

Thou art the sweetest source of
 saltest sorrows.
 Thy blest to-days bring such unblest
 to-morrows ;
 Thy softest hope makes saddest
 memory.
 Thou hadst destruction in thee from
 the birth ;
 Incomprehensible !

O Love, thy brightest bridal gar-
 ments
 Are poisoned, like that robe of ag-
 onies
 Which Deianira wove for Hercules,
 And, being put on, turn presently
 to cerements !

Thou art unconquered in the fight.
 Thou rangest over land and sea.
 O let the foolish nations be !
 Keep thy divine desire
 To upheave mountains or to kindle
 fire

From the frore frost, and set the
 world alight.

Why make thy red couch in the
 damask cheek ?

Or light thy torch at languid eyes ?
 Or lie entangled in soft sighs
 On pensive lips that will not speak ?
 To sow the seeds of evil things
 In the hearts of headstrong kings ?
 Preparing many a kindred strife
 For the fearful future hour ?

O leave the wretched race of man,
 Whose days are but the dying sea-
 sons' span ;

Vex not his painful life !
 Make thy immortal sport
 In heaven's high court,
 And cope with Gods that are of
 equal power.

VI. ELECTRA. CHORUS. CLY-
 TEMNESTRA.

ELECTRA.

Now is at hand the hour of retribu-
 tion.

For my father, at last returning,
 In great power, being greatly in-
 jured,
 Will destroy the base adulterer,
 And efface the shameful Past.

CHORUS.

O child of the Godlike Agamemnon !
 Leave vengeance to the power of
 Heaven ;
 Nor forestall with impious footsteps
 The brazen tread of black Erinnys.

ELECTRA.

Is it, besotted with the adulterous
 sin,
 Or, as with flattery pleasing present
 power,
 Or, being intimidate, you speak these
 words ?

CHORUS.

Nay, but desiring justice, like your-
 self.

ELECTRA.

Yet Justice oft times uses mortal
 means.

CHORUS.

But flings aside her tools when work
 is done.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O dearest friends, inform me, went
 this way
 Ægisthus ?

CHORUS.

Even now, hurrying hitherward
 I see him walk, with irritated eyes.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A reed may show which way the
 tempest blows.
 That face is pale,—those brows are
 dark . . . ah !

VII. ÆGISTHUS. CLYTEMNES-
 TRA.

ÆGISTHUS.

Agamemnon

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My husband . . . well ?

ÆGISTHUS.

(Whom may the great Gods curse !)
 Is scarce an hour hence.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Then that hour's yet saved
 From sorrow. Smile, Ægisthus—

ÆGISTHUS.

Hear me speak.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not as your later wont has been to
 smile—

Quick, fierce, as though you scarce
 could hurry out

The wild thing fast enough ; for
 smiling's sake,

As if to show you could smile, though
 in fear

Of what might follow,—but as first
 you smiled

Years, years ago, when some slow
 loving thought

Stole down your face, and settled on
 your lips,

As though a sunbeam halted on a
 rose,

And mixed with fragrance, light.
 Can you smile still

Just so, Ægisthus ?

ÆGISTHUS.

These are idle words,
 And like the wanderings of some
 fevered brain :
 Extravagant phrases, void of import,
 wild.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah, no ! you cannot smile so, more.
 Nor I !

ÆGISTHUS.

Hark ! in an hour the King—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hush ! listen now,—
 I hear, far down yon vale, a shepherd
 piping

Hard by his milk-white flock. The
 lazy things !

How quietly they sleep or feed among
 The dry grass and the acanthus
 there ! . . . and he,

He hath flung his faun-skin by, and
 white-ash stick,

You hear his hymn ? Something of
 Dryope.

Faunus, and Pan . . . an old wood
 tale, no doubt !

It makes me think of songs when I
 was young

I used to sing between the valleys
 there,

Or higher up among the red ash-
 berries,

Where the goats climb, and gaze.
 Do you remember

That evening when we lingered all
 alone,

Below the city, and one yellow star
 Shook o'er yon temple ? . . . ah,

and you said then,
 "Sweet, should this evening never
 change to night,

But pause, and pause, and stay just
 so,—yon star

Still steadfast, and the moon behind
 the hill,

Still rising, never risen,—would this
 seem strange ?

Or should we say, 'why halts the
 day so late ?'

Do you remember ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Woman ! woman ! this
 Surpasses frenzy ! Not a breath of
 time

Between us and the clutch of
Destiny,—
Already sound there footsteps at our
heels,
Already comes a heat against our
cheek,
Already fingers cold among our hair,
And you speak lightly thus, as
though the day
Lingered toward nuptial hours! . . .
awake! arouse!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I do wake . . . well, the King—

ÆGISTHUS.

Even while we speak
Draws near. And we—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Must meet him.

ÆGISTHUS.

Meet? ay . . . how?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

As mortals should meet fortune—
calmly.

ÆGISTHUS.

Quick!
Consult! consult! Yet there is time
to choose
The path to follow.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I have chosen it
Long since.

ÆGISTHUS.

How?—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O, have we not had ten years
To ripen counsel, and mature re-
solve?
What's to add now?

ÆGISTHUS.

I comprehend you not.
The time is plucking at our sleeve.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ægisthus,
There shall be time for deeds, and
soon enough,
Let that come when it may. And it
may be
Deeds must be done shall shut and
shrive! up

All quiet thoughts, and quite pre-
clude repose
To the end of time. Upon this
awful strait
And promontory of our mortal life
We stand between what was, and is
not yet.

The Gods allot to us a little space,
Before the contests which must soon
begin,

For calmer breathing. All before
lies dark,
And difficult, and perilous, and
strange;

And all behind . . . What if we take
one look,

One last long lingering look (before
Despair,
The shadow of failure, or remorse,
which often

Waits on success, can come 'twixt us
and it,

And darken all) at that which yet
must seem

Undimmed in the long retrospect of
years,—

The beautiful imperishable Past!
Were this not natural, being inno-
cent now

—At least of that which is the greater
crime!

To-night we shall not be so.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ah, to-night!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

All will be done which now the Gods
foresee.

The sun shines still,

ÆGISTHUS.

I oft have marked some day
Begin all gold in its flusht orient,
With splendid promise to the wait-
ing world,
And turn to blackness ere the sun
ran down.
So draws our love to its dark close.
To-night—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Shall bring our bridals, my Beloved!
For, either
Upon the melancholy shores of
Death
(One shadow near the doors of Pluto)
greeted
By pale Proserpina, our steps shall
be,
Or else, secure, in the great empty
palace
We shall sleep crowned—no noise to
startle us—
And Argos silent round us—all our
own!

ÆGISTHUS.

In truth I do not dare to think this
thing.
For all the Greeks will hate us.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What of that?
If that they do not harm us,—as who
shall?

ÆGISTHUS.

Moreover, though we triumph in the
act
(And we may fail, and fall) we shall
go down
Covered with this reproach into the
tomb,
Hunted by all the red Eumenides;
And, in the end, the ghost of him we
slew,
Being beforehand there, will come
between
Us and the awful Judges of the
dead!

And no one on this earth will pray
for us;
And no hand will hang garlands on
our urns,
Either of man, or maid, or little
child;
But we shall be dishonored.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O faint heart!
When this poor life of ours is done
with—all
Its foolish days put by—its bright
and dark—
Its praise and blame—rolled quite
away—gone o'er
Like some brief pageant—will it stir
us more,
Where we are gone, how men may
hoot or shout
After our footsteps, then the dust
and garlands
A few mad boys and girls fling in
the air
When a great host is passed, can
cheer or vex
The minds of men already out of
sight

Toward other lands, with pæan and
with pomp

Arrayed near vaster forces? For
the future,

We will smoke hecatombs, and build
new fanes,

And be you sure the gods deal
leniently

With those who grapple for their
life, and pluck it!

From the closed grip of Fate, albeit
perchance

Some ugly smutch, some drop of
blood or so,

A spot here, there a streak, or stain
of gore,

Should in the contest fall to them,
and mar

That life's original whiteness.

ÆGISTHUS.

Tombs have tongues

That talk in Hades. Think it!
Dare we hope,
This done, to be more happy?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My Beloved,
We are not happy,—we may never
be,
Perchance, again. Yet it is much to
think
We have been so: and even though
we must weep,
We have enjoyed.

The roses and the thorns
We have plucked together. We
have proved both. Say,
Was it not worth the bleeding hands
they left us

To have won such flowers? And if
'twere possible
To keep them still,—keep even the
withered leaves,
Even the withered leaves are worth
our care.

We will not tamely give up life,—
such life!
What though the years before, like
those behind,

Be dark as clouds the thunder sits
among,
Tipt only here and there with a wan
gold

More bright for rains between?—
'tis much,—'tis more,
For we shall ever think "the sun's
behind.

The sun must shine before the day
goes down!"
Anything better than the long, long
night,

And that perpetual silence of the
tomb!
'Tis not for happier hours, but life
itself

Which may bring happier hours, we
strike at Fate.
Why, though from all the treasury
of the Past

'Tis but one solitary gem we save—
One kiss more such as we have kist,
one smile,

One more embrace, one night more
such as those

Which we have shared, how costly
were the prize,
How richly worth the attempt! In-
deed, I know,

When yet a child, in those dim
pleasant dreams

A girl will dream, perchance in
twilight hours,

Or under eve's first star (when we
are young
Happiness seems so possible,—so
near!

One says, "it must go hard, but I
shall find it!"
Ofttimes I mused,—“My life shall
be my own,

To make it what I will.” It is their
fault

(I thought) who miss the true de-
lights. I thought

Men might have saved themselves:
they flung away,

Too easily abasht, life's opening
promise:

But all things will be different for
me.

For I felt life so strong in me!
indeed

I was so sure of my own power to
love

And to enjoy,—I had so much to
give,

I said, “be sure it must win some-
thing back!”

Youth is so confident! And though
I saw

All women sad,—not only those I
knew,

As Helen (whom from youth I
knew, nor ever

Divined that sad impenetrable smile
Which oft would darken through
her lustrous eyes,

As drawing slowly down o'er her
cold cheek

The yellow braids of odorous hair,
she turned

From Menelaus praising her, and
sighed,—

That was before he, flinging bitterly
down

The trampled parsley-crown and
undrained goblet,

Cursed before all the Gods his sud-
den shame

And young Hermione's deserted
youth!

Not only her,—but all whose lives I
learned,

Medea, Deianira, Ariadne,
And many others,—all weak,

wronged, opprest,
Or sick and sorrowful, as I am
now,—

Yet in their fate I would not see my
own,

Nor grant allegiance to that general
law

From which a few, I knew a very
few,

With whom it seemed I also might
be numbered,

Had yet escaped securely:—so ex-
empting

From this world's desolation every-
where

One fate—my own!
Well, that was foolish! Now

I am not so exacting. As we move
Further and further down the path
of fate

To the sure tomb, we yield up, one
by one,

Our claims on Fortune, till with
each new year

We seek less and go further to ob-
tain it.

'Tis the old tale,—aye, all of us
must learn it!

But yet I would not empty-handed
stand

Before the House of Hades. Still
there's life,

And hope with life; and much that
may be done.

Look up, O thou most dear and
cherisht head!

We'll strive still, conquering; or, if
falling, fall

In sight of grand results.

ÆGISTHUS.

May these things be!
I know not. All is vague. I should
be strong

Even were you weak. 'Tis other-
wise—I see,

No path to safety sure. We have
done ill things.

Best let the past be past, lest new
griefs come.

Best we part now.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Part! what, to part from thee!
Never till death,—not in death even,
part!

ÆGISTHUS.

But one course now is left.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And that is—

ÆGISTHUS.

Flight.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Coward!

ÆGISTHUS.

I care not.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Flight! I am a Queen.

A goddess once you said,—and why
not goddess?

Seeing the Gods are mightier than
we

By so much more of courage. O,
not I,

But you, are mad.

ÆGISTHUS.

Nay, wiser than I was.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And you will leave me?

ÆGISTHUS.

Not if you will come.

CLYTEMNESTRA.
This was the Atlas of the world I
built!

ÆGISTHUS.
Flight! . . . yes, I know not . . .
somewhere . . . anywhere.
You come? . . . you come not?
well? . . . no time to pause!

CLYTEMNESTRA.
And this is he—this he, the man I
loved!
And this is retribution! O my
heart!
O Agamemnon, how art thou
avenged!
And I have done so much for him!
. . . would do
So much! . . . a universe lies
ruined here.

Now by Apollo, be a man for once!
Be for once strong, or be forever
weak!
If shame be dead, and honor be no
more,
No more true faith, nor that which
in old time
Made us like Gods, sublime in our
high place,
Yet all surviving instincts warn
from flight.
Flight!—O, impossible! Even now
the steps
Of fate are at the threshold. Which
way fly?
For every avenue is barred by death.
Will these not scout your flying
heels? If now
They hate us powerful, will they
love us weak?
No land is safe; nor any neighbor-
ing king
Will harbor Agamemnon's enemy.
Reflect on Troy; her ashes smoul-
der yet.

ÆGISTHUS.
Her words compel me with their aw-
ful truth,

For so would vengeance hound and
earth us down.

CLYTEMNESTRA.
If I am weak to move you by that
love
You swore long since—and sealed it
with false lips!—
Yet lives there nothing of the ambi-
tious will?
Of those proud plots, and dexterous
policy,
On which you builded such high
hopes, and swore
To rule this people Agamemnon
rules;
Supplant him eminent on his own
throne,
And push our power through Greece?

ÆGISTHUS.
The dream was great.
It was a dream. We dreamt it like
a king.

CLYTEMNESTRA.
Ay, and shall so fulfil it—like a
King!
Who talks of flight? For now, be-
think you well,
If to live on, the byword of a world,
Be any gain, even such flight offers
not.
Will long-armed Vengeance never
find you out
When you have left the weapon in
her hands?
Be bold, and meet her! Who fore-
stall the bolts
Of heaven, the Gods deem worthy
of the Gods.
Success is made the measure of our
acts.
And, think, Ægisthus, there has
been one thought
Before us in the intervals of years,
Between us ever in the long dark
nights,
When, lying all awake, we heard the
wind.

Do you shrink then? or, only closer
drawing
Your lips to mine, your arms about
my neck,
Say, "Who would fear such chances,
when he saw
Behind them such a prize for him as
this?"
Do you shrink now? Dare you put
all this from you?
Revoke the promise of those years,
and say
This prospect meets you unprepared
at last?
Our motives are so mixt in their be-
ginnings
And so confused, we recognize them
not
Till they are grown to acts; but
ne'er were ours
So blindly wov'n, but what we both
untangled
Out of the intricacies of the heart
One purpose:—being found, best
grapple to it.
For to conceive ill deeds yet dare not
do them,
This is not virtue, but a twofold
shame.
Between the culprit and the demi-
god
There's but one difference men re-
gard—success.
The weakly-wicked shall be doubly
damned!

ÆGISTHUS.
I am not weak . . . what will you?
. . . O, too weak
To bear this scorn! . . . She is a
godlike fiend,
And hell and heaven seem meeting
in her eyes.

CLYTEMNESTRA.
Those who on perilous ventures
once embark
Should burn their ships, nor ever
dream return.
Better, though all Olympus marched
on us,

To die like fallen Titans, scorning
Heaven,
Than live like slaves in scorn of our
own selves!

ÆGISTHUS.
We wait then? Good! and dare
this desperate chance.
And if we fall (as we, I think, must
fall)
It is but some few sunny hours we
lose,
Some few bright days. True! and
a little less
Of life, or else of wrong a little more,
What's that? For one shade more
or less the night
Will scarce seem darker or lighter,
—the long night!
We'll fall together, if we fall; and
if—
O, if we live!—

CLYTEMNESTRA.
Ay, that was nobler thought.
Now you grow back into yourself,
your true self.
My King! my chosen! my glad care-
less helpmate
In the old time! we shared its pleas-
ant days
Royally, did we not? How brief
they were!
Nor will I deem you less than what
I know
You have it in you to become, for
this
Strange freakish fear,—this passing
brief alarm.
Do I not know the noble steed will
start
Aside, scared lightly by a straw, a
shadow,
A thorn-bush in the way, while the
dull mule
Plods stupidly adown the dizziest
paths?
And oft indeed, such trifles will dis-
may
The finest and most eager spirits,
which yet

Daunt not a duller mind. O love,
 be sure
 Whate'er betide, whether for well or
 ill,
 Thy fate and mine are bound up in
 one skein;
 Cloths must cut them both insepa-
 rate.
 You dare not leave me—had you
 wings for flight!
 You shall not leave me! You are
 mine, indeed,
 (As I am yours!) by my strong right
 of grief.
 Not death together, but together
 life!
 Life—life with safe and honorable
 years,
 And power to do with these that
 which we would!
 —His lips compest—his eye dilates
 —he is saved!
 O, when strong natures into frailer
 ones
 Have struck deep root, if one exalt
 not both,
 Both must drag down and perish!

ÆGISTHUS.

If we should live—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And we shall live.

ÆGISTHUS.

Yet . . . yet—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What! shrinking still?
 I'll do the deed. Do not stand off
 from me.

ÆGISTHUS.

Terrible Spirit!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, not terrible,
 Not to thee terrible—O say not so!
 To thee I never have been anything

But a weak, passionate, unhappy
 woman,
 (O woe is me!) and now you fear
 me—

ÆGISTHUS.

No,

But rather worship.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O my heart, my heart,
 It sends up all its anguish in this
 cry—
 Love me a little?

ÆGISTHUS.

What a spell she has
 To sway the inmost courses of the
 soul!
 My spirit is held up to such a height
 I dare not breathe. How finely sits
 this sorrow
 Upon her, like the garment of a
 God!
 I cannot fathom her. Does the
 same birth
 Bring forth the monster and the
 demigod?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I will not doubt! All's lost, if love
 be lost,—
 Peace, honor, innocence, — gone,
 gone! all gone
 And you, too — you, poor baffled
 crownless schemer,
 Whose life my love makes royal,
 clothes in purple,
 Establishes in state, without me,
 answer me,
 What should you do but perish, as is
 fit?
 O love, you dare not cease to love
 me now!
 We have let the world go by us. We
 have trusted
 To ourselves only: if we fail our-
 selves
 What shall avail us now? Without
 my love
 What rest for you but universal
 hate,

And Agamemnon's sword? Ah, no—
 —you love me,
 Must love me, better than you ever
 loved,—
 Love me, I think, as you love life
 itself!
 Ægisthus! Speak, Ægisthus!

ÆGISTHUS.

O great heart,
 I am all yours. Do with me what
 you will.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O, if you love me, I have strength
 for both.
 And you do love me still?

ÆGISTHUS.

O more, thrice more,
 Thrice more than wert thou Aphro-
 ditë's self
 Stept zoned and sandalled from the
 Olympian Feasts
 Or first revealed among the pink sea-
 foam.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Whate'er I am, be sure that I am
 that
 Which thou hast made me,—noth-
 ing of myself.
 Once, all unheedful, careless of my-
 self,
 And wholly ignorant of what I was,
 I grew up as a reed some wind will
 touch,
 And wake to prophecy,—till then all
 mute,
 And void of melody, — a foolish
 weed!
 My soul was blind, and all my life
 was dark,
 And all my heart pined with some
 ignorant want.
 I moved about, a shadow in the
 house,
 And felt unwedded though I was a
 wife;
 And all the men and women which
 I saw

Were but as pictures painted on a
 wall:
 To me they had not either heart, or
 brain,
 Or lips, or language,—pictures! noth-
 ing more.
 Then, suddenly, athwart those
 lonely hours
 Which, day by day dreamed listlessly
 away,
 Led to the dark and melancholy
 tomb,
 Thy presence passed and touched
 me with a soul.
 My life did but begin when I found
 thee.

O what a strength was hidden in this
 heart!
 As, all unvalued, in its cold dark
 cave

Under snow hills, some rare and
 priceless gem
 May sparkle and burn, so in this
 life of mine
 Love lay shut up. You broke the
 rock away,
 You lit upon the jewel that it hid,
 You plucked it forth,—to wear it,
 my Beloved!

To set in the crown of thy dear life!
 To embellish fortune! Cast it not
 away.

Now call me by the old familiar
 names:

Call me again your Queen, as once
 you used:
 You large-eyed Herë!

ÆGISTHUS.

O, you are a Queen
 That should have none but Gods to
 rule over!
 Make me immortal with one costly
 kiss!

VIII. CHORUS. ELECTRA. CLY-
 TEMNESTRA. ÆGISTHUS.

CHORUS.

Io! Io! I hear the people shout.

ELECTRA.
See how these two do mutually confer,
Hatching new infamy. Now will he dare,
In his unbounded impudence, to meet
My father's eyes? The hour is nigh at hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.
O love, be bold! the hour is nigh at hand.

ELECTRA.
Laden with retribution, lingering slow.

ÆGISTHUS.
A time in travail with some great distress.

CLYTEMNESTRA.
Nay, rather safety for the rest of time.
O love! O hate!

ELECTRA.
O vengeance!

ÆGISTHUS.
O wild chance
If favoring fate—

CLYTEMNESTRA.
Despair is more than fate.

CHORUS.
Io! Io! The King is on his march.

ÆGISTHUS.
Did you hear that?

ELECTRA.
The hour is nigh at hand!

CLYTEMNESTRA.
Leave me to deal with these. I know the arts
That guide the doubtful purpose of discourse

Through many windings to the appointed goal.
I'll draw them on to such a frame of mind
As best befits our purpose. You, meanwhile,
Scatter vague words among the other crowd,
Least the event, when it is due, fall foul
Of unpropitious natures.

ÆGISTHUS.
Do you fear
The helpless, blind ill-will of such a crowd?

CLYTEMNESTRA.
He only fears mankind who knows them not.
But him I praise not who despises them.
Whence come, Electra?

ELECTRA.
From my father's hearth
To meet him; for the hour is nigh at hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.
So do our hopes race hotly to one end,
(A noble rivalry!) as who shall first
Embrace this happy fortune. Tarry not.
We too will follow.

ELECTRA.
Justice, O be swift!

IX. CLYTEMNESTRA. CHORUS.
SEMI-CHORUS. HERALD.

CLYTEMNESTRA.
A froward child! She's gone. My blood's in her.
Her father's, too, looks out of that proud face.
She is too bold . . . ha, well—Ægisthus? . . . gone!

O fate! to be a woman! You great Gods,
Why did you fashion me in this soft mould?
Give me these lengths of silky hair? These hands
Too delicately dimpled! and these arms
Too white, too weak! yet leave the man's heart in me,
To mar your masterpiece, — that I should perish,
Who else had won renown among my peers,
A man, with men,—perchance a god with you,
Had you but better sexed me, you blind Gods!
But, as for man, all things are fitting to him.
He strikes his fellow 'mid the clanging shields,
And leaps among the smoking walls, and takes
Some long-haired virgin wailing at the shrines,
Her brethren having fallen; and you Gods
Commend him, crown him, grant him ample days,
And dying honor, and an endless peace
Among the deep Elysian asphodels.
O fate, to be a woman! To be led—
Dumb, like a poor mule, at a master's will,
And be a slave, though bred in palaces,
And be a fool, though seated with the wise,—
A poor and pitiful fool, as I am now,
Loving and hating my vain life away!

CHORUS.

These flowers—we plucked them
At morning, and took them
From bright bees that sucked them

And warm winds that shook them
'Neath blue hills that o'erlook them.

SEMI-CHORUS.

With the dews of the meadow
Our rosy warm fingers
Sparkle yet, and the shadow
Of the summer-cloud lingers
In the hair of us singers.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Ere these buds on our altars
Fade; ere the forked fire,
Fed with pure honey, falters
And fails: louder, higher
Raise the Pæan.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Draw nigher,
Stand closer! First praise we
The Father of all.
To him the song raise we.
Over Heaven's golden wall
Let it fall! Let it fall!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Then Apollo, the king of
The lyre and the bow;
Who taught us to sing of
The deeds that we know,—
Deeds well done long ago.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Next, of all the Immortals,
Athenë's gray eyes;
Who sits throned in our portals,
Ever fair, ever wise.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Neither dare we despise
To extol the great Herë,

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

And then,
As is due, shall our song
Be of those among men
Who were brave, who were strong
Who endured.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Then, the wrong
Of the Phrygian : and Iliion's false
sons :
And Scamander's wild wave
Through the bleak plain that runs.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Then, the death of the brave.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Last, of whom the Gods save
For new honors : of them none
So good or so great
As our chief Agamemnon
The crown of our State.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O friends, true hearts, rejoice with
me ! This day
Shall crown the hope of ten uncer-
tain years !

CHORUS.

For Agamemnon cannot be far off—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He comes—and yet—O Heaven pre-
serve us all !
My heart is weak—there's One he
brings not back ;
Who went with him ; who will not
come again ;
Whom we shall never see !—

CHORUS.

O Queen, for whom,
Lamenting thus, is your great heart
cast down ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The earliest loved—the early lost !
my child—

CHORUS.

Iphigenia ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

She—my child—

CHORUS.

—Alas !
That was a terrible necessity !

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Was it necessity ? O pardon, friends,
But in the dark, unsolaced solitude,
Wild thoughts come to me, and per-
plex my heart.
This, which you call a dread neces-
sity,
Was it a murder or a sacrifice ?

CHORUS.

It was a God that did decree the
death.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis through the heart the Gods do
speak to us.
High instincts are the oracles of
heaven.

Did ever heart,—did ever God, be-
fore,
Suggest such foul infanticidal lie ?

CHORUS.

Be comforted ! The universal good
Needed this single, individual loss.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Can all men's good be helped by one
man's crime ?

CHORUS.

He loosed the Greeks from Aulis by
that deed.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O casual argument ! Who gave the
Greeks
Such bloody claim upon a virgin's
life ?
Shall the pure bleed to purge impu-
rity ?

A hundred Helens were not worth
that death !
What ! had the manhood of com-
bined Greece,

Whose boast was in its untamed
strength, no help

Better than the spilt blood of one
poor girl ?

Or, if it were of need that blood
should flow

What God ordained him execution-
er ?

Was it for him the armament was
planned ?

For him that angry Greece was
leagued in war ?

For him, or Menelaus, was this done ?
Was the cause his, or Menelaus'
cause ?

Was he less sire than Menelaus was ?
He, too, had children ; did he mur-
der them ?

O, was it manlike ? was it human,
even ?

CHORUS.

Alas ! alas ! it was an evil thing.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O friends, if any one among you all,
If any be a mother, bear with me !
She was my earliest born, my best
beloved.

The painful labor of that perilous
birth

That gave her life did almost take
my own.

He had no pain. He did not bring
her forth.

How should he, therefore, love her
as I loved ?

CHORUS.

Ai ! ai ! alas ! Our tears run down
with yours.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O, who shall say with what delicious
tears,

With what ineffable tenderness,
while he

Took his blithe pastime on the windy
plain,

Among the ringing camps, and
neighing steeds,

First of his glad compeers, I sat
apart,

Silent, within the solitary house :
Rocking the little child upon my

breast ;
And soothed its soft eyes into sleep
with song !

CHORUS.

Ai ! ai ! unhappy, sad, unchilded
one !

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Or, when I taught, from inarticulate
sounds,

The little, lisping lips, to breathe his
name.

Now they will never breathe that
name again !

CHORUS.

Alas ! for Hades has not any hope,
Since Thracian women lopped the
tuneful head

Of Orpheus, and Heracleus is no
more.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Or, spread in prayer, the helpless,
infant hands,

That they, too, might invoke the
Gods for him.

Alas, who now invokes the Gods for
her ?

Unwedded, hapless, gone to glut the
womb

Of dark, untimely Orcus !

CHORUS.

Ai ! alas !

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I would have died, if that could be,
for her !

When life is half-way set to feeble
eld,

And memory more than hope, and
to dim eyes
The gorgeous tapestry of existence
shows
Mothed, fingered, frayed, and bare,
'twere not so hard
To fling away this ravelled skein of
life,
Which else, a little later, Fate had
cut.
And who would sorrow for the o'er-
blown rose
Sharp winter strews about its own
bleak thorns?
But, cropped before the time, to fall
so young!
And wither in the gloomy crown of
Dis!
Never to look upon the blessed sun—

CHORUS.

Ai! ai! alinon! woe is me, this
grief
Strikes pity paralyzed. All words
are weak!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And I had dreamed such splendid
dreams for her!
Who would not so for Agamemnon's
child?
For we had hoped that she, too, in
her time
Would be the mother of heroic
men!

CHORUS.

There rises in my heart an awful
fear,
Lest from these evils darker evils
come;
For heaven exacts, for wrong, the
uttermost tear,
And death hath language after life
is dumb!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

It works! it works!

CHORUS.

Look, some one comes this way.

HERALD.

O Honor of the House of Tantalus!
The king's wheels echo in the
brazen gates.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Our heart is half-way there, to wel-
come him.
How looks he? Well? And all
our long-lost friends—
Their faces grow before me. Lead
the way
Where we may meet them. All our
haste seems slow.

CHORUS.

Would that he brought his dead
child back with him!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Now let him come. The mischief
works apace!

X. CHORUS.

CHORUS.

The winds were lulled in Aulis;
and the day,
Down-sloped, was loitering to the
lazy west.
There was no motion of the glassy
bay,
But all things by a heavy light
oppress.
Windless, cut off from the destined
way,—
Dark shrouds, distinct against the
lurid lull,—
Dark ropes hung useless, loose, from
mast to hull,—
The black ships lay abreast.
Not any cloud would cross the
brooding skies.
The distant sea boomed faintly.
Nothing more.
They walked about upon the yellow
shore;

Or, lying listless, huddled groups
supine,
With faces turned toward the flat
sea-spine,
They planned the Phrygian battle
o'er and o'er;
Till each grew sullen, and would
talk no more,
But sat, dumb-dreaming. Then
would some one rise,
And look toward the hollow hulls,
with haggard, hopeless eyes—
Wild eyes—and, crowding round,
yet wilder eyes—
And gaping, languid lips;
And everywhere that men could see,
About the black, black ships,
Was nothing but the deep-red sea;
The deep-red shore;
The deep-red skies;
The deep-red silence, thick with
thirsty sighs;
And daylight, dying slowly. Noth-
ing more.
The tall masts stood upright;
And not a sail above the burnished
prores;
The languid sea, like one outwearied
quite,
Shrank, dying inward into hollow
shores,
And breathless harbors, under sandy
bars;
And, one by one, down tracts of
quivering blue,
The singed and sultry stars
Looked from the inmost heaven,
far, faint, and few,
While, all below, the sick and steam-
ing brine
The spilled-out sunset did incarna-
dine.

At last one broke the silence; and a
word
Was lisped and buzzed about, from
mouth to mouth;
Pale faces grew more pale; wild
whispers stirred;
And men, with moody, murmuring
lips, conferred

In ominous tones, from shaggy
beards uncouth:
As though some wind had broken
from the blurred
And blazing prison of the stagnant
drouth,
And stirred the salt sea in the stifled
south.
The long-robed priests stood round;
and, in the gloom,
Under black brows, their bright and
greedy eyes,
Shone deathfully; there was a
sound of sighs,
Thick-sobbed from choking throats
among the crowd,
That, whispering, gathered close,
with dark heads bowed;
But no man lifted up his voice aloud,
For heavy hung o'er all the helpless
sense of doom.

Then, after solemn prayer,
The father bade the attendants, ten-
derly
Lift her upon the lurid altar-stone.
There was no hope in any face;
each eye
Swam tearful, that her own did gaze
upon.
They bound her helpless hands with
mournful care;
And looped up her long hair,
That hung about her, like an amber
shower,
Mixed with the saffron robe, and
falling lower,
Down from her bare and cold white
shoulder flung.
Upon the heaving breast the pale
cheek hung,
Suffused with that wild light that
rolled among
The pausing crowd, out of the crim-
son drouth.
They held hot hands upon her
pleading mouth;
And stifled on faint lips the natural
cry.
Back from the altar-stone,
Slow-moving in his fixed place