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MY DEAR N—

Some while ago you asked me to complete a version of the *Œdipus Tyrannus* and *Colonaeus* of Sophocles, which had been lying by me some years. Here they are at last, the two Tragedies united into one Drama under the ponderous alliteration which figures on the Title-page; for which, however, I could hit on no so comprehensive a substitute. If you can, pray do so. There also, you see that my Drama professes to be neither a Translation, nor a Paraphrase of Sophocles, but “chiefly taken” from him: I need scarcely add, only intended for those who do not read the Greek. As you, however, to whom I send it, are a Scholar, who not only knows, but reveres the original, I shall try to excuse some of the liberties which I have taken with it. For my very free treatment of what I have retained you are already sufficiently prepared; not so, perhaps, for the much I have omitted: still less for one audacious substitution of my own work for that of Sophocles in what I may call the Second Act in the Second Part of my Play.

Well, then, to begin with the more venial sins of omission. You will see that I have dispensed with all (including what I believe is called the *Kommos*) which follows the narration of the catastrophe as related by the

several witnesses ; as I think is the case in some of the Tragedies of Euripides. What Professor Paley says of the Kommos which terminates the *Persæ* of Æschylus must, I think, be true of all : that, whatever effect the vehement recitation might add to it, the Dialogue is secondary to the Spectacle—by which I understand him to mean those outward signs of woe which are implied in the name. Even as I venture to believe—proh Scholasticus !—that in most of the Lyric Chorus (unless in the case of Æschylus) the words are secondary to the Lyre : are ; in fact, a kind of better *Libretto* for the Music.

However this may be with Ode or Kommos, I think no English reader will care to have the horror of the catastrophe in the first Play increased, even to his Mind's eye, by the exhibition of the poor self-blinded King staggering into the public street, whither his two daughters have been summoned to weep, and be wept over by him. In the original, you know, the spectacle he presents is much more revolting—a spectacle indeed of royal degradation surely worse than any which Aristophanes satirised in Euripides. And is not the catastrophe when told of as being accomplished within doors, more terrible, though less horrible, than when exhibited without ? And, on the other hand, does not a reader find the impression left on him by the grand catastrophe of the *Colonæus* dissipated rather than enhanced by the Lamentations which follow, and conclude the Tragedy ?

Thus far I do not think you will much differ with me : but what will you say to the disappearance of two principal Characters from the *Dramatis Personæ*—that of Creon from the first Play, and that of Ismene from the second ? *Œdipus*, you know, has involved Creon in the same groundless charge of Treason which he brings against

Teiresias ; and, after much and violent altercation with the Prophet, turns with yet more vindictive fury upon the Prince, who comes to vindicate himself from the charge. From all which little results except to show that the Creon of this Play (the Tyrannus) proves himself by his temperate self-defence, and subsequent forbearance toward his accuser, very unlike the Creon of the two after Tragedies, which Goethe thought should be regarded as parts of a connected Trilogy—a theory which is not favoured either by this dissimilarity of character in the several Tragedies, nor by the dates usually assigned to the composition of each ; the Antigone being reputed as among the earlier, and the Colonæus, as tradition tells, the very last of all the Poet's works.

As for Ismene—her cautious refusal to help in burying her revolted brother may not be inconsistent with her singular exploit of riding alone to Athens to acquaint her banished father with what is plotting against him in Thebes. But her arrival brings with it more of paternal and filial effusion than comes within the compass of my Play. So I pretend that some loyal Theban—she, if you please, on her Sicilian filly—had told all that was to be told previously to the opening of the Play : and thus Ismene “disappears from my Playbill ” altogether. And Œdipus seems to me to present us a no less pathetic figure when accompanied only by the one daughter who is traditionally associated with him as the type of filial as afterward of sisterly, devotion.

The disappearance of the two sisters along with that Kommos from the first Play helps to connect it with the second in point of Time, without, I think, diminishing the interest of either. In the Tyrannus, you know, Œdipus appears as a man little, if at all, beyond the prime of life.

He came quite young, he tells us, to Thebes ; his unlucky marriage, by which the State thought to confirm his other claims to the throne, would, for the same reasons, be not long delayed ; those two daughters of his are scarce in their teens—certainly not marriageable—when brought in to him just before his expulsion ; which, as the life of Thebes depended on it, must have followed immediately on his conviction. Creon, at any rate, must have been, by his ill-starr'd relation with Œdipus, considerably the older of the two ; and he, we see, is capable of very active service both in the *Colonæus* and *Antigone* ; and certainly if Œdipus became an old man between the time of his leaving Thebes, and that of his arrival at Athens, *Antigone*, who figures along with him in both the original Tragedies, may, on her subsequent return to Thebes, have been a suitable bride in point of years to Creon's son *Hæmon*, but scarcely such as he would have been so much enamoured of as to sacrifice himself at her side.

Nevertheless, in the original *Colonæus*, Œdipus has become an old—I think, a very old man. Our own Theatre—our own Shakespeare—has “jumped the life” of his people over as wide an interval in the compass of a single Play as Sophocles has done in two several Tragedies : but, especially if considering them as parts of a Trilogy, one cannot help asking one's self *where*, in all the little world of Greece, Œdipus could have found Space to wander in all the Time.

Perhaps, however, so ran the Legend ; or Sophocles consider'd that, as usual, I think, in ancient Tragedy—the “Pity of it” was increased by adding the weight of old age to blindness and calamity. I do not question that : but is it so with the grandeur of his præternatural “taking off,” if determined to a time of life when death in some way or other is inevitable ?

So much for omission. And now for my capital act of treason committed against Sophocles, amounting to nothing less than the re-casting of the whole Second Act (as I call it) of the *Colonæus*, including Creon's bootless expedition to Athens.

I never understood, though I doubt not the Athenian audience approved, that coming of his with a considerable force (as in the original he does) unprevented—uninterrupted, and apparently unobserved, under the very walls of their City, and there seizing on those who were taking refuge there. Insomuch that, when King Theseus, alarmed by the outcries of the Chorus, comes to the rescue, Antigone and Ismene have already been forced away by some of Creon's people, and *Ædipus* only just escapes being carried off by Creon himself.

In re-casting all this, I hope that whatever wrong I may have done Sophocles, King Theseus, at any rate, has not suffered indignity at my hands, if Creon be made to regard him of sufficient account as to apprise him before advancing to his walls; *not* with the rash design of seizing and carrying off those who are under his protection; but to prevail on them, if he can, by fair argument, to return to Thebes: Theseus standing between the two parties to hear, if not to judge, what has to be said on either side.

And on that score also I have something to say. Up to this visit of Creon's, I could never see any just ground for the rancorous hate which *Ædipus* entertains and exhibits toward Creon or toward his own sons, which occupy so much of the *Colonæus* with imprecations, that remind one of Lear's against his daughter, but without as much reason, and therefore without engaging our sympathy in his behalf. For how stands the case? Phœbus

had announced that, until the murder of King Laius were avenged, Thebes would not rid herself of the Plague that was devouring her: Œdipus denounces Excommunication on the Criminal; convicts himself;* and, after putting out his own eyes, calls aloud for Thebes to execute the sentence he had call'd down upon himself, whether by banishment or death. Creon, however, who is now left in charge of the City, decides, with the concurrence of Œdipus' two sons, that banishment will be sufficient accomplishment of the Oracle; and Œdipus is accordingly banished. He soon indeed repents of his rash self-denunciation, and prays to be restored to Thebes: but how could that be until Apollo, by Oracle or Augury, should sanction his return, without danger of bringing back the Plague which he took away with him?

And when the Oracle at last declares that Thebes can only secure herself from her enemies by repossessing herself of her old King, it is on the strange condition that she is to keep her treasure, whether alive or dead, upon alien territory, for the very reason that he is polluted by his father's blood. Not a satisfactory arrangement for him, whatever it might be for Thebes; but for this, and for all thus far, the Gods were responsible, not Creon and the sons upon whom he fulminates his wrath.

But when Creon appears, and afterward Polynices, to persuade, if not to force him *home*, he being apprised of their ulterior intentions regarding him, we do not wonder at his blazing up against their selfish duplicity. But

* Though, so far as I see, the sole surviving witness of the deed whom he has ultimately—(not immediately, as would have Justice Shallow)—sent for to decide the question, had not yet arrived; or, being, as the Chorus surmises, the same who convicts Œdipus of his fatal parentage, is not interrogated at all as to his Father's murder.

still it is, I think, their previous ill-usage (as he thinks it), rather than their present design upon him, which mainly supplies the fuel of his wrath.

Now, had his first expulsion been aggravated by unnecessary cruelty and insult on their part ; and had they persisted in keeping him out when the Gods, under some favourable auspices, might have been supposed to license his return to Thebes, polluted as he might still be with the blood which had not prevented his reigning there for so many years before : I think he would have been furnished with such reason for his Fury as would have carried our feelings along with him. And, whatever ancient Legend or Mythology might say, neither of them was very impracticable, had the Poet chosen to deal with them as I have ventured on doing with him.

While doing, as well as saying all this, I am sure you will understand that I am not pretending to improve on Sophocles, whether as a Poet or a Dramatist. As for Poetry, I pretend to very little more than representing the old Greek in sufficiently readable English verse : and whatever I have omitted, added, or altered, has been with a view to the English reader of To-day, without questioning what was fittest for an Athenian theatre more than two thousand years ago. Those great ancient Tragedians were not, any more than their audiences, nice about such consistencies and probabilities as any modern playwright would provide for, and, so far, be the better for it.

One modification of the original not even the English Scholar—I do not mean, Scholastic—would resent ; namely, leaving the terrible story to develop itself no further than needs it must to be intelligible, without being descanted, dwelt, and dilated on, after the fashion of Greek Tragedy.

As I thought I should make no better hand of the Choruses than old Potter, I have left them, as you see, in his hands ; excepting two fragments which might otherwise be imputed to him : one at page 32 of the First Part during which Iocasta is supposed to be making her oblations at the altar before the Corinthian Herald interrupts her : and, secondly, at page 40 of the Second Part, by way of giving Theseus a little while before he enters on the scene to which he has been so hastily summoned. You say that good literal Prose translation would be better than Potter. So think I too in some respects ; but with Potter the Lyric *Form*, so essential to the conception of Greek Tragedy, is retained, if nothing else : though some grand piece of appropriate organ music would answer the purpose much better.

What I meant for a written letter has grown to such a length—and long-windedness, I fear—that it shall even go to the printer along with the play which it prates about, and, at any rate, give you no little trouble in deciphering. Pray mark down what you see amiss in both : and believe me yours, as ever, sincerely,

LITTLEGRANGE.

THE
DOWNFALL AND DEATH
OF
KING ŒDIPUS.

A Drama in Two Parts.

CHIEFLY TAKEN FROM THE
ŒDIPUS TYRANNUS AND COLONÆUS OF
SOPHOCLES.

THE INTER-ACT CHORUSES ARE FROM POTTER.

PART I.
ŒDIPUS IN THEBES.

Dramatis Personæ.

ŒDIPUS, *King of Thebes.*

IocASTA, *his Queen.*

CREON, *her Brother.*

TEIRESIAS, *Prophet of Apollo.*

PRIEST.

HERALD FROM CORINTH.

SHEPHERD OF KING LAIUS.

CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS.

*The Scene is at THEBES, before the Palace of KING
ŒDIPUS.*

THE DOWNFALL AND DEATH OF KING ŒDIPUS.

ŒDIPUS, PRIEST AND SUPPLIANTS *assembled before his
palace-gate*, CHORUS.

Œd. Children of Cadmus, and as mine to me,
When all that of the plague-struck city can
With lamentation loud, and sacrifice
Beset the shrines and altars of the Gods
Through street and market-place, or by the tomb
Which shrouds Ismenus' sacred ashes—why
Be you thus gathered at my palace-door,
Mute, with the Suppliant's olive-branch in hand ?
Asking, or deprecating, what ? which I,
Not satisfied from other lips to learn,
Myself am come to hear it from your own.
You, whose grave aspect and investiture
Announce the chosen oracle of all,
Tell me the purport : I am here, you see,
As King, and Father of his people too,
To listen and what in me lies to do ;
For surely mine were but a heart of stone
Not to be moved by such an embassy,
Nor feel my people's sorrows as my own.

Priest. O Œdipus, our Father, and our King !
Of what a mingled company you see
This Supplication gather'd at your door ;
Ev'n from the child who scarce has learn'd to creep,
Down to old age that little further can,
With all the strength of life that breathes between.

You know how all the shatter'd city lies
 Reeling a-wreck, and cannot right herself
 Under the tempest of this pestilence,
 That nips the fruitful growth within the bud,
 Strangles the struggling blossom in the womb,
 With sudden death infects the living man,
 Until the realm of Cadmus wastes, and Thebes
 With her depopulation Hades feeds.
 Therefore, myself and this mute company
 In supplication at your altar sit,
 Looking to you for succour ; looking not
 As to a God, but to the Man of men,
 Most like the God in man's extremity :
 Who, coming here a stranger to the land,
 Didst overcome the Witch who with her song
 Seduced, and slew the wisest and the best ;
 For which all but divine deliverance Thebes
 Call'd the strange man who sav'd her to the throne
 Left void by her hereditary king.
 And now the kingdom looks to you once more—
 To you, the Master of the master-mind,
 To save her in a worse extremity :
 When men, not one by one, but troop by troop,
 Fall by a plague more deadly than the Sphynx,
 Till Thebes herself is left to foreign arms
 Assailable—for what are wall and tower,
 Divinely built and founded as they be,
 Without the rampart of the man within ?—
 And let not what of Cadmus yet survives
 From this time forth regard you as the man
 Who saved them once, by worse to perish now.

Œd. Alas, my children ! telling me of that
 My people groans with, knowing not yourselves
 How more than any man among you, I,
 Who bear the accumulated woes of all ;
 So that you find me, coming when you may,
 Restlessly pacing up and down all day,
 Tossing all night upon a sleepless bed,

Endeavouring all that of myself I can,
 And all of Heaven implore—thus far in vain.
 But if your King have seem'd to pause awhile,
 'Tis that I wait the issue of one hope,
 Which, if accomplish'd, will accomplish all.
 Creon, my brother, and my second self
 Beside the throne I sit on, to the shrine
 Of Delphian Phœbus, man's assur'd appeal
 In all his exigence, I have despatch'd :
 And long before you gather'd at my door
 Within my soul was fretting, lest To-day
 That should have lighted him from Delphi back,
 Pass over into night, and bring him not.
 But come he must, and will ; and when he comes,
 Do I not all, so far as man may do,
 To follow where the God shall point the way,
 Denounce me traitor to the State I saved
 And to the people who proclaimed me King.

Cho. Your words are as a breath from Delphi, King,
 Prophetic of itself ; for even now
 Fore-running Rumour buzzes in our ear
 That he whose coming all await is here.

Œd. And as before the advent of a God,
 The moving multitude divides—O Phœbus !
 Be but the word he carries back to me
 Auspicious as well-timed !

Chorus. And shall no less ;
 For look ! the laurel wreath about his brow
 Can but announce the herald of Success.

ŒDIPUS, CREON, CHORUS.

Œd. Son of Menceceus ! Brother ! Brother-king !—
 Oh, let impatience for the word you bring
 Excuse brief welcome to the messenger !
 Be but the word as welcome !—

Cre. As it shall,
 Have you your ancient cunning to divine
 The darker word in which the God of Light
 Enshrines his answer.

Œd. Speak ! for till I hear,
I know not whether most to hope or fear.

Cre. Am I to speak before the people here,
Or to yourself within ?

Œd. Here, before all,
Whose common cause it is.

Cre. To all then thus :
When Delphi reach'd, and at the sacred shrine
Lustration, sacrifice, and offering made,
I put the question I was charg'd withal,
The Prophetess of the three-footed throne,
Conceiving with the vapour of the God
Which wrapt her, rising from Earth's centre, round,
At length convuls'd to sudden answer broke :
O SEVEN-GATED CITY, BY THE LYRE
COMPACT, AND PEOPLED FROM A DRAGON SIRE
THEBES FEEDS THE PLAGUE THAT SLAYS HER NOURISHING
WITHIN HER WALLS THE SLAYER OF HER KING.

Œd. The slayer of her King ? What king ?

Cre. None else

I know than Laius, son of Labdacus,
Who occupied the throne before you came ;
That much of Oracle, methinks, is plain.

Œd. A story rises on me from the past.
Laius, the son of Labdacus—of whom
I know indeed, but him I never saw.

Cre. No ; he was slain before you set your foot
Over the country's threshold.

Œd. Slain ! By whom ?

Cre. That to divine were to interpret all
That Œdipus himself is call'd to answer.
Thus much is all we know,
The King was murder'd by some roving band,
Of outlaws, who waylaid him on his road
To that same Delphi, whither he had gone
On some such sacred mission as myself.

Œd. Yet of those roving outlaws, one at least
Yet breathes among us in the heart of Thebes.

Cre. So saith the Oracle.

Œd. In the midst of all
The citizens and subjects of the King
He slew?

Cre. So saith the Oracle.

Œd. But hold!
The story of this treason—all, you say,
Now known of it, how first made known in Thebes?

Cre. By the one man of the King's retinue,
Who having 'scaped the fate which took the rest,
As if the assassin's foot were at his heels,
Half dead with fear, just reach'd the city gates
With breath to tell the story.

Œd. And breathes still
To tell it once again?

Cre. I know not that:
For having told it, the bewilder'd man,
As fast as hither he had fled, fled hence,
Where, if the assassin's foot not on him then,
His eye, the God declares, were on him now—
So fled he to his native field again
Among his flocks and fellow-husbandmen.

Œd. And thus the single witness you let slip,
Whose eye might ev'n have singled out the man,
As him the man's!—Oh, had I but been by,
I would have driv'n interrogation home,
Would the bewilder'd memory so have sifted
Of each minutest grain of circumstance—
How many, accoutred how, what people like—
Now by the lapse of time and memory,
Beyond recall into oblivion pass'd!
But not to lose what yet of hope there is—
Let him be sent for, sought for, found and brought,

Cre. Meanwhile, default of him for whom you send,
Or of uncertain memory when he comes,
Were it not well, if still the God withhold
His revelation of the word we need,
To question it of his Interpreter?

Æd. Of his Interpreter ?

Cre. Of whom so well,
As of Teiresias, the blind Seer of Thebes,
Whose years the God hath in his service counted
Beyond all reach of human memory ?

Æd. So be it. But I marvel yet why Thebes,
Letting the witness slip, then unpursued,
Or undetected, left the criminal,
Whom the King's blood, by whomsoever spilt,
Cried out aloud to be reveng'd upon.

Cre. What might be done we did. But how detect
The roving robber, in whatever land,
Of friend or foe alike, outlaw'd of all,
Where ever prey to pounce on on the wing,
Or housed in rock or forest, save to him
Unknown, or inaccessible ? Besides,
Thebes soon had other business on her hand.

Æd. Why, what of business to engage her more
Than to revenge the murder of her King ?

Cre. None other than the riddle-singing Sphynx
Who, till you came to silence her, held Thebes
From thinking of the dead to save herself.

Æd. And leaving *this* which then you might have
guess'd,
To guess at that which none of you could solve,
You have brought home a riddle on your heads
Inextricable and more fatal far !
But I, who put the riddling Witch to rest,
This fatal riddle will unravel too,
And by swift execution following
The revelation, once more save the realm,
And wipe away the impiety and shame
Of Laius' yet unexpiated death.
For were no expiation to the God,
And to the welfare of this people due,
Were't not a shame thus unreveng'd so long
To leave the slaughter of so great a King—
King Laius, the son of Labdacus,

Who from his father Polydore his blood
 Direct from Cadmus and Agenor drew ?
 Shame to myself, who, sitting on the throne
 He sate on, wedded to the very Queen
 Who should have borne him children, as to me
 She bore them, had not an assassin's hand
 Divorced them ere their wedded life bore fruit !
 Therefore to this as 'twere my father's cause,
 As of my people's—nay, why not my own,
 Who in his death am threaten'd by the hand
 Of him, whose eye now follows me about ?—
 With the Gods' aid do I devote myself.
 And hereto let the city's Herald all
 Her population summon, from my lips
 To hear and help in what I shall devise :
 And you, that with bow'd head and olive wand,
 Have since the dawn been gather'd at my door,
 Beseeching me with piteous silence, rise,
 And by their altars supplicate the Gods,
 And Phœbus chief of all, that he may turn
 His yet half-clouded word into full light,
 And with one shaft of his unerring bow
 Smite dead the Plague which back into the dust
 Whence Cadmus raised them lays the People low.

CHORUS.

Thou oracle of Jove, what fate
 From Pytho's golden shrine
 Brings to th' illustrious Theban state
 Thy sweet-breath'd voice divine ?
 My trembling heart what terror rends,
 While dread suspense on thee attends,
 O Delian Pæan, healing pow'r
 Daughter of golden Hope, to me,
 Blest voice, what now dost thou decree,
 Or in time's future hour ?

Daughter of heav'n's almighty Lord,
 Immortal Pallas, hear !
 And thou, Diana, queen ador'd,
 Whose tutelary care
 Protects these walls, this favour'd state,
 Amidst the forum 'round whose seat
 Sublime encircling pillars stand !
 God of the distant-wounding bow,
 Apollo, hear ; avert our woe,
 And save the sick'ning land !

This realm when former ills opprest,
 If your propitious pow'r
 In mercy crush'd the baleful pest,
 Outrageous to devour ;
 In mercy now extend your care,
 For all is misery and despair,
 And vain the counsels of the wise.
 No fruit, no grain to ripeness grows ;
 The matron feels untimely throes,
 The birth abortive dies.

The Shades, as birds of rapid flight,
 In quick succession go,
 Quick as the flames that flash through night,
 To Pluto's realms below.
 Th' unpeopled town beholds the dead
 Wide o'er her putrid pavements spread,
 Nor grac'd with tear or obsequy.
 The altars round, a mournful band,
 The wives, the hoary matrons, stand,
 And heave the suppliant sigh.

With deep sighs mix'd the hallow'd strain
 Bursts fervent to the skies :
 Deign then, O radiant Pallas, deign
 In all thy might to rise.

From this fierce pow'r, which raging round
Unarm'd inflicts the fiery wound,
 Daughter of Jove, my country save ;
Hence, goddess, hence the fury sweep
To Amphitrite's chambers deep,
 Or the rough Euxine wave !

Doth aught the Night from ruin spare ?
 The Morning's sickly ray,
Pregnant with death, inflames the air,
 And gives disease its prey.
Father of gods, whose matchless force
Wings the red lightning's vengeful course,
 With all thy thunders crush this foe !
Potent to aid, Lycæan king,
Thy shafts secure of conquest wing,
 And bend thy golden bow !

Thy beams around, Diana, throw,
 And pierce this gloom of night,
As on Lycaëum's moss-clad brow
 Thou pour'st thy silver light !
Thy nymphs, O Theban Bacchus, lead,
The golden mitre round thy head,
 Grief-soothing god of wine and joy ;
Wave thy bright torch, and with its flame
This god, to gods an odious name,
 This lurid pest destroy !

ŒDIPUS, CHORUS.

Œd. You came to me for counsel ; hearken then,
And do as well as hearken, like myself
Following the pointed finger of the God
Which thus far leads us, all may yet be well.
I, Œdipus, albeit no Theban born,
By Thebes herself enthroned her sovereign King,
Thus to the citizens of Thebes proclaim ;

That whosoever of them knows by whom
 King Laius, son of Labdacus, was slain,
 Forthwith let him disclose it undismay'd ;
 Yea, though the criminal himself he were,
 Let not the dread of deadly consequence
 Revolt him from confession of the crime ;
 For he shall suffer nothing worse than this,
 Instant departure from the city, but
 Uninjur'd, uninsulted, unpursued ;
 For though feloniously a King he slew
 Yet haply as a stranger unaware
 That king was Laius ; and thus the crime
 Half-clear'd of treason, half absolved by time.
 Nor, on the other hand, if any knows
 Another guilty, let him not for love,
 Or fear, or whatsoever else regard,
 Flinch from a revelation that shall win
 More from myself than aught he fears to lose—
 Nay, as a second saviour of the State
 Shall after me be call'd ; and who should not
 Save a whole people at the cost of one ?
 But *Him*—that one—who would not at the cost
 Of self-confession save himself and all—
 Him—were he nearest to my heart and hearth—
 Nearest and dearest—thus do I denounce ;
 That from the very moment that he stands,
 By whatsoever, or by whom, reveal'd,
 No man shall him bespeak, at home, abroad,
 Sit with at table, nor by altar stand,
 But, as the very Pestilence he were
 Incarnate which this people now devours,
 Him slay at once, or hoot and hunt him forth,
 With execration from the city walls.
 But if, in spite of promise or of threat,
 The man who did, or knows who did, this deed,
 Still hold it in his bosom unreveal'd—
 That man—and he is here among us now—
 Man's vengeance may escape when he forswears

Participation in the crime, but not
 The Gods', himself involving in the Curse
 Which, with myself and every man in Thebes,
 He shall denounce upon the criminal,
 Invoking all the Gods withhold from him
 That issue of the earth by which he lives,
 That issue of the womb by which himself
 Lives after him ; that in the deadly curse
 By which his fellows perish he and his
 May perish, or, if worse there be, by worse !

Cho. Beside Apollo's altar standing here,
 That oath I swear, that neither I myself
 Nor did myself, nor know who did this deed :
 And in the curse I join on him who did,
 Or, knowing him who did, will not reveal.

Œd. 'Tis well : and, all the city's seven gates closed,
 Thus solemnly shall every man in Thebes
 Before the altars of his country swear.

Cho. Well have you done, O Master, in so far
 As human hand and wit may reach ; and lo !
 The sacred Seer of Thebes, Teiresias,
 To whom, next to the God himself, we look
 For Heaven's assistance, at your summons comes,
 In his prophetic raiment, staff in hand,
 Approaching, gravely guided as his wont,
 But with a step, methinks, unwonted slow.

ŒDIPUS, TEIRESIAS, CHORUS.

Teiresias, Minister and Seer of God,
 Who, blind to all that others see without,
 See that within to which all else are blind ;
 Sequester'd as you are with Deity,
 You know, what others only too well,
 The mortal sickness that confounds us all ;
 But you alone can tell the remedy.
 For since the God whose Minister you are,
 Bids us, if Thebes would be herself again,
 Revenge the murder of King Laius

By retribution on the murderer
 Who undetected walks among us now ;
 Unless by you, Teiresias, to whose lips,
 As Phœbus his Interpreter we cling,
 To catch the single word that he withholds,
 And without which what he reveals is vain —
 Therefore to you, Teiresias, you alone,
 Do look this people and their Ruler—look,
 Imploring you, by that same inward light
 Which sees, to name the man who lurks unseen,
 And whose live presence is the death of all.

Tei. Alas ! how worse than vain to be well arm'd
 When the man's weapon turns upon himself !

Œd. I know not upon whom that arrow lights.

Tei. If not on him that summon'd, then on him
 Who, summon'd, came. There is one remedy ;
 Let those who hither led me lead me hence.

Œd. Before the single word— word which you alone
 Can speak—be spoken ? How is this, Teiresias,
 That to your King on such a summons come,
 You come so much distemper'd ?

Tei. For the King,
 With all his wisdom, knows not what he asks.

Œd. And therefore asks that he may know from you,
 Seeing the God hath folded up his word
 From human eyesight.

Tei. Why should I reveal
 What He I serve has chosen to conceal ?

Œd. Is't not your office to interpret that
 To man which he for man vouchsafes from Heaven ?

Tei. What Fate hath fixed to come to pass come will,
 Whether reveal'd or not.

Œd. I know it must ;
 But Fate may cancel Fate, foretelling that
 Which, unpredicted, else would come to pass.

Tei. Yet none the less I tell you, Œdipus,
 That you, though wise, not knowing what you ask,
 I, knowing, shall not answer.

Œd. You will not !
 Inexorable to the people's cries—
 Plague-pitiless, disloyal to your King—
Tei. Oh ! you forsooth were taunting me but now
 With *my* distemper'd humour—
Œd. Who would not,
 When but a word, which you pretend to know,
 Would save a people ?
Tei. One of them at least
 It would not.
Œd. Oh, scarce any man, methinks,
 But would himself, though guiltless, sacrifice,
 If that would ransom all.
Tei. Yet one, you see,
 Obdurate as myself—
Œd. You have not heard, perchance, Teiresias,
 (Unless from that prophetic voice within),
 How through the city, by my herald's voice,
 With excommunication, death, or banishment,
 I have denounced, not him alone who did,
 But him who, knowing who, will not reveal ?
Tei. I hear it now.
Œd. And are inflexible
 To Fear as Pity ?
Tei. It might be, to Fear
 Inflexible *by* Pity ; else, why fear
 Invulnerable as I am in Truth,
 And by the God I serve inviolate !
Œd. Is not your King a Minister of Zeus,
 As you of Phœbus, and the King of Thebes
 Not more to be insulted or defied
 Than any Priest or Augur in his realm ?
Tei. Implore, denounce, and threaten as you may,
 What unreveal'd I would, I will not say.
Œd. You will not ! Mark then how, default of your
 Interpretation, I interpret you :
 Either not knowing what you feign to know,
 You lock your tongue in baffled ignorance ;

Or, knowing that which you will not reveal,
 I do suspect—Suspect! why, stand you not
 Self-accused, self-convicted, and by me
 Denounced as he, that knowing him who did,
 Will not reveal—nay, might yourself have done
 The deed that you with some accomplice plann'd,
 Could those blind eyes have aim'd the murderous
 hand!

Tei. You say so! Now then, listen in your turn
 To that one word which, as it leaves my lips,
 By your own Curse upon the Criminal
 Denounced, should be your last in Thebes to hear.
 For by the unerring insight of the God
 You question, Zeus his delegate though you be
 Who lay this Theban people under curse
 Of revelation of the murderer
 Whose undiscovered presence eats away
 The people's life—I tell you—You are he!

Cho. Forbear, old man, forbear! And you, my King,
 Heed not the passion of provok'd old age.

Œd. And thus, in your blind passion of revenge,
 You think to 'scape contempt or punishment
 By tossing accusation back on me
 Under Apollo's mantle.

Tei. Aye, and more,
 Dared you but listen.

Cho. Peace, O peace, old man!

Œd. Nay, let him shoot his poisoned arrows out;
 They fall far short of me.

Tei. Not mine, but those
 Which Fate had filled my Master's quiver with,
 And you have drawn upon yourself.

Œd. Your Master's?
 Your Master's; but assuredly not His
 To whom you point, albeit you see him not,
 In his meridian dazzling overhead,
 Who is the God of Truth as well as Light,
 And knows as I within myself must know

If Memory be not false as Augury,
 The words you put into his lips a Lie !
 Not He, but Self—Self only—in revenge
 Of self-convicted ignorance—Self alone,
 Or with some self whom Self would profit by—
 As were it—Creon, say—smooth, subtle Creon,
 Moving by rule and weighing every word
 As in the scales of Justice—but of whom
 Whispers of late have reach'd me—Creon, ha !
 Methinks I scent another Master here !
 Who, wearied of but secondary power
 Under an alien King, and would belike
 Exalt his Prophet for good service done
 Higher than ever by my throne he stood—
 And, now I think on't, bade me send for you
 Under the mask of Phœbus—

Cho. Oh, forbear—
 Forbear, in turn, my lord and master !

Tei. Nay,
 Let him, in turn, his poison'd arrows, *not*
 From Phœbus' quiver, shoot, but to return
 On his own head. 'Tis natures such as his,
 That on a slight suspicion, self-inflam'd,
 Blaze into sudden wrath, then leave the man
 In his own ashes to repent.

Œd. O vain
 Prerogative of human majesty,
 That one poor mortal from his fellows takes,
 And, with false pomp and honour dressing up,
 Lifts idol-like to what men call a Throne,
 For all below to worship and assail !
 That even the power which unsolicited
 By aught but salutary service done
 The men of Thebes committed to my hands,
 Some, restless under just authority,
 Or jealous of not wielding it themselves,
 Ev'n with the altar and the priest collude,
 And tamper with, to ruin or to seize !

Prophet and Seer forsooth and Soothsayer !
 Why, when the singing Witch contrived the noose
 Which strangled all who tried and none could loose,
 Where was the Prophet of Apollo then ?
 'Twas not for one who poring purblind down
 Over the reeking entrail of the beast,
 Nor gaping to the wandering bird in air,
 Nor in the empty silence of his soul
 Feigning a voice of God inaudible,
 Not he, nor any of his tribe—but I—
 I, Œdipus, a stranger in the land,
 And uninspired by all but mother-wit,
 Silenc'd and slew the monster against whom
 Divine and human cunning strove in vain.
 And now again when tried, and foil'd again,
 This Prophet—whether to revenge the past,
 And to prevent discomfiture to come,
 Or by some traitor aiming at my throne
 Suborn'd to stand a greater at his side
 Than peradventure e'er he stood at mine,
 Would drag me to destruction ! But beware !
 Beware lest, blind and agèd as you are,
 Wrapt in supposititious sanctity,
 You, and whoever he that leagues with you,
 Meet a worse doom than you for me prepare.

Tei. Quick to your vengeance, then ; for this same day
 That under Phœbus' fiery rein flies fast
 Over the field of heaven, shall be the last
 That you shall play the tyrant in.

Œd. O Thebes,
 You never called me Tyrant, from the day
 Since first I saved you !

Tei. And shall save again ;
 As then by coming, by departing now.
 Enough : before the day that judges both
 Decide between us, let them lead me home.

Œd. Aye, lead him hence—home—Hades—anywhere !
 Blind in his inward as his outward eye.

Tei. Poor man ! that in your inward vision blind,
 Know not, as I, that ere this day go down,
 By your own hand yourself shall be consign'd
 To deeper night than now you taunt me with ;
 When, not the King and Prophet that you were,
 But a detested outcast of the land,
 With other eyes and hands you feel your way
 To wander through the world, begging the bread
 Of execration from the stranger's hand
 Denied you here, and thrust from door to door,
 As though yourself the Plague you brought from Thebes ;
 A wretch, self-branded with the double curse
 Of such unheard, unnatural infamy,
 As shall confound a son in the embrace
 Of her who bore him to the sire he slew !

CHORUS.

Strophe 1.

All yet is dark. What wretch abhorr'd,
 Grasping with blood-stain'd hand his ruthless sword,
 From Delphi's high rock-seated shrine
 Declares the voice divine
 The author of this horrid deed ?
 Now let him wing his swiftest speed ;
 The son of Jove upon him flies,
 Arm'd with the flames and lightnings of the skies :
 Dreadful, resistless in their force
 The Fates attend his course.

Antistrophe 1.

The oracle divinely bright
 To drag the latent murderer into light
 Shone forth, Parnassus, from thy brow
 White with eternal snow :
 For, like a bull, to secret shades,
 To rocks, to caves, to sylvan glades,

Far from the Pythian prophecies
 Mournful the solitary wanderer flies :
 In vain : they hover round his head,
 And ceaseless terrors spread.
 Dreadful, dreadful things to hear
 Utters the prophetic Seer.
 Him doth truth, doth falsehood guide ?
 Fear and hope my soul divide ;
 Painful suspense ! The present and the past
 Darkening clouds alike o'ercast.
 Was wrong by Laius done of old,
 That made the son of Polybus his foe ?
 Such in no record is enroll'd ;
 Nought at this hour of proof I know,
 Decreeing as the Seer decreed,
 To charge on Œdipus the secret deed.

Antistrophe 2.

Jove, high ruler of the skies,
 And the Pythian god are wise ;
 They the deeds of mortals know,
 All whate'er is done below :
 Of knowledge doth the Seer a brighter ray,
 Than illumines me, display ?
 Some deeper drink of wisdom's spring ;
 But proofs, that flash conviction I demand.
 The Sphinx display'd her dreadful wing,
 His wisdom saved the sinking land ;
 Then let my grateful soul disdain
 To rank the hero with the murderer's train.

IOCASTA, CHORUS, *then* ŒDIPUS.

Ioc. A noise has reach'd me through the palace-wall
 Of words between Teiresias and the King,
 In which my brother's name was all misused.
 You who were here, and heard, can tell me all.

Cho. Words there have been indeed on either side,
By provocation into passion blown,
Which after-thought as likely will disown.

Ioc. But to what purport ?

Cho. I would not repeat
What those who utter'd now may wish unsaid,
Much more, unheard. But look ! the King himself
To answer for himself.

Ioc. As one who dreams.
In Heaven's name, husband, tell me what has fired
This wrath between you and Teiresias,
So fierce that e'en my brother Creon's name
Was scorcht withal, and in its ashes now
Still smoulders in your face ?

Œd. That has been said
On either side that should not ; but on his,
Relying on protection from his God,
Treason so foul against his King—

Ioc. But what ?

Œd. Why need tell now, if, as the Prophet says
This very day shall not go down without
To Thebes, as you, revealing ?—What if I—
If I, that have with banishment or death
Denounced the assassin of King Laius—
Myself am he ?

Ioc. You ! Œdipus ?

Œd. So says
Apollo's prophet.

Ioc. You !—Teiresias !—You !
On what presumption, Human or Divine ?

Œd. On His whose chariot shall not cross the sky,
But dragging me to Night along with it.

Ioc. Which cannot be—we know, which cannot be
Of the God's self—you of yourself more sure
Than any mortal Prophet sure of Him.

Œd. So might I think. But if not from the God,
From whom then, Iocasta ?

Ioc. Only not

From Creon—Whosoever else, not he!—
My brother, and your brother, being mine!

Œd. Yet brother against brother, son 'gainst sire,
Such things have been between them, and shall be,
For things of less ambition than a throne.

Ioc. Oh, strangle such suspicion in its birth
Of one more innocent than babe unborn!
Why, had he minded empire, could he not
Have claimed it for himself before you came,
And Thebes was looking for a sovereign?
Or, after-minded to unseat you King,
Would have contriv'd and hatch'd his priestly plot
Ere you so firmly seated on the throne,
And life with all of us so much for-spent
As makes ev'n just possession—and much more,
Unjust, of little moment to us all!

Œd. So be it. From the God of Light and Truth
Less likely than from him of Sleep and Dream,
Whose-ever be the Prophet.

Ioc. Had you not
Provok'd the Prophet first?

Œd. As who would not,
Who either knowing would withhold the word
On which a people's whole salvation hung,
Then, taunted into malice by just wrath,
Or to collusion with some traitor leagued,
Belied his God, and me.

Ioc. The man is old,
And testy, and perhaps incens'd by you,
Mere human passion with the lees
Of Divination mixing—

Œd. Be it so;
And so, methinks, I might have let it pass,
But for a parting threat, which though in wrath
And malice, like the rest it may have been,
Woke up the echo of another Word
Told me by Delphi's self, so long ago
As with its unfulfilment to have died
Almost from memory.

Ioc. What Oracle
Which, if the Prophet fail'd, has fail'd as well ?
Œd. You know I am the son of Polybus,
Of Corinth King, and Merope his Queen,
And till a chance, of which you may not know,
Slight as it seem'd, but fraught with grave result,
Methought the first in Corinth after them.
One day at table, when the cup went round,
One of the company whom I, belike
Flushed with the wine and youthful insolence,
Had twitted with his meaner parentage,
Bade me beware ; for, proudly as I sate
Above them all beside the royal twain
A superstition linger'd, that because
Of some ill-omen'd accident of birth
Their son should never to their throne succeed.
The word awhile sank in the flowing wine,
But when the wine went off the word was there,
And all night long kept stirring in my brain.
So that, with morning when I woke again,
Unable to endure it unsuppress'd,
I challeng'd King and Queen to answer me
The challenge thrown out by the nameless guest.
Indignantly they heard ; denounc'd the man,
Whoever it might be, for false or fool,
And with endearing re-assurances
Recomforted me awhile. Nevertheless,
Spite re-assurance and redoubled love,
That random word still rankled in my heart,
And I resolv'd on quenching all misdoubt
From the head fountain of all truth at Delphi.
Thither, without a word of whither gone,
I went, and put my question. But the God
Vouchsafed no revelation of the past,
But prophesied far worse for me to come ;
That I should slay my father : then with her
Who bore me wed, and bring into the world
A race the world would loathe to look upon.

Whereat affrighted—as what man were not?—
 From Corinth and from those I was to wrong
 I fled—I scarce knew whither, so from them—
 Fled hither ; and in spite of prophecies,
 All that I lost regained, except the bliss
 Of prospering in a loving mother's eyes.

Ioc. And see ! the father whom you were to slay,
 With that Queen-mother whom you were to wed,
 Lives to a ripe old age in Corinth, far
 Beyond his reach who should have wrong'd them
 both,

Himself fast wedded and enthroned in Thebes !

Œd. And yet this blunted shaft of long ago,
 And rusted with oblivion, had the Seer
 Snatch'd from his Master's armoury To-day,
 For malediction's last and master blow !

Ioc. Which from his Master's hand had fail'd before !
 And would you listen to a woman's voice
 I could requite your story, Œdipus
 With one so like as almost to be one,
 Save that in mine the Sire it was who foil'd
 Predestination, as in yours the Son.

Œd. In this dumb pause between despair and hope,
 Whose voice to me more welcome than your own ?

Ioc. When first I wedded with King Laius,
 Whose murder now perplexes Thebes and you,
 A Prophecy from Delphi reached his ears—
 But whether from the God, or from his Priest,
 I know not—but there went the Prophecy ;
 That he should die slain by the hand of him
 Who should be born between himself and me.
 Whereat, like you, affrighted, when the child
 But three days born had seen the light of day,
 He had him, spite of all a mother's cries,
 Not slain, but left in some such desert place
 As where with cold and hunger, he must die.
 So, at the sacrifice of that poor life
 Saving his own, he lived himself in peace,

Till slain—not as the Oracle foretold
 Slain by the son himself had slain before,
 But by that undetected alien hand
 Which the fond Prophet pointed at in you.
 Of such account are such vaticinations,
 Whether from Phœbus, or his Minister ;
 Of which take you no heed. For, surely, what
 Fate has determin'd, Fate shall bring to pass,
 Whether by prophecy foretold or not.

Œd. So seems it.

Ioc. Nay, beyond denial is.
 And yet you seem to hesitate as one
 Who in broad daylight cannot see his way.

Œd. Was it not said that Laius your King
 Upon some sacred errand by the road
 Was set upon and murdered ?

Ioc. Even so ;
 To that same Delphi where yourself had been,
 As much to be misled.

Œd. And whereabouts ?

Ioc. Somewhere in Phocis which his road went
 through ;
 As went the story.

Œd. And how long ago ?

Ioc. Nay, just before you came to Thebes yourself
 To save us from the Sphynx, and occupy
 The throne left empty by my husband's death.
 What makes you muse ?

Œd. And this King Laius
 About what age, and what to look upon ?

Ioc. Lofty and large of stature, and of port
 And aspect that becomes a King ; his hair
 Just whitening with the earliest frost of age—

Œd. And how accompanied ?

Ioc. With such a train
 Accompanied as may become a King
 Upon a peaceful errand of his own,
 And through a friendly people travelling.

Œd. And, as the story went, but one of those
Who, witnessing, escaped to tell the tale.

Ioc. Ev'n so it was.

Œd. And him they let depart
With half his tale untold ?

Ioc. Nay, all he could,
Half dead with terror. Meanwhile Œdipus,
What is't that, when I thought to clear your brow
With dissipation of prophetic fear,
Darkens it more and more ?

Œd. Is it not strange—
Strange—that your second husband, like your first,
With such a cross-related Prophecy
Threatened, like him should have defeated it ?

Ioc. Strange as it is, but most assuredly.

Œd. O Iocasta, what if secret Fate
Aveng'd the God, who sometimes speaks for her,
Two thwarted utterances by one blow
On Laius and myself unpropheied ?

Ioc. I know not what this aims at.

Œd. You shall hear.
When, as I told you, in my youth at Corinth,
I had resolv'd to cross that Prophecy
Which from the God's own lips myself had heard,
By flying those I was foredoom'd to wrong—
Nay, from the very country of my birth,
Leaving them all behind me for the stars
Alone to tell me of their whereabouts—
I fled : and flying as at random on,
I came—now mark me, Iocasta, came—
Whether in Phocis, or elsewhere, I know not—
Where two main roads which lead two nations on
To Delphi, shrink into a narrow gorge ;
When, coming up the narrow road, Behold !
A Herald first, and then a chariot,
In which, erect beside his charioteer,
There rode the stately semblance of a King,
And so came on, not swerving left or right,

As if the road were but for them, and I
 A cur, to slink aside and let them by.
 Whereat, no cur, but a King's son, enrag'd,
 With the stout staff I carried in my hand
 I smote the charioteer ; on which the King
 Struck me with his—for which he paid too dear
 With such a fatal counter-blow from mine
 As roll'd him headlong dead into the dust :
 And, after him, his Herald, and all his
 Who came against me one by one I slew.
 Now if the royal man—for such he was—
 Were—as by such consent of circumstance
 I scarce dare think were not—

Ioc. Oh, many a King
 Of a like presence, and like retinue,
 Has been that road to learn the word of Fate
 Which he, like you, had vainly learn'd before.

Œd. But one, escaped, they say ; and if he live—
 And if maintain the tale that first he told,
 That Laius, not by one, but many men,
 Was in his chariot set upon and slain,
 Then was it surely not King Laius
 Whom single-handed, and alone, I slew.
 But if he falter from that first report—

Ioc. How should he ?

Œd. Whether out of present fear,
 Or after, to excuse a coward flight,
 One man to numbers multiply he might—

Ioc. He cannot—whether by device or fear,
 He cannot falter from his first report—
 Unless the sudden presence of his King,
 And the disquiet of your looks affright him
 Into the confirmation of false fear.
 But meanwhile, Œdipus, come in with me,
 And let not troubled Thebes new troubles see
 Writ in your brows, augmenting present ill,
 And Prophecy that Fate shall not fulfil.

CHORUS.

Strophe 1.

Fair Fortune deign with me to dwell,
 My soul if holy reverence awes,
 By thinking, speaking, acting well,
 To bow obedient to the Laws.
 From heav'n they draw their lineage high,
 And tread with stately step the sky :
 Their father the Olympian king ;
 No mixture of man's mortal mould ;
 Nor shall Oblivion's sable wing
 In shades their active virtues fold.
 In them the god is great, nor fears
 The withering waste of years.

Antistrophe 1.

The tyrant Pride engenders. Pride
 With wealth o'erfilled, with greatness vain,
 Mounting with Outrage at her side,
 The splendid summit if she gain,
 Falls headlong from the dangerous brow,
 Down dash'd to ruin's gulf below.
 Not so our monarch : for of old,
 His contest glorious to the state,
 In her own blood the Fury roll'd :
 So may the god now guide his fate !
 Still be the god's protection mine,
 Strong in his power divine !

Strophe 2.

But should some wretch, contemptuous, bold,
 Brave the just gods, his hands with slaughter stain,
 The vengeful pow'rs of heav'n disdain,
 Nor their pure seats in holy reverence hold,
 Him may Perdition sweep away,

And thus his wanton pride repay ;
 Him too, whom wild Ambition prompts to seize,
 Though Justice cries aloud, forbear.
 Can all his vaunts, who dares attempts like these,
 Guard his proud heart from guilty fear ?
 Such deeds if glory waits, in vain
 I lead this choral train.

Antistrophe 2.

No more at Delphi's central cell,
 At Abæ, or Olympia's hallow'd shrine,
 Attendant pay I rites divine,
 Till the god deigns this darkness to dispel.
 O Jove, if thee we rightly call
 The sovereign lord, the king of all,
 Let not concealment this in shades enfold
 From thee, and thy immortal reign !
 The oracles, to Laius giv'n of old,
 They spurn with insolent disdain,
 No more to Phœbus honours pay ;
 And things divine decay.

IOCASTA, CHORUS.

Ioc. Ancients of Thebes, in this extremity
 When ev'n the very steersman of the realm,
 To whom we look for our deliverance,
 Veering himself with every wind that blows
 Of rumour, helplessly resigns the helm,
 I come, albeit with these poor woman's hands,
 To offer wreath and incense on the shrines
 And altars of our tutelary Gods ;
 And first to thee, Apollo, first to thee,
 Whose altar nearest to the palace stands,
 And on whose word depends the life of Thebes,
 Lest any unconsidered word against
 Thy Minister, revolt thy face from us ;
 Imploring thee with all the Gods in Heav'n
 To help where all of human help is vain.

CHORUS.

Barb'd with Death, there are among
 The gold-enquiver'd arrows hung
 About Apollo's shoulder ; whence,
 As over heav'n his chariot burns,
 The land he loves to harvest turns,
 And cities swell with opulence ;
 Ev'n so, where yet unexpiated sin
 Cries out, or undetected lurks within,
 The God his lustre turns to pestilence ;
 And contrite man must worship and abide,
 Till, Nemesis and Justice satisfied,
 When men least dream it, one relenting ray—
 Oh grant, Apollo, grant it as we pray !—
 Strikes through sheer midnight, and lets in the day.

HERALD, IOCASTA, CHORUS.

Her. Tell me who will among you, men of Thebes,
 Which is the palace of King Œdipus,
 And, further, if the King himself within ?

Cho. This is the palace ; and the King himself
 Within ; and she that by that altar stands
 Offering her garland to the God, his Queen.

Her. Oh, to the prayer she offers at the shrine
 She lays the wreath on, be the God benign !

Ioc. A Herald ! Whence, and on what embassy ?

Her. From Corinth, as the message that I bring.

Ioc. Good may the tidings be where all goes ill.

Her. If, as things human, not unmix'd with pain,
 To you and yours auspicious in the main.

Ioc. So far so well ; but tell me—

Her. This in sum—

The citizens of Corinth, by my voice,
 Proclaim King Œdipus of Thebes their King.

Ioc. Œdipus King of Corinth ?

Her. Even so.

Ioc. But does not Polybus in Corinth reign ?

Her. No ; the long years that kept him on the Throne,
At length have laid him in his father's tomb.

Ioc. The King of Corinth dead ! Polybus dead !
Summon the King ! You Oracles of Heaven,
Of what account shall men hereafter hold
Your Ministers—or you ? This was the Sire
Whom Œdipus, for fear of slaying, fled,
Now by the common course of Nature dead !

ŒDIPUS, IOCASTA, HERALD, CHORUS.

Œd. What tidings ? Is the man I sent for here ?

Ioc. Not he, but one whose coming shall go far
To make his coming needless. Herald, speak.

Her. I come from Corinth, by the people there
Charg'd with a mission to King Œdipus,
Whom, in the room of Polybus now dead,
They call upon to fill the sovereign chair.

Œd. My father dead ?

Ioc. And by no hand of yours !

Her. No, nor by any hand but Nature's own,
That lightly rocks, you know, old age to sleep.

Œd. And this is he whom by the Oracle
From Phœbus his own lips, myself I heard
Foredoom'd to slay—
Yet with whose death I have no more to do
Than leaving him to languish for the son
Whose hand was to have slain him had he stay'd !

Ioc. Did not I say ?

Œd. But who would not be scared
By such prediction from the God himself—
Of which yet half hangs dark above my head !

Ioc. This word from Corinth is a Signal-fire
Assuring us that Oracle, half slain,
Must all lie buried in your father's tomb

Œd. The agèd King is dead, you tell me, Herald—
But Merope, his Queen ?

Her. Lives, and may live
As one that hath not reached her winter yet ;

And longer yet to live if you return,
Whose sudden flight from Corinth neither she
Nor Corinth cease to wonder at, and mourn.

Œd. Yet, Herald, she herself it was whose love,
That would have held me there, thence banish'd me.

Her. If one, a simple subject as I am,
Might ask of him he now salutes for King—

Œd. A Prophecy of Phœbus, from the lips
Of Phœbus' self, and utter'd in these ears,
Involving me in worse calamity

With Merope, my mother, who survives,
Than by my father's death I have escap'd.

Her. I understand not wholly, but thus much,
That 'twas the fear of some mysterious wrong
Against them both which drove you from their side
And from your country.

Œd. That, and that alone.

Her. I know not if for better or for worse,
But certainly for strangest, Œdipus,
If now for the first time, and from my lips,
You learn that you are not indeed the son
Of those you fled from in that two-fold fear.

Œd. You seem a loyal as well-season'd man,
As near in age to him you lately serv'd
As trusted, and I think to me and mine
Well-minded now.

Her. If not, I had not told
What told I have.

Œd. And would reiterate?

Her. By the most solemn oath by which mankind
Adjure the Gods to witness human word.

Œd. That I am not in very deed the son
Of Polybus, and Merope his Queen?

Her. No more their son than—might I so dare say—
Than son of mine—and that is, not at all.

Œd. But was this known in Corinth?

Her. To none else
Save to the King and Queen themselves, and me.

Œd. Yet 'twas in Corinth when the cup went round
At table, that a guest once startled me
With a light taunt of somewhat like to that
Which now you gravely tell.

Her. The random shot
Of idleness, or malice freed by wine,
That sometimes nears the mark.

Œd. But how was it
That only you beside the King and Queen
Knew for a truth ?

Her. Would Œdipus know all ?

Œd. Yea—on the allegiance you profess to him,
Whom now you have saluted as your King.

Her. Thus then I know it : for that I alone
Laid you a new-born babe into their hands
Who, childless as they were, and like to be,
Ev'n took what fortune sent them for their own.

Cho. This man bears stranger tidings from himself
Than from his country he was charg'd withal.

Œd. You—and you solely—brought me to their
hands—
From whose receiv'd me then ?

Ioc. O Œdipus,
When all, beyond all hope, has ended well,
Why tempt the God, still jealous of success,
By questioning the means ?

Œd. I bid you speak !

Her. You charge me for an answer, Œdipus,
Which, were you not my King who bids me speak,
Yet might resent when spoken—

Œd. But one word
Of ev'n unwelcome truth from human lip
Were welcome in the night of mystery
That Fate has gather'd round me.

Her. Listen, then.
Long ere in favour of these whitening locks,
And recompense of faithful service done,

King Polybus had made me what I am,
 I was his shepherd ; and, upon a time
 Keeping my flock upon Kithæron's side,
 One of like calling with myself, though not
 Of the same country, who that summer through
 Had fed his sheep beside me, came one day,
 And listening first, and looking all about,
 As tenderly as any mother might,
 With those rough hands of his he laid in mine
 A naked infant—say, some three days born—
 And fasten'd foot to foot, like some poor lamb,
 Which some one of the land from which he came,
 Warm from the bosom of its mother took
 To perish on the barren mountain's side,
 Of cold and hunger. Which the kindly man
 Not finding in himself the heart to do,
 But yet as fearful if he left undone,
 Gave you—for you, King Ædipus, it was—
 The very name you bear, remembering
 The pitiful condition of the babe—
 Gave you to me, to carry far away
 And pitifully cherish for my own
 Beyond all search of those who wished you dead.
 So to his country he, and I to mine :
 Which when I reach'd, and to my King and Queen
 Show'd them the prettiest lamb of all my flock,
 They, whether by some instinct of their own
 Inspired, or somewhat royal in the Child
 Prophetic of the Man that was to be,
 Took, nurs'd, and reared to manhood for their own,
 And set beside themselves upon the throne.

Cho. The Gods upon the mountain-top, men tell,
 Do sometimes light, and through the tangled dell
 And forest-shade—

Æd. A shepherd like yourself,
 But not of Corinth. Whence then ?

Her. Thebes, he said,
 To which your destiny recall'd you.

Œd. Thebes !

Ioc. O Œdipus, by all the Gods in heav'n,
And all that upon earth you hold most dear,
Heed not these stories of the past, patch'd up
By the fallacious memory of old age !

Œd. He were by nature baser than base-born
Who would not find and follow to its source
The current of the blood by which he lives
This Shepherd—and from whom took he the child,
Charg'd with that ruthless errand ?

Her. Either I
With mine own duty busied did not ask,
Or he not answer.

Œd. But to answer lives ?

Her. Those of his country best can answer that.

Œd. Does any man of all the people here
Remember such a man ?

Cho. Maybe the same
Already sent for, who, as I remember,
Like this good Herald, shepherded the flocks
Of Laius ere he left them. But the Queen—

Ioc. No more ! No more ! For your sake, Œdipus,
If not for mine—no more !

Œd. Whatever shame
My birth betray, your blood it cannot taint ;
Not were I prov'd the issue of a sire
Three generations deep in slavery.

Ioc. Forbear ! once more, for one last time, forbear !

Œd. If aught you know—and your wild looks and
words
But argue somewhat than conjecture worse—
At once reveal it all : for ask I will
Till all be answered.

Ioc. Wretched man ! the last
These lips shall ever utter you have heard !

Cho. She is gone as one distracted. O my Lord,
What should this sudden passion of the Queen
Forebode of ill !

Œd. Forebode what ill it may,
 But I will solve the riddle of my birth.
 The Queen belike, of royal birth herself
 And haughty-minded as such women are,
 Resents her husband's baser parentage ;
 But I, regardless of the accident
 That oft from royal blood provokes a slave,
 I do account myself the royal heir
 Of Destiny, who found me where I lay,
 By man's blind foresight which defeats itself
 Cradled to perish on Kithæron's side,
 And taking from a simple shepherd's hand,
 So laid me in the lap of Royalty,
 And through the days and years of human growth
 Rear'd to the kingly stature that I am.
 And when, affrighted by vain prophecies,
 From Corinth, and the throne prepared me there,
 I fled, inalienable Destiny
 Pursuing drove me but from throne to throne,
 Till, doubling back my course to reach my height,
 Now Thebes and Corinth claim me for their own.

CHORUS.

Strophe

If a prophet's soul be mine
 Ought illum'd with skill divine,
 By Olympus' sacred height
 Ere the morning's streaming light
 Thou, Cithæron, shalt unfold
 All this mystery round thee roll'd,
 And with pride and triumph own
 Œdipus thy foster'd son.
 Then with joy would we advance,
 Leading light the festive dance ;
 Teach thy woods with joy to ring,
 And with transport hail our king.

Glorious with thy silver bow
Phœbus, these our joys allow !

Antistrophe.

Who, of all the heav'nly pow'rs,
Gave thee birth in these close bow'rs ?
Some bright Nymph of sylvan race
Did the frolic Pan embrace,
Wand'ring o'er the mountain's brow ?
Or to Phœbus dost thou owe
Thy birth ? From him the craggy height,
Him the pastur'd dales delight.
Or to him, the god who roves
Through Cyllene's cypress groves ?
Or did Bacchus, wont to tread
His loved haunt, the mountain's head,
Thee receive, confess'd his son,
From the Nymphs of Helicon ?
Raptur'd with their tuneful strain
Sportive oft he joins their train.

ŒDIPUS, SHEPHERD, HERALD, CHORUS.

Œd. Whether or not the man we have so long
Been looking after, one at least whose age
Evens with his whose story we have heard.

Cho. Whether the same of whom the stranger tells
I know not, but the man himself I know
For an old shepherd of King Laius.

Her. And I for him with whom I shepherded
Upon Kithæron's side so long ago.

Œd. Approach, old man—still nearer—unafraid ;
For nothing but my favour need you fear,
If, looking straight at me, as I at you,
Straightforwardly you answer what I ask.
You, in the days gone by, and long ere Time

Had strewn his silver honour on your head—
You were a servant of King Laius ?

Shep. His servant—not his slave—no less than he,
Myself a freeman of the soil of Thebes.

Œd. As such I understand ; and in that wise,
As a free servant of King Laius,
You kept his flocks ?

Shep. Upon a time I might.

Œd. And folding them at home in winter-time,
Led them in Summer forth ?

Shep. So shepherds use,
Where'er the more and sweeter pasture grew.

Œd. And ever on Kithæron's grassy sides
In summer-time, remember you this man,
Old as yourself, keeping his flock with yours ?

Shep. Time that has silver'd, as you say, my locks,
Has somewhat dimm'd both eyes and memory.

Œd. None older than your fellow-shepherd here,
Who with his locks as silver-touch'd as yours,
Sees with his eyes, and well remembers you.

Shep. Maybe ; but all men are not all alike,
And he may err as well remembering me,
As I forgetting him.

Her. Listen to me,
And let my voice, and what it has to tell,
Recall to you the man your eyes do not.
Can you not call to mind, though long ago,
Keeping your flock with one whose flock, like yours,
Grazed on Kithæron, one long summer through—

Shep. With more than one, may be.

Her. Nay, but with one
To whom, just as that same long summer closed,
And cold Arcturus warn'd the shepherd home,
You brought a naked infant—

Shep. Brought ? who brought ?

Her. Tied by the feet—

Shep. What should one know of that

Her. Being myself the man you gave it to.

Shep. Methinks this man, whoever he may be,
And howsoever gifted with good eyes,
Is something weaker in his wits than I,
Recounting all such idle rhapsody.

Œd. And you, sharp-witted as you are, methinks
Seem looking round about you for escape
In hesitation—but escape shall not.
Look you! Beware!

Shep. What have I said amiss?

Œd. Not said, but will not say.

Shep. What would you have?

Œd. The babe your fellow-shepherd asks about—
That naked, new-born, ankle-fetter'd babe,
Did not you bring and put into his hands?

Shep. And would to Heaven had died before I did!

Œd. And death you shall not have to pray for long,
If, knowing what prevarication proves
You know, you not reveal.

Shep. And if reveal!
Have you not heard enough?

Œd. No, if not all.
The babe you put into this shepherd's hands
Was not your own?

Shep. Oh, not mine own!

Œd. Then whose?

Shep. O Œdipus, my master, and my lord!
In mercy question me no more!

Œd. No more
In mercy if you answer not at once.

Shep. O me! The terror of your countenance
Scatters what little memory age has left!
What if I found the little helpless thing
There laid alone and none to tell me whose?
Or he from whom I took it knew no more
Than he to whom I gave it?

Œd. Bind his hands
The lash must loose the tongue.

Shep. O Œdipus,
Shame not white hairs !

Œd. Nay, shame them not yourself
By false prevarication with your King.
That helpless babe—me—Œdipus—your King—
Who gave into your hands ?

Shep. Alas ! alas !
One of the household of the King that was !—

Œd. Slave ? Servant ? Who ?

Shep. Alas ! one now within
Can answer all !

Œd. Answer yourself then, who ?

Shep. Woe's me ! I drift into destruction's mouth !

Œd. And I with you. But who ?

Shep. Alas ! The Queen !

Œd. The Queen !

Shep. Ev'n Iocasta's sacred self !

Œd. But not her own ?

Shep. I said not that—

Œd. Her own ?

Shep. Yourself have said !

Cho. The man is turn'd to stone !

[*After a silence.*]

Œd. The God of Delphi has reveng'd himself !
His oracle defied of long ago,
And his insulted prophet's of to-day,
Break in one judgment o'er my head, who now,
Myself sole witness and interpreter,
Divine that half reveal'd is all fulfilled,
And on myself myself pronounce my doom.

Cho. O Œdipus, my lord—

Œd. Speak to me not,
Approach me not, unless at once to slay,
Or thrust with execration from the walls,
The wretch convicted of the double crime

Of parricide; and—Ha ! the prophet said
That, ere the Day which all beholds go down,
I shall have look'd my last upon the Sun
Which all accomplishes—and, ere we pass
To darkness, somewhat yet is to be done.

CHORUS.

Strophe.

Ye race of mortals, what your state ?
Life I an airy nothing deem.
For what, ah ! what your happiest fate,
More than light fancy's high-wrought dream ?
How soon those baseless dreams decay,
And all the glittering visions melt away !
Whilst thy example, hapless King,
Thy life, thy fortune I bewail,
Happy no man of mortal birth I hail.
Thine was no vulgar fate : its tow'ring wing
To wealth, and empire's splendid summit soar'd :
When, silenc'd her mysterious lore,
The harpy-talon'd monster scream'd no more,
Our bulwark thou against that pest abhorr'd,
Thebes gave her sceptre to thy honour'd hand,
And hail'd thee monarch of a mighty land.

Antistrophe.

Who now is pierc'd with keener pain ?
To all thy glories bid farewell :
They fly and in their stead a train
Of miseries crowd with thee to dwell.
To one great port, illustrious king,
Their gallant barks the son and father bring ;
But sink in wild waves roaring round.
How could thy father's bed so long,
Ah, how in silence bear the horrid wrong !

But thee th' all-seeing eye of time hath found,
And these unhallow'd rites abhorrent shows.

O son of Laius, ne'er again,
Ne'er could my sorrowing heart thy sight sustain :
Yet I lament in mournful strains thy woes,
By thee 'twas mine to life, to light, to rise ;
By thee in dark despair to close my eyes.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Mess. O venerable Senators of Thebes,
O liege-men of the house of Labdacus,
What shall you now not hear, what not behold,
Of horror in the palace of your Kings,
Which all the waters in one volume drown'd
Of Nile and Ister could not wash away !

Cho. What we already have beheld and heard
Were but prophetic of yet worse to come ;
Tell us the worst.

Mess. If breath I have to tell,
If not the worst, the worse that first befell.
The light of Iocasta's life is quench'd !

Cho. Alas, not strange as terrible ! But how ?

Mess. By her own hand ; as by my eyes indeed
I cannot, but from others can, avouch,
With such bewilder'd senses as I may—
When, as you witness'd for yourselves, from hence
She fled, and flew distractedly within,
Shrieking, and tearing her grey locks, she ran
Along the echoing walls until she reach'd
The nuptial chamber, shot the bolt within,
And by the affrighted women lock'd without
Was heard calling on 'Laius, Laius !
Her husband Laius, father of the Son
Who slew, and worse dishonour'd him when dead !
This, and much more, and much more terrible,

They heard : and then a silence as of death,
 Through all the house ; till with the sudden yell
 As of some wild beast closing on his prey,
 King Œdipus along the corridor
 With imprecations half articulate,
 Fearful to hear—too fearful to relate—
 With thrice the force of the mad Herakles
 He flung himself against the chamber-door,
 And bursting in, to all who dared to look
 Disclosed the wretched woman hanging dead.
 Whom when he saw, roaring, he sprang upon,
 And tearing from the beam flung down aheap,
 And spurn'd ; and then, most horrible of all,
 Wide open tore the raiment from her breast,
 From which himself recoiling with a shriek,
 He struck the golden clasp into his eyes,
 Which having seen such things, he cried, henceforth
 Should in the night of Hades look on those
 He loath'd to look on, and behold no more
 Those who in life were dearest to his eyes.
 Then rising, blind, and bleeding as he was,
 He groped and stagger'd back the way he came,
 Vociferating as he went along
 That none who would not share the curse with him
 Should touch unless to slay him—till he reach'd
 The palace-door, and would, methinks, have that,
 As of the nuptial chamber, open burst,
 Had not King Creon bid them lead him in
 Where none henceforth should hear, and none behold,
 Till Thebes his fate determine.—All is told.

CHORUS.

Oh men of Thebes, this famous man behold,
Who coming here a stranger to the gate,
The Sphynx's fatal riddle did unfold,
And, chosen King, as Saviour of the State,
To such a pitch of power and glory rose,
As not a King but envied his estate.
Now to that depth of degradation sunk
As not a wretch but may commiserate.
Beholding which, and counsell'd by the wise,
That Nemesis regards with jealous eyes
Man's over-much, and at his elbow stands
To shake the full cup in the steadiest hands,
Deem not the wisest of To-morrow sure,
Nor fortunate account him till he dies.

THE DOWNFALL AND DEATH OF
KING ŒDIPUS.

PART II.

ŒDIPUS AT ATHENS.

Dramatis Personæ.

ŒDIPUS.

ANTIGONE, *his Daughter.*

POLYNICES, *his Son.*

CREON OF THEBES.

THESEUS, *King of Athens.*

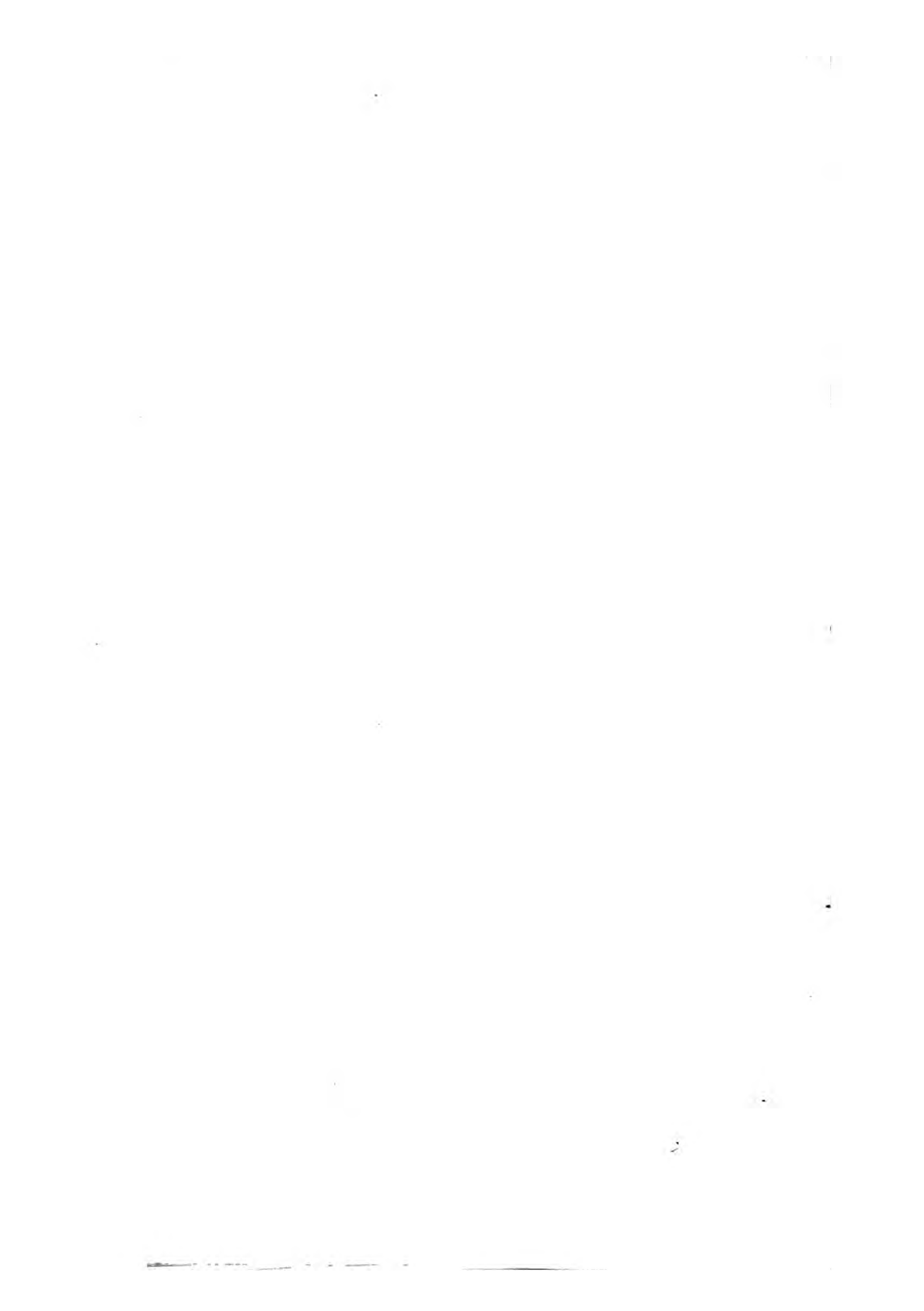
AN ATHENIAN CITIZEN.

————— MESSENGER.

HERALD FROM THEBES.

CHORUS OF ATHENIAN ELDERS.

*Scene: A road near ATHENS, bordered by the Sacred
GROVE of the EUMENIDES.*



THE
DOWNFALL AND DEATH OF KING ŒDIPUS.

PART II.
ŒDIPUS AT ATHENS.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

Œd. The dawn which breaks not on my sightless eyes
Salutes my forehead with reviving warmth :
Here let us rest awhile, Antigone,
From this brief travel stol'n by fear from night.
But know you whither it hath led us, and
Among what strangers, who from charity
Shall with sufficient for the day provide
For one with less than little satisfied ?

Ant. I know from one who cross'd us in the dusk,
With steps as hurried as our own, the land
Is Attica.

Œd. The Gods for that be praised !

Ant. And not far off I see the shining walls
And marble temple-fronts, and citadel,
As of some stately city : and the place
We stand on, as for some peculiar use
Sequester'd from the daily track of men,
Where a pure rill of water rambles through
Untrampled herbage, overshadowed all
With laurel, and with olive, poplar-topt,
As you may guess from many a nightingale
About us warbling, well assured of home.

Œd. And might not, haply, some poor hunted thing,
With but a sorry burden for his song,
Here, too, some breathing-while of refuge find ?

Ant. And in good time comes of the country one
Who shall advise us, lest, as strangers here,
We trespass on the usages of those
To whom we look for shelter and support.

Enter an ATHENIAN.

O stranger—

Ath. Hush ! Before another word—
Where ev'n a word unlawful—how much more
Profaning will unconsecrated feet
This consecrated ground.

Œd. I yet dare ask
Whether to Deity, or Demigod,
Thus consecrate ?

Ath. To Deity, and such
As least of all will Men's intrusion brook
Within their sacred precincts.

Œd. Who be they ?

Ath. None other but those awful Sisters Three,
Daughters of Earth and Darkness.

Œd. By what name
Invoked of men ?

Ath. By whatsoever name
Elsewhere invoked, here, with averted eyes,
And but an inward whisper—"The Benign."

Œd. Benign then, as their name and nature is
To those who suffer and who do no wrong,
May they receive the sightless suppliant,
Who by no sightless insight setting foot
A stranger on their consecrated ground,
Alive shall never leave it but to die.

Ath. Your words I understand not ; but I know,
Whether to live or die, depart you must.

Œd. But what, if rather fearing unjust Man
Than the just God, and those same awful Three,
If stern to guilt, not unbenign to me,
I leave their hallow'd refuge ?

Ath. Nay, for that
The land itself is consecrated all
To God or Demigod, who, Just themselves,
Protect and vindicate the Just : for here

Poseidon rules, the Master of the Seas,
 And there Prometheus, with his torch of Life ;
 The ground about us glories in the name
 Of King Colonus of the Horse ; and this
 Same highway running by the Sacred Grove
 Leads to the Citadel that bears Her name,
 To whom the City's self is dedicate.

Œd. As such I do salute her !—And the King
 That, under her, her chosen people rules——

Ath. Theseus, the son of Ægeus, and, like him,
 Though mortal yet, almost the Demigod.

Œd. Theseus, the son of Ægeus,—aye, I know
 And know indeed that no delusive light
 Led me to him with whom I have to do.
 Shall one among your fellow-citizens
 Bear your King word from one who once was King,
 And who, unkinglike as his presence now,
 Can tell him that which, if he hearken to,
 Shall, for a little service done to me,
 Do to his kingdom and himself much more ?

Ath. Strange as the message from so strange a man,
 Yet shall King Theseus hear of it. Meanwhile,
 If in despite of warning and advice
 You still refuse to leave forbidden ground,
 I, that am but a simple citizen,
 Dare not enforce ; but forthwith shall apprise
 Those of the City who shall deal with you,
 As in their wisdom best they shall advise.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

Œd. Is he departed ?

Ant. We are all alone.

Œd. Daughters of Earth and Darkness ! In whose
 womb
 Unborn till Sovereign Order the new World
 From Chaos woke, yourselves you still secrete,

With those three Fatal Sisters who the thread
 Of Human Life do spin among the Dead,
 While you the scourge of human Wrong prepare ;
 If peradventure with unlicens'd feet
 The consecrated earth I have profaned,
 That veils your Presence from this upper air,
 Repudiate me not : no, nor the God
 Who destined, nor the God who prophesied,
 That, after drifting the blind wreck I am
 About the world, a Horror to Mankind,
 Within the very temple of your wrath
 At last the haven of my rest should find ;
 If satisfied at last be wrath Divine,
 And men err not who name its ministers,
 Though not without a shudder—"The Benign,"
 Let your avenging Justice, that so long
 Hath chased the guiltless instrument of Wrong,
 Here let him rest until the Power whose throne
 You dwell beside in Darkness give the sign.

CHORUS, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

Cho. These are the strangers—this the sightless man,
 And this the maiden that he told us of,
 Who impiously this consecrated ground
 Have ventured to profane.

Œd. Not impiously,
 But ignorantly, who first setting foot
 Upon this alien soil—

Cho. But impiously,
 When warn'd upon what consecrated ground,
 With honey-flowing waters running through
 The inviolable herbage, still persist—
 A stranger too, where no Athenian born,
 Not only dares not enter, but pass by
 Save with averted eyes, and inward prayer,
 That holy lips scarce dare articulate.

Ant. We must obey them, Father, as we should.

Œd. You will not, if I quit the Sanctuary,
Do, nor let others do me violence ?

Cho. Fear not the wrath of men, but that of those
Who watch you through the soil which you profane.

Œd. But who, if of their counsel more you knew,
As sooner than you look for know you may,
Would not resent, as you, the wrong I do to them.
Meanwhile, on no worse usage than from them
Relying when committed to your hands——
Lead me, Antigone.

Cho. Till you have passed
The bound of sequestration—further yet—
And yet a little further—So, enough.
There, travel-wearied, and, methinks, in years
Well stricken, rest upon the bank awhile.
But, ere I bid you welcome to the land
Whose sanctity your foot at first profaned,
Tell who you are, and whence.

Œd. To tell you “ Who ”
Would tell you all : and if I hesitate——

Cho. Not to declare your country and your name
Augurs but evil for yourself or it.

Œd. You of that City have heard tell, whose walls
To Music rose, and whose Inhabitants,
From the sown Dragon’s teeth sprung up arm’d men ?

Cho. Of Thebes ? Aye, much of olden times, and of
The worse then Dragon Sphinx that in our day
The Dragon seed devoured.

Œd. And of the man
Who slew that, worse than Dragon—

Cho. Œdipus !
As by the signal of those sightless eyes,
And lingering self-avowal, I divine—

Œd. Revolt not from me.

Cho. And for You ! For You—
May be, the monster most unnatural—

To set your foot upon the holiest spot
 Of this all-consecrated Athens ! You !
 Who, were your very presence not enow
 Contamination to the land, and shame,
 May bring on us the plague you left at Thebes !
 I should not wrong a promise half implied
 If with these hands I tore you from the Land
 Your impious presence doubly violates,
 Where e'en the guiltless dare not. But begone
 Thence ! Hence ! Pollute our land no more ! Begone

Ant. O men of Athens ! if you will not hear
 My Father pleading for himself, hear me,
 Not for myself, but for my Father pleading,
 As to a Father, by the love you bear
 The Daughter by yon Altar-hearth at home,
 And by the Gods we worship as yourselves.

Cho. Daughter, the Gods whom you adjure us by,
 Repudiating Œdipus from Thebes,
 From Athens also do repudiate.

Œd. O then of Fame that blows about the world
 The praise of men and nations, what the worth,
 If Athens—Athens, through the world renown'd
 For hospitable generosity—
 Athens, who boasts the power as much as will
 To save and succour the misfortunate—
 If she that honour forfeit at your hands,
 Who, from the very horror of my name,
 And shapeless rumour of the terrible things
 Which I have suffer'd, rather than have done,
 Would thrust me from the Sanctuary forth
 Of those whose law you violate no less
 By broken Faith, than with unwary foot
 Did I their consecrated soil transgress ?
 One, too, that howsoe'er you know it not,
 Ev'n with the Ban that drives him from his own
 Carries a Blessing with him to the Land
 That shall accept him, and a Curse to those

Who, being his, henceforth shall be their foes.
 All which, unto my inward eye as clear
 As yonder Sun that shines in Heav'n to yours,
 I shall reveal to him who governs here,
 If hearing he deny me not. Meanwhile,
 I do adjure you, by those Deities
 Whose Sanctuary you have drawn me from,
 Do me no violence ; remembering
 That, if Benign they be, Avengers too,
 As of all outraged Law, so not the less
 Of violated hospitality.

Cho. We have discharged ourselves in warning you,
 And to King Theseus, whom you summon'd here,
 Your cause and self henceforward we commit
 To deal with, and adjudge as seems him fit.

THESEUS, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

Thes. I have been hither summoned at the call
 Of one from whom, 'twas said, the light of Day
 Together with his Kingdom passed away :
 And, knowing of one such, and one alone,
 Reported in the roll of living men,
 Nor uninstructed in the destiny
 Which from the glory it had raised him to
 Precipitated to a depth so low,
 Amid the ruin of this fallen man
 I know that Œdipus of Thebes is he.
 I too remember when like him forlorn,
 I wandered friendless in a foreign land,
 And with an alien people much endured :
 And, had I always been what now I am,
 Yet none the less by what myself have known
 Than by the records of Mankind, aware
 That, howsoever great a King To-day,
 No surer of To-morrow than yourself ;
 Therefore whatever Athens or her King

Of hospitable service can supply,
Let him demand : for much indeed it were
For Ædipus to ask and I withhold.

Æd. O Theseus, if indeed the King I was
Look through the ruin of the wretch I am,
No less doth full assurance of a King,
Although to these quencht eyes insensible,
Breathe through the generous welcome of your word,
And ere of my necessities I tell,
Assure me of the boon as yet unaskt.
For the detested story of my life,
Unaskt, you know it—whence, and what I was,
To what catastrophe reserv'd you see—
Yet not so ignominious to myself,
No, nor to Athens so unprofitable,
Will you but listen, and do that for me,
Which, howsoever strange from lips like mine,
Is sure as Fate itself, as Fate it is.

Thes. Doubt not, however strange, whether or not
To Athens profitable, if to you,
What Ædipus demands shall Theseus do.

Æd. But profitable shall it be to both,
Unless the Spokesman of Futurity
From Delphi shall have prophesied a lie :
For this unsightly remnant of a king—
Though while it breathes a burden to us both,
But when the breath is out of it, to be
More serviceable to you than good looks—
I do consign to you for sepulture
Under the walls that, as they sheltered me
While living, after death will I defend.

Thes. But of the life you have to live between
This hour and that why take you no account ?

Æd. No ; for the life between this hour and that
In that sepulture is provided for.

Thes. You ask an easy favour at my hands,
Whether for life or death.

Œd. Nevertheless,
May be, to promise easier than to do.

Thes. How so ?

Œd. Those loving friends of mine in Thebes,
Who would not when I pray'd them, now, per-force,
If not per-suasion, when myself would not,
Will have me back with them.

Thes. And what if Thebes,
Relenting, or repenting, Œdipus—

Œd. O, not repenting or relenting, Thebes,
But by an Oracle of Phœbus scared,
Which told them that unless they get me home,
To lie when dead under their City walls,
They shall not thrive in war against the foe,
Whose walls shall overshadow what they lose.
As Thebes shall find should ever strife arise
Between herself and Athens, if their King
Vouchsafe me that which I have ask't of him.

Thes. But Thebes and Athens, friendly powers of old,
What quarrel should arise to make them foes ?

Œd. O Son of Ægeus ! to the Gods alone
Belongs immunity from Change and Death :
All else doth all controlling Time confound.
Earth waxes old : and all that from her womb
She brings to light upon her bosom dies,
And all is mutability between.
Ev'n so with Man, who never at one stay,
No less in mind than body changeable,
Likes what he liked not, loathes where once loved,
And then perchance to liking turns again.
And as with man, with Nation none the less,
If now with Thebes and Athens all look fair,
Yet Time his furrow'd track of Night and Day
Pursues, wherein some grain of Discord dropt,
Perhaps no bigger than an idle word,
Yet shall infect, and with its poisonous growth,
Well-ripen'd Amity to rancour turn.

As one day—for I prophesy—shall be,
 When my cold ashes underneath these walls
 Shall drink the warm blood of my enemies—
 Ev'n as they might upon this quarrel now,
 Had Thebes not other foe to deal withal.

Theb. Rumour hath reach'd us of some warlike stir,
 But on what quarrel —

Æd. Thebes against herself.

For those two sons of mine, who for so long
 In the Egyptian fashion, as I thought,
 Kept house, and did the women's work within,
 Now, full adult in arrogance and pride,
 Assert their sex to quarrel for the throne
 From which they banish'd me : Eteocles
 The younger, with the subtle Creon's aid,
 Not only seizes first, but yet withholds
 The sceptre from his elder brother's hand ;
 Who, as by sure intelligence I learn,
 Hath fled to Argos, and so cunningly
 Made good his cause, that King Adrastus there
 Gives him his daughter's hand in marriage, and
 Along with her, by way of royal dower,
 A host in arms that shall reconquer Thebes,
 And set my elder son upon—my Throne.
 And now by Phœbus' Oracle forewarn'd
 That whichever City with its walls
 Shadows my tomb shall have the victory,
 And fearful now of what they wish'd before,
 Lest any day should find, where they might not,
 Their victim, less by years than by the load
 Of shame and woe they laid upon him, dead,
 They dog my steps like vultures on the track
 Of gathering battle and the sharpest scent
 May even now be close upon my heels.

Cho. Whether with Argos Thebes for war prepares,
 Behold a Herald, from whatever land
 I know not, as a messenger of Peace
 To Athens, with that Olive in his hand.

Enter HERALD *from* THEBES.

Her. Creon of Thebes by mine his Herald's voice
To Theseus, King of Athens, greeting sends,
Craving from him due license to confer
With Œdipus, the King of Thebes that was,
Now by report upon Athenian soil—

Œd. Oh, I forefelt his coming in the wind!—

Her. Until which license granted by the King,
With a small retinue he waits aloof
Before advancing to the City's wall.

Thes. Your King does well ; and to his courtesy
With a like greeting Athens shall reply.

Œd. Oh, let no greeting made to him impeach
What first vouchsafed to me!

Thes. Fear not for that :
The courtesy which courtesy returns
No less leaves Œdipus sole arbiter
To grant or to refuse what Thebes demands.

Œd. If so, this Herald need not tarry long,
Nor overtax his memory with the word
That I shall freight him with.

Thes. And yet methinks
That e'en from lips he loves not Œdipus
Might hear a word that should send up the scale
Which now so down against his Country weighs.
What once you heard, if when you heard it true,
May, by the changing Time and Circumstance
Of which you tell me, now be Truth no more.

Œd. More false than Creon Falsehood cannot be.
O Theseus, one of heart and speech yourself,
You know not what the double tongue can do.

Thes. Nay, but the tongue which you so much distrust
Will have to deal not with myself but you,
Who know the man, and how to sift the word,
As once of one more cunning than himself.
And for all other argument than word,
Myself and Athens are engaged for that.

Œd. Be't so—vouchsafe but to be here yourself,
As Witness and as Judge between us both,
And you shall hear the Truth from those false lips
Wrung out, which had been told you by the true,
Had not that busy Herald interposed
His olive leaf between yourself and me.

Thes. Witness I may be, but of neither Judge
In that which but concerns yourself and Thebes.
But, whichever way the scale may turn,
Not Judgment's self, save from the God's own lip,
Against your will shall move you from my side.
Meanwhile, within the City, Œdipus,
With such observance as becomes myself
With me abide this meeting.

Œd. Ill beseems
The mendicant demurring at the hand
That but too generously deals with him.
But the prophetic voice of Destiny,
That led me hither, will not let me hence,
Till he have giv'n the signal to be gone.

Thes. Be't as you will ; with these good men abide
Secure, as in my promise, which I call
The Power beside whose sacred grove we stand
To witness, as I pledge it with my hand.

Œd. Theseus, ere this the Gods whom you adjure
Themselves had sworn by Fate the fore-decreed
Requital of that generosity
Which no requital looks for ; and I know
That even now, escaping through their hands,
The Blessing strives to anticipate the Deed.

Cho. But, that no evil influence thwart its way,
And to propitiate that jealous Power
Whose Sanctuary you at first profaned—
You, Œdipus, and you, whose pious hand
Leading him wrong, like expiation need—
Returning to the consecrated shade
Of one that in its inmost shadow dwells,

Its dedicated Priest and Minister,
 The ceremonial he enjoins obey,
 First, by lustration in the sacred stream ;
 Then to the sacred Earth, whereunder keep
 Those Three Benign ones ever on the watch,
 Thrice three libations from three vessels pour—
 Of honey mixt with water, but no wine :
 Which when the forest-shaded Earth has supt,
 Upon her bosom olive wands thrice three
 Lay with a prayer within the lips supprest ;
 And then, with unreverting eyes to us
 Returning, wait in confidence the rest.

CHORUS.

Strophe 1.

Well, stranger, to these rural seats
 Thou comest, this region's blest retreats,
 Where white Colonus lifts his head,
 And glories in the bounding steed.
 Where sadly sweet the frequent nightingale
 Impassion'd pours her evening song,
 And charms with varied notes each verdant vale
 The ivy's dark-green boughs among ;
 Or shelter'd 'midst the cluster'd vine,
 Which high above, to form a bow'r
 Safe from the sun or stormy show'r,
 Loves its thick branches to entwine ;
 Where frolic Bacchus always roves,
 And visits with his fost'ring Nymphs the groves.

Antistrophe 1.

Bath'd in the dew of heav'n each morn
 Fresh is the fair Narcissus born,
 Of these great pow'rs the crown of old :
 The Crocus glitters robed in gold.

Here restless fountains ever murm'ring glide,
 And as their crisped streamlets stray
 To feed, Cephisus, thy unfailing tide,
 Fresh verdure marks their winding way ;
 And as their pure streams roll along
 O'er the rich bosom of the ground,
 Quick spring the plants, the flow'rs around.
 Here oft to raise the tuneful song
 The virgin band of Muses deigns ;
 And car-borne Venus guides her golden reins.

Strophe 2.

What nor rich Asia's wide domain,
 Nor all that sea-encircled land
 From Doric Pelops named, contain,
 Here, unrequir'd the cult'ring hand,
 The hallow'd plant spontaneous grows,
 Striking cold terror through our foes.
 Here blooms, this favour'd region round,
 The fertile Olive's hoary head ;
 The young, the old behold it spread,
 Nor dare with impious hand to wound :
 For Morian Jove with guardian care
 Delights to see it flourish fair ;
 And Pallas, fav'ring, from the skies
 Rolls the blue lustre of her eyes.

Antistrophe 2.

My voice yet once more let me raise,
 Yet other glories to relate :
 A potent god for these we praise,
 His presents to this favour'd state ;
 The Steed obedient to the rein,
 And safe to plough the subject main.

Our highest vaunt is this, thy grace
 Saturnian Neptune, we behold
 The ruling curb emboss'd with gold
 Control the courser's manag'd pace.
 Though loud, O King, thy billows roar,
 Our strong hands grasp the well-form'd oar ;
 And, while the Nereids round it play,
 Light cuts our bounding bark its way.

THESEUS, ŒDIPUS, CREON, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

Thes. Son of Menceceus, of the realm of Thebes,
 A Ruler, and its Representative ;
 Your peaceful advent by your Herald's voice
 Duly proclaim'd as much from me demands
 Of courteous welcome and acknowledgment.
 The purport of your mission to this Land
 Yourself have told me, as foretold by him,
 Who, till to-day a stranger like yourself,
 And by no Herald like yourself announced,
 Yet once a King, is still a King to me.
 And at his bidding am I present now,
 Not as a Judge between you to decide
 A question that concerns yourselves alone,
 But to hear that which, though he needs it not,
 Should justify that honour at my hands
 Which his ill Fate has forfeited in Thebes ;
 And as a King in Athens to remain,
 If by persuasion or just argument
 You fail to move him ev'n to reign with you.

Cre. O Theseus, Son of Ægeus, and still more
 Than Ægeus' self about the world proclaim'd,

Slayer of the fiery-breathing Minotaur,
 And hordes of Men than one such monster worse :
 The Monarch of a State, if any in Greece,
 In men and means abounding, of the Gods
 Observant, and of Justice to Mankind,
 With your world-famous Areopagus,
 No less for Wisdom than for Arms renown'd,
 Like Her whose tutelary name you boast.
 On what a peaceful mission I am come,
 My Herald first, and the small retinue
 That follows me, sufficiently declare :
 To trespass not on foreign Land or Law—
 No, nor on his who, having found his way,
 Hath found a home on this Athenian soil ;
 But whom, with what fair argument I may
 Of Kindred and of Country, I would fain,
 However royally entreated here,
 Entreat with me back to his home again.

Cho. You know the man, though, haply, not the man
 He was, whom now you are to deal withal.

Cre. Therefore to him will I address myself,
 In words as few and unrheterical
 As simple Truth needs to be clothed withal
 In summoning a momentous question up :
 Praying the Goddess underneath whose shade
 We here are standing to direct them home.
 O Œdipus ! my Brother—once my King—
 And King once more to be, will you but hear
 What for myself, and with me Thebes, I speak ;
 Sore wearied both under this long divorce
 From one that once the Saviour was of all,
 Under a judgment which your evil Fate
 Prepared, yourself invoked on your own head,
 And Thebes must execute if Thebes would live.
 But as no judgment wrought by human hand,
 And most to him that suffers from the blow,
 But of the shaking hand that dealt it tells—

What of misdeed, or of misfortune what,
 Suffer'd or done—unwittingly by you
 Done, and by Thebes unwillingly redress'd—
 Behold at last, by Fate's accomplishment,
 The Oracles of Phœbus justified,
 The Gods by expiation of the Curse
 Appeased, and Thebes once more herself again,
 Like one recover'd from a mortal throe,
 And fain to fold him to her heart once more
 Who saved her once, and yet a second time
 Who sacrificed himself that she might live ;
 Your Country reaches out beseeching arms,
 Land over land, until she finds you here,
 Among a People, with a King alike
 In hospitality renown'd as arms,
 But, welcome and entreat you as they may,
 Who cannot be to you, nor you to them,
 As Œdipus to Thebes, or Thebes to him.
 Wherefore I do beseech you, Œdipus,
 By all the ties that man to man endear
 Of kindred and of country ; by all those
 That King to People bind, as them to him :
 Yea, by the God, who, for a secret end
 That Man not fathoms, having parted them,
 Now, reconciled himself, would reconcile ;
 Be all that erring Man on either side
 Hath done amiss forgotten as forgiv'n,
 And Œdipus and Thebes as one again.
 Look ! I, your Brother, like yourself in years,
 And, little as you think it, like yourself
 Worn out with necessary execution
 Of what you had to suffer self condemn'd ;
 With long and weary travel have I come,
 Half fearful of less prosperous return,
 Imploring you, if I cannot persuade
 With argument that shall commend itself
 If not to you, to those you trust in here,

Yet in the eyes of Athens shame me not
By sending empty-handed back to Thebes.

Cho. The Man has spoken : and to us it seems
In well-consider'd word, King Œdipus,
And temper that invites a like reply.

Œd. Temper and word so well consider'd, friends,
That, unaccustom'd as I long have been
To civil greeting till I lighted here,
And haply not the man I was to guess
The well-consider'd word—But thus it runs :
That, satisfied at length with all the shame
And beggary she condemned and left me to,
To expiate the crime——

Cre. I said not that—

Œd. On which just Judgment done—though, by the way,
Granting the Judgment just, I yet might ask
If you, my kinsman, and those sons of mine,
Must needs become its executioner ?

Cre. To Greece do I appeal if you yourself
On your own head drew not the Judgment down
Which Fate decreed and Phœbus prophesied,
And upon which the Peoples' Being hung ;
And which who but the People's Magistrate,
Kinsman or other, needs must execute ?

Œd. By setting on the rabble pack of Thebes
To yelp me through the gates ? But let that pass :
For now the rabble pack, to make amends,
Send those who set them on to hunt me back.

Cre. If you will have it so, so must it be :
So but to good result on either side.

Œd. Yet somewhat take amends on yours, I think,
Whether by People or by Magistrate :
Who, when the Plague by ceasing long ago
Proved Expiation duly made by me,
And I myself, worn with the load of shame
I bore about with me among strange men,
Cried out to lay my weary burden down—

Were't with my life—among mine own once more,
Then would you not to my entreaty grant
What, unbesought, you come entreating now.

Cre. The People, panic-stricken with the storm
That, having made such havoc in their ranks,
Had scarcely pass'd, still dreaded its return.

Œd. And prithee, Creon, how recomforted,
And to my presence reconciled at last?

Cre. The Magistrate whom you so much distrust,
Adding the voice of their authority
To theirs who by their sacred ministry
The will of Heaven divine—

Œd. Teiresias still !
Whose refluent years against the base itself
Of Delphi's breaking shiver out of sight ?
Aye, he it was who with its breath surcharg'd,
First trumpeted me forth ; and now perhaps,
When other Augury and Omen fail'd
To reassure People and Magistrate,
By some new summons from the Delphian shrine,
Hath quicken'd Thebes to reconciliation
By something stronger than regretful Love.

Cre. What mean you, Œdipus ?

Œd. No more but this ;
That, as I wander'd—not so long ago—
About the world begging my daily bread,
A little wind from Delphi wandering too
Came up with me, and whisper'd in my ears
That, unless Thebes should have me back again,
She would not thrive in arms against the foe
That even then was knocking at her doors.

Cre. I scarcely thought the selfsame Œdipus,
Who scarce would heed Apollo's Prophet once,
Should for a Prophet's take the wandering voice
Of rumour in the wind.

Œd. And, did I not,
As, spite of taunt, now better taught, I do,

The pious Creon never fail'd in faith,
 And by his presence here and now attests
 That wandering voice from Delphi told me true.
 And somewhat more. For, to be plain with you,
 Another wind, that not from Delphi blew,
 But somehow slipping through your city gates,
 Whisper'd how Thebes, of that same Oracle
 From Delphi self-assured, but not the less,
 Despite of Augur and of Soothsayer,
 Still apprehensive of my presence there,
 Would have me back—would have me back indeed,
 Not while I lived to fold me to her heart
 With those beseeching arms you tell me of,
 But at arm's length—outside the city walls—
 Like some infectious leper there to bide
 Till Death, which surely could not come too fast,
 And might perchance be quickened if too slow,
 Even in death dishonoured as in life,
 Should safely hide me in the ground below.

Cre. What ! has some traitor been deluding you
 With some swol'n rumour of the market-place ?

Œd. Traitor to you, as true to me, but not
 To you more traitor than to you yourself,
 If, as I think, who cannot see your face—
 I thank the Gods I cannot—but those here
 Shall witness where the startled countenance
 Convicts the false denial of the tongue.

Cre. Ev'n were that babbling traitor's word as true
 As he is false, I find not Œdipus
 Much otherwise among his new friends here,
 Than among those he counts for foes at home.

Œd. You see not, for you know how ere long—
 How soon I know not, but not long, I know—
 What others here now witness, standing round,
 And some you see not watching underground,
 Why from this spot, by which I first set foot,
 I would not—no, not to be seated by
 King Theseus' side in his Acropolis,

I would not move until I went to die.
 Whether or no you guess my mystery,
 Enough ! you see I have unravell'd yours.
 Begone ! You lose but time and tongue——Begone !
 And tell your people this on your return :
 That, were the word from Delphos, and the word
 From Thebes as false as you pretend it—yea,
 False as yourself—I would not back with you ;
 No, were with all her population Thebes,
 From the first harvest of the Dragon's teeth
 That ancient Cadmus sowed the field withal
 Rais'd from the dust that first he raised them from,
 From Thebes to Athens flocking at your heels,
 I would not back with them, no, not to reign
 Enthroned among them as I was before,
 Much less a tainted leper like to lie
 Outside your walls while living, and, when dead,
 There huddled under as a thing accursed,
 Save for the Victory that within me lies,
 And shall but quicken as the body dies.
 No ; the same answer that I make to you,
 Take home with you to all : on this same spot
 Of earth, which now I stand a beggar on,
 Beside this consecrated Grove, in which
 Unconsecrated but predestin'd foot
 I first set foot—I say, my Throne is here,
 Deep-based as Hades, fix'd as Fate itself ;
 And this poor staff I long have lean'd upon
 The Sceptre, wherewith from the world beneath
 I shall direct the issues of the war
 That shall determine wingéd Victory
 To rest upon the Land where tomb'd I lie.

Cre. Theseus, in vain to reason with a man,
 Still more the slave that evermore he was
 Of Passion which inveterates with years ;
 Suspecting even those who mean him well,
 As once myself ; and when, to his own cost,

Falsely he found, as with such men it fares,
 He first injustice justifies by worse.
 Therefore to you, King Theseus, and to these
 Grave Councillors of Athens, I appeal :
 And, irrespective of the ties that bind
 All men to kith and country, but which he,
 Despite all loving offer on their side,
 Irreconcilably repudiates—ask,
 If that same Oracle which he pretends
 By some vague rumour reach'd his ears say true,
 And that victorious power, as he pretends,
 Be lodg'd in him, whether alive or dead—
 Is he not bound, reluctant though he be,
 With his returning presence to requite
 The deadly mischief which it wrought before ?—
 A Pestilence so terrible to Thebes
 As almost to extermination thinn'd
 Her people, and yet leaves but half arrayed
 Against the foe now knocking at her doors.
 For such a foe we have to deal with now—
 Adrastus, King of Argos, who, by this
 Man's son, and by his own ambition, led,
 Has, with some several powers allied with him,
 Raised such a Force as threatens to destroy
 What little life the Father left in Thebes,
 And either to reconquer and there reign,
 Or raze our sacred ramparts to the dust.
 And on that second count I ask again—
 Whether, if that wing'd Victory do indeed
 Abide with him, he be not doubly bound,
 By now submission to his country's will
 To counter-expiate his son's revolt,
 While for past wrong atoning for himself ?
 And furthermore I ask, would it beseem
 A King and People wise and just as this,
 If not with Thebes confederate, not her Foe,
 Who, disregarding as I know you do,

All visionary profit for yourselves,
 Would not escape that censure in men's eyes,
 Withholding—nay, before those jealous eyes
 Upholding—one who, for his sake—still more
 For her's who innocently shares the shame—
 Were better in the bosom of his own
 To veil a life defaced—if not by crime,
 By that so crime-like—terrible—twofold—
 Of Parricide and——

Œd. Shameless villain, hold !
 Who in the compass of this brief appeal
 Before these reverend Elders and their King,
 Dare show the double face and double tongue
 For which of old you were notorious :
 First with fair honey-sweet cajoling words
 Seeking to entice ; and, when the honey fail'd,
 Intimidating with a threatened sting,
 As impotent to wound as that to win.
 Intimidate, I say—not me alone,
 But this great People and their Sovereign,
 Who dare, forsooth, who dare between us stand
 With talk—O not of Crime forsooth—but of
 Calamity so crime-like—'twas the word—
 So cunningly confused, that when at first
 You came, propitiation on your tongue,
 The word of pity floated on the top,
 But when that fail'd, then Crime came uppermost,
 And Crime left ringing in this people's ears.
 Lest which—not to my shame I know indeed
 With good King Theseus, and his Councillors,
 But with the Citizens, less well advised,
 Ring out the old alarm that shall again—
 And let it !—rouse the cry of baffled Thebes,
 I will arrest, and from denial false,
 Or the less guilty silence of consent,
 Convict you once for all, and let you go.
 Was't not predicted, ev'n before my birth,

By Phœbus, Fate's unerring Oracle,
 That I should slay my father ? And the God
 Provided for his own accomplishment,
 Ev'n by the very means that father took
 To wrench out of my hands his destiny,
 As old Kithæron wots of to this hour.
 For Fate, that was not to be baffled thus,
 And Phœbus, that was not to be forsworn,
 There found and rear'd me till my arm was strong
 To do the execution they fore-doom'd.
 Yea, on the very road King Laius
 Again was going to that Oracle
 He fondly dream'd—as afterward his son
 More vainly bragg'd—of having foil'd before,
 I met—I smote—I slew—my Father—yes—
 And you, before this presence, answer me !
 If one you knew not save that King he were,
 Upon the public thoroughfare of men
 Had struck you, no less royal than himself ;
 Would you, sedate and pious as you are,
 In youth and courage strong as I was then—
 Would you have paused to think whether, in all
 The roll of human possibility
 The man who smote you might not in his veins
 Have running blood akin to that in yours,
 Or, in the sudden wrath of self-defence,
 Retaliated with a counter-blow ?
 Yea ! as the very Father whom I slew,
 Could his voice reach us though the earth between,
 Would ev'n now bear me witness, as he shall
 When I rejoin him in the world below ;
 That, howsoever for the world's behoof,
 The Gods, albeit with pitying eyes from heaven,
 Chastise the guiltless instruments of crime
 For which they knew that Fate is chargeable,
 They look not with a like compassion down
 Upon those mortal agents of their doom

Who, with a vengeance more implacable,
 Pursue and persecute—aye, let it be
 The Parricide!—The Parricide!—
 And for that yet more terrible mischance
 That follow'd—and for which yourselves in Thebes
 Were, under Destiny, responsible—
 All shameless as you are, ar't not ashamed
 Before an alien People and their King
 To breathe of that, which, Crime or not, thyself
 And one—and one—more dear—involves in that
 Which unaware to have done is less shame
 Than with aforethought malice to proclaim!

Cho. If to King Creon Reason heretofore
 Seem'd choked in Passion, not to wonder now
 That, with this burst of Fury overwhelm'd,
 He leaves in silence Theseus to reply.

Thes. Albeit on either side appeal'd to now,
 And whichever way myself inclined,
 I shall not from my former purpose swerve;
 To stand as Witness, not as Arbiter,
 Between two Princes of an alien land,
 Whereof one yet is Ruler, and though fall'n
 From rule the other, still a King to me.
 To whom, first coming to the land I rule,
 I pledg'd an oath by those Eumenides
 Beside whose sanctnary e'en now we stand,
 That if Persuasion and fair Argument
 Should fail with him,—as fail'd it has, you see,
 Nor less with her, who, wedded to his fate,
 Clings all the closer to her father's side—
 No power but Heav'n's should move him from my land.
 And therefore, heedless what the world may say,
 Well knowing that my hospitality
 To no remoter self-advantage looks,
 I should not—even if not engaged by oath—
 I should not—from my plighted promise swerve.

Cre. I may not, were I minded—I, with these

Few followers—in the teeth of Athens arm'd,
 Arraign the adverse judgment of their King ;
 But to the courteous welcome I have met,
 Reciprocating with a like farewell,
 Must to my people leave on my return
 How minded, and how temper'd, to receive
 This unforeseen denial of their right.

Thes. That you shall settle with your friends at home ;
 And in what temper and to what result
 Among yourselves decided and declared,
 Thebes shall not find our Athens unprepared.

CHORUS.

Strophe 1.

Were I where the dauntless train
 Swells the battle's brazen roar ;
 On the hallow'd Pythian plain ;
 Or the torch-illumin'd shore,
 Where for men their holy flame
 O'er the sacred Mysteries wakes,
 And 'mongst Priests of honour'd name
 Where his station Silence takes,
 Wont his golden key to bear
 In his firm tongue-locking hand !
 There the warrior Theseus, there
 Join'd the virgin sisters stand ;
 There they shall soon the conflict share,
 And pour the torrent rage of war.

Antistrophe 1.

Westward haply on the plain,
 Where the white and rocky steep

Tow'rs o'er Oia's rich domain,
 May th' ensanguin'd battle sweep :
 Where impetuous in their speed,
 Glowing with the flames of war,
 Warriors spur the foaming steed,
 Other warriors roll the car.
 Brave the youths who here reside,
 Brave th' Athenian troops in fight ;
 Shine their reins with martial pride,
 All their trappings glitter bright ;
 These honours in their rich array
 To Pallas all and Neptune pay.

Strophe 2.

Is the dreadful work begun ?
 Or does ought their force delay ?
 O let me give the glad presages way !
 Soon shall yon bright ethereal sun
 Behold him, vaunting now no more,
 Compell'd th' afflicted virgin to restore,
 Afflicted through her father's woes.
 Each day some deed effected shows,
 The ruling hand of righteous Jove.
 I am the prophet of a prosperous fight.
 Had I the pennons of a dove
 High o'er the clouds to whirl my flight,
 Then should my raptur'd eyes behold
 The victory my thoughts foretold.

Antistrophe 2.

Thou in heav'n's high throne adored,
 Sovereign of the gods above,
 Give strength, O pow'ful all-beholding Jove,
 Give conquest to my country's lord ;
 With glory mark his purple way,
 And make the ambush'd foe an easy prey !

Pallas, propitious hear my pray'r,
 And show that Athens is thy care !
 Thee, Hunter Phœbus, skill'd to trace
 The sylvan savage in his rapid flight ;
 Thee, whom the pleasures in the chase
 Of the fleet, spotted hind delight,
 Thee I implore, chaste Huntress Maid,
 Aid her brave sons, our country aid !

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Mes. Where is King Œdipus ?

Cho. Behold him here.

Mes. King Œdipus, Theseus of Athens King,
 Hath sent me back with this report full speed :
 That Creon with a cloud of armèd men
 Whom we found ambush'd on a neighbouring height,
 Without encounter, but with lowering brows,
 And muttered thunder of Revenge to come,
 Broke up and blew away the way they came.

Œd. The Gods be praised, and Theseus blest withal !

Mes. Who bids me tell you further what myself
 Did also witness ; that, as we returned,
 Before Poseidon's Altar by the way,
 Whereat we stay'd to sacrifice and pray,
 A strange man, as with distant travel worn,
 And low beneath a load of sorrow bow'd,
 By that same Altar they both worshipped at
 Besought a boon of Theseus ; and, when askt
 His country, name, and parentage, replied,
 From Argos—

Œd. Argos !

Mes. But himself, he said,

The Son of Œdipus, once King of Thebes,
Whom, ere he went to conquer and retrieve
By arms the throne usurped from both in Thebes,
With many tears King Theseus he besought
To see, perchance before he went to die :
And Theseus, moved by pity for the man,
And reverence for the shrine by which he pray'd.—

Œd. I will not see him !

Cho. Nay, consider yet ;
As by the sacred earth you stand beside
From Theseus welcome for yourself you found,
So by the shrine at which with Theseus pray'd
Your son, refuse not what to Creon granted
Of hearing and reply.

Mes. So pray'd the King.

Ant. Oh, Father, young and maiden as I am,
Unfit to lift my voice among these men,
Yet hear me—if not for my brother's sake,
May be less guilty than you now believe,
Or if yet guilty, not impenitent,
Who comes to plead forgiveness at your feet—
If not for his sake, Father, yet for mine—
Let me but see my brother's face once more,
And hear his voice, before he goes to die.

Cho. The Maid says well ; and for herself, and him
She pleads for : nay, King Œdipus, for you,
From whose compliance harm cannot—perchance
Some unexpected profit may ensue.

Œd. You know not what you ask, Antigone ;
But thus by Theseus at the altar's side
Entreated, let what has to be be done,
And leave me to such peace as may be mine.

Cho. And yonder, lo ! the solitary man
Comes slowly weeping hither.

Ant. Oh, my brother !

Cho. Approach, unhappy man, approach, and plead
Your sorrows, and, as you deserve, succeed.

POLYNICES, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

Pol. Appeal ! Alas, how scarcely dare approach,
 Who scarce aloof dare contemplate through tears
 That Vision of paternal majesty,
 Or his misfortune like my own deplore !
 Beholding him an outcast like myself,
 In sorry raiment—travel-torn as mine—
 With that bow'd head, those tangled locks that fall
 O'er the benighted temple of his brows ;
 And her, who, like my father, loved me once,
 And even now whose falling tears confess
 That ev'n the eternal love she bears to him
 Hath not yet quencht the Sister in her heart—
 Oh, wretched, and part-guilty as I am,
 Albeit the judgment on yourself you brought,
 Of living worse than death that Thebes might live,
 Had I but known—but heard—much more had seen,
 What now I see, and know, had never been ;
 Never had been—much less so long endured,
 And shall no longer, now I witness, be,
 Despite of those who drown'd my single voice,
 As now their treason has confounded me.

No word ? No sign ? revolted from me still ?—
 For, were I guilty as you guilty deem,
 Yet not so guilty as Eteocles,
 Who proves himself arch-criminal tow'rd you
 By after treason to your elder-born,
 Seizing the Throne which, if you leave, devolves
 Upon your first-born second self in me.
 This hath Eteocles, my Brother, done,
 By subornation of the Citizens,
 With the connivance of the subtle Creon,
 Who spins his web within the City walls
 To catch the Sons, their Father as he caught,

Involving us in that unnatural strife
 By which he purposes, when rid of one,
 To rule the other ; or, destroying both,
 Himself in title as in deed to reign.
 Thus me, who least came easy to his hand,
 Hath he like you driv'n out, like you to seek
 And find a country and a home elsewhere ;
 You, on this hospitable soil, with this
 Great Sovereign and his generous People here ;
 Whom, without asking further service from,
 Nor wishing to dissever from your side,
 Unless by restoration to your own
 To sweeten separation from themselves,
 I do implore you, Father, were it but
 With one relenting gesture of the hand,
 One speechless inclination of the head,
 Vouchsafe your wretched son some dawning sign
 Of that forgiveness, wherewith fully arm'd,
 I may for more than past misdeed atone,
 By vengeance upon those who wrong us both.
 For when, so foully by those two betray'd,
 I fled to Argos, King Adrastus there
 Gave me not only welcome when I came,
 But after, when possess'd of all my wrongs,
 His daughter's hand in wedlock ; and with that,
 By way of dowry, such an Host in Arms,
 As, with the favour of the Gods, which your
 Forgiveness, oh my Father ! shall secure,
 Shall Thebes recover, and re-throne us both.
 For look ! For us a seven-fold Armament
 By seven such Champions headed and array'd
 As yet the world has not together seen,
 Leagued in our cause ; Amphiaraus first,
 For Divination famous as for Arms,
 Knowing the issue of the War he joins ;
 Ætolian Tydeus next ; and next to him

Eteoclus of Argos ; and the fourth,
 Hippomedon : then Capaneus, who boasts
 Of bringing down the walls of Thebes by Fire :
 Parthenopæus next of Arcady,
 So from his mother Atalanta named :
 And seventh, and last, myself, your elder-born,
 And right successor to your dynasty.
 With sev'n such Champions, and with such a Host,
 One need we yet to consecrate our arms
 And triumph in the cause which is your own.
 Wherefore, repenting what unfilial wrong,
 By others wrought on, I have done to you,
 Hither on foot from Argos am I come,
 A contrite suppliant at my Father's feet ;
 Imploring him, by all those Household Gods
 Whose monuments before our palace door—
 Yea, by the faithful men within the walls,
 Who, to a statue-like inaction cow'd,
 Stand mutely wondering for their absent lord—
 And for her sake who, having shared so long
 Your sorrow, now your triumph shall partake—
 Remit your righteous wrath against a son,
 Who, tow'rd you guilty as he may have been,
 And all distasteful in your eyes as now,
 Shall now for more than past misdeed atone,
 Or, in just retribution failing, fall.

(After a long pause.)

Œd. Hath this man said all he came charg'd to say ?

Cho. So from the unruffled silence into which
 His words have fall'n and vanisht I conceive.

Œd. But that the Sovereign Ruler of this Land
 Had sent this man to me, and thought it well
 That I should hear and answer, hear I might,
 But not a word of answer from my lips :
 No, nor a sign, save with averted face,

And one blind warning of the hand—" Begone !"
 But thus entreated, by the word of one
 Whose word should be the law of Love to me,
 And of the friendly Council here beside,
 I will not only hear, but will reply—
 Such a reply as he that asks for it
 Shall wish he had not come so far to hear.
 Who—Wretch!—who when thou hadst the sovereign power,
 Which now thy Brother to himself usurps,
 Then—not cajoled nor forced, as you pretend—
 For was not I, the Victim, Witness too ?—
 But, one with them, didst set the rabble on
 To hoot me forth to shame and beggary ;
 Yea, when, not like yourselves implacable,
 The God allow'd and I besought return,
 Still shut me out, and, but to serve your ends,
 Still would have let me linger till I died
 In a strange country, and in such a plight
 As now, forsooth, you weep to look upon !
 Thou hypocrite ! with those pretended tears
 Of false contrition, which, were't true, too late,
 Think'st to cajole me with a show of Love—
 Aye, of such Love wherewith a man regards
 The tool he needs to work his purpose with,
 And forthwith fling regardlessly away,
 Laying on those the load of infamy
 Thou sharedst with them of the royal spoil
 They stole from me, and now, like other thieves,
 Would keep between themselves, outwitting thee,
 Who, them outwitting, to thyself would keep ;
 Oh Fool as Hypocrite ! suspecting not
 How that most cunning rogue of all the three
 Has been before you, and the mask you wear,
 But that, behind which playing such a part,
 In his, mid passion he was forced to drop,
 And, as he fled discomfited away,
 Left you to wear, and to a like result.

Fools both, as Hypocrites ! suspecting not
 That he you would deceive your errand knows,
 Each to win back the stolen stakes you lost—
 The Kingdom once without the King, but now
 The King himself to bring the Kingdom back ;
 Who, flung before as offal from your walls,
 Is now become a treasure of such price
 As each of you would fain get home again,
 Like stolen treasure—to be buried there.
 You see I know your errand : if you fail
 To guess my answer—
 One way lies Argos, and another Thebes,
 Which those tired feet might fail to reach in time ;
 But could you borrow Hermes' feather'd heel
 Might catch your Rival ere the Sun goes down,
 And from his lip learn all. If not from him,
 Then somewhat later, from your brother there,
 When you shall meet him, arm to arm, in arms,
 Under the wall where you would bury me.
 Then might you tell him in return, were not
 The story swallow'd up enacting it,
 How, as he speaks, your living Father's Ghost
 Foresees you both, up-looking from the tomb
 In which your hopes of conquest die with him,
 You, not the Champion leading, lance-erect,
 Your Argive Host to sack your native Thebes ;
 Nor him within it in mock majesty
 Posting his people to defend the Gates :
 Not thus, but in your golden feathers both,
 Where one another challenging you stood,
 Stretch'd in the dust, slain by each other's hand.
 This, standing on the consecrated ground
 Of those avenging Sisters underneath
 Who hear, and even as I speak prepare
 To do their destined work, I prophesy ;
 You never to reconquer or regain
 The Kingdom lost where he shall never reign ;

But ev'n before the walls that you contest,
Die, slaying him by whom yourself are slain !

Cho. Terrible words from human lip to hear !
And by what witness from what other world
Attested, as methought heard once before,
While this man spoke, and heav'n and earth look'd clear ?

Ant. Alas ! Alas ! for my belovéd Brother !

Pol. Aye, and Alas ! not for myself alone,
But for all those arm'd in my cause, Alas !
To whom returning I may not reveal
The doom of death to me, to them defeat !

Ant. O then by all you worship, and hold dear,
Return to Argos not ; or, if return,
Revealing that you carry back with you,
Revolt them from your fatal Enterprise,
And, leaving graceless Thebes to go her way,
With those you loved, and you are loved by, live !

Pol. Love me they would no more, Antigone,
If, having roused them at the trumpet's sound
To arms, both Men and Champions, in my cause,
Then to dissuade them, if dissuade I could,
By rumour of uncertain Prophecies,
And Malediction that to them would seem
But empty raving of impotent wrath.
Or, ev'n would they retreat, as will they not,
Could I endure in Argos to survive
My younger brother's laughing-stock in Thebes ?

Ant. Oh, better that than this unnatural war,
Which cannot end, which cannot end, I know,
But with the fatal consequence that leads
Or haunts my Father's footsteps where he goes !
While the false Creon, who has set you on,
Shall mock you both, who die that he may win !

Pol. Too late, too late, Antigone, too late !
And when that comes which is foredoom'd, and I
Lie stark and cold before the walls of Thebes,
With him whom slaying I am doom'd to die,

Shall not one pious hand, Antigone,
Protect your lifeless brother from the dog
With some handfuls of his Mother Earth ?

Ant. Oh, but it shall not need ! You shall not go !
If not for Love, in Pity, for you both,
My Father shall relent !

Pol. But Fate shall not.

Œd. No, by that other roll of thunder, no !

Cho. Again ! Yet not a cloud in Heav'n above——

Œd. These are no thunders from the hand of Zeus,
But the dark Ruler of the World below,
Reverberating from the vault of Heav'n——
Shall some one here go straightway to your King,
And bid him, whatsoever busied with—
Yea, were it by the Altar worshipping,
Forthwith unworshipt leave it ; for the God
Who links the Fate of Athens with mine own,
By those three thunders hence has summon'd me.
Gather no dust upon the feet of him
Who goes this errand : for the God, I know,
Who, brandishing aloft his Oracles
Accomplisht, in one compass of the sky
From my meridian drove me to my fall,
And, as himself he sank behind the Night,
Into the hands of those who therein rule
My destiny resign'd—the God, I say,
Whose rising found me here, with his descent
Shall take me down with him, and leave me there.

CHORUS.

Strange things hath this day witness'd and heard tell
By the strange man whom Phœbus from the stream
Of Ocean rising with his levell'd beam
Surprised, as with a cloud of Oracle
Encompass'd, in the consecrated shade
Of those who underneath more darkly dwell,

Whose more propitious name scarce daring we
 To whisper, he—seemingly not unheard—
 No, nor unanswer'd—calls on undismay'd.
 Strange things—and if the word of presage hold,
 Not unattested by those thunders three,
 Yet stranger are we likely to behold,
 Prophetical of Evil if to some,
 To Athens, and her People and her Kings,
 Auspicious all, and for all time to come.

THESEUS, ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CHORUS.

Thes. Look, at your bidding, Œdipus, once more
 I come, prepared to do as I have done
 Of hospitable service all I may.

Œd. Yea, once more, Theseus, and for one last time,
 Before the God recalls me to himself,
 Have I recall'd you, to solicit not,
 But the good service of a single day,
 Which, were life longer, were, I know, life-long,
 With Death's eternal blessing to repay :
 Which when I prophesied as soon to be,
 Not knowing then how soon ; but knowing now.

Thes. By what assurance, Œdipus ?

Œd. By those
 Three subterranean thunders summon'd hence.

Thes. From Athens ?

Œd. From the eyes of Athens, aye ;
 And yet nowhither else : a mystery
 Whose peremptory resolution
 The God who loves you but for you delays.

Thes. I must believe that one whom destiny
 Hath step by step oracularly led,
 Reads and interprets right the wondrous Signs
 Which others but attest and wonder at.

Œd. And for a further witness and a last—
 Blind as I am, and hitherto so long

Compell'd to find my way with other's eyes,
 Myself shall those who led me forthwith lead
 Along the road where that shall have to be
 Which other eyes than Theseus' none may see.
 Which having seen, King Theseus, in your heart
 Keep unreveal'd ; and when you come to die,
 To him alone who after you the Throne
 Of Athens mounts reveal it ; he in turn
 To him who him shall follow ; and so forth,
 From hand to hand, until the end of Time :
 Not trusting that into the People's hand,
 Who, loyal, wise, and pious, let them be,
 Seducible by those seditious few
 That still infest the soundest Commonweal,
 Abuse the power committed to their hands,
 And by disorder and revolt at home
 Become of foreign enemies the prey.
 And now the Powers to you and yours Benign,
 Who thrice have call'd me from the world below,
 Now that the word of vantage in your heart
 Is register'd, will brook no more delay,
 And the mute Hermes of the lower world,
 Ev'n as I speak, prepares to lead the way.

CHORUS.

Strophe.

If I may thee, infernal Queen,
 Thou gloomy pow'r by mortal eyes unseen,
 With holy awe revere ;
 And thee, stern Monarch, whose terrific sway
 The dreary realms of night obey,
 Hear Pluto, Pluto hear !
 Let not pangs of tort'ring pow'r
 Rack the stranger's dying hour,
 While the cheerless path he treads
 To the Stygian house that leads.—
 Guilt wast doom'd to know

Various ills and bitter woe :
 May the god with just regard
 Grace thee with a bright reward !

Antistrophe.

Ye awful pow'rs, from realms of night
 Who vengeful rise the guilty to affright !
 And thou, grim Dog of Hell,
 Before the iron gates of Pluto spread
 Enormous on thy horrid bed,
 With many a hideous yell
 Whilst thy echoing cave resounds,
 Guarding fierce those dismal bounds ;
 Thou, whom Earth to Tartarus bore,
 Cease, oh cease thy dreaded roar ;
 Gentle meet him in those glades ;
 When he joins the silent shades ;
 Ever wakeful, cease t'appal ;
 Dog of Hell on thee I call !

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Mes. O Citizens of Athens, to sum up
 In fewest words what, to be told at large,
 Would need an apter tongue than mine to tell—
 King Œdipus—

Cho. Is dead——

Mes. I say not that ;
 From human eyes departed, I will say ;
 And with such circumstance as, could I tell
 All that myself I saw, who saw not all——

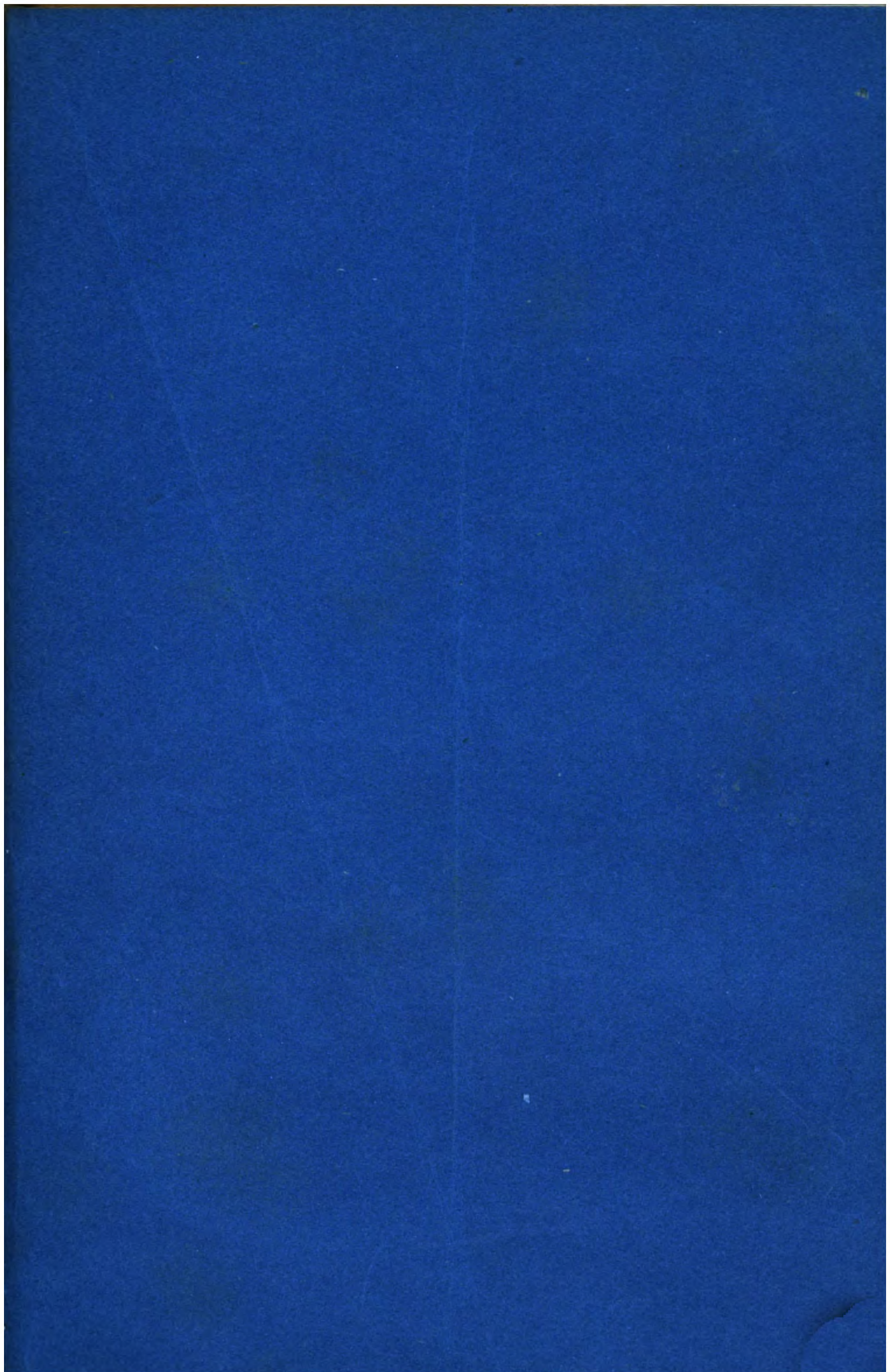
Cho. But, if not all, yet what you saw, recount.

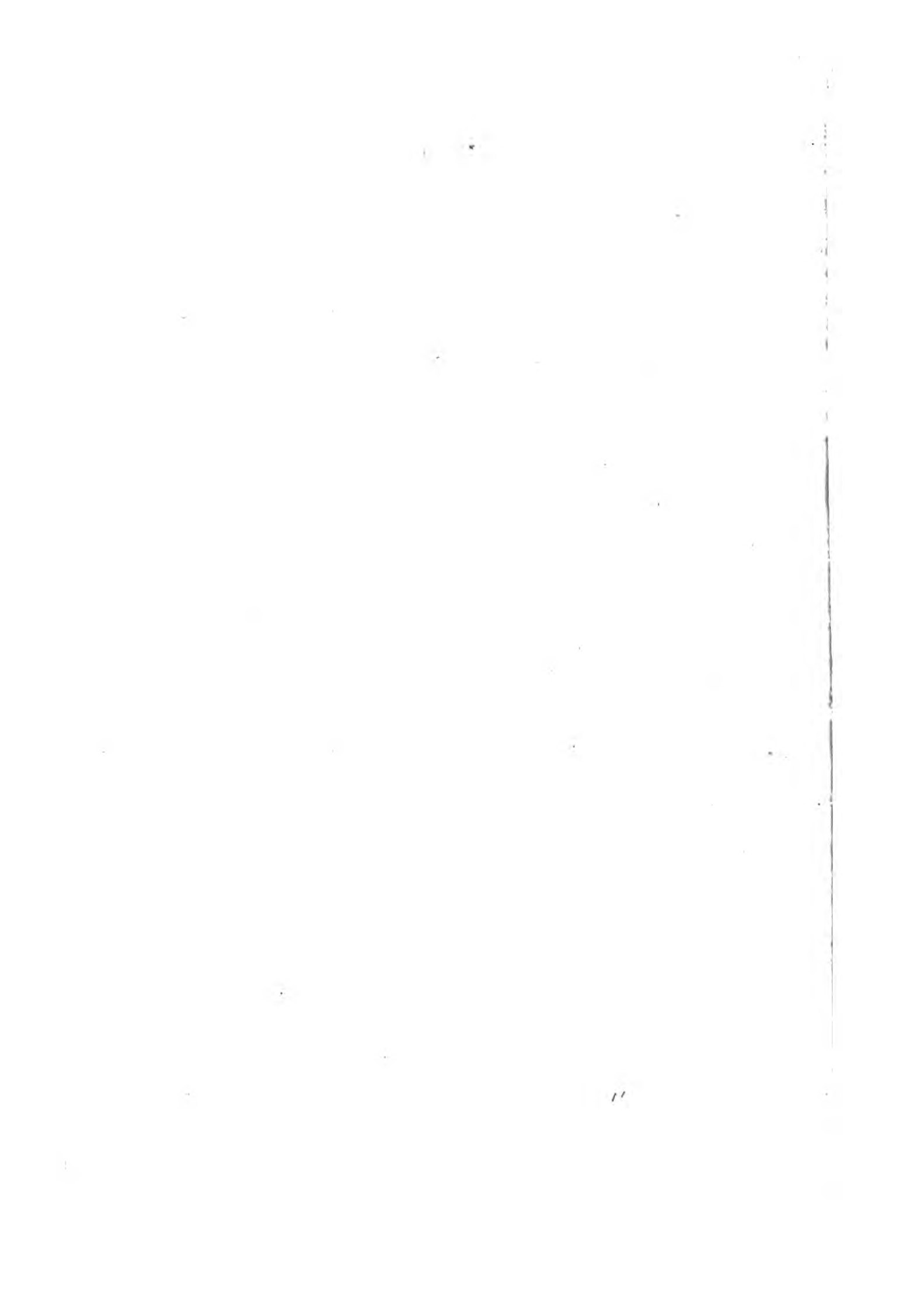
Mes. How the blind King, by what interior light
 Guided himself we know not, guided us,
 You that were present witness for yourselves ;
 And how with Theseus and the woeful Maid

Beside him, and some wondering few behind,
 Straightforward, with unhesitating step,
 That needed not his staff to feel the way,
 Led on ; till, reacht the threshold of the road
 Which leads, they say, down to the nether world,
 Beside the monumental stone that marks
 Where our King Theseus and Peirithous,
 After long warfare, plighted hands of peace,
 He stopp'd, sate down, his tatter'd raiment loos'd,
 And bade his daughter from the running brook
 Bring him wherewith himself to purify.
 Which she, resorting to the nearest field
 Of Ceres, with what decent haste she might,
 Returned, and wash'd him, and in raiment clean
 Reclothed, as to the rite of Burial due.
 And when all this was done, as for the Dead,
 Weeping himself, he folded in his arms
 His weeping child, and told her, from that hour,
 She that so long had suffer'd for his sake,
 With but the love between them to requite,
 The face of him she loved must see no more.
 And so they wept together for a while,
 Together folded in each other's arms,
 And all was silent else ; when suddenly,
 A thunder-speaking voice, as from the jaws
 Of earth that yawn'd beneath us, call'd aloud :
 "HO ! THOU THERE ! WHY SO LONG A-COMING ? COME !"
 Then Œdipus, who knew the word, and whence,
 Relax'd his folding arms, and, rising up,
 Took Theseus' hand, and, in it laying hers,
 Besought him never to desert the child,
 Nor yield her up to any against her will,
 But be to her the Father whom she lost.
 To which King Theseus having pledged his word,
 The other, folding in one last embrace,
 With one last kiss, his daughter to his heart,
 Bade her return with us and never once

Look back on what was not for any one
But for King Theseus and himself to know.
Which said, and all in awful wonder hush'd,
The weeping Daughter turn'd away with us,
Slowly, like those who leave a funeral pyre,
With us our way re-tracing ; until I,
Seiz'd with a longing I could not control,
Despite the word yet ringing in my ears,
Look'd back—and saw King Theseus standing there,
As 'twere a man smit with a sudden blaze,
His hand covering his eyes ; but Œdipus,
There—anywhere—there was not—vanisht—gone—
But, whether by some flash from Heav'n despatcht,
Or by His hand who through the shatter'd Earth
Had summon'd him in thunder, drawn below,
No living man but Theseus' self may know.



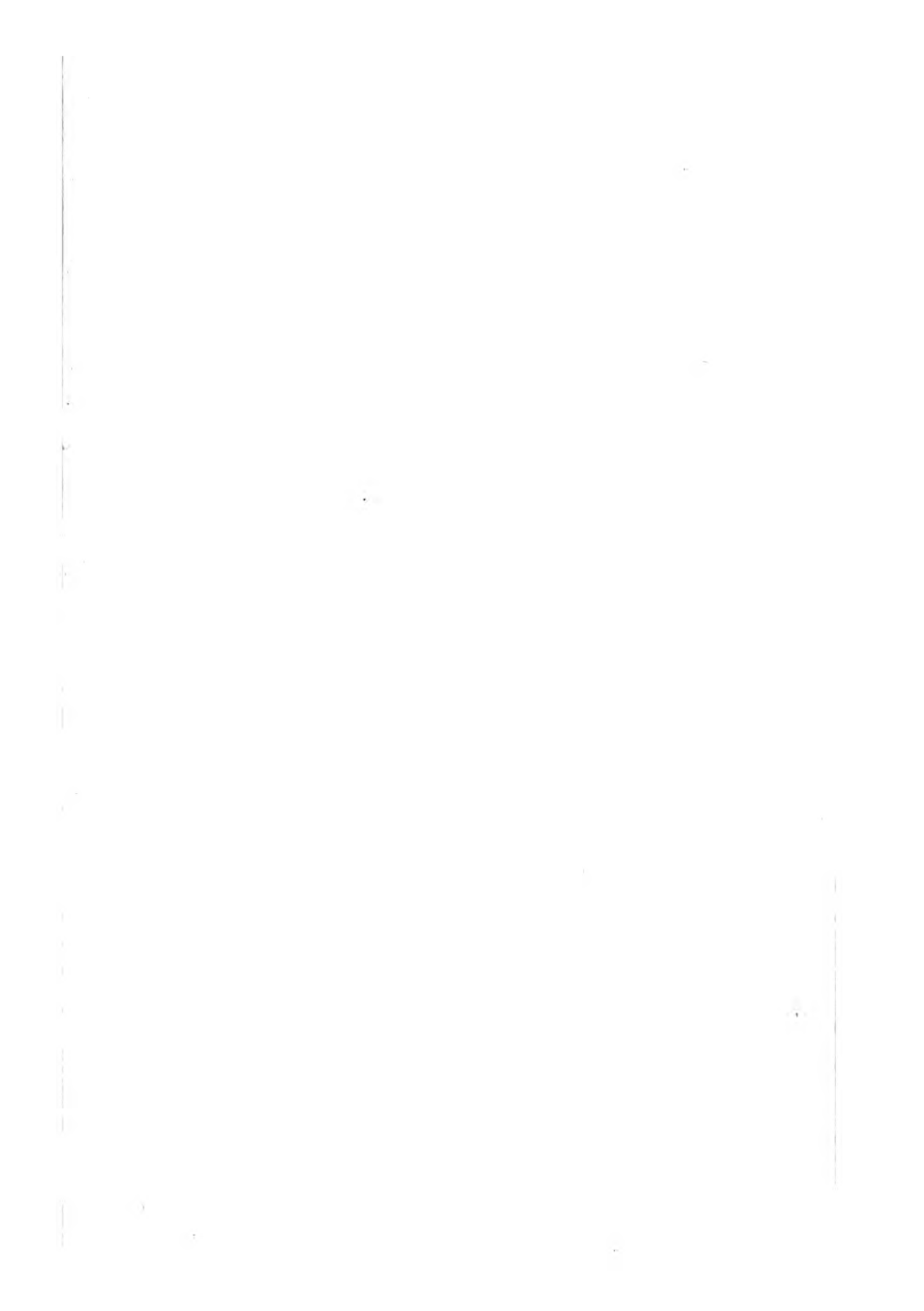




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