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THE FIREGIVER

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P R O M E T H E U S
T H E F I R E G I V E R

BY

ROBERT BRIDGES

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No. 67

ARGUMENT

PROMETHEUS coming on earth to give fire to men appears before the palace of Inachus in Argos, on a festival of Zeus. He interrupts the ceremony by announcing fire, and persuades Inachus to dare the anger of Zeus and accept the gift. Inachus, fetching Argeia his wife from the palace, has in turn to quiet her fears. He asks a prophecy of Prometheus, who foretells the fate of Io their daughter. Prometheus then setting flame to the altar, and writing his own name thereon in the place of that of Zeus, disappears.

The chorus sing (i) a hymn to Zeus with the stories of the birth of Zeus and the marriage of Hera, with the dances of the Curetes and the Hesperides. (ii) Their anticipation of fire, with an ode on wonder. (iii) A tragic hymn on the lot of man. (iv) A fire-chorus. (v) A final chorus in praise of Prometheus.

All the characters are good. Prometheus prologizes: he carries a long reed.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

PROMETHEVS

INACHVS

ARGEIA

SERVANT

IO *persona muta*

CHORVS youths and maidens of the house of Inachus

The SCENE is in ARGOS before the palace of Inachus: an altar inscribed to Zeus is at the centre of the stage.

PROMETHEUS

FROM high Olympus and the domeless courts,
Where mighty Zeus our angry king confirms
The Fates' decrees & bends the wills of the gods,
I come : and on the earth step with glad foot.

This variegated ocean-floor of the air,
The changeful circle of fair land, that lies
Heav'n's dial, sisterly mirror of night & day,
The wide o'er-wandered plain, this nether world
My truant haunt is, when from jealous eyes
I steal, for hither 'tis I steal, and here
Unseen repair my joy : yet not unseen
Methinks, nor seen unguessed of him I seek.
Rather by swath or furrow, or where the path
Is walled with corn I am found, by trellised vine

At

Or olive

Or olive led in banks or orchard trim :
 I watch all toil & tilth, farm, field & fold,
 And taste the mortal joy ; since not in heaven
 Among our easeful gods hath facile time
 A touch so keen, to wake such love of life
 As stirs the frail & careful being, who here,
 The king of sorrows, melancholy man,
 Bows at his labour, but in heart erect
 A god stands, nor for any gift of god
 Would barter his immortal-hearted prime.

Could I but win this world from Zeus for mine,
 With not a god to vex my happy rule,
 I would inhabit here & leave high heaven :
 So much I love it & its race of men,
 Even as he that hates them, hates both them & me
 For loving what he hates, & would destroy me,
 Outcast in the scorn of all his cringing crew,
 For daring but to save what he would slay :
 And me must first destroy. Thus he denieth
 My heart's wish, thus my counsel sets at naught,
 Which him saved once, when all at stake he stood
 Vprisen in rebellion to overthrow

THE FIREGIVER

3

The elderseated Titans ; for I that day
Gave him the counsels which his foes despised.
Vnhappy they, who had still their blissful seats
Preserved & their Olympian majesty
Had they been one with me. Alas my kin !

But he, when he had taken the throne and chained
His foes in wasteful Tartarus, said no more
Where is Prometheus our wise counsellor ?
What faith Prometheus ? tell us, O Prometheus,
What Fate requires ! but waxing confident
And wanton, as a youth first tasting power,
He wrecked the timeless monuments of heaven,
The witnesses of the wisdom of the gods,
And making all about him new, beyond
Determined to destroy the race of men,
And that create afresh or else have none.

Then his vain mind imagined a device,
And at his bidding all the opposed winds
Blew, & the scattered clouds & furlèd snows,
From every part of heaven together flying,
He with brute hands in huge disorder heaped :
They with the winds' weight & his angry breath

Were

Were thawed : in cataracts they fell, & earth
 In darkness deep & whelmèd tempest lay
 Drowned 'neath the waters. Yet on the mountain-tops
 Some few escaped, & some thus warned by me
 Made shift to live in vessels which outrode
 The season & the fury of the flood.

And when his rain was spent & from clear skies
 Zeus, looking down upon the watery world,
 Beheld these few, the remnant of mankind,
 Who yet stood up & breathed ; he next withdrew
 The seeds of fire, that else had still lain hid
 In withered branch & the blue flakes of flint
 For man to exact & use, but these withdrawn
 Man with the brutes degraded would be man
 No more ; & so the tyrant was content.

But I, despised again, again upheld
 The weak, & pitying them sent sweet Hope,
 Bearer of dreams, enchantress fond & kind,
 From heaven descending on the unhindered rays
 Of every star, to cheer with visions fair
 Their unamending pains. And now this day
 Behold I come bearing the seal of all

Which

THE FIREGIVER

5

Which Hope had promised : for within this reed
A prisoner I bring them stolen from heaven
The flash of mastering fire, & it have borne
So swift to earth, that when yon noontide sun
Rose from the sea at morning I was by,
And unperceived of Hêlios plunged the point
I' the burning axle, & withdrew a tongue
Of breathing flame, which lives to leap on earth
For man the father of all fire to come.

And hither have I brought it even to Argos
Vnto king Inachus, him having chosen
Above all mortals to receive my gift :
For he is hopeful, careful, wise, & brave.

He first when first the floods left bare the land
Grew warm with enterprise, & gathered men
Together, & disposed their various tasks
For common weal combined ; for soon were seen
The long straight channels dwindling on the plain,
Which flow from stagnant pool & wide morafs
The pestilent waters to the rivers bore :
Then in the ruined dwellings & old tombs
He dug, unbedding from the wormèd ooze

Veffels

Vessels and tools of trade & husbandry ;
 Wherewith, all seasonable works restored,
 Oil made he & wine anew, & taught mankind
 To live not brutally though without fire,
 Tending their flocks & herds & weaving wool,
 Living on fruit & milk & shepherds' fare,
 Till time should bring back flame to smithy and hearth,
 Or Zeus relent. Now at these gates I stand,
 At this mid hour, when Inachus comes forth
 To offer sacrifice unto his foe.
 For never hath his faithful zeal foreborne
 To pay the power, though hard, that rules the world
 The smokeless sacrifice, which first to day
 Shall smoke, and rise at heaven in flame to brave
 The baffled god. See here a servant bears
 For the cold altar ceremonial wood :
 My shepherd's cloak will serve me for disguise.

S E R V A N T

With much toil have I hewn these sapless logs.
PR. But toil brings health & health is happiness.
SERV. Here's one I know not—nay, how came he here
Unseen

THE FIREGIVER

7

Unseen by me? I pray thee, stranger, tell me
What wouldst thou at the house of Inachus?

PR. Intruders, friend, & travellers have glib tongues,
Silence will question such. *SERV.* If 'tis a message,
To day is not thy day—who sent thee hither?

PR. The business of my leisure was well guessed:
But he that sent me hither is I that come.

SERV. I smell the matter—thou wouldst serve the house?

PR. 'Twas for that very cause I fled my own.

SERV. From cruelty or fear of punishment?

PR. Cruel was my master, for he slew his father.
His punishments thou speakest of are crimes.

SERV. Thou dost well flying one that slew his father.

PR. Thy lord, they say, is kind. *SERV.* Well thou wilt see.
Thou may'st at once begin—come, give a hand.

PR. A day of freedom is a day of pleasure;
And what thou doest have I never done,
And understanding not might mar thy work.

SERV. Ay true—there is a right way & a wrong
In laying wood. *PR.* Then let me see thee lay it:
The sight of a skill'd hand will teach an art.

SERV. Thou seest this faggot I have now unbound

How

How it is packed within. *PR.* I see the cones
 And needles of the fir, which by the wind
 In melancholy places ceaselessly
 Sighing are strewn upon the tufted floor.

SERV. These took I from a sheltered bank, whereon
 The sun looks down at noon; for there is need
 The things be dry. These first I spread; thereon
 Small sticks that snap i'the hand. *PR.* Such are enough
 To burden the slow flight of labouring rooks,
 When on the leafless tree-tops in young march
 Their glossy herds assembling soothe the air
 With cries of solemn joy & cawings loud.
 And such the long-necked herons will bear to mend
 Their airy platform, when the loving spring
 Bids them take thought for their expected young.

SERV. See even so I cross them & cross them so:
 Larger & by degrees a steady stack
 Have built whereon the heaviest logs may lie:
 And all of sun-dried wood: & now 'tis done.

PR. And now 'tis done what means it now 'tis done?

SERV. Well thus 'tis rightly done: but why 'tis so
 I cannot tell nor any man here knows;

Save

THE FIREGIVER

9

Save that our master when he sacrificeth,
As thou wilt hear anon, speaketh of fire ;
And fire he saith is good for gods & men .
And the gods have it and men have it not :
And then he prays the gods to send us fire,
And we, against they send it, must have wood
Laid ready thus as I have shewn thee here.

PR. To day he sacrificeth ? **SERV.** Ay, this noon.
Hark ! hearst thou not ? they come. The solemn flutes
Warn us away ; we must not here be seen
In these our soiled habits, yet may stand
Where we may hear & see and not be seen. [*Exeunt.*

*Enter chorus, and from the Palace Inachus bearing
cakes : he comes to stand behind the altar.*

CHORVS

God of Heaven !
We praise thee, Zeus most high,
To whom by eternal Fate was given
The range & rule of the sky :
When thy lot, first of three

BI

Leapt

Leapt out, as fages tell,
 And won Olympus for thee,
 Therein for ever to dwell :
 But the next with the barren sea
 To grave Poseidon fell,
 And left fierce Hades his doom, to be
 The lord & terror of Hell.

Thou fittest for aye
 Encircled in azure bright,
 Regarding the path of the sun by day,
 And the changeful moon by night :
 Attending with tireless ears
 To the song of adoring love,
 With which the separate spheres
 Are voiced, that turn above :
 And all that is hidden under
 The clouds thy footing has furled
 Fears the hand that holdeth the thunder,
 The eye that looks on the world.

Semichorus Of all the isles of the sea
of youths Is Crete most famed in story :

Above

Above all mountains famous to me
Is Ida, and crowned with glory.
There guarded of Heaven & Earth
Came Rhea at fall of night
To hide a wondrous birth
From the Sire's unfathering fight.
The halls of Cronos rang
With omens of coming ill,
And the mad Curêtes danced & fang
Adown the slopes of the hill.

Then all the peaks of Gnoffus kindled red
Beckoning afar unto the sinking sun.
He thro' the vaporous west plunged to his bed,
Sunk, & the day was done.
But they though he was fled
Such light still held, as oft
Hanging in air aloft,
At eve from shadowed ship
The Egyptian sailer sees :
Or like the twofold tip
That o'er the topmost trees

B₂

Flares

Flares on Parnassus, & the Theban dames
Quake at the ghostly flames.

Then friendly night arose
To succour Earth, & spread
Her mantle o'er the snows
And quenched their rosy red.
But in the east upsprings
Another light on them,
Selène, with white wings
And hueless diadem.
Little could she befriend
Her father's house & state,
Nor her weak beams defend
Hypérion from his fate.
Only where'er she shines,
In terror looking forth,
She sees the wailing pines
Stoop to the bitter North :
Or searching twice or thrice
Along the rocky walls,
She marks the columned ice

Of

Of frozen waterfalls :
 But still the darkened cave
 Grew darker as she shone,
 Wherein was Rhea gone
 Her child to bear & save.

Then danced the Dactyls & Curètes wild [*Here they dance*
 And drowned with yells the cries of mother & child ;
 Big-armed Damnameneus 'gan prance and shout :
 And burly Acmon struck the echoes out :
 And Kelmis leaped & howled : and Titias pranced :
 And broad Cyllenus tore the air & danced :
 While deep within the shadowed cave at rest
 Lay Rhea, with her babe upon her breast.

INACHVS

If any here there be whose impure hands
 Among pure hands, or guilty heart among
 Our guileless hearts be stained with blood or wrong,
 Let him depart !

If there be any here in whom high Zeus
 Seeing impiety might turn away,

Now

Now from our sacrifice & from his sin
Let him depart !

Semichorus I have chosen to praise
of maidens Hêra the wife and bring
A hymn for the feast on marriage days
To the wife of the gods' king.
How on her festival
The gods were all at strife
Which should give of them all
The fairest gift to the wife.
But Earth said, Fair to see
Is mine & yields to none,
I have grown for her joy a sacred tree,
With apples of gold thereon.

Then Hêra when she heard what Earth had given
Smiled for her joy, and longed & came to see :
On doveswings flying from the height of heaven,
Down to the golden tree :
As tired birds at even
Come flying straight to house
On their accustomed boughs.

'Twas

"Twas where on tortured hands
Bearing the mighty pole
Devoted Atlas stands :
And round his bowed head roll
Day-light & night, and stars unmingled dance,
Nor can he raise his glance.

She saw the rocky coast
Whereon the azured waves
Are laced in foam, or loft
In water-lighted caves :
The olive island, where
Amid the purple seas
Night unto Darknefs bare
The four Hesperides :
And came into the shade
Of Atlas, where she found
The garden Earth had made
And fenced with groves around.
And in the midst it grew
Alone, the pricelefs stem,
As careful, clear & true
As graving on a gem.

Nature

Nature had kissèd Art
 And borne a child to stir
 With jealousy the heart
 Of heavens Artificer.
 From crown to swelling root
 It mocked the goddess' praise,
 The green enamelled sprays,
 The emblazoned golden fruit.

And 'neath the tree, with hair & zone unbound, [*The dance*
 The fair Hesperides aye danced around.
 And Æglê danced & sang 'O welcome queen!
 And Erytheia sang 'The tree is green!
 And Hestia danced & sang 'The fruit is gold :'
 And Arethufa sang 'Fair queen behold !'
 And all joined hands & danced about the tree,
 And sang 'O Queen we dance & sing for thee !'

IN. If there be any here who has complaint
 Against our rule or claim or supplication,
 Now in the name of Zeus let him appear,
 Now let him speak !

PR.

PROMETHEVS

All hail, most worthy king, such claim have I.

IN. May grace be with thee, stranger ; speak thy mind.

PR. To Argos, king of Argos, at thy house
I bring long journeying to an end this hour,
Bearing no idle message for thine ears.
For know that far thy fame has reached & men
That ne'er have seen thee tell that thou art set
Upon the throne of virtue, that good-will
And love thy servants are, that in thy land
Joy, honour, trust & modesty abide
And drink the air of peace, that kings must see
Thy city, would they know their peoples' good
And stablish them therein by wholesome laws.
But one thing mars the tale, for o'er thy lands
Travelling I have not seen from morn till eve,
Either from house or farm or labourer's cot,
In any village, nor this town of Argos
A blue-wreathed smoke arise : the hearths are cold,
This altar cold : I see the wood & cakes
Unbaken,—O King where is the fire ?

CI

IN.

IN. If hither stranger thou wert come to find
That which thou findest wanting, join with us
Now in our sacrifice, take food within,
And having learnt our simple way of life
Return unto thy country whence thou camest.
But hast thou skill or knowledge of this thing,
How best it may be fought, or by what means
Hope to be reached, O speak! I wait to hear.

PR. There is, O king, fire on the earth this day.

IN. On earth there is fire thou sayest! *PR.* There is fire.

IN. On earth this day! *PR.* There is fire on earth this day.

IN. This is a sacred place, a solemn hour,
Thy speech is earnest: yet even if thou speak truth,
O welcome messenger of happy tidings,
And though I hear aright, yet to believe
Is hard: thou canst not know what words thou speakest
Into what ears: they never heard before
This found but in old tales of happier times,
In sighs of prayer & faint unheated hope:
Maybe they heard not rightly, speak again!
PR. There is, O king, fire on the earth this day.
IN. Yes, yes, again. Now let sweet Music blab

Her

Her secret & give o'er ; here is a trumpet
 That mocks her method. Yet 'tis but the word.
 May be thy fire is not the fire I seek ;
 May be though thou didst see it, now 'tis quenched,
 Or guarded out of reach : speak yet again
 And swear by heaven's truth is there fire or no,
 And if there be what means may make it mine.

PR. There is, O king, fire on the earth this day :
 But not as thou dost seek it to be found.

IN. How seeking wrongly shall I seek aright ?

PR. Thou prayest here to Zeus, & him thou callest
 Almighty, knowing he could grant thy prayer :
 That if 'twere but his will the journeying sun
 Might drop a spark into thine outstretched hand :
 That at his breath the splashing mountain brooks
 That fall from Orneæ, & cold Lernè's pool
 Would change their element, and their chill streams
 Bend in their burning banks a molten flood :
 That at his word so many messengers
 Would bring thee fire from heaven, that not a hearth
 In all thy land but straight would have a god
 To kneel & fan the flame : and yet to him

It is, to him thou prayest. *IN.* Therefore to him.

PR. Is this thy wisdom, king, to sow thy seed
Year after year in this unsprouting foil?

Haft thou not proved & found the will of Zeus
A barren rock for man with prayer to plow?

IN. His anger be averted! we judge not god
Evil because our wishes please him not.

Oft our shortfighted prayers to heaven ascending
Ask there our ruin, and are then denied
In kindness above granting: were't not so
Scarce could we pray for fear to pluck our doom
Out of the merciful withholding hands.

PR. Why then provokest thou such great good will
In long denial & kind silence shown?

IN. Fie, fie! Thou lackest piety: the god's denial
Being nought but kindness, there is hope that he
Will make that good which is not:—or if indeed
Good be withheld in punishment, 'tis well
Still to seek on & pray that god relent.

PR. O Sire of Argos Zeus will not relent.

IN. Yet fire thou sayst is on the earth this day.

PR. Not of his knowledge nor his gift, O king.

IN.

IN. By kindness of what god then has man fire ?

PR. I say but on the earth unknown to Zeus.

IN. How boastest thou to know not of his knowledge ?

PR. I boast not : he that knoweth not may boast.

IN. Thy daring words bewilder sense with sound.

PR. I thought to find thee ripe for daring deeds.

IN. And what the deed for which I prove unripe ?

PR. To take of heaven's fire. *IN.* And were I ripe

What should I dare, beseech you ? *PR.* The wrath of Zeus.

IN. Madman, pretending in one hand to hold

The wrath of god & in the other fire.

PR. Thou meanest rather holding both in one.

IN. Both impious art thou & incredible.

PR. Yet impious only till thou dost believe.

IN: And what believe ? ah, if I could believe !

It was but now thou saidst that there was fire,

And I was near believing, I believed :

Now to believe were to be mad as thou.

CHOR. He may be mad and yet say true—may be

The heat of prophecy like a strong wine

Shameth his reason with exultant speech.

PR. Thou say'st I am mad, and of my sober words

Haft

Haft called those impious which thou fearest true,
Those which thou knowest good incredible.
Confider ere thou judge: be first assured
All is not good for man that seems god's will.
See, on thy farming skill, thy country toil,
Which bends to aid the willing fruits of earth,
And would promote the seasonable year,
The face of nature is not always kind:
And if thou search the sum of visible being
To find thy blessing featured, 'tis not there:
Her best gifts cannot brim the golden cup
Of expectation which thine eager arms
Lift to her mouthèd horn—what then is this
Whose wide capacity outbids the scale
Of prodigal beauty, so that the seeing eye
And hearing ear, retiring unamazed
Within their quiet chambers, sit to feast
With dear imagination, nor look forth
As once they did upon the varying air?
Whence is the fathering of this desire
Which mocks at fated circumstance? nay though
Obstruction lie as cumbrous as the mountains,

Nor

Nor thy particular hap hath armed desire
Against the brunt of evil,—yet not for this
Faints man's desire : it is the unquenchable
Original cause, the immortal breath of being :
Nor is there any spirit on Earth astir
Nor 'neath the airy vault nor yet beyond
In any dweller in far-reaching space
Nobler or dearer than the spirit of man :
That spirit which lives in each & will not die,
That wooeth beauty, and for all good things
Urgeth a voice, or in still passion figheth,
And where he loveth draweth the heart with him.
Hast thou not heard him speaking oft & oft,
Prompting thy secret musing & now shooting
His feathered fancies, or in cloudy sleep
Piling his painted dreams? O hark to him!
For else if folly shut his joyous strength
To mope in her dark prison without praise,
The hidden tears with which he wails his wrong
Will sour the fount of life. O hark to him!
Him may'st thou trust beyond the things thou seest.
For many things there be upon this earth

Vnblest

Vnblest & fallen from beauty, to mislead
Man's mind, and in a shadow justify
The evil thoughts & deeds that work his ill.
Fear, hatred, lust & strife, which, if man question
The heavenborn spirit within him, are not there.
Yet are they bold of face, and Zeus himself,
Seeing that Mischiefe held her head on high,
Lest she should go beyond his power to quell,
And draw the inevitable Fate that waits
On utmost ill, himself preventing Fate
Hasted to drown the world, and now would crush
Thy little remnant : but among the gods
Is one whose love & courage stir for thee,
Who being of manlike spirit, by many shifts
Has stayed the hand of the enemy, who crieth
Thy world is not destroyed, thy good shall live :
Thou hast more power for good than Zeus for ill,
More courage, justice, more abundant art,
More love, more joy, more reason : though around thee
Rank-rooting evil bloom with poisonous crown,
Though wan & dolorous & crooked things
Have made their home with thee thy good shall live.

Know

Know thy desire : and know that if thou seek it,
And seek, and seek, and fear not, thou shalt find.

Semichorus Is this a god that speaketh thus ?

Semichorus He speaketh as a man
In love or great affliction yields his soul.

IN. Thou, whencefoe'er thou comest, whoe'er thou art,
Who breakest on our solemn sacrifice
With solemn words, I pray thee not depart
Till thou hast told me more ; this fire I seek
Not for myself, whose thin & silvery hair
Tells that my toilsome age nears to its end,
But for my children & the aftertime,
For great the need thereof, wretched our state ;
Nay, set by what has been, our happiness
Is very want, so that what now is not
Is but the measure of what yet may be.
And first are barest needs, which well I know
Fire would supply, but I have hope beyond,
That Nature in recovering her right
Would kinder prove to man who seeks to learn
Her secrets & unfold the cause of life.
So tell me, if thou knowest, what is fire ?

Di

Doth

Doth earth contain it? or, since from the sun
 Fire reaches us, since in the glimmering stars
 And pallid moon, in lightning, and the glance
 Of tracking meteors that at nightfall flow
 How in the air a thousand flightless things
 Travel, and ever on their windswift course
 Flame when they lift & into darkness go,
 Since in all these a fiery nature dwells,
 Is fire an airy essence, a thing of heaven,
 That, could we poise it, were an alien power
 To make our wisdom less, our wonder more?

PR. Thy wish to know is good, and happy is he
 Who thus from chance & change has launched his mind
 To dwell for ever with undisturbed truth.
 This high ambition doth not prompt his hand
 To crime, his right & pleasure are not wronged
 By folly of his fellows, nor his eye
 Dimmed by the griefs that move the tears of men.
 Son of the earth, and citizen may be
 Of Argos or of Athens & her laws,
 But still the eternal nature where he looks
 O'errules him with the laws which laws obey,

And

And in her heavenly city enrols his heart.

IN. Thus ever have I held of happiness,
 The child of heavenly truth, and thus have found it
 In prayer & meditation & still thought,
 And thus my peace of mind based on a floor
 That doth not quaver like the joys of sense :
 Those I possess enough in seeing my slaves
 And citizens enjoy, having myself
 Tasted for once & put their sweets away.
 But of that heavenly city of which thou sayest
 Her laws o'errule us have I little learnt,
 For when my wandering spirit hath dared alone
 The unearthly terror of her voiceless halls
 She hath fallen from delight, and without guide
 Turned back, and from her errand fled for fear.

PR. Think not that thou canst all things know nor deem
 Such knowledge happiness : the allknowing Fates
 No pleasure have, who sit eternally
 Spinning the unnumbered threads that Time hath woven,
 And weaves, upgathering in his furthest house
 To store from sight ; but what 'tis joy to learn
 Or use to know that may'st thou ask of right.

D₂

IN.

IN. Then tell me, for thou knowest, what is fire ?

PR. Know then, O King, that this fair earth of men,
The Olympus of the gods, and all the heavens
Are lesser kingdoms of the boundless space
Wherein Fate rules ; they have their several times,
Their seasons & the limit of their thrones,
And from the nature of eternal things
Springing, themselves are changed ; even as the trees
Or birds or beasts of earth, which now arise
To being, now in turn decay & die.

The heaven & earth thou seest for long were held
By Fire, a raging power, to whom the Fates
Decreed a slow diminishing old age,
But to his daughter, who is that gentle goddess,
Queen of the clear & azure Firmament,
In heaven called Hygra, but by mortals Air,
To her, the child of his slow doting years,
Was given a beauteous youth, not long to outlast
His life, but be the pride of his decay,
And win to gentler sway his lost domains.

And when the day of time arrived, when Air
Took o'er from her decrepit fire the third

Of

Of the Sun's kingdoms, the one-moonèd earth,
Straight came she down to her inheritance.

Gaze on the sun with thine unshaded eye
And shrink from what she saw. Forests of fire
Whose waving trunks, sucking their fuel, reared
In branched flame roaring, and their torrid shades
Aye underlit with fire. The mountains lifted
And fell & followed like a running sea,
And from their swelling flanks spumed froth of fire ;
Or, like awakening monsters, mighty mounds
Rose on the plain awhile.

Sem. (maidens) He discovers a foe.

Sem. (youths) An enemy he paints.

PR. These all she quenched,
Or charmed their fury into the dens & bowels
Of earth to smoulder, there the vital heat
To hold for her creation, which then—to her aid
Summoning high Reason from his home in heaven,—
She wrought anew upon the temperate lands.

Sem. (maidens) 'Twas well Air won this kingdom of her fire.

Sem. (youths) Now say how made she green this home of fire.

PR. The waters first she brought that in their streams

And

And pools & seas innumerable things
 Brought forth, from whence she drew the fertile seeds
 Of trees & plants, and last of footed life,
 That wandered forth, and roaming to & fro
 The rejoicing earth peopled with living sound.
 Reason advised, and Reason praised her toil;
 Which when she had done she gave him thanks, and said,
 Fair comrade, since thou praifest what is done,
 Grant me this favour ere thou part from me.
 Make thou one fair thing for me, which shall suit
 With what is made, and be the best of all.

'Twas evening, and that night Reason made man.

Sem. (maidens) Children of air are we, and live by fire.

Sem. (youths) The sons of Reason dwelling on the earth.

Sem. (maidens) Folk of a pleasant kingdom held between
 Fire's reign of terror & the latter day
 When dying soon in turn his child must die.

Sem. (youths) Having a wise creator, above time
 Or youth or change, from whom our kind inherit
 The grace & pleasure of the eternal gods.

IN. But how came gods to rule this earth of Air?

PR. They also were her children who first ruled.

Cronos

Cronos, Iapetus, Hypérion,
 Theia & Rhea, and other mighty names
 That are but names—whom Zeus drave out from heaven,
 And with his tribe sits on their injured thrones.

IN. There is no greater god in heaven than he.

PR. Nor none more cruel nor more tyrannous.

IN. But what can man against the power of god?

PR. Doth not man strive with him? thyself dost pray.

IN. That he may pardon our contrarious deeds.

PR. Alas! alas! what more contrarious deed,
 What greater miracle of wrong than this,

That man should know his good & take it not?

To what god wilt thou pray to pardon this?

In vain was reason given, if man therewith

Shame truth, and name it wisdom to cry down

The unschooled promptings of his best desire.

The beasts that have no speech nor argument

Confute him, and the wild hog in the wood

That feels his longing hurries straight thereto

And will not turn his head. *IN.* How mean'st thou this?

PR. Thou hast desired the good, and now canst feel

How hard it is to kill the heart's desire.

IN.

IN. Shall Inachus rise against Zeus, as he
Rose against Cronos & made war in heaven?

PR. I say not so, yet if thou didst rebel
The tongue that counselled Zeus should counsel thee.

Sem. (maidens) This is strange counsel.

Sem. (youths) He is not
A counsellor for gods or men.

IN. O that I knew where I might counsel find,
That one were sent, nay, were't the least of all
The myriad messengers of heaven, to me!
One that should say 'This morn I stood with Zeus,
He hath heard thy prayer and sent me: ask a boon,
What thing thou wilt, it shall be given thee.'

PR. What wouldst thou say to such a messenger?

IN. No need to ask then what I now might ask,
How 'tis the gods, if they have care for mortals,
Slubber our worst necessities—and the boon,
No need to tell him that. **PR.** Now, king, thou see'st
Zeus sends no messenger, but I am here.

IN. Thy speech is hard, and even thy kindest words
Unkind. If fire thou hast, in thee 'tis kind
To proffer it: but thou art more unkind

Yoking

Yoking heaven's wrath therewith. Nay, and how knowest thou
Zeus will be angry if I take of it ?

Thou art a prophet : ay, but of the prophets
Some have been taken in error, and honest time
Has honoured many with forgetfulness.

I'll make this proof of thee. Show me thy fire—
Nay, give't me now—if thou be true at all
Be true so far : for the rest there's none will lose
Nor blame thee being false—where is thy fire ?

PR. O rather had it thus been mine to give
I would have given it thus : not adding aught
Of danger or diminishment or loss.

So strong is my goodwill ; nor less than this
My knowledge, but in knowledge all my power :
Yet since wise guidance with a little means
Can more than force unminded, I have skill
To conjure evil & outcompass strength.

Now give I thee my best, a little gift
To work a world of wonder ; 'tis thine own
Of long desire, and with it I will give
The cunning of invention & all arts
In which thy hand instructed may command,

Et

Interpret

Interpret, comfort or ennobled nature,
 With all provision that in wisdom is,
 And what prevention in foreknowledge lies.

IN. Great is the gain. *PR.* O king the gain is thine,
 The penalty I more than share. *IN.* Enough,
 I take thy gift; nor hast thou stood more firm
 To every point of thy strange chequered tale,
 Revealing, threatening, offering more & more,
 And never all, than I to this resolve.

PR. I knew thy heart would fail not at the hour.

IN. Nay, failed I now, what were my years of toil
 More than the endurance of a harnessed brute,
 Flogged to his daily work, that cannot view
 The high design to which his labour steps?
 And I of all men were dishonoured most
 Shrinking in fear, who never shrank from toil,
 And found, abjuring, thrusting stiffly back,
 The very gift for which I stretched my hands.
 What though I suffer? are these wintry years
 Of growing desolation to be held
 As cherishable as the suns of spring?
 Nay, only joyful can they be in seeing

Long

Long hopes accomplished, long desires fulfilled.
 And since thou hast touched ambition on the side
 Of nobleness, and stirred my proudest hope,
 And wilt fulfil this, shall I count the cost?
 Rather decay will triumph, and cold death
 Be lapped in glory, seeing strength arise
 From weakness, from the tomb go forth a flame.
PR. 'Tis well; thou art exalted now. The grace
 Becomes thy valiant spirit. *IN.* Lo! on this day
 Which hope despaired to see, hope manifests
 A vision bright as were the dreams of youth;
 When life was easy as a sleeper's faith
 Who swims in the air & dances on the sea;
 When all the good that scarce by toil is won,
 Or not at all is won, is as a flower
 Growing in plenty to be plucked at will:
 Is it a dream again or is it truth,
 This vision fair of Greece inhabited?
 A fairer sight than all fair Iris sees,
 Footing her airy arch of colours spun
 From Ida to Olympus, when she stays
 To look on Greece and thinks the sight is fair;

Far fairer now, clothed with the works of men.

PR. Ay, fairer far : for nature's varied pleasaunce
Without man's life is but a desert wild,
Which most where most she mocks him needs his aid.
She knows her silence sweeter when it girds
His murmurous cities, her wide wasteful curves
Larger beside his œconomic line ;
Or what can add a mystery to the dark,
As doth his measured music when it moves
With rhythmic sweetness through the void of night ?
Nay, all her loveliest places are but grounds
Of vantage, where with geometric hand,
True square & careful compass, he may come
To plan & plant & spread abroad his towers,
His gardens, temples, palaces & tombs.

And yet not all thou seest, with tranced eye
Looking upon the beauty that shall die,
The temple-crowned heights, the walled towns,
Farms & cool summer seats, nor the broad ways,
That bridge the rivers and subdue the mountains,
Nor all that travels on them, pomp or war
Or needful merchandise, nor all the sails

Piloting

Piloting over the wind-dappled blue
 Of the summer-foothed Ægean, to thy mind
 Can picture what shall be : these are the face
 And form of beauty, but her heart & life
 Shall they be who shall see it, born to shield
 A happier birthright with intrepid arms,
 To tread down tyranny & fashion forth
 A virgin wisdom to subdue the world,
 To build for passion an eternal song,
 To shape her dreams in marble, and so sweet
 Their speech, that envious Time hearkening shall stay
 In fear to snatch, and hide his rugged hand.
 Now is the birthday of thy conquering youth,
 O man, and lo thy priest & prophet stand
 Beside the altar & have blessed the day.
IN. Ay, blessed be this day. Where is thy fire ;
 Or is aught else to do ere I may take ?
PR. This was my message, speak and there is fire.
IN: There shall be fire. Await me here awhile.
 I go to acquaint my house, and bring them forth. [Exit.

CHORVS

C H O R U S

Hearken, O Argos, hearken!

There will be fire.

And thou, O Earth, give ear!

There will be fire.

Sem. (maidens) Who shall be sent to fetch this fire for the king?

Sem. (youths) Shall we put forth in boats to reap,

And shall the waves for harvest yield

The rootless flames that nimbly leap

Vpon their evershifting field?

Sem. (maidens) Or we in olive-groves go shake

And beat the fruiting sprays, till all

The silv'ry glitter which they make

Beneath into our baskets fall?

Sem. (youths) To bind in sheaves & bear away

The white unshafted darts of day?

Sem. (maidens) And from the shadow one by one

Pick up the playful oes of sun?

Sem. (youths) Or wouldst thou mine a passage deep

Vntil the darksome fire is found

Which prisoned long in seething sleep

Vexes

Vexes the caverns underground ?

Sem. (maidens) Or bid us join our palms perchance,
To cup the slant and chinkèd beam,
Which mounting morn hath sent to dance
Across our chamber while we dream ?

Sem. (y.) Say whence & how shall we fetch this fire for the king ?
Our hope is impatient of vain debating.

Sem. (m.) My heart is stirred at the name of the wondrous thing,
And trembles awaiting.

CHOR. ODE. A coy inquisitive spirit, the spirit of wonder,
Possesses the child in his cradle, when mortal things
Are new, yet a varied surface and nothing under.
It busies the mind on trifles & toys and brings
Her grasp from nearer to further, from smaller to greater,
And slowly teaches flight to her fledgeling wings.
(2) Where'er she flutters & falls surprises await her :
She soars, and beauty's miracles open in flight,
The flowers & trees & beasts of the earth ; and later
The skies of day, the moon & the stars of night ;
'Neath which she scarcely venturing goes demurely,
With mystery clad, in the awe of depth & height.

- (3) O happy for still unconscious, for ah! how surely
How soon & surely will disenchantment come,
When first to herself she boasts to walk securely,
And drives the master spirit away from his home.
- (4) Seeing the marvellous things that make the morning
Are marvels of every-day, familiar, and some
Have lost with use, like earthly robes, their adorning
As earthly joys the charm of a first delight
- (5) And some are fallen from awe to neglect & scorning;
Until— (6) O tarry not long dear needed sprite!—
Till thou, though uninvited, with fancy returnest
To hallow beauty and make the dull heart bright :
To inhabit again thy gladdened kingdom in earnest.
Wherein, (7) from the smile of beauty afar forecasting
The pleasure of god, thou livest at peace and yearnest
With wonder unspeakable, deep & everlasting.

Reenter

Reenter from the Palace Inachus, with Argeia and Io.

INACHVS

That but a small & easy thing now seems,
 Which from my house when I came forth at noon
 A dream was and beyond the reach of man.
 'Tis now a fancy of the will, a word,
 Liberty's lightest prize. Yet still as one
 Who loiters on the threshold of delight,
 Delaying pleasure for the love of pleasure,
 I dally—Come Argeia, and share my triumph!
 And set our daughter by thee, though her eyes
 Are young, there are no eyes this day so young
 As shall forget this day—while one thing more
 I ask of thee; this evil, will it light
 On me or on my house or on mankind?
PR. Scarce on mankind, O Inachus, for Zeus
 A second time failing will not again
 Measure his spite against their better fate.

Fi

And

And now the terror which awhile o'er Earth
 Its black wings spread shall up to Heaven ascend
 And gnaw the tyrant's heart : for there is whispered
 A word gone forth to scare the mighty gods.
 How one must soon be born, and born of men,
 Who shall drive out their impious host from heaven,
 And from their skiey dwellings rule mankind
 In truth & love. So scarce on man will fall
 This evil, nay, nor on thyself, O king ;
 Thy name shall live an honoured name in Greece.
IN. Then on my house 'twill be. Know'st thou no more ?
PR. Know I no more ? Ay, if my purpose fail
 'Tis not for lack of knowing : if I suffer,
 'Tis not that poisonous fear hath flurled her task,
 Or let brave resolution walk unarmed.
 My ears are callous to the threats of Zeus,
 The direful penalties his oath hath laid
 On every good that I in heart & hand
 Am sworn to accomplish, and for all his threats,
 Left their accomplishment should outrun mine,
 Am bound the more. Nay, nor his evil minions,
 Nor Force, nor Strength shall bend me to his will.

AR.

AR. Alas, alas, what heavy words are these,
That in the place of joy forbid your tongue,
That cloud and change his face, while desperate sorrow
Sighs in his heart? I came to share a triumph:

All is dismay & terror. What is this?

IN. True, wife, I spake of triumph, and I told thee
The long miscarrying hope of my whole life
Is born this day fulfilled: how great that hope
Thou knowest, who hast shared; but the condition
I told thee not and thou hast heard: this prophet,
Who comes to bring us fire, hath said that Zeus
Wills not the gift he brings, and will be wroth
With us that take it. *AR.* O doleful change, I came
In pious purpose, nay, I heard within
The hymn to glorious Zeus: I rose and said,
The mighty god now bends, he thrusts aside
His heavenly supplicants to hear the prayer
Of Inachus his servant, let him hear.
O let him turn away now lest he hear.
Nay, frown not on me; though a woman's voice
That counsels is but heard impatiently,
Yet by thy love, and by the sons I bare thee,

F2

By

By this our daughter, our last ripening fruit,
 By our long happiness and hope of more,
 Hear me and let me speak. *IN.* Well, wife, speak on.

AR. Thy voice forbids more than thy words invite :
 Yet say whence comes this stranger. Know'st thou not ?
 Yet whencefoe'er, if he but wish us well,
 He will not bound his kindness in a day.

Do nought in haste. Send now to Sicyon
 And fetch thy son Phoroneus, for his sake
 In this is more than thine, and he is wise.

'Twere well Phoroneus & Ægialeus

Were both here : may be they would both refuse
 The strange conditions which this stranger brings.

Were we not happy too before he came ?

Doth he not promise us unhappiness ?

Bid him depart, and at some other time,

When you have well considered, then return.

IN. 'Tis his conditions that we now shall hear.

AR. O hide them yet ! Are there not tales enough
 Of what the wrathful gods have wrought on men ?

Nay, 'twas this very fire thou now would'st take,

Which vain Salmeon, son of Æolus,

Made

Made boast to have, and from his rattling car
Threw up at heaven to mock the lightning. Him
The thunderer stayed not to deride, but sent
One blinding fork, that in the vacant sky
Shook like a serpent's tongue, which is but seen
In memory, and he was not, or for burial
Rode with the ashes of his royal city
Vpon the whirlwind of the riven air.
And after him his brother Athamas,
King of Orchomenos, in frenzy fell
For Hera's wrath, and raving killed his son ;
And would have killed fair Ino, but that she fled
Into the sea, preferring there to woo
The choking waters, rather than that the arm
Which had so oft embraced should do her wrong.
For which old crimes the gods yet unappeased
Demand a sacrifice, and the king's son
Dreads the priest's knife, and all the city mourns.
Or shall I say what shameful fury it was
With which Poseidon smote Pasiphaë
But for neglect of a recorded vow :
Or how Actæon fared of Artemis

When

When he surpris'd her, most himself surpris'd :
And even while he look'd his boasted bow
Fell from his hands, and through his veins there ran
A strange oblivious trouble, darkening sense
Till he knew nothing but a hideous fear
Which bade him fly, and faster, as behind
He heard his hounds give tongue, that through the wood
Were following, closing, caught him and tore him down.
And many more thus perished in their prime :
Lycaon & his fifty sons, whom Zeus
In their own house spied on, and unawares
Watching at hand, from his disguise arose,
And overfet the table where they sat
Around their impious feast and slew them all :
Alcyonè and Ceyx, queen & king,
Who for their arrogance were changed to birds ;
And Cadmus now a serpent, once a king ;
And saddest Niobe, whom not the love
Of Leto aught availed, when once her boast
Went out, though all her crime was too much pride
Of heaven's most precious gift, her children fair.
Six daughters had she, and six stalwart sons ;

But

But Leto bad hēr two destroy the twelve.
And somewhere now, among lone mountain rocks
On Sipylus, where couch the nymphs at night
Who dance all day by Achelous' stream,
The onċe proud mother lies, herself a rock,
And in cold breast broods o'er the goddess' wrong.
IN. Now hush thy fear. See how thou tremblest still.
Or if thou fear, fear passion, for the freshes
Of tendernefs & motherly love will drown
The eye of judgment : yet, since even excess
Of the soft quality fits woman well
I praise thee, nor would ask thee less to aid
With counsel, than in love to share my choice.
Tho' weak thy hands to poise, thine eye may mark
This balance, how the good of all outweighs
The good of one or two though these be us.
Let not reluctance shame the sacrifice
Which in another thou wert first to praise.
AR. Alas for me, for thee and for our children,
Who, being our being, having all our having,
If they fare ill our pride lies in the dust.
IN. O deem not a man's children are but those

Out

Out of his loins engendered—our spirit's love
 Hath such prolific consequence, that Virtue
 Cometh of ancestry more pure than blood,
 And counts her seed as sand upon the shore.

Happy is he whose body's sons proclaim
 Their father's honour, but more blest to whom
 The world is dutiful, whose children spring
 Out of all nations, and whose pride the proud
 Rise to regenerate when they call him sire.

AR. Thus, husband, ever have I bought & buy
 Noblenefs cheaply being linked with thee.

Forgive my weaknes; see, I now am bold;
 Tell me the worst, I'll hear & wish 'twere more.

IN. Retire—thy tears perchance may stir again.

AR. Nay, I am full of wonder and would hear.

PR. Bid me not tell if ye have fear to hear;
 But have no fear. Knowledge of future things
 Can nothing change man's spirit: and though he seem
 To aim his passion darkly, like a shaft
 Shot toward some fearful sound in thickest night,
 He hath an owl's eye, and must blink at day.
 The springs of memory, that feed alike

His

His thought & action, draw from furthest time
 Their constant source, and hardly brook constraint
 Of actual circumstance, far less attend
 On glassed futurity; nay, death itself,
 His fate unquestioned, his foretasted pain,
 The certainty foreknown of things unknown,
 Cannot discourage his habitual being
 In its appointed motions, to make waver
 His eager hand, nor loosen the desire
 Of the most feeble melancholy heart
 Even from the unhopefullest of all her dreams.

IN. Since then I long to know, now something lay
 Of what will come to mine when I am gone.

PR. And let the maid too hear, for 'tis of her
 I speak, to tell her whither she should turn
 The day ye drive her forth from hearth & home.

IN. What sayst thou? drive her out? and we? from home?
 Banish the comfort of our eyes? Nay rather
 Believe that these obedient hands will tear
 The heart out of my breast, ere it do this.

PR. When her wild cries arouse the house at night,
 And, running to her bed, ye see her set

Gi

Vpright

Vpright in tranced sleep, her starting hair
 With deathly sweat bedewed, in horror shaking,
 Her eyeballs fixed upon the unbodied dark,
 Through which a draping mist of luminous gloom
 Drifts from her couch away,—when, if asleep,
 She walks as if awake, and if awake
 Dreams, and as one who nothing hears or sees,
 Lives in a sick & frantic mood, whose cause
 She understands not or is loth to tell;

AR. Ah, ah, my child, my child!

Dost thou feel aught? nay nay, thou'rt well—thy face
 I thought grew pale—speak to me—nay, 'tis nothing.

PR. Ye then distraught with sorrow, neither knowing
 Whether to save were best or lose, will seek

Apollo's oracle. *IN.* And what the answer?

Will it discover nought to avert this sorrow?

PR. Or else thy whole race perish root & branch.

IN. Alas alas!

PR. Yet shall she live though lost; from human form
 Changed, that thou wilt not know thy daughter more.

IN. Woe woe: my thought was praying for her death.

PR. In Hera's temple shall her prison be

At

At high Mycenæ, till from heaven be sent
 Hermes, with song to soothe & sword to slay
 The beast whose hundred eyes devour the door.

IN. Enough, enough is told, unless indeed,
 The beast once slain, thou canst restore our child.

PR. Nay, with her freedom will her wanderings
 Begin. Come hither child—nay, let her come :
 What words remain to speak will not offend her,
 And shall in memory quicken, when she looks
 To learn where she should go,—for go she must,
 Stung by the venomous fly, whose angry flight
 She still will hear about her, till she come
 To lay her sevenfold-carried burden down
 Vpon the Æthiop shore where he shall reign.

IN. But say—say first, what form— *PR.* In snow-white hide
 Of those that feel the goad and wear the yoke.

IN. Round-hoofed, or such as tread with cloven foot ?

PR. Wide-horned, large-eyed, broad-fronted, and the feet
 Cloven which carry her to her far goal.

IN. Will that of all these evils be the term ?

PR. Ay, but the journey first which she must learn.
 Hear now my child, the day when thou art free,

Leaving the lion-gate, descend and strike
 The Trêtan road to Nemea, skirting wide
 The unhunted forest o'er the watered plain
 To walled Cleônæ, whence the traversed stream
 To Corinth guides : there enter not but pass
 To narrow Isthmus, where Poseidon won
 A country from Apollo, and through the town
 Of Crommyon, till along the robber's road
 Pacing, thy left eye meet the westering sun
 O'er Geraneia, and thou reach the hill
 Of Megara, where Car thy brother's babe
 In time shall rule ; next past Eleufis climb
 Stony Panactum & the pine-clad slopes
 Of Phyle ; shun the left-hand way, and keep
 The rocks ; the second day thy feet shall tread
 The plains of Græa, whence the roadway serves
 Aulis & Mycaleffus to the point
 Of vext Euripus : fear not then the stream,
 Nor scenting think to taste, but plunging in
 Breast its salt current to the further shore.
 For on this island mayst thou lose awhile
 Thy maddening pest, and rest & pasture find,

And

And from the heafs of bold Maciftus fee
 The country left & fought : but when thou feel
 Thy torment urge, move down, recrofs the flood,
 And weft by Harma's fenced gap arrive
 At feven-gated Thebes : thy friendly goddefs
 Oungan Athenè has her feat without.

CHOR. Now if ſhe may not ſtay thy toilſome deſtined ſteps,
 I pray that ſhe may flay for thee the maddening fly.

PR. Keep not her ſanctuary long, but ſeek
 Bœotian Afcra, where the Muſes' fount
 Famed Aganippe wells : Ocalea
 Paſs, and Tilphufa's northern ſteeps deſcend
 By Alalcomenæ, the goddeſs' town.
 Guard now the lake's low ſhore, till thou have croſſed
 Hyrcana & Cephiffus, the laſt ſtreams
 Which feed its reedy pools, when thou ſhalt come
 Between two mountains that encloſe the way
 By peakèd Abæ to Hyampolis.
 The right hand path that thither parts the vale
 Opes to Cyrtonè and the Locrian lands ;
 Toward Elateia thou, where o'er the marſh
 A path with ſtones is laid ; and thence beyond

To

To Thronium, Tarphe, & Thermopylæ,
Where rocky Lamia views the Maliac gulf.

CHOR. If further she should go, will she not see
That other Argos, the Dodonian land?

PR. Crossing the Phthian hills thou next shalt reach
Pharsalus, and Olympus' peakèd snows

Shall guide thee o'er the green Pelagic plains

For many a day, but to Argissa come

Let old Peneius thy slow pilot be

Through Tempè, till they turn upon his left

Crowning the wooded slopes with splendours bare.

Thence issuing forth on the Pierian shore

Northward of Ossa thou shalt touch the lands

Of Macedon. *CHOR.* Alas, we wish thee speed,

But bid thee here farewell; for out of Greece

Thou goest mongst the folk whose chattering speech

Is like the voice of birds, nor home again

Wilt thou return. *PR.* Thy way along the coast

Lies till it fouthward turn, when thou shalt seek

Where wide on Strymon's plain the hindered flood

Spreads like a lake; thy course to his oppose

And face him to the mountain whence he comes.

Which

Which doubled, Thrace receives thee : barbarous names
Of mountain, town & river, and a people
Strange to thine eyes & ears, the Agathyrsi,
Of pictured skins, who owe no marriage law,
And o'er whose gay-spun garments sprent with gold
Their hanging hair is blue. Their torrent swim
That measures Europe in two parts, and go
Eastward along the sea, to mount the lands
Beyond man's dwelling, and the rising steeps
That face the sun untrodden and unnamed.—

Know to earth's verge remote thou then art come,
The Scythian tract & wilderness forlorn,
Through whose rude rocks and frosty silences
No path shall guide thee then, nor my words now.
There as thou toilest o'er the treacherous snows,
A sound then thou shalt hear shall stop thy breath,
And prick thy trembling ears ; a far off cry,
Whose throat seems the white mountain and its passion
The woe of earth. Flee not, nor turn not back :
Let thine ears drink and guide thine eyes to see
That sight whose terrors shall assuage thy terror,
Whose pains shall kill thy pain. Stretched on the rock,
Naked

Naked to scorching sun, to pinching frost,
 To wind & storm & beaks of wingèd fiends
 From year to year he lies. Refrain to ask
 His name & crime—nay, haply when thou see him
 Thou wilt remember—'tis thy tyrant's foe,
 Man's friend, who pays his chosen penalty.
 Draw near my child, for he will know thy need,
 And point from land to land thy further path.

CHORUS

O miserable man, hear now the worst.
 O weak & tearful race,
 Born to unhappiness, see now thy cause
 Doomed & accurst!

It surely were enough, the bad & good
 Together mingled, against chance & ill
 To strive, and prospering by turns,
 Now these, now those, now folly and now skill,
 Alike by means well understood
 Or 'gainst all likelihood,

Loveliness

Loveliness flaving to the unlovely will
That overrides the right and laughs at law.

But always all in awe
And imminent dread :
Because there is no mischief thought or said,
Imaginable or unguessed,
But it may come to be ; nor home of rest,
Nor hour secure : but anywhere,
At any moment ; in the air,
Or on the earth or sea,
Or in the fair
And tender body itself it lurks, creeps in,
Or seizes suddenly,
Torturing, burning, withering, devouring,
Shaking, destroying ; till tormented life
Sides with the slayer, not to be,
And from the cruel strife
Falls to fate overpowering.

Or if some patient heart,
In toilsome steps of duty tread apart,
Thinking to win her peace within herself,

Hi

And

And thus awhile succeed :
 She must see others bleed,
 At others' misery moan,
 And learn the common suffering is her own,
 From which it is no freedom to be freed :
 Nay, Nature, her best nurse,
 Is tender but to breed a finer sense,
 Which she may easier wound, with smart the worse
 And torture more intense.

And no strength for thee but the thought of duty,
 Nor any solace but the love of beauty.
 O Right's toil unrewarded !
 O Love's prize unaccorded !

I say this might suffice,
 O tearful & unstable
 And miserable man,
 Were't but from day to day
 Thy miserable lot,
 This might suffice, I say,
 To term thee miserable.
 But thou of all thine ills too must take thought,

Must

Must grow familiar till no curse astound thee,
With tears recall the past,
With tears the times forecast,
With tears, with tears thou hast
The scapeless net spread in thy fight around thee.

How then support thy fate,
O miserable man, if this befall,
That he who loves thee and would aid thee, daring
To raise an arm for thy deliverance,
Must for his courage suffer worse than all?

IN. Bravest deliverer, for thy prophecy
Has torn the veil which hid thee from my eyes,
If thyself art that spirit, of whom some things
Were darkly spoken,—nor can I doubt thou art,
Being that the heaven its fire withholds not from thee
Nor time his secrets,—tell me now thy name,
That I may praise thee rightly; and my late
Unwitting words pardon thou, and these who still
In blinded wonder kneel not to thy love.

PR. Speak not of love. See, I am moved with hate,
And fiercest anger, which will sometimes spur

H₂

The

The heart to extremity, till it forget
 That there is any joy save furious war.
 Nay, were there now another deed to do
 Which more could hurt our enemy, than this
 Which here I stand to venture, here would I leave thee
 Conspiring at his altar, and fly off
 To plunge the branding terror in his soul.
 But now the rising passion of my will
 Already jars his reaching sense, already
 From heaven he bids his minion Hermes forth
 To bring his only rebel to his feet.
 Therefore no more delay, the time is short,
IN. I take, I take. 'Tis but for thee to give.

PR. O heavenly fire, life's life, the eye of day,
 Whose nimble voice amid the starry night
 Of music-making ether loves to play,
 Whispering commands to every gliding sprite
 To feed all things with colour, from the ray
 Of thy bright-glancing, white
 And silver-spinning light :
 Unweaving its thin tissue for the bow

Of

Of Iris, separating countless hues
Of various splendour for the grateful flowers
To crown the hastening hours,
Changing their special garlands as they choose.

O spirit of rage & might,
Who canst unchain the links of winter stark,
And bid earth's stubborn metals flow like oil,
Her porphyrous heart-veins boil;
Whose arrows pierce the cloudy shields of dark;
Let now this flame, which did to life awaken
Beyond the cold dew-gathering veils of morn,
And thence by me was taken,
And in this reed was borne,
A smothered theft and gift to man below,
Here with my breath revive,
Restore thy lapsed realm, and be the fire
Of many an earthly fire.

O flame, flame bright and live,
Appear upon the altar as I blow.

CHOR. 'Twas in the marsh reed.

See

See to his mouth he sets its hollow flute
 And breathes therein with heed,
 As one who from a pipe with breathings mute
 Will music's voice evoke.

See, the curl of a cloud.

IN. The smoke, the smoke!

Semichorus Thin clouds mounting higher.

IN. 'Tis smoke, the smoke of fire.

Sem. Thick they come & thicker,

Quick arise & quicker,

Higher still & higher.

—Their wreaths the wood enfold.

I see a spot of gold.

They spring from a spot of gold,

Red gold, deep among

The leaves...A golden tongue.

O behold, behold,

Dancing tongues of gold,

That leaping aloft flicker,

Higher still & higher.

IN. 'Tis fire, the flame of fire!

Semichorus The blue smoke overhead

Is turned to angry red.

The fire, the fire, it stirs.
Hark, a crackling sound,
As when all around
Ripened pods of furze
Split in the parching sun
Their dry caps one by one,
And shed their seeds on the ground.

—Ah! what clouds arise.

Away! O come away. [*Exit Prometheus unobserved*]

The wind-wafted smoke,
Blowing all astray,
Blinds and pricks my eyes.

Ah! I choke, I choke.

—All the midst is rent :

See the twigs are all
By the flaming spent
White & gold, and fall.
How they writhe, resist,
Blacken, flake, and twist,
Snap in gold and fall.

—See the stars that mount,

Momentary

Momentary bright
Flitting specks of light
More than eye can count.
Insects of the air,
As in summer night
Show a fire in flying
Flickering here & there,
Waving past and dying.
—Look, a common cone
Of the mountain pine
Solid gold is grown,
Till its scales outshine,
Standing each alone
In the spiral rows
Of their fair design,
All the brightest shows
Of the sun's decline.
—Hark, there came a hiss,
Like a startled snake
Sliding through the brake.
Oh, and what is this?
Smaller flames that flee

Sidelong

Sidelong from the tree,
 Hark, they hifs, they hifs.
 —How the gay flames flicker,
 Spurting, dancing, leaping
 Quicker yet & quicker,
 Higher yet & higher,
 —Flaming, flaring, fuming,
 Cracking, crackling, creeping,
 Hissing & consuming :
 Mighty is the fire.

IN. Stay, stay, cease your rejoicings. Where is he,
 The prophet,—nay, what say I,—the god, the giver?
CH. He is not here—he is gone. *IN.* Search, search around.
 Search all, search well. *CH.* He is gone, he is not here.
IN. The palace gate lies open : go, Argeia,
 May be he went within : go seek him there. [*Exit Argeia.*
 Look down the sea road, down the country road :
 Follow him if ye see him. *CH.* He is not there.
IN. Strain, strain your eyes : look well : search everywhere.
 Look townwards—is he there? *CH.* He is not there.
CH. He is not there. *AR.* (*reentering*) He is not there.

J1

CHOR.

CH. O see! *CH.* See where? *CH.* See on the altar—see!

CH. What see ye on the altar? *CH.* Here in front

Words newly writ. *CH.* What words? *CH.* A name—

IN. Ay true—

There is the name. How like a child was I,
 That I must wait till these dumb letters gave
 The shape & foul to knowledge : when the god
 Stood here so self-revealed to ears & eyes
 That, 'tis a god I said, yet wavering still,
 Doubting what god,—and now, who else but he?
 I knew him, yet not well, I knew him not :
 Prometheus—ay, Prometheus. Know ye, my children,
 This name we see was writ by him we seek :
 'Tis his own name, his own heartfiring name,
 Feared and revered among the immortal gods ;
 Divine Prometheus : see how here the large
 Cadmeian characters run, scoring out
 The hated title of his ancient foe—
 To Zeus 'twas made, and now 'tis to Prometheus—
 Writ with the charred reed—theft upon theft.
 He hath stolen from Zeus his altar, and with his fire
 Hath lit our sacrifice unto himself.

Ió Prometheus, friend and firegiver,
 For good or ill thy thefts & gifts are ours.
 We worshipped thee unknowing. *CH.* But now where is he?
IN. No need to search—we shall not see him more.
 We look in vain. The high gods when they choose
 Put on & off the solid visible shape
 Which more deceives our hasty sense, than when
 Seeing them not we judge they stand aloof.
 And he, he now is gone ; his work is done :
 'Tis ours to see it be not done in vain.
CH. What is to do? speak, bid, command, we fly.
IN. Go some and fetch more wood to feed the fire.
 And some into the city to proclaim
 That fire is ours : and send out messengers
 To Corinth, Sicyon, Megara and Athens
 And to Mycenæ, telling we have fire :
 And bid that in the temples they prepare
 Their altars, and send hither careful men
 To learn of me what things the time requires. [*Exit part of Ch.*
 The rest remain to end our feast ; and now
 Seeing this altar is no more to Zeus,
 But shall for ever be with smouldering heat

Fed for the god who first set fire thereon,
 Change ye your hymns, which in the praise of Zeus
 Ye came to sing, and change the prayer for fire
 Which ye were wont to raise, to high thanksgiving,
 Praising aloud the giver and his gift.

Part of CHORUS Now our happy feast hath ending
 While the sun in heaven descending
 Sees us gathered round a light
 Born to cheer his vacant night.
 Praising him to-day who came
 Bearing far his heavenly flame :
 Came to crown our king's desire
 With his gift of golden fire.

Semichorus My heart, my heart is freed.
 Now can I sing. I loose a shaft from my bow,
 A song from my heart to heaven, and watch it speed.
 It revels in the air, and straight to its goal doth go.

I have no fear I praise distinguishing duly :
 I praise the love that I love and I worship truly.
 Goodness I praise, not might,
 Nor more will I speak of wrong,

But

But of lovingkindness & right ;
 And the god of my love shall rejoice at the sound of my song.
 I praise him whom I have seen.
 As a man he is beautiful, blending prime & youth,
 Of gentle and lovely mien,
 With the step and the eyes of truth,
 As a god,—O were I a god, but thus to be man !
 As a god, I set him above
 The rest of the gods ; for his gifts are pledges of love,
 The words of his mouth rare & precious,
 His eyes' glance & the smile of his lips are love.

He is the one
 Alone of all the gods,
 Of righteous Themis the lofty-spirited son,
 Who hates the wrongs they have done.
 He is the one I adore.
 For if there be love in heaven with evil to cope,—
 And he promised us more & more,—
 For what, what may we not hope ?

ODE My soul is drunk with joy, her new desire
 In far forbidden places wanders away.

Her

Her hopes with free bright-coloured wings of fire
 Vpon the gloom of thought
 Are failing out.
 Awhile they rise, awhile to rest they softly fall,
 Like butterflies, that flit
 Across the mountains, or upon a wall
 Winking their idle fans at pleasure sit.

O my vague desires!
 Ye lambent flames of the soul, her offspring fires :
 That are my soul herself in pangs sublime
 Rising and flying to heaven before her time :
 What doth tempt you forth
 To melt in the south or shiver in the frosty north ?
 What seek ye or find ye in your random flying,
 For ever soaring aloft, soaring and dying ?
 Joy, the joy of flight ;
 They hide in the sun, they flare and dance in the night.
 Gone up, gone out of sight—and ever again
 Follow fresh tongues of fire, fresh pangs of pain.
 Ah! could I control
 These vague desires, these leaping flames of the soul :

Could

Could I but quench the fire, ah! could I stay
 My soul that flieth, alas, and dieth away! [*Enter other part of ch.*]

Part of CHOR. Here is wood to feed the fire—
 Never let its flames expire.
 Sing ye still while we advance
 Round the fire in measured dance,
 While the sun in heaven descending
 Sees our happy feast have ending.
 Weave ye still your joyous song,
 While we bear the wood along.

Semichorus But O return,
 Return thou flower of the gods!
 Remember the limbs that toil and the hearts that yearn,
 Remember and soon return!
 To prosper with peace & skill
 Our hands in the works of pleasure, beauty & use.
 Return, and be for us still
 Our shield from the anger of Zeus.

And he, if he raise his arm in anger to smite thee,
 And think for the good thou hast done with pain to requite thee,
 Vengeance I heard thee tell,

And

And the curse I take for my own,
That his place is prepared in hell,
And a greater than he shall hurl him down from his throne.

Down down from his throne !

For the god who shall rule mankind from the deathless skies
By mercy and truth shall be known,
In love and peace shall arise.

For him,—if again I hear him thunder above,

O, then, if I crouch or start,

I will press thy lovingkindness more to my heart,
Remember the words of thy mouth rare & precious,
Thy heart of hearts and gifts of divine love.

Yattendon, 1882.





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