

The Suppliants

My Libyan foot I've planted ; hence by the brize³⁶
Divinely fretted with fitful oar she hies³⁷

From various shore to shore,
God-maddened wanderer. Twice the billowy wave
She crossed ; and twice her fated name she gave
To the wide sea's straitened roar.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Spurred through the Asian land with swiftest speed
She fled, where Phrygian flocks far-pasturing feed ,

Then restless travelled o'er
Mysia, where Teuthras holds his fortress high,
Cilician and Pamphylian heights, and nigh
Where roaring waters pour
From fountains ever fresh their torrent floods,
And Aphrodite's land whose loamy roods
Swell with the wheaten store.*

STROPHE III.

Thence by her wingéd keeper stung, she speeds
To the land divine, the many-nurturing meads,

And to the snow-fed stream,
Which like impetuous Typhon,† vasty pours
Its purest waves, that the salubrious shores
From pestilent taint redeem.‡

Here from harsh Hera's madly-goading pest,
From hattering chase of undeserved unrest,
At length by the holy stream.

ANTISTROPHE III.

She rests. Pale terror smote their hearts who saw
The unwonted sight beheld with startled awe

The thronging sons of Nile ;
Nor dared to approach this thing of human face,³⁸
Portentous-mingled with the lowing race,
Treading the Libyan soil.

Who then was he, the brize-stung Io's friend,
With charms of soothing virtue strong to end
Her weary-wandering toil?

STROPHE IV.

Jove, mighty Jove, Heaven's everlasting king,
He soft-inspiring came,

* Cyprus.

† See Prometheus Bound, p. 192 above.

‡ See Prometheus Bound, p. 204 and Note 46.

And with fond force innocuous heals her ills ;
 She from her eyes in lucent drops distils
 The stream of sorrowful shame,
 And in her womb from Jove a burden bore,
 A son of blameless fame,
 Who with his prosperous life long blessed the Libyan shore

ANTISTROPHE IV.

Far-pealed the land with jubilant shout—from Jove,
 From Jove it surely came,
 This living root of a far-branching line !
 For who but Jove prevailed, with power divine,
 Harsh Hera's wrath to tame ?
 Such the great work of Jove ; and we are such,
 O Jove, our race who claim
 From him whose name declares the virtue of thy touch.

STROPHE V.

For whom more justly shall my hymn be chaunted
 Than thee, above all gods that be, high-vaunted,
 Root of my race, great Jove ;
 Prime moulder from whose plastic-touching hand
 Life leaps : thine ancient-minded counsels stand,
 Thou all-devising Jove.

ANTISTROPHE V.

High-throned above the highest as the lowest,
 Beyond thee none, and mightier none thou knowest,
 The unfearing, all-feared one.
 When his deep thought takes counsel to fulfil,
 No dull delays clog Jove's decided will ;³⁹
 He speaks, and it is done.

Enter DANAUS.

Danaus. Be of good cheer, my daughters ! All is well,
 The popular voice hath perfected our prayers.

Chorus. Hail father, bearer of good news : but say,
 How was the matter stablished ? and how far
 Prevailed the people's uplifted hands to save us ?

Danaus. Not doubtingly, but with a bold decision,
 That made my old heart young again to see't.
 With one acclaim, a forest of right hands
 Rose through the hurtled air. These Libyan exiles—
 So ran the popular will—shall find a home

The Suppliants

In Argos, free, and from each robber hand
 Inviolatè, the native or the stranger ;
 And, whoso holding Argive land refuses
 To shield these virgins from the threatened force,
 Disgrace shall brand him, and the popular vote
 Oust him from Argos. Such response the king
 Persuasive forced, with wise admonishment ;
 Urging the wrath of Jove, which else provoked
 Would fatten on our woes, and the twin wrong
 To you the stranger, and to them the city,
 Pollution at their gate, a fuel to feed
 Ills without end. These words the Argive people
 Answered with suffragating hands, nor waited
 The herald's call to register their votes :
 Just eloquence ruled their willing ear, and Jove
 Crowned their fair purpose with the perfect deed. [*Exit.*]

Chorus. Come then, sisters, pour we freely
 Grateful prayers for Argive kindness ;
 Jove, the stranger's friend, befriend us,
 While from stranger's mouth sincerest
 Here we voice the hymn ;
 To a blameless issue, surely,
 Jove will guide the fate.

CHORAL HYMN.

STROPHE I.

Jove-born gods, benignly bending,
 Look, we pray, with eyes befriending,
 On these Argive halls !
 Ne'er may Mars, the wanton daring,
 With his shrill trump, joyless-blaring,
 Wrap, in wild flames, fiercely flaring,
 These Pelasgian walls !
 Go ! thy gory harvest reaping
 Far from us : thy bloody weeping
 Distant tribes may know.
 Bless, O Jove, this Argive nation !
 They have heard the supplication
 Of thy suppliants low ;
 Where the swooping Fate abased us,
 They with Mercy's vote upraised us
 From the prostrate woe !

ANTISTROPHE I.

Not with the male, the stronger, erring,
 But, woman's weaker cause preferring,
 Stood their virtue proof:
 Wisely Jove, the Avenger, fearing,
 To the chastened eye appearing,
 High his front of wrath up-rearing
 'Gainst the guilty roof.
 For heavily, heavily weighs the Alastor,
 Scapeless, and, with sore disaster,
 Sinks the sinner low.
 Bless, O Jove, this Argive nation,
 That knew their kindred's supplication,
 And saved them from the foe:
 And when their vows they pay, then surely
 Gifts from clean hands offered purely
 Thou in grace shalt know.

STROPHE II.

High these suppliant branches raising,
 Sisters, ancient Argos praising,
 Pour the grateful strain!
 Far from thy Pelasgian portals
 Dwell black Plague, from drooping mortals
 Ebbing life to drain!
 May'st thou see the crimson river
 From fierce home-bred slaughter, never
 Flowing o'er thy plain!
 Far from thee the youth-consuming
 Blossom-plucking strife!
 The harsh spouse of Aphrodite,
 Furious Mars in murder mighty,
 Where he sees thy beauty blooming,
 Spare his blood-smeared knife!

ANTISTROPHE II.

May a reverend priesthood hoary
 Belt thy shrines, their chiefest glory,
 With an holy band!
 By the bountiful libation,
 By the blazing pile, this nation
 Shall securely stand.
 Jove, the great All-ruler, fearing,

The Suppliants

Jove, the stranger's stay, revering,
 Ye shall save the land ;
 Jove, sure-throned above all cavil,
 Rules by ancient right,
 May just rulers never fail thee !
 Holy Hecate's aid avail thee,⁴⁰
 To thy mothers when in travail
 Sending labours light !

STROPHE III.

May no wasting march of ruin
 Work, O Argos, thine undoing !
 Never may'st thou hear
 Cries of Mars, the shrill, the lyreless !
 Ne'er may tearful moans, and quireless,
 Wake the sleeper's ear !
 Far from thee the shapes black-trooping
 Of disease, delightless-drooping !
 May the blazing death-winged arrow
 Of the Sun-god spare the marrow
 Of thy children dear !

ANTISTROPHE III.

Mighty Jove, the gracious giver,
 With his full-sheaved bounty ever
 Crown the fruited year !
 Flocks that graze before thy dwelling
 With rich increase yearly swelling
 The prosperous ploughman cheer !
 May the gods no grace deny thee,
 And the tuneful Muses nigh thee,
 With exuberant raptures brimming,
 From virgin throats thy praises hymning
 Hold the charmèd ear !

STROPHE IV.

O'er the general weal presiding,
 They that rule with far-providing
 Wisdom sway, and stably-guiding,
 Changeful counsels mar !
 Timely with each foreign nation
 Leagues of wise conciliation
 Let them join, fierce wars avoiding,
 From sharp losses far !

ANTISTROPHE IV.

The native gods, strong to deliver,
With blood of oxen free-poured ever,
With laurel-branches failing never,
Piously adore!

HONOUR THY PARENTS : spurn not lightly
This prime statute sanctioned rightly ;
Cling to this, a holy liver,
Steadfast evermore !

Re-enter DANAUS.

Danaus. Well hymned, my daughters ! I commend your prayers ;
But brace your hearts, nor fear, though I, your father,
Approach the bearer of unlooked-for news.
For from this consecrated hold of gods
I spy the ship ; too gallantly it peers
To cheat mine eye. The sinuous sail I see,
The bulging fence-work on each side,⁴¹ the prow
Fronted with eyes to track its watery way,⁴²
True to the steerman's hint that sits behind,
And with no friendly bearing. On the deck
Appear the crew, their swarthy limbs more swart
By snow-white vests revealed : a goodly line
Of succour in the rear : but in the van
The admiral ship, with low-furled sail makes way
By the swift strokes of measured-beating oars.
Wait calmly ye, and with well-counselled awe
Cling to the gods ; the while ye watch their coming,
Myself will hence, and straight return with aid
To champion our need.⁴³ For I must look for
Some herald or ambassador claiming you,
Their rightful prey, forthwith ; but fear ye not,
Their harsh will may not be. This warning take
Should we with help be slow, remain you here
Nor leave these gods, your strength. Faint not : for surely
Comes the appointed hour, and will not stay,
When godless men to Jove just fine shall pay.

STROPHE I.

Chorus. Father, I tremble, lest the fleet-winged ships,
Ere thou return, shall land—soon—very soon !
O father, I tremble to stay, and not flee,
When the bands of the ruthless are near !

My flight to foreclose from the chase of my foes !
 O father, I faint for fear !

Danaus. Fear not, my children. The accomplished vote
 Of Argos saves you. They are champions sworn.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Chorus. They come—destruction's minions mad with hate,
 Of fight insatiate : well thou know'st the men.
 With their host many-counted, their ships dark-fronted,⁴⁴
 They are near, O father, how near !
 Their ships stoutly-timbered, their crews swarthy-mem-
 bered,
 Triumphant in wrath I fear !

Danaus. Even let them come. They'll find their match in
 Argos ;
 A strong-limbed race with noon-day sweats well hardened.⁴⁵

STROPHE II.

Chorus. Only not leave me ! Pray thee, father, stay !
 Weak is a lonely woman. No Mars is in her.⁴⁶
 Dark-counselled, false, cunning-hearted are they,
 Unholy, as obscene crows
 On the feast of the altar that filthily prey ;
 They fear not the gods, my foes !

Danaus. 'Twill make our cause the stronger, daughters, if
 Their crime be sacrilege, and their foes the gods.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Chorus. The trident and the sacred blazonry
 Will not repel their violent hands, O father !
 They are proud, haughty-hearted, a high-blown race ;
 They are hot, they are mad for the fray !
 With the hound in their heart, and the dog in their face,
 They will tear from the altar their prey.

Danaus. Dogs let them be, the world has wolves to master them !
 And good Greek corn is better than papyrus.⁴⁷

Chorus. Being reasonless as brutes, unholy monsters,
 And spurred with wrath we must beware their fury.

Danaus. 'Tis no light work to land a fleet. To find
 Safe roads, sure anchorage, and to make fast
 The cables, this not with mere thought is done.
 The shepherds of the ships⁴⁸ are slow to feel
 Full confidence, the more that on this coast
 Harbours are few.⁴⁹ Besides, thou see'st the sun

Slants to the night ; and still a prudent pilot
 Fears in the dark. No man will disembark,
 Trust me, till all are firmly anchored. Thou
 Through all thy terrors still cling to the gods,
 Thy most sure stay. Thy safety's pledged. For me
 I'm old, but with the tongue of fluent youth
 I'll speak for thee, a pleader without blame.

[*Exit.*]

CHORAL HYMN.

STROPHE I.

O hilly land, high-honoured land,
 What wait we now, poor fugitive band?
 Some dark, dark cave
 Show me, within thy winding strand,
 To hide and save!
 Would I might vanish in smoke, ascending
 To Heaven, with Jove's light clouds dim-blending
 In misty air,
 Like wingless, viewless dust, and ending
 In nothing there!

ANTISTROPHE I.

'Tis more than heart may bear. Quick Fear
 My quaking life with dusky drear
 Alarm surroundeth!
 My father spied my ruin : sheer
 Despair confoundeth.
 Sooner, high-swung from fatal rope,
 Here may I end both life and hope,
 And strong Death bind me,
 Than hated hearts shall reach their scope,
 And shame shall find me!

STROPHE II.

Would I were throned in ether high,
 Where snows are born, and through the sky
 The white rack skurries! Would that I
 Might sit sublime
 On a hanging cliff where lone winds sigh,⁵⁰
 Where human finger never showed
 The far-perched vultures' drear abode,
 Nor goat may climb!

The Suppliants

Thence sheer to leap, and end for ever
My life and name,
Ere forceful hands this heart deliver
To married shame!

ANTISTROPHE II.

There, where no friendly foot may stray,
There let me lie, my limbs a prey
To dogs and birds : I not gainsay :
 'Twas wisely said,
Free from much woe who dies to-day
Shall be to-morrow. Rather than wedded
To whom I hate, let me be bedded
 Now with the dead !
Or if there be, my life to free,
 A way, declare it,
Ye gods !—a surgeon's cut for me,
 My heart shall bear it !

STROPHE III.

Voice ye your sorrow ! with the cry
Of doleful litany pierce the sky !
For freedom, for quick rescue cry
 To him above !
Ruler of Earth, look from thy throne,
 With eyes of love !
These deeds of violence wilt thou own,
Nor know thy prostrate suppliant's groan,
 Almighty Jove ?

ANTISTROPHE III.

Ægyptus' sons, a haughty race,
Follow my flight with sleepless chase,
With whoop and bay they scent my trace
To force my love.
Thy beam is true ; both good and ill
Thy sure scales prove,
Thou even-handed ! Mortals still
Reap fair fulfilment from thy will,
All-crowning Jove.

CHORUS, *in separate voices, and short hurried exclamations:* ⁵¹

Voice 1. Ah me! he lands! he leaps ashore!
He strides with ruffian hands to hale us!

Voice 2. Cry, sisters, cry ! swift help implore !

If here to cry may aught avail us !

Voice 3. Ah me ! 'tis but the muffled roar

Of forceful storms soon to assail us !

Voice 1. Flee to the gods ! to the altars cling !

Voice 2. By sea, by land, the ruthless foe

Grimly wantons in our woe !

Voice 3. Beneath thy wing shield us, O king !

Enter HERALD.

Herald. Hence to the ships ! to the good ships fare ye !⁵²
Swiftly as your feet may bear ye !

Chorus. Tear us ! tear us !

Rend us rather,

Torture and tear us !

From this body

Cut the head !

Gorily gather

Us to the dead !

Herald. Hence to the ships, away ! away !

A curse on you, and your delay !

O'er the briny billowy way

Thou shalt go to-day, to-day !

Wilt thou stand, a mulish striver,

I can spur, a forceful driver ;

Deftly, deftly, thou shalt trip

To the stoutly-timbered ship !

If to yield thou wilt not know,

Gorily, gorily thou shalt go !

An' thou be not madded wholly,

Know thy state, and quit thy folly !

Chorus. Help, ho ! help, ho ! help !

Herald. To the ships ! to the ships away with me !

These gods of Argos what reck we ?

Chorus. Never, O never

The nurturing river,

Of life the giver,

The healthful flood

That quickens the blood

Let me behold !

An Argive am I,*

From Inachus old,

These gods deny

Thy claim. Withhold !

* In this very perplexed passage I follow PAL. BOTHE's conjecture, *Αργεῖος*, is very happy.

Herald. To the ships, to the ships, with march not slow,
 Will ye, nill ye, ye must go!
 Quickly, quickly, hence away!
 Know thy master and obey!
 Ere a worse thing thou shalt know—
 Blows and beating—gently go!

STROPHE I.

Chorus. Worse than worstest
 May'st thou know!
 As thou cursest,
 Curst be so!
 The briny billow
 O'er thee flow!
 On sandy pillow
 Bedded low,

'Neath Sarpedon's breezy brow,*
 With the shifting sands shift thou!

Herald. Scream—rend your robes in rags!—call on the gods!
 The Egyptian bark thou shalt not overleap.
 Pour ye the bitter bootless wail at will!

ANTISTROPHE I.

Chorus. With fierce heart swelling
 To work my woe,
 With keen hate yelling
 Barks the foe.
 Broad Nile welling
 O'er thee flow!
 Find thy dwelling
 Bedded low,

'Neath the towering Libyan waters,
 Towering thou 'gainst Libya's daughters!

Herald. To the ships! to the ships! the swift ships even-oared!
 Quickly! no laggard shifts! the hand that drags thee
 Will lord it o'er thy locks, not gently handled!

STROPHE II.

Chorus. O father, oh!
 From the altar
 The assaulter
 Drags me to my woe:
 Step by step, a torturing guider,
 Like the slowly-dragging spider,

* A promontory in Cilicia.—STRABO, p. 670. PAL.

Cruel-minded so
Like a dream,
A dusky dream,
My hope away doth go !
O Earth, O Earth,
From death redeem !
O Earth, O Jove deliver !

Herald. Your Argive gods I know not ; they nor nursed
My infant life, nor reared my riper age.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Chorus. O father, oh !
From the altar
The assaulter
Drags me to my woe !
A snake two-footed fiercely fretted
Swells beside me ! from his whetted
Fangs, black death doth flow !
Like a dream,
A dusky dream,
My hope is vanished so !
O Earth, O Earth,
From death redeem !
O Earth, O Jove deliver !

Herald. To the ships ! to the ships ! Obey ! I say, obey !
Pity thy robes, if not thy flesh—away !

STROPHE III.

Chorus. Ye chiefs of the city,
By force they subdue me !

Herald. Well ! I must drag thee by the hair ! come ! come !
Point thy dull ears, and hear me !—come ! come ! come !

ANTISTROPHE III.

Chorus. I'm lost ! I'm ruined !
O king, they undo me !

Herald. Thou shalt see kings enough anon, believe me,
Ægyptus' sons—kingless thou shalt not die.

Enter KING with Attendants.

King. Fellow, what wouldst thou ? With what purpose here
Dost flout this land of brave Pelasgian men ?
Deem'st thou us women ? A barbarian truly
Art thou, if o'er the Greek to sport it thus

The fancy tempts thee. Nay, but thou art wrong
Both root and branch in this.

Herald. How wrong? Speak plainly.

King. Thou art a stranger here, and dost not know
As a stranger how to bear thee.

Herald. This I know,
I lost my own, and what I lost I found.

King. Thy patrons* who, on this Pelasgian ground?

Herald. To find stray goods the world all over, Hermes
Is prince of patrons.⁵³

King. Hermes is a god,
Thou, therefore, fear the gods.

Herald. And I do fear
The gods of the Nile.

King. We too have gods in Argos.

Herald. So be it: but, in Argos or in Africk,
My own's my own.

King. Who touches these reaps harm,
And that right soon.

Herald. No friendly word thou speak'st,
To welcome strangers.

King. Strangers are welcome here;
But not to spoil the gods.

Herald. These words of thine
To Ægyptus' sons be spoken, not to me.

King. I take no counsel, or from them, or thee.

Herald. Thou—who art thou? for I must plainly make
Rehearsal to my masters—this my office
Enforces—both by whom, and why, unjustly
I of this kindred company of women
Am robbed. A serious strife it is; no bandying
Of words from witnesses, no silver passed
From hand to hand will lay such ugly strife;
But man for man must fall, and noblest souls
Must dash their lives away.

King. For what I am,
You, and your shipmates, soon enough shall know me.
These maids, if with the softly suasive word
Thou canst prevail, are thine; to force we never
Will yield the suppliant sisters; thus the people
With one acclaim have voted; 'tis nailed down
Thus to the letter. So it must remain.

* πρόξενοι.—See Note 19 to page 226 above.

Thou hast my answer, not in tablets graven,
Or in the volumed scroll, all stamped and sealed,
But from a free Greek mouth. Dost understand me?
Hence quickly from my sight!

Herald. Of this be sure,
A war thou stirrest, in which, when once begun,
The males will be the stronger.

King. We, too, have males
In Argos, lusty-blooded men, who drink
Good wine, not brewed from barley.* As for you,
Ye virgins, fearless follow where these guides
Shall lead. Our city strongly girt with wall,
And high-reared tower receives you. We can boast
Full many a stately mansion; stateliest piled
My palace stands, work of no feeble hands.
Right pleasant 'tis in populous floors to lodge
With many a fellow-tenant: some will find
A greater good in closely severed homes,
That have no common gates: of these thou hast
The ample choice: take what shall like thee most.
Know me thy patron, and in all things know
My citizens thy shield, whose vote hath pledged
Thy safety; surer guarantee what wouldst thou?

Chorus. Blessing for thy blessing given,
Flow to thee, divine Pelasgian!
But for our advisal forthwith
Send, we pray thee, for our father;
He the firm, the far foreseeing,
How to live, and where to lodge us,
Duly shall direct. For ever
Quick to note the faults of strangers
Sways the general tongue; though we
Hope all that's good and best from thee.

King [to the attendant maids]:
Likewise you, ye maids attendant
For his daughters' service, wisely
Portioned by the father, here
Be your home secure,
Far from idle-bruited babblings,
'Neath my wing to dwell!

* "Potui humor ex hordeo aut frumento in quandam similitudinem vini corruptus." —
TACITUS de mor. Geom. c. 23.

Enter DANAUS, attended by an Argive guard.

Danaus. Daughters! if so the Olympian gods deserve
 Your sacrifices, your libations, surely
 Argos no less may claim them! Argos truly
 Your Saviour in worst need! With eager ears
 They drank my tale, indignant the foul deeds
 Of our fell-purposed cousinship they heard,
 And for my guard this goodly band they set me
 Of strong spear-bearing men, lest being slain
 By the lurking lance of some insidious foe
 My death bring shame to Argos. Such high honor,
 From hearts where kindness moves the friendly deed,
 They heaped the sire withal, that you, the daughters,
 In father's stead should own them. For the rest,
 To the chaste precepts graven on your heart
 That oft I gave, one timely warning add,
 That time, which proveth all, approve your lives
 Before this people; for 'gainst the stranger, calumny
 Flows deftly from the tongue, and cheap traducement
 Costs not a thought. I charge ye, therefore, daughters,
 Your age being such that turns the eyes of men
 To ready gaze, in all ye do consult
 Your father's honor: such ripe bloom as yours
 No careless watch demands: so fair a flower
 Wild beasts and men, monsters of all degrees,
 Winged and four-footed, wantonly will tear.
 Her luscious-dropping fruits the Cyprian * hangs
 In the general view, and publishes their praise;⁵⁴
 That whoso passes, and beholds the pomp
 Of shapeliest beauty, feels the charmed dart
 That shoots from eye to eye, and vanquished falls
 By strong desire. Give, therefore, jealous heed
 That our long toils, and ploughing the deep sea
 Not fruitless fall; but be your portment such
 As breeds no shame to us, nor to our enemies
 Laughter. A double lodgment for our use,
 One from the state, the other from the king,
 Rentless we hold. All things look bright. This only,
 Your father's word, remember. More than life
 Hold a chaste heart in honor.

Chorus. The high Olympians
 Grant all thy wish! For us and our young bloom,

* Venus.

Fear nothing, father : for unless the gods
Have forged new counsels, we ev'n to the end
Will tread the trodden path, and will not bend.

CHORAL HYMN.⁵⁵

STROPHE I.

Semi-Chorus 1. Lift ye the solemn hymn !
High let your pæans brim !
Praise in your strain
Gods that in glory reign
High o'er the Argive plain,
High o'er each castled hold,
Where Erasinus old *
Winds to the main !

Semi-Chorus 2 [*to the attendant maids*] :
Sing, happy maids, with me !
Loud with responsive glee
Voice ye the strain !
Praise ye the Argive shore,
Praise holy Nile no more,
Wide where his waters roar,
Mixed with the main !

ANTISTROPHE I.

Semi-Chorus 1. Lift ye the solemn hymn !
High let your pæans brim !
Praise in your strain
Torrents that bravely swell
Fresh through each Argive dell,
Broad streams that lazily
Wander, and mazily
Fatten the plain.

Semi-Chorus 2. Sing, sisters, sing with me
Artemis chaste ! may she
List to the strain !
Never, O never may
Marriage with fearful sway
Bind me ; nor I obey
Hatefullest chain !

STROPHE II.

Semi-Chorus 1. Yet, mighty praise be thine⁵⁶
Cyprian queen divine !
Hera, with thee I join,

* This river and the Inachus flow into the Argolic gulf, both near the city of Argos, taking their rise in the mountain ridge that separates Argos from Arcadia.

The Suppliants

Nearest to Jove.
 Subtly conceiving all,
 Wiseliest weaving all,
 Thy will achieving all
 Nobly by love!

Semi-Chorus 2. With thee Desire doth go ;
 Peitho,* with suasive flow
 Bending the willing foe,
 Marches with thee.
 Lovely Harmonia⁵⁷
 Knows thee; and, smote with awe,
 Strong kings obey the law
 Whispered by thee.

STROPHE IV.

Semi-Chorus 1. Yet must I fear the chase,⁵⁸
 Sail spread in evil race,
 War with a bloody pace
 Spurred after me.

Why to this Argive shore
 Came they with plashing oar,
 If not with sorrow's store
 Treasured for me?

Semi-Chorus 2. Comes fated good or ill,
 Wait we in patience still!
 No power may thwart his will
 Jove, mighty Jove.
 Laden with sorrow's store
 Virgins in days of yore
 Praised, when their grief was o'er,
 Jove, mighty Jove.

Semi-Chorus 1. Jove, mighty Jove, may he
 From wedded force for me
 Rescue prepare!

Semi-Chorus 2. Fair fall our maiden lot!
 But mighty Jove may not
 Yield to thy prayer.

Semi-Chorus 1. Know'st thou what woes may be
 Stored yet by Fate for me?

Semi-Chorus 2. Jove and his hidden plan
 Sight of the sharpest man
 Searcheth in vain ;
 Thou in thy narrow span
 Wisely remain !

* The goddess of Persuasion.

Semi-Chorus 1. Wisely my thought may fare
Tell me, O tell me where?

Semi-Chorus 2. 'Gainst what the gods ordain
Fret not thy heart in vain!

STROPHE.

Semi-Chorus 1. Save me, thou chief of gods, great Jove,
From violent bonds of hated love,
Even as the Inachian maid of yore
Thy hand set free from labour sore,
What time thou soothed with touch divine
Her weary frame,
And with a friendly force benign
Thy healing came.

ANTISTROPHE.

Semi-Chorus 2. May the woman's cause prevail!
And, when two certain ills assail,
Be ours the less: and Justice fair
For the just shall still declare.
Ye mighty gods o'er human fates
Supremely swaying,
On you my prayer, my fortune waits,
Your will obeying.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

A LYRICO-DRAMATIC SPECTACLE

I cannot think but curses climb the sky,
And there awake God's gentle-sleeping peace.

SHAKESPEARE.

Alle Schuld rächt sich auf Erden.

GOETHE.

PERSONS

ETEOCLES, Son of Oedipus.

MESSENGER.

CHORUS OF THEBAN VIRGINS.

ISMENE, }
ANTIGONE, } Sisters of Eteocles.

HERALD.

SCENE—*The Acropolis of Thebes.*

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

ONE of the most indisputable laws of the moral world, and, when seriously considered, perhaps the most awful one, is that principle of hereditary dependence, which connects the sins of one generation, and often of one individual, by an indissoluble bond, with the fortunes of another. In the closely compacted machinery of the moral world no man can be ignorant, or foolish, or vicious to himself. The most isolated individual by the very act of his existence, as he necessarily inhales, so he likewise exhales, a social atmosphere, either healthy so far, or so far unhealthy, for the race. Nothing in the world is independent either of what co-exists with it, or of what precedes it. The present, in particular, is everywhere at once the child of the past, and the parent of the future. It is no doubt true that a foolish father does not always beget a foolish son. There are counteracting influences constantly at work to prevent the fatal tendency to degeneration, of which Horace speaks so feelingly—

*Aetas parentum pejor avis tulit
Nos nequiores, mox daturos
Progeniem vitiosiore,*

but the “DELICTA MAJORUM IMMERITUS LUES” of the same poet remains a fearful reality in the daily administration of the world, which no serious-thinking man can afford to disregard. In the ancient law of Moses, as in the most famous systems of Christian theology, this principle plays a prominent part; and awful as its operation is, often sweeping whole generations into ruin, and smiting whole nations with a chronic leprosy, for the folly or extravagance of an ephemeral individual, we shall not be surprised to find it equally conspicuous in the literature of so subtle a people as the Greeks. The Hellenic mind, no doubt, was too sunny and too healthy to allow itself to be encased and imprisoned with this idea, as with an iron mail; but as a mysterious dark background of moral existence it was recognised in its highest power; and nowhere so distinctly, and with such terrible iteration, as in those lyrical exhibitions of solemn, religious, and legendary faith, which we call tragedy.

Among the other serious ethico-religious legends with which the scanty remains of the rich Greek tragedy have made us more familiar, the dark fates of two famous families—the Pelopidae and the Labdacidae—force themselves upon our attention with a marked distinctness. How the evil genius (ἁλᾶστωρ) of inherited guilt revealed itself in the blood-stained track of the descendants of Tantalus we have seen on the large scale of a complete trilogy in the first volume; the play to which we now introduce the reader is an exhibition of the same stern law of moral concatenation, in one of the scenes of the dark story of the Theban family of the Labdacidae. Labdacus, the father of this unfortunate race, is traced back in the legendary genealogy to the famous Phœnician settler, Cadmus, being removed from him by only one generation.* This head of the family appears tainted with no moral guilt of an extraordinary kind; but his son Laius figures in the legend, not like Pelops in the Pelopidan story, as a murderer, but as a licentious and a lustful character. Yielding to the violent impulses of unnatural passion,† he is said to have carried off from Elis, Chrysippus, the son of Pelops; whereupon the injured father pronounced against the unholy ravisher the appropriate curse that he should die childless, or, if he did beget children, that himself should lose his life by the hands of those to whom he had been the means of giving it. We see here exemplified that grand principle of retaliation (*lex talionis*), “*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*,” which stands out so prominently in the laws of Moses, and is so agreeable to the moral instincts of the human heart. Laius was to perish by his own progeny, because, in the irregular gratification of the procreative instinct, he had sinned against Nature. The curse spoken against him by Pelops was the wrathful expression of one of Nature’s greatest laws; in whatever way we seek violently to obtain happiness contrary to the sober course of the divine arrangements, in that way we are sure with our own hands to work our own destruction. This is inevitable. Accordingly, that the direct sanction of the gods might be added to the utterance of an aggrieved human heart, the legend represents the lustful offender as consulting the oracle of Delphi, whether he might not with safety disregard the imprecation of Pelops, and beget children by his wife Iocaste (called Epicaste in Homer, Od. XI. 271); and receiving the ominous answer—

Sow not the seed of children, in despite
Of the gods: for if thou shalt beget a son,

* Eurip. Phœnissæ. Prolog., and Argument to the same from the Cod. Guelpherbyt. in Matthiæ.

† πρῶτος ἐν ἀνθρώποις τὴν ἀρρενοφθορίαν ἔνρων. — Compare ROMANS i. 27.

Him who begat shall the begotten slay,
And all thy house in bloody ruin perish.*

But the divine oracle, as was to have been expected from the character of the questioner, was given in vain. Laius had consulted the oracle not that he might know and obey the divine will, but that he might, if possible, escape from the terrible consequences of the curse of Pelops, and yet gratify his natural desire of having offspring. The result was natural. In a moment of forgetfulness, induced by the free use of that mother of many evils, wine, he neglected the divine warning; and, from his fatal embrace, a child was born, destined in the course of the accomplishment of the ancient curse, both to suffer many monstrous misfortunes in his own person, and to transmit guilt and misery to another generation. This child was Oedipus,† so named from the piercing of his feet by nails, and subsequent exposure on Mount Cithaeron, a device contrived by his father, in order to escape the fulfilment of the divine oracle. But it is not possible, as Homer frequently inculcates, to deceive the mind of the gods. The helpless infant, the child of destiny, is found (like Romulus), by some shepherds, and by them taken to Polybus king of Corinth. Here the foundling is brought up as the son of that monarch; but, on one occasion, being taunted by some of his youthful comrades with the reproach that he is not really the son of Polybus, but a fatherless foundling, he goes forth to the oracle of Delphi, and to the wide world, to clear up what had been more wisely left in the dark; and here his god-sent misfortunes overtake him, and the evil genius of his father drives the innocent son blindfold into inevitable woe. The Pythoness, according to her wont, returned an answer more doubtful than the question. Oedipus was told not who his father was, but that a dark destiny hung over him, to kill his father, and to commit incest with his mother. Knowing no parents but those whom he had left at Corinth, he proceeded on his wanderings, in a direction the opposite of that by which he had come; and, on the road between Delphi and Daulis,‡ met a person of consequence, with a charioteer and an attendant, in a car. The charioteer immediately ordered the foot traveller, somewhat insolently, after the manner of aristocratic satellites, to get out of the way; which rudeness the hot youth resenting, a scuffle ensued, in which the charioteer

* Μὴ σπείρε τέκνων ἄλοκα δαιμόνων βίᾳ, κ.τ.λ.—Eurip. Phœnis. 19.

† οἰδέω to swell, and ποὺς a foot; literally *swell-foot*. Welcker remarks that there is a peculiar significancy in the appellations connected with this legend; even Λαῖος being connected with λαικάζω, λαισκαπρος, and other similar words—(*Trilog.* p. 355)—but this is dangerous ground.

‡ The σχιστὴ ὁδός.—See Wordsworth's Greece, p. 21.

and his master were slain, while the attendant fled. The murdered prince was Laius ; and Oedipus, unwittingly, nay, doing everything he could to elude the fate, had slain his own father. But the ancient Fury, for a season, concealed her vengeance, and allowed a brief glory to be shed round her victim, that he might thereafter be plunged in more terrible darkness. The Sphynx, a monstrous creature, of Egyptian birth, half virgin, half lion, had been sent by wrathful Mars, to desolate the Theban country, devouring, with her bloody jaws, whosoever could not solve her famous riddle. When depopulation proceeded at a fearful rate from this cause, the Thebans promised Iocaste, the widow of Laius, and queen of the country, in marriage, to him who should succeed in explaining the enigma. Oedipus was successful ; and, becoming king of Thebes, was married, in ignorance, to his own mother. Thus the net of destiny was drawn closer and closer round its victim ; but the hour of doom was not yet come. Joined in this unnatural wedlock, the unfortunate son of Laius became the father of two sons, Eteocles and Polynices, and of two daughters, Antigone and Ismene. Circumstances (which Sophocles narrates in his *Oedipus Tyrannus*) afterwards bringing the story of Oedipus' life and the nature of his connection with Iocaste to light, the unfortunate old king looking upon himself as an object of hatred to the gods, and unworthy to look upon the day, tore out his eyes, and was confined by his sons—whether from cruelty or superstition—in a separate house, and treated otherwise in a manner that appeared to him disrespectful and unkind.* Enraged at this treatment, he pronounced an imprecation against them, that they should one day *DIVIDE THEIR INHERITED LAND BY STEEL* ; whereupon they, to render any hostile collision impossible, made an agreement to exercise kingly authority over the whole Theban territory, each for a year at a time, while the other should leave the country. Eteocles, as the elder, reigned first ; but when the appointed term came round, like other holders of power, he showed himself loath to quit ; and Polynices, fleeing to Argos, sought assistance from Adrastus, king of that country. This prince, along with the Ætolian Tydeus, the father of Diomedes, and other chiefs, marched against Thebes with a great armament, in order to force Eteocles to yield the yearly tenure of the throne to his brother, according to agreement. The appearance of this armament before the gates of the Cadmean city, and its sad issue, in the death, by their own

* It is particularly mentioned in the oldest form of the legend, that he considered his sons had not sent him his due share of the flesh offered in the family sacrifice.—Scholiast Soph. O. C. 1375. This is alluded to in the fifth antistrophe of the third great choral chaunt of this play, v. 768. WELL. See my Note.

hands, of the two hostile brothers, form the subject of the present play.

From this rapid sketch, the reader will see plainly that the dismal story of Laius and Oedipus, and his children, affords materials for a whole series of tragedies ; and that, in fact, "THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES" is only one of the last acts of a great consecutive legendary history, of which each part is necessary to explain the other. This close connection of the subjects naturally suggests the question, whether our play, as we now have it, stood alone in dramatic representation, or whether it was not—like other pieces in this volume—only a subordinate part of a large dramatic whole. We know for certain that Æschylus wrote at least four plays, besides the present, of which the materials were taken from the cycle of this Theban legend—namely, LAIUS, OEDIPUS, THE SPHYNX, and the ELEUSINIANS ;* and it has been not unplausibly conjectured that some of his other plays, of which the names are preserved, belong to the same series.† In what precise connection, however, the existing play stood to any of the rest in actual representation, there were, till very recently, no satisfactory means of judging ; and accordingly no scanty wealth of erudite speculation (after the German fashion), made to look like science, was spent upon the subject. Now, at length it has been announced, that the *διδασκαλία*, containing the actual order of representation of four of these plays, has been discovered ;‡ and, if the document be genuine, we are enabled to assert that, in the 78th Olympiad, Æschylus gained the tragic prize with the tetralogy, of LAIUS, OEDIPUS, THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES, and the SPHYNX, a satiric drama.

With regard to the merits of the present piece, while its structure exhibits, in the most striking manner, the deficient skill of the early dramatists, its spirit is everywhere manly and noble, and instinct with the soul of the warlike actions which it describes. The best parts are epic, not dramatic—namely, those in which the Messenger describes the different characters and appearance of the seven chiefs posted each at a separate gate of the Cadmean city. The drama concludes with a Theban coronach or wail over the dead bodies of the self-slain brothers ; for the proper relishing of which, the imaginative reproduction of some appropriate music is indispensable. The introduction after this of the Herald, announcing the decree of the Theban senate, whereby burial is denied to the body of Polynices,

* The subject of "The Eleusinians" was the burial of the dead bodies of the chiefs who had fallen before Thebes, through the mediation of Theseus.—See Plutarch, *Life of that hero*, c. 29.

† See Welcker's *Trilogie*, p. 359, etc.

‡ *Classical Museum*, No. XXV. p. 312.

and the heroic display of sisterly affection on the part of Antigone, are—if this really was the last piece of a trilogy—altogether foreign both to the action and to the tone of the tragedy, and must be regarded as a blunder. If Schiller, and even Shakespere, on occasions, could err in such matters, much more Æschylus.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Eteocles. Ye citizens of Cadmus ! he who sits
Holding the helm in the high poop of state,
Watchful, with sleepless eyes, must, when he speaks,
Speak words that suit the time. If we succeed,
The gods will have the praise ; but should we fail
(Which may averting Jove from me avert,¹
And from this Theban city !), I alone
Must bear the up-heaped murmurings of the whole,
A motley-voiced lament. Ye men of Thebes,
Not manhood's vigour only, but ye also
Who lack ripe years, and ye whose green old age
Nurses unwithered strength,* arm, and redeem
Your country's honor from a cruel blot.
Let not the citadel of your ancient sires,
The altars of your native gods, your children,
Nor the dear mother Earth, that nursed you, blame
The slackness of your love—the nurse who bore
Your creeping childhood on her fostering soil,
And through your slow growth up to firmer years,
Toiled that the strong arms of her faithful sons,
Might shield her need. Up to this hour the god
Inclines to us ; though close hedged in by the foe,
The vantage hath been ours. But now the seer,
The shepherd of prophetic birds' revolving
In his ear and inward sense deep-pondered truths,²
By no false art, though without help from fire,
Even he soothsaying sings that the Argive camp
Holds midnight council to attack the city.
Therefore be ready ; mount the battlements ;
Top every tower ; crown every parapet ;
Fence every gate with valiant-hearted men,
Well harnessed for the fight : and never fear
This trooping alien foe. The gods will give
A happy issue. Myself have sent out scouts,
Sure men, not wont to linger. Their advice
Shall shield us from surprise.

* See PALEY'S Note.

Enter MESSENGER.*Mess.*

Eteocles,

Most excellent lord of Thebes ! what I have seen
 With mine own eyes, no idle unvouched tale,
 I bring thee from the camp. Seven warlike chiefs
 I saw, in solemn sacrifice assembled :
 Holding the head of the devoted ox,
 Over the shield with iron rimmed they dipped
 Their hands in the steaming blood, and swore an oath,
 By Mars, Enýo, and blood-loving Terror,³
 Either to raze the walls of Thebes, and plunder
 The citadel of Cadmus, or else drench
 This soil with Argive blood. Then, as for death
 Prepared, they decked the chariot of Adrastus⁴
 With choice love-tokens to their Argive kin,
 Dropping a tear, but with their mouths they gave
 No voice. An iron-hearted band are they,
 Breathing hot war, like lions when their eye
 Looks instant battle. Such my news ; nor I
 Slow to report ; for in the camp I left them
 Eager to share among their several bands
 Our gates by lot. Therefore, bestir thee ; fence
 Each gate with the choicest men : dash all delay ;
 For now the Argive host, near and more near,
 All panoplied comes on ; the dark-wreathed dust
 Rolls, and the snowy foam of snorting chargers
 Stains the pure Theban soil. Like a wise pilot
 That scents the coming gale, hold thou the city
 Tight, ere the storm of Ares on our heads
 Burst pitiless. Loud the mainland wave is roaring.
 This charge be thine : myself, a sleepless spy,
 Will bring thee sure word from the hostile camp :
 Safe from without, so ye be strong within. [*Exit.*

Eteocles. O Jove ! O Earth ! O Gods that keep the city !

And thou fell Fury of my father's curse ! *

Destroy not utterly this Cadméan seat

Rent, razed, deracinated by the foe !

Yield not our pious hearths, where the loved speech
 Of Hellas echoes, to a stranger host !

Let not the free-born Theban bend the neck,

To slavery thrall'd, beneath a tyrant's yoke !

Be ye our strength ! our common cause we plead ;

A prosperous state hath cause to bless the gods. [*Exit.*

* See Introductory Remarks.

I.

The CHORUS⁵ enter the scene in great hurry and agitation.

O wailing and sorrow, O wailing and woe!
 Their tents they have left, many-banded they ride,
 And onward they tramp with the prance of pride,
 The horsemen of the foe.

The dark-volumed dust-cloud that rides on the gale,
 Though voiceless, declares a true messenger's tale;
 With clattering hoofs, on and on still they ride;⁶
 It swells on my ear, loud it rusheth and roareth,
 As a fierce wintry torrent precipitous poureth,
 Rapidly lashing the mountain side.

Hear me ye gods, and ye goddesses hear me!
 The black harm prevent that swells near and more near me!
 As a wave on the shore when the blast beats the coast,
 So breaks o'er the walls, from the white-shielded host,⁷
 The eager war-cry, the sharp cry of fear,
 As near still it rolls, and more near.

II.

The CHORUS become more and more agitated. They speak one to another in short hurried exclamations, and in great confusion.

Chorus 1. To which of the gods and the goddesses now
 Shall I pay my vow?

Chorus 2. Shall I cling to the altar, and kneeling embrace
 The guardian gods of the Theban race?

Tutti. Ye blissful Olympians, throned sublime,
 In the hour of need, in the urgent time,
 May the deep drawn sigh,
 And the heart's strong cry
 Ascend not in vain to your seats sublime!

Chorus 1. Heard ye the shields rattle, heard ye the spear?
 In this dark day of dole,
 With chaplet and stole⁸

Let us march to the temples, and worship in fear!

Chorus 2. I heard the shield's rattle, and spear clashed on spear
 Came stunning my ear.

Tutti. O Ares, that shines in the helmet of gold,⁹
 Thine own chosen city wilt thou behold
 To slavery sold?

O Ares, Ares, wilt thou betray
 Thy Theban home to-day?

III.

The CHORUS crown the altars of the gods, and then, falling on their knees, sing the following Theban Litany, in one continuous chaunt.

Patron gods that keep the city,
 Look, look down upon our woe,
 Save this band of suppliant virgins
 From the harsh-enslaving foe!
 For a rush of high-plumed warriors
 Round the city of the free,
 By the blast of Ares driven,
 Roars, like billows of the sea.
 Father Jove the consummator,*
 Save us from the Argive spear;
 For their bristling ranks enclose us,
 And our hearts do quake with fear,
 And their steeds with ringing bridles¹⁰
 Knell destruction o'er the land;
 And seven chiefs, with lance in hand,
 Fixed by lot to share the slaughter,
 At the seventh gate proudly stand.
 Save us, Pallas, war-delighting
 Daughter of immortal Jove!
 Save us, lord of billowy ocean!
 God of pawing steeds, Poseidon,¹¹
 Join thine aid to his above,
 And with thy fish-piercing trident
 Still our hearts, our fears remove.
 Save us Ares! father Ares,
 Father now thy children's need!
 Save us Cypris, mother of Thebans,¹²
 For we are thy blood indeed!
 Save us, save us, Wolf-Apollo,¹³
 Be a wolf against the foe!
 Whet thine arrows, born of Leto,
 Leto's daughter bend thy bow!

IV.

The Litany is here interrupted by the noise of the besiegers storming the city, and is continued in a hurried irregular manner.

Chorus 1. I hear the dread roll of the chariots of war!

Tutti. O holy Hera!

* See Note 35 to the Suppliants, p. 235 above.

Chorus 2. And the axles harsh-creaking with dissonant jar!

Tutti. O Artemis dear!

Chorus 1. And the vext air is madded with quick-branished spears.

Semi-Chorus 1. To Thebes, our loved city, what hope now appears?

Semi-Chorus 2. And when shall the gods bring an end of our fears?

Chorus 1. Hark! hark! stony hail the near rampart is lashing!

Tutti. O blest Apollo!

Chorus 2. And iron-bound shield against shield is clashing!

Tutti. The issue of war with the gods abideth,

The doubtful struggle great Jove decideth.

O Onca, blest Onca,¹⁴ whose worshippers ever

Invoke thee, the queen of the Oncan gate,

The seven-gated city deliver, deliver,¹⁵

Thou guardian queen of the gate.

v.

The CHORUS unite again into a full band, and sing the Finale of the Litany in regular Strophe and Antistrophe.

STROPHE.

Gods and goddesses almighty!

Earthly and celestial powers!

Of all good things consummators,

Guardians of the Theban towers!

Save the spear-encompassed city

From a foreign-speaking foe!¹⁶

Hear the virgin band, that prays thee

With the out-stretched arms of woe!

ANTISTROPHE.

Gods and demigods! the city

Aid that on your aid depends,

Watch around us, and defend us;

He is strong whom God defends.

Bear the incense in remembrance

Of our public sacrifice;

From a people rich in offerings

Let no prayer unanswered rise!

Re-enter ETEOCLES.

Eteocles. Answer me this, insufferable brood!

Is this your wisdom, this your safety-note

To Theban soldiers, this your war-cry, thus
 In prostrate woe clasping the guardian gods,
 To scream and wail the vain lament of fools?
 I pray the gods, in good or evil days,
 May never fate be mine to lodge with women.
 When fortune's brave, their pride's unbearable;
 But, comes a thought of fear, both hall and forum
 Must ring with their laments. Why run ye thus
 From street to street, into the hearts of men
 Scattering dastardy, and bruited fear?
 Nay, but ye chiefly help the enemy's cause
 Without the gate, and we by friends within
 Are more besieged; such aid expect from women!
 Thebans give ear; whoso shall disobey
 My word in Thebes, man, woman, old, or young,
 Whoe'er he be, against himself he writes
 Black sentence to be stoned by the public hand.
 Without the gates let brave men fight; within
 Let women tend their children, and their webs.
 Hear ye, or hear ye not? or do I speak
 To the deaf?

STROPHE I.

Chorus. Son of Oedipus be witness!
 Should not terror rob our wits,
 When we hear the roll of chariots,
 Whirling wheels, and creaking axles,
 And the unresting tramp of horses
 Champing fierce their fire-forged bits?

Eteocles. What then? when with the storm the good ship
 labours,

Shall the wise helmsman leave his proper post,
 To clasp the painted gods upon the prow? ¹⁷

ANTISTROPHE I.

Chorus. When we heard war's rattling hail-drift
 Round our ramparts wildly rave,
 Trusting to the gods of Cadmus,
 Spurred by fear, we hither hurried,
 Here to pray, and clasp the statues
 Of the good gods strong to save.

Eteocles. Pray that our well-manned walls be strong to save us,
 Else will the gods help little. Who knows not
 That, when a city falls, they pass to the Victor? ¹⁸

STROPHE II.

Chorus. Never, never may the council
Of the assembled gods desert us,
While I live, and look on day!
Never, never may the stranger
Rush through the streets, while midnight burning
Lights the robber to his prey!

Eteocles. Weak prayers confound wise counsel. Know ye not
Obedience is the mother of success,
And pledge of victory. So the wise have spoken.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Chorus. But the gods are strong. When mortals
Stretch the arm in vain to save us,
Help is waiting from above.
When dark night enveils the welkin,
And thick-mantled ruin gathers,
They enclasp us round with love.

Eteocles. Leave sacrifice and oracles to men,
And 'gainst the imminent foe pray to the gods.
Women should hold their tongues, and keep their homes.

STROPHE III.

Chorus. By the strength of gods the city
Each rude tide hath learnt to stem;
Who shall charge us with offending,
When we make our vows to them?

Eteocles. Your vows I grudge not, nor would stint your prayers;
But this I say, blow not your fears about,
Nor taint the general heart with apprehension.

ANTISTROPHE III.

Chorus. Startled by the blare of battle,
Hearing clash of combat fell,
With a quaking heart I hied me
To this sacred citadel.

Eteocles. And when ye hear that some are dead or wounded,
Drag not the news with wailings through the town;
For blood of mortals is the common food¹⁹
Of the war god.

Chorus. Hark! the angry steeds are snorting.

Eteocles. Hear what thou wilt; but do not hear aloud.

Chorus. The Earth beneath me groans, the wall is shaking.

Eteocles. The walls are mine to uphold. Pray you, be silent.

Chorus. Woe's me, the clash of arms, loud and more loud,
Rings at the gate !

Eteocles. And thou the loudest !—Peace !

Chorus. Great council of the gods, O save us ! save us !

Eteocles. Perdition seize thee ! thy words flow like water.

Chorus. O patron gods, save me from captive chains !

Eteocles. Thy fear makes captive me, and thee, and all.

Chorus. O mighty Jove, fix with thy dart the foe !

Eteocles. O Jove, of what strange stuff hast thou made women !

Chorus. Men are no better, when their city's captured.

Eteocles. Dost clasp the gods again, and scream and howl ?

Chorus. Fear hurries on my overmastered tongue.

Eteocles. One small request I have ; beseech you hear me.

Chorus. Speak : I am willing, if I can, to please thee.

Eteocles. Please me by silence ; do not fright thy friends.

Chorus. I speak no more : and wait my doom with them.

Eteocles. This word is wiser than a host of wails.

And now, instead of running to and fro,
Clinging to every image as you pass,
Pray to the gods with sober supplication,
To aid the Theban cause : and, when ye hear
My vow, lift up a blithe auspicious shout,
A sacred hymn, a sacrificial cry,
As brave Greek hearts are wont, whose voice shall speak
Sure confidence to friends, and to the foe
Dismay. Now, hear my vow. If they who keep
The city, keep it now from the Argive spear,
I vow to them, and to the patron gods
Of field and forum, and the holy fount
Of Dirce and Ismenus' sacred stream,²⁰
That blood of lambs and bulls shall wash their altars,
And spear-pierced trophies, Argive harnesses,
Bedeck their holy halls. Such be your prayers ;
Not sighs and sobs, and frantic screams, that shake
The hearts of men, but not the will of gods.
Meanwhile, with six choice men, myself the seventh,
I'll gallantly oppose these boastful chiefs
That block our outlets. Timely thus I'll gag
The swift-winged rush of various-bruited news,
That in the hour of danger blazes fear.

[*Exit.*

CHORAL HYMN.

STROPHE I.

Well thou speakest ; but unsleeping
Terrors shake my virgin frame,
And the blasts of war around me
Fan my fears into a flame.
As the dove her dovelets nursing,
Fears the tree-encircling serpent,
Fatal neighbour of her nest ;
Thus the foe, our walls enclosing,
Thrills with ceaseless fears my breast.
Hark ! in hurrying throngs careering
Rude they beat our Theban towers,
And a rain of rock-torn fragments
On the roofs of Cadmus showers !
Save us, gods that keep the city,
Save us, Jove-begotten Powers !

ANTISTROPHE I.

Say what region shall receive ye,
When the Theban soil is waste ?
When pure Dirce's fount is troubled,
From what waters shall ye taste ?
Theban soil, the deepest, richest,
That with fruits of joy is pregnant,
Dirce, sweetest fount that runs,
From Poseidon earth-embracing,
And from Tethys' winding sons.²¹
Patron-gods maintain your glory,
Sit in might enthroned to-day :
Smite the foe with fear ; fear stricken
Let them fling their arms away :
Hear our sharp shrill-piercing wailings,
When for Cadmus' weal we pray !

STROPHE II.

Sad it were, and food for weeping,
To behold these walls Ogygian,
By the stranger spearman mounted,
Levelled by the Argive foe,
And these towers by god-sent vengeance
Laid in crumbling ashes low.
Sad it were to see the daughters,

The Seven against Thebes

And the sonless mothers grey,
 Of old Thebes, with hair dishevelled,
 And rent vestments, even as horses
 Dragged by the mane, a helpless prey;
 Sad to hear the victors' clamour
 Mingling with the captive's moan,
 And the frequent-clanking fetter
 Struggling with the dying groan.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Sad, most sad, should hands unlicensed
 Rudely pluck our opening blossom;
 Sad—yea better far to die!
 Changing nuptial torch and chamber
 For dark homes of slavery.
 Ah! my soul within me trembles,
 When it shapes the sight of shame,
 Swift the chase of lawless murder,
 And the swifter chase of flame;
 Black the surly smoke upwreathing,
 Cries, confusion, choking heat;
 Shrine-polluting, man-subduing
 Mars, wild borne from street to street!

STROPHE III.

Towers and catapults surrounding,
 And the greedy spear upswallowing
 Man by man, its gory food:
 And the sucking infants clinging
 To the breasts that cannot bear them,
 Cries to ears that cannot hear them
 Mingle with their mother's blood.
 Plunder, daughter of Confusion,
 Startles Plenty from his lair,
 And the robber with the robber
 Bargains for an equal share;
 Gods! in such a night of terrors
 How shall helpless maidens fare?

ANTISTROPHE III.

Planless is the strife of Plunder.
 Fruits of patient years are trampled
 Reckless in the moment's grave;
 And the maids that tend the household,

With a bitter eye of weeping,
See the treasured store of summers
Hurried by the barren wave.
Woe, deep woe, waits captive maidens,
To an untried thraldom led,
Bound, by chains of forced affection,
To some haughty husband's bed :
Sooner, sooner may I wander
Sister of the sunless dead !

Semi-Chorus 1. Methinks I see the scout sent by the king :
Doubtless he brings us news ; his tripping feet
Come swift as wheels that turn on willing axles.

Semi-Chorus 2. The king himself, the son of Oedipus,
Comes in the exact nick to hear his tidings :
With rapid and unequal steps he too
Urges the way.

Enter MESSENGER and ETEOCLES from opposite sides

Mess. What I have seen I come
To tell ; the movements of the foe, the station
That lot hath given each champion at the gates.
First at the Proetian portal Tydeus stands,²²
Storming against the seer, who wise forbids
To pass Ismenus' wave, before the sacrifice
Auspicious smiles. But he, for battle burning,
Fumes like a fretful snake in the sultry noon,
Lashing with gibes the wise Oiclidan seer,²³
Whose prudence he interprets dastardy,
Cajoling death away. Thus fierce he raves,
And shakes the overshadowing crest sublime,
His helmet's triple mane, while 'neath his shield
The brazen bells ring fear.²⁴ On his shield's face
A sign he bears as haughty as himself,
The welkin flaming with a thousand lights,
And in its centre the full moon shines forth,
Eye of the night, and regent of the stars.
So speaks his vaunting shield : on the stream's bank
He stands, loud-roaring, eager for the fight,
As some fierce steed that frets against the bit,
And waits with ruffling neck, and ears erect,
To catch the trumpet's blare. Who will oppose
This man ? what champion, when the bolts are broken,
Shall plant his body in the Proetian gate ?

Eteocles. No blows I fear from the trim dress of war,
 No wounds from blazoned terrors. Triple crests
 And ringing bells bite not without the spear ;
 And for this braggart shield, with starry night
 Studded, too soon for the fool's wit that owns it
 The scutcheon may prove seer. When death's dark night
 Shall settle on his eyes, and the blithe day
 Beams joy on him no more, hath not the shield
 Spoken significant, and pictured borne
 A boast against its bearer? I, to match
 This Tydeus, will set forth the son of Astacus,
 A noble youth not rich in boasts, who bows
 Before the sacred throne of Modesty,
 In base things cowardly, in high virtue bold.
 His race from those whom Ares spared he draws,²⁵
 Born from the sown field of the dragon's teeth,
 His name Melanippus. Mars shall throw the dice
 Bravely for him, and Justice call him brother,
 While girt he goes from his loved Theban mother
 To ward the Argive spear.

STROPHE I.

Chorus. May the gods protect our champion !
 Be the cause of Right his shield !
 But I fear to see the breathless
 Bleeding bodies of true warriors
 Strewn upon the battle field.

Mess. Speed well your pious prayers ! The lot hath placed
 Proud Capaneus before the Electran gate,²⁶
 A giant warrior mightier than the first,
 And boasting more than mortal. His high threats
 May never Chance* fulfil ! for with the aid
 Of gods, or in the gods' despite, he vows
 To sack the city, and sets the bolted wrath
 Of Jove at nought, his lightnings and his thunders
 Recking no more—so speaks the vauntful tongue—
 Than vulgar noonday heat. His orbéd shield
 The blazon of a naked man displays,
 Shaking a flaring torch with lofty threat
 In golden letters—I WILL BURN THE CITY.
 Such is the man : who shall not quail before
 A pride that flings defiance to the gods ?

* CHANCE (Τύχη), it must be recollected, was a divine power among the ancients.

Eteocles. Here, too, we meet the strong with something stronger.
 When men are proud beyond the mark of right,
 They do proclaim with forward tongue their folly,
 Themselves their own accuser. This brave Capaneus
 With empty threats and wordy exercise,
 Fights mortal 'gainst immortals, and upcasts
 Loud billowy boasts in Jove's high face. But I
 In Jove have faith that he will smite this boaster
 With flaming bolts, to vulgar heat of noon
 In no wise like. The gallant Polyphontus,
 A man of glowing heart, against this blusterer
 I'll send, himself a garrison to pledge
 Our safety, by the grace of Artemis,
 And the protecting gods. Name now the others.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Chorus. Perish, with his boasts, the boaster,
 By strong thunder prostrate laid!
 Never, never may I see him
 Into holy homes of virgins
 Rushing, with his godless blade!

Mess. Hear more. The third lot to Eteocles
 Leapt from the upturned brazen helm,²⁷ and fixed him
 At the Netaean gate.²⁸ His eager steeds,
 Their frontlets tossed in the breeze, their swelling nostrils
 High-snorting with the impatient blast of war,
 Their bridles flapping with barbaric clang,
 He curbs, and furious 'gainst the city wheels them,
 Even as a whirling storm. His breadth of shield,
 Superbly rounded, shows an armed man
 Scaling a city, with this proud device,
 NOT MARS HIMSELF SHALL HURL ME FROM THESE TOWERS.
 Choose thou a champion worthy to oppose
 This haughty chief, and pledge his country's weal.

Eteocles. Fear not: with happy omen, I will send,
 Have sent already, one to meet this foe,
 Whose boasts are deeds, brave Megareus, a son
 Of the dragon's race, a warrior recking nothing
 The snortings of impatient steeds. This man
 Will, with his heart's blood, pay the nursing fee
 Due to his Theban mother,* or come back—
 Which grant the gods!—bearing on that proud shield

* See Note 60 to the Choephoræ.

Rich spoil to garnish forth his father's halls,
 The painted champion, and the painted city,
 And him that living bore the false-faced sign.
 Now name the fourth, and spare me not your boasts.

STROPHE II.

Chorus. May the gods protect my champion !
 Ruin seize the ruthless foe !
 As they boast to raze the city,
 So may Jove with wrathful vengeance
 Lay their frenzied babblings low !

Mess. The fourth's Hippomedon. Before the gate
 He stands of Onca Pallas, clamouring on
 With lordly port. His shield's huge round he waved,
 (Fearful to view), a halo not a shield.
 No vulgar cunning did his hand possess
 Who carved the dread device upon its face,
 Typhon, forth-belching, from fire-breathing mouth,
 Black smoke, the volumed sister of the flame ;²⁹
 And round its hollow belly was embossed³⁰
 A ring of knotted snakes. Himself did rage,
 Shouting for battle, by the god of war
 Indwelt,³¹ and, like a Maenad, his dark eyes
 Look fear. Against this man be doubly armed,
 For, where he is, grim Fear is with him.

Eteocles. Onca
 Herself will guard the gate that bears her name,
 From her own ramparts hurl the proud assailer,
 And shield her nurslings from this crested snake.
 Hyperbius; the right valiant son of Oenops,
 Shall stand against this foe, casting his life
 Into the chance of war ; in lordly port,
 In courage, in all the accoutrements of fight
 Hippomedon's counterpart—a hostile pair
 Well matched by Hermes.³² But no equal match
 Their shields display—two hostile gods—the one
 Fire-breathing Typhon, father Jove the other,
 Erect, firm-planted, in his flaming hand
 Grasping red thunder, an unvanquished god.
 Such are the gods beneath whose wing they fight,
 For us the strong, for them the weaker power.
 And as the gods are, so the men shall be
 That on their aid depend. If Jove hath worsted

This Typhon in the fight, we too shall worst
Our adverse. Shall the king of gods not save
The man whose shield doth bear the SAVIOUR JOVE.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Chorus. Earth-born Typhon, hateful monster,
Sight that men and gods appals,
Whoso bears in godless blazon
Great Jove's foe, shall Jove almighty
Dash his head against the walls.

Mess. So grant the gods! The fifth proud foe is stationed
Before the Borean gate, hard by the tomb
Of the Jove-born Amphion. By his spear
He swears, his spear more dear to him than gods,
Or light of day, that he will sack the city
In Jove's despite: thus speaks half-man, half-boy,
The fair-faced scion of a mountain mother.
The manly down, luxuriant, bushy, sprouts
Full from his blooming cheek: no virgin he
In aspect, though most virgin-like his name.*
Keen are his looks, and fierce his soul; he too
Comes not without a boast against the gates;
For on his shield, stout forgery of brass,
A broad circumference of sure defence,
He shows, in mockery of Cadméan Thebes,
The terrible Sphynx, in gory food delighting,
Hugely embossed, with terror brightly studded,
And in her mortal paw the monster rends
A Theban man: for which reproachful sign
Thick-showered the bearer bears the keenest darts,—
Parthenopæus, bold Arcadian chief.
No man seems he to shame the leagues he travelled
By petty war's detail. Not born an Argive,
In Argos nursed, he now her love repays,
By fighting 'gainst her foes. His threats—the god
Grant they be only threats!

Eteocles. Did they receive
What punishment their impious vaunts deserve,
Ruin with one wide swoop should swamp them all.
This braggart stripling, fresh from Arcady,
The brother of Hyperbius shall confront,
Actor, a man whose hand pursues its deed,

* The name PARTHENOPAUS, from παρθένος, a virgin, and ὤψ, the countenance.

Not brandishing vain boasts. No enemy,
 Whose strength is in his tongue, shall sap these walls,
 While Actor has a spear: nor shall the man
 Who bears the hated portent on his shield
 Enter our gate, but rather the grim sign
 Frown on its bearer, when thick-rattling hail
 Showered from our walls shall dint it. If the gods
 Are just, the words I speak are prophecy.

STROPHE III.

Chorus. The eager cry doth rend my breast,
 And on end stands every hair,
 When I hear the godless vaunting
 Of unholy men! May Até
 Fang them in her hopeless snare!

Mess. The sixth a sober man, a seer of might,
 Before the Homoloidian gate stands forth,³³
 And speaks harsh words against the might of Tydeus.
 Rating him murderer, teacher of all ill
 To Argos, troubler of the city's peace,
 The Furies' herald, crimson slaughter's minion,
 And councillor of folly to Adrastus.
 Thy brother too, the might of Polynices,
 He whips with keen reproaches, and upcasts
 With bitter taunts his evil-omened name,
 Making it spell his ugly sin that owns it.³⁴
 O fair and pious deed, even thus he cries,
 To blot thy native soil with war, and lead
 A foreign host against thy country's gods!
 Soothly a worthy deed, a pleasant tale
 For future years to tell! Most specious right,
 To stop the sacred fountain up whence sprung
 Thy traitor life! How canst thou hope to live
 A ruler well acknowledged in the land,
 That thou hast wounded with invading spear?
 Myself this foreign soil, on which I tread,
 Shall feed with prophet's blood. I hope to die,
 Since die I must, an undishonoured death.
 Thus spake the seer, and waved his full-orb'd shield
 Of solid brass, but plain, without device.
 Of substance studious, careless of the show,
 The wise man is what fools but seem to be,³⁵
 Reaping rich harvest from the mellow soil

Of quiet thought, the mother of great deeds.
Choose thou a wise and virtuous man to meet
The wise and virtuous. Whoso fears the gods
Is fearful to oppose.

Eteocles.

Alas! the fate

That mingles up the godless and the just
In one companionship! wise was the man
Who taught that evil converse is the worst
Of evils, that death's unblest fruit is reaped
By him who sows in Até's fields.* The man
Who, being godly, with ungodly men
And hot-brained sailors mounts the brittle bark,
He, when the god-detested crew goes down,
Shall with the guilty guiltless perish. When
One righteous man is common citizen
With godless and unhospitable men,
One god-sent scourge must smite the whole, one net
Snare bad and good. Even so, Oïcleus' son,
This sober, just, and good, and pious man,
This mighty prophet and soothsayer, he,
Leagued with the cause of bad and bold-mouthed men
In his own despite—so Jove hath willed—shall lead
Down to the distant city of the dead
The murky march with them. He will not even
Approach the walls, so I may justly judge.
No dastard soul is his, no wavering will;
But well he knows, if Loxias' words bear fruit,
(And, when he speaks not true, the god is dumb)
Amphiaraus dies by Theban spear.
Yet to oppose this man I will dispatch
The valiant Lasthenes, a Theban true,
Who wastes no love on strangers; swift his eye,
Nor slow his hand to make the eager spear
Leap from behind the shield. The gods be with him!

ANTISTROPHE III.

Chorus. May the gods our just entreaties
For the cause of Cadmus hear!
Jove! when the sharp spear approaches,
Sit enthroned upon our rampires,
Darting bolts, and darting fear!

* See Note 60 to Agamemnon.

Mess. Against the seventh gate the seventh chief
 Leads on the foe, thy brother Polynices ;
 And fearful vows he makes, and fearful doom
 His prayers invoke. Mounted upon our walls,
 By herald's voice Thebes' rightful prince proclaimed,
 Shouting loud hymns of capture, hand to hand
 He vows to encounter thee, and either die
 Himself in killing thee, or should he live
 And spare thy recreant life, he will repay
 Like deed with like, and thou in turn shalt know
 Dishonouring exile. Thus he speaks and prays
 The family gods, and all the gods of Thebes,
 To aid his traitor suit. Upon his shield,
 New-forged, and nicely fitted to the hand,
 He bears this double blazonry—a woman
 Leading with sober pace an armed man
 All bossed in gold, and thus the superscription,
 "I, JUSTICE, BRING THIS INJURED EXILE BACK,
 TO CLAIM HIS PORTION IN HIS FATHER'S HALL."
 Such are the strange inventions of the foe.
 Choose thou a man that's fit to meet thy brother ;
 Nor blame thy servant : what he saw he says :
 To helm the state through such rude storm be thine !

Eteocles. O god-detested ! god-bemadded race !³⁶
 Woe-worthy sons of woe-worn Oedipus !
 Your father's curse is ripe ! but tears are vain,
 And weeping might but mother worser woe.
 O Polynices ! thy prophetic name
 Speaks more than all the emblems of thy shield ;
 Soon shall we see if gold-bossed words can save thee,
 Babbling vain madness in a proud device.
 If Jove-born Justice, maid divine, might be
 Of thoughts and deeds like thine participant,
 Thou mightst have hope ; but, Polynices, never,
 Or when the darkness of the mother's womb
 Thou first didst leave, or in thy nursling prime,
 Or in thy bloom of youth, or in the gathering
 Of beard on manhood's chin, hath Justice owned thee,
 Or known thy name ; and shall she know thee now
 Thou leadst a stranger host against thy country ?
 Her nature were a mockery of her name
 If she could fight for knaves, and still be Justice.
 In this faith strong, this traitor I will meet

Myself: the cause is mine, and I will fight it.
For equal prince to prince, to brother brother,
Fell foe to foe, suits well. And now to arms!
Bring me my spear and shield, hauberk and greaves!

[*Exit* MESSENGER.]

Chorus. Dear son of Oedipus! let not thy wrath
Wax hot as his whom thou dost chiefly chide!
Let the Cadméans with the Argives fight;
This is enough: their blood may be atoned.
But, when a brother falls by brother's hands,
Age may not mellow such dark due of guilt.

Eteocles. If thou canst bear an ill, and fear no shame,
Bear it: but if to bear is to be base,
Choose death, thy only refuge from disgrace.

STROPHE IV.

Chorus. Whither wouldst thou? calm thy bosom,
Tame the madness of thy blood;
Ere it bear a crimson blossom,
Pluck thy passion in the bud.

Eteocles. Fate urges on; the god will have it so.³⁷
Now drift the race of Laius, with full sail,
Abhorred by Phœbus, down Cocytus' stream!

ANTISTROPHE IV.

Chorus. Let not ravening rage consume thee!
Bitter fruit thy wrath will bear;
Sate thy hunger with the thousands,
But of brother's blood beware!

Eteocles. The Curse must work its will: and thus it speaks,
Watching beside me with dry tearless eyes,
Death is thy only gain, and death to-day
*Is better than to-morrow!*³⁸

STROPHE V.

Chorus. Save thy life: the wise will praise thee;
To the gods with incense come,
And the storm-clad black Erinnys
Passes by thy holy home.

Eteocles. The gods will reckon the curse, but not the prayers
Of Laius' race. Our doom is their delight.
'Tis now too late to fawn the Fate away.

ANTISTROPHE V.

Chorus. Nay! but yet thou mayst: the god,
That long hath raged, and burneth now,
With a gentler sway soft-wafted,
Soon may fan thy fevered brow.

Eteocles. The Curse must sway, my father's burning curse.
The visions of the night were true, that showed me
His heritage twin-portioned by the sword.

Chorus. We are but women: yet we pray thee hear us.

Eteocles. Speak things that may be, and I'll hear. Be brief.

Chorus. Fight not before the seventh gate, we pray thee.

Eteocles. My whetted will thy words may never blunt.

Chorus. Why rush on danger? Victory's sure without thee.

Eteocles. So speak to slaves; a soldier may not hear thee.

Chorus. But brother's blood—pluck not the bloody blossom.

Eteocles. If gods are just, he shall not 'scape from harm. [*Exit.*]

CHORAL HYMN.

STROPHE I.

I fear the house-destroying power; I fear
The goddess most ungodlike,³⁹
The all-truth-speaking seer
Of evil things, whose sleepless wrath doth nurse
Fulfilment of the frenzied father's curse.
The time doth darkly lower;
This strife of brother's blood with brother's blood
Spurs the dread hour.

ANTISTROPHE I.

O son of Scythia, must we ask thine aid?
Chalybian stranger thine,⁴⁰
Here with the keen unsparing blade
To part our fair possessions? thou dost deal
A bitter lot, O savage-minded steel!
Much loss is all the gain,
When mighty lords with their stark corpses measure
Their whole domain.

STROPHE II.

When the slain shall slay the slayer,
And kindred blood with blood
Shall mingle, when the thirsty Theban soil
Drinks eager the black-clotting sanguine flood,

Who then shall purge the murderous stain,
 Who wash it clean again?
 When ancient guilt and new shall burst,
 In one dire flood of woe?

ANTISTROPHE II.

With urgent pace the Fury treadeth,
 To generations three
 Avenging Laius' sin on Laius' race;
 What time he sinned against the gods' decree,
 When Phœbus from Earth's central shrine*
 Thrice sent the word divine—
 LIVE CHILDLESS, LAIUS, FOR THY SEED
 SHALL WORK THY COUNTRY'S WOE.

STROPHE III.

But he to foolish words gave ear,
 And ruin to himself begot,
 The parricidal Oedipus, who joined
 A frenzied bond in most unholy kind,
 Sowing where he was sown; whence sprung a bud
 Of bitterness and blood.

ANTISTROPHE III.

The city tosses to and fro,
 Like a drifted ship; wave after wave,
 Now high, now low, with triple-crested flow
 Now reared sublime, brays round the plunging prow.
 These walls are but a plank: if the kings fall
 'Tis ruin to us all.

STROPHE IV.

The ancestral curse, the hoary doom is ripe.
 Who now shall smooth such hate?
 What hand shall stay, when it hath willed to strike,
 The uplifted arm of Fate?
 When the ship creaks beneath the straining gale,
 The wealthy merchant † flings the well-stowed bale
 Into the gulf below.‡

ANTISTROPHE IV.

When the enigma of the baleful Sphynx
 By Oedipus was read,

* See Note 73 to the Choephoræ.

† See PAPE. *in voce* αλφηστής.

‡ Maritime similes are very common in Æschylus, and specially this.—Compare Agamemnon, p. 70, Strophe II.

And the man-rending monster on a stone
 Despairful dashed her head ;
 What mortal man by herd-possessing men,
 What god by gods above was honoured then,
 Like Oedipus below !

STROPHE V.

But when his soul was conscious, and he saw
 The monstrous wedlock made 'gainst Nature's law,
 Him struck dismay,
 In wild deray,
 He from their socket roots uptore
 His eyes, more dear than children, worthy no more
 To look upon the day.

ANTISTROPHE V.

And he, for sorry tendance wrathful,⁴¹ flung
 Curses against his sons with bitter tongue,
 "THEY SHALL DISPUTE
 A DIRE DISPUTE,
 AND SHARE THEIR LAND WITH STEEL." I fear
 The threatened harm ; with boding heart I hear
 The Fury's sleepless foot.

Re-enter MESSENGER.

Mess. Fear not, fair maids of Theban mothers nursed !
 The city hath 'scaped the yoke ; the insolent boasts
 Of violent men hath fallen ; the ship o' the state
 Is safe ; in sunshine calm we float ; in vain
 Hath wave on wave lashed our sure-jointed beams,
 No leaky gap our close-lipped timbers knew,
 Our champions with safety hedged us round,
 Our towers stand firm. Six of the seven gates
 Show all things prosperous ; the seventh Phœbus
 Chose for his own (for still in four and three
 The god delights),⁴² he led the seventh pair,
 Crowning the doom of evil-counselled Laius.

Chorus. What sayst thou ? What new ills to ancient Thebes ?

Mess. Two men are dead—by mutual slaughter slain.

Chorus. Who?—what?—my wit doth crack with apprehension.

Mess. Hear soberly : the sons of Oedipus—

Chorus. O wretched me ! true prophet of true woe.

Mess. Too true. They lie stretched in the dust.

Chorus.

Sayst so?

Sad tale! yet must I school mine ears to hear it.

Mess. Brother by brother's hand untimely slain.

Chorus. The impartial god smote equally the twain.

Mess. A wrathful god the luckless race destroys,
And I for plaints no less than pæans bring thee ⁴³
Plentiful food. The state now stands secure,
But the twin rulers, with hard-hammered steel,
Have sharply portioned all their heritage,
By the dire curse to sheer destruction hurried.
What land they sought they find it in the grave,
The hostile kings in one red woe are brothered;
The soil that called them lord hath drunk their blood.

[*Exit.*

Chorus. O Jove almighty! gods of Cadmus,
By whose keeping Thebes is strong,
Shall I sing a joyful pæan,
Thee the god full-throated hymning
That saved the state from instant harm?
Or shall drops of swelling pity
To a wail invert my ditty?
O wretched, hapless, childless princes!
Truly, truly was his name
Prophet of your mutual shame! *
Godless was the strife ye cherished,
And in godless strife ye perished!

CHORAL HYMN.

STROPHE I.

The curse that rides on sable wing,
Hath done its part,
And horror, like a creeping thing,
Freezes my heart.
Their ghastly death in kindred blood
Doth pierce me thorough,
And deeply stirs the Thyad flood †
Of wail and sorrow.
An evil bird on boding wing
Did darkly sway,
When steel on steel did sternly ring
In strife to-day.

* Another pun on POLYNICES, see above, p. 278.

† *i.e.* Raging flood, *Thyad*, from *θύω*, to rage.

ANTISTROPHE I.

The voice that from the blind old king
 With cursing came,
 In rank fulfilment forth doth bring
 Its fruit of shame.
 O Laius, thou didst work our woe
 With faithless heart ;
 Nor Phœbus with a half-dealt blow
 Will now depart.
 His word is sure, or pacing slow,
 Or winged with speed,
 And now the burthened cloud of woe,
 Bursts black indeed.

*[The bodies of ETEOCLES and POLYNICES
 are brought on the stage.]*

EPODE.

Lo ! where it comes the murky pomp,
 No wandering voice, but clear, too clear
 The visible body of our fear !
 Twin-faced sorrow, twin-faced slaughter,
 And twin-fated woe is here.
 Ills on ill of monstrous birth
 Rush on Laius' god-doom'd-hearth.
 Sisters raise the shrill lament,
 Let your lifted arms be oars !
 Let your sighs be breezes lent,
 Down the wailing stream to float
 The black-sail'd Stygian boat ;
 Down to the home which all receiveth,
 Down to the land which no man leaveth,
 By Apollo's foot untrodden,
 Sullen, silent, sunless shores !
 But I see the fair Ismene,
 And Antigone the fair,
 Moving to this place of mourning,
 Slow, a sorrow-guided pair.
 We shall see a sight for weeping
 (They obey a doleful hest)
 Lovely maids deep-bosomed pouring
 Wails from heavy-laden breast.
 Chaunts of sorrow, dismal prelude