

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 careless helpmate
In the old time! we shared its pleasant 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 dismay
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;
Clotho must cut them both inseparate.
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.

But rather worship.

No,

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 demi-god?

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 ourselves
What shall avail us now? Without my love
What rests 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 Aphrodite's self
Stept zoned and sandalled from the Olympian Feast
Or first revealed among the pink sea-foam.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Whate'er I am, be sure that I am that
Which thou hast made me, — nothing of myself.
Once, all unheeding, careless of myself,
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! nothing 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;
Your large-eyed Herē!

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. CLYTEMNESTRA. 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,
Lest 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,

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 Ilion'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 uncertain
years!

CHORUS.

For Agamemnon cannot be far off —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He comes — and yet — O Heaven preserve us all!
My heart is weak — there's One he brings
not back;

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 dew 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!

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 perplex
my heart.

This, which you call a dread necessity,
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, before,
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 impurity?
A hundred Helens were not worth that
death!

What! had the manhood of combinéd
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 executioner?

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 murder
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 be-
loved.

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 tune-
ful 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,
't were 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'erblown
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! alon! 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 utter-
most 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 welcome
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 uselessly, 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. Nothing more.
 The tall masts stood upright;
 And not a sail above the burnished prores;
 The languid sea, like one outworn 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 steaming brine
 The spilled-out sunset did incarnadine.
 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, tenderly
 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 crimson 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
 A little space,
 The speechless father turned. No word was said.
 He wrapped his mantle close about his face,

In his dumb grief, without a moan.
 The lopping axe was lifted overhead.
 Then, suddenly,
 There sounded a strange motion of the sea,
 Booming far inland; and above the east
 A ragged cloud rose slowly, and increased.
 Not one line in the horoscope of Time
 Is perfect. O, what falling off is this,
 When some grand soul, that else had been sublime,
 Falls unawares amiss,
 And stoops its crested strength to sudden crime!
 So gracious a thing is it, and sweet,
 In life's clear centre one true man to see,
 That holds strong nature in a wise control;
 Throbbing out, all round, the heat
 Of a large and liberal soul.
 No shadow, simulating life,
 But pulses warm with human nature,
 In a soul of godlike stature;
 Heart and brain, all rich and rife
 With noble instincts; strong to meet
 Time calmly, in his purposed place.
 Sound through and through, and all complete;
 Exalting what is low and base;
 Enlarging what is narrow and small;
 He stamps his character on all,
 And with his grand identity
 Fills up Creation's eye.
 He will not dream the aimless years away
 In blank delay,
 But makes eternity of to-day,
 And reaps the full-earned time. For him
 Nature her affluent horn doth brim,
 To strew with fruit and flowers his way —
 Fruits ripe and flowers gay.
 The clear soul in his earnest eyes
 Looks through and through all plaited lies,
 Time shall not rob him of his youth,
 Nor narrow his large sympathies.
 He is not true, he is a truth,
 And such a truth as never dies.
 Who knows his nature, feels his right,
 And, toiling, toils for his delight;
 Not as slaves toil: where'er he goes,
 The desert blossoms with the rose.
 He trusts himself in scorn of doubt,
 And lets orb'd purpose widen out.
 The world works with him; all men see

Some part of them fulfilled in him;
 His memory never shall grow dim;
 He holds the heaven and earth in fee,
 Not following that, fulfilling this,
 He is immortal, for he is!

O weep! weep! weep!
 Weep for the young that die;
 As it were pale flowers that wither under
 The smiting sun, and fall asunder,
 Before the dews on the grass are dry,
 Or the tender twilight is out of the sky,
 Or the lilies have fallen asleep;
 Or ships by a wanton wind cut short
 Are wrecked in sight of the placid port
 Sinking strangely, and suddenly —
 Sadly, and strangely, and suddenly —
 Into the black Plutonian deep.
 O weep! weep! weep!
 Weep, and bow the head,
 For those whose sun is set at noon;
 Whose night is dark, without a moon;
 Whose aim of life is sped
 Beyond pursuing woes,
 And the arrow of angry foes,
 To the darkness that no man knows —
 The darkness among the dead.
 Let us mourn, and bow the head,
 And lift up the voice, and weep
 For the early dead!
 For the early dead we may bow the head,
 And strike the breast, and weep;
 But, O, what shall be said
 For the living sorrow?
 For the living sorrow our grief —
 Dumb grief — draws no relief
 From tears, nor yet may borrow
 Solace from sound or speech; —
 For the living sorrow
 That heaps to-morrow upon to-morrow
 In piled-up pain, beyond Hope's reach!
 It is well that we mourn for the early dead,
 Strike the breast, and bow the head;
 For the sorrow for these may be sung,
 or said,
 And the chaplets be woven for the fallen head,
 And the urns to the stately tombs be led,
 And Love from their memory may be fed,
 And song may ennoble the anguish;
 But, O, for the living sorrow, —
 For the living sorrow what hopes remain?
 For the prisoned, pining, passionate pain,
 That is doomed forever to languish,

And to languish forever in vain,
For the want of the words that may be-
stead

The hunger that out of loss is bred.
O friends, for the living sorrow —
For the living sorrow —
For the living sorrow what shall be said ?

XI. A PHOCIAN. CHORUS. SEMI-
CHORUS.

PHOCIAN.

O noble strangers, if indeed you be
Such as you seem, of Argos, and the land
That the unconquer'd Agamemnon rules,
Tell me is this the palace, these the roofs
Of the Atridæ, famed in ancient song ?

CHORUS.

Not without truth you name the neigh-
borhood,
Standing before the threshold, and the
doors
Of Pelops, and upon the Argive soil.
That which you see above the Agora
Is the old fane of the Lycæan God,
And this the house of Agamemnon's
queen.
But whence art thou ? For if thy dusty
locks,
And those soiled sandals show with
aught of truth,
Thou shouldst be come from far.

PHOCIAN.

And am so, friends,
But, by Heaven's favor, here my jour-
ney ends.

CHORUS.

Whence, then, thy way ?

PHOCIAN.

From Phocis ; charged with gifts
For Agamemnon, and with messages
From Strophius, and the sister of your
king.
Our watchmen saw the beacon on the
hills,
And leaped for joy. Say, is the king
yet come ?

CHORUS.

He comes this way ; stand by, I hear
them shout ;

Here shall you meet him, as he mounts
the hill.

PHOCIAN.

Now blest be all the Gods, from Father
Zeus,
Who reigns o'er windy Æta, far away,
To King Apollo, with the golden horns.

CHORUS.

Look how they cling about him ! Far
and near
The town breaks loose, and follows after,
Crowding up the ringing ways.
The boy forgets to watch the steer ;
The grazing steer forgets to graze ;
The shepherd leaves the herd ;
The priest will leave the fane ;
The deep heart of the land is stirred
To sunny tears, and tearful laughter,
To look into his face again.

Burst, burst the brazen gates !
Throw open the hearths, and follow !
Let the shouts of the youths go up to
Apollo,
Lord of the graceful quiver :
Till the tingling sky dilates —
Dilates, and palpitates ;
And, Pæan ! Pæan ! the virgins sing ;
Pæan ! the king ! the king !
Laden with spoils from Phrygia !
Io ! Io ! Io ! they sing
Till the pillars of Olympus ring :
Io ! to Queen Ortygia,
Whose double torch shall burn forever !
But thou, O Lord of the graceful quiver,
Bid, bid thy Pythian splendor halt,
Where'er he beams, surpassing sight ;
Or on some ocean isthmus bent,
Or wheeled from the dark continent,
Half-way down Heaven's rosy vault,
Toward the dewy cone of night.
Let not the breathless air grow dim,
Until the whole land look at him !

SEMI-CHORUS.

Stand back !

SEMI-CHORUS.

Will he come this way ?

SEMI-CHORUS.

No ; by us.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Gods, what a crowd !

SEMI-CHORUS.

How firm the old men walk !

SEMI-CHORUS.

There goes the king. I know him by
his beard.

SEMI-CHORUS.

And I, too, by the manner of his gait.
That Godlike spirit lifts him from the
earth.

SEMI-CHORUS.

How gray he looks !

SEMI-CHORUS.

His cheek is seamed with scars.

SEMI-CHORUS.

What a bull's front !

SEMI-CHORUS.

He stands up like a tower.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Ay, like some moving tower of arméd
men,
That carries conquest under city-walls.

SEMI-CHORUS.

He lifts his sublime head, and in his
port
Bears eminent authority.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Behold,
His spear shows like the spindle of a
Fate !

SEMI-CHORUS.

O, what an arm !

SEMI-CHORUS.

Most fit for such a sword ;
Look at that sword.

SEMI-CHORUS.

What shoulders !

SEMI-CHORUS.

What a throat !

SEMI-CHORUS.

What are these bearing ?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Urns.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Alas ! alas !

SEMI-CHORUS.

O friends, look here ! how are the mighty
men
Shrunk up into a little vase of earth,
A child might lift. Sheathed each in
brazen plates,
They went so heavy, they come back so
light,
Sheathed, each one, in the brazen urn of
death !

SEMI-CHORUS.

With what a stateliness he moves along !

SEMI-CHORUS.

See, how they touch his skirt, and grasp
his hand !

SEMI-CHORUS.

Is that the queen ?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Ay, how she matches him !
With what grand eyes she looks up, full
in his !

SEMI-CHORUS.

Say, what are these ?

SEMI-CHORUS.

O Phrygians ! how they walk !
The only sad men in the crowd, I think.

SEMI-CHORUS.

But who is this, that with such scornful
brows,
And looks averted, walks among the
rest ?

SEMI-CHORUS.

I know not, but some Phrygian woman,
sure.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Her heavy-fallen hair down her white
neck
(A dying sunbeam tangled in each tress)
All its neglected beauty pours one way.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Her looks bend ever on the alien ground,
As though the stones of Troy were in
her path.
And in the pained paleness of her brow
Sorrow hath made a regal tenement.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Here comes Electra; young Orestes, too;
See how he emulates his father's stride!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look at Ægisthus, where he walks apart,
And bites his lip.

SEMI-CHORUS.

I oft have seen him so
When something chafes him in his bitter
moods.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Peace, here they come!

CHORUS.

Io! Io! The King!

XII. AGAMEMNON, CLYTEMNESTRA, ÆGISTHUS, ELECTRA, ORESTES, CASSANDRA, a Phocian, Chorus, Semi-Chorus, and others in the procession.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O blazing sun, that in thy skyey tower
Pauseth to see one kingly as thyself,
Lend all thy brightest beams to light his
head,
And gild our gladness! Friends, behold
the King!
Now hath Ætolian Jove, the arbiter
Of conquests, well disposed the issues
here;
For every night that brought not news
from Troy
Heaped fear on fear, as waves succeed to
waves,
When Northern blasts blow white the
Cretan main,—
Knowing that thou, far off, from toil to
toil
Climbedst, uncertain. Unto such an one
His children, and young offspring of the
house
Are as a field, which he, the husbandman,

Owing far off, does only look upon
At seedtime once, nor then till harvest
comes;
And his sad wife must wet with nightly
tears
Unsolaced pillows, fearing for his fate.
To these how welcome, then, his glad
return,
When he, as thou, comes heavy with the
weight
Of great achievements, and the spoils of
time.

AGAMEMNON.

Enough! enough! we weigh you at full
worth,
And hold you dear, whose gladness equals
yours;
But women ever err by over-talk.
Silence to women, as the beard to men,
Brings honor; and plain truth is hurt,
not helped
By many words. To each his separate
sphere
The Gods allot. To me the sounding
camp,
Steeds, and the oaken spear; to you the
hearth,
Children, and household duties of the
loom.
'Tis man's to win an honorable name;
Woman's to keep it honorable still.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

(O beast! O weakness of this woman-
hood!
To let these pompous male things strut
in our eyes,
And in their lordship lap themselves se-
cure,
Because the lots in life are fallen to them.
Am I less heart and head, less blood and
brain,
Less force and feeling, pulse and passion
— I —
Than this self-worshipper — a lie all
through?)
Forgive if joy too long unloose our lips,
Silent so long: your words fall on my
soul
As rain on thirsty lands, that feeds the
dearth
With blessed nourishment. My whole
heart hears.
You speaking thus, I would be silent
ever.

AGAMEMNON.

Who is this man?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A Phocian, by his look.

PHOCIAN.

O King, from Strophius, and your sister's
court,
Despatched with this sealed tablet, and
with gifts,
Though both express, so says my royal
Head,
But poorly the rich welcome they intend.
Will you see this? — and these?

AGAMEMNON.

Anon! anon!
We'll look at them within. O child,
thine eyes
Look warmer welcome than all words
express.
Thou art mine own child by that royal
brow.
Nature hath marked thee mine.

ELECTRA.

O Father!

AGAMEMNON.

Come!
And our Orestes! He is nobly grown;
He shall do great deeds when our own
are dim.
So shall men come to say "the father's
sword
In the son's hands hath hewn out nobler
fame."
Think of it, little one! where is our
cousin?

ÆGISTHUS.

Here! And the keys of the Acropolis?

AGAMEMNON.

O well! this dust and heat are over-
much.
And, cousin, you look pale. Anon!
anon!
Speak to us by and by. Let business
wait.
Is our house ordered? we will take the
bath.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Will you within? where all is ordered fair
Befitting state: cool chambers, marble-
floored

Or piled with blazing carpets, scented
rare
With the sweet spirit of each odorous gum
In dim, delicious, amorous mists about
The purple-paven, silver-sided bath,
Deep, flashing, pure.

AGAMEMNON.

Look to our captives then.
I charge you chiefly with this woman
here,
Cassandra, the mad prophetess of Troy.
See that you chafe her not in her wild
moods.

XIII. CLYTEMNESTRA. ÆGISTHUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Linger not!

ÆGISTHUS.

What? you will to-day —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

— This hour.

ÆGISTHUS.

O, if some chance mar all!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

We'll make chance sure.
Doubt is the doomsman of self-judged
disgrace:
But every chance brings safety to self-
help.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ay, but the means — the time —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

— Fulfil themselves.
O most irresolute heart! is this a time
When through the awful pause of life,
distinct,
The sounding shears of Fate slope near,
to stand
Meek, like tame wethers, and be shorn?
How say you,
The blithe wind up, and the broad sea
before him,
Who would crouch all day long beside
the mast
Counting the surges beat his idle helm,
Because between him and the golden isles

The shadow of a passing storm might
hang?
Danger, being pregnant, doth beget re-
solve.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou wert not born to fail. Give me
thy hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Take it.

ÆGISTHUS.

It does not tremble.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O be strong!
The future hangs upon the die we cast:
Fortune plays high for us—

ÆGISTHUS.

Gods grant she win.

XIV. CHORUS. SEMI-CHORUS.
CASSANDRA.

CHORUS.

O thou that dost with globéd glory
Sweep the dark world at noon of night,
Or among snowy summits, wild and
hoary,

Or through the mighty silences
Of immemorial seas,
With all the stars behind thee flying
white,

O take with thee, where'er
Thou wanderest, ancient Care,
And hide her in some interlunar haunt;
Where but the wild bird's chaunt
At night, through rocky ridges gaunt,
Or moanings of some homeless sea may
find her

There, Goddess, bar, and bind her;
Where she may pine, but wander not;
Loathe her haunts, but leave them not;
Wail and rave to the wind and wave
That hear, yet understand her not;
And curse her chains, yet cleave them
not;

And hate her lot, yet help it not.
Or let her rove with Gods undone
Who dwell below the setting sun,
And the sad western hours
That burn in fiery bowers;
Or in Amphitritë's grot
Where the vexéd tides unite,
And the spent wind, howling, breaks

O'er sullen oceans out of sight
Among sea-snakes, that the white moon
wakes

Till they shake themselves into diamond
flakes,

Coil and twine in the glittering brine
And swing themselves in the long moon-
shine;

Or by wild shores hoarsely rage,
And moan, and vent her spite,
In some inhospitable harborage
Of Thracian waters, white.

There let her grieve, and grieve, and
hold her breath
Until she hate herself to death.

I seem with rapture lifted higher,
Like one in mystic trance.

O Pan! Pan! Pan!

First friend of man,
And founder of Heaven's choir,
Come thou from old Cyllenë, and inspire
The Gnosian, and Nysæan dance!

Come thou, too, Delian king,
From the blue Ægean sea,
And Mycone's yellow coast:

Give my spirit such a wing
As there the foolish Icarus lost,
That she may soar above the cope
Of this high pinnacle of gladness,
And dizzy height of hope;

And there, beyond all reach of sadness,
May tune my lips to sing
Great Peans, full and free,
Till the whole world ring

With such heart-melting madness
As bards are taught by thee!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look to the sad Cassandra, how she
stands!

SEMI-CHORUS.

She turns not from the wringing of her
hands.

SEMI-CHORUS.

What is she doing?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look, her lips are moved.

SEMI-CHORUS.

And yet their motion shapes not any
sound.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Speak to her.

SEMI-CHORUS.

She will heed not.

SEMI-CHORUS.

But yet speak.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Unhappy woman, cease a little while
From mourning. Recognize the work
of Heaven.

Troy smoulders. Think not of it. Let
the past

Be buried in the past. Tears mend it
not.

Fate may be kindlier, yet, than she ap-
pears.

SEMI-CHORUS.

She does not answer.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Call to her again.

SEMI-CHORUS.

O break this scornful silence! Hear us
speak.

We would console you.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look, how she is moved!

SEMI-CHORUS.

O speak! the heart's hurt oft is helped
by words.

CASSANDRA.

O Itys! Itys! Itys!

SEMI-CHORUS.

What a shriek!

She takes the language of the nightingale,
Unhappy bird! that mourns her per-
ished form,
And leans her breast against a thorn, all
night.

CASSANDRA.

The bull is in the shambles.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Listen, friends!

She mutters something to herself.

CASSANDRA.

Alas!
Did any name Apollo? woe is me!

SEMI-CHORUS.

She calls upon the God.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Unhappy one,
What sorrow strikes thee with bewilder-
ment?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Now she is mute again.

CHORUS.

A Stygian cold
Creeps through my limbs, and loosens
every joint.

The hot blood freezes in its arteries,
And stagnates round the region of the
heart.

A cloud comes up from sooty Acheron,
And clothes mine eyelids
With infernal night.

My hair stands up.
What supernatural awe
Shoots, shrivelling through me,
To the marrow and bone?

O dread and wise Prophetic Powers,
Whose strong-compelling law
Doth hold in awe

The laboring hours,
Your intervention I invoke,
My soul from this wild doubt to save;
Whether you have

Your dwelling in some dark, oracular
cave,

Or solemn, sacred oak;
Or in Dodona's ancient, honored beech,
Whose mystic boughs above
Sat the wise dove;

Or if the tuneful voice of old
Awake in Delos, to unfold
Dark wisdom in ambiguous speech.
Upon the verge of strange despair
My heart grows dizzy. Now I seem
Like one that dreams some ghastly
dream,

And cannot cast away his care,
But harrows all the haggard air
With his hard breath. Above, be-
neath,

The empty silence seems to teem
With apprehension. O declare
What hidden thing doth Fate prepare,
What hidden, horrible thing doth Fate
prepare?

For of some hidden grief my heart seems
half aware.