, and gentle tendance; these
 I freely give. If aught beyond ye crave,
 There's counsel with my lord. I'll speak to him.

Orest. I am a stranger come from Phocian Daulis.
 When I, my burden to my back well saddled,
 Stood for the road accoutred, lo! a man
 To me not known, nor of me knowing more,
 But seeing only that my feet were bound
 For Argos, thus accosted me (his name,
 I learned, was Strophius the Phocian): Stranger,
 If Argos be thy purpose, bear this message
 From me to whom it touches near. Orestes
 Is dead; charge well thy memory with the tale,
 And bring me mandate back, if so his friends
 Would have him carried to his native home,
 Or he with us due sepulture shall find,
 A sojourner for ever. A brazen urn
 Holds all the remnant of the much-wept man,
 The ashes of his clay. Thus Strophius spake:
 And if ye are the friends, whom chiefly grief
 Pricks for his loss, my mission's done; at least
 His parents will be grieved to hear 't.

*Elect.*⁵³

Woe's me!

Sheer down we topple from proud height; harsh fate

Is ours to wrestle with. O jealous Curse,
 How dost thou eye us fatal from afar,
 And with thy well-trimmed bow shoot chiefly there
 Where thou wert least suspect! Thou hast me now
 A helpless captive lorn, and reft of all
 My trustiest friends. Orestes also gone,
 Whose feet above the miry slough most sure
 Seemed planted! Now our revelry of hope,
 The fair account that should have surgeoned woe,
 Is audited at nothing! ⁵⁴

Orest. Would the gods,
 Where happy hosts give welcome, I were guest
 On a more pleasant tale! The entertained
 No greater joy can know than with good news
 To recreate his entertainer's ears;
 But piety forbade, nor faith allowed
 To lop the head of truth.

Clytem. Thou shalt not fare the worse for thy bad news,
 Nor be less dear to us. Hadst thou been dumb,
 Some other tongue had vented the sad tale.
 But ye have travelled weary leagues to-day,
 And doubtless need restoring. Take him, boy,
 With the attendant sharers of his travel,
 To the men's chambers. See them well bestowed,
 And do all things as one, that for neglect
 Shall give account. Meanwhile, our lord shall know
 What fate hath chanced; his wit and mine shall find
 What solace may be for these news unkind.

[*Exeunt into the house.*]

Chorus. When, O when, shall we, my sisters,
 Lift the strong full-throated hymn,
 To greet Orestes' triumph? Thou,
 O sacred Earth, and verge revered
 Of this lofty mound, where sleeps
 The kingly helmsman of our State,
 Hear thou, and help! prevail the hour
 Of suasive wile, and smooth deceit! ⁵⁵
 Herald him Hermes—lead him, thou
 The nightly courier of the dead, ⁵⁶
 Through this black business of the sword!
 In sooth the host hath housed a grievous guest;
 For see where comes Orestes' nurse, all tears!
 Where goest thou, nurse, beyond our gates to walk,
 And why walks Grief, an unfee'd page, with thee!

Enter NURSE.

Nurse. My mistress bids me bring Ægisthus quickly,
To see the strangers face to face, that he
May of their sad tale more assurance win
From their own mouths. Herself to us doth show
A murky-visaged grief; but in her eye
Twinkles a secret joy, that time hath brought
The consummation most devoutly wished
By her—to us and Agamemnon's house
Most fatal issue, if these news be true.
Ægisthus, too, with a light heart will hear
These Phocian tidings. O wretched me! what weight
Of mingled woes from sire to son bequeathed,
Have the gods burdened us withal! Myself,
How many griefs have shaken my old heart;
But this o'ertops them all! The rest I bore,
As best I might, with patience: but Orestes,
My own dear boy, my daily, hourly care,
Whom from his mother's womb these breasts did suckle—
How often did I rise o' nights, and walked
From room to room, to soothe his baby cries;
But all my nursing now, and all my cares
Fall fruitless. 'Tis a pithless thing a child,
No forest whelp so helpless; one must even
Wait on its humour, as the hour may bring.
No voice it has to speak its fitful wants,
When hunger, thirst, or Nature's need commands.
The infant's belly asks no counsel. I
Was a wise prophetess to all his wants,
Though sometimes false, as others are. I was
Nurse to the child, and fuller to its clothes,
And both to one sad end. Alack the day!
This double trade with little fruit I plied,
What time I nursed Orestes for his father;
For he is dead, and I must live to hear it.
But I must go, and glad his heart, who lives
Plague of this house, with news that make me weep.

Chorus. What say'st thou, Nurse? *how* shall thy master come?

Nurse. *How* say'st thou? how shall I receive the question?

Chorus. Alone, I mean, or with his guards?

Nurse.

She says

His spearmen shall attend him.

Chorus. Not so, Nurse!

If thou dost hate our most hate-worthy master,
Tell him to come alone, without delay,
To hear glad tidings with exulting heart.
The bearer of a tale can make it wear
What face he pleases.⁵⁷

Nurse. Well! if thou mean'st well,
Perhaps—

Chorus. Perhaps that Jove may make the breeze
Yet veer to us.

Nurse. How so? Our only hope,
Orestes, is no more.

Chorus. Softly, good Nurse;
Thou art an evil prophet, if thou say'st so.

Nurse. How? hast thou news to a different tune?

Chorus. Go! go!
Mind thine own business, and the gods will do
What thing they will do.

Nurse. Well! I'll do thy bidding!
The gods lead all things to a fair conclusion!

CHORAL HYMN.⁵⁸

STROPHE I.

O thou, o'er all Olympian gods that be,
Supremely swaying,
With words of wisdom, when I pray to thee,
Inspire my praying.
We can but pray; to do, O Jove, is thine,
Thou great director;
Of him within, who works thy will divine,
Be thou protector!
Him raise, the orphaned son whom thou dost see
In sheer prostration;
Twofold and threefold he shall find from thee
Just compensation.

ANTISTROPHE I.

But hard the toil. Yoked to the car of Fate,
When harshly driven,
O rein him thou! his goaded speed abate
Wisely from Heaven!
Jove tempers all, steadies all things that reel;
When wildly swerveth

From the safe line life's burning chariot wheel,
 His hand preserveth.
 Ye gods, that guard these gold-stored halls, this day
 Receive the claimant,
 Who comes, that old Wrong to young Right may pay
 A purple payment.

STROPHE II.

BLOOD BEGETS BLOOD ; but, when this blow shall fall,
 O thou, whose dwelling
 Is Delphi's fuming throat, may this be all !
 Of red blood, welling
 From guilty veins, enough. Henceforth may joy
 Look from the eyes of the Atridan boy,
 Discerning clearly
 From his ancestral halls the clouds unrolled,
 That hung so drearily.

ANTISTROPHE II.

And thou, O Maia's son,* fair breezes blow,
 The full sail swelling !
 Cunning art thou through murky ways to go,
 To Death's dim dwelling ;
 Dark are the doings of the gods ; and we,
 When they are clearest shown, but dimly see ;
 Yet faith will follow
 Where Hermes leads, the leader of the dead,
 And thou, Apollo.

EPODE.

Crown ye the deed ; then will I freely pour
 The blithe libation,
 And, with pure offerings, cleanse the Atridan floor
 From desecration !
 Then with my prosperous hymn the lyre shall blend
 Its kindly chorus,
 And Argos shall be glad, and every friend
 Rejoice before us !
 Gird thee with manhood, boy ; though hard to do,
 It is thy father's work ; to him be true.
 And, when she cries—*Son, wilt thou kill thy MOTHER ?*
 Cry—FATHER, FATHER ! and with that name smother

* Hermes or Mercury. See Notes 55 and 56 above.

The rising ruth. As Perseus, when he slew
 The stony Dread,* was stony-hearted, do
 Thy mission stoutly ;
 For him below, and her above,† pursue
 This work devoutly.
 The gods by thee, in righteous judgment, show
 Their grace untender !
 Thou to the man, that dealt the deathful blow,
 Like death shalt render.

Enter ÆGISTHUS.

Ægis. Not uninvited come I, having heard
 A rumour strange, by certain strangers brought,
 No pleasant tale—Orestes' death. In sooth,
 A heavy fear-distilling sorrow this,
 More than a house may bear, whose wounds yet bleed,
 And ulcerate from the fangs of fate. But say,
 Is this a fact that looks us in the face,
 Or startling words of woman's fears begotten,
 That shoot like meteors through the air, and die?
 What proof, ye maids, what proof?

Chorus. Our ears have heard.
 But go within ; thyself shalt see the man ;
 Try well the teller, e'er thou trust the tale.

Ægis. I'll scan him well, and prove him close, if he
 Himself was at the death, or but repeat
 From blind report the news another told.
 It will go hard, if idle breath cheat me.
 My eyes are in my head, and I can see.

[Exit into the house.]

Chorus. Jove ! great Jove ! What shall I say ?
 How with pious fervour pray,
 That from thee the answer fair
 Be wafted to my friendly prayer ?
 Now the keen-edged axe shall strike,
 With a life-destroying blow ;
 Now, or, plunged in deep perdition,
 Agamemnon's house sinks low,
 Or the hearth with hope this day
 Shall blaze, through all the ransomed halls,
 And the son his father's wealth
 Shall win, and with his sceptre sway.

* The Gorgon Medusa.

† Agamemnon and Electra.

In the bloody combat fresh,
He shall risk it, one with two;
Hand to hand the fight shall be.
Godlike son of Agamemnon,

Jove give strength to thee!

Ægis. [*from within*]. Ah me! I fall. Ah! Ah!

Chorus. Hear'st thou that cry? How is't? Whose was that groan?

Let's go aside, the deed being done, that we
Seem not partakers of the bloody work.⁵⁹

'Tis ended now.

Enter SERVANT.

Serv. Woe's me! my murdered master!

Thrice woeful deed! Ægisthus lives no more.

Open the women's gates! uncase the bolts!

Were needed here a Titan's strength—though that

Would nothing boot the dead. Ho! hillo! ho!

Are all here deaf? or do I babble breath

In sleepers' ears? Where, where is Clytemnestra?

What keeps my mistress? On a razor's edge

Her fate now lies; the blow's already poised,

That falls on her too—nor unjustly falls.

Enter CLYTEMNESTRA.

Clytem. Well! what's the matter? why this clamorous cry?

Serv. He, who was dead, has slain the quick. 'Tis so.

Clytem. Ha! Thou speak'st riddles; but I understand thee.

We die by guile, as guilefully we slew.

Bring me an axe! an axe to kill a man!

Quickly!—or conqueror or conquered, I

Will fight it out. To this 'tis come at last.

*Enter ORESTES, dragging in the dead body of ÆGISTHUS;
with him PYLADES.*

Orest. Thee next I seek. For him, he hath enough.

Clytem. Ah me! my lord, my loved Ægisthus dead!

Orest. Dost love this man? then thou shalt sleep with him,

In the same tomb. He was thy bedmate living,

Be thou his comrade, dead.

Clytem. Hold thee, my son!

Look on this breast, to which with slumbrous eyes

Thou oft hast clung, the while thy baby gum

Sucked the nutritious milk.

Orest. What say'st thou, Pylades?

Shall I curtail the work, and spare my mother?

Pyl. Bethink thee well; the Loxian oracles,

Thy sure-pledged vows, where are they, if she live?

Make every man thy foe, but fear the gods.

Orest. Thy voice shall rule in this; thou judgest wisely.

Follow this man; here, side by side with him,

I'll butcher thee. Seemed he a fairer man

Than was my father when my father lived?

Sleep thou, where he sleeps; him thou lovest well,

And whom thou chiefly shouldst have loved thou hatedst.

Clytem. I nursed thy childhood, and in peace would die.⁶⁰

Orest. Spare thee to live with me—my father's murderer?

Clytem. Not I; say rather Fate ordained his death.

Orest. The self-same Fate ordains thee now to die.

Clytem. My curse beware, the mother's curse that bore thee.

Orest. That cast me homeless from my father's house.

Clytem. Nay; to a friendly house I lent thee, boy.

Orest. Being free-born, I like a slave was sold.

Clytem. I trafficked not with thee. I gat no gold.

Orest. Worse—worse than gold—a thing too foul to name!

Clytem. Name all my faults; but had thy father none?

Orest. Thou art a woman sitting in thy chamber.⁶¹

Judge not the man that goes abroad, and labours.

Clytem. Hard was my lot, my child, alone, uncherished.

Orest. Alone by the fire, while for thy gentle ease

The husband toiled.

Clytem. Thou wilt not kill me, son?

Orest. I kill thee not. Thyself dost kill thyself.

Clytem. Beware thy mother's anger-whetted hounds.*

Orest. My father's hounds have hunted me to thee.

Clytem. The stone that sepulchres the dead art thou,

And I the tear on't.

Orest. Cease: I voyaged here,

With a fair breeze; my father's murder brought me.

Clytem. Ah me! I nursed a serpent on my breast.

*Orest.*⁶² Thou hadst a prophet in thy dream, last night;

And since thou kill'd the man thou shouldst have spared,

The man, that now should spare thee, can but kill.

[*He drives her into the house, and there murders her.*]

Chorus. There's food for sorrow here; but rather, since

Orestes could not choose but scale the height

* The Furies.—See next piece.

Of bloody enterprise, our prayer is this :
That he, the eye of this great house, may live.⁶³

CHORAL HYMN.

STROPHE I.

Hall of old Priam, with sorrow unbearable,
Vengeance hath come on the Argive thy foe ;
A pair of grim lions, a double Mars terrible,⁶⁴
Comes to his palace, that levelled thee low.
Chanced hath the doom of the guilty precisely,
Even as Phœbus foretold it, and wisely
Where the god pointed, was levelled the blow.
Lift up the hymn of rejoicing ; the lecherous,
Sin-laden tyrant shall lord it no more ;
No more shall the mistress so bloody and treacherous
Lavish the plundered Pelopidan store.

STROPHE II.

Sore chastisement⁶⁵ came on the doomed and devoted,
With dark-brooding purpose and fair-smiling show ;
And the daughter of Jove the eternal was noted,
Guiding the hand that inflicted the blow—
Bright Justice, of Jove, the Olympian daughter ;
But blasted they fell with the breath of her slaughter
Whose deeds of injustice made Justice their foe.
Her from his shrine sent the rock-throned Apollo,⁶⁶
The will of her high-purposed sire to obey,
The track of the blood-stained remorseless to follow,
Winged with sure death, though she lag by the way.

EPODE.

Ye rulers on Earth, fear the rulers in Heaven,
No aid by the gods to the froward is given ;
For the bonds of our thraldom asunder are riven,
And the day dawns clear.

Lift up your heads ; from prostration untimely
Ye halls of the mighty be lifted sublimely !
All-perfecting Time shall bring swift restitution,
And cleanse the hearth pure from the gory pollution,
Now the day dawns clear.

And blithely shall welcome them Fortune the fairest,⁶⁷
The brother and sister, with omens the rarest ;
Each friend of this house show the warm love thou bearest,
Now the day dawns clear !

Enter ORESTES, with the body of CLYTEMNESTRA.

Orest. Behold this tyrant pair, my father's murderers,
 Usurpers of this land, and of this house
 Destroyers. They this throne did use in pride,
 And now in love, as whoso looks may guess,
 They lie together, all their vows fulfilled.
 Death to my hapless father, and to lie
 Themselves on a common bier—this was their vow ;
 And they have vowed it well. Behold these toils,
 Wherewith they worked destruction to my father,
 Chained his free feet, and manacled his hands.
 There—spread it forth—approach—peruse it nicely.
 This mortal vest, that so the father—not
 My father, but the Sun that fathers all
 With light⁶⁸—may see what godless deed was done
 Here by my mother. Let him witness duly,
 That not unjustly I have spilt this blood—
 My mother's ; for Ægisthus recks me not ;
 As an adulterer should, he died : but she,
 That did devise such foul detested wrong
 Against the lord, to whom beneath her zone
 She bore a burden, once so valued, now
 A weight that damns her ; what was she?—a viper
 Or a torpedo—that with biteless touch
 Strikes numb who handles.⁶⁹ Harsh the smoothest phrase
 To name the bold unrighteous will she used.
 And for this fowler's net—this snare—this trap—
 This cloth to wrap the dead⁷⁰—this veil to curtain
 A bloody bath—teach me a name for it !
 Such murderous toils the ruffians use, who spill
 Their neighbour's blood, that they may seize his gold,
 And warm their heart with plenty not their own.
 Lodge no such mate with me ! Sooner may I
 Live by high Heaven accursed, and childless die.

Chorus. A sorry work—alas ! alas !

A dismal death she found.

Nor sorrow quite from man may pass

That lives above the ground.

Orest. A speaking proof ! Behold, Ægisthus' sword
 Hath left its witness on this robe ; the time
 Hath paled the murderous spot, but where it was
 The sumptuous stole hath lost its radiant dye.

Alas! I know not, when mine eyes behold
 This father-murdering web, if I should own
 Joy lord, or grief. Let grief prevail. I grieve
 Our crimes, our woes, our generation doomed,
 Our tearful trophies blazoned with a curse.

Chorus. The gods so will that, soon or late,
 Each mortal taste of sorrow;
 A frown to-day from surly Fate,
 A biting blast to-morrow.

Orest. Others 'twixt hope and fear may sway, my fate
 Is fixed and scapeless.⁷¹ Like a charioteer,
 Dragged from his course by steeds that spurned the rein,
 Thoughts past control usurp me. Terror lifts,
 Even now, the prelude to her savage hymn,
 Within my heart exultant. But, while yet
 My sober mind remains, witness ye all
 My friends, this solemn abjuration! Not
 Unjustly, when I slew, I slew my mother—
 That mother, with my father's blood polluted,
 Of every god abhorred. And I protest
 The god that charmed me to the daring point
 Was Loxias, with his Pythian oracles,
 Pledging me blameless, this harsh work once done,
 Not done, foredooming what I will not say;
 All thoughts most horrible undershoot the mark.
 And now behold me, as a suppliant goes,
 With soft-wreathed wool, and precatory branch,⁷²
 Addressed for Delphi, the firm-seated shrine
 Of Loxias, navel of earth, where burns the flame
 Of fire immortal named.⁷³ For I must flee
 This kindred blood, and hie me where the god
 Forespoke me refuge. Once again I call
 On you, and Argive men of every time,
 To witness my great griefs. I go an exile
 From this dear soil. Living, or dead, I leave
 These words, the one sad memory of my name.

Chorus. Thou hast done well; yoke not thy mouth this day
 To evil words. Thou art the liberator
 Of universal Argos, justly greeted,
 Who from the dragon pair the head hath lopped.

[*The FURIES appear in the background.*]

Orest. Ah, me! see there! like Gorgons! look! look there!

All dusky-vested, and their locks entwined
With knotted snakes. Away! I may not stay.

Chorus. O son, loved of thy sire, be calm, nor let
Vain phantoms fret thy soul, in triumph's hour.

Orest. These are no phantoms, but substantial horrors;
Too like themselves they show, the infernal hounds
Sent from my mother!

Chorus. 'Tis the fresh-gouted blood
Upon thy hand, that breeds thy brain's distraction.

Orest. Ha! how they swarm! Apollo! more—yet more!
And from their fell eyes droppeth murderous gore.

Chorus. There is atonement.⁷⁴ Touch but Loxias' altar,
And he from bloody stain shall wash thee clean.

Orest. Ye see them not. I see them.⁷⁵ There!—Away!
The hell-hounds hunt me: here I may not stay.

Chorus. Nay, but with blessing go. From fatal harm
Guard thee the god whose eyes in love behold thee!⁷⁶
Blown hath now the third harsh tempest,
O'er the proud Atridan palace,

Floods of family woe!

First thy damned feast, Thyestes,
On thy children's flesh abhorrent;
Then the kingly man's prostration,
And thy warlike pride, Achaia,

Butchered in a bath;

Now he, too, our greeted Saviour

Red with this new woe!

When shall Fate's stern work be ended,

When shall cease the boisterous vengeance,

Hushed in slumbers low?

THE EUMENIDES

A LYRICO-DRAMATIC SPECTACLE

ἄλγεα

Πολλὰ μάλ' ὅσσα τε μητρὸς Ἐριννύες ἐκτελέουσιν.

Odyssey xi. 289.

My solitude is solitude no more,
But peopled with the Furies.

BYRON.