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# AGAMEMNON

A TRAGEDY

TAKEN FROM ÆSCHYLUS.



LONDON:

BERNARD QUARITCH,

15 PICCADILLY.

1876.

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## P R E F A C E.

*[This Version—or Per-version—of Æschylus was originally printed to be given away among Friends, who either knew nothing of the Original, or would be disposed to excuse the liberties taken with it by an unworthy hand.*

*Such as it is, however, others, whom I do not know, have asked for copies when I had no more copies to give. So Mr. Quaritch ventures on publishing it on his own account, at the risk of facing much less indulgent critics.*

*I can add little more to the Apology prefixed to the private Edition.]*

I SUPPOSE that a literal version of this play, if possible, would scarce be intelligible. Even were the dialogue always clear, the lyric Choruses, which make up so large a part, are so dark and abrupt in themselves, and therefore so much the more mangled and tormented by copyist and commentator, that the most conscientious translator must not only jump at a mean-

ing, but must bridge over a chasm; especially if he determine to complete the antiphony of Strophe and Antistrophe in English verse.

Thus, encumbered with forms which sometimes, I think, hang heavy on Æschylus himself;\* struggling with indistinct meanings, obscure allusions, and even with *puns* which some have tried to reproduce in English; this grand play, which to the scholar and the poet, lives, breathes, and moves in the dead language, has hitherto seemed to me to drag and stifle under conscientious translation into the living; that is to say, to have lost that which I think the drama can least afford to lose all the world over. And so it was that, hopeless of succeeding where as good versifiers, and better scholars, seem to me to have failed, I came first to break the bounds of Greek Tragedy; then to swerve from the Master's footsteps; and so, one

\* For instance, the long antiphonal dialogue of the Chorus debating what to do—or whether do anything—after hearing their master twice cry out (in pure Iambics also) that he is murdered.



license drawing on another to make all of a piece, arrived at the present anomalous conclusion. If it has succeeded in shaping itself into a distinct, consistent, and animated Whole, through which the reader can follow without halting, and not without accelerating interest from beginning to end, he will perhaps excuse my acknowledged transgressions, unless as well or better satisfied by some more faithful Interpreter, or by one more entitled than myself to make free with the Original.

But to re-create the Tragedy, body and soul, into English, and make the Poet free of the language which reigns over that half of the world never dreamt of in his philosophy, must be reserved — especially the Lyric part—*for* some Poet, worthy of that name, and of congenial Genius with the Greek. Would that every one such would devote himself to one such work! whether by Translation, Paraphrase, or Metaphrase, to use Dryden's definition, whose Alexander's Feast, and

some fragments of whose Plays, indicate that he, perhaps, might have rendered such a service to Æschylus and to us. Or, to go further back in our own Drama, one thinks what Marlowe might have done; himself a translator from the Greek; something akin to Æschylus in his genius; still more in his grandiose, and sometimes *authadostomous* verse; of which some lines relating to this very play fall so little short of Greek, that I shall but shame my own by quoting them before hand;

“Is this the face that launched a thousand ships,  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?  
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss!”



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

—:0:—

AGAMEMNON, *King of Argos.*

CLYTEMNESTRA, *his Queen.*

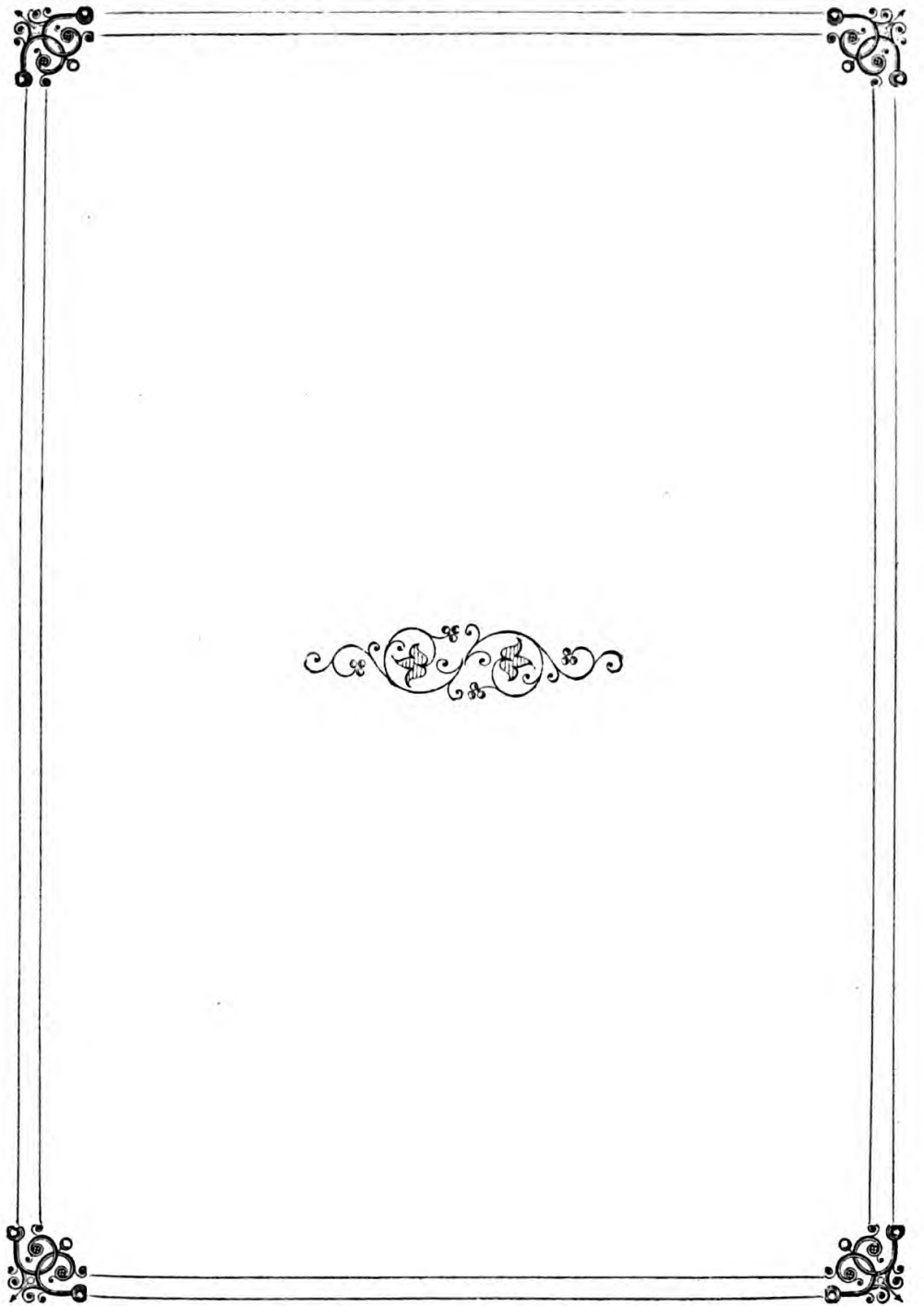
ÆGISTHUS, *his Cousin.*

CASSANDRA, *Daughter of King PRIAM.*

HERALD.

CHORUS *of ancient Councillors.*

—  
*The scene is at ARGOS.*



## AGAMEMNON.

[AGAMEMNON'S *Palace*: a *Warder on the Battlements*.]

WARDER.

[Once more, once more, and once again once more]  
I crave the Gods' compassion, and release  
From this inexorable watch, that now  
For one whole year, close as a couching dog,  
On Agamemnon's housetop I have kept,  
Contemplating the muster of the stars,  
And those transplendent Dynasties of Heav'n\*  
That, as alternately they rise and fall,  
Draw Warmth and Winter over mortal man.

\* The commentators generally understand these *λαμπροὺς δυνάστας* to mean Sun and Moon. Blomfield, I believe, admits they may be the Constellations by which the seasons were anciently marked, as in the case of the Pleiades further on in the Play. The Moon, I suppose, had no part to play in such a computation; and, as for the Sun, the beacon-fire surely implies a night-watch.





The words scarce from my lips.—Have the Gods heard?  
Or am I dreaming wide awake? as wide  
Awake I am—The Light! The Light! The Light  
Long look't for, long despair'd of, on the Height!  
Oh more to me than all the stars of night!  
More than the Morning-star!—more than the Sun  
Who breaks my nightly watch, this rising one  
Which tells me that my year-long night is done!  
When, shaking off the collar of my watch,  
I first to Clytemnestra shall report  
Such news as, if indeed a lucky cast  
For her and Argos, sure a Main to me!  
But grant the Gods, to all! A master-cast,  
More than compensating all losses past;  
And lighting up our altars with a fire  
Of Victory that never shall expire!

*[Exit Warder. Daylight gradually dawns, and enter slowly Chorus.]*

CHORUS.

I.

Another rising of the sun  
That rolls another year away,  
Sees us through the portal dun  
Dividing night and day

Like to phantoms from the crypt  
Of Morpheus or of Hades slipt,  
Through the sleeping city creeping,  
Murmuring an ancient song  
Of unvindicated wrong,  
Ten year told as ten year long.  
Since to revenge the great abuse  
To Themis done by Priam's son,  
The Brother-Princes that, co-heir  
Of Atreus, share his royal chair.  
And from the authentic hand of Zeus  
His delegated sceptre bear,  
Startled Greece with such a cry  
For Vengeance as a plunder'd pair  
Of Eagles over their aerial lair  
Screaming, to whirlpool lash the waves of air.

## II.

The Robber, blinded in his own conceit,  
Must needs think Retribution deaf and blind.  
Fool! not to know what tongue was in the wind,  
When Tellus shudder'd under flying feet,  
When stricken Ocean under alien wings;

Was there no Phœbus to denounce the flight  
From Heav'n? Nor those ten thousand Eyes of Night?  
And, were no other eye nor ear of man  
Or God awake, yet universal Pan,  
    For ever watching at the heart of things.  
And Zeus, the Warden of domestic Right,  
    And the perennial sanctity of Kings,  
Let loose the Fury who, though late  
Retarded in the leash of Fate,  
    Once loos'd, after the Sinner springs ;  
Over Ocean's heights and hollows,  
Into cave and forest follows,  
    Into fastest guarded town,  
Close on the Sinner's heel insists,  
And, turn or baffle as he lists,  
    Dogs him inexorably down.

## III.

Therefore to revenge the debt  
    To violated Justice due,  
Armèd Hellas hand in hand  
    The iron toils of Ares drew  
Over water, over land,

Over such a tract of years ;  
Draught of blood abroad, of tears  
At home, and unexhausted yet :  
All the manhood Greece could muster,  
And her hollow ships enclose ;  
All that Troy from her capacious  
Bosom pouring forth oppose ;  
By the ships, beneath the wall,  
And about the sandy plain,  
Armour-glancing files advancing,  
Fighting, flying, slaying, slain :  
And among them, and above them,  
Crested Heroes, twain by twain,  
Lance to lance, and thrust to thrust,  
Front erect, and, in a moment,  
One or other roll'd in dust.  
Till the better blood of Argos  
Soaking in the Trojan sand,  
In her silent half dispeopled  
Cities, more than half unmann'd,  
Little more of man to meet  
Than the helpless child, or hoary  
Spectre of his second childhood,  
Tottering on triple feet,



Like the idle waifs and strays  
Blown together from the ways  
Up and down the windy street.

## IV.

But thus it is ; All bides the destin'd Hour ;  
And Man, albeit with Justice at his side,  
Fights in the dark against a secret Power  
Not to be conquer'd—and how pacified ?

## V.

For, before the Navy flush'd  
Wing from shore, or lifted oar  
To foam the purple brush'd ;  
While about the altar hush'd  
Throng'd the ranks of Greece thick-fold,  
Ancient Chalcas in the bleeding  
Volume of the Future reading  
Evil things foresaw, foretold :  
That, to revenge some old disgrace  
Befall'n her sylvan train,  
Some dumb familiar of the Chace  
By Menelaus slain,

The Goddess Artemis would vex  
The fleet of Greece with storms and checks :  
That Troy should not be reached at all ;  
Or—as the Gods themselves divide  
In Heav'n to either mortal side—  
If ever reach'd, should never fall—  
Unless at such a loss and cost  
As counterpoises Won and Lost.

## VI.

The Elder of the Royal Twain  
Listen'd in silence, daring not arraign  
Ill omen, or rebuke the raven lips :  
Then taking up the tangled skein  
Of Fate, he pointed to the ships ;  
He sprang aboard : he gave the sign ;  
And blazing in his golden arms ahead,  
Drew the long Navy in a glittering line  
After him like a meteor o'er the main.

## VII.

So from Argos forth : and so  
O'er the rolling waters they,  
Till in the roaring To-and-fro  
Of rock-lockt Aulis brought to stay :

There the Goddess had them fast :  
With a bitter northern blast  
    Blew ahead and block'd the way :  
Day by day delay ; to ship  
And tackle damage and decay ;  
Day by day to Prince and People  
    Indignation and dismay.  
“ All the while that in the ribb'd  
“ Bosom of their vessels cribb'd,  
“ Tower-crowned Troy above the waters  
“ Yonder, quaffing from the horn  
“ Of Plenty, laughing them to scorn”—  
    So would one to other say ;  
And man and chief in rage and grief  
    Fretted and consumed away.

## VIII.

Then to Sacrifice anew :  
    And again within the bleeding  
    Volume of the Future reading,  
Once again the summoned Seer  
    Evil, Evil, still fore-drew.

Day by day, delay, decay  
To ship and tackle, chief and crew :  
And but one way—one only way to appease  
The Goddess, and the wind of wrath subdued ;  
One way of cure so worse than the disease,  
As, but to hear propound,  
The Princes struck their sceptres to the ground.

## IX.

After a death-deep pause,  
The Lord of man and armament his voice  
Lifted into the silence—" Terrible choice !  
" To base imprisonment of wind and flood  
" Whether consign and sacrifice the band  
" Of heroes gathered in my name and cause ;  
" Or thence redeem them by a daughter's blood—  
" A daughter's blood shed by a father's hand ;  
" Shed by a father's hand, and to atone  
" The guilt of One—who, could the God endure  
" Propitiation by the Life impure,  
" Should wash out her transgression with her own."

## X.

But, breaking on that iron multitude,  
The Father's cry no kindred echo woke :  
And in the sullen silence that ensued  
An unrelenting iron answer spoke.

## XI.

At last his neck to that unnatural yoke  
He bowed : his hand to that unnatural stroke :  
With growing purpose, obstinate as the wind  
That block'd his fleet, so block'd his better mind,  
To all the Father's heart within him blind—  
For thus it fares with men ; the seed  
Of Evil, sown by seeming Need,  
Grows, self-infatuation-nurst,  
From evil Thought to evil Deed,  
Incomprehensible at first,  
And to the end of Life accurst.

## XII.

And thus, the blood of that one innocent  
Weigh'd light against one great accomplishment,



At last—at last—in the meridian blaze  
Of Day, with all the Gods in Heaven agaze,  
And armèd Greece below—he came to dare—  
After due preparation, pomp, and prayer,  
He came—the wretched father—came to dare—  
Himself—with sacrificial knife in hand,—  
Before the sacrificial altar stand,  
To which—her sweet lips, sweetly wont to sing  
Before him in the banquet-chamber, gagg'd,  
Lest one ill word should mar the impious thing ;  
Her saffron scarf about her fluttering,  
Dumb as an all-but-speaking picture, dragg'd  
Through the remorseless soldiery—  
But soft !—

While I tell the more than oft-  
Told Story, best in silence found,  
Incense-breathing fires aloft  
Up into the rising fire,  
Into which the stars expire,  
Of Morning mingle ; and a sound  
As of Rumour at the heel  
Of some great tiding gathers ground ;  
And from portals that disclose  
Before a fragrant air that blows

Them open, what great matter, Sirs,  
Thus early Clytemnestra stirs,  
Hither through the palace gate  
Torch in hand, and step-elate,  
Advancing, with the kindled Eyes  
As of triumphant Sacrifice ?

CLYTEMNESTRA : CHORUS.

Oh, Clytemnestra, my obeisance  
Salutes your coming footstep, as her right  
Who rightly occupies the fellow-chair  
Of that now ten years widow'd of its Lord.  
But—be it at your pleasure ask'd, as answered—  
What great occasion, almost ere Night's self  
Rekindles into Morning from the Sun,  
Has woke your Altar-fire to Sacrifice ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, never yet did Night—  
Night of all Good the Mother, as men say,  
Conceive a fairer issue than To-day !  
Prepare your ear, Old man, for tidings such  
As youthful hope would scarce anticipate.

CHORUS.

I have prepared them for such news as such  
Preamble argues.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What if you be told—  
Oh mighty sum in one small figure cast!—  
That ten-year-toil'd-for Troy is ours at last?

CHORUS.

“If told!”—Once more!—the word escap'd our ears,  
With many a baffled rumour heretofore  
Slipt down the wind of wasted Expectation.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Once more then; and with unconditional  
Assurance having hit the mark indeed  
That Rumour aimed at—Troy, with all the towers  
Our burning vengeance leaves aloft, is ours.  
Now speak I plainly?

CHORUS.

Oh! to make the tears,  
That waited to bear witness in the eye,  
Start, to convict our incredulity!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh blest conviction that enriches you  
That lose the cause with all the victory.

CHORUS.

Ev'n so. But how yourself convinced before ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

By no less sure a witness than the God.

CHORUS.

What, in a dream ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I am not one to trust  
The vacillating witnesses of Sleep.

CHORUS.

Aye—but as surely undeluded by  
The waking Will, that what we strongly *would*  
Imaginates ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Aye, like a doating girl.

## CHORUS.

Oh, Clytemnestra, pardon mere Old Age  
That, after so long starving upon Hope,  
But slowly brooks his own Accomplishment.  
The Ten-year war is done then ! Troy is taken !  
The Gods have told you, and the Gods tell true—  
But—how ? and when ?

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ev'n with the very birth  
Of the good Night which mothers this best Day.

## CHORUS.

To-day ! To-night ! but of Night's work in Troy  
Who should inform the scarcely open'd ear  
Of Morn in Argos ?

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hephaistos, the lame God,  
And spriteliest of mortal messengers ;  
Who, springing from the bed of burning Troy,  
Hither, by fore-devis'd Intelligence  
Agreed upon between my Lord and me,  
Posted from dedicated Height to Height

The reach of land and sea that lies between.  
And, first to catch him and begin the game,  
Did Ida fire her forest-pine, and, waving,  
Handed him on to the Hermæan steep  
Of Lemnos; Lemnos to the summit of  
Zeus-consecrated Athos lifted; whence,  
As by the giant taken, so despatcht,  
The Torch of Conquest, traversing the wide  
Ægæan with a sunbeam-stretching stride,  
Struck up the drowsy watchers on Makistos;  
Who, flashing back the challenge, flash'd it on  
To those who watch'd on the Messapian height.  
With whose quick-kindling heather heap'd and fired  
The meteor-bearded messenger refresh't,  
Clearing Asopus at a bound, struck fire  
From old Kithæron; and, so little tired  
As waxing even wanton with the sport,  
Over the sleeping water of Gorgopis  
Sprung to the Rock of Corinth; thence to the cliffs  
Which stare down the Saronic Gulf, that now  
Began to shiver in the creeping Dawn;  
Whence, for a moment on the neighbouring top  
Of Arachnæum lighting, one last bound  
Brought him to Agamemnon's battlements.



By such gigantic strides in such a Race  
Where First and Last alike are Conquerors,  
Posted the travelling Fire, whose Father-light  
Ida conceived of burning Troy To-night.

## CHORUS.

Woman, your words man-metal ring, and strike  
Ev'n from the tuneless fibre of Old Age  
Such martial unison as from the lips  
Shall break into full Pæan by and by.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Aye, think—think—think, old man, and in your soul  
As if 'twere mirror'd in your outward eye.  
Imagine what wild work a-doing there—  
In Troy—to-night—to-day—this moment—how  
Harmoniously, as in one vessel meet  
Esil and Oil, meet Triumph and Despair,  
Sluiced by the sword along the reeking street,  
On which the Gods look down from burning air.  
Slain, slaying—dying, dead—about the dead  
Fighting to die themselves—maidens and wives.

Lockt by the locks, with their barbarian young,  
And torn away to slavery and shame  
By hands all reeking with their Champion's blood.  
Until, with execution weary, we  
Fling down our slaughter-satiated swords,  
To gorge ourselves on the unfinisht feasts  
Of poor old Priam and his sons; and then,  
Roll'd on rich couches never spread for us,  
Ev'n now our sleep-besotted foreheads turn  
Up to the very Sun that rises here.  
Such is the lawful game of those who win  
Upon so just a quarrel—so long fought :  
Provided always that, with jealous care,  
Retaliation wreaking upon those  
Who our insulted Gods upon them drew,  
We push not Riot to *their* Altar-foot ;  
Remembering, on whichever mortal side  
Engaged, the Gods are Gods in heav'n and earth,  
And not to be insulted unaveng'd.  
This let us take to heart, and keep in sight ;  
Lest, having run victoriously thus far,  
And turn'd the very pillar of our race,  
Before we reach the long'd-for goal of Home  
Nemesis overtake, or trip us up ;

Some ere safe shipp'd : or, launcht upon the foam,  
Ere touch'd the threshold of their native shore ;  
Yea, or that reach'd, the threshold of the door  
Of their own home ; from whatsoever corner  
The jealous Power is ever on the watch  
To compass arrogant Prosperity.  
These are a woman's words ; for men to take,  
Or disregarded drop them, as they will ;  
Enough for me, if having won the stake,  
I pray the Gods with us to keep it still.

[*Exit* CLYTEMNESTRA.]

CHORUS.

Oh, sacred Night,  
From whose unfathomable breast  
Creative Order formed and saw  
Chaos emerging into Law :  
And now, committed with Eternal Right,  
Who didst with star-entangled net invest  
So close the guilty City as she slept,  
That when the deadly fisher came to draw,  
Not one of all the guilty fry through crept.

## II.

Oh, Nemesis,  
Night's daughter ! in whose bosoming abyss  
Secretly sitting by the Sinner's sleeve,  
Thou didst with self-confusion counterweave  
His plot ; and when the fool his arrow sped,  
Thine after-shot didst only not dismiss  
Till certain not to miss the guilty head.

## III.

Some think the Godhead, couching at his ease  
Deep in the purple Heav'ns, serenely sees  
Insult the altar of Eternal Right.  
Fools ! For though Fortune seem to misrequite,  
And Retribution for awhile forget ;  
Sooner or later she reclaims the debt  
With usury that triples the amount  
Of Nemesis with running Time's account.

## IV.

For soon or late sardonic Fate  
With Man against himself conspires ;  
Puts on the mask of his desires :  
Up the steps of Time elate

Leads him blinded with his pride,  
And gathering as he goes along  
The fuel of his suicide :  
Until having topt the pyre  
Which Destiny permits no higher,  
Ambition sets himself on fire ;  
In conflagration like the crime  
Conspicuous through the world and time  
Down amidst his brazen walls  
The accumulated Idol falls  
To shapeless ashes ; Demigod  
Under the vulgar hoof down-trod  
Whose neck he trod on ; not an eye  
To weep his fall, nor lip to sigh  
For him a prayer ; or, if there were,  
No God to listen, or reply.

v.

And as the son his father's guilt may rue ;  
And, by retort of justice, what the son  
Has sinn'd, to ruin on the father run ;  
So may the many help to pay the due  
Of guilt, remotely implicate with one.

And as the tree 'neath which a felon cowers,  
With all its branch is blasted by the bolt  
Of Justice launch'd from Heav'n at *his* revolt ;  
Thus with old Priam, with his royal line,  
Kindred and people ; yea, the very towers  
They crouch'd in, built by masonry divine.

## VI.

Like a dream through sleep she glided  
Through the silent city gate,  
By a guilty Hermes guided  
On the feather'd feet of Theft ;  
Leaving between those she left  
And those she fled to lighted Discord,  
Unextinguishable Hate ;  
Leaving him whom least she should,  
Menelaus brave and good,  
Scarce believing in the mutter'd  
Rumour, in the worse than utter'd  
Omen of the wailing maidens,  
Of the shaken hoary head :  
Of deserted board and bed.  
For the phantom of the lost one  
Haunts him in the wonted places ;

Hall and Chamber, which he paces  
Hither, Thither, listening, looking,  
Phantom-like himself alone ;  
Till he comes to loathe the faces  
Of the marble mute Colossi,  
Godlike Forms, and half-divine,  
Founders of the Royal line,  
Who with all unalter'd Quiet  
Witness all and make no sign.  
But the silence of the chambers,  
And the shaken hoary head,  
And the voices of the mourning  
Women, and of ocean wailing,  
Over which with unavailing  
Arms he reaches, as to hail  
The phantom of a flying sail—  
All but answer, Fled ! fled ! fled !  
False ! dishonour'd ! worse than dead !

## VII.

At last the sun goes down along the bay,  
And with him drags detested Day.  
He sleeps ; and, dream-like as she fled, beside  
His pillow, Dream indeed, behold ! his Bride

Once more in more than bridal beauty stands ;  
But, ever as he reaches forth his hands,  
Slips from them back into the viewless deep,  
On those soft silent wings that walk the ways of  
sleep.

## VIII.

Not beside thee in the chamber,  
Menelaus, any more ;  
But with him she fled with, pillow'd  
On the summer softly-billow'd  
Ocean, into dimple wreathing  
Underneath a breeze of amber  
Air that, as from Eros breathing,  
Fill'd the sail and flew before ;  
Floating on the summer seas  
Like some sweet Effigies  
Of Eirene's self, or sweeter  
Aphrodite, sweeter still :  
With the Shepherd, from whose luckless  
Hand upon the Phrygian hill,  
Of the three Immortals, She



The fatal prize of Beauty bore,  
Floating with him o'er the foam  
She rose from, to the shepherd's home  
On the Ionian shore.

## IX.

Down from the City to the water-side  
Old Priam, with his princely retinue.  
By many a wondering Phrygian follow'd, drew  
To welcome and bear in the Goddess-bride  
Whom some propitious wind of Fortune blew  
From whence they knew not o'er the waters wide  
Among the Trojan people to abide  
A pledge of Love and Joy for ever—Yes ;  
As one who drawing from the leopardess  
Her suckling cub, and, fascinated by  
The little Savage of the lustrous eye,  
Bears home, for all to fondle and caress,  
And be the very darling of the house  
It makes a den of blood of by and by.

## X.

For the wind, that amber blew,  
Tempest in its bosom drew ;

Soon began to hiss and roar ;  
And the sweet Effigies  
That amber breeze and summer seas  
Had wafted to the Ionian shore,  
By swift metamorphosis  
Turn'd into some hideous, hated,  
Fury of Revenge, and fated  
Hierophant of Nemesis ;  
Who, growing with the day and hour,  
Grasp'd the wall, and topp'd the tower,  
And, when the time came, by its throat  
The victim City seized, and smote.

## XI.

But now to be resolv'd, whether indeed  
Those fires of Night spoke truly, or mistold  
To cheat a doating woman ; for, Behold,  
Advancing from the shore with solemn speed,  
A Herald from the Fleet, his footsteps roll'd  
In dust, Haste's thirsty consort, but his brow  
Check-shadow'd with the nodding Olive-bough ;  
Who shall interpret us the speechless sign  
Of the fork'd tongue that preys upon the pine.

## HERALD: CHORUS.

Oh, Fatherland of Argos, back to whom  
After ten years do I indeed return  
Under the dawn of this auspicious day!  
Of all the parted anchors of lost Hope  
That this, depended least on, yet should hold;  
Amid so many men to me so dear  
About me dying, yet myself exempt  
Return to live what yet of life remains  
Among my own; among my own at last  
To share the blest communion of the Dead!  
Oh, welcome, welcome, welcome once again  
My own dear Country and the light she draws  
From the benignant Heav'ns; and all the Gods  
Who guard her; Zeus Protector first of all;  
And Phœbus, by this all-restoring dawn  
Who heals the wounds his arrows dealt so fast  
Beside Scamander; and not last nor least  
Among the Powers engaged upon our side,  
Hermes, the Herald's Patron, and his Pride;  
Who, having brought me safely through the war,  
Now brings me back to tell the victory  
Into my own belovèd country's ear;

Who, all the more by us, the more away,  
Beloved, will greet with Welcome no less dear  
This remnant of the unremorseful spear.  
And, oh, you Temples, Palaces, and throned  
Colossi, that affront the rising sun,  
If ever yet, your marble foreheads now  
Bathe in the splendour of returning Day  
To welcome back your so long absent Lord;  
Who by Zeus' self directed to the spot  
Of Vengeance, and the special instrument  
Of Retribution put into his hands,  
Has undermined, uprooted, and destroy'd,  
Till scarce one stone upon another stands,  
The famous Citadel, that, deeply cast  
For crime, has all the forfeit paid at last.

## CHORUS.

Oh hail and welcome, Herald of good news!  
Welcome and hail! and doubt not thy return  
As dear to us as thee.

## HERALD.

To me so dear,  
After so long despaired of, that, for fear

Life's after-draught the present should belie,  
One might implore the Gods ev'n now to die !

CHORUS.

Oh, your soul hunger'd after home !

HERALD.

So sore,  
That sudden satisfaction of once more  
Return weeps out its surfeit at my eyes.

CHORUS.

And our's, you see, contagiously, no less  
The same long grief, and sudden joy, confess.

HERALD.

What ! Argos for her missing children yearned  
As they for her, then ?

CHORUS.

Aye ; perhaps and more,  
Already pining with an inward sore.

HERALD.

How so ?

CHORUS.

Nay, Silence, that has best endured  
The pain, may best dismiss the memory.

HERALD.

Ev'n so. For who, unless the God himself,  
Expects to live his life without a flaw ?  
Why, once begin to open that account,  
Might not *we* tell for ten good years to come  
Of all we suffer'd in the ten gone by ?  
Not the mere course and casualty of war,  
Alarum, March, Battle, and such hard knocks  
As foe with foe expects to give and take ;  
But all the complement of miseries  
That go to swell a long campaign's account.  
Cramm'd close aboard the ships, hard bed, hard  
board :  
Or worse perhaps while foraging ashore  
In winter time ; when, if not from the walls,  
Pelted from Heav'n by Day, to couch by Night

Between the falling dews and rising damps  
That elf'd the locks, and set the body fast  
With cramp and ague ; or, to mend the matter,  
Good mother Ida from her winter top  
Flinging us down a coverlet of snow.  
Or worst perhaps in Summer, toiling in  
The bloody harvest-field of torrid sand,  
When not an air stirr'd the fierce Asian noon,  
And ev'n the sea sleep-sicken'd in his bed.  
But why lament the Past, as past it is ?  
If idle for the Dead who feel no more,  
Idler for us to whom this blissful Dawn  
Shines doubly bright against the stormy Past ;  
Who, after such predicament and toil,  
Boast, once more standing on our mother soil,  
That Zeus, who sent us to revenge the crime  
Upon the guilty people, now recalls  
To hang their trophies on our temple walls  
For monumental heir-looms to all time.

## CHORUS.

Oh, but Old age, however slow to learn,  
Not slow to learn, nor after you repeat,

Lesson so welcome, Herald of the Fleet !  
But here is Clytemnestra ; be you first  
To bless her ears, as mine, with news so sweet.

CLYTEMNESTRA : HERALD : CHORUS.

I sang my Song of Triumph ere he came,  
Alone I sang it while the City slept,  
And these wise Senators, with winking eyes,  
Look'd grave, and weigh'd mistrustfully my word,  
As the light coinage of a woman's brain.  
And so they went their way. But not the less  
From those false fires I lit my altar up,  
And, woman-wise, held on my song, until  
The City taking up the note from me,  
Scarce knowing why, about that altar flock'd,  
Where, like the Priest of Victory, I stood,  
Torch-handed, drenching in triumphant wine  
The flame that from the smouldering incense rose.  
Now what more needs ? This Herald of the Day  
Adds but another witness to the Night ;  
And I will hear no more from other lips,  
Till from my husband Agamemnon all,



Whom with all honour I prepare to meet.  
Oh, to a loyal woman what so sweet  
As once more wide the gate of welcome fling  
To the lov'd Husband whom the Gods once more  
After long travail home triumphant bring;  
Where he shall find her, as he left before,  
Fixt like a trusty watchdog at the door,  
Tractable him-ward, but inveterate  
Against the doubtful stranger at the gate;  
And not a seal within the house but still  
Inviolatè, under a woman's trust  
Incapable of taint as gold of rust.

[*Exit* CLYTEMNESTRA.]

HERALD: CHORUS.

A boast not misbeseeming a true woman.

CHORUS.

For then no boast at all. But she says well;  
And Time interprets all. Enough for us  
To praise the Gods for Agamemnon's safe,  
And more than safe return. And Menelaus,  
The other half of Argos—What of him?

HERALD.

Those that I most would gladden with good news,  
And on a day like this—with fair but false  
I dare not.

CHORUS.

What, must fair then needs be false ?

HERALD.

Old man, the Gods grant somewhat, and withhold  
As seems them good : a time there is for Praise,  
A time for Supplication : nor is it well  
To twit the celebration of their largess,  
Reminding them of something they withhold.

CHORUS.

Yet till we know how much withheld or granted,  
We know not how the balance to adjust  
Of Supplication or of Praise.

HERALD.

Alas,  
The Herald who returns with downcast eyes,

And leafless brow prophetic of Reverse,  
Let him at once—at once let him, I say,  
Lay the whole burden of Ill-tidings down  
In the mid-market place. But why should one  
Returning with the garland on his brow  
Be stopt to name the single missing leaf  
Of which the Gods have stinted us!

CHORUS.

Alas,  
The putting of a fearful question by  
Is but to ill conjecture worse reply!  
You bring not back then—do not leave behind—  
What Menelaus was?

HERALD.

The Gods forbid!  
Safe shipp'd with all the host.

CHORUS.

Well but—how then?  
Surely no tempest—

HERALD.

Ay ! by that one word  
Hitting the centre of a boundless sorrow !

CHORUS.

Well, but if peradventure from the fleet  
Parted—not lost ?

HERALD.

None but the eye of Day,  
Now woke, knows all the havoc of the Night.  
For Night it was ; all safe aboard—sail set,  
And oars all beating home ; when suddenly,  
As if those old antagonists had sworn  
New strife between themselves for our destruction,  
The sea, that tamely let us mount his back,  
Began to roar and plunge under a lash  
Of tempest from the thundering heavens so fierce  
As, falling on our fluttering navy, some  
Scatter'd, or whirl'd away like flakes of foam :  
Or, huddling wave on wave, so ship on ship  
Like fighting eagles on each other fell,

And beak, and wing, and claws, entangled, tore  
To pieces one another, or dragg'd down.  
So when at last the tardy-rising Sun  
Survey'd, and show'd, the havoc Night had done,  
We, whom some God—or Fortune's self, I think—  
Seizing the helm, had steer'd as man could not,  
Beheld the waste Ægæan wilderness  
Strown with the shatter'd forest of the fleet,  
Trunk, branch, and foliage ; and yet worse, I ween,  
The flower of Argos floating dead between.  
Then we, scarce trusting in our own escape,  
And saving such as yet had life to save,  
Along the heaving wilderness of wave  
Went ruminating, who of those we miss'd  
Might yet survive, who lost : the saved no doubt,  
As sadly speculating after us.  
Of whom, if Menelaus—and the Sun,  
(A prayer which all the Gods in Heav'n fulfil !)  
Behold him on the water breathing still ;  
Doubt not that Zeus, under whose special showers  
And suns the royal growth of Atreus' towers,  
Will not let perish stem, and branch, and fruit,  
By loss of one corroborating root.

## CHORUS.

Oh, Helen, Helen, Helen ! oh, fair name  
And fatal, of the fatal-fairest dame  
That ever blest or blinded human eyes !  
Of mortal women Queen beyond compare,  
As she whom the foam lifted to the skies  
Is Queen of all who breathe immortal air !  
Whoever, and from whatsoever wells  
Of Divination, drew the syllables  
By which we name thee ; who shall ever dare  
In after time the fatal name to wear,  
Or would, to be so fatal, be so fair !  
Whose dowry was a Husband's shame ;  
Whose nuptial torch was Troy in flame ;  
Whose bridal Chorus, groans and cries ;  
Whose banquet, brave men's obsequies ;  
Whose Hymenæal retinue,  
The wingèd dogs of War that flew  
Over lands and over seas,  
Following the tainted breeze,  
Till, Scamander reed among,  
Their fiery breath and bloody tongue  
The fatal quarry found and slew ;

And, having done the work to which  
The God himself halloo'd them, back  
Return a maim'd and scatter'd pack.

## II.

And he for whose especial cause  
Zeus his wingèd instrument  
With the lightning in his claws  
From the throne of thunder sent :  
He for whom the sword was drawn :  
Mountain ashes fell'd and sawn ;  
And the armèd host of Hellas  
Cramm'd within them, to discharge  
On the shore to bleed at large ;  
He, in mid accomplishment  
Of Justice, from his glory rent !  
What ten years had hardly won,  
In a single night undone ;  
And on earth what saved and gain'd,  
By the raven sea distraïn'd.

## III.

Such is the sorrow of this royal house ;  
But none in all the City but forlorn

Under its own peculiar sorrow bows.  
For the stern God who, deaf to human love,  
Grudges the least abridgment of the tale  
Of human blood once pledg'd to him, above  
The centre of the murder-dealing crowd  
Suspends in air his sanguinary scale ;  
And for the blooming Hero gone a-field  
Homeward remits a beggarly return  
Of empty helmet, fallen sword and shield,  
And some light ashes in a little urn.

## IV.

Then wild and high goes up the cry  
To heav'n, " So true ! so brave ! so fair !  
" The young colt of the flowing hair  
" And flaming eye, and now—look there !  
" Ashes and arms !" or, " Left behind  
" Unburied, in the sun and wind  
" To wither, or become the feast  
" Of bird obscene, or unclean beast ;  
" The good, the brave, without a grave—  
" All to redeem *her* from the shame  
" To which she sold her self and name !"—



For such insinuation in the dark  
About the City travels like a spark ;  
Till the pent tempest into lightning breaks,  
And takes the topmost pinnacle for mark.

v.

But avaunt all evil omen!  
Perish many, so the State  
They die for live inviolate ;  
Which, were all her mortal leafage  
In the blast of Ares scatter'd,  
So herself at heart unshatter'd,  
In due season she retrieves  
All her wasted wealth of leaves,  
And age on age shall spread and rise  
To cover earth and breathe the skies.  
While the rival at her side  
Who the wrath of Heav'n defied,  
By the lashing blast, or flashing  
Bolt of Heav'n comes thunder-crashing,  
Top and lop, and trunk and bough,  
Down, for ever down. And now,  
He to whom the Zeus of Vengeance

Did commit the bolt of Fate—  
Agamemnon—how shall I  
With a Pæan not too high  
For mortal glory, to provoke  
From the Gods a counter-stroke,  
Nor below desert so lofty,  
    Suitably felicitate?  
Such as chasten'd Age for due  
May give, and Manhood take for true.  
For, as many men comply  
From founts no deeper than the eye  
    With other's sorrows ; many more,  
With a Welcome from the lips,  
That far the halting heart outstrips,  
    Fortune's Idol fall before.  
Son of Atreus, I premise,  
    When at first the means and manhood  
Of the cities thou didst stake  
For a wanton woman's sake,  
    I might grudge the sacrifice ;  
    But, the warfare once begun,  
Hardly fought and hardly won,  
Now from Glory's overflowing  
Horn of Welcome all her glowing

Honours, and with uninvincible  
Hand, before your advent throwing,  
I salute, and bid thee welcome,  
Son of Atreus, Agamemnon,  
Zeus' revenging Right-hand, Lord  
Of taken Troy and righted Greece :  
Bid thee from the roving throne  
Of War the reeking steed release ;  
Leave the laurel'd ship to ride  
Anchor'd in her country's side,  
And resume the royal helm  
Of thy long-abandon'd realm :  
What about the State or Throne  
Of good or evil since has grown,  
Alter, cancel, or complete ;  
And to well or evil-doer,  
Even-handed Justice mete.

*Enter AGAMEMNON in his chariot, CASSANDRA following  
in another.*

AGAMEMNON.

First, as first due, my Country I salute,  
And all her tutelary Gods ; all those  
Who, having sent me forth, now bring me back,  
After full retribution wrought on those  
Who retribution owed us, and the Gods  
In full consistory determined ; each,  
With scarce a swerving eye to Mercy's side,  
Dropping his vote into the urn of blood.  
Caught and consuming in whose fiery wrath,  
The stately City, from her panting ashes  
Into the face of the revolted heavens  
Gusts of expiring opulence puffs up.\*  
For which, I say, the Gods alone be thank'd ;  
By whose connivance round about the wall  
We drew the belt of Ares, and laid bare

---

\* Those who know the Greek will scarce accuse me of over-alliteration  
in this line, which runs in the original thus,

Spodos propempei pionas ploutou pnoas

The flank of Ilium to the Lion-horse,\*  
Who sprung by night over the city wall,  
And foaled his iron progeny within,  
About the setting of the Pleiades.†  
Thus much by way of prelude to the Gods.  
For you, oh white-hair'd senators of Argos,  
Your measur'd Welcome I receive for just ;  
Aware on what a tickle base of fortune  
The monument of human Glory stands ;  
And, for humane congratulation, knowing  
How, smile as may the mask, the man behind  
Frets at the fortune that degrades his own.  
This, having heard of from the wise, myself,  
From long experience in the ways of men,  
Can vouch for—what a shadow of a shade  
Is human loyalty ; and, as a proof,  
Of all the Host that filled the Grecian ship,

---

\* Dr Donaldson tells us in his *Varronianus*, (says Paley) that the Lion was the symbol of the Atreidæ ; and Pausanias writes that part of the ancient walls of Mycenæ was yet standing in his day, and Lions on the gate. Wordsworth's *Athens* says the Lion was often set up to commemorate a victory.

† " About the setting of the Pleiades," is about the end of Autumn.

And pour'd at large along the field of Troy,  
One only Chief—and he, too, like yourself,  
At first with little stomach for the cause—  
The wise Odysseus—once in harness, he  
With all his might pull'd in the yoke with me,  
Through envy, obloquy, and opposition :  
And in Odysseus' honour, live or dead—  
For yet we know not which—shall this be said.  
Of which enough. For other things of moment  
To which you point, or human or divine,  
We shall forthwith consider and adjudge  
In seasonable council ; what is well,  
Or in our absence well deserving, well  
Establish and requite ; what not, redress  
With salutary caution ; or, if need,  
With the sharp edge of Justice ; and to health  
Restore, and right, our ailing Commonwealth.  
Now, first of all, by my own altar-hearth  
To thank the Gods for my return, and pray  
That Victory, which thus far by my side  
Has flown with us, with us may still abide.

*Enter CLYTEMNESTRA from the Palace.*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh Men of Argos, count it not a shame  
If a fond wife, and one whom riper years  
From Youth's becoming bashfulness excuse,  
Dares own her love before the face of men ;  
Nor leaving it for others to enhance,  
Simply declares the wretched widowhood  
Which these ten years she has endured, since first  
Her husband Agamemnon went to Troy.  
'Tis no light matter, let me tell you, Sirs,  
A woman left in charge of house and home—  
And when that house and home a Kingdom—and  
She left alone to rule it—and ten years !  
Beside dissent and discontent at home,  
Storm'd from abroad with contrary reports,  
Now fair, now foul ; but still as time wore on  
Growing more desperate ; as dangerous  
Unto the widow'd kingdom as herself.  
Why, had my husband there but half the wounds  
Fame stabbed him with, he were before me now,  
Not the whole man we see him, but a body  
Gash'd into network ; aye, or had he died

But half as often as Report gave out,  
He would have needed thrice the cloak of earth  
To cover him, that triple Geryon  
Lies buried under in the world below.  
Thus, back and forward baffled, and at last  
So desperate—that, if I be here alive  
To tell the tale, no thanks to me for that,  
Whose hands had twisted round my neck the  
noose

Which others loosen'd—my Orestes too  
In whose expanding manhood day by day  
My Husband I perused—and, by the way,  
Whom wonder not, my Lord, not seeing here ;  
My simple mother-love, and jealousy  
Of civic treason—ever as you know,  
Most apt to kindle when the lord away—  
Having bestow'd him, out of danger's reach,  
With Strophius of Phocis, wholly yours  
Bound by the generous usages of war,  
That make the once-won foe so fast a friend.  
Thus, widow'd of my son as of his sire,  
No wonder if I wept—not drops, but showers,  
The ten years' night through which I watch'd in  
vain



The star that was to bring him back to me ;  
Or, if I slept, a sleep so thin as scared  
Even at the slight incursion of the gnat ;  
And yet more thick with visionary terrors  
Than thrice the waking while had occupied.  
Well, I have borne all this : all this have borne,  
Without a grudge against the wanderer,  
Whose now return makes more than rich amends  
For all ungrateful absence—Agamemnon,  
My Lord and Husband ; Lord of Argos ; Troy's  
Confunder ; Mainstay of the realm of Greece ;  
And Master-column of the house of Atreus—  
Oh wonder not if I accumulate  
All honour and endearment on his head !  
If to his country, how much more to me,  
Welcome, as land to sailors long at sea,  
Or water in the desert ; whose return  
Is fire to the forsaken winter-hearth ;  
Whose presence, like the rooted Household Tree  
That, winter-dead so long, anew puts forth  
To shield us from the Dogstar, what time Zeus  
Wrings the tart vintage into blissful juice.  
Down from the chariot thou standest in,  
Crown'd with the flaming towers of Troy, descend,

And to this palace, rich indeed with thee,  
But beggar-poor without, return ! And ye,  
My women, carpet all the way before,  
From the triumphal carriage to the door,  
With all the gold and purple in the chest  
Stor'd these ten years ; and to what purpose stor'd,  
Unless to strow the footsteps of their Lord  
Returning to his unexpected rest !

## AGAMEMNON.

Daughter of Leda, Mistress of my house,  
Beware lest loving Welcome of your Lord,  
Measuring itself by his protracted absence,  
Exceed the bound of rightful compliment,  
And better left to other lips than yours.  
Address me not, address me not, I say  
With dust-adoring adulation, meeter  
For some barbarian Despot from his slave ;  
Nor with invidious Purple strew my way,  
Fit only for the footstep of a God  
Lighting from Heav'n to earth. Let whoso will  
Trample their glories underfoot, not I.  
Woman, I charge you, honour me no more  
Than as the man I am ; if honour-worth,

Needing no other trapping but the fame  
Of the good deed I clothe myself withal ;  
And knowing that, of all their gifts to man,  
No greater gift than Self-sobriety  
The Gods vouchsafe him in the race of life :  
Which, after thus far running, if I reach  
The goal in peace, it shall be well for me.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Why, how think you old Priam would have walk'd  
Had he return'd to Troy your conqueror,  
As you to Hellas his ?

AGAMEMNON.

What then ? Perhaps  
Voluptuary Asiatic-like,  
On gold and purple.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Well, and grudging this,  
When all that out before your footstep flows  
Ebbs back into the treasury again ;  
Think how much more, had Fate the tables turn'd,

Irrevocably from those coffers gone,  
For those barbarian feet to walk upon,  
To buy your ransom back ?

AGAMEMNON.

Enough, enough !

I know my reason.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What ! the jealous God ?  
Or, peradventure, yet more envious Man ?

AGAMEMNON.

And *that* of no small moment.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

No ; the one  
Sure proof of having won what others would.

AGAMEMNON.

No matter—Strife but ill becomes a woman.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And frank submission to her simple wish  
How well becomes the Soldier in his strength ?

AGAMEMNON.

And I must then submit ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Aye, Agamemnon,  
Deny me not this first Desire on this  
First Morning of your long-desired Return.

AGAMEMNON.

But not till I have put these sandals off,  
That, slave-like, too officiously would pander  
Between the purple and my dainty feet.  
For fear, for fear indeed, some Jealous eye  
From heav'n above, or earth below, should strike  
The Man who walks the earth Immortal-like.  
So much for that. For this same royal maid,  
Cassandra, daughter of King Priamus ,  
And whom, as flower of all the spoil of Troy,  
The host of Hellas dedicates to me ;  
Entreat her gently ; knowing well that none  
But submit hardly to a foreign yoke ;  
And those of Royal blood most hardly broke.  
That if I sin thus trampling underfoot  
A woof in which the Heav'ns themselves are dyed,

The jealous God may less resent his crime,  
Who mingles human mercy with his pride.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

The Sea there is, and shall the sea be dried ?  
Fount inexhaustible of purple grain  
Than all the wardrobes of the world could drain ;  
And Earth there is, whose dusky closets hide  
The precious metal wherewith not in vain  
The Gods themselves this Royal house provide ;  
For what occasion worthier, or more meet,  
Than now to carpet the victorious feet  
Of Him who, thus far having done their will,  
Shall now their last About-to-be fulfil.

[AGAMEMNON *descends from his chariot, and goes with*  
CLYTEMNESTRA *into the house, CASSANDRA remaining.*]

## CHORUS.

About the nations runs a saw,  
That Over-good ill-fortune breeds ;  
And true that, by the mortal law,

Fortune her spoilt children feeds  
To surfeit, such as sows the seeds  
Of Insolence, that, as it grows,  
The flower of Self-repentance blows.  
And true that Virtue often leaves  
The marble walls and roofs of kings,  
And underneath the poor man's eaves  
On smoky rafter folds her wings.

## II.

Thus the famous city, flown  
With insolence, and overgrown,  
Is humbled : all her splendour blown  
To smoke : her glory laid in dust ;  
Who shall say by doom unjust ?  
But should He to whom the wrong  
Was done, and Zeus himself made strong  
To do the vengeance He decreed—  
At last returning with the meed  
He wrought for—should the jealous Eye  
That blights full-blown prosperity  
Pursue him—then indeed, indeed,

Man should hoot and scare aloof  
Good-fortune lighting on the roof ;  
Yea, even Virtue's self forsake  
If Glory follow'd in the wake ;  
Seeing bravest, best, and wisest  
But the playthings of a day,  
Which a shadow can trip over,  
And a breath can puff away.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*re-entering*).

Yet for a moment let me look on her—  
This, then, is Priam's daughter—  
Cassandra, and a Prophetess, whom Zeus  
Has giv'n into my hands to minister  
Among my slaves. Didst thou prophesy that ?  
Well—some more famous have so fall'n before—  
Ev'n Herakles, the son of Zeus, they say  
Was sold, and bow'd his shoulder to the yoke.

CHORUS.

And, if needs must a captive, better far  
Of some old house that affluent Time himself



Has taught the measure of prosperity,  
Than drunk with sudden superfluity.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ev'n so. You hear? Therefore at once descend  
From that triumphal chariot—And yet  
She keeps her station still, her laurel on,  
Disdaining to make answer.

CHORUS.

Nay, perhaps,  
Like some stray swallow blown across the seas,  
Interpreting no twitter but her own.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

But, if barbarian, still interpreting  
The universal language of the hand.

CHORUS.

Which yet again she does not seem to see,  
Staring before her with wide-open eyes  
As in a trance.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Aye, aye, a prophetess—  
Wench of Apollo once, and now—the King's!  
A time will come for her. See you to it:  
A greater business now is on my hands:  
For lo! the fire of Sacrifice is lit,  
And the grand victim by the altar stands.

[*Exit* CLYTEMNESTRA.]

CHORUS (*continuing*).

Still a mutter'd and half-blind  
Superstition haunts mankind,  
That, by some divine decree  
Yet by mortal undivin'd,  
Mortal Fortune must not over-  
Leap the bound he cannot see;  
For that even wisest labour  
Lofty-building, builds to fall,  
Evermore a jealous neighbour  
Undermining floor and wall.  
So that on the smoothest water  
Sailing, in a cloudless sky,  
The wary merchant overboard  
Flings something of his precious hoard

To pacify the jealous eye,  
That will not suffer man to swell  
Over human measure. Well,  
As the Gods have order'd we  
Must take—I know not—let it be.  
But, by rule of retribution,  
Hidden, too, from human eyes,  
Fortune in her revolution,  
If she fall, shall fall to rise :  
And the hand of Zeus dispenses  
Even measure in the main :  
One short harvest recompenses  
With a glut of golden grain ;  
So but men in patience wait  
Fortune's counter-revolution  
Axled on eternal Fate ;  
And the Sisters three that twine,  
Cut not short the vital line ;  
For indeed the purple seed  
Of life once shed—

CASSANDRA.

Phœbus Apollo !

CHORUS.

Hark!

The lips at last unlocking.

CASSANDRA.

Phœbus! Phœbus!

CHORUS.

Well, what of Phœbus, maiden? though a name  
'Tis but disparagement to call upon  
In misery.

CASSANDRA.

Apollo! Apollo! Again!  
Oh, the burning arrow through the brain!  
Phœbus Apollo! Apollo!

CHORUS.

Seemingly  
Possess'd indeed—whether by—

CASSANDRA.

Phœbus! Phœbus!  
Thorough trampled ashes, blood, and fiery rain,

Over water seething, and behind the breathing  
Warhorse in the darkness—till you rose again  
Took the helm—took the rein—

CHORUS.

As one that half asleep at dawn recalls  
A night of Horror!

CASSANDRA.

Hither, whither, Phœbus? And with whom,  
Leading me, lighting me—

CHORUS.

I can answer that—

CASSANDRA.

Down to what slaughter-house!  
Foh! the smell of carnage through the door  
Scares me from it—drags me tow'rd it—  
Phœbus! Apollo! Apollo!

## CHORUS.

One of the dismal prophet-pack, it seems,  
That hunt the trail of blood. But here at fault—  
This is no den of slaughter, but the house  
Of Agamemnon.

## CASSANDRA.

Down upon the towers  
Phantoms of two mangled Children hover—and a  
famish'd man,  
At an empty table glaring, seizes and devours !

## CHORUS.

Thyestes and his children ! Strange enough  
For any maiden from abroad to know,  
Or, knowing—

## CASSANDRA.

And look ! in the chamber below  
The terrible Woman, listening, watching,  
Under a mask, preparing the blow  
In the fold of her robe—

## CHORUS.

Nay, but again at fault :  
For in the tragic story of this House—  
Unless, indeed, the fatal Helen—  
No woman—

## CASSANDRA.

No Woman—Tisiphone ! Daughter  
Of Tartarus—love-grinning Woman above,  
Dragon-tail'd under—honey-tongued, Harpy-claw'd,  
Into the glittering meshes of slaughter  
She wheedles, entices, him into the poisonous  
Fold of the serpent—

## CHORUS.

Peace, mad woman, peace !  
Whose stony lips once open vomit out  
Such uncouth horrors.

## CASSANDRA.

I tell you the lioness  
Slaughters the Lion asleep ; and lifting

Her blood-dripping fangs buried deep in his mane,  
Glaring about her insatiable, bellowing,  
Bounds hither—Phœbus, Apollo, Apollo, Apollo !  
Whither have you led me, under night alive with fire,  
Through the trampled ashes of the city of my sire,  
From my slaughtered kinsmen, fallen throne, insulted  
shrine,  
Slave-like to be butcher'd, the daughter of a Royal  
line !

## CHORUS.

And so returning, like a nightingale  
Returning to the passionate note of woe  
By which the silence first was broken !

## CASSANDRA.

Oh,  
A nightingale, a nightingale, indeed,  
That, as she "Itys ! Itys ! Itys !" so  
I "Helen ! Helen ! Helen !" having sung  
Amid my people, now to those who flung  
And trampled on the nest, and slew the young,



Keep crying "Blood ! blood ! blood !" and none will heed !

Now what for me is this prophetic weed,  
And what for me is this immortal crown,  
Who like a wild swan from Scamander's reed  
Chaunting her death-song float Cocytus-down ?  
There let the fatal Leaves to perish lie !  
To perish, or enrich some other brow  
With that all-fatal gift of Prophecy  
They palpitated under Him who now,  
Checking his flaming chariot in mid sky,  
With divine irony sees disadorn  
The wretch his love has made the people's scorn,  
The raving quean, the mountebank, the scold,  
Who, wrapt up in the ruin she foretold  
With those who would not listen, now descends  
To that dark kingdom where his empire ends.

CHORUS.

Strange that Apollo should the laurel wreath  
Of Prophecy he crown'd your head withal  
Himself disgrace. But something have we heard  
Of some divine revenge for slighted love.

## CASSANDRA.

Aye—and as if in malice to attest  
With one expiring beam of Second-sight  
Wherewith his victim he has curs'd and blest,  
Ere quencht for ever in descending night ;  
As from behind a veil no longer peeps  
The Bride of Truth, nor from their hidden deeps  
Darkle the waves of Prophecy, but run  
Clear from the very fountain of the Sun.  
Ye call'd—and rightly call'd me—bloodhound ; ye  
That like old lagging dogs in self-despite  
Must follow up the scent with me ; with me,  
Who having smelt the blood about this house  
Already spilt, now bark of more to be.  
For, though you hear them not, the infernal Choir .  
Whose dread antiphony forswears the lyre,  
Who now are chaunting of that grim carouse  
Of blood with which the children fed their Sire,  
Shall never from their dreadful chorus stop  
Till all be counter-pledg'd to the last drop.

## CHORUS.

Hinting at what indeed has long been done,

And widely spoken, no Apollo needs ;  
And for what else you aim at—still in dark  
And mystic language—

CASSANDRA.

Nay, then, in the speech,  
She that reproved me was so glib to teach—  
Before yon Sun a hand's-breadth in the skies  
He moves in shall have moved, those age-sick eyes  
Shall open wide on Agamemnon slain  
Before your very feet. Now, speak I plain ?

CHORUS.

Blasphemer, hush !

CASSANDRA.

Aye, hush the mouth you may,  
But not the murder.

CHORUS.

Murder ! But the Gods—

CASSANDRA.

The Gods !  
Who now abet the bloody work within !

CHORUS.

Woman !—The Gods !—Abet with whom ?—

CASSANDRA.

With Her,  
Who brandishing aloft the axe of doom,  
That just has laid one victim at her feet,  
Looks round her for that other, without whom  
The banquet of revenge were incomplete.  
Yet ere I fall will I prelude the strain  
Of Triumph, that in full I shall repeat  
When, looking from the twilight Underland,  
I welcome Her as she descends amain,  
Gash'd like myself, but by a dearer hand.  
For that old murder'd Lion with me slain,  
Rolling an awful eyeball through the gloom  
He stalks about of Hades up to Day,  
Shall rouse the whelp of exile far away,

His only authentic offspring, ere the grim  
Wolf crept between his Lioness and him ;  
Who, with one stroke of Retribution, her  
Who did the deed, and her adulterer,  
Shall drive to hell ; and then, himself pursued  
By the wing'd Furies of his Mother's blood,  
Shall drag about the yoke of Madness, till  
Releas'd, when Nemesis has gorg'd her fill,  
By that same God, in whose prophetic ray  
Viewing To-morrow mirror'd as To-day,  
And that this House of Atreus the same wine  
Themselves must drink they brew'd for me and mine ;  
I close my lips for ever with one prayer,  
That the dark Warder of the World below  
Would ope the portal at a single blow.

## CHORUS.

And the raving voice, that rose  
Out of silence into speech  
Out-ascending human reach,  
Back to silence foams and blows,  
Leaving all my bosom heaving—  
Wrath and raving all, one knows ;

Prophet-seeming, but if ever  
Of the Prophet-God possest,  
By the Prophet's self confest  
God-abandon'd—woman's shrill  
Anguish into tempest rising,  
Louder as less listen'd.

Still—

Spite of Reason, spite of Will,  
What unwelcome, what unholy,  
Vapour of prognostic, slowly  
Rising from the central soul's  
Recesses, all in darkness rolls?  
What! shall Age's torpid ashes  
Kindle at the ransom spark  
Of a raving maiden?—Hark!  
What was that behind the wall?  
A heavy blow—a groan—a fall—  
Some one crying—Listen further—  
Hark again then, crying "Murder!"  
Some one—who then? Agamemnon?  
Agamemnon?—Hark again!  
Murder! murder! murder! murder!  
Help within there! Help without there!  
Break the doors in!—

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

*(Appearing from within, where lies AGAMEMNON dead.)\**

Spare your pain.

Look! I who but just now before you all  
Boasted of loyal wedlock unashamed,  
Now unashamed dare boast the contrary.  
Why, how else should one compass the defeat  
Of him who underhand contrives one's own,  
Unless by such a snare of circumstance  
As, once enmesht, he never should break through?  
The blow now struck was not the random blow  
Of sudden passion, but with slow device  
Prepared, and levell'd with the hand of time.  
I say it who devised it; I who did;  
And now stand here to face the consequence.  
Aye, in a deadlier web than of that loom  
In whose blood-purple he divined his doom,  
And fear'd to walk upon, but walk'd at last,  
Entangling him inextricably fast,  
I smote him, and he bellow'd; and again  
I smote, and with a groan his knees gave way;

\* Hermann says, "Tractis tabulatis"—the scene *drawing*—"conspicitur Clytemnestra in conclavi stans ad corpus Agamemnonis."

And, as he fell before me, with a third  
And last libation from the deadly mace  
I pledg'd the crowning draught to Hades due,  
That subterranean Saviour—of the Dead !\*  
At which he spouted up the Ghost in such  
A burst of purple as, bespatter'd with,  
No less did I rejoice than the green ear  
Rejoices in the largess of the skies  
That fleeting Iris follows as it flies.

## CHORUS.

Oh woman, woman, woman !  
By what accursèd root or weed  
Of Earth, or Sea, or Hell, inflamed,  
Dar'st stand before us unashamed  
And, daring do, dare glory in the deed !

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, I that dream'd the fall of Troy, as you  
Belike of Troy's destroyer. Dream or not,  
Here lies your King—my Husband—Agamemnon,  
Slain by this right hand's righteous handicraft.

\* At certain Ceremonies, the Third and crowning Libation was to  
*Zeus Sotēr* ; and thus ironically to Pluto.



Like you, or like it not, alike to me ;  
To me alike whether or not you share  
In making due libation over this  
Great Sacrifice—if ever due, from him  
Who, having charg'd so deep a bowl of blood,  
Himself is forced to drink it to the dregs.

## CHORUS.

Woman, what blood but that of Troy, which Zeus  
Foredoom'd for expiation by his hand  
For whom the penalty was pledg'd ? And now,  
Over his murder'd body, Thou  
Talk of libation !—Thou ! Thou ! Thou !  
But mark ! Not thine of sacred wine  
Over his head, but ours on thine  
Of curse, and groan, and torn-up stone,  
To slay or storm thee from the gate,  
The City's curse, the People's hate,  
Execrate, exterminate—

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Aye, aye, to me how lightly you adjudge  
Exile or death, and never had a word

Of counter-condemnation for Him there ;  
Who, when the field throve with the proper flock  
For Sacrifice, forsooth let be the beast,  
And with his own hand his own innocent  
Blood, and the darling passion of my womb—  
Her slew—to lull a peevish wind of Thrace.  
And him who curs'd the city with that crime  
You hail with acclamation ; but on me,  
Who only do the work you should have done,  
You turn the axe of condemnation. Well ;  
Threaten you me, I take the challenge up ;  
Here stand we face to face ; win Thou the game,  
And take the stake you aim at ; but if I—  
Then, by the Godhead that for me decides,  
Another lesson you shall learn, though late.

## CHORUS.

Man-mettled evermore, and now  
Manslaughter-madden'd ! Shameless brow !  
But do you think us deaf and blind  
Not to know, and long ago,  
What Passion under all the prate  
Of holy justice made thee hate  
Where Love was due, and love where—

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, then, hear !

By this dead Husband, and the reconciled  
Avenging Fury of my slaughter'd child,  
I swear I will not reign the slave of fear  
While he that holds me, as I hold him, dear,  
Kindles his fire upon this hearth : my fast  
Shield for the time to come, as of the past.  
Yonder lies he that in the honey'd arms  
Of his Chryseides under Troy walls  
Dishonour'd mine : and this last laurell'd wench,  
This prophet-messmate of the rower's bench,  
Thus far in triumph his, with him along  
Shall go, together chaunting one death-song  
To Hades—fitting garnish for the feast  
Which Fate's avenging hand through mine has drest.

## CHORUS.

Woe, woe, woe, woe!  
That death as sudden as the blow  
That laid Thee low would me lay low  
Where low thou liest, my sovereign Lord !

Who ten years long to Trojan sword  
Devoted, and to storm aboard,  
In one ill woman's cause accurst,  
Liest slain before thy palace door  
By one accursedest and worst !

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Call not on Death, old man, that call'd or no,  
Comes quick ; nor spend your ebbing breath on me,  
Nor Helena : who but as arrows be  
Shot by the hidden hand behind the bow.

## CHORUS.

Alas, alas ! The Curse I know  
That round the House of Atreus clings,  
About the roof, about the walls,  
Shrouds it with his sable wings ;  
And still as each new victim falls,  
And gorg'd with kingly gore,  
Down on the bleeding carcass flings,  
And croaks for " More, more, more ! "

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Aye, now, indeed, you harp on likelier strings.  
Not I, nor Helen, but that terrible  
Alastor of old Tantalus in Hell ;  
Who, one sole actor in the scene begun  
By him, and carried down from sire to son,  
The mask of Victim and Avenger shifts :  
And, for a last catastrophe, that grim  
Guest of the abominable banquet lifts  
His head from Hell, and in my person cries  
For one full-grown sufficient sacrifice,  
Requital of the feast prepared for him  
Of his own flesh and blood—And there it lies.

## CHORUS.

Oh, Agamemnon ! Oh, my Lord !  
Who, after ten years toil'd ;  
After barbarian lance and sword  
Encounter'd, fought, and foil'd ;  
Returning with the just award  
Of Glory, thus inglorious by  
Thine own domestic Altar die,

Fast in the spider meshes coil'd  
Of Treason most abhorr'd !

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

And by what retribution more complete,  
Than, having in the meshes of deceit  
Enticed my child, and slain her like a fawn  
Upon the altar; to that altar drawn  
Himself, like an unconscious beast, full-fed  
With Conquest, and the garland on his head,  
Is slain ; and now, gone down among the Ghost,  
Of taken Troy indeed may make the most,  
But not *one* unrequited murder boast.

## CHORUS.

Oh Agamemnon, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead !  
What hand, what pious hand shall wash the wound  
Through which the sacred spirit ebb'd and fled !  
With reverend care compose, and to the ground  
Commit the mangled form of Majesty,  
And pour the due libation o'er the mound !

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

This hand, that struck the guilty life away,  
The guiltless carcase in the dust shall lay  
With due solemnities : and if with no  
Mock tears, or howling counterfeit of woe,  
On this side earth ; perhaps the innocent thing,  
Whom with paternal love he sent before,  
Meeting him by the melancholy shore,  
Her arms about him with a kiss shall fling,  
And lead him to his shadowy throne below.

## CHORUS.

Alas ! alas ! the fatal rent  
Which through the house of Atreus went,  
Gapes again ; a purple rain  
Sweats the marble floor, and falls  
From the tottering roof and walls,  
The Dæmon heaving under ; gone  
The master-prop they rested on :  
And the storm once more awake  
Of Nemesis ; of Nemesis  
Whose fury who shall slake !

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ev'n I ; who by this last grand victim hope  
The Pyramid of Vengeance so to cope,  
That—and methinks I hear him in the deep  
    Beneath us growling tow'rd his rest—the stern  
    Alastor to some other roof may turn,  
Leaving us here at last in peace to keep  
What of life's harvest yet remains to reap.

## CHORUS.

Thou to talk of reaping Peace  
Who sowest Murder ! Woman, cease !  
And, despite that iron face—  
Iron as the bloody mace  
Thou bearest—boasting as if Vengeance  
    Centred in that hand alone ;  
Know that, Fury pledg'd to Fury,  
Vengeance owes himself the debts  
He makes, and while he serves thee, whets  
    His knife upon another stone,  
Against thyself, and him with thee  
Colleaguing, as you boast to be,  
The tools of Fate. But Fate is Zeus ;



Zeus—who for awhile permitting  
Sin to prosper in his name,  
Shall vindicate his own abuse ;  
And having brought his secret thought  
To light, shall break and fling to shame  
The baser tools with which he wrought.

ÆGISTHUS : CLYTEMNESTRA : CHORUS.

All hail, thou daybreak of my just revenge !  
In which, as waking from injurious sleep,  
Methinks I recognize the Gods enthroned  
In the bright conclave of eternal Justice,  
Revindicate the wrongs of man to man !  
For see *this* man—so dear to me now dead—  
Caught in the very meshes of the snare  
By which his father Atreus netted mine.  
For that same Atreus surely, was it not ?  
Who, when the question came of, Whose the throne ?  
From Argos out his younger brother drove,  
My sire—Thyestes—drove him like a wolf,  
Keeping his cubs—save one—to better purpose.  
For when at last the home-heartbroken man  
Crept humbly back again, craving no more

Of his own country than to walk its soil  
In liberty, and of her fruits as much  
As not to starve withal—the savage King,  
With damnable alacrity of hate,  
And reconciliation of revenge,  
Bade him, all smiles, to supper—such a supper,  
Where the prime dainty was—my brother's flesh,  
So maim'd and clipt of human likelihood,  
That the unsuspecting Father, light of heart,  
And quick of appetite, at once fell to,  
And ate—ate—what, with savage irony  
As soon as eaten, told—the wretched man  
Disgorging with a shriek, down to the ground  
The table with its curst utensil dashed,  
And, grinding into pieces with his heel,  
Cried, loud enough for Heav'n and Hell to hear,  
“ Thus perish all the race of Pleisthenes ! ”  
And now behold ! the son of that same Atreus  
By me the son of that Thyestes slain  
Whom the kind brother, sparing from the cook,  
Had with his victim pack'd to banishment ;  
Where Nemesis— (so sinners from some nook,  
Whence least they think assailable, assailed) —  
Rear'd me from infancy till fully grown,

To claim in full my father's bloody due.  
Aye, I it was—none other—far away  
Who spun the thread, which gathering day by day  
Mesh after mesh, inch upon inch, at last  
Reach'd him, and wound about him, as he lay,  
And in the supper of his smoking Troy  
Devour'd his own destruction—scarce condign  
Return for that his Father forc'd on mine.

## CHORUS.

Ægisthus, only creatures of base breed  
Insult the fallen; fall'n too, as you boast,  
By one who plann'd but dared not do the deed.  
This is your hour of triumph. But take heed;  
The blood of Atreus is not all outrun  
With this slain King, but flowing in a son,  
Who saved by such an exile as your own  
For such a counter-retribution—

## ÆGISTHUS.

Oh,  
You then, the nether benchers of the realm,  
Dare open tongue on those who rule the helm?

Take heed yourselves ; for, old and dull of wit,  
And harden'd as your mouth against the bit,  
Be wise in time ; kick not against the spurs ;  
Remembering Princes are shrewd taskmasters.

## CHORUS.

Beware thyself, bewareing me ;  
Remembering that, too sharply stirred,  
The spurrer need beware the spurred ;  
As thou of me ; whose single word  
Shall rouse the City—yea, the very  
Stones you walk upon, in thunder  
Gathering o'er your head, to bury  
Thee and thine Adultrous under !

## ÆGISTHUS.

Raven, that with croaking jaws  
Unorphan, undivine,  
After you no City draws ;  
And if any vengeance, mine  
Upon your wither'd shoulders

CHORUS.

Thine !

Who daring not to strike the blow  
Thy worse than woman-craft design'd,  
To worse than woman—

ÆGISTHUS.

Soldiers, ho !

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Softly, good Ægisthus, softly ; let the sword that has  
so deep  
Drunk of righteous Retribution now within the scab-  
bard sleep !  
And if Nemesis be sated with the blood already spilt,  
Even so let us, nor carry lawful Justice into Guilt.  
Sheath your sword ; dismiss your spears ; and you,  
Old men, your howling cease,  
And, ere ill blood come to running, each unto his home  
in peace,

Recognizing what is done for done indeed, as done  
it is,  
And husbanding your scanty breath to pray that  
nothing more amiss.  
Farewell. Meanwhile, you and I, Ægisthus, shall  
deliberate,  
When the storm is blowing over, how to settle House  
and State.



