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THE MUSES' PAGEANT
BY W. M. L. HUTCHINSON
VOLUME THREE

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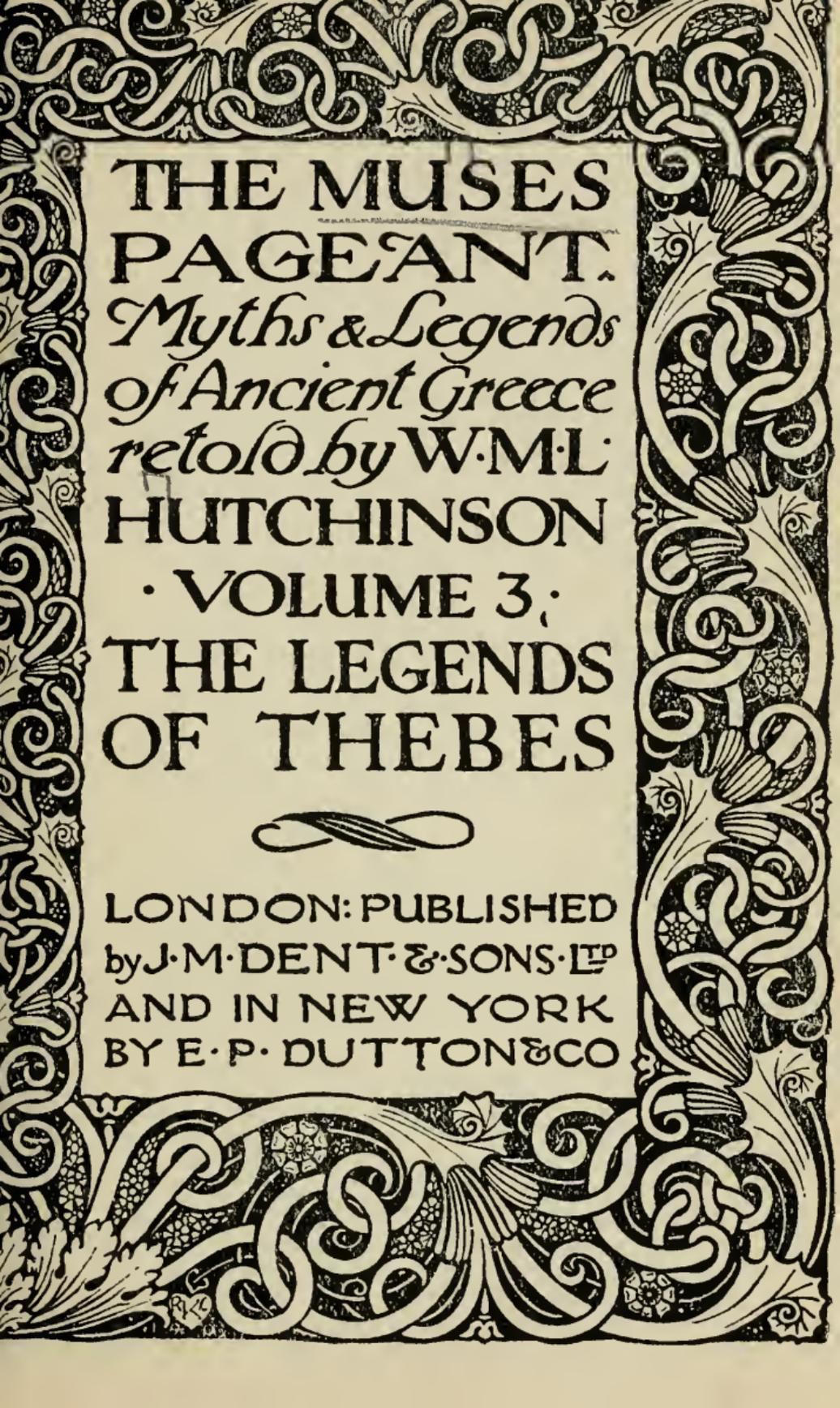
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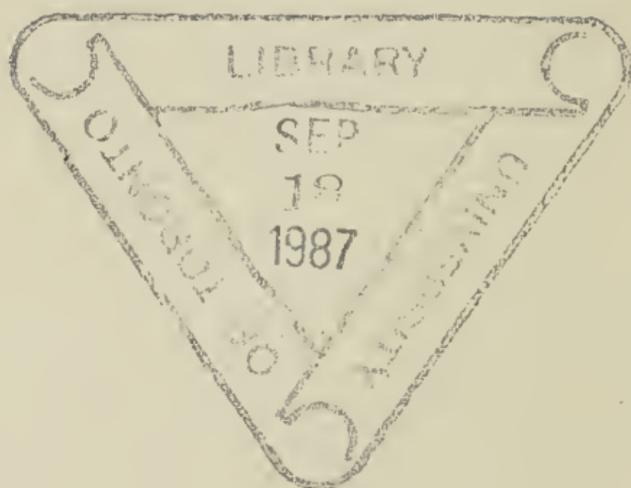
THE
SAGES
OF OLD
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AGAIN
IN US
GLANVILLE



THE MUSES
PAGEANT.
*Myths & Legends
of Ancient Greece
retold by W. M. L.
HUTCHINSON*
· VOLUME 3;
THE LEGENDS
OF THEBES



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INTRODUCTION

THEBES, a city that played always a minor part in Greek history, save when raised to transient supremacy by the genius of Epaminondas, could yet boast legendary glories which far outshone those of Sparta or Athens. The story of her founding by CADMUS the Dragon-killer was the most marvellous of fairy-tales; his good fortune, crowned by marriage with a daughter of the gods, remained proverbial in Hellas; as did also the wisdom of his descendant OEDIPUS, who solved the riddle of the Sphinx. Her seven-gated walls, builded by the magic of AMPHION'S lyre, had endured a siege only less famous than that of Troy; within them had been born the most human of gods and the most divine of heroes—DIONYSUS and HERACLES. These were captain jewels in the carcanet of praises that Pindar dedicated to his mother-city. But, as he does not fail to remind us, the law that "for every good a mortal receives from the gods, he must likewise receive two evils," was awfully exemplified by the Theban royal house; and this made their history a stock subject of Greek tragedy. Besides a host of plays of which only the titles are extant, the *Seven against Thebes* of Aeschylus, the *Bacchae* and *Phoenissae* of Euripides, the *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, and *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles dealt

with various chapters of that dark chronicle. When Milton spoke of gorgeous Tragedy "Presenting Thebes or Pelops' line, or the tale of Troy divine," his phrase summed up the main sources of the Attic dramatists; and of the three great legend-cycles he names, the Theban is not the least richly shrined by their art. For while "Pelops' line" furnished Aeschylus with the theme for that trilogy which stands unrivalled among the works of human genius, the sorrows of Cadmus and his race inspired alike Euripides' swansong—the *Bacchae*, and that flawless masterpiece of Sophocles—*Oedipus the King*.

With such a wealth of material at command, it seemed best to devote a whole Volume of the *Muses' Pageant* to the Legends of Thebes. But the general plan of the work required that the story of DIONYSUS should be included among the Myths of the Gods in our First Volume; and though HERACLES was by birth a Theban, his Pan-Hellenic character and unique importance, no less than the multiplicity of his adventures, induced the compiler to reserve an account of his Life and Death to the concluding Volume.

Information as to the literary sources used in the present volume may be more conveniently given here than, as usual, in the form of an appendix.

Chapter I. contains material scattered up and down in the writings of dramatists, lyric poets, and mythographers.

Chapters II.—V. give prose narrative versions of four plays mentioned above, viz., *Oedipus the King*, *The Seven against Thebes*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and

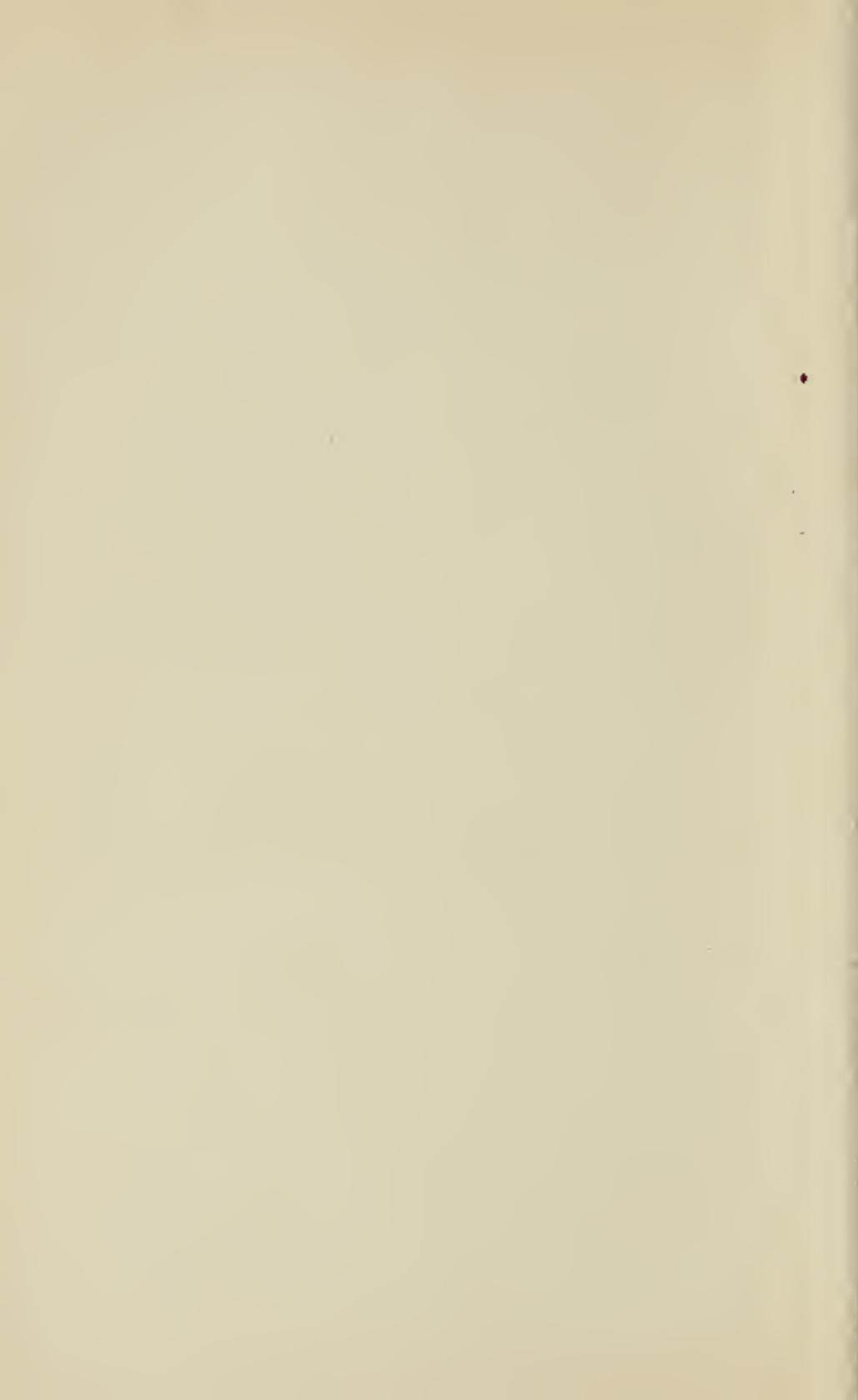
Antigone, in the order of the episodes they present. The chronological order of the plays themselves is entirely different; the earliest being Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* (467 B.C.), while the sequence of the three Sophoclean plays is *Antigone* (442 or 441 B.C.), *Oedipus the King* (probably circa 429-420), *Oedipus at Colonus* (brought out in 401, after the poet's death).¹ Thus the three latter tragedies, though related in subject, did not form a trilogy, and there are even some discrepancies of detail and character between them, which have been harmonised in our version. The reader may be reminded that while Greek tragedies were produced by custom in groups of three, two kinds of such trilogies were used concurrently—the one consisting of plays which were parts of a single story, the other of plays unconnected in subject. Aeschylus usually, though not always, employed the former kind, which gave ampler room to the mighty sweep of his creative imagination; the latter was introduced by Sophocles, and its narrower compass was better suited to an artist whose supreme interest and excellence lay in the minute portrayal of character. That each of his three Theban tragedies has a unity of its own, like a faultless statue, will be apparent, I hope, even in a version which can give but a faint impression of their poetic beauty.

¹ An interesting explanation of the priority of the *Antigone* will be found in the introduction to Jebb's edition of that play.



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THE MUSES' PAGEANT

CHAPTER I

THE MAKERS OF THEBES

Cadmus

THERE was once a king in Phoenicia, the land of palm-trees, whose name was Agenor; and he had three sons and one daughter, called Europa, the loveliest princess in all the East. Now it fell on a day that Europa went with her maiden companions into the pastures by the sea to gather meadow saffron; and while they plucked the flowers a noble milk-white bull came sedately towards them and stood before the princess, regarding her with his mild and lustrous eyes. And her companions were affrighted, but she called to them, "There is nothing to fear, maidens! See, this bull is as quiet and gentle as a lamb. Ah, the beautiful creature! I have never seen his like in my father's herds. He is the very King of Bulls—and looks at me as if he knew I was praising him." With that, she patted the great beast's glossy neck, who suddenly knelt down before her, bowing his kingly head to the earth. "Courteous Bull," cried Europa, merrily, "have you a mind I should ride you?" and in frolic mood she placed herself on his back. Up rose the

bull, lowing softly, and made for the sea-beach; stately and slow was his pace at first; and the maidens, reassured, danced round him in girlish glee, and pelted Europa with blossoms, which she flung back laughing. But as they came near the waves' edge, the bull rushed forward with a thunderous bellow, scattering the terrified damsels right and left; straight into the foam he plunged, and swam out to sea with his rider. Vain was Europa's cry for help; vainly her playmates rent the air with their shrieks; so swiftly she was borne away that they saw but for a moment her sweet face looking backward, as with one hand she waved to them and with the other grasped the bull's horn; then, only her bright hair streaming and her mantle fluttering in the breeze—and then only a vanishing speck far out on the purple main.

When King Agenor heard what had befallen his daughter, he was like to run mad with grief; for she was the apple of his eye, thrice dearer to him than any of his sons. And he said to them, "It is certainly no bull that has carried off Europa, but some vile enchanter who took that shape to deceive her. Now one of you three must go in search of that miscreant, and kill him, and bring your sister home, else I shall go down to my grave mourning."

Then Cadmus, the youngest son, who loved his sister the best and was of a dauntless spirit, answered that he would gladly go on that errand.

"Do so forthwith, then," said the King, "and look that you never come back to Phoenicia until you find my lost one, on pain of a father's curse."

So Cadmus crossed the sea, visiting many an isle, and came to the mainland of Hellas; and there he wandered a whole year, but heard no word of Europa. Then he heard the fame of Apollo's oracle in Delphi and went to inquire of the god, who gave him this answer by the mouth of the inspired priestess: "*Cease from thy quest, Phoenician prince, for thou art not fated to achieve it. Enough for thee to know that Europa's lover is Zeus himself, who hath made her Queen of a many-citied land where she dwells in splendour and felicity. As for thee, here in Hellas shall thy home be, and well shalt thou fare therein. Go forth now into Pytho's glen, and thou wilt see a red heifer alone upon the road; follow her until she lies down to rest, and in that place do thou build thee a city.*"

And Cadmus, putting his trust in the god, went straightway out of the temple with his servants; and that red heifer led them on over down and dale until they came to a wooded valley where two streams met; a low hill rose just above the meeting of the waters, and on its grassy top she lay down. Fair was the place, but very solitary, and Cadmus marvelled how he was to build a city with none to help him but a few slaves; howbeit, his faith failed not, and he resolved to begin by raising an altar to Athena, the patroness of his house, and sacrificing the heifer thereon. So he bade his men fetch wood from a grove at the hill-foot, while he himself cut and piled sods for the altar. Now in that grove was a sacred fount of Ares the War-God, who had set a dragon to guard it, the most fearsome of his

kind. No sooner did the slaves enter the grove, than the monster sprang upon them, and devoured two shrieking wretches in the twinkling of an eye; the rest fled back to their lord and bade him escape for his life. But he, drawing his sword, rushed into the grove, and ere ever the gorged beast could spring, he cut off its head at one blow. In the same instant he saw a maiden standing before him clad in glittering armour, with casque and shield of gold, grasping a long spear, and knew it was Athena herself. "Hero," said she, "you have done valiantly, and shall reap a wondrous harvest from your valour. Take the dragon's teeth and scatter them broadcast, as the sower scatters his seed." And when Cadmus did so, behold a host of armed men sprang up from the ground, and fell with fury on one another until all but five were slain. Then the goddess waved her spear aloft, and immediately those five flung down their swords and remained motionless. "These, Cadmus," she said, "are the mightiest, as you have seen, of the mighty Seed of the Dragon. *Sparti*¹ shall they be called, and shall be the first citizens of your new city, and beget a warrior race that will make it renowned through future ages." So saying, Athena departed; and Cadmus with help of the Sparti straightway built a citadel on the hill-top, known as the *Cadmeia* from that day to this.

But Ares, full of wrath for the death of the dragon, yet fearing to touch a man under Athena's protection, complained bitterly before Zeus and all the

¹ *i.e.* Sown.

Olympians against the mortal who had slain his servant and defiled his sacred grove with blood. Athena rose up and spoke in Cadmus' defence; high words passed between her and the War-God, and blows were like to follow, so sharp was their quarrel, had not Zeus commanded them to forbear and submit the cause to a vote of the other gods. The Olympians voted Cadmus guilty of a murder, and Ares clamoured for sentence of death; but Zeus said, "The man shall not die, for I have seen his piety towards us and the uprightness of his soul; moreover, he knew not that the place where he slew the dragon was holy ground. Therefore I pronounce this sentence—he shall build Ares a temple in that place, and serve him there as thrall for an Olympian Year." Now the Olympian Year is eight years as men reckon them; so for that space Cadmus served as a hewer of wood and drawer of water in the temple of Ares. By his diligent service and blameless life he won favour with all the Immortals, and with the War-God himself, so that when the eight years were ended they bestowed such honour on the Phoenician prince as never mortal had before. For Ares and Aphrodite gave him their child, lovely Harmonia, to wife; all the gods sat at the marriage feast in the Cadmeia, and the divine Muses raised the nuptial song.

For many years after this Cadmus was a byword for his good fortune; in peace or war, whatsoever he took in hand prospered; as his wealth and power increased, more and more folk gathered to him, and a well-peopled town grew up at the foot of his citadel.

By middle age, he ruled a kingdom as broad as any in Hellas. But there is an ancient saying that for every good gift a man receives at the hand of the gods, he must receive likewise two evils, and this was well seen in Cadmus at the last. Of the heavy sorrows that he endured in his old age, and the dread calamity that overwhelmed his house through the wrath of Dionysus, I have told already in the legend of that god.¹ There, too, you may read how, after long grief and pain, Cadmus and Harmonia possess a tearless, immortal lot. You have heard also the punishments of two of their proud daughters, Agavé, and Ino, wife of Athamas; but not that of the third, Autonoë. Now she, who with her sisters had rejected and blasphemed Dionysus, was smitten by him with madness, even as they; and she wandered in that frenzy through many lands, until she met with a holy seer, a son of Apollo, who healed and wedded her for her beauty's sake. This was Aristaeus, whom the huntress-maid Cyrene bore to her divine bridegroom,² and on whom rested a double portion of his sire's healing and prophetic power, insomuch that after death he was widely worshipped as a god. And now Autonoë lived happy certain years, and hardened her heart, deeming that she alone of her sisters had escaped retribution—but it overtook her in the end. For her only son, Actaeon, a fair youth that loved hunting, came unawares one day upon virgin Artemis, as she bathed in a woodland stream; and gazing too boldly on divinity disrobed he suffered a fearful penalty, being that instant

¹ Vol. I., ch. xi.

² Vol. I., p. 137.

changed into a stag, and in that shape torn to pieces by his own hounds. Which when his mother knew, she killed herself for grief.

Amphion and Zethus

When Cadmus passed away from his kingdom, leaving no heir, the government fell to Nycteus, a powerful chieftain of the race of the Sparti. To the new king's misfortune, his only child was a daughter, named Antiope, whom he betrothed in early girlhood to his brother, Lycus, according to the ancient custom that an heiress should wed her next of kin. But before the day of her espousals came, Antiope had yielded to an immortal lover; so fair she was, that the enamoured King of gods took for her sake the form of a satyr, and wooed her, not in vain, under the greenwood tree. And not long after, the maiden fled from home, sorely dreading her father's wrath when her secret could be hidden no longer; all alone she came to the city of Sicyon, where Epopeus the King no sooner beheld the lovely fugitive than he prayed her to be his wife. To which Antiope consented readily, for what better could she do? But King Nycteus, hearing what was become of his daughter, so took it to heart that he presently pined away and died; and with his latest breath he charged Lycus to avenge the dishonour that Antiope had brought upon their house. So Lycus made war on the King of Sicyon, and having defeated and slain him in a great battle, sacked his city and brought Antiope away captive. Now on the home-

ward march travail came upon her, and she brought forth twin sons, whom Lycus in his cruelty cast out on the wayside to perish. But a certain shepherd, who was watching afar off, had compassion on the babes and took them to his wife, who reared them as her own; stalwart youths they grew up, and their foster-parents named them Amphion and Zethus.

Meanwhile their hapless mother languished in a dungeon; bread and water was all her fare, and every day she endured some fresh torture at the hands of a relentless gaoler, Dircé, the wife of Lycus. For this woman hated Antiope with the deadly hate born of jealousy; she knew well enough that Lycus had only married her because he was disappointed of his destined bride, whom she believed that he still loved; therefore had she demanded charge of the prisoner, and never wearied of tormenting her. But Zeus had not forgotten Antiope; by his providence she escaped at last from her dungeon, and was guided to the dwelling of the kindly shepherd, and made herself known to her sons. At the tale of her sufferings the young men's hearts burned within them; sword in hand they rushed to the house of Lycus, and surprised and slew him by his own hearthstone. But to his cruel queen they meted a worse doom; for they tied her to a wild bull's tail, so that she was dragged to death. And they cast her mangled body into the Fount of Ares that was called *Dirce* ever after.

Now King Nycteus had governed his folk mildly, but Lycus had ruled them with a rod of iron; so

they lifted no hand against Amphion and Zethus, but welcomed them as destroyers of a tyrant and rightful heirs of their good grandsire. But Lycus had made friends and allies among neighbouring princes who now talked of avenging him, and the sons of Antiope saw that they could not hold their new kingdom unless they strengthened it against invasion. So they took counsel together, and Zethus, who was the stronger and more warlike of the two, was all for raising a standing army, partly of citizens and partly of the outlaws and rovers that in those days were plentiful and ever ready to sell their swords to the highest bidder. But Amphion, though brave, was no lover of arms; his delight was in the peaceful life of a countryman, in the shepherd's trade, and above all in minstrelsy, being himself a skilled harper; and now he unfolded another plan to his brother. "Why should we bring in foreign soldiers," he said, "to eat us out of house and home, or why keep our own men perpetually under arms, when there is a better way? Let us build a great wall right round the Cadmeian Hill, enclosing the town; then, if war comes, the folk can bring their families, goods, and cattle into a sure stronghold."

Zethus laughed as he answered, "You are a dreamer, brother, like all minstrels and know more of harping than kingcraft. Why, it would take years to build such a wall, even if our folk had any skill in masonry, which they have not. No, your plan will not serve, unless, indeed, you mean to make the Cyclopes build for you, as 'tis said they did for Proetus of Tiryns?"

“ I had not thought of all that,” said Amphion, and he went away dejected to his sheepfold. Now there met him on the way a stranger, a shepherd lad, with merry, sunburnt face, singing blithely; and asked him why he looked so downcast. Amphion told him very readily, for his heart was full; then, sighing, “ It would have been a fine thing,” he said, “ only, you see, I cannot do it.”

“ I do not see that,” replied the stranger quietly; “ men have done harder things—with the right helpers. And speaking of helpers, what was it Zethus said to you just now about the Cyclopes? ”

At these words, Amphion stood awestruck, for he had not repeated his brother's jest. “ You know *that* ? ” he faltered, “ then—you are—not what you seem.”

“ A shrewd guess,” laughed the other, “ but half wrong, Amphion, for a true shepherd am I, as every shepherd knows. Why else do you all bring your firstlings to my altars? ”

Then Amphion knew it was Hermes, dear to shepherds, giver of increase to the flocks, and hailed the god with joy and reverence. “ To you also, hail, son of Antiope the Fair,” answered Hermes, “ nay, *brother* should be the word between you and me. For know, that Zeus is your sire, albeit Zethus your twin was begotten by King Epopeus. Now, brother, I have a gift for you under my cloak; take this lyre, 'tis of my own framing, just such another as I made in my childhood out of a tortoise's shell, and gave Apollo. But this one has a magic in it—of peculiar service to builders. So do you dig the foundations

for that wall of yours, and get stones quarried, and brought to the spot; then play the lyre—and see what happens.” With that, Hermes laughed his merry laugh again, and was gone.

Now whereas Amphion was a shepherd, like his foster-father, Zethus was a husbandman, proud of that calling; to dig, plough, and reap, he said, was fit work for men of thews and sinews, and strengthened their arms to fight; but to tend sheep was mere boy’s work. Despising shepherds as idlers, he thought little of their god; so when Amphion told him the bidding of Hermes, he was in no haste to fulfil it. “The son of Maia has power in the sheep-folds and the pastures,” said he, “but he is no guardian of cities, like the greater Olympians. What should he know of building walls and towers? However, do as you will, my brother, for I love you too well to thwart you. There has never yet been discord between us, and never shall be, I trust.”

So with help of the folk Amphion traced out the foundations of a great wall, enclosing the Cadmeia and the lower city, with towers at all its angles, and with seven gateways; and he built an altar to Hermes within the circuit. And stones in abundance were quarried from a neighbouring hill, and piled in seven heaps near the gateways. When this was done, Amphion sacrificed a lamb to Hermes on the new altar, in the presence of all the folk; and having sacrificed, he took his lyre and began to play. Then was seen a wondrous sight. The quarried stones rose up in air like flights of locusts, thousands upon thousands, so that they darkened the noon-

day; then, while Amphion played on with fast-beating heart, they sank and settled, rank above rank, on his foundations—and there stood the city wall, with bastions, towers, and gates complete.

This was the building of seven-gated THEBES, which name Amphion gave to the new city in honour of Thebe, his brother's wife, and the fairest in a land of fair women. Some say Thebe was a daughter of Asopus, the chief river of that land, and found favour with King Zeus, who promised that she should be queen of a city that should make her name famous to after ages.

The folk of neighbouring villages came gladly to dwell within the strong bulwarks of Thebes; both the old and the new citizens called themselves *Thebans*, instead of *Cadmeans* as aforetime; and Amphion and Zethus ruled there many years in peace and prosperity. But an oracle came from Delphi to the brother kings that the sceptre should not abide with their house, because of what they had done to Dirce; for the gods, though they love justice, love not those that deal vengeance in overflowing measure. And as Apollo had foretold, so it came to pass. First, Zethus saw his only son die while yet a child, and himself died not long after, broken-hearted at that loss; and presently the same fate, only in more grievous wise, overtook Amphion, through the overweening pride of the wife he married.

Niobe was the name of this haughty queen; she was daughter to the Lydian king Tantalus, and the fame of her beauty drew suitors from all lands to his splendid palace on Mount Sipylus. Amphion

came with the rest, and won her heart by the charm of his god-given lyre. Now Niobe bore her husband seven sons and seven daughters, all beautiful as the day; and in an evil hour she boasted that no goddess had children to compare with hers. "They call Leto blessed and glorious among mothers," she said, "but what is her glory to mine? She has but the two children; Niobe twice seven, and all a match in beauty for Apollo and Artemis." That heard gentle Leto; and forthwith she came in guise of an old woman to the Queen in her chamber, and bade her unsay those vaunting words, lest the divine Twins should be wrath for their mother's sake. But Niobe answered, "Hold your peace, old beldame, whoever you are, and get you gone, or I will have you scourged out of Thebes for your insolence." Immediately the old woman vanished, and there arose piteous cries from the courtyard where the children were at play: "*O mother, save me! Ah, the arrows, the arrows! Mother, help, we perish!*" Forth rushed Niobe, and beheld her children already dead or dying beneath a shower of arrows from the sky. One only, her youngest daughter, did she save alive, screening the child with her own body. This child, whose name was Chloris, lived to be a wife and mother, but from the terror of that hour her face was ever after as white as marble. So swift and deadly was the vengeance of Apollo and Artemis for the insult offered to their loved mother. Now Amphion pined away and died, as I have said, for grief at his heavy loss; then Niobe returned to her own land, and there she mourned and wept night

and day for her children, refusing to be comforted. At last, Zeus had compassion on her, and changed her into a rock that may yet be seen upon Mount Sipylus. In shape it resembles a seated woman, and down its face steal for ever the cold rivulets of Niobe's tears.

CHAPTER II

OEDIPUS THE KING

I

AFTER these things the citizens of Thebes met together to choose a king, and they chose Laius, son of Labdacus, because he was of the house and lineage of Cadmus. For the father of Labdacus was Polydorus, who was a son of Cadmus, though not born in wedlock. When Nycteus took the kingdom, Polydorus was yet a child; he was brought up in great privacy by his mother's kin, for fear of the new ruler; as was Labdacus also, whom he left orphan at an early age. And it seemed that the wrath of the gods still rested on the descendants of Cadmus, for Labdacus in his turn died a young man, leaving one child, Laius, as sole scion of the race. Now Laius, being come to manhood, had gone out into the world to seek his fortune, and dwelt as a henchman and friend with the great King Pelops in Elis; until the Thebans, mindful of the ancient glories of his house, sent for him to reign over them. Which he did prosperously for a while, and took to wife Jocasta, daughter of the chieftain Menoeceus.

But in the first year of his kingship, Laius went to Apollo's festival at Delphi, and there the god spake this warning to him by the mouth of the priestess:

“Take heed, O King, that thou beget no child, for thy first begotten shall slay thee.” Thus Laius returned home much disquieted, and for a time he obeyed the oracle, but by and by he set it at nought, after the manner of men who take no thought for the morrow so they may enjoy the present hour. But when Jocasta brought forth a son, the King remembered Apollo’s word; fearing to kill the babe himself, yet resolved to destroy it, he sewed a leathern thong through its ankles, and gave it thus maimed to a trusty servant, bidding him cast it out on Mount Cithaeron, nigh the city. Not so could he defeat the sure purposes of the gods, for the servant, moved by compassion, gave the child to a herdsman of his acquaintance, who dwelt on the further slopes of Cithaeron, beyond the Theban boundary. Now this herdsman was a thrall of Polybus, King of Corinth; he brought the babe to his lord’s wife, thinking she might rear it for pity’s sake; and she, who had long been childless, no sooner saw it than her heart yearned towards the helpless, maltreated thing. By her loving tendance the child throve and was healed of his wounds, but from the disfigurement they left upon him he was named *Oedipus*, that is, “swollenfoot.”

Oedipus grew up a comely lad, quick-tempered to a fault, but wise beyond his years; insomuch that King Polybus, being without issue, was glad to adopt his wife’s fosterling as his son and heir. But it fell on a day that Oedipus went to a banquet in Corinth, and quarrelled with one of his feast-mates, who cast it in his teeth that he was no true son of

King Polybus, but a nameless foundling. And this greatly enraged the young man, who had been brought up to call the King and Queen his father and mother. Indignantly he told them what had passed, and from their evasive answers gathered that some mystery indeed surrounded his birth. "I will not brook concealment," he cried; "since you keep the truth from me, I go to learn it from the god at Delphi." And for all they could say, he set out that very hour, alone and on foot. Now when he inquired of Apollo's prophetess, all the answer she gave him was this: "*Oedipus, of all men most hapless, it were good for thee if thou hadst never been born, for thy fate is to slay thy father and wed with thy mother.*" The heart of Oedipus quailed at those awful words; he fled out of the temple like a man distraught, not knowing or caring whither.

When he came to himself, he was leagues away from Delphi, in a mountain pass where four ways met; a stone sign-post at the cross-roads showed him that one of them led to Corinth. "Yonder lies my way, then," said Oedipus, and stepped onward a few paces; then, recollecting all, "No, no," he cried, "I dare not, must not go home. Never more will I set foot in Corinth—while my parents live—and if I do not, why, the oracle can never be fulfilled! Now I see that a wise man, forewarned, may overcome Fate, though simpletons walk unresisting to their doom. I need only shun Corinth and win a new home in some other city, and that fearful prophecy will come to nought." So saying, Oedipus turned, elated with new hope; he read again the sign-

post at the cross-roads, and chose to follow the up-hill track that would bring him, he saw, to the city of Thebes. Now he had not gone far when there met him a man riding in a mule-car and attended by five slaves on foot. The road was narrow there, and the slaves cried insolently to Oedipus to make way for their lord, who drove his mules on at a gallop, and struck the young man in the face with his whip as he passed, calling out, "Stand back, dog of a peasant!" At that, such fury possessed Oedipus that with one bound he sprang right into the car as it whirled by; like lightning he drew his sword and stabbed the driver to the heart, so that he fell out dead upon the road. And the slaves incontinently fled; but Oedipus pursued and killed all but one, in the ecstasy of his rage. Then he went on his way, but fearing a hue and cry after the doer of that deed, he thought best to avoid Thebes for a while, and so turned aside into the hills, where he found hospitality from certain shepherds.

It seemed that news travelled slowly in those remote uplands; for months passed, and still there was no talk of a murder among the hill-folk; which surprised their guest the more because he knew the man he had slain was some great one, by his dress and equipage. And when at last the shepherds told him they had heard strange tidings, these were not what he looked for, but concerned a weird monster that was ravaging the Theban land. This creature, it was reported, had the body of a lioness, the wings of an eagle, and the head and breast of a beauteous maiden; she spoke with human voice, and named

herself *Sphinx*, that is, "Throttler," not without reason. For she preyed neither on flocks nor herds, but on boys and young men; on these she swooped unawares, and having throttled them with her lion paws, she sucked their blood. And the terror-stricken Thebans had held parley with the Sphinx, at a rock near their city which she made her abode; then had she demanded of them to yield her every month the toll of one youth to be her victim unless he could answer a certain riddle that she put forth. "Guess my riddle," she said, "and I will depart from you;" but no man hitherto had found out the answer; so the Thebans went on paying that dreadful tribute, choosing the monthly victim by lot. For better this seemed to them than that the Sphinx should seize their children day by day. "Were I the King of Thebes," cried Oedipus when he had heard this tale, "I would either guess the riddle or myself die for the people. Methinks whoever now sits on the throne of Cadmus is a weakling, else he would not suffer the flower of his folk to perish after this manner." Then said one of his shepherd friends, "Nay, the King of Thebes is lately dead, killed in some brawl, as we hear—and thereby hangs the crown of the whole story; for his wife's brother, who now bears sway, has let proclaim that whosoever can guess the riddle of the Sphinx shall take the kingdom and the hand of the widowed queen as his reward."

"And what is the riddle?" asked Oedipus, eagerly. But this the shepherds could not say; they had only heard it was something that utterly

passed the wit of man to understand. Oedipus smiled, but said no more, and the next day he took leave of his kindly hosts, saying it was high time he sought his fortune further in the world. All this while he had kept his own counsel, and went away unknown as he came.

Not many days after, a young wayfarer appeared in seven-gated Thebes; travel-stained was his garb, and dust of the roads lay thick on his sandals, yet there was somewhat princely in his speech and mien. It was the hour of full market when he entered the city, and in the hearing of all the folk he announced himself as one Oedipus, a Corinthian, who was come to earn the reward promised to the man that should guess the riddle of the Sphinx. Certain Theban elders, pitying the stranger's youth, warned him that he was merely throwing away his life. "You will fail, my son," said one of them, "as all others have failed, and die the same hideous death under the monster's claws." But Oedipus was not to be dissuaded; so the trembling burghers led him to the rock of the Sphinx. There, couchant on the crag-top, the winged Lioness-Maiden was basking in the sunshine; she raised her head at the noise of footsteps, and a smile dawned on her beautiful and cruel face. And seeing Oedipus, she began delicately licking her lips, like a cat that sees cream, with a gentle, purring sound. But he, nothing daunted, sat down on a hillock over against her, and said, "Fell Maiden, Terror of Thebes, put forth thy riddle unto me, that I may unriddle it if I can." The Sphinx regarded him long with her cold, gleaming

eyes, then sang, and her voice was sweetest music—

*“What is the creature's name
That keeps his form the same,
Though the feet he walks on be
First four, then two, then three?”*

And grimly she smiled, as Oedipus, bending his eyes on the ground, pondered silently for a few moments. Suddenly he looked up, and in a great voice, “MAN is that creature!” he exclaimed. “It is *man* that first crawls on four feet, in his babyhood; then walks erect on two; and lastly hobbles on three, in his old age, making a third foot of his staff. Have I guessed thy riddle, O Sphinx, or no?”

Never a word replied the Sphinx, but with an eldritch scream she flung herself headlong down the crag and broke her neck in the fall. For so she was doomed to perish, if ever mortal should find out the answer to her riddle.

II

Twenty years had passed away since the stranger from Corinth had ridded the Thebans of their weird visitant, when, early one morning, a dolorous multitude assembled before the gates of the ancient palace of Cadmus. Old men and young were there; women also, both matrons and maidens, all seemingly grief-stricken, and the more part habited in black. Wailing, as of mourners, rose from the throng; blended ever and anon with cries of “*Oedipus! Oedipus the Wise! Hast thou no help*

for us, O our King?" All at once, the gates swung open and a tall, crowned figure appeared on the threshold, at sight of whom silence fell upon the crowd. Oedipus, for he it was, stretched forth the sceptre in his hand to bespeak attention, and made oration in these words: "It is not from slumber I come at your call, my people, but from nightlong anxious musing on your affliction, which is to me as mine own. Unworthy, truly, were I of the name of king, could I sleep while funeral pyres blaze everywhere, and the mourners go continually about the streets of Thebes! The gods alone know for what cause they have stricken our city with pestilence so virulent that scarce a house remains wherein there is not one dead; but certain it is, that no human skill or wisdom can stay this plague. Therefore, citizens, I have sent Creon, my queen's brother, to inquire of Apollo at Delphi; and to-day, if I mistake not, he should be here again, bringing the response of the god. And be ye well assured that I shall zealously embrace whatever means the oracle ordains for your salvation."

No sooner had Oedipus thus spoken, than a grey-haired man, wearing the insignia of a priest of Zeus, joyfully exclaimed, "Lo, here comes Creon—with good tidings! For I see on his head a wreath of Apollo's sacred bay—a manifest token that he has received a favourable answer from the oracle."

And it seemed that the priest was right; the next moment, Creon strode hastily through the excited throng and called aloud to the King, "Good news, my lord and brother! The plague shall be stayed

so soon as we cast out from our land the murderers of King Laius, or put them to death. For 'tis his wrathful ghost, too long unavenged, that hath sent pestilence on the Thebans. Such answer bring I from the god."

"What is this you tell me?" cried Oedipus, greatly astonished. "I know, indeed, that Laius died by violence; but, as I understand, that befell while he was on a journey, and far from home. How say you then that his murderers are dwelling among us?"

"It is Apollo's oracle that says so," replied Creon, "else might I not believe it. For Laius, as you have heard, was journeying abroad when a band of highway robbers attacked and killed him. Now, who would think that any of these men would dare to settle in our country—albeit they were never traced——"

"That is a strange thing, too," broke in Oedipus. "A king of Thebes murdered on the highway, by men who seem to have sprung from nowhere—and then—disappeared from human sight! For, doubtless, you moved heaven and earth to find them?"

"Why, as to that," said Creon, "you must remember that even the murder was a small thing to us at the time compared to the horrible tyranny of the Sphinx. '*Near is my shirt, but nearer is my skin,*' says the proverb; we Thebans were more bent on saving our children from the monster than on avenging our slain king. Then *you* came—our heaven-sent deliverer—and we forgot all else in joy."

"By help of the gods," said Oedipus, solemnly,

“ I shall now deliver Thebes a second time. For I will not rest until I find and punish those murderers; which is my bounden duty not only as king, but as successor to Laius—nay, inheriting his throne. I stand to him in the place of a son, and will avenge him as I would my own father! Hear, then, all ye people of Thebes! If any of you knows who killed Laius, and has kept it secret either through fear or favour—let him come privately and tell me the whole truth; let him not be afraid to confess that knowledge, for by all our gods I swear he shall suffer no hurt. Only, he must dwell no more in Thebes; but he shall depart unscathed, taking with him wife, children, cattle, and everything that is his.”

“ A just and merciful sentence! ” exclaimed the old priest of Zeus, as the king paused. “ The man, if such there be, who hath screened the murderers by silence, is not free of bloodguilt.”

Then Oedipus went on yet more solemnly, and in sterner tones: “ Thus much for him that, knowing the truth, will speak out at last. But mark me, citizens, if there be one amongst you who knows and will not speak—I denounce that man before the gods and before you all as traitor to the state, a public enemy—and a murderer. Yea, for on that man's secret hang all our lives; that one man's silence dooms us and our children to perish of plague; and the blood of Laius is on that man's head, seeing he defrauds his ghost of the vengeance for which it craves. Therefore I call down upon him the curse of the injured dead; and I charge you, Thebans, on

pain of the same curse, to deal alike with the murderers and with whosoever shall be found privy to their crime. Let such an one be interdicted from fire and water and from holy rites; let none speak to him, nor endure his presence, nor succour him, though dying of thirst and hunger; be it lawful for whoso will to slay him as men slay a noxious beast. But for the doer of the deed, may he consume away and perish miserably; and may every curse I speak fall on my own head if wittingly I harbour him under my roof."

Deep silence followed these tremendous words; it was broken by the priest of Zeus. "In the name of all the folk," he said earnestly, "I answer, *So be it!*" And the crowd murmured assent; but some one cried, "Apollo knows all things. Why not inquire of *him* who murdered King Laius?"

"Nay," said the priest, "had the god chosen to reveal that, he would have done so to Creon. And no good can come of questioning him on a matter that he plainly wills not to disclose. But there is among us a famed and holy minister of Apollo—Teiresias the Seer; peradventure he may have been vouchsafed the knowledge we desire, and will impart it—if the king command."

"Worthy priest," exclaimed Oedipus, "you have hit on the very expedient that Creon has this moment whispered to me; I shall send instantly for Teiresias; meanwhile, do you lead the citizens to the altar of Zeus, and offer prayers and vows for a happy issue out of our afflictions."

Thereupon the priest and the people withdrew,

and the King, having given orders to an attendant, went into his house to await the seer's coming.

Now Teiresias was had in deep reverence by all the Thebans, not only for his gift of soothsaying, but for the unexampled length of days which the gods had granted him. The friend and age-fellow of Cadmus, he was already an old man when Dionysus came to Thebes; he had been the first to welcome the god's advent, and had vainly warned the headstrong Pentheus not to fight against him; since then three generations of men had passed away, yet was Teiresias still hale in body and the keen force of his mind unabated. Such reparation had Athena made for an injury she did him in his youth. For it was his ill-hap to light unawares upon the virgin goddess while she was bathing in a forest pool; and she, in the surprise and anger of the moment, cried, "Be the eyes for ever blind that have dared look on Athena naked!" Nor had she power to reverse that doom when presently she learned that Teiresias had offended unwittingly; so to make amends, she obtained from Zeus a miraculous span of life for him, and from Apollo the gift of infallible prophecy; and she gave him also no mean portion of her own wisdom.

Not long had Oedipus restlessly paced his hall when the sound of the seer's well-known voice without sent him hurrying to the courtyard. Teiresias stood there, leaning on the arm of a young boy, his guide and servitor; his million-wrinkled face expressed the deepest agitation; he seemed to be expostulating with the king's messenger, who, with an

air of profound respect, was urging him to advance. "Nay, let me turn back," Oedipus heard him say. "Your master did ill to summon me—and I did worse to obey . . . let me go home again!"

"How now, venerable Seer," exclaimed Oedipus, confronting him, "I trust you do not mean to deny us the help of your god-given insight at such a pass as this?"

"Alas!" replied Teiresias, "what profits foreknowledge, without power to avert the evil foreknown? King, suffer me to depart; I cannot, dare not utter the truth you ask of me."

"Then you know who murdered Laius?" cried Oedipus, and as the seer bowed his head, "Why, this is rank treason," he went on excitedly, "treason to me, your king, and to Thebes, your motherland—if, knowing the secret whereon hangs her deliverance from this cruel plague, you do not instantly declare it. Speak, I charge—nay, I implore you in the name of your suffering fellow-countrymen! . . . What, you are silent . . . you shake your head and turn away? Basest of men, would you betray us all to our destruction? Oh, were your heart not hard as the nether millstone you could not be untouched by the misery of your country!"

"Wherefore this passion, Oedipus?" calmly answered the seer. "What is ordained will come to pass, whether I reveal it or no. I tell you, I *will* not speak—and now rage your fill, since you are one that can rule others, but not his own stormy moods."

"Have I not cause of anger," fiercely returned

the King, "in your wicked obduracy? But wrath, old man, does not cloud my judgment—I read the meaning of your silence—and *I* will speak, since you, very wisely, will not. Listen, then; I say *you* are the man we seek; it was *you* that plotted the murder of Laius; ay, but for your blindness, yours had been the hand that struck him down!"

The seer's pale cheek flushed at these words; he quivered from head to foot and raised the staff he carried as if about to deal a blow, but, mastering himself with effort—"Is it even so?" he quietly said. "Then . . . I bid you, O king, abide by the proclamation you have made, and from this hour speak no word more to me, nor to any Theban . . . since you are he whose guilt pollutes the land."

"This to my face?" thundered the astonished King; "insolent dotard, know you to whom you speak?"

"To him that forced speech from me against my will," replied the seer, undaunted; "wherefore, blame me not for plain words."

"Make them plainer," cried Oedipus. "You have said too much—and yet not enough—for what you mean I cannot guess."

Then Teiresias stretched forth his hand, and pointing full at the King, "Thou art the man," he solemnly uttered, "for whom thou biddest us search."

"You dare . . . you dare . . ." stammered Oedipus, choking with fury—"but you shall not say that twice . . . and live!"

"Spare your threats," answered the seer, "I fear nothing you can do to me, for Truth is a sure refuge."

“ Ay,” sneered the King, “ to others—but not to you. For what should he know of Truth who is blind, in body—and in soul? ”

“ How pitiably,” murmured Teiresias, “ comes that taunt from *your* lips—who are so soon to hear it cast at you by all Thebes! ”

But Oedipus, if he heard that saying, did not heed it; he stood frowning and fixed in thought a moment or two; and suddenly, with ominous calmness—“ Tell me,” he said, “ was it you, or Creon, that invented this? ”

If he hoped to surprise some confession from Teiresias, he was disappointed; unruffled, the old man answered, “ It is not Creon who works you mischief, but yourself.”

“ Ah,” burst out the King, “ to see how wealth and royal sway are beset by envy! To think that for the sake of these things—of the kingship this city conferred on me a gift unasked—the trusty Creon, my friend from the first, should plot my ruin . . . ay, suborn to that end a crafty magic-monger—a cheating wizard—whose eyes are keen for lucre only, and stone-blind in the prophetic art! Yea, Teiresias, wherein have you ever proved yourself a seer? What help had you to give Thebes when that four-footed songstress haunted the land? Yet hers was no riddle for a chance comer’s guessing, but one that of all others needed skilled divining. But could *you* read it, either by your bird-auguries or by sign from any god? No, ’twas I, the stranger, the unlessoned Oedipus, that made an end of the Sphinx, answering her by mine own wit, not by seercraft. And is

it such a man you aim to overthrow, in hopes to stand nearest the throne when Creon sits thereon? Bitterly, methinks, shall you both rue the attempt—and were it not for your grey hairs, you should learn by sharp suffering the worth of your so-called wisdom.”

By this, the aged seer's patience was at an end, and sternly he made reply: “ King though you are, I have a freeman's right, being accused, to answer you; for no slave of yours am I, but of Apollo. Neither will I be written down a follower of Creon, who call no man master or patron. I say, then—since you reproach me with my blindness—that you, having eyes, see not the ills that encompass you, nor where it is you dwell, nor with what housemates. Why, know you even whose son you are? . . . Verily, all unweeting, you are hateful to your nearest, both the living and the dead; and the hour cometh when the curse of your father and mother will drive you from this land . . . and your eyes, so keen now, shall behold nought but darkness evermore. . . . Now Oedipus, assail Creon and me with insults . . . such as may be looked for from the basest of all men that live, or shall live hereafter.”

“ This is past all bearing! ” cried Oedipus, wildly. “ Get you hence to perdition! Begone, I say! Darken not my doors another instant! ”

“ But for your urgent summons I had not approached them,” returned the seer, with dignity.

“ And had I known what senseless folly you would utter, you should have stayed at home, for me,” exclaimed the King.

“ You may reckon me a fool,” said Teiresias, slowly, “ but—your parents deemed otherwise.”

“ *My parents,*” said Oedipus, wonderingly. “ But they never knew you. . . . Stay, Teiresias . . . you have wakened an old doubt in me. . . . Tell me, of whom am I begotten? ”

“ This day shall beget—and destroy you,” replied the seer, in solemn oracular tones.

“ Bah! You speak nothing but riddles,” cried Oedipus, impatiently.

“ And wherefore not—to such a master-hand at guessing them? ” inquired the other. “ Nay, I will leave you further matter for your skill—listen, for little I reck of your displeasure, knowing you have no power to harm a hair of my head. The man you are seeking . . . the slayer of Laius, whom you have denounced and proscribed . . . *that man is here*; reputed an alien sojourner, he will be known at last for a Theban born—and small joy shall he have of the discovery. For thereupon shall he go forth into exile—a blind man, guided by his staff, who now walks by sight—a beggar, who now is rich. He will prove to be the brother of his own children; the spouse of her that bore him; his father’s slayer—and supplanter in the marriage-bed. . . . Go in, Oedipus, and ponder these sayings, and if the truth of them be not shortly manifest, you may indeed call me a false prophet. . . . Now lead me home, boy; my errand here is done.”

So saying, Teiresias departed, led by his young slave; the king gazed after him awhile, like one

stupefied; then went into the palace with hasty, disordered steps.

During their colloquy, the messenger who had fetched Teiresias, an old and trusted retainer, had stood by in mute dismay; he was about to follow his lord within when a voice hailed him from the courtyard gate; turning, he saw Creon, attended by three or four Theban Elders, and hurried to meet them. The Queen's brother was a man of stately presence and frank, open countenance; it was pale and troubled now, as he eagerly addressed the old henchman. "Friend," he said, "you can tell me and these citizens whether the terrible report I have just heard be true. . . . I had it from one who spoke with Teiresias as he left these gates. It seems the King accuses me . . . *me* . . . of conspiring against him! What, *I* to be branded with the name of traitor? Intolerable shame! Rather will I die, fellow-citizens, than live dishonoured among you."

"Patience, noble Creon," said one of the Elders, "of a surety, the King spoke under stress of violent rage, and meant not what he said."

"But did he say it?" cried Creon to the henchman; "did he say that I had prompted the seer to forge a lying tale?"

"Such were his words," answered the old man, reluctantly; "what he could mean, I know not."

"And he had his wits and senses when he thus slandered me?" persisted Creon.

"I cannot tell," said the other; "what the master does is hid from the eyes of servants. But hither comes my lord. . . ."

Even as he spoke, Oedipus strode across the courtyard towards them; and eying Creon malevolently, "Ho, you," he cried, "what brings you here? What brazen-faced audacity is this, to enter my gates in the very hour you are detected as the would-be assassin of your king and robber of his crown! Prithee, now, wherein have I shown myself either coward or fool, that you should think to conquer me with no arms but trickery?"

"This is unfair dealing, King," answered Creon, steadily; "you have no right to accuse and condemn me without listening to my defence. Hear, before you judge——"

"No, no," interrupted the King; "you are a good orator . . . but I am a bad listener . . . when I know beforehand that the speaker is a villain."

"Then let me hear, at least," said Creon, "what it is that you charge me with."

"So be it," replied Oedipus. "Did you, or did you not, counsel me to send for yon pompous prophet?"

"I did," said Creon, "and I maintain that I counselled you rightly."

"And this Teiresias," went on the King, "was he practising his art in Thebes . . . when Laius was murdered?"

"Certainly," said Creon, "and as highly revered then as now. But why ask me what you surely know?"

"I have something else to ask you," said Oedipus. "At that time, did Teiresias say any word of . . . me?"

"Not to my knowledge . . . wherefore should he?" answered Creon, more and more bewildered.

"Ask, rather," said the King, "wherefore so great a sage did not discover the murderer."

"As to that," said Creon, "I know nothing; and I am wont to keep silence on matters beyond my comprehension."

"Ah," said Oedipus, "but there is one thing you *do* know—and will be wise to acknowledge—that unless *you* had prompted him, Teiresias would never have charged *me* with the death of Laius."

"He accused *you*?" exclaimed Creon, visibly astounded. "This is the first I have heard of it. So *that* is what you believe of me. I see, at last, the drift of your cross-questioning . . . and in common justice, Oedipus, you must answer *my* questions now. Say, then, is not my sister your wedded wife, and do you not reign as king consort, while she has equal sway with you over the Thebans, who revere her as their native and lawful Queen?"

"All this is true," said Oedipus, "but nothing to the purpose."

"Nay, hear me out," said Creon; "do not I, as brother to the Queen, and the King too, by marriage, hold the third place in the kingdom, enjoying all the honours and privileges of royalty? Am I not courted and caressed by all in Thebes, because they know my favour is the sure passport to yours? Why, I have all the advantages of kingship except the name—and none of the evils. And can you think me fool enough to exchange my free and happy state—even if I could—for the heavy burden of a

crown? I thank the gods I am not so misguided as to be ambitious of more in life than wealth with honour! As for hatching treason . . . send to Delphi, and ask whether I have not faithfully reported the oracle of Apollo; sift the whole matter, and if you can prove that I have tampered with the seer you shall put me to death, not by your sentence only, but by mine. But condemn me not on mere suspicion; bethink you, that a man who casts away a worthy friend, casts away something precious as life itself."

Then gravely spoke one of the Theban Elders: "O King, Creon has said well; sudden judgments are seldom to be trusted."

"But sudden treason must be quelled," retorted Oedipus; "and I shall make short work with this traitor here."

"You do not mean to banish me?" exclaimed Creon, turning pale.

"Far from it," grimly answered the King. "Death, not exile, is the punishment I intend for you; so shall you be a warning to all against the sin of envy."

"Will *nothing* make you hear reason?" said Creon, passionately. "Am I to be doomed without trial? Oh, you must be out of your mind!"

"You will find I have wits enough left to protect myself," said Oedipus, glaring at him.

"Then it is your duty to protect me also," began Creon, but the King fiercely interrupted, "It is *not*, for you are a traitor. My duty is to the State . . ."

"Of which you are the tyrant," shouted Creon.

“The State, forsooth! As if it were all yours, and I had no place or rights in it!”

And now from high words these two were like to fall to blows, had not one of the city Elders timidly stepped forward. “Forbear, princes,” he admonished them. “Here, in good time, comes the Queen, whose mediation will restore peace between you.”

Jocasta, a woman still beautiful, and of mien most royal, came swiftly towards her husband and brother with looks full of displeasure and surprise. “Unhappy men,” she said, “what means this reckless strife of tongues that I overheard within? Are you not ashamed to set on foot a private quarrel in the midst of public calamity? Oedipus, my lord, come with me into the house; and you, Creon, return home. I pray you both, do not magnify some trifling grievance at such a time.”

“My sister,” replied Creon, “this husband of yours has just sentenced me to death.”

“I avouch it, lady mine,” said Oedipus, “for I have detected him in a foul plot against my life.”

“May I never prosper,” exclaimed Creon, “may I die accurséd, if I have done aught of what you lay to my charge.”

“O, believe him, Oedipus,” cried Jocasta, “for the gods' sake; have respect to his oath—and to me, and these good citizens, who will plead for him.”

“Yea, King,” said an Elder, “we all entreat you not to condemn without proof a man found blameless hitherto, and now attesting his innocence by a solemn and tremendous oath.”

“Look you,” said Oedipus, “in seeking that, you seek my own death, or banishment.”

“No, by the Sun, divine leader of the Immortals,” cried the Elder, “may I perish abhorred of gods and men if such a wish ever crossed my mind. But my heart bleeds for our afflicted land—alas, will you add another woe to the many that Thebes endures?”

“Enough,” answered the King, sullenly. “Let the man go—though it cost me my life, or my kingdom. Your piteous plea moves me—not any words of his. Detested shall he be, wheresoe’er he goes.”

“*You* are detestable,” retorted Creon, “even in relenting, and in your fits of rage, intolerable. Such natures are justly ordained to be their own worst plagues.”

“Out of my sight! Begone, ere I do you a mischief,” hissed the King, springing forward, but Jocasta caught him by the arm and signed imperiously to the Elders to lead her brother away. They hurriedly obeyed, and Creon made no resistance; with a last, defiant glance at Oedipus, he turned and passed out through the gateway.

“Now we are alone, my lord,” said Jocasta, “be pleased to tell me how this quarrel began.”

“Your wishes are ever law to me, Lady,” replied the King. “You must know, then, that Creon began it, for he declares that I am the man who killed Laius.”

“Is it possible?” exclaimed the Queen. “But why—what made him imagine such a thing? Did he profess to speak from his own knowledge or from hearsay?”

"Why, that I know not," said Oedipus, "for he did not say it to my face, but like the crafty knave he is, sent that worker of iniquity, the Seer, to do his errand. O, 'twas a cunning trick, but I fathomed it! I remembered how earnestly Creon begged me to summon Teiresias—and when the old rogue denounced *me*, feigning inspiration, I saw at once that Creon had tampered with him."

"Nay, Oedipus, you wrong him," said the Queen gently; "I am certain Teiresias alone is your accuser. And what *he* says need not trouble you at all, for there is no real art of soothsaying among men. Listen, I will prove it to you in a few words! An oracle was given to Laius—I scruple to say, by Phoebus himself, but at least by his ministers—that if he begot a son, that son would kill him. Instead of which, he was killed at those crossways, by outland robbers, as 'tis supposed! And the child I bore him lived not three days, for Laius, in dread of the oracle, strung his feet together and had him cast out on a lonely mountain-side. So you see, Apollo did not fulfil his word concerning either of them; my poor babe perished long before his father—and Laius met his doom from strangers. Then never heed Teiresias and his auguries; the god himself will make the truth known, when he wills, but signs and prophecies are a delusion."

The King seemed to find no comfort, but the reverse, in his wife's speech; his brow grew darker as he listened, and once he started violently; when she ended, he said with a deep sigh, "Ah, my Queen, a dreadful misgiving seized me when you spoke of

Laius having been slain *at crossways* ! I never heard that before—nor, indeed, at what place the disaster befell. Where are those crossways, Jocasta? ”

“ In a pass of the Phocian mountains,” she answered, “ between our land and Delphi. . . . But what ails you, my lord? You are trembling . . . your face is white. . . . ”

“ It is nothing,” he said impatiently. “ Tell me . . . how many years ago was . . . your husband . . . murdered? ”

“ Why, you know as well as I do,” exclaimed Jocasta. “ It was only just before you came to Thebes.”

“ Ay,” said the King, gloomily, “ and . . . what age had Laius then? What was he like? . . . Describe him to me.”

“ He was a tall man, his hair just sprinkled with grey,” said Jocasta; “ his face and figure much resembled yours. . . . ”

“ Woe is me,” muttered the King. “ I little knew I was calling down those curses on my own head! ”

Jocasta partly heard, and in alarm and bewilderment she cried, “ Husband, what is troubling you? Why do you look and talk so strangely? ”

“ My heart misgives me that the Seer . . . discerns aright,” he faltered; “ but to be certain, I must know one thing more. . . . What retinue had Laius on that fatal journey . . . large or small? ”

“ Five slaves only,” replied Jocasta; “ they were on foot, and he rode in a mule-car. The murderers killed the slaves too—all but one, who brought the dreadful tidings home.”

A groan burst from Oedipus. "It is as clear as day, now," he said. "Yet—I have *one* faint hope. The slave who escaped . . . is he still of your household? If so, let me speak with him at once."

"He is yet in my service," said the Queen, "but not here. For soon after the murder—on the very day, I remember, that you appeared in Thebes and wrought our deliverance—he came and besought me to give him charge over my sheepfolds on the hills, saying he could not bear to dwell in Thebes any longer. I could understand it—he had been my husband's most devoted servant and might not brook a new master; so I granted his petition—indeed, his faithfulness deserved a larger recompense. I think he has never since set foot in Thebes."

"But you will send for him now, and quickly?" said Oedipus, anxiously.

"If you desire it, yes," replied Jocasta; "when have I ever thwarted a wish of yours? But I may fairly ask you, my dear lord, what you want with the man, and wherefore this strange agitation? Have not I, your wife, a right to know what troubles you so deeply?"

"Every right," Oedipus answered tenderly, "and you shall hear all. You have long known why I quitted my home in Corinth—how the chance taunt of a boon-companion, flown with wine, raised in me a doubt concerning my parentage which I sought to have resolved by the oracle of Delphi. You know, too, the response Apollo gave—and that I determined never to see Corinth more, lest I should incur unutterable guilt. Only one thing have I kept from

you—a thing I have told no living soul—and that is what now fills me with dread.” And thereupon he described his encounter with the stranger in the mule-chariot on the road to Thebes. “I am well-nigh convinced,” he said, “that that man was Laius, for your story tallies with mine in every point—save one. You say, Laius was attacked and slain by a band of men; now, I was alone. All hangs on your shepherd’s testimony; if he, the one eye-witness of his lord’s death, confirms your report, he proves me innocent.”

“Then all is well,” replied Jocasta, “for not only I, but the whole city, heard him declare that not one, but several men, fell upon Laius and his train—I will send for him instantly, and you shall hear the story from his own lips. Meanwhile, my lord, be of better cheer and shake off these gloomy forebodings; for my own part, having seen how completely false was the prediction that my son should slay his father, I put no trust in any oracles, nor in those that utter them.” With that, she took Oedipus by the hand and led him into the palace.

III

It was the noontide hour of repose, and the marketplace of Thebes lay silent and deserted in the sunshine. Only, in the cool shade of a temple-porch, a group of dignified old men sat conversing in low and melancholy tones. They were those Elders of the city who had attended Creon to the palace; they had escorted him home again, and now, too troubled

in mind for slumber, were discussing his stormy interview with the King. As they talked, a stranger in travelling-garb crossed the market-place, looking about him as if in doubt of his direction; a grey-haired man of weather-beaten countenance, but well-knit and brisk in his gait. "Whither away, friend?" one of the Elders hailed him.

"Sir," said the newcomer, stepping up to him, "I seek Oedipus the King. Of your courtesy, direct me to his house—or tell me where I may find him, for my errand is of much import."

The Elders scanned him inquisitively; whispers passed between them; then said he that had just spoken, "You will find the King in his palace, which is near at hand, and we will guide you thither ourselves. May we know the nature of your errand?"

"I thank you, good sirs," replied the stranger, "but I have no time to lose. If you will lead on to the palace, you will hear my tidings the sooner."

Thereupon the Elders rose up and led the way at their best speed; and as they entered the courtyard there met them the Queen and her women, carrying garlands and baskets filled with incense.

"Fathers of the city," Jocasta addressed them, "you find me on my way to the temples of our gods with offerings for their altars. For Oedipus is a prey to such distraction of soul that he cannot, like a man of sense, judge things present by the evidence of things past; wherefore, having exhorted him in vain, I am minded to implore aid from the gods in this strait—especially from Apollo, who is most

nearly concerned therein. You will commend me, I know, reverend Elders; for to behold the helmsman of the State thus stricken must fill us all with deep anxiety."

Before the Elders could reply, the stranger stepped forward, crying, "Good fortune be yours now and evermore, O Lady, since you are, I take it, the wife of Oedipus."

"You name me rightly, stranger," said the Queen graciously, "and I return the good wishes you so courteously bestow on me. But say, whence are you, and what brings you hither?"

"I am from Corinth," said the man, "and bear good tidings for your husband, Queen. Good tidings I say—though he will not hear them without sadness. The Corinthian folk mean to make him their king—for the aged Polybus is dead."

"This is great news indeed!" cried Jocasta, exultantly—and turning to her handmaids, "Run, one of you, and bid the King come to me at once. Ha, oracles of Delphi, where are you now? The man is dead whom you foretold that Oedipus should slay—the fear that drove Oedipus from his home is proved baseless!"

With a smile of triumph she met her lord as he hurried forth, and said to him, "Hear what this stranger comes to tell you, Oedipus—and see how much Apollo's sublime oracles are worth! He brings you news from Corinth that your father Polybus is no more."

"Polybus dead!" exclaimed the King. "Are you certain of this, friend?"

"Certain as any one can be that has seen him buried," replied the Corinthian messenger.

"Did he die by disease—or some treachery?" asked the King, anxiously.

"His death was natural," said the messenger; "I cannot name you his malady, but any sickness would easily be fatal to him at his advanced age."

Oedipus drew a deep breath of relief, and turning to the Queen—"Ah, wife," he said, "who, after this, can trust the voice that speaks from Delphi's oracular shrine—and warned me that I was fated to become a parricide? For my father lies in his grave, and by no act of mine. Unless, indeed, grief at my absence preyed on the old man's heart and hastened his end—in that sense alone can I be held accountable. . . ."

"Nay, my lord," put in Jocasta, "that prophecy was as false as all the rest that have so affrighted you. I told you there was nothing in them—and now, perhaps, you will believe me."

"Yes, you were right," said the King, "and I was misled by fear. But still I cannot be quite at ease . . . for, see you, Jocasta, one half of the prophecy may yet come true. I am not, praise the gods, my father's murderer, and never can be; but for aught we know I *may* be destined to wed my mother. *That* fear will never cease to haunt me while she lives."

"Why torment yourself so needlessly," began Jocasta—but the Corinthian, who had listened to the King's last words with earnest attention, exclaimed, "Your pardon, Lady, but suffer me to ask

King Oedipus, who is the woman that he is in dread of marrying."

"Why, Queen Merope of Corinth—who else?" said Oedipus, looking at him with surprise.

"Ah," said the other; "now, will you deign to repeat—believe me, I have good reason for asking—the oracle of which you spoke just now as being given to you at Delphi?"

"Surely," said Oedipus. "The god foretold, by the mouth of his priestess, that I should kill my own father and marry with my own mother. That is why I have been so many years a voluntary exile from Corinth—prospering, truly, in this land of my adoption, but missing the sweetest thing in life—intercourse with loved parents."

"And *that* was the reason why you never returned to us," said the Corinthian, musingly. "Well, I rejoice that *I* was the messenger appointed to fetch you home at last——"

"No more of that," interrupted Oedipus. "Let the Corinthians choose whom they will for king; I will never enter their city while my mother lives."

"It is time for me to speak out, then," said the messenger, "and rid you of a causeless fear. Who should do it but I, my son, that knew and befriended you of old—though you do not remember me—and came hither right fain to do you a service, as my future king? Now mark me—you *are not one drop of blood akin to Polybus.*"

"What is this you say?" cried Oedipus, thunderstruck. "Was not Polybus my father?"

"No more than I am," replied the messenger

calmly; "I know, because I myself brought you, a new-born babe, into his house. Having long been childless, he adopted you, and reared you as his own son."

"Then who was my true father?" said Oedipus, looking at him with bewildered eyes.

"I know not to this day," said the messenger; "for you came into my hands by mere chance, while I, who was then shepherd to Polybus, was keeping his flocks on Mount Cithaeron; and the man who gave you to me—another shepherd—told me nothing as to your parents. But cruel-hearted they must have been, whoever they were, for they had not only abandoned, but maimed you in barbarous fashion; your ankle-tendons were sewn together with a leathern thong—the wonder was you were not crippled for life. That was how you got your name—from the swellings on your feet——"

"Ah, that bitter disgrace of my infancy," cried Oedipus. "Whose work was that—my father's or my mother's?"

"Nay, I cannot say," said the messenger; "the shepherd I had you from may have known——"

"Yes, yes," broke in Oedipus, feverishly, "tell me about this man. . . . Who was he?"

"A shepherd, as I told you," answered the messenger; "I have forgot his name—but he was a household thrall of King Laius, who then ruled Thebes."

"Of Laius?" exclaimed the King. "And where is he now? I must find him. . . . Is he still alive?"

"Your own citizens know best about that," said

the Corinthian; "as for me, I never saw him again."

The King turned swiftly to the group of Elders. "Do any of you," he cried, "know the man the stranger means, or what has become of him?"

"I think," said one of them, after a pause, "he must be the old shepherd who served Laius so long—and now has charge of our Queen's sheepfolds. But she herself may be able to tell you for certain."

"Do you hear that, Jocasta?" said the King, trembling with excitement; "the very man we have sent for! What say you, is it *he* whom this stranger means?"

But Jocasta was staring before her with fixed, unseeing eyes, like a woman in a trance, and her face was white as death. Absorbed in listening, the Elders had remarked nothing of this, but they now gazed at her with alarm. As for Oedipus, his intense pre-occupation kept him unconscious of his wife's stricken look as she answered faintly, "What matters it who he means? . . . Pay no heed to him . . . there is no use in recalling these things."

"But I must and will recall them," exclaimed Oedipus; "I will not rest until I have followed up this clue and discovered my true parentage."

"Do not, for the gods' sake," said Jocasta, imploringly; "if you love your life inquire no farther. . . . I suffer enough . . . already."

"Nay, be of good cheer," answered he, coldly; "even should I prove to be the slave-born son of a slave-born mother, it can cast no slur of baseness upon *you*."

"O, I beseech you, seek to know no more," said

the Queen in a voice of anguish; "trust me, it is for your own good I plead with you. . . ."

"Not another word," said Oedipus. "What you call *my good* has been my injury all this while—if you mean my false belief that I was the son of King Polybus. But now I shall know the truth——"

"O ill-fated one," broke out the Queen, "that you might never know it!"

"Ay," said Oedipus, scornfully, "'tis easily seen why *you* wish that." And turning to Jocasta's attendants, "Go in, some of you," he commanded, "and see if the shepherd be come—if so, bring him to me instantly. As for your mistress here—leave her to enjoy her pride of birth!"

"*Alas, alas, for thee, most miserable,*" wailed Jocasta; "I have no other greeting for thee now—nor shall have any more." And with that, she rushed into the palace, followed by her affrighted handmaids.

The Elders exchanged dismayed glances, and the chief among them spoke out their common thought, "Oedipus, what ails the Queen to depart thus suddenly in heartrending grief? She answered not your questioning. I fear, I fear some evil will break forth out of her silence."

"Let it, for aught I reckon," said the King. "I am utterly purposed to know my lineage, however humble it may be. As for her, being a woman, she is full of pride, and thinks shame, belike, to have wedded a man of low degree. But *I* reckon myself the child of Fortune—and while she prospers me I shall never come to dishonour. Yea, Fortune is my

mother, and my kindred are the Times and Seasons that have now abased and now exalted me! Such am I, by birth, and never will I so change my nature as to shrink from tracing out mine ancestry! ”

“ May you have no cause,” responded the Chief Elder, fervently. “ Rather do we surmise—for such things have been—that in Cithaeron’s glens some Dryad gave you birth, the fruit of a god’s embraces. Ay, who knows but hill-faring Pan, or Apollo, or Cyllene’s lord, or Bacchus, that loves to toy with the Nymphs in his mountain haunts—was sire to Oedipus! ”

As he said this, a weatherbeaten old man in a sheepskin cloak came out of the palace, on whom Oedipus no sooner set eyes than he exclaimed, “ Elders, here comes the herdsman at last—unless I, never having seen him, am mistaken! But *you* must have known him of old . . . is this he? ”

“ He, and none other,” replied the Chief Elder; “ well do we know him, for Laius had no more faithful servant.”

“ And do *you* recognise him, stranger of Corinth? ” said Oedipus.

“ Ay,” said the messenger, after one quick glance, “ this is the man I spoke of, King.”

“ Hither to me, ancient,” said Oedipus, beckoning the newcomer. “ Look me in the face, and answer what I shall ask you. Were you once a servant of Laius? ”

“ I was,” said the herdsman; “ not a purchased slave,” he added, proudly, “ but born and bred in his house.”

"What was your employment in his service?" asked the King.

"For the greater part of my life I tended his cattle," replied the herdsman, "either on Mount Cithaeron or in the neighbouring lowlands."

"Now look at this man here," said Oedipus, drawing quicker breath and pointing to the Corinthian; "do you remember to have seen him before?"

The herdsman looked—and shook his head. "I cannot say I do, at this moment," he answered.

"No wonder, King," said the messenger; "however, I will soon make him recollect me clearly! Why, my old acquaintance, were not you and I neighbours on Cithaeron for three whole seasons, you keeping watch over two herds and I over one, from spring until the rising of Arcturus told us winter was near? Then, each year, we brought the cattle down from the hill-pastures, and you drove your herds to the byres of King Laius, while I drove mine Corinthwards. Come, do I speak truth about these happenings or no?"

"You are right," answered the herdsman, "I do remember you now—though we met so long ago."

"Very well, then," said the messenger, with a satisfied glance at Oedipus, "and do you remember, in those old days, giving me a certain child, which you asked me to bring up as mine own?"

"How now—why do you talk of that?" cried the herdsman, starting violently.

"Because, good sir, *that child stands before you*," said the messenger—and pointed to the King.

“Perdition seize you!” fiercely exclaimed the herdsman, “will you hold your tongue?”

“Nay, do not chide him, old man,” interrupted the King; “it is *you* that deserve to be rebuked—and sharply.”

“For what offence, my noble master?” said the abashed herdsman.

“For not answering his question about that child,” said Oedipus.

“But . . . he talks nonsense . . . mere waste of breath,” stammered the herdsman, visibly distressed.

“You are stubborn, I see,” said Oedipus, furiously, “but I will wring the truth out of you,” and turning towards the open doors of the palace, “Within there!” he called, “send my guard hither!” And immediately four brawny spearmen came clanking down the steps of the palace-porch and halted before the King. “Take that slave away and put him on the rack,” he began—but the herdsman cried out in terror—

“No, no! spare me, lord! . . . For the gods’ sake do not torture me—old, helpless as I am! . . . I will speak . . . what is it you would know?”

“Did you give a child to this man here, as he says?” demanded the King.

“I did,” groaned the herdsman, “would I had perished that selfsame day!”

“You will perish *this* day,” retorted Oedipus, “if you hide what you are bound to disclose. Was this child one of your own—or how came it into your hands?”

"It was none of mine," said the herdsman; "it had been given to me by . . . some one."

"By whom?" thundered Oedipus; "palter another instant and torments shall open your lips! I ask you once for all—in whose house was the child born?"

"Do not ask me," cried the old man, wringing his hands. "Ah, master, in the gods' name I implore you, do not ask me that!"

"If I ask you twice," said Oedipus, with a look of cold ferocity, "you are a dead man."

"I heard . . . I was told . . ." muttered the herdsman, quailing, "that the babe belonged to the house of . . . Laius."

"Do you mean to one of his house-thralls, or was it akin to him?" said Oedipus sternly.

The herdsman gave one look at his implacable face, and with a sort of calm despair—" 'Twas said to be Laius' own child," he said, "but she within there—your wife—knows best about that. For *she* gave it me . . . that I might kill it."

"She . . . *the mother* . . . had the heart . . ." came in a broken whisper from Oedipus.

"Ay, for she was feared of the prophecy," went on the herdsman, "that the child was destined to slay his father. Howbeit, I, out of pity, gave the babe to this Corinthian here, thinking that if it were taken out of the land Laius would be safe enough. But he preserved it—oh, for what a fate! King, if he truly says that *you* are his fosterling, then verily you were born under an evil star!"

"O, O!" shrieked the King in an agony, "'tis all

plain now! O light of day, now Oedipus looks his last upon you—Oedipus the misbegotten, the incestuous, the parricide!” He threw up his right hand in a great gesture of farewell, turned, and went into the house staggering like a drunken man. The heavy bronze doors shut behind him with a clang; there was a jarring noise of bolts drawn within; then all was still in the palace-court.

IV

When the King had disappeared from view, the spectators of that scene remained awhile mute and motionless, overpowered by horror. The messenger from Corinth was the first to recover himself somewhat. “Farewell, old friend,” he whispered to the herdsman; “this is no place for me—I must away.”

“I will see you to the city-gate, then,” whispered back the other, “for I must find Creon—he should be told at once what has passed.” And the two old servitors stole away together. Seeing them depart, the King’s bodyguard likewise exchanged some muttered words, and filed out through a side-door of the palace; the sound of their armed tread roused the ancient Elders, who gathered round the altar in the midst of the courtyard and prayed earnestly and low. But still they kept their anxious eyes fixed on those closed doors, as if longing, and yet dreading, to see them open. Presently, to the clatter of falling bars, they *did* open . . . were flung wide . . . and the King’s house-steward rushed out with grief and terror in his look.

“What is it? What new disaster hath befallen?” cried the Elders, as he halted at sight of them.

“Ah, honoured leaders of our folk,” exclaimed the man, “what things you must hear . . . and behold! How will you mourn, that love this ancient house of Labdacus! For, methinks, not all the water of Ister or of Phasis could cleanse it of the pollution it holds; guilt, both unwilling and wilful, lurks therein . . . soon to be revealed . . . but the crowning woes are the self-wrought!”

“We have heard the fearful secret of the house,” quavered an Elder; “what worse can you have to tell?”

“In one word,” replied the steward, “the divine Jocasta is dead!”

“O hapless lady! Is't possible?” cried out the old men. “But *how* died she . . . by what sudden stroke?”

“By her own hand,” the steward answered; and as groans of horror burst from them all—“Ay, 'tis frightful to hear,” he went on, “but you have been spared the worst—you have not *seen* the things that I saw, yonder! . . . Sirs, you asked how our wretched Queen died . . . I will make shift to tell you that . . . and the rest. . . . When she came into the house, in that passion of grief you beheld, straight to her chamber she fled, rending her tresses with both hands, and shut and barred the door ere any of us could stay her. There we all heard her making piteous moan . . . calling on the name of one long dead . . . of Laius . . . and bewailing her twofold espousals, wherein she, the twice miserable,

gave birth to the slayer of her husband and to the children of her child. . . . Thus much we servants overheard, as we stood, terrified, outside the chamber door, but of her last moments none knows anything. For then Oedipus burst into the palace-hall like a madman, and went raging to and fro, shouting to us to fetch him a sword . . . to bring forth her that was *his wife yet not his wife, being mother of his children and himself*. We obeyed not, you may be sure, but slunk out of his way as best we might. Not one of us would have told him for our lives where our mistress was. But as if some god guided him in his frenzy, Oedipus ran straight to her threshold with a great and terrible cry; burst open the door, rending the bolts from their sockets, and sprang into the chamber . . . where we, peering in, saw the Queen hanging by her girdle from a rafter! . . . At that sight, Oedipus howled like a wild beast; then seized her in his arms, undid the noose; and laid her on the ground—but she was dead. And then—O horrible to witness!—he tore off the golden brooches that clasped her robe . . . and with one in each hand he stabbed at his eyeballs, again and yet again, until his cheeks streamed blood . . . crying out the while that those erring eyes should no more see his miseries and disastrous home, nor any more mislead him—save in darkness! . . . There I left those twain, man and wife, overwhelmed by a common doom. Happiness unalloyed was their former lot; but now, in one day, mourning, madness, death, infamy—all woes that have a name encompass them! ”

He ended, weeping, and for a while no man found voice to speak; then the Chief Elder asked in low, awed tones—"But . . . the sufferer yonder . . . is there now a lull in his stormy agony?"

"Nay," said the steward, "he clamours for some one to lead him forth and show all Thebes the parricide, the . . . I dare not repeat his unhallowed words! . . . crying that he must instantly quit the land, nor longer abide here, under the curse his own lips pronounced. Strength, and guidance, are lacking to him, or else . . . but lo, the doors open! 'Tis he . . . now, Thebans, shall you behold a sight revolting . . . yet most piteous."

Pity mingled, in truth, with the horror that thrilled those ancient men as Oedipus came forth, groping his way, and turned full upon them the ghastly ruins of his eyes. Shuddering, they averted their gaze and lifted up their voices in a broken chorus of lamentations and reproaches against Fate. "Is it you? Is it you?" sobbed Oedipus, stretching out helpless hands. "Yes, I know your voices, friends . . . I am not utterly forsaken . . . *you* are loyal still to . . . the blind man."

"Alas, alas, how couldst thou dare this fearful deed?" wailed the Elders. "Better thou wert dead than living sightless! What god urged thee on?"

"Apollo — it was Apollo, friends," groaned Oedipus; "he hath finished the work of my destruction. But mine own hands, not another's, smote me—and let no man say 'twas not well done. For should I go down with seeing eyes to the realm of Hades, how might I endure to behold my father

or woeful mother there . . . I, whose crimes against them both deserve worse than the gallows! Or think you my children can be a sweet sight to me—being whose they are? O, never, never; nor yet this town and citadel, and hallowed images of the gods, from whence I am an outcast by mine own decree. Yea, I bade all spurn away the godless, polluted wretch, unclean towards the gods and towards the family of Laius. And was I, self-branded with such ignominy, to look this people in the face? Nay, rather, had I power to close the source of hearing too, I would not spare to immure this wretched body wholly, and become not only blind but deaf; for sweet it is when the mind dwells beyond the pale of outward evils! . . . Ho, thou, Cithaeron, wherefore didst thou receive me, and not slay me that same hour? O Polybus, O Corinth, and halls that I deemed my ancestral home, how fair without and foul within was the nursling ye reared! O lonely, wooded glen and crossways three, that drank from these hands my father's blood, have you kept some memory of me, and the things I did . . . then . . . and thereafter. . . . O bridals, bridals, that gave life to me and then . . . renewed . . . to my offspring . . . putting forth fruits unnatural, abominable. . . . But enough; shame it is even to speak of deeds of shame. . . . Ye Elders, I adjure you by the gods, hide me straightway somewhere forth of Thebes, or kill me, or fling me into the sea, where none of you may behold me more! Come, friends, vouchsafe to take the hand of one so fallen. Ah, you need not shrink, in fear lest I

contaminate you; the man lives not who can bear this load of guilt and agony, save I myself!"

Thus spake Oedipus, blindly reaching forth his hand; and the Elders wept for pity of him, yet drew back in sore perplexity. But suddenly cried their aged headman, "Lo, in good time, here comes Creon; 'tis for him to consider and deal with your request, O Oedipus, seeing he alone remains to defend this land in your stead."

"Ah me, what shall I say to him?" muttered Oedipus, "what loyalty can I claim from him I so manifestly and basely wronged?"

With that came to the blind man a sound of hasty footsteps . . . a stifled exclamation . . . then Creon's voice, stern yet compassionate—"I come not, Oedipus, to mock you, neither to reproach you with past injuries, but if you have ceased to regard your fellow-men, reverence at least the all-nurturing beams of the Sun-God, nor expose to his view this loathly sight, intolerable to earth and the heavens. . . . Bind up his eyes, some of you, and convey him into the house; piety requires that family afflictions should be witnessed by kinsfolk only."

Certain of the household, who by now were gathered in the porch, made haste to obey; Oedipus suffered them to bandage his eyes with a linen cloth, but when they would have led him in, he turned from them and exclaimed, "For the gods' sake, Creon, since contrary to my thought you deal thus nobly with one who so evilly entreated you, grant me one boon! Cast me straightway out of this land

into some desert place, where I may have no communing with any human soul."

"I should have done that unasked," said Creon, "had I not wished to inquire first of Apollo what it behoves us to do."

"But he hath made known his will already," said Oedipus, "even that the parricide and sin-defiled should be cut off."

"Such, indeed, was the tenor of his command," answered Creon, "but in our present strait 'tis best to learn his will more fully. For that he speaks unerringly, *you* can now bear witness."

"I resign all to your charge," said Oedipus submissively, "and place myself wholly in your hands. Bury . . . her that lies yonder . . . where you will; it is your right as her next kinsman. But for me, let not this city of my fathers claim me as an inmate! Suffer me to dwell among the hills, on Cithaeron . . . my Cithaeron, which my father and mother assigned me as my tomb—that I may die where they twain purposed. And yet too well I know neither disease nor any hurt may end me; for never had I been saved from imminent death but that a strange and fearful lot awaited me. Howbeit, let my fate run its appointed course. . . . Creon, do not bid me take thought for my sons; being men, they need never come to want, wheresoever they may dwell. But ah, my two hapless little maids . . . that have been nurtured on the choicest of my fare, lacking nought my wealth could give them . . . it is of *them* I am thinking. O, let me hold them in my arms once again and lament my fill over our miseries!

. . . Come, prince, come, noble scion of a noble line, vouchsafe me this . . . for only to touch them will make me fancy I have them still . . . as when these eyes could see." With that, the blind man paused, and seemed to listen intently; then, in broken quivering tones—"What is it I fancy?" he cried. "Can it be—tell me, some one, for the love of heaven—can it be that I hear my darlings weeping . . . that Creon has mercifully sent to me my best-beloved children? . . . Have I come near the truth?"

"Yes," answered Creon, "for I caused the children to be brought, knowing their presence would cheer you, as it has ever done."

"Now, blessings be upon you," cried Oedipus, "and may your guardian genius watch over you to better purpose than did mine! . . . Where are you, where are you, my children? Come hither, come—'tis with these two hands your father must see you now . . . they must serve him instead of the eyes that were once so bright and keen."

So saying, he held forth his arms, and as an old nurse led two fair-haired little girls towards him, not one of those that stood by could refrain from tears. Many beheld that piteous sight; for besides the King's household and the retainers of Creon, a number of citizens were by this time assembled in the palace-court. Then Oedipus clasped the children to his bosom, and kissed them, and began to lament over them, saying, "Alas, alas, my beloved ones, how bitter is the lot in store for you! What slights and scornings must ye endure at the hands of this Theban folk! From every gathering of citizens,

from every festival of the gods, you will be turned away, and sent weeping home again, excommunicated from sacred rites. . . . And when you come to nubile age, what man will set at nought the obloquy that will pursue the daughters of such a father . . . who will take brides dowered with reproach and shame? No man, O my children; but all too surely you must pine in barren virginity. . . . O son of Menoeceus, these have no father now but you, for we that gave them being are dead, both dead! Wherefore, pray you, leave not your own kin to wander homeless, unhusbanded, begging their bread; make not their lot equal with mine in misery. Have pity on them . . . see, they are so young, so little . . . and so utterly desolate, unless *you* befriend them. Promise me you will, noble Creon, and give me your hand upon it." Silently Creon gave the pledge. "'Tis well," said Oedipus, heaving a sigh of relief; "and now, children dear, I had fain given you many counsels ere we part, could you yet understand them, but instead I will bid you pray—pray always that you may find meet homes and a better lot in life than your father's." So saying, he kissed the children once more, and lifted up his voice and wept; and they wept also, clinging to him affrightedly.

Then said Creon, mildly, "Enough of these tears, Oedipus, for there is a time for all things. Come now into the house."

"Though loth, I must needs obey," said Oedipus, "but on this condition, that you will send me into exile."

"You ask me for what the gods only can grant," answered Creon.

"But I am become hateful in the sight of the gods," said Oedipus.

"For that very reason you will soon have your wish," returned the other, significantly.

"Do you truly think so?" asked Oedipus, with great earnestness.

"What I do not think," said Creon, "I am not given to waste words on."

"Then lead me hence," said Oedipus; but as, at a word from Creon, a servant gently took the children from his arms, he cried imperiously—"No, no, do not take them from me . . . leave me at least my daughters!"

But coldly answered Creon, "Seek not to prevail in everything, Oedipus; for the things that you once held abide not with you to your life's end."

The blind King bowed his head in silence, and two of his guards led him unresisting into the palace. As that tragic figure disappeared from view, the Chief of the Elders turned to the awestruck crowd—"Behold, ye people of Thebes," he said, "this Oedipus, he that solved the far-famed riddle and was so mighty a man . . . he, the envy of every citizen for his prosperity . . . behold what a sea of troubles hath overwhelmed him! Herein is well seen the wisdom of the ancient saw that bids us *consider the closing day*, and call no mortal happy until he reach, unscathed, the bourn of Life's journey."

CHAPTER III

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

I

MANY kings renowned for wisdom and valour ruled Argos, land of steeds, in the olden time; but the wisest and most valiant of them all was Adrastus, who was, moreover, a very father to his people. His ancestor in the third degree was Bias, brother to the great seer Melampus; and how those two brethren came to be kings in Argos has been shown already by the teller of this tale.¹ Now they held joint sway in perfect amity to their lives' end; but after their deaths their sons quarrelled for the kingdom; and a long feud began between the two houses, wherein sometimes one party prevailed and sometimes the other. At last Adrastus, who had reigned but a short time in the stead of his father Talaus, was driven from the land by his kinsman Amphiaraus, of the house of Melampus; and he, with his household, took refuge in the city of Sicyon, across the Argive border, for Polybus, the king of that city, was his father-in-law. It came to pass not long after that Polybus fell sick and died; and because he had no son, he left his kingdom to his daughter's husband. So Adrastus ruled Sicyon, and prospered there three years; but still his heart was in his own land, and

¹ See Vol. II., Part II., "Myths of Argos."

his one desire was to win back the throne of his fathers. But he durst not go to war, for the men of Sicyon were few compared to the Argives; moreover, he feared Amphiaraus, whose power over the folk was very great because he was not only a redoubted warrior, but a prophet and seer, having inherited the gift of Melampus. It was fated, however, that Amphiaraus should be vanquished, not by the sword, but by a woman, as you shall hear.

For Adrastus had a beautiful sister, the golden-haired Eriphyle, whom Amphiaraus had loved from the time when they played together as children. This maiden fled with her brother to Sicyon, and when Amphiaraus could no longer see her, he found no more pleasure in his days. And after three years, overmastered by longing, he sent a herald to Adrastus, saying, "Give me Eriphyle to wife, and let there be peace between us! for I am ready to restore you the half of Argos as her bride-price."

But Adrastus said to the herald, "Bid my kinsman come himself to Sicyon, that we may talk of this matter face to face. I will be his surety, taking a solemn oath in your presence that he shall come and go unmolested."

For the wise King thought to himself, "If Amphiaraus once sets eyes on the maiden, he will pay whatever bride-price I ask, rather than lose her, seeing she is ten times fairer now than when she left Argos."

Even so it was; Amphiaraus no sooner heard the message than he came hotfoot to Sicyon; the King received him with open arms, while Eriphyle, who had well learned her part, stood by, smiling demurely,

and from that moment he was caught fast "in her strong toil of grace." Nor did he refuse consent when Adrastus named restitution, not only of patrimony, but of the royal sceptre and judgment-seat of Argos, as the terms of the marriage. Then brother and sister exchanged glances, and she, rosily blushing, said, "Will you grant me a favour, my lord and husband that is to be?"

"A thousand, lady of my heart," cried the happy lover.

"Nay, I desire but one," answered Eriphyle, "and I ask it of my brother also. If—which the gods forefend—you and he should ever be at variance again, then let *me* arbitrate between you. Swear, princes, that it shall be so, and that you will abide by my decision on the matter in dispute. For though I am but a weak foolish woman, methinks you could choose no more trustworthy arbiter than one who owes equal love and duty to you both. Ah, my lords, deny me not—think how wretched I must be, as wife and sister, should any feud break out between you twain. Whichever win the victory, *I* must suffer all the bitterness of defeat."

"You say well, my sister," exclaimed Adrastus, "and if our kinsman will enter into such a covenant, I shall gladly do the same."

"I ask nothing better," said Amphiaraus, "and I praise the gods, Eriphyle, for this good thought of yours, which will bring lasting peace to Argos. Come, Adrastus, let us make the covenant forthwith, in the most solemn manner that may be devised."

Now there was in Sicyon a grove and altar of those

Nether Goddesses whom men call by many names, but to the Sicyonians and Athenians they were known as the EUMENIDES, that is, *Kindly Ones*, Powers of awful sanctity, whose vengeance is as a consuming fire upon the shedder of blood and the oath-breaker. Thither the King now led Amphiaraus; and there they covenanted together as the custom was; for having killed and quartered a black lamb, they stood each between two of the quarters and pronounced these words—“ *As I devote this victim to the Eumenides, so I devote myself, if I break troth ; as his blood is poured out upon the ground and his body hewn in pieces, so let it be with me if I perform not the promise made to my kinsman.*”

Amphiaraus made that compact with never a thought that Adrastus had suggested it to Eriphyle, as a piece of policy; and if his simplicity in the whole matter appear strange to you, you must know that this Seer, for all his wisdom, had the heart of a child; guileless himself, he dreamed not of guile in others. Besides, Love had marked him for his own; and whom that god would conquer he first makes blind. So, having wedded Eriphyle that same day, Amphiaraus returned to Argos the happiest of men, bringing with him the bride he had so long desired and the kinsman to whom, for her sake, he willingly resigned a crown.

II

Ten years came and went, and brought no cloud on the prosperity of Argos and her ruling house.

King Adrastus had learned by many proofs the god-given power of Amphiaraus to foretell the future, and the loyalty of his soul; insomuch that he trusted him entirely and did nothing without his counsel. Nor had the least shadow of dissension arisen between them; by both their ancient compact was forgotten, or remembered only with a smile. As for Eriphyle, she was the happy mother of two young sons, and the love she had feigned for her husband in the beginning had become real, so constant was his tenderness. Adrastus, too, was blessed with children, his wife having borne him two daughters in Sicyon, and a son not long after their return to Argos.

And now, his daughters being maidens grown, the King began to think of bestowing them in marriage; and he sent to inquire of the oracle at Delphi what alliances he should make for them. And the god answered by the mouth of his priestess, "*Let Adrastus marry one maiden to a lion and the other to a bear.*" The King could make nothing of this, so he went to Amphiaraus. "What can this mean?" he said, "Apollo bids me take a lion and a bear for my sons-in-law. Does he mock me, think you?"

"No," answered the Seer; "if you go this evening after sundown to the city-gate you will see the lion and the bear of whom he speaks, and be willing enough to marry them to your daughters."

So Adrastus went out at eventide to the gate, which was already closed and barred for the night; just as he came up, a great noise of scuffling and quarrelling began without, and he cried to the

warders on the battlements to look over and tell him what it was. "There are two armed men down yonder," called out the warders, "and they have begun to fight with swords." Then Adrastus bade them open the postern, and went out quickly, and thrust his staff between the fighters, saying, "Forbear, sirs, whoever you may be; know that I am king here, and will have no brawling at my gates." And as the strangers, reverencing his look and tone of authority, put up their swords, he asked them who they were and what was their quarrel. "King of Argos," said one, "I will tell you my name and errand presently; as for quarrelling, this man here began it, not I. For finding your gate shut, I had lain down under the porch to sleep till daybreak; then comes up this swaggerer—whom I never saw before—and pushes me with his foot, bidding me give my betters room. Was I, a king's son, to brook such insolence tamely? No, by Ares!"

"I would have you know, king's son," cried the other, "that I am your equal by birth, and in all else a better man than you—as my sword shall prove, if you dare challenge me."

"Not so hasty, stranger," said Adrastus; "come, you shall both lodge with me this night and drown dispute in the wine-cup."

The two kings' sons thanked him for his courtesy, and gladly followed him to the palace; and no sooner came they into the lighted hall than Adrastus marked that the one who first came to the gate had a lion's head emblazoned on his shield and the other the head of a bear. Then he understood that these

were they to whom the oracle bade him give his daughters; and the thing pleased him well, because both were young men of goodly presence and, it seemed, of dauntless temper. So he feasted them with the best, and when they had eaten and drank their fill he courteously asked their names and parentage. "Tydeus is my name," quoth he of the lion-shield, "and though unknown to you, King Adrastus, I am your guest-friend by inheritance. For King Oeneus of Calydon is my father, whose house and yours were friends of old. So, at least, he told me, and bade me ask hospitality in Argos, since I was forced to flee my homeland because I had slain a man by misadventure."

"And are you indeed a son of revered Oeneus, my father's friend and mine?" exclaimed Adrastus. "Now, thrice welcome, Tydeus; count my house as your own, I pray you, and grieve not for your outlawry, for in Argos you shall find a new home, and in me, if you will, a second father. Why, now I bethink me, your lady mother was an Argive born, so you are half a citizen already. . . . But now, my other guest, I would fain hear *your* name and story."

"I am called Polyneices," answered he that had the bear's head for device. "My father is a king famed erewhile throughout Hellas for his wisdom, power, and glory . . . and now, alas, for his calamities . . . even Oedipus of Thebes. Of him I need say no more . . . the ruin that suddenly overtook him is but too well known to all men. But this is what brings me to Argos; when Oedipus was cast

out from Thebes, the kingship fell to his two sons, myself and Eteocles; and instead of dividing it, we agreed to hold it by turns, each for the space of a year. Now I, being the elder, reigned for the first year, and then gave up the sceptre to Eteocles according to our bond; but when his turn came to lay it down, he basely defrauded me, saying that what he had he would hold, and threatening me with death if I did not instantly avoid the land. What could I do but fly? . . . My wicked brother had our house and treasures in possession, the royal guards were at his command, and the citizens took his part, to their shame be it said! And thus you see me, King, a banished man and a wanderer, whose one hope is in the justice of his cause. Therefore am I come to Argos, seeking aid of you and your people; for I am well assured that whoso will fight in my quarrel shall reap the victory, having the gods on their side."

"Noble Polyneices," said Adrastus, "you likewise are welcome to my house, both for your own sake, and for the sake of your illustrious ancestry, that had its root in Cadmus whom the gods honoured in life and in death. Certes, you have had great wrong from your brother, and I would fain see you righted; but to make war on seven-gated Thebes, that strong city, were a task full of peril. In my poor judgment, a better course is open to you, that, namely, which I hinted to Tydeus . . . but now let me unfold it plainly to you both. Princes, I have two maiden daughters, not the least fair in this land of fair women; richly dowered, they lack

not suitors—but I have seen none on whom I would so gladly bestow them as on you twain. For I perceive that you are worthy scions of your famous houses, and methinks your coming hither is not without providence divine. So, if you are content to abide in Argos, you, Polyneices, shall wed my elder daughter, Argeia; and you, bold Tydeus, shall have her sister Deïpyle to wife.”

The two exiles, as you may guess, consented readily, and were overjoyed at their sudden good fortune; so on the morrow the double bridals were celebrated with pomp and pageantry, and for seven days Adrastus entertained all comers to splendid feasts. And his sons-in-law lived full happily with their young wives until a year had gone by.

But Polyneices, cherishing deadly hate to his brother, could not rest until, by prayers and promises of much spoil, he had gained the consent of Adrastus to make war on Thebes—if, at least, Amphiaraus and the other chieftains of Argos were found willing. Then, having summoned the chiefs to council, Adrastus laid the matter before them; and when Polyneices had spoken for himself, each chief gave his sentence in turn, as the custom was. And the rest, headed by the bold Tydeus, were all for war; but Amphiaraus, waiting until all had spoken, rose up and said, “O King and leaders of Argos, beware of taking arms in this man’s quarrel, lest you bring on us and our city the curse that rests upon him, even the curse of his father Oedipus. Yea, Polyneices, hast thou forgotten how, when the blind and miserable old man was driven from Theban soil, he

cursed both thee and thy brother, because in most unnatural wise ye forbore to succour him? "

"What could we do?" said Polyneices, much abashed. "The god at Delphi had commanded that he should be exiled——"

"But not that he should go aidless, alone, and beg his bread from door to door," sternly answered the Seer; "not that his own sons should desert him in his extreme need. Therefore impute not to the gods what was the fault of your hard hearts only. And you, Argives, be warned in time; he that fights for Polyneices fights not against flesh and blood, but against dark and dreadful Powers—the curses of an outraged father."

So saying, Amphiaraus turned and went out of the assembly; and they all sat silent a while, amazed at his words. But then out spoke Tydeus, "Comrades, the Seer trusts in signs and omens, but let us warriors trust rather in our swords. As for the curse of Oedipus—why should Polyneices dread it more than Eteocles? Both, it seems, incurred it equally; but in the matter which alone concerns us now, Polyneices has right on his side, whereas his brother is notoriously a usurper. That is enough for me, and should be for any man that loves justice and burns to win renown of valour. So, on to Thebes, say I!"

"Well said, brave Tydeus," cried all the chieftains, taking heart again. "To Thebes, to Thebes!"

But Adrastus said, "Not without Amphiaraus, friends; for you know his fame among the people both as seer and warrior; they will despair of victory unless he go with our host."

“ Ah, King, this word undoes me,” cried Polyneices, “ for you will never persuade him.”

“ Content you, son,” replied the King, “ I know how to deal with him. Go with me to his house and you shall see.” And with that he dismissed the council, bidding them muster their vassals in readiness for war.

Now as they went together to the Seer's house, Adrastus told Polyneices of the compact made long ago, and how Amphiaraus must yield and march to Thebes if Eriphyle gave the word. “ We will go first to my sister,” he said, “ and tell her what she must say—and the rest will be easy.”

But herein the King was mistaken; when Eriphyle, whom they found spinning in her chamber, had heard their errand, she answered coldly, “ You make too sure of me, my brother, forgetting that Amphiaraus has become dearer to me than even yourself. If he thwarts you in this matter, he has some good reason; and I, as a duteous wife, must prefer his judgment to yours.”

Whereat Adrastus, though reckoned the most eloquent prince of his time, could find no words to express his surprise and anger, and so strode out of the chamber and the house. But Polyneices lingered, for there had flashed into his mind a saying of his wife about Eriphyle—that *she would give her very eyes to possess the necklace of Harmonia*. Now this peerless necklace, which the divine craftsman Hephaestus wrought for a marriage-gift to Harmonia, bride of Cadmus, had ever since been the chiefest treasure of the Theban royal house; queen

after queen had worn the inestimable jewel, until the hapless Jocasta gave it to her eldest and favourite son, who brought it with him to Argos. It was hard, he now thought, to part with such an heirloom; but if Eriphyle so coveted it, she should have it at the price of betraying her husband, for only so could he, Polyneices, recover the throne of Thebes. Very warily, very gradually, he broached that bargain to her; very patiently met her indignant protests—for he thought she protested overmuch; still he pleaded, and still Eriphyle listened and shook her head. But he could see that she wavered—and therefore was as good as lost. “Kinswoman,” he said, “Argeia shall bring you the necklace. You need say nothing to her; if she returns without it . . . I shall understand.”

“But . . . no one must know . . .” murmured Eriphyle, with a sidelong glance.

“No one shall,” said Polyneices, “except my wife; and she will hold her tongue, for my sake and her own.” So saying, he went his way quickly, with triumph in his heart. . . . Before nightfall, the good news was known to all the city that Amphiaraus, who had at first opposed the war with Thebes, had been won over by the persuasive eloquence of King Adrastus.

III

On the third morn thereafter, a great and gallant host marched through the streets of Argos in seven companies, led by as many chieftains. Old men,

women, and children thronged doorways and temple-steps to watch their passing, and rent the air with shrill acclaims and prayers for their victory and safe return. First came the King in splendid armour, with a shield whereon golden stars encircled a crescent moon; he was riding his famous black horse, Arion, the fleetest in all Hellas, and currently supposed to have been bred by Poseidon, Lord of Steeds. It was seen that each of the captains who followed had blazoned his shield with a new device, bearing on their enterprise; and there was applause from the women-folk as they scanned these emblems, but the old men shook their heads and muttered prayers. The shield of Polyneices displayed a woman, robed and crowned, leading an armed man by the hand; above the woman's head was inscribed, JUSTICE, and from her mouth issued the words, THIS MAN WILL I BRING HOME. Tydeus had chosen the device of a naked man brandishing a flaming torch, with the legend, I WILL BURN THE CITY. Next came proud Capaneus, sprung from the old Argive kings; on his shield appeared a warrior scaling a rampart, and this inscription, NOT ARES HIMSELF SHALL TURN ME BACK.

Now, after him came a young chieftain whose device pleased the more thoughtless onlookers best of all; for it was that ancient terror and reproach of Thebes, the wingéd Sphinx, flying aloft with two boys in her clutch. "Wittily fabled!" cried some one; "as that fell maiden ravaged Thebes, so wilt thou, O Child of a Maiden!" And others caught up the saying; for the young chieftain's name was

Parthenopæus, that is, "Maiden's Son," and he was the child of Atalanta, the far-renowned Maid of Arcady. Though yet a stripling, *Parthenopæus* thirsted after glory; he no sooner heard that *Adrastus* was levying a host against Thebes than he led his Arcadian vassals over the border to Argos, and offered his services to the King, who gladly welcomed such an ally.

Mecisteus, brother to *Adrastus*, was the sixth captain; but the multitude had no eyes for him or his armorial bearings, so eager were they to note those of *Amphiaraus*, who followed seventh and last. The device he had chosen would assuredly convey some weighty presage either of good or ill success! But as the Seer went by in his chariot, murmurs of disappointment arose—for the shield he carried was blank.

Now the wives and children of *Adrastus* and his kin were gathered at the city gate to bid them the last farewell. *Eriphyle* stood among the rest, holding her two sons by the hand, and when *Amphiaraus* drew near, she bade him godspeed with a smile on her pale face. But he, not so much as looking at her, called his elder son, a noble boy of ten years old, to come up to him in the chariot; and putting his arm about his neck, "*Alcmaeon*," he said in a low voice, "thou art not too young to heed and remember thy father's last commands. Now mark . . . dost thou see that woman yonder, smiling at us?"

"My mother, sir?" asked the little lad, wonderingly.

“Ay,” said the Seer, “she is thy mother . . . but thou must not think on that! For she is a traitress, boy . . . she has sold her husband’s life for a jewelled bauble . . . you will learn how some day. Remember, when thou shalt hear that I have perished, that *she* sent me to my death; yea, and knowingly . . . for I had warned her what must betide me if I went to Thebes! . . . Wherefore I charge thee, my son, as thou art lief and dear, and on peril of a father’s curse—take vengeance on his murderess when thou comest to manhood. Farewell, child of my heart . . . and once more I say to thee—*Remember!*”

Then Amphiaraus tenderly embraced his son; and having caused him to light down from the chariot, he went his way after the rest of the departing host.

IV

When the Seven Chieftains came to the border of Argos they halted, as the custom was, to offer sacrifice to Zeus before they set foot on alien ground, and implore favourable omens for their enterprise. But plainly the King of Gods warned them to turn back; no augury of thunder did he vouchsafe, but quenched the altar-flames with a sudden shower of rain. The victim, a young bull, struggled fiercely when led to the altar; his entrails, being opened, were seen to contain no liver; in short, every sign of ill-luck attended the sacrifice. But the hearts of all the Seven, save Amphiaraus, were hardened

past remedy; and better it seemed to them all to encounter death than the dishonour of retreat. So on they marched, and came next noon to a deep, grassy vale; there they halted once more, needing water for themselves and their horses.

But water they found none, for the streams of the vale were now dried up by the midsummer heat; and the Seven Chieftains went together to look for a spring. By and by they saw an old woman sitting in a meadow, with a child playing at her feet; and they asked her where they might find water. "There is a spring not far off, lords," said the old woman, "I will show it you, if you will follow me." And rising up, she led them across the meads, leaving the child at his play. But just as they came to the spring, they heard piercing shrieks behind them; and the old woman cried, "It is my nursling! Alas, some evil has befallen him and I am undone!" Back she ran, and the Seven with her—but they came too late; the child lay dead among the meadow flowers, and the print of a serpent's fangs upon his arm showed what death he had died. His old nurse threw herself on the ground beside him, weeping and tearing her grey hair. "O gods!" she wailed, "that I should live to see this day! . . . O me unhappy! Now will my master certainly kill me, because I kept not watch over his son!"

Then said Amphiaraus, "Be comforted, dame, for the fault is ours, not yours; and we will see that you come to no harm for doing us service. Tell us, who is your master, and what place is this?"

"This is the Vale of Nemea," answered the old

woman, "and my master, Lycurgus, is king of the city Cleonae, nigh at hand."

"And who are *you*, I pray?" said Adrastus. "Though you seem to be a slave, your look and accent betoken a higher degree."

"I was once a queen," replied the old woman, lifting her head proudly; "it may be, warriors, you have heard my name—Hypsipyle of Lemnos."

"What," cried Adrastus, "are you indeed that island queen who entertained Jason and his comrades? Then by what strange reverse of fortune came you here?"

"I will tell you," said Hypsipyle; "when I and the rest of the Lemnian women plotted vengeance upon our menfolk we swore to put them every one to death. Howbeit, I secretly spared my father, King Thoas, and hid him in a great chest, which I caused to be thrown into the sea; and as the gods would have it, the chest drifted ashore on another isle, whose folk rescued the old man, and he dwelt with them some years, keeping himself close. Meanwhile I reigned as queen in Lemnos, and doubted not that Thoas had perished; but word came at last that he was alive—and when they heard that, my women-subjects seized and bound me, declaring that I had broken faith with them and ought to die for my treachery. But some said, 'Let us not kill her, for we have enough blood on our heads already; rather let us sell her into slavery.' That seemed best to all; and so, having kept me in chains until the next merchant vessel touched Lemnos, they sold me to her captain, who brought me to the

slave-mart of Corinth, where Lycurgus bought me for a handmaid to his wife. . . . Many a year have I spent in thralldom, and now, ill-fated that I am, I shall die a thrall's death for this mischance! "

"Nay, fear not that," said Adrastus; "we will make Lycurgus promise to hold you guiltless, or he shall reckon with us and all our host. Come, guide us to the city . . . my men shall bear home this ill-starred child and I myself will break the heavy tidings to his father."

"We will go also," said the rest of the Seven, and so they did; and with grief and amazement the folk of Cleonae saw the body of their king's little son borne through their gates, escorted by stranger warriors. And that day there was weeping and mourning in the house of Lycurgus and in all his city.

Now Adrastus did not forget to plead for Hypsipyle; but at the first word, Lycurgus desired him to say no more of that, for the unfaithful slave deserved to die. Then said Amphiaraus, "Take heed, King, that you do this woman no hurt; for I am given to know that your child's untimely death was ordained by the gods, as a sign to me and my comrades of the fate in store for us at Thebes, whither we lead our host." When Lycurgus heard that he was afraid, knowing by report how great a seer was Amphiaraus; and he readily promised to deal kindly with Hypsipyle for the rest of her days. Then he prayed the Seven Chieftains to abide while he celebrated his son's funeral rites; and Amphiaraus said, "Yea, King, for meet it is we should

render signal honours to his innocent ghost, that for our sakes thus early walks the asphodel meadow. Bury the child in the Vale of Nemea, even where he died; and we will offer sacrifice and hold games at his tomb, as unto a hero, which shall be renewed yearly evermore. And I prophesy that the Nemean Games shall become famous in the aftertime; the flower of the youth of Hellas shall contend therein, and they shall be reckoned among the four that men will call *the Sacred Games*. Such glory, Lycurgus, doth the King of Gods vouchsafe your child in death. But whereas his name while he lived was Opheltes, henceforth he shall be named *Archemorus*, that is, 'Pioneer of Doom,' for he goeth first on the dark road that I and these, and all the bravest of our host, must shortly tread."

So the Seven tarried three days in Nemea with their army, and held funeral games for Archemorus, as the Seer had ordained. Now the victor in each contest was crowned with a wreath of wild parsley, because that herb was used in the ritual of the dead; and such was ever after the custom at the Nemean Games.

V

Meanwhile, news of the coming of the Argives had flown before them to Thebes; and Eteocles with the nobles and burghers set about the work of preparing for a siege. Arms and munitions of war were hastily got ready, and every gate strongly manned; the country folk came flocking in with their cattle and

household goods; the King and the wealthy land-owners had endless droves of sheep and oxen, and endless trains of waggons laden with corn, oil, and wine, brought in from their demesnes. Next, by Eteocles' order, all the women and children were lodged in the Cadmeia, the ancient citadel on the rocky height in the midst of the town, which contained the holiest shrines of Thebes and the palace that Cadmus himself built of old.

Now scarcely had the Thebans thus made all ready for defence, when the sentinels on the walls beheld a swarthy cloud of dust rising fast along the sky from the westward; and nearer as it rolled they could see plainly and more plainly beneath it the long glittering array of helmets and lances, hear ever louder the clarion's shrill war-notes, thunder of horse-hoofs, and trampling of armed multitudes. The alarm was quickly given; and the citizens, rushing to the wall, saw the Argive army, a glorious and terrible sight, drawn up in seven battalions on the further bank of the river Ismenus, a short half-mile away. But instead of the onset, their trumpets sounded a parley; a single warrior, preceded by a herald, crossed the shallow stream—now at its midsummer ebb—and advanced to the city. And when they came to the gate called the Proetid Gate, the herald in a loud voice demanded safe-conduct and an audience of King Eteocles for Tydeus, son of Oeneus, who brought terms of peace from the Argive leaders. Eteocles was for holding no parley with the foe; but being overruled by Creon and the city elders, he gave the pledge of

safe-conduct, and swore on behalf of the Thebans to observe the truce which Tydeus offered them in the name of the Argives. So, having sent back the herald to Adrastus with this report, Tydeus entered the city; and Eteocles received him into his house with every mark of honour, and made him a feast, to which the captains and chief men of Thebes were bidden. But when all had eaten and drunk their fill, the King asked to hear the conditions of peace with Argos; then roundly answered bold Tydeus: "There is but one, Eteocles—that you forthwith restore the kingdom to Polyneices your brother, laying down the power you wrongfully hold. This do, and we his allies will quit your land without harming so much as a blade of grass; but if you force us to war, expect no mercy; for we will take this city with the sword, and burn it with fire, and lay it even with the ground, so that no man shall say, *This is Thebes.*"

"Son of Oeneus," cried the King, his eyes flashing with rage, "were you not doubly sacred as envoy and guest, I would make you rue bringing me such a message! Take my defiance to those that sent you; say, I bid them do their worst; and tell the accursed traitor Polyneices that I and all true Thebans abhor and spit upon him, who has dared to lead alien foes against his motherland."

Then up rose all the chiefs assembled and cried, "It is well spoken! Long live King Eteocles, and perish his traitor brother, who would bring ruin on sacred Thebes! To arms, to arms, Thebans . . . let us conquer or die!"

“Yea, are ye so hot for a fray?” said Tydeus, looking hardily on their scowling faces. “Listen then to me! Here stand I, no traitor, but good man and true; and challenge you one and all to single combat with broadsword and shield. I will lay on for Argos, and lay ye on for Thebes; and may the side whose champion wins be victorious in the coming strife! Of your courtesy, Thebans, take up my challenge; for loth were I to go hence without repaying in some sort my honourable entertainment.”

Thus spoke the dauntless son of Oeneus, and moved his hearers to admiration; and nine chieftains, man by man, encountered him in sword-play, but he overcame them all. Then, taking courteous leave of them, he went his way out of the city; for it was now eventide, and darkness was falling fast. Now an evil thought had come to Eteocles while he watched the overthrow of his champions; and he set an ambush of twenty spearmen on the road to the ford of Ismenus to waylay and murder bold Tydeus. But he, singlehanded, fought his way through them, killing no less than nine and putting the rest to flight; and so returned, unscathed, to the Argive camp. Adrastus and the rest of the Seven heard with indignation how the Thebans had broken truce; and when Tydeus had further reported the defiance of Eteocles, they determined to assault the city on the morrow's morn.

There was little sleep for Eteocles that night; at earliest dawn he arose, and was buckling on his armour when a babel of shrieks and outcries was

heard in the palace forecourt. Out he strode, and found the Theban women huddled together like frightened sheep on the steps of the porch, wailing and clapping their hands distractedly. At sight of him they redoubled their clamour, shrieking out, "All's lost, all's lost, O King! The Argives be upon us! . . . We are all ravished, murdered, undone! . . . Help, O gods of Thebes! . . . Save us, Zeus and Athena!"

"Be silent, you intolerable creatures," thundered the King. "How dare you raise this immodest, ill-omened uproar here, enough to take all heart out of the men who are defending you? Would the gods had never created womankind — senseless, shiftless, obstreperous torments that ye are—but given men offspring without you; then had it been a better world, I trow! What, are you not ashamed to cry havoc, and the assault not yet begun?"

"Forgive us, lord," said one of the elder women, quailing beneath his eye, "but we have reason enough for terror . . . the Argives in their thousands are at the gates even now!"

"Ha," exclaimed Eteocles, "then I must to the wall. Go into the temples, women, and pray for Thebes—but soberly and quietly, for the gods love not noisy supplications and laments."

Just then, one of his henchmen ran full speed into the courtyard, crying, "Where is the King?"

"Here, man," said Eteocles, striding down from the porch. "What news from the wall? Do the Argives approach? These women say so, but I hear no signal of battle."

“Ay, they have invested the city on all sides, lord,” said the henchman; “their army moved in seven divisions, each of which has taken up its post before one of our gates. But they will not attack just yet—their leaders are holding council of war at the Proetid Gate, where the good seer Amphiaraus has his post.”

“You name him well,” cried Eteocles, “a good seer is he and a good man to boot—pity such an one should league himself with evil-doers! And they say he is the best warrior in Argos—but he will meet his match in Periclymenus, who holds the Proetid Gate. . . . Now tell me, where will Adrastus and Mecisteus fight?”

“Adrastus at the Homoloïd Gate, his brother at the Onchaeon,” answered the henchman.

“Good,” said Eteocles; “they will find two valiant sons of Astacus to welcome them—Ismarus and Leades. Where is Tydeus posted?”

“At the Crenid Gate,” replied the henchman, “where the third son of Astacus is warder. The gods preserve him from Tydeus’ sword—that bold chieftain has the strength of a lion as we learned to our cost last night!”

“And Melanippus has the strength of a wild bull,” retorted the King; “if he had not been absent on his guard, Tydeus would have come off otherwise than he did. But Astacus’ fourth son captains the Electran Gate—whom must *he* encounter?”

“A young Arcadian chief, who has marched with Adrastus,” said the henchman; “Parthenopaeus they call him, as our spies report.”

“I have heard of the stripling,” said Eteocles, “and good words went with his name; he is comely, too, they say—but methinks the damsels of Arcady will look and long for him in vain. . . . Who comes against the Ogygian Gate?”

“The fierce Capaneus,” said the henchman, “one that fears neither gods nor men. I myself heard him shouting impious vaunts before the gate, and saw the device on his shield—’tis a warrior scaling a city-wall and defying Ares himself to hinder him.”

“May Zeus confound the blasphemer,” exclaimed the King, “as I doubt not he will, for nought do the gods so detest as overweening arrogance. But now I must go to my own post at the Hypsistan Gate . . . and tell me, which of the Argive leaders assails it?”

“My lord,” faltered the henchman, “I have named them all but one . . . whom you would do well to avoid . . .”

“You mean my brother,” cried Eteocles. “Now, by all the gods, you bring me good tidings! I would not for the whole world that Polyneices should fall by any sword but mine.”

At those words, a cry of horror broke from the Theban women; and an ancient dame who had known Eteocles from childhood flung herself at his feet. “The gods forbid this thing!” she wailed. “Go not to the Hypsistan Gate, my King, for your own sake . . . for the sake of all who love you! Out and alas . . . heard ever mortal the like of this, that brothers born of one womb should meet in deadly combat?”

And the rest of the women, falling on their knees, besought him with tears not to provoke their gods by that unnatural conflict, lest they should forsake Thebes utterly; but to take the defence of some other gate. But sternly he answered, "Peace, brawling fools, or I shall think you are well-wishers to the vile traitor, and tremble for his safety. As for the gods, I reckon not how I offend them; for they have hated all my race these many years with a great hatred." So saying, Eteocles went forth to the Hypsistan Gate.

VI

Meanwhile, the Seven took final counsel together; and offered the wonted sacrifice to Zeus, Lord of Victory, before joining battle, praying for auspicious omens. But when they bade Amphiaraus divine for them as his manner was, he looked upon the altar and said, "Why tempt ye the God, seeking after a sign, though he has given you many and you would not heed? Is he a man, that he should repent him of his word? Not so, but his yea is yea, and his nay, nay, everlastingly. Therefore he gives no sign by this sacrifice, whether good or ill."

Then Adrastus prayed him at least to speak some word of cheer out of his own foreseeing mind, that the chieftains might hearten their men withal ere they fought.

"Do not ask him, Adrastus," cried Tydeus. "Is not his one delight to prophesy evil continually?"

Look, how he glowers at us now! I warrant his mind's eye beholds all seven of us slain under these walls."

"Not *all*," said the Seer dreamily, letting his gaze rest on one after another of his comrades; "I see one riding for his life . . . in the wild stream of flight . . . the pursuers follow hard after him . . . but he outstrips them . . . he, alone, comes home to lowland Argos."

"Prophet of evil," exclaimed Adrastus wrathfully, "be silent—I should have known you would bode nothing but disaster, as Tydeus says."

But the Seer went on, turning his rapt eyes upon the Proetid Gate. "I see another host moving to the assault . . . upon a day yet distant . . . an Argive host, but not ours. . . . Ah, child, in thine aspect shines forth the spirit of thy sires! . . . Plainly I discern the speckled snake, Alcmaeon's shield-device, in the van of those that storm in at yonder gate. . . . And on the war-lord that in our first siege was vanquished, even Adrastus, wait better auspices now; yet as touching his own house, his fortune is reversed; when the Argive host by the gods' grace returns triumphant, 'tis he alone that buries a son fallen on the field."

Thus spoke Amphiaraus in his vision; and his comrades, all but one, hearkened with awe to his inspired words. But the fierce Capaneus cried, "Why stand we idly here, listening to this prating seer like children frightened by an old wife's tale? I'll to the fray, and hear no more of it; for this city I will take in despite of Zeus himself!"

Then all day long the noise of battle rolled about the walls of Thebes; grim was the slaughter and great were the deeds of arms at each of her seven gates. Where all did bravely, none wrought such prodigies of valour as Tydeus; like corn before the sickle the defenders of the Electran Gate went down before his sword, until he and Melanippus, strongest of the Thebans, met face to face. Then began a duel that besieged and besiegers paused in the thick of fight to look on; until, at the same instant, Melanippus stabbed bold Tydeus a hand's-deep in the breast, and he smote the Theban through helmet and through head; and down they fell together in a great pool of blood. Now the gods were looking down from their golden houses to behold the battle; and when Athena saw Tydeus fall, who honoured her above all the Olympians, she took ambrosia in her hands and sped down to him, with intent to bestow immortal life on the dying man. But Tydeus, in the death-agony, fixed his teeth in the head of Melanippus and tore the flesh like a ravening wolf. And when the goddess saw that, she turned away with loathing and left him to his fate. Thus perished the first of the Seven.

And the next that fell was Capaneus—by no mortal hand. For, according to his boast, he suddenly scaled the wall by a ladder, close to the Ogygian Gate; with a flaming torch in either hand he drove the defenders back and sprang towards the lofty gable of a neighbouring temple, to set it on fire. But in the same instant Zeus hurled a thunderbolt at Capaneus, and he fell headlong from the

battlement, a livid corpse. Such was the end of one who all his life had been a contemner of the gods. And the knees of Adrastus and his men were loosened with dismay when pale-faced scouts brought him word that Tydeus and Capaneus were fallen.

Yet manfully he fought on, though messenger after messenger came with tidings of disaster at the other gates; his brother Mecisteus was slain outright . . . Parthenopaeus breathing his last . . . Amphiaraus twice driven back with heavy loss from the Proetid Gate. Still hour by hour the great fight went on, until, near sunset, a rumour flew like wildfire through all the Argive host that Polyneices himself was slain, in duel with his brother. And therewithal Zeus sent divine panic upon them, such as the bravest may not withstand when it suddenly grips his heart; so that they wavered, broke, and fled in shameful rout. And the Thebans, sallying forth from every gate, pursued them many a league, taking no prisoners, but slaying without mercy. King Adrastus, seeing all was lost, mounted his horse Arion and plunged into the wild stream of flight; the Theban horsemen followed hard after him; but swifter than the wind that noble steed carried his rider over hill and dale, and brought him safe to Argos. But of the gallant army he had led forth came but a remnant behind him; and of the Seven Chieftains, he only returned alive from the siege of Thebes.

Now while the whole city rang with lamentations—for there was no house but mourned father, sons

or brothers slain—the King remorsefully thought on Amphiaraus, and he cried in the hearing of the people, “ Ah, how I yearn for the jewel of my host, the best of warriors and of seers! But doubtless he, too, hath perished, as he foretold . . . by some Theban's spear.”

Then answered one of the Argives that had escaped, “ O King, our Seer, the shepherd of the folk, is indeed taken from us; but not as you believe; for Zeus, it seems, willed not that so good a man should suffer dishonour at the last. I was of the company Amphiaraus led to the assault, and bear witness that he fought like a lion until that panic from the gods seized on our host; then cried he with a great voice, *The hour is come*, and bade Platon his charioteer light down, and himself turned the horses and fled with the rest. And the warden of the Proetid Gate pursued after him on horseback, and all but overtook him; but just as the Theban launched his spear—ah, gods, what a sight was that for mortal eyes!—the solid earth yawned wide under the Seer's chariot, and he with his horses went down into the chasm, that closed over their heads. 'Twas a fearful doom—but at least it spared that god-like hero the ignominy of a deathwound in . . . the back! ”

Then Adrastus and all the people lifted up their voices and wept for Amphiaraus, bethinking them that they could not even bring the body of that wise and mighty hero to rest among them, in the sepulchre of his fathers. And the King sent a herald to Thebes with a rich ransom, to beg a truce

and leave for the Argives to bury their dead; and himself, with the city Elders and a retinue of slaves, followed to the Theban border. Now the herald brought back word that the victors were not rejoicing, but mourning; because Eteocles, in the act of slaying Polyneices, had been stabbed by him to the heart. And their uncle Creon, who was now king, was plunged in sorrow of his own; for his young son Menoeceus had died by his own hand to save Thebes. For, while the battle stood doubtful, the blind seer Teiresias had revealed to Creon that the Thebans should conquer if he offered up his son to the gods; which the father refused with horror, and bade Teiresias keep that oracle secret at his peril; but the noble youth, overhearing their discourse, went forth without a word and accomplished that sacrifice, himself the victim and the priest. (Wherefore the Thebans ever after paid divine honours to Menoeceus, as the saviour of his country.) The herald reported further that Creon at first haughtily rejected his petition, saying that dogs and vultures should be the buriers of the slain Argives; but yielded to the entreaties of the Theban Elders not to bring the wrath of the gods upon the city by such an outrage against divine and human laws. But he sent word that the Argives must bury their own dead only, leaving Polyneices to his countrymen.

So Adrastus and his train came unarmed, and clad in the white robes that Argive mourners wear, to the field of slaughter, and the common soldiery they buried in trenches where they lay, but for the

chieftains and warriors of mark they built seven funeral pyres, one before each gate of the city. Then having burned the bodies, they quenched the flames with wine, and placed the ashes and calcined bones in urns of painted clay, as the manner was, to be buried in their own land.

But Evadne, the wife of Capaneus, had stolen after them to Thebes, cherishing a high resolve; and when his lightning-seared corse was laid on the pyre, she darted forth and leaped into the flames, and so perished, clasping her slain lord. For Capaneus, the godless and lawless, whose hand was against every man and every man's hand against him, was loved by one woman with an exceeding love. And the Argives mingled their ashes in one urn, which was laid in the ancient burial-place of the kings of Tiryns.

Now the body of Parthenopaeus was found lying outside the Electran Gate; not weltering in gore, like all the rest, for kindly hands had washed and anointed it for burial, and straightened the limbs, so that the youth appeared beautiful in death as in life. And near by, in the shadow of the gate, stood a band of maidens, watching him with compassionate eyes. "Damsels of Thebes," said Adrastus, when he saw them, "can you tell me who of your citizens hath done these pious offices to a slain foeman?"

"It was I and my companions here, O King," modestly replied a maiden, tall, graceful, and yellow-haired like all the daughters of Thebes. "When we came out to view the slain our hearts

were moved with pity at the sight of that fair young chieftain lying low in the bloody dust. Then some one told us he was Parthenopæus, Atalanta's child, and for the sake of that flower of maidenhood we did as we have done. Nay, had you not come, we ourselves would have made his grave rather than let *her* son be a prey to carrion birds."

"Nobly have you done and nobly spoken," said Adrastus, "and now I see the saying is true that the freeborn maids of Thebes are women in gentleness but men in courage. May the gods reward each of you with a bridegroom like Parthenopæus . . . in everything but his fate."

With that he was turning away, but the maiden said, "If it be not troublesome to you, King Adrastus, there is something we would fain ask. We knew not, till this day, that peerless Atalanta had wedded and borne a child; how came she to renounce the virginity that was her pride? Was it to a mortal lover she yielded, or to some god?"

"Dear maidens, I shall gladly tell you all you would know," answered Adrastus. "Many gallant youths, sons of kings, wooed the huntress-maid, but she would have none of them, loving too well her free life on the Arcadian hills, and scorning the joys of Aphrodite. And to rid herself of their importunities, Atalanta challenged each suitor in turn to run a race with her, vowing to wed the man that could overtake her and none other. Now the rest she easily outstripped, though they were among the best runners in Hellas, for she was fleet-footed as a stag; but the last, Milanion the Arcadian, won

his race by help of Aphrodite. For he had made his prayer to that goddess, and she, willing to humble the maid who had slighted her, gave Milanion two apples of faery gold from the Tree of the Hesperides, bidding him fling them before Atalanta as she passed him in the race. Milanion did so, and Atalanta could not forbear to halt and snatch up the gleaming treasures; then on she sped, but too late to overtake her lover, who came first to the goal. Thus was the tameless virgin made a bride against her will; yet if the marriage yoke chafed her, it was not for long, for the saying goes in Arcadia that never wedded pair loved each other so entirely as Milanion and Atalanta. Alas, how will they mourn when I send to their home in Tegea a handful of grey ashes, sole relics of their sole child! ”

Then Adrastus bade farewell to the Theban maidens, and they returned into the city, weeping for Parthenopaeus the beautiful and for his mother. But Arcadian legend says that Milanion and Atalanta had passed from among men before their son fought in the host of Adrastus; for being now past life's prime, they had prayed the gods to renew their waning strength—and were straightway changed into a lion and a lioness, in which shapes they yet haunt the glens of Arcady. Be this true or false, certain it is that no man knows the place of their sepulchre unto this day.

Here ends the tale of the Seven against Thebes.

CHAPTER IV

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

I

“CHILD of a blind old man, Antigone, what country or city of men have we reached now? Who shall bestow to-day’s scanty alms on Oedipus the wanderer? Little he asks—and less than that little obtains, yet is therewith content. For masters three have schooled me to patience—time, and my sufferings, and the spirit of a noble race within me. But, my daughter, if there is any seat in view, set me down there to rest, until we learn where we now are.”

He who thus spoke was a tall, white-haired man, bent with age, who by his wallet and coarse cloak seemed a mendicant; his sunken eyelids were closed, and his face, for all its sadness, had the singular placid look of the blind. With one hand he leaned upon his staff, the other rested on the shoulder of her he called Antigone, a girl of about eighteen, whose worn, travel-stained attire could not hide her grace and beauty. Tenderly she answered the old man, “Father mine, sorely-tried Oedipus, I think I see in the distance the towers of a city, but the place where we stand is hallowed ground, one can tell, all mantled as it is

with laurel, vine, and olive . . . and hark, what a choir of nightingales are warbling within its coverts! But close by is a low stone wall, fencing a grove of ancient trees . . . there you may rest, father . . . come, sit you down on this rough-hewn bench . . . you have come far to-day for one of your years."

So saying, Antigone half led and half supported her charge to the fence of the grove; and as she carefully placed him on a broad, flat stone—"Ay, this does well, child," murmured Oedipus, "here let me rest, but keep watch over the blind man."

"I should know how to do *that*, dear father, by this time," she answered lovingly; "but may I not leave you here awhile and find out what place this is? All I know is we have entered the land of Athens. . . ."

"So much every wayfarer we met told us," said Oedipus, "but that helps little. Yes, go, daughter, and learn the name of this countryside—if, indeed, it is inhabited."

"It is, my father," exclaimed Antigone; "I need not leave you . . . a man passes yonder . . . now he sees us, and hastily approaches. Speak to him, now, as your mind directs, for he stands before you."

"Stranger," began Oedipus, "as you hear from this maiden, who hath eyesight for herself and me, you come in happy time to give us guidance——"

"Before you say more," interrupted the newcomer, "rise from that seat, for you trespass where it is not lawful for any man to set foot."

“How call you this spot? To which of the gods is it sacred?” said Oedipus, much moved.

“It is forbidden ground,” replied the stranger, “wherein no man dwells or enters; for the awful goddesses, daughters of Earth and Darkness, inhabit there.”

“And by what holy name may I invoke them aright?” said Oedipus, in a trembling voice.

“The all-seeing EUMENIDES,¹ so the folk here call them,” said the stranger; “elsewhere, maybe, they are known by other auspicious names.”

“Now, graciously may they receive their suppliant,” said Oedipus, “that I may go hence no more. For by this token I know that mine hour is at hand.”

“I understand you not, old man,” said the stranger, looking at him with a certain awe; “but since I dare not take upon myself to remove you, I will e’en go and see what our townsmen judge best to be done.”

“For the gods’ love, friend,” exclaimed Oedipus, “do not scorn to answer me, poor vagrant though I am; but say, to what region have I come?”

“Far be it from me to scorn you,” replied the stranger; “I willingly tell what you desire to know. All about us is hallowed soil; the august Poseidon holds it in fee, and the divine Fire-bringer, Prometheus the Titan. And the neighbouring ploughlands own for their lord the horseman COLONUS, whose name they bear; nor our town-

¹ That is, *the Benign Goddesses*.

ship only, but the folk that dwell therein, are called after that hero."

"Have you a king over you," asked Oedipus, "or do the many rule?"

"We belong to Athens," said the man of Colonus, "and Theseus, who reigns there, is our king. Had you eyes, you might see the city yonder; it stands upon a hill in the midst of the plain, a short half-league away."

"I pray you," said Oedipus, "let some one go and fetch the king to me here. Tell him it shall profit him much to help me but a little."

"Why, what service can a blind man render any one?" cried the astonished villager.

"Nay, do mine errand, friend," said Oedipus; "for of the things I have to tell Theseus my vision is unclouded."

"Then, stranger," said the man, "take this counsel for your good—for 'tis well seen you are noble in all but fortune—bide where you are while I go and tell the matter to my fellow-townsmen—in Colonus, I mean, not Athens. For *they* must judge whether you are to stay here or depart."

And he went quickly out of the glade by the way he came.

"Has the stranger gone from us, my child?" asked Oedipus, after a moment's silence.

"Yes, father," said Antigone; "you can speak freely—we are alone."

Then Oedipus turned him towards the dusky grove, and stretched forth his hands, and prayed in these words: "O sovran ones, terrible of aspect,

since I have found my first resting-place in this domain of yours, be not austere towards me—and towards Phoebus. For he, when he foretold all that woe, spake of a rest that should be mine after long years—when, at my journey's end, I should sit as guest and suppliant at the shrine of deities revered. There should close my miserable life, and in that abode I should work much good to those that received me as an inmate, but ill to those that sent—nay, drove me from their midst. Whereof Apollo promised that a sure sign should be given me—earthquake, or voice of thunder, or lightning-flash from Zeus. . . . O goddesses, according to his word, grant me even now a swift and sudden passing out of life—if haply I seem not too abject in your eyes, being a slave in bondage to the worst ills of humankind. . . . Come, sweet children of primal Darkness; come, thou namesake of Pallas, great Athens, of all cities highest in honour; have pity on this poor wraith of Oedipus, this shadow of the man he was. . . .”

Longer had he prayed, but Antigone whispered in his ear, “Hush, father; some aged men come this way—perhaps the guardians of the shrine.”

“I will keep silence,” he answered low, “and do you hide me a little way within the grove, that I may learn the tenor of their discourse; for prudent action comes of foreknowledge alone.”

Silently and quickly his daughter obeyed, and when the village Elders reached the entrance to the grove they looked perplexedly about them—for there was no blind stranger to be seen. And forth-

with they began prying and peering all around—but, as Antigone could see from her ambush, keeping well away from the boundary-fence—and calling excitedly one to another in their high, shrill voices, “Look! . . . Who could it be? . . . Where bides he, whither has he stolen away, that most outrageous of mortals? . . . Look, look well, brothers . . . search for him everywhere. A vagabond, the old man! Ay, a vagabond and an alien, else never had he approached this untrodden grove of Maidens implacable . . . whom we fear to name, and pass by their threshold in silence with averted eyes. . . . ’Twas but now we heard report of one that came hither, untouched by awe—yet, brothers, I have searched the precinct round and failed to find his lurking-place.”

Wearied and disheartened, the Elders were just re-assembling at the front of the grove when a voice hailed them—“Behold, I am he whom you seek,” and Oedipus stepped forth from behind a thicket of bay, with Antigone at his side.

“Ah! Ah!” they cried out, staring wide-eyed at the forlorn figure, “dreadful to look on is he . . . dreadful to hear!”

“Do not, I beseech you, regard me as lawless,” began Oedipus, “but——”

“O Zeus the Protector,” exclaimed an Elder, “who may this old man be?”

“Not one highly favoured in his lot, O rulers of Colonus,” said Oedipus, “as I show but too plainly, who walk by sight of another, and from greatness have fallen to low estate.”

“Alas, and wast thou born with those sightless eyes?” said the Elder compassionately; “evil and long, it would seem, hath been thy span of life. But if I can hinder it, thou shalt not bring forth curses on thyself by trespassing . . . as thou dost trespass now. Yon silent, grassy dell, where flows a fountain brimming with delicious draughts—beware of it, thou all-hapless stranger! Come forth from thence, I say, if anywise thou wilt heed my warning; leave precincts forbidden to foot of man, and speak to us on ground common to all—till then, be mute!”

“What now were best to do, my child?” murmured Oedipus.

“It behoves us, father, to be as careful as these townsmen for what is meet and right,” replied Antigone, “so let us hearken and obey.”

“Give me your hand, then,” said Oedipus, “and lead me out of the grove. . . . But, O friends, let me suffer no wrong, since I change my station trusting the word of one of you.”

Then answered the same Elder, “I, the headman of the rest, promise in their name, old man, that none shall take thee from hence against thy will. But come yet further . . . lead him still onward, maiden . . . still onward . . . so, here let him sit down, on this low rock.”

With tenderest care, Antigone led her father whither the Elder beckoned her; Oedipus, spent with travel, groaned as he limped along, and sank wearily down upon the grey, lichened rock—one of many that broke the level sward around.

"Now that thou canst rest awhile, poor sufferer," said the headman of Colonus, "say, what man art thou, and wherefore led thus afflicted? We would fain learn thy native country. . . ."

"I am an exile, friends," said Oedipus, "but for the rest . . . no, no, let none ask who I am!"

"And wherefore not?" asked the headman. "Tell it out, I charge thee."

"I am . . . a monstrous being," groaned Oedipus. "Daughter, what must I say? . . . Woe and alas! What is to become of me now, my child?"

"Tell them all," said Antigone calmly, "for there is no retreating now."

"Yes, I will speak—since no hiding-place is left me," said Oedipus. "Listen, then, Elders; have you heard of Laius' son . . . O me! . . . of the race of Labdacus"—cries of dismay interrupted him, but he went on—"the wretched Oedipus?"

"Art thou *he*?" shrieked the Elders, recoiling.

"I am that ill-fated one," he said, "but let not that affright you." But they all cried out, shuddering, "Away, away! Get thee hence! Begone from our land!" Mournfully he replied, "Is it thus you keep your plighted word, strangers?"

"The gods avenge not the breaking of a promise won by deceit," answered the headman sternly. "Arise, go forth instantly from our borders, lest thou bring some plague on our commonwealth."

Then spoke Antigone, "O reverent-minded strangers, since you could not brook to hear mine aged father so much as name crimes done in ignorance, have pity on me, wretched maid, who suppli-

cates for him, that he may find compassion at your hands in his distress! Ah, see, friends, on my knees I supplicate . . . looking on you, and you, with eyes not blind . . . no, they rest on yours . . . trustfully, as a daughter's might. O, show us mercy, for on you, as it were on a god, hangs our fate! Grant me this unhopèd-for grace . . . by all you hold dear, I implore it . . . by child and wife, by every sacred tie, and by your god!"

Not unmoved, the Elders looked on her as she knelt before them with her sad and noble face upturned, bending her pleading gaze now on this man, now on that. And gently their leader answered—

"Be assured, child of Oedipus, we pity thee, and him likewise, in your calamities. But, as god-fearing men, we cannot and dare not say one word to thee beyond this."

"What boots it, then," said Oedipus, "that the glory and fame of Athens are everywhere noised abroad—if rumour speaks so idly when it calls her the most devout of cities, the one refuge and stay of the oppressed alien? Have *I* found it so, whom ye first dislodged, and now drive out, scared by my mere name? For this feeble form appals you not, I trow; nor should those deeds whereof I was rather the sufferer than the doer. Yea, that my heart knows well! And in sooth, even had I known what I did, what crime were it to requite wrong with wrong? But, as it was, I went my destined way unknowing, while they that wronged me sought my death wilfully. Therefore, friends, I entreat you in the gods' name to succour and defend me, according

to your promise. Make not a show of reverencing the gods, while in deed ye set them at nought; consider that their eyes are upon the pious and the impious, nor ever yet did the sacrilegious man escape their vengeance. Ah, darken not the fame of fortunate Athens by abetting sacrilege! Nor despise mine unsightly presence; for lo, I come unto you sanctified, reconciled to the gods, charged with a blessing to your townsmen. . . . But of this your liege lord shall hear, when he comes; meanwhile, do nothing base!"

"Thy discourse, ancient sir, must needs give us pause," said the headman, "for weighty arguments hast thou urged. But we will leave all to our King's judgment, who will soon be here; for the man that brought us word of your presence went on to summon him."

"But think you he will come at the bidding of a blind stranger?" said Oedipus, anxiously.

"Ay," replied the headman. "Theseus will guess—though we did not—who that blind stranger is, and that will bring him fast enough. For though it is a far cry to Thebes, thy strange, eventful history is well known to him and all our city."

"May he come in a happy hour for himself and Athens; and for me also—since a good man is ever his own friend," said Oedipus.

Antigone, meanwhile, had risen to her feet and was gazing intently down the woodland path along which she and her father had come. "Whom do I see?" she exclaimed suddenly. "O father, I know not what to think——"

“What is it, what see you, child Antigone?” asked the blind man.

“A woman riding fast this way,” she said, “on a Sicilian colt; a Thessalian sunbonnet shades her face. . . . Can it be? No, it is not . . . O me, how I waver between *yes* and *no* . . . and yet it *is* herself and none other! She is near, she greets me with that bright smile of hers; yes, yes, 'tis my own Ismene!”

“What say you?” cried Oedipus; “your sister *here*?”

“Dear father, she is indeed,” said Antigone; “here, beside you, to answer for herself.” And she turned to embrace the fair-haired girl, who, alighting from her horse and flinging the bridle-reins to a mounted attendant, ran towards her with open arms.

Ismene, a year or two younger than Antigone, resembled her with a difference; she had the same features, but cast, as it were, in a softer mould. Tears streamed from her eyes as she embraced in turn her sister and her father. “O dearest ones,” she cried, “hard it was to find you, and now 'tis hard to see you, for weeping!”

“My child, and do I feel your loved touch again?” said Oedipus, clasping her hand. “Tell me, what brings you . . . was it yearning after absent dear ones?”

“It was my care for you, father,” replied Ismene. “I set out with the one trusty servant I had, to tell you news.”

“And what of your young brothers, child?” broke in Oedipus. “How are they faring?”

“As best they may—but now all goes ill with them,” replied Ismene.

“Ah,” cried Oedipus, “how closely do those two ape the manners of Egypt, where the men sit weaving at home, while their wives earn daily bread by outdoor labour. For they, O daughters, who should toil for me, keep at home, maiden-fashion; while ye bear my burdens in their stead. She here, my Antigone, ever since she grew from childhood into maidenhood, has shared my wanderings, still guiding the old man through forest wilds; hungry, foot-sore, she wends along, braving many a storm, many a scorching sun, and counts home well lost so she may win her father daily bread. . . . And you, Ismene, made your way to me before, all unknown to the Thebans, that you might tell me the oracle Phoebus had delivered concerning this frail body. . . . Dear child, what tidings do you bring this second time?”

“Father,” said Ismene, “I could tell you much of the risks and hardships I have encountered in tracing you hither—but I forbear, since to relate them would be to suffer them twice over. The news I bring is of your ill-fated sons—who till now were at peace in Thebes. But now, alas, an evil spirit of discord, sent of some god and nurtured by their own fierce mood, hath seized upon them—and they are at war for the kingdom. For Eteocles has usurped his brother's right, and driven him into exile; but Polyneices—so reports are rife—betook himself to Argos, where he has married the King's daughter and is now gathering a host of allies to invade our land.

These are no idle rumours, father, but dreadful truths—and I see not how the gods will manifest their compassion for your sufferings.”

“And what hope had you then,” said Oedipus, “that the gods would vouchsafe to look on me, or send me any help?”

“Great hope,” said Ismene, “since I heard the oracle that has come from Delphi concerning you; but let me tell out my tale, and you will understand. . . . When the feud began between my brothers, the Thebans sent to inquire of Apollo, who gave answer that they should bring you back again, dead or alive, if they wished to prosper, for their strength and safety lies in you alone.”

“In *me*?” exclaimed Oedipus, bitterly. “Am I to be their champion—now that I am as good as dead?”

“Yes, for the gods who erstwhile laid you low now raise you up again,” replied Ismene; “and so, as I must forewarn you, Creon himself is on his way to fetch you to . . . the Theban border, which you may not cross.”

“I do not understand you,” said her father; “speak more plainly, child. What mean the Thebans to do with me?”

“They will keep you in ward just beyond the frontier,” she answered, “because, though your presence will be their safeguard against all enemies, they will not suffer you to dwell among them.”

“But at least, when I die, they will lay my bones in Theban earth?” said Oedipus, wistfully.

“Nay, the stain of kindred blood allows not *that*, O my father,” sighed Ismene.

"Then never shall they have me in their power!" he exclaimed. "But tell me, did your brothers hear this oracle?"

"Ay, both, and both put faith in it," said Ismene.

"And did those wretches," cried Oedipus, "though they knew I might lawfully be restored to my home, sacrifice all filial feeling to their lust of rule, and consent to my being held prisoner?"

"These are bitter words to hear," said Ismene, weeping, "but I must confess them true."

"Then may the gods never assuage the predestined feud between them," said Oedipus; "may it be mine to sway the issue of the war my sons embark on even now . . . to this effect, that neither he who now holds the sceptre and throne shall abide in Thebes, nor he who lately was cast forth ever come home again!"

Now at these words his daughters wept aloud, and the Elders of Colonus could not forbear to murmur their disapproval. Then passionately spoke the blind man—"Hear, you Athenians, and judge between those two and me. Know, that when I, the father that begat them, was thrust out with obloquy from the land, they disowned me and refused me succour; nay, by their means was I driven forth a proclaimed outlaw. . . . You will say, perhaps, that the Theban State banished me at mine own request? Not so, friends; in those first dreadful hours when my one desire was to perish then and there by the murderer's death of stoning, no man would help me to my wish; it was long after, when

my agony had abated, and I perceived that my wild heart had craved punishment in excess of what my offence deserved—it was *then* the State doomed me to lasting exile. And then might those two sons of mine have shielded me . . . but they would not; they would not say the one little word that would have saved their father from the lot of an outcast and a beggar. . . . While *these*, girls as they are, spend the utmost of their little strength in tending me; to *these* I look for sustenance, and protection, and every filial care. . . . But their brothers have chosen another part; even to sit upon a throne and wield a sceptre, and play the king in Thebes. Ay, so they may; but never shall they have *me* for ally; and no good will come of their dominion over the Cadmean folk. That know I for a surety; revolving not this latest oracle alone, but those that Phoebus spake to me in days long past. Wherefore let the Thebans send Creon, or any other chief of rank and power, in quest of me; for if you, friends, will but defend me, together with your holy guardian-goddesses, ye shall gain for your State a mighty saviour, and therewithal bring toil and trouble on my foes.”

The Elders heard those words with deep attention, and when they had conferred together a moment, their headman said, “Worthy of compassion art thou, O Oedipus, and these thy daughters also, and since moreover thou dost proclaim thyself the saviour of our country, we desire to advise thee for thy profit.”

“Do so, my good friend,” replied Oedipus,

“perform that kindly office, as to one who will promptly fulfil thy bidding.”

“Make atonement, then, to these divinities whom thou hast first approached, and on whose ground thou hast trespassed,” answered the headman.

“With what ritual?” asked Oedipus. “Instruct me, friends, how I must proceed.”

“First of all,” said the headman, “thou must bring, with clean hands, water for libation from the sacred, everflowing spring, and mingle it with honey—but no wine—in painted bowls, such as we have at hand, the work of a skilled artist. And having twined the rims and handles of the bowls with snowy lambswool, pour out the libations, facing eastward; pour from each three times, and the third time empty the bowls to the last drop. Then must thou lay thrice nine olive-branches on the spot, to right and left, and pray this prayer——”

“Ay, teach me the prayer,” said Oedipus, “for that crowns all.”

“*May those we name Benign Ones in mood benign accept the suppliant unto his salvation,*” recited the Elder solemnly; “pray in these words, and let whoso is with thee utter the same on thy behalf; speak low, forbear loud, long-drawn entreaties; then depart, and beware thou turn not to look back as thou goest! These things if thou wilt duly perform I shall stand by thee with a good courage; but otherwise, O stranger-guest, I should tremble for thee.”

Then Oedipus essayed to rise from his seat on the mossy bank, but overcome with weariness, he sank

down again, and said—"I can go no further, my children. Two infirmities weigh me down—lack of strength and my blindness. Let one of you go and perform these rites; for methinks one soul availeth more than a thousand to make atonement, if love inspire it. Do quickly what ye have to do—but go not *both* from me, for I am helpless bereft of a guide."

"I will go on this errand, father," said Ismene, "only, I have yet to learn where the offering must be made."

"Beyond this grove, damsel," answered an Elder; "I will show you the place, and furnish you with all things needful for the libation."

"Let us be going, then," said Ismene. "Antigone, watch over our father until I return. . . ."

II

By this time, the sun was drawing westward, though the long summer day was not yet near its close. A cool breeze from the sea went whispering among the laurels and olive-trees; no other sound broke for awhile the silence of the lonely glade. For Oedipus, leaning his grey head on Antigone's shoulder, had fallen asleep, and the Elders of Colonus sat mute and motionless around them, waiting the event. About half an hour had passed, when a young man, splendidly arrayed, drew near with quick, springing tread; he acknowledged by a gesture the respectful salutation of the Elders as

they rose up to meet him; then fixed his keen, dark eyes on the sleeping wanderer and the maiden at his side. "Theseus is here, my father," whispered Antigone, knowing who this must be; and at that the blind man sat up and leaned forward, hearkening with a piteous intentness. Theseus spoke at once, with the grave courtesy of a king addressing his equal: "Not only by former report of thine eyes' disaster I know thee, O son of Laius, but by what I have newly learned; for thy garb and suffering countenance declare all too plainly who thou art. And with heartfelt compassion I would ask, ill-starred Oedipus, wherefore comest thou to my State and me for refuge—thou and this hapless maiden who ministers to thee? Say on; for whatever sorrows thou hast to tell of, I, too, perchance, have known them. I was reared among aliens like thee; I, more than most, have had to wrestle through dangers that beset me in a strange land; so never would I turn my face from one who is a stranger, as thou art, or grudge him all the help in my power. For well I know that I am a man, and that no more than thou can I call to-morrow mine own."

Then said Oedipus: "Theseus, thy nobleness, expressed so briefly, permits me to answer in few words. For who I am, and of what sire begotten, and from what country I come—this thou hast said; nothing remains, therefore, but to tell thee the thing I desire of thee. . . . Know, then, I come to give thee this miserable body—a worthless gift to outward view, yet of more profit than any shape of beauty, yea, great gain will it bring to thee and

thine; but what that gain is thou must wait to learn until it comes."

"When will that be?" asked Theseus, wonderingly.

"When I shall die, and thou shalt give me burial," answered Oedipus.

"It is the last rites, then, thou seekest at my hands," said Theseus; "a small boon, truly; but instead of dwelling on the future, tell me how I may serve thy present needs."

"All services thou canst render me, now and hereafter, meet in the office I have named," said Oedipus; "but mark—'tis no light, no easy task I require of thee—but a contest. For my sons, O King, purpose to convey me back yonder. . . ."

"And why should they not, if, as I suppose, thou art willing?" broke in Theseus.

"Nay, when I was willing," said Oedipus, "they would not suffer my presence."

"But, foolish one," exclaimed Theseus, "anger is useless in adversity."

"When thou hast learned my story, rebuke me; but not till then," answered Oedipus, with dignity. And the young King said frankly—

"I am in the wrong to speak without knowledge. Pray, tell me the whole matter."

"O Theseus, I have borne woe upon woe, each more strange and terrible than the last," said Oedipus, sighing heavily.

"Is it, then, the ancient sorrows of thy line thou wouldst rehearse?" asked the King.

"Not so, for *that* tale is familiar in the mouth of

every Hellene," replied Oedipus, bitterly; "'tis of the sequel I would speak. . . . Behold, to crown my miseries, I was driven forth an exile by mine own sons, and now they seek to gain possession of me only because Apollo has revealed that, dead or living, this feeble frame will be the bulwark of the land wherein it finds a resting-place. But forasmuch as the guilt of a parricide is upon me, they mean to bring me no further than the border of the Theban land, and hold me a captive there. Now therefore, dear son of Aegeus, receive me into thy keeping, and thou shalt own hereafter that Oedipus was no unprofitable inmate of thy realm—unless the gods deceive me."

Then outspoke the headman of Colonus, "My King, these and the like promises hath this man made us from the first."

And Theseus, much moved, answered him, "Who would reject the proffered amity of one that is not only free of our civic hearth as a time-honoured ally, but comes a suppliant to our deities, and will pay richest tribute to Athens and to me? Mindful of all this, I will in no wise cast away his boon, but admit him into our commonwealth. So, if it please this our guest to abide in Colonus, I leave him to thy care, good Elder. But if thou hadst rather lodge with me in Athens, Oedipus, thou shalt do so; choose according to thy pleasure."

"O Zeus, pour blessings on such men as this!" said Oedipus fervently. "Were it permitted me, Theseus, I would go with thee; but it is *here* that I am destined to conquer those that cast me out.

Yea, King, victory is the boon my presence will secure to Athens—if thou dost fulfil thy promise.”

“Doubt not of that,” replied Theseus, “for never will I betray thee.”

“I will not bind thee by an oath,” said Oedipus, “as though thou wert of the baser sort——”

“If thou didst,” said the King, “thou couldst gain no more than from my simple word.”

“I know it, Theseus,” answered Oedipus, “but there is one thing yet that troubles me—men will come anon to bear me hence. . . .”

“Fear not, these good citizens will deal with them,” returned Theseus, glancing at the Elders; “and now farewell awhile. . . .”

“No, no,” Oedipus cried out, “take heed thou leave me not!”

“It is not for thee to teach me my duty, old man,” said the King with some displeasure.

“But fear constrains me to speak,” said Oedipus; “thou knowest not what threats they utter——”

“I know this,” interrupted Theseus, “that no man living shall take thee hence in my despite. As for threats, the men thou fearest may speak great, swelling words about thy capture, but between them and thee, I ween, lies a sea they cannot cross. Nay, be of good cheer—trust in Phoebus that sent thee hither, if not in me! Yet well I know that in my absence my name alone will guard thee from all harm.” So saying, Theseus went his way along the path to Colonus.

Then the Elders gathered round their new guest, bidding him take courage; and to hearten him the

more, they began to speak the praises of Athens and of their own township, telling how both were especially blessed of mighty gods, how by grace of Zeus and Athena the olive flourished in their land as nowhere else on earth, their glory and their treasure unfailing; and they said that he was come to the loveliest and most favoured spot of Attic earth, named after its guardian Hero, the warrior Colonus. But as they talked thus, Antigone watched the path that had led her to the glade, and presently she cried, "Ah, land so highly extolled, the hour is come to prove that the glorious things spoken of thee are true! Father, I see Creon hasting this way with his retainers."

"Kind Elders," exclaimed Oedipus, "I look to you for protection!"

"Courage, for thou shalt have it," answered the headman; "though I be old, my country's strength is in its prime." And he and his colleagues boldly faced the Theban prince as he came up, followed by his bodyguard of spearmen. Creon, however, read misgiving in their looks, and addressed them with studied deference, "Noble burghers of Attica, I see you feel some alarm at my sudden coming; but, trust me, you have no cause either to fear, or to greet me with harsh words. For I intend no violence—nay, myself am an old man and know full well that I come to a State second to none in Hellas! But, aged as you see me, I have journeyed hither that I may persuade this man to return with me to Thebes; to this *I* was commissioned by the general voice of the citizens, because none had grieved for his sufferings

so deeply as myself, his kinsman. . . . Come, then, O much-afflicted Oedipus, come back to thy home. Lo, they whose right it is now summon thee—even the whole Cadmean folk . . . and myself foremost among them, since worst of villains were I if my heart ached not for thy miseries, old man! Alas, that I should see thee in such a case . . . far from home, and a wanderer, and poverty-stricken . . . with no attendant but this hapless girl; woe's me, I little thought she would ever come to this . . . tending thee in beggary . . . unwedded, though in her flower, and a ready prey for the chance-come ravisher. Unhappy that I am, why name I this piteous thing, this reproach to me and thee and all our house? . . . Yet there's no hiding what is manifest to all eyes. . . . But do thou, Oedipus, for the love of our ancestral gods, bury this disgrace forthwith by consenting to revisit thy city and thy home. Pay Athens what grateful praise thou wilt; 'tis well deserved; but the city that reared thee of old has the higher claim on thy reverence."

Thus spoke Creon, and the old men of Colonus were not unmoved by his show of concern for his distressed kinsfolk; but Oedipus answered with indignation—"Thou reckless evil-doer, who evermore weavest some cunning snare out of sound arguments, wouldst thou entrap me yet again in toils of bitter anguish? Lo, when I, grief-maddened, besought to go from Thebes, thou didst deny me that mercy; but when I had supped full of sorrows, and life at home would have been sweet to me, then didst thou thrust me out and banish me; ay, *then*

our kinship had small weight with thee! And now thou seest me favoured by this city and all her folk, thou wouldst pluck me hence, masking cruelty with smooth words. But that these citizens may know thy baseness, I will tell them this—thou art *not* come to restore me to my home, but to make me dwell on the Theban border, whereby thy city shall be safeguarded to all time from Athenian conquest. . . . Nay, Creon, thou shalt have not *me* but another . . . even the Avenging Spirit, born of my curse, to haunt the land for ever; and my two sons shall inherit so much of my ground as will serve them for their . . . deathbed. What, know I better than thou how it stands with Thebes? No marvel, seeing I learn of more certain informants—Apollo, yea, and Zeus himself, Apollo's sire! . . . Now go; for though thou dost not, I know, believe what I have said, thou canst no longer dictate where I am to dwell. Mine is the choice, and I have chosen this land of Athens."

While the discrowned King of Thebes thus spoke, Creon with difficulty suppressed his rising anger, yet made a calm reply—"Unhappy man, wilt thou nourish even in old age the fierce intractable temper that has ever been thy bane? These wild, unfounded accusations harm no one but thyself . . . and I take these reverend Athenians to witness how patiently I endure them. But I trust thou wilt answer thy friends in more gentle terms if I once secure thee. . . ."

"And how wilt thou do that," cried Oedipus scornfully, "in despite of my allies here?"

“If I fail,” returned Creon, eying him malevolently, “I can nevertheless wound thee to the heart. Thou hast two daughters; one I have just intercepted and sent away under guard; the other I will carry off even now.” And at a sign from him two of his spearmen laid hold of Antigone, and dragged her from her father’s side, before the amazed Elders could stir a finger. But as the maiden shrieked aloud, and Oedipus shouted, “Help, help; forsake me not, O friends,” they ran forward brandishing their staves and crying, “Begone, Theban stranger, and let that maiden alone! . . . What means this outrage? . . . Let her go, men, at your peril!”

“Take her hence, guards, and wait for me at the trysting-place with the rest of our company,” ordered Creon; and despite her struggles, Antigone was borne swiftly away. Piteous it was to hear her call lamentably on her father’s name; but still more piteous to see his feeble hands groping for her in vain, and the tears rolling from his sightless eyes, as he sobbed out, “Where art thou, child? . . . Give me thy hand . . . I will hold thee fast! . . . O miserable me, she is not here . . . she is gone, my best-beloved, my only comforter!”

But Creon answered scoffingly, “Ay, henceforth thou must trudge thy rounds without those sister-crutches to lean upon. *That* is the victory thou hast gained by stubborn pride over thy country and well-wishers . . . enjoy it as thou mayest!” And with that he turned to depart; but the Elders of Colonus barred his way, and boldly spoke the head-

man, "Halt, stranger, we will not let thee go until those maidens are restored to us."

"Touch me if you dare," exclaimed Creon, drawing his sword; "and since you provoke me to it, Athenians, you shall have better cause for reprisals . . . I will carry off not only those two girls, but their father here!"

"O shameless villain," burst out Oedipus, "hast robbed me of her that was eyes and sight to me, and now wouldst lay violent hands on me also? For this may the all-witnessing Sun give an old age like mine to thee and to thy children!"

"You hear him curse me, old men?" said Creon, trembling with rage, "now, then, I will forbear no longer, but take him single-handed."

And thrusting the Elders aside, he grasped Oedipus by the shoulder, raised him roughly to his feet, and began to drag him away.

Now the Elders, feeble and weaponless, shrank back from Creon's drawn sword; but they gave what aid they could by shouting with all their force, "Hither and help, ye people! . . . Hither, O chiefs! A rescue, a rescue here!" until the woods rang to their cries. And before Creon could urge his groaning prisoner many paces onward, help came. Theseus, sword in hand, rushed into the glade with a band of retainers.

"Who cried a rescue? What is the matter here?" he called as he came; and sobbingly answered Oedipus, "O best of friends—for I know thy voice—I am cruelly misused by this man thou seest . . ."

"Ha, who is the stranger?" said Theseus, fixing

his keen gaze on Creon, who had loosed hold of Oedipus and stood defiantly at bay; "calm thyself, son of Laius, and tell me what he has done to make you all raise such clamour as brought me hither full speed—though I was in the act of sacrificing to the Sea-God, lord of Colonus, on his altar near by."

But Oedipus could only gasp out, "It is Creon . . . he hath torn both my daughters from me . . . and sent them away prisoners."

"*What* sayst thou?" exclaimed the young King in a voice of thunder.

"It is but too true, my prince," said the headman of the Elders; and in few words he told how Antigone and her sister were captured. Theseus was never one to waste time on speech when his swift mind had resolved on action; he heard without comment, then said to his retainers, "Speed back to the altar, one of you; bid all the citizens muster, horse and foot, and hasten to the Merchants' Crossways—there will they most likely intercept the maidens, on the high road to Thebes. Quick now, begone with my message!" Then, as a nimble slave made off for Colonus, Theseus turned to Creon, saying, "But touching this man, if I dealt with him in anger such as he merits, he should not escape out of my hands unscathed. Thank my forbearance, Creon, that I do no more than keep thee hostage until the girls are brought back safe and sound; for thou hast done a deed most unworthy of thine ancestry and thy country . . . ay, not from Thebes hast thou learned to harry suppliants under the protection of a friendly State. Dost thou think my city

holds none but women, or cowards, and myself am nought, that thou darest put such an affront upon us? I bid thee once for all, restore his daughters to Oedipus, and that quickly, unless thou art minded to spend the rest of thy days in Athens as an enforced settler."

"Son of Aegeus," replied Creon, "far be it I should mean any affront to thee or thy city, nor have I offered any by this action. For I was well assured that ye would not receive a man impure, and a parricide, knowing that just and wise tribunal, your Areopagus, forbids such fugitives to dwell among you; else would I not have attempted this capture. Nay, even so, I had not used violence, but that he there enraged me by cursing both me and my house; then, indeed, I sought to repay like with like; for a man's spirit grows not old with his body, and death alone makes it callous to injuries. But now, having right but no might on my side, I submit to thy pleasure, King; deal as thou wilt . . . I am an old man and alone . . . yet not so old that I may not some day requite thee!"

"Ah, shameless soul," cried Oedipus, ere Theseus could reply, "is it I or thyself, thinkest thou, that is disgraced by the opprobrious terms thou art so glib withal? Slayings . . . marryings . . . disasters . . . these dost thou recite against me, knowing full well that in all these I was the unwitting tool of the gods, who, it would seem, cherish some ancient hatred to our house. Yea, for nought else canst thou lay to my charge; in nothing have I transgressed save in what I did ignorantly, with-

out my will, led on by the Powers above; my father's spirit, could he hear and answer, would pronounce me guiltless towards him! But, O thou hardened wretch, shamest thou not to force me to speak of *her* marriage who was thine own sister . . . as I *will* speak, since thou givest thy tongue such impious licence! Her son, her son was I—O misery!—and we knew it not; and she, my mother, gave my children birth. . . .”

The blind man paused, shuddering; a murmur of pity and horror came from the Elders; then once more he addressed Creon, with bitter scorn—“ But thou, forsooth, trusting not to justice but that universal eloquence of thine which ranges freely over themes permitted and unpermitted—thou thinkest it well to vilify me in this presence, and flatter Theseus, and bepraise Athens. Yet thou hast overlooked one thing in thy panegyric—there is no city on earth that so devoutly reverences the gods as this Athens, whence thou wouldst have torn me, the agéd suppliant, as thou hast torn my daughters. For which cause I now summon the goddesses that inhabit here, and importune them with prayers, to succour and defend me; that thou mayst learn what manner of men they are who watch over this city.”

Then said King Theseus, “ Here is enough of words. Lead on forthwith, Creon, to the place whither thou hast sent the maidens, that if they be yet there, I may bring them back; though it may be our people have already found and rescued them and no more remains to do. But I warn thee, think not cunning will serve thy turn; I am not so simple

as to believe thou wouldst dare this outrage without some force to back thee; and I have taken measures accordingly. What, dost thou comprehend me—or do my precautions seem to thee needless?"

"I have no fault to find with aught thou sayest . . . here," replied Creon sullenly; "when I am home again, I shall know what to do."

"Away, and threaten thy fill," said Theseus; "but do thou, Oedipus, wait tranquilly here; for, trust me, I will set thy daughters at thy side again or die in that endeavour. Elders, bear him company meanwhile."

"Blessings light on thee, O Theseus," exclaimed Oedipus, "for thy noble heart and for the just kindness thou hast showed me!" . . .

III

An hour had barely passed—although each of its minutes seemed an hour to Oedipus in his suspense—when the Elders of Colonus, who had comforted him as best they might with hopeful words, set up a joyous cry—"O pilgrim friend, no false prophets were we! Lo, here come thy two daughters, and our King with them!"

"Where, where are they? . . . Is it possible?" quavered the blind man, rising and stretching out his arms; the next moment, Antigone flung herself into them, crying, "O father, father, that some god could grant thee to see this noblest of men who brings us back to thee!"

“ My child . . . and are ye *both* here? ” said Oedipus, weeping tears of joy. “ Ismene too? . . . Come close, close; let me feel your arms about me, my darlings, that I thought I should feel never more! . . . Ah, I have my best-belovéd again, and now not even in death should I be all unhappy, since they are at my side. . . . So, lean against me, one on either hand; rest and take breath after your woeful roving that left me desolate; and tell me what has passed, but briefly, as becomes youthful maidens.”

Antigone said, “ Father, this man here is our preserver; it is from him you should hear his exploit. Thus brief shall be my answer.” And she turned her grave, sweet eyes on Theseus, who stood by.

“ Ah, friend,” said Oedipus, “ marvel not if this unlooked-for joy of my children’s return has made me garrulous! Nor deem me unthankful; for well I know it is thy doing and thine alone—*thou* hast saved them out of their distress—and may the gods reward thee and thy people according to my prayers! . . . Reach hither thy hand, King, that I may clasp it, and kiss thy cheek . . . if that be not presumption— Yet, what am I saying? How should the wretch I am become wish thee to touch one so deep-dyed with manifold guilt? No, no, I wish not that, nor will endure it; for none but those acquainted with grief have the strength to share my burden. . . . So, hail to thee, Theseus, in this hour; and hereafter, do thou care for me as duly as thou hast to-day.”

And the kindly voice of Theseus made answer—

“Truly, not strange I deem it that thou shouldst give utterance somewhat lengthy to thy joy over thy children, nor that thou shouldst choose to speak first with them, not me. Here was nothing to offend me, who strive to make my life glorious rather by deeds than words. For proof of that—I have broken no jot or tittle of mine oath to thee, ancient sir; for I return bringing thy children with me, safe and sound. But as for how the fight was won, why should I boast of what thou mayst learn at leisure from these damsels? Enough of that; now give heed to another matter, which was reported to me as I came hitherward. 'Tis said that a certain man, not from Thebes, yet of thy kindred, hath suddenly appeared at the altar of Poseidon, where I was sacrificing when called to thine aid; and that he now sits there as a suppliant.”

“Whence comes he?” said Oedipus, with a troubled brow. “What is his request as suppliant? It is something of weight—else had he not taken that privileged seat.”

“All I know,” said Theseus, “is that he craves to be permitted speech with thee, and then to go his way in peace.”

“But who can he be, this suppliant?” persisted Oedipus.

“Think a moment,” said Theseus slowly. “Hast thou not a kinsman dwelling in Argos who might wish to speak with thee?”

“Not another word, dearest friend,” exclaimed Oedipus. “I know too well whom thou meanest; nay, never plead for *him*—'tis unworthy of thee.”

“But I,” said Theseus, “neither know who this man is, nor what he has done to earn my censure.”

“He is my son, O King,” cried Oedipus, “my detested son; of all men living, the man whose voice were most hateful to mine ear.”

“But surely,” said Theseus, “there is no harm in hearing his petition, since thou art free to grant or deny it? I see not why this should pain thee; moreover, I bid thee beware lest thou offend the god under whose protection this man hath placed himself.”

Then said Antigone—“My father, young as I am, reject not my counsel; grant that man audience; vouchsafe that Ismene and I may once more behold our brother! For be certain he means to use persuasion and not force; then, what harm can it do to listen to him? . . . Thou didst beget him; wherefore, should he wrong thee never so basely and impiously, thou canst not lawfully take revenge on him, O father! Ah, remember what thou thyself hast suffered through father and mother; look back on the past and thou wilt discern, I know, how evil is the harvest of evil anger; no slight evidence hast thou of that . . . in those blinded eyes! Come, yield to Theseus and to me! It is not seemly that those who plead with justice should plead long; nor that a man should receive good and fail to repay the same.”

“My child,” said Oedipus, “grievous to me is this pleasure ye win by your words—nevertheless, be it as ye will. Only, friend, if yon man is to come hither, let no one gain the mastery over me.”

"I need not to be told that twice, old man," replied Theseus; "I would not boast; but be assured thou art safe, as long as any god safeguards *me*."

And with that he went from them towards Colonus. Now the suppliant of whom he spoke was waiting hard by, on the outskirts of the grove; so but a few moments had passed when Antigone softly exclaimed, "He comes, my father—unattended . . . and with tears streaming from his eyes. Lo, Polyneices is with us."

Bitterly, in truth, wept the young man as he looked on his father; and it was with real, if facile, emotion that he cried, "Ah me, what shall I do? Shall I weep first for mine own evil plight, O sisters, or for mine agéd father's . . . beholding him thus . . . a stranger and exile, clad in filthy rags, and the unkempt locks above that eyeless brow tossing in the wind . . . and to match the rest, yon scrip of broken victuals that he bears for stay against hunger! Wretch that I am, I learn too late what he has suffered; and I acknowledge myself the worst, the most unfilial of sons—hear it from my own lips! But since Zeus himself, in all his works and ways, hath Mercy throned beside him, may she be present with thee also, O my father; for these faults may yet be amended . . . and even had I the will, I could not add to my sin against thee, having sinned already to the utmost."

The pleading voice ceased, and a tense silence followed; for Oedipus sat mute, his face averted and rigid as though stiffened into stone. Then

Polyneices spoke again, "Why art thou silent? Father, say at least something . . . turn not from me! Hast thou no answer for me? Wilt thou dismiss me with speechless scorn, nor even tell me why thou art wroth? . . . O sisters mine, essay to move our father from this relentless, inexorable silence, that he send me not hence—I, the suppliant of the god—dishonoured, without word of reply."

"Tell him thyself what need brings thee here, unhappy one," answered Antigone; "by much speaking, one touches the chords now of joy, now of anger, or compassion—and gives, as it were, a voice to the voiceless."

"Thou counsellest well," said Polyneices, "and I will speak forthright—first calling to mine aid that very god from whose altar the King of Athens uplifted me, that I might come hither with warranty of safe ingress and regress; of which pledge, O strangers, I demand fulfilment from yourselves, and from my sire and sisters here. . . . Now, father, let me tell thee wherefore I am come. . . . Eteocles, my brother, has driven me into exile, and usurped thy throne, which I claimed as thine eldest born; for though he had neither right on his side, nor was the better man, he prevailed with the citizens. And of this I well believe thy curse to be the cause; as I likewise have heard from soothsayers. Now when I came a fugitive to Argos, King Adrastus gave me his daughter to wife; and he, with all the most renowned warriors of his realm, solemnly covenanted with me to lead their sevenfold host against Thebes,

that I might either die in my just quarrel or cast out those that had wronged me from the land. . . . Well, and what is mine errand unto thee? I come with suppliant prayers, my father; not mine alone, but those of the seven chieftains that even now beleaguer the plain of Thebes; among whom are Amphiaraus, best of warriors and best of seers; Tydeus the Aetolian; Capaneus, who boasts that he will burn Thebes to the ground; and Arcadian Parthenopaeus, named from the erstwhile virgin whose wedlock gave him birth—the famous Atalanta. For six all told are my princely allies, and I myself am the seventh leader of the dauntless Argive host; and we all beseech thee, my father, by these thy children, and by thine own soul, to abate thy wrath against me, as I march to take vengeance on my brother who has robbed me of home and country. For if oracles speak truly, victory will be with those who have thee on their side. Now therefore, by our sacred founts, and by the gods of our race, I adjure thee to hear and to yield. Consider, I and thou are beggars and aliens, dependent for a home on courting the favour of others, linked by a common fate; while *he* lords it in Thebes, faring sumptuously—and mocks at us both. But if thou wilt aid my purpose, lightly and soon shall I overthrow him; and so establish thee in thine own house again, and myself also. Yield thy consent, and I shall make good that boast; but without thee, I cannot even return alive from mine enterprise.”

Still his father kept silence; then said the head-

man of Colonus—"For his sake who sent this man to thee, Oedipus, give him whatever answer seems best to thee, ere thou dismiss him."

And Oedipus said, "Look you now, Elders of Colonus, were it not Theseus who hath sent him hither to obtain mine answer, he should never have heard my voice. But now that boon shall be vouchsafed him ere he depart—ay, such things shall he hear as will sadden him all his days! Listen, then, thou villain, who when thou hadst the throne and sceptre which thy brother now hath in Thebes didst cast out thine own father into exile, and make me wear this squalid garb which thou dost weep to look on *now* . . . being fallen into the same evil plight as I. It is too late for tears! While I live, I must endure this lot of homeless beggary and ever remember that I owe it all to thee. Yea, but that daughters were born to me, I had been dead ere now, for all the succour *thou* hast given me; these maidens have been my preservers, my nurses . . . men, not women, in their loyal service; but thou and thy brother are aliens and no sons of mine. Therefore the eyes of God look upon thee—not yet, indeed, as they will look presently, if that army be verily marching against Thebes. For never shalt thou take that city; nay, ere then, thou wilt fall stained with blood-guilt . . . and thy brother too. Such were the curses I uttered aforetime against you both; such do I now invoke as allies in my quarrel . . . that ye may learn to reverence parents, nor despise your sire because he is blind; for not so did these maidens here! And my malison shall

prevail against thy twofold plea of suppliancy and of right to the Theban throne—if indeed Justice, known of old, sit by an everlasting law on the right hand of Zeus! . . . Thou, therefore, get thee hence, loathed and disowned of me thy father; begone, thou worst of villains, with this curse of mine upon thy head—never to conquer thy native land, nor return to lowland Argos, but to die by a kinsman's blow, and slay him that drove thee out. For this I pray; and I call on the awful Tartarean Darkness wherein Laius dwells to make thee a new home—I call on the Goddesses of this place, and on the Destroying Spirit that hath sown deadly mutual hate in the breasts of you twain. Go, with this response in thine ears; go, and proclaim to all Thebes, and to thy trusty allies, what inheritance Oedipus hath bequeathed to his sons!”

And having thus spoken, with passion dreadful to hear and see, the blind man sank down exhausted on his seat, and covered his bowed head with his mantle. Then Polyneices lifted up his voice and wept, and thus he said, “Woe is me for my bootless journey, and for my comrades! Alas, to what a bourn have we set forth from Argos . . . even one that I dare not name to any of my comrades . . . no, nor turn them back . . . but I must go in silence to encounter this doom. . . . O sisters mine, since ye have heard our hard-hearted father's prayer, if his curse be fulfilled and ye, by any chance, return to Thebes—for the gods' sake, do not *you* dishonour me; give me a grave and funeral rites! For so, to the praise ye have already won by your filial

piety, shall be added the equal praise of having rendered loyal service to a brother."

"Polyneices," exclaimed Antigone, "grant me one thing, I beseech thee."

"Name it, dearest Antigone," answered the young man.

"Lead back thy host to Argos," she said, "and that speedily; do not ruin thyself and thy mother-city!"

"It is too late," replied her brother gloomily; "to falter now would disgrace me forever—no warrior would march again under such a captain."

"Alas, brother," she said, "but who now will dare to follow thee, hearing what our sire hath foretold?"

"Nay," said Polyneices, "they will not hear it from me; a good general keeps ill tidings to himself." And as the sisters clung to him, weeping, "Let me go, dear ones," he went on, "for needs must I tread the way of doom that the Furies of my sire prepare for me; but may you twain walk ever safely, with Zeus for guide—if ye will render me those last offices I have desired of you. While I live, there is nought you can do for me—then let me have your care when I am dead. Come, release me, sisters—and farewell; for you will see my living face no more."

So saying, he gently disengaged himself from the maidens' arms, kissed each upon the brow, murmuring a prayer that the gods would preserve from all evil creatures so innocent; and went hastily on his way, casting no look behind. . . .

IV

When their brother was gone, Antigone and Ismene sat them down and wept; but silently, for there was that in the now unveiled face of Oedipus which overawed them. It was not anger they read there, for the passion that shook the blind man as he hurled his malediction on his son no longer deformed his countenance; it was a nameless something which chilled the maidens' hearts with the sense that their father had suddenly become aloof from them—that he, still close beside them, had nevertheless passed into a world they knew not. And a like awe of their guest now took hold on the Elders of Colonus, so that they forbore to address him, and talked together in lowered voices, until a peal of thunder from the clear evening sky made them call loudly on the name of Zeus. Then cried Oedipus, "My children, my children, if there be here any one to send, let him fetch the all-excellent Theseus, for this winged thunder of Zeus will lead me forthwith to Hades. . . . Lo, another peal! Let some one go, I pray you, with utmost speed to summon the King. . . . Ah, daughters, now comes upon me the end foretold, inevitable . . . whereof this thunder is the appointed sign . . . hark, yet again it warns me! . . . O, where is Theseus? Will he come in time to find me alive—and conscious, so as to repay his benefits as I promised?"

As he spoke, the heavens grew black with storm-

clouds; thunder now rolled incessant, and therewithal Zeus sent a shower of hail; and the Elders of Colonus prayed loud and fast, beseeching the Thunderer to have mercy on them and their land, and to forgive them if they had transgressed by receiving a man accursed, sin-defiled. But meanwhile, one of them had gone at his best speed to Poseidon's altar, bethinking him that Theseus might be there, completing the interrupted sacrifice; there, indeed, he found the King, who made haste to obey his urgent summons, moved by the portent of the storm, which passed as swiftly as it came. And as he once more stood by his blind guest, "What new thing hath befallen, son of Laius," asked Theseus, "to make thee desire my presence? Was it, as one may readily guess, the thunder and hail that God sent even now?"

"Ah, King," said Oedipus, "by heaven-sent good luck thou comest to me who yearned for thee—for now does my life hang in the balance, and fain would I redeem my pledges to thee and thy State before I die. Lo, the gods, their own heralds, bring me the message with exact fulfilment of the appointed signs . . . peal on peal of thunder . . . lightnings hurled thick and fast by the invincible hand!"

"Thou dost convince me," replied Theseus, "for already I have found thine auguries true in the matter of war between Thebes and Athens . . . which I deemed impossible until I heard Creon threaten it. Say, then, what must now be done?"

And Oedipus said, "I will disclose, son of Aegeus, that which shall be an incorruptible treasure unto

this realm of thine. Now, even now, without support or guidance, I shall lead the way to the place where I must die. But do thou never reveal to any man where that place lies hidden, so shall it ever set up for thee a defence more sure than many bucklers or than the spears of neighbouring allies. But as touching things under a ban, and not to be uttered, thyself shalt learn them when thou comest to that place alone; for I may not reveal them to any of thy citizens, nor to my children that I love so well. No, thou alone must keep the secret, and when thine end draws near, impart it to thy successor; and let it be handed down in like manner from king to king. Thus shalt thou hold thine Athens ever secure from harm by the seed of the Dragon. . . . But now, for the divine sending urges me, let us set forth to yonder place, and dally here no longer."

So saying, Oedipus arose; and to the amazement of all, he walked onward with quick, firm tread, like one that clearly sees the path before him. And as he went, the blind man turned, beckoning with his hand, and said, "Follow me, O my children—thus; for strangely now am I become your guide . . . as ye were mine of late. Onward . . . touch me not . . . nay, let me find myself the holy sepulchre where I am destined to lie buried in this land. This way, come—this way! for this way Hermes the Guide doth lead me, and Persephone, Queen of Souls. . . . O Light that to me art darkness, whose beams for these many years I have not seen, but felt—I feel thee now for the last time! Yea,

now I fare to hide my life's close with Hades. But thou, my best of friends, happy and blest be thou, and thy people, and this land of thine; and in your prosperity remember me the dead, that it may be well with you evermore."

Then swiftly Oedipus went his way through the twilight glade; and his daughters and Theseus followed marvelling. There followed also, but at a distance, two or three villagers who had attended Theseus as he came from Poseidon's altar. But the Elders of Colonus abode where they were, overcome with awe at these strange happenings; and anon their headman lifted up his voice and prayed thus, "If lawful it be to adore with prayers the invisible Goddess, and thee, King of the Nocturnal Ones—we beseech thee, Aidoneus, Aidoneus, that without a pang, by no lamentable doom, the stranger may reach those Nether Plains of the Dead that entomb all mankind, and the Stygian dwelling-place. Many the afflictions that overtook him without fault of his own—but now in recompense may a just God exalt him! . . . Hear us, Goddesses of the Underworld; and thou, dread Shape of the unconquerable Hound, Warder untamed, snarling, as ancient legend declares, from thy couch at the hospitable cavern-gates of Hades—give free passage to the stranger on his way to the Plains of the Dead! Hear my prayer, O Death, Giver of the unawakening sleep! . . ."

By now, the sun was set and all the woods were darkened; but in the open glade there was yet light enough to show the old men each other's faces;

every cloud had passed, and the evening star glittered on a field of stainless azure. A windless calm had fallen over land and sea; not a leaf stirred in the hushed woods. You would have thought the very trees were watching and listening, alive and aware, round the human watchers, and holding their breaths like them in expectation. . . . At last quick footfalls broke the tense silence; the Elders, rising up in haste, saw at hand one of the villagers that had followed after Oedipus. And the man's look told them what news he brought even before he said, solemnly, "Fellow-townsmen, to give you in fewest words the sum of my tidings—Oedipus hath passed away! But for the manner of his passing—that was such as may not be recounted briefly."

"Tell us, tell us all," exclaimed the Elders. "Is he gone indeed, that man of sorrows? But how—by a heaven-sent and painless stroke of doom?"

"Ay, there you hit on the very point that is so worthy of wonder," replied the messenger; "but listen, and you shall hear all the tale. Yourselves beheld how the blind man went from hence, not led by his dear ones, but showing the way to us all. . . . Well, straight on he fared to yon sheer chasm hight *the Threshold*, where brazen steps lead down to Earth's nethermost roots; there he halted, nigh the great mixing-bowl of bronze that Theseus set there for a memorial of his covenant with Pirithous, what time they two descended by that stair to the Underworld. He took his stand midway between that monument and the Thorician Rock—the hollow

pear-tree and the stone-built tomb; then, sitting down, he ungirt his soiled raiment, and calling his daughters, he bade them fetch water from some spring, that he might wash, and pour out libations. And the maidens fetched it from the neighbouring Hill of Demeter, Our Lady of Verdure; and having bathed him therewith, they put on him a white vesture, such as the dead are arrayed in for burial—but whence they had it, I know not. No sooner was all this done to his content, than the Nether Zeus thundered within the earth; and the shuddering maidens fell at their father's knees, weeping and lamenting sore, and beating their breasts. But when Oedipus heard their sudden bitter outcry, he put his arms about them, and said, 'Ah, children, this day bereaves you of your father. For the things concerning me have an end; nor any more shall ye be burdened with the care of me—a heavy burden, I wot well, my daughters . . . and yet one word makes all those labours light. . . . For *love*, passing all love you can win from others, was your recompense from me, of whom you are orphaned henceforth to your lives' end.' Thus did father and daughters lament and weep together, knit in close embraces. But when they had wept their fill and their cries went up no more, there was silence for a space; then suddenly was heard a voice of one calling on him by name, so that for very terror the hair rose up on the heads of all that stood by. For the god called him again and yet again, in divers tones—'*Ho, there, ho, there, Oedipus, why tarry we on our road? Thou hast delayed too long already.*' Now

when he perceived that it was the god who summoned him, he bade King Theseus draw near—for we all stood apart while his daughters ministered to him—and when Theseus came to his side, he said, 'O friend, I pray thee, give thy right hand to my children here—take it, my daughters!—in pledge that thou wilt never forsake them, but do all things for their welfare as occasion and thy goodwill may prompt.' And Theseus, like the noble man he is, gave that promise calmly, without lamenting, to his guest - friend. Then Oedipus, groping with his hands, embraced his daughters, saying, 'My children, ye too must nobly steel your hearts—and quit this place, nor seek to hear and behold things that are not for your eyes or ears. Nay, go from me with all haste—let none but Theseus, whose right it is, remain to be initiated in the "mystery enacted here."' Thus spake he in the hearing of us all; and with tears and lamentations we followed the maidens as they retreated. But when we had gone a little way, we looked back . . . and lo, that man I speak of was nowhere to be seen . . . but the King only . . . and he screening his eyes with his hand, as from some vision too dazzling for mortal sight. And after a little while, we saw him bow down and kiss the earth . . . then rise and stretch his arms heavenward with upturned face . . . adoring the Nether and the Olympian gods in one act of prayer. . . . But by what manner of doom yonder man passed away no mortal can tell, save Theseus only. No fiery thunderbolt of Zeus made an end of him, nor any sea-born whirlwind

snatched him away; but either some god sent escort bore him hence, or the Nether World itself opened to receive him, and took him gently, without pain. For not amid wailings, sickness, and suffering came Oedipus to his end; but mystic and wonderful was his passing, beyond any mortal man's."

When the Elders of Colonus had heard these tidings, they kept silence awhile, filled with pious awe; then one of them asked, "And how fares it now with those orphaned maidens?"

"At their own request," answered the messenger, "our King is about to send them home to Thebes; their first petition, to be shown their father's grave, Theseus, with all gentleness, refused; saying the welfare of Athens depended on his keeping that secret inviolate. And he desired the maidens to remain here, promising to cherish them no less than their own brothers might; but at the name of *brother*, Antigone turned pale, and she said, 'O King, send me and my sister home to ancient Thebes, for a task awaits me there from which I shall not shrink, though it be fraught with utmost peril.' Thus spoke that fair and royal maiden, and won consent from Theseus our lord; but what task she has in mind to perform remains unknown to us all."

CHAPTER V

ANTIGONE

THE sun had not yet risen, but already a faint crimson, like the fire at an opal's heart, tinged the silvery East; the song of birds was loud in the woodlands around Thebes; cattle lowed from the dewy pastures, and spires of bluish smoke curling upward over the roofs of the town showed that many households were thus early awake and astir. Only the palace-fortress of the Cadmeia seemed still asleep; not even a watchman's footfall broke the silence of the empty courtyard; nor, if any such was at his post, did he challenge two black-robed figures who stole out of the great main gateway in the dim dawn. They halted in the open space beyond, looking about them as if fearful of being observed; then one spoke in low tones, "There is no one near. . . . We may speak freely. . . . Ismene, my own loved sister, knowest thou one ill, of all our heritage from Oedipus, that Zeus hath spared to accomplish for us twain? Anguish, ruin, shame, dishonour—these, in every form, have I seen descending on us. And now, to crown all, what edict is this that, as rumour has it, the Captain-General has let proclaim to all Thebes? Say, hast thou heard aught of it—or knowest thou not that

. . . one dear to us is to undergo the punishment of an enemy? ”

“ I have heard nothing, Antigone,” replied Ismene’s gentle voice, “ nothing either to hearten or sadden me, concerning our dear ones, since yesterday’s tidings . . . that we were bereft of our two brothers at once, by their fatal duel. And since the Argive host hath fled in the night bypast, I know just as little whether the event brings me gain or loss.”

“ But *I* knew, full well,” said Antigone, sighing; “ that is why I have brought thee outside the palace-gates—the very walls within have ears!—to tell thee what none must overhear.”

“ What is it? ” said Ismene, anxiously. “ Some misfortune, I can see by that darkened brow.”

And indignantly her sister answered, “ Yea, hath not Creon appointed funeral honours to one of our brothers—and to the other, the dishonour of lacking a grave? Eteocles, ’tis said, he hath interred with all due and wonted rites, to his greater glory among the souls below; but the corse of hapless Polyneices—so they say—it is proclaimed throughout the city that none may bury or lament *him*; he is to be left unmourned, unsepulchred, sweet provender for whatever birds of prey descry him, to gorge their fill upon. Such, if report speaks truly, is the ordinance that the worthy Creon hath framed for thee and me . . . I say, for *me* . . . and anon he will come hither to announce the same in plain words to those that as yet have not heard it; nor does he esteem this a light matter, but whoso any-

wise transgresses the commandment shall die by the traitor's doom of public stoning. There . . . thou hast my tidings; and shortly will it be seen whether thou art true-bred, or the degenerate daughter of a noble race."

"But if 'tis even so, my poor sister," faltered Ismene, "what can *I* do to help or hinder?"

"Consider whether thou wilt share a dangerous task," said Antigone, "and help me take up the corse from where it lies . . ."

"Thou meanest, then, to bury him," exclaimed Ismene, "though it is forbidden to the Thebans, one and all?"

"Assuredly I will bury my brother . . . and thine . . . even if thou wilt not," replied Antigone calmly; "disloyal to him will I never prove."

"Ah, rash girl, wouldst thou defy Creon's edict?" said Ismene.

"Nay, he hath no right to bar me from mine own," answered Antigone.

"Alas," sighed Ismene, "think, sister, how our father perished, detested and ill-famed . . . blinded by his own hand, through horror at the crimes his own search revealed; then she, the wife and mother both, did violence to her life with the corded noose; last, our two hapless brothers have fallen in one day by each other's sword. And now we two, the latest left . . . think what utter ruin must befall us if we rebel against the lawful commandment of our sovereign! Nay, we must consider, first, that we are women, and born for submission to men; next, that we are subject to the stronger, so that

we must needs obey in this matter, and in things more grievous still. I, therefore, craving pardon from Those Below—since I act under duress—will submit to authority; for it is senseless to be meddling.”

“I ask no help from thee,” said Antigone, with cold disdain. “I would not take it now, even shouldst thou wish to give it. No, be as thou hast chosen to be; but I will bury yonder man; for that deed I am content to die. I shall rest in peace with him, dear to my dear one, holy in my crime; since ’tis but a little while I must please the living—but with those yonder my rest shall be everlasting. But be it thine, an thou wilt, to dishonour laws that are precious in the sight of the gods.”

“I do not dishonour them,” cried Ismene, “but I am powerless to act in defiance of the State.”

“That excuse may serve *thee*,” replied Antigone; “for my part, I will go to pile the sod over my dearest brother.”

“Alas for thee, unhappy sister,” said Ismene, bursting into tears, “how I tremble for thy sake!”

“Fear not for me—look to thine own safety,” said Antigone, turning away. Ismene laid a shaking hand upon her arm. “At least,” she begged, “tell no one what thou art going to do . . . keep it secret . . . as I will.”

“Ay me . . . denounce it,” answered the other bitterly, drawing her arm away; “thou wilt earn far more hatred . . . when the truth comes out . . . if thou dost not proclaim my deed to all.”

“Ah, cruel,” wept Ismene, “thou hast a warm

heart for the cold clay—none for thy living sister.”

“I render fealty where it is most due,” said Antigone.

“Say, thou *wouldst* render it,” returned her sister, “if thou hadst the power—but thou hast not.”

“Well, then, when I find myself powerless, I shall desist at once,” said the other, in the tone of one humouring a child.

“Nay, one ought not to set out at all, when the enterprise is hopeless,” said Ismene, shaking her pretty head sagely.

But Antigone's patience was at an end. “Another word of that sort,” she cried, “and not only shall I hate thee, but the hate of dead Polyneices will cleave unto thee, as thou deservest. But let me and my foolish purpose alone—leave me to suffer this terrific doom; for nothing I must suffer can be so terrible as to die ignobly.”

“Go thy way, then, if thou art resolved,” sobbed Ismene, “and be sure of this—that, however misguided, thou art truly loved of thy loved ones.”

So saying, she withdrew into the palace; but Antigone went with swift, noiseless footsteps towards the goal she had chosen, and cast no look behind. . . .

The sun had risen, bathing the grey walls of the Cadmeia in golden splendour, when a company of aged men in rich apparel halted before the gateway of the citadel. Turning to the East, they uplifted their voices in a hymn of praise to the Sun-God; then, to the same melody, they chanted their thanksgiving for the overthrow and flight of the Argive

invaders. While these ancients were yet singing' the iron-studded gates were flung open, and one who seemed their leader cried, " Behold, here comes Creon, son of Menoeceus, whom the late dispensation of the gods hath made king over Thebes; what is he inly pondering, that he should convene this special assembly of Elders? "

As he spoke, Creon came forth, garbed in the kingly purple, and escorted by two spearmen. The new monarch acknowledged gravely the salutation of the Elders, and thus addressed them—" Sirs, the vessel of our commonwealth, tempest-tost of late, now rides once more on an even keel, by grace of the gods. And you have I chosen out from all the citizens to confer with me, knowing how unswerving has ever been your loyalty to the house of Laius—whose throne I, Creon, now possess, as next-of-kin to those two ill-starred brothers. Now, a man's nature cannot be known at full until he is set in authority; that touchstone will prove him of base metal, to my thinking, if through fear of popular censure he holds his peace instead of ordaining what is best for the State; or if he put the claims of friendship above those of country. For I—be Zeus my witness, that beholdeth all things evermore—would never keep silence if I saw danger threatening the citizens, nor reckon an enemy of Thebes as my friend; knowing this, that we owe our safety to the good ship, our country, and can make ourselves friends only while she prospers on her course. Such are my principles of government—in consonance wherewith I have now published this decree touch-

ing the sons of Oedipus—namely, that Eteocles, who hath fallen gloriously in defence of the city, shall be buried with all the honours that wait on the most illustrious dead; but his brother Polyneices, the returned exile, who would have destroyed with fire the city of his fathers and the temples of their gods . . . who would have given his own race, some to death, the rest to slavery . . . *him* it hath been publicly proclaimed that none shall inter or mourn, but he shall be left unburied, a prey to dogs and birds, loathsome to the view. This mind is in me; and never, by act of mine, shall the evildoer be exalted above the righteous; but whoso bears goodwill to this city shall receive honours at my hand, in his life and in his death."

Then answered one of the Elders, submissively, "Such is thy pleasure, O Creon, son of Menoecus; and certes, thou hast power to deal as thou wilt, both with the dead and with us who yet live."

"Look to it, then," said Creon, "that ye be guardians of my edict."

"Nay, that is a task for younger men," replied the Elder, with a look of injured dignity.

"Thou mistakest," said Creon quickly, "I speak not of watching the corpse . . . that is cared for already . . . but beware of abetting any who may disobey this mandate."

"Disobey it?" exclaimed the Elder, "none will do that, I trow. No man is fool enough to be in love with death."

"Why, as thou sayest, death is the penalty," answered Creon; "and yet some one might risk it

for a bribe . . . many a man hath been led to ruin by the lust of gain."

At that moment, one of the royal guards was seen advancing from the direction of the town—in so singular a manner that the eyes of the group beside the gate were riveted upon him. Now he would run a few yards, now slacken his pace, and now stop dead as though an invisible hand pulled him back; then hurry on again, and again halt; his round, simple face, no less than these motions, showed terror and perplexity in ludicrous guise. At sight of Creon, the man's fear seemed to redouble, and he wheeled about as if to fly; but mastering himself with visible effort, he went up to him, dropped on one knee, and gabbled out—"My King, I will not say that I come breathless with running, nor at my best speed; no, for my thoughts checked me again and again, and turned me from my course. For thus my mind kept prompting me—'*Fool, why wilt rush on certain death?*' but then, '*Wherefore, wretch, dost linger? If Creon hears this from another, wilt thou not smart therefor?*' So I reasoned with myself—and made a long road of a short one by loitering. But at last this resolve won the day—that I should go to thee—and though my tale be nought I will e'en tell it out. For one comfort I hold fast to—I can suffer nothing but what is fated."

"Well, what is it makes thee so uneasy?" asked Creon, half smiling.

"First, a word to thee about myself," said the guard earnestly. "I did not do the deed—I saw not

the doer—and 'twere not just that I should come to any harm."

"Ay, art so prompt with thy defence?" said the King, "then thou hast some strange thing to tell. Speak out, canst thou not?—and so begone."

"Why, thus it is, then," blurted out the man; "the corpse yonder—some one hath newly given it burial . . . and made off again . . . after scattering dry earth over it, and hallowing it with the wonted offerings."

"How sayest thou?" exclaimed Creon, furiously. "What man hath dared to do this thing?"

"I know not," said the guard, trembling, "it must have been done just before our watch was set—while it was yet twilight; when the sun rose we saw what I told you—the dead man shrouded from view, not entombed, but lightly covered with dust . . . as 'twere the work of one that shunned defilement. For that cleaves, they say, to whoso passes an unburied corpse without throwing a handful of earth on it. . . . Thus, then, we found him lying, and there was no sign that either wild beast or dog had been near, or torn his flesh. And the ground all about was dry and hard, with never a mark of feet, or of wheels, nor yet of digging with mattock or hoe; the doer of that deed had left not a trace behind. . . . Then evil words were loudly bandied among us, each guard accusing his fellow; at last we were like to come to blows, none being there to hinder. Every man was charged—and no man convicted; for each pleaded ignorance. And we were all ready to take molten iron in our hands, or

walk through fire, and to swear by the gods that we had not done this thing, and knew neither the deviser nor the doer. . . . At length, when cross-questioning proved bootless, one gave such advice that we all bowed our faces to the earth in dread; for he said we must report the matter to thee and not conceal it. Now, we saw nothing for it but to obey him—which would certainly undo us. And, as better might not be, we cast lots who should carry the tidings; and 'twas luckless I that drew this prize! So here I am, no more welcome than willing, I trow; for every man mislikes the bearer of ill news."

While the guard ran on in this manner, with much graphic pantomime, Creon stood frowning, fixed in thought, and seemed not to heed him; and when the tale was done, he remained silent. Then said the Chief Elder, in awe-struck tones, "O King, I have had an inkling from the first that the thing we have heard may be the work of gods."

But Creon turned on him in a fury. "Hold thy peace," he exclaimed, "ere thou enrage me above measure, and prove thyself as far gone in folly as in years. For 'tis past bearing what thou sayest—that the gods take thought for yonder corpse. Was it to repay a benefactor with high honours that they shrouded *him*—who came to burn their columned fanes and votive offerings, to set their land on fire, to make havoc of its laws? Or seest thou the gods doing honour to wicked men? It is not so. Nay, but there be some in Thebes that have already murmured against me, irked by this decree, shaking their heads at it in secret; and would not dutifully

bear my yoke, like loyal subjects. It is these men, I know and am persuaded, who have seduced and bribed the watchmen to do this thing. O, of all long-standing evils among men, the worst is money! It ruins cities, it makes men homeless, it corrupts the honest; 'tis the teacher of every vice and all manner of sacrilege. But they who have done this deed for lucre's sake have wrought for themselves certain retribution, come it late or soon. Now, as surely as I worship Zeus—on mine oath be it spoken—I tell thee, knave, if ye do not find and bring before me the man who performed this burial, mere death shall be too light a punishment for you all—ye shall hang by the thumbs, first, till agony wrings the truth from you! Ay, ye shall learn that ill-gotten gains seldom profit the gainer.”

The wretched guard attempted some reply, but Creon cut him short with, “Ah, thou art a born chatterer, that one sees.”

“That may be—but never guilty of this deed,” the man protested.

“Thou art,” cried the King, “and what is more, thou hast bartered thy life for lucre. . . . What sayest thou? *'Tis terrible to be falsely suspected?* Yea, forsooth, wax eloquent on that theme . . . but if ye show me not the culprit, ye shall own that shameful gains bear bitter fruit.”

So saying, he turned on his heel and strode into the palace. The guard looked after him, and his eyes twinkled shrewdly. “May the culprit be found with all my heart,” he muttered; “but found or no—and that must chance decide—thou wilt never

see *me* come here again. Little I thought to win out of this alive, and much am I beholden to the gods therefor!" And with that he made off, running as for his life. . . .

An hour had passed, but the City Elders yet lingered at the gate, discussing these strange happenings, when the guard returned leading a prisoner, and cries of horrified amazement broke from them as they saw that his prisoner was—Antigone.

"Here she is," he shouted, "here's the culprit! We caught her in the act of giving burial! Where is Creon, ho!"

"What is the matter?" said the King, appearing in the gateway. "Ha—what brings *thee* here again?"

The guard now faced him with an exultant air. "King," said he, "I could have sworn *nothing* would, after thy threats—which proves that one should never pledge one's self not to do a thing; for swear I did to keep away—but sudden unlooked-for joy has made me break mine oath. So here I have brought this maiden—who was caught in the act of paying funeral rites. No casting of lots *this* time who should be messenger, but to me and none other has that good luck fallen. Now take her thyself, King, and question her at thy pleasure; but as for me, I have a right to be made quit of this bad business once for all."

And letting go his unresisting captive's arm, he stepped back with a satisfied smile to await dismissal. But the King, who had been staring at Antigone's fair, bowed head as though unable to

trust his eyesight, imperiously beckoned him forward. "This maiden," he said, "where and how didst thou arrest her? Take heed of thine answer. Art well assured of what thou hast said?"

"I saw her burying the corpse that thou hast forbidden to bury," replied the guard, with a kind of surly triumph; "if that be not plain speaking, I know not what is."

"But how was she seen, how caught in the act? Let me hear all that passed," said Creon.

And nothing loth the man told his tale. "It happened thus," said he; "when I and my fellows got back to the place with those awful threats of thine on our minds, we diligently swept off the pall of dust, until the clammy corpse lay bare; then we sat down on a hillock-top to windward, so that we might not nose him. We were all broad awake, and kept stirring up any comrade that seemed to flag in watchfulness with streams of abuse. But when the sun rose high and sultry heat came on, behold, a sudden whirlwind raised a storm of dust, a skyey torment, that filled all the plain and disfigured the leafy woods, and high heaven was brimful of it. Then we shut our eyes, enduring the godsent plague; but when it ceased at last, the maiden was in view. And when she saw the corpse lying bare, she gave a cry like the shrill cry of a bird in its anguish, when it comes to the empty nest and finds its brood have been taken. Even so bitterly wailed she, and invoked curses on the doers of that deed. Straightway, then, she brings handfuls of dust, and crowns the corpse with libations, poured thrice from aloft

out of a fair-wrought bronze pitcher. Soon as we saw that, we rushed forward and seized our prey, who was no whit daunted, nor resorted to denial when we accused her—which was at once pleasant and painful to me. For a great joy it is to 'scape from peril one's self, but it is a painful thing to get a friend into trouble. However, all such thoughts have less weight with me than my proper safety."

Then Creon turned to Antigone. "Hear, thou," he said roughly, "thou with the downcast eyes—dost thou confess, or deny, what is laid to thy charge?"

Antigone raised her head, and looking him in the face, "I avow the deed," she calmly said, "nor seek to deny it."

"So, fellow, thou art quit of a heavy indictment—away with thee," Creon flung at the guard, who made off with all speed; then in menacing tones—"Now tell me, thou," he resumed, "and answer in one word—didst thou know that it was forbidden by public proclamation to bury yonder corpse?"

"Yea, I knew it," said Antigone, "how could I not, when 'twas common knowledge?"

"And notwithstanding thou hast dared to transgress that commandment?" sternly asked the King.

"Even so," replied Antigone, "for it was not Zeus who laid it upon me, nor hath the Justice that inhabits with the Nether Gods established such laws among men. Neither thought I thy decrees had such weight, that a mortal could traverse the unwritten, unfailing ordinances of the gods. For these are not of to-day or yesterday, but from everlasting;

and no man knoweth when they were first revealed. I was little likely to incur the penalty of law-breaking from Heaven's tribunal, through fear of any man! Yea, for I knew . . . could not but know . . . that I must die some day, even without thy sentence; and if I am to die before my time, I reckon that a gain. For who that lives, like me, beset with miseries, dost not gain by death? So to me this doom brings but a trivial pang; but had I let my mother's son lie unburied, *there* would have been anguish; I feel none now. And if in thy judgment I have wrought foolishly, it is peradventure a fool that impeaches me for folly."

As the daughter of Oedipus spoke thus, old memories stirred the hearts of the Theban Elders; and when she ceased, one said, deprecatingly, "The maiden shows herself true offspring of a fierce sire . . . and knows not how to submit to misfortune."

"Mark this, my friend," said Creon, eying him askance, "'tis the haughty spirit that ever goeth before a fall; 'tis your hardest iron, made stubborn in the furnace, that oftenest proves brittle; and I have seen mettlesome horses broken in by means of a small bit. Ay, for a slave has done with pride when he meets his master! . . . She, here, was no novice in insolence when she transgressed the law proclaimed; and on top of that, behold a second outrage . . . she boasts and exults over her crime! Now, certes, I am no man, but *she* is the man, if she triumph thus unscathed. Nay, be she my sister's child, or closer akin to me than any that worships our household Zeus, she and her sister

shall not escape a horrible doom. They shall die, the pair of them—for I accuse the other of equal complicity in this burial. Go, summon her—did I not see her in the house even now, frantic, out of her senses? ” And as his retainers, with an obedient start, hurried within, the King went on, moodily—“ Ever thus, covert treason betrays itself beforehand. Hateful—but what I hate no less is that a detected criminal should seek to glorify the crime.”

Then said Antigone, “ What more wouldst thou have than to take and kill me? ”

“ Truly, nothing,” replied Creon, “ if I gain that, I gain all.”

“ And why then tarriest thou? ” she said; “ I accept no point of thy reasoning—the gods forbid I ever should!—and my creed cannot but offend thee. And yet, as touching glory, how could I have won greater, than by paying funeral rites to my born brother? These men here would own they approved the deed, had not fear locked their lips. But despotism, fortunate in so much else, has the privilege of doing and saying what it will.”

“ I tell thee,” exclaimed Creon, “ thou art single in thine opinion; not one of these citizens shares it. Art not ashamed to set up thy judgment against theirs? And since thou harpest on duty to a brother, was not *he* also thy brother who fell in the opposite cause? Yet thou hast rendered a boon which is impious in his eyes.”

“ The dead man will not bear witness to that,” replied Antigone softly.

"Ay, will he," retorted Creon, "if thou equal him in honour with that impious one."

Antigone said, "It was not his slave, but his brother who perished——"

"Ravaging this land," broke in the King, "whereas *he* died in its defence. Thinkest thou his righteous soul desires a like portion with the wicked in funeral honours?"

"Who can tell?" dreamily answered Antigone. "Perhaps in the Underworld my deed is accounted blameless."

"Do not hope it," said Creon; "for they who were foes on earth are still foes down there. Thy brothers, assuredly, hate each other still; by favouring one thou hast sided against the other."

"It is not my nature to take part in hating, but in loving," said the maiden, with unruffled brow.

Wrathfully the king looked on her, for his last shaft had missed the mark. This girl cared nothing for his threats, nor for the disapproval of all Thebes; all her thoughts were with her departed kindred, whom she was so soon to join; if the prospect of meeting Eteocles' offended spirit did not dismay her, nothing else would. "Go, then, to the Underworld," he cried, "and since thou art for loving, love the folk yonder. While I live, no woman shall master *me!*"

At this moment two of the household led out Ismene; weeping she came, and her lovely face was flushed and tear-stained. A murmur of compassion broke from the Elders, but Creon's rage welcomed a new vent, and he turned fiercely on the

shrinking maiden. "Ha, thou viper," he exclaimed, "thou that I nourished in my house while thou wast privily sucking my blood—yea, *two* pestilent traitresses I harboured unwittingly!—come, tell me now, wilt confess thy share in this burying, or dost thou deny all knowledge of it?"

Ismene cast one glance at her sister, and as though gathering courage in that serene presence, she answered, "I plead guilty . . . if *she* permits . . . and own myself her accomplice."

"No; Justice forbids that," exclaimed Antigone. "Thou wouldst not take part in the deed, and it was mine alone."

"But now thou art in trouble, I would fain stand by thee," said Ismene. "Ah, sister, count me not unworthy to die with thee, and to sanctify the dead."

"Prithee, share not thou my doom," coldly replied Antigone, "nor lay claim to an act from which thou didst keep aloof. 'Tis enough that *I* should die."

"And what pleasure shall I have in living when thou art gone?" wailed Ismene.

"Ask that of Creon," said Antigone, "since he has all thy regard."

"O, what good can it do thee to wound me like this?" cried her sister, and burst into passionate weeping.

"Nay, now," said Antigone, more gently, "if I mocked thee, 't was with a heavy heart. But remember, thou didst choose life when I chose death; take courage, then, to live, seeing thou

canst render me no other service. For I have died already, that I might befriend the dead."

"I declare," cried the King, "one of these girls now proves as senseless as the other has been all her life."

"Yea, O King, for one's reason, such as it is, deserts one in trouble," answered Ismene with spirit.

"So it appears," retorted Creon, "from thy choosing to share the offence of an evildoer."

"How could I help it . . . how could I live without her?" cried Ismene, and wept afresh.

"No more of that," sternly said Creon; "her days are ended."

"Thou wilt not slay her?" shrieked Ismene. "No, no, thou canst not . . . thou hast forgotten . . . she is thy son's betrothed."

"There lack not other fields for him to plough," said the King, "and I should abhor my son's marriage with a wicked woman."

At that, a sigh broke from Antigone, and she murmured, "Ah, Haemon, my dearest, how thy father dishonours thee!" And the Elders were much moved; for all Thebes knew how deep and pure an affection had drawn together the daughter of Oedipus and the son of Creon, and their betrothal had been universally welcomed as uniting the past and present royal lines.

"King," said one among them, "can it be thou wilt deprive thy son of his affianced bride?"

"'Tis Death, not I, that will break off the marriage," answered Creon with a grim smile. "But

we waste time—slaves, conduct these two within, and look that you guard them closely. Aha, from now they must learn to be women, and not gad about as they choose; for even the bold are apt to flee when the gates of Hades loom before them.”

Silent, unresisting, the maidens were led into the palace; Creon was about to follow, when a young man, richly attired, strode out of the doorway and confronted him with troubled mien. Creon's face softened at the sight of him. “My son,” he said, “art thou enraged against thy father? For thou knowest, methinks, that thy bride's doom is sealed.”

“Father, I am thine own,” said Haemon submissively; “I shall be guided as thy wisdom directs . . . no marriage will I account more precious than thy righteous governance.”

“Why, very well said,” replied the King; “ever cleave to that rule—to set thy father's will above all other things. For to this end do men pray that dutiful offspring may grow up around their hearths—even that their children may recompense their father's enemy with evil, and honour the friend he honours. But if a man begets unprofitable children, what can one say but that he hath begotten toils for himself and an abounding source of mockery for his foes? Then never, my son, let pleasure overthrow thy judgment on a woman's account; knowing that whoso takes an evil woman for bedfellow and housemate gets cold comfort of his fondling. Ay, what wound more piercing than a false loved one? Come, then, dismiss the girl with loathing, as were she thy bitter enemy, to find a bridegroom

in the house of Hades. For since I have caught her in open and single-handed rebellion, I will not prove a liar to the Thebans—no, I will slay her. . . . So now let her call to her heart's content on Zeus of the Blood-kin; it shall not move me, for if I foster lawlessness among mine own kindred, how shall I curb it in others? He that maintains justice in his family will be found maintaining it in the State also. But no good word have I for such as, having transgressed laws, set them at defiance, and would give orders to their rulers. No, whomsoever the State invests with authority, that man must be obeyed in things great and small, right or wrong; and certain I am that one who renders such obedience would prove a good ruler no less than a loyal subject, and be found a faithful and gallant comrade in time of war. . . . But anarchy is the most deadly of all plagues. This it is that destroys commonwealths, lays waste men's homes, and puts to rout allied armies; whereas the greater number of them that prosper owe their very lives to obeying authority. Therefore we must defend our institutions, and by no means permit ourselves to be worsted by a woman. Better, if needs must, be deposed by the hand of man, than be called a woman's vassal!"

"Unless age hath cheated me of judgment, there is wisdom in what thou sayest," exclaimed an Elder, as the king paused and looked fixedly at his son, expecting reply.

"Father," began the youth with deference, "'tis the gods who implant reason, that supreme treasure, in the minds of men; and though I have neither the

skill nor the wish to dispute thy reasoning, yet . . . peradventure another man might have some true things to say on the other side. Be that as it may, 'tis my natural part to watch popular opinion in thine interest; for not one of the citizens dare say to thy face what would offend thee; but *I* have private opportunities of hearing how all Thebes bemoans yonder maiden. '*She of all women,*' they say, '*least merited such a fate—to die a shameful death in requital of a most glorious deed. She, who would not suffer her own brother to lie unburied on the field of slaughter, a prey to dogs and vultures—hath she not earned golden honour for her reward?*' So the folk murmur in secret. . . . But I, sire, count nothing on earth more precious than thy welfare; for what brighter jewel can children wear than a thriving father's good fame—or a father than his children's? I pray thee, then, let not one fixed thought be thy mind's only wear, even that *thy* verdict must be right, and no other. For if a man fancy he alone is wise, peerless in mind and eloquence—look within him and you shall find mere hollowness. Nay, 'tis no disgrace for a man, even if he be a sage, to learn many lessons and to shun obstinacy. As, on a torrent's banks, the trees that bend before it lose never a twig, while their stiffer fellows are swept away root and branch; even thus fares the mariner that never slackens the tautened sheet—he overturns his craft and makes the rest of his cruise hull uppermost! Ah, but desist from wrath; suffer thy mood to alter. For if I, despite my youth, may venture on an apophthegm, this I say—Far best it were that

men should be endowed by nature with perfect wisdom; but in default—and few there be so gifted—'tis good also to learn of them that counsel aright."

The Elders listened approvingly to Haemon's speech, and when he made an end, one said, "O King, if the youth hath uttered a word in season, it is meet thou shouldst take a lesson from him, and he, no less, from thee; for we have had a wise discourse from either side."

"What, is a man of *my* age to be taught prudence by one of *his*?" exclaimed Creon, contemptuously.

"Not if the teaching be unrighteous," said Haemon; "but if I *am* young, thou shouldst consider my deserts rather than my age."

"A deserving act, truly, to pay homage to the lawless," scoffed his father.

"I am so far from that," replied Haemon, gravely, "that I would have no respect shown to the vicious."

"And is not yonder girl infected with vice?" cried the King.

"*That* our whole Theban folk deny as one man," was his son's rejoinder.

"Shall Thebes dictate my policy?" flashed back Creon. "Is it not everywhere held that the city belongs to the ruler?"

"A city is no city if one man owns it," said Haemon; "best choose a desert if thou wouldst play the monarch."

Creon glared at him for a moment, then said with affected carelessness, "This fellow, it seems, is the woman's ally."

"If *thou* art a woman—yes!" retorted Haemon,

no longer master of himself, "for verily my one aim is to serve *thee*."

And now the two bandied words like sword-thrusts—"Thou villain, dost contend openly with thy father?"

"Ay, since I find thee sinning against Justice."

"What, by upholding my kingly authority?"

"Thou dost not uphold it when thou tramplest underfoot the prerogatives of the gods."

"O caitiff soul, and weaker than a woman!"

"But not so weak, at least, as to submit to dishonour."

"And yet thy whole pleading is in yonder woman's cause."

"No, 'tis on behalf of thee and me, and of the Nether Gods."

"Thou woman's bonds slave, seek not to cajole me."

"Wert thou not my father, I should charge thee with unwisdom."

"Thou shalt rue teaching me *wisdom*—out of thy lack thereof."

"What, must thou speak and none venture a reply?"

"I speak to some purpose—that girl can never be thy bride . . . in *this* world."

"She must die, then . . . and, in dying, bring death to . . . some one else."

"So—art grown reckless to the point of threatening me?"

"If 'tis a threat to oppose futile resolves!"

"*Futile*, sayest thou?" exclaimed Creon, trembling

with rage. "Now, by yonder Heaven, thou shalt pay dearly for all this contumelious reproaching of me. . . . Ho, slaves within! Bring out that detested creature, that she may die here and now . . . in her bridegroom's presence."

And Haemon, with equal passion—"No, not while I stand by . . . never dream it . . . shalt thou slay her . . . nor ever again shalt thou look upon my face! And so . . . I leave thee to such friends as can endure thy maniac moods."

So saying, he made towards the city with hasty, disordered steps.

"He rushes from us, O King, like one desperate," ventured the Chief Elder, "and a young mind, under stress of anguish, harbours dangerous thoughts."

"Let him do his worst—let him think to move heaven and earth, for aught I care," said Creon, furiously, "but he cannot rescue those two girls from destruction."

"But thou wilt not slay *both*?" exclaimed the Elder; and a murmur rose among his fellows—"No, no, that must not be . . . the younger sister is plainly guiltless."

Tyrant as he was, Creon could not disregard a protest which he felt all Thebes would echo. "I was forgetting," he said, "and thou dost well to remind me—Ismene must go free, being innocent. As for the other—her doom shall be such that our State shall not incur blood-guilt thereby. For I will have her taken to that lonely place without the city where, as thou knowest, there are sepulchral chambers hewn out of the rock. Some are yet un-

tenanted . . . and in one of those Antigone shall be immured, with the dole of food that pious custom ordains in such a case for the averting of public uncleanness. So shall her blood not be on us of Thebes. And in that tomb, calling upon Hades, her sole god, she may achieve . . . for all I know . . . immunity from Death; if not, she will at least gain tardy knowledge of the truth that to honour *his* people is labour thrown away." With these words Creon turned about and strode into the palace, before any of the Elders could frame a reply.

Deeply moved were these ancient Thebans by the quarrel they had just witnessed; to men of their day and order, the spectacle of a son defying his father was more portentous than we can realise, insomuch that a maiden's death seemed a light thing in comparison. Therefore, as they now spoke together in hushed, sorrowful tones, the old men's theme was the resistless power of Love, who could drive his votary to break even the sacred filial tie. But while they yet descanted on this, Antigone was led forth by her executioners; and at that sight the Elders could not refrain from tears. And she, wistfully regarding them, said—"Behold me, citizens of my fatherland, setting out on my last journey . . . looking my last on the sunbeams that shall gladden me nevermore. For Hades, who bids *Good-night* to all, leads me to the banks of Acheron . . . or ever the hymeneal chant be raised for me . . . nay, 'tis Acheron's self I must espouse."

There was that in the royal maiden's look and tone which changed the pity of the Elders to a kind

of awe. "Glorious, verily, and highly praised," they exclaimed, "thou departest to yonder Glen of the Dead, thou on whom no malady hath laid wasting hand, neither is the sword thine allotted guerdon; but self-swayed, and yet alive, thou wilt descend into Hades, as never mortal did before."

"And yet," said Antigone with a strange smile, "I know the story of the Phrygian woman, Tantalus' daughter, that sojourned once among us . . . how miserably she perished on topmost Sipylus . . . how, like strangling ivy, a stony growth overspread her flesh. Still, men say, she is wasting there under rain and snow perennial; still the rocks are wetted by her streaming tears. . . . And likest unto *hers* is the natal Genius that now lays me down to sleep."

It was of her rocky tomb the maiden thought, as she likened herself to rock-bound Niobe; but whoso looked upon her standing there, so calm, so marble-pale, might well have fancied that the very change had come over her which made a statue of the Phrygian queen. Yet, under that mask, her heart was yearning for a word of human sympathy from those old men, who had known her from childhood.

"But Niobe was divine, thou knowest, and sprung from gods," said the Chief Elder, reprovingly, "whereas *we* are mere mortals by birth and descent. Howbeit, 'tis great glory for a woman to be equalled in fate with the peer of goddesses, while she yet lives, and afterwards when dead."

"Woe is me, I am bemocked!" cried Antigone.

“Now, by our ancestral gods, can ye not forbear till I am gone . . . must ye deride me to my face? O wellspring of Dirce, O precinct of bright-charioted Thebe, ye, at least, will testify how all unmourned of friends, and by what decree, I fare to the dungeon of an unnatural grave . . . me miserable . . . who can find no home on earth or down below . . . with the living, or with the dead!”

“In thy reckless career,” sighed the Chief Elder, “thou hast dashed thyself, my child, against the lofty throne of Justice . . . and fallen heavily. But it comes into my mind that in this struggle thou payest the price of . . . thy father’s crime.”

“Ah, thou hast touched upon my sorest mis-giving,” replied Antigone, “renewing the thrice-sung lament for my father and for all the disasters of our illustrious race, offspring of Labdacus. . . . Ah, from what fearful wedlock was I born to wretchedness? What were they to each other who were my parents . . . with whom I am about to dwell, accurst, unwedded? And thou, too, O my brother, wert evil-starred in marriage; but for that Argive alliance thou hadst not died the death that has been my ruin.”

“A pious action claims a certain reverence,” moralised the Chief Elder, “but flouting of authority is what no ruler can tolerate. Thy self-willed nature hath undone thee.”

At that, the maiden turned from him with a deep-drawn sigh. “Unwept, unfriended, without bridal hymn,” she murmured, “I am led, poor sufferer,

on this way prepared. No longer, hapless that I am, must I see yon blessed Lamp of Day in its splendour; yet not a friend bemoans my doom . . . none has tears to shed for me . . .”

“If songs and lamentations could profit those about to die,” broke in the harsh voice of Creon, “wot ye not that there would never be an end of them? . . . Take her hence, I say, with all speed! Close the sepulchral vault upon her, as I bade ye . . . and then leave her there alone, to die, or live entombed, as best may please her. Our hands are pure of this girl's blood; but hap what hap, she shall dwell no more above ground.”

Then said Antigone, gazing before her with fixed tearless eyes as though in a waking dream, “O tomb, O bride-chamber, O cavern-home that shall prison me for aye, whither I pass to meet mine own people . . . yea, all the host of them that are gone, whom Persephone hath welcomed in the realms of death. Last of them all I go down thither, and of all most wretchedly, who die as a malefactress ere I have lived out my span of life. . . . Yet I nurse the hope that my coming will be sweet to ye, O father and mother mine, and sweet to thee, my brother!” . . . She paused, cast a half-bewildered look on those around, and with sudden passion, “Wherein have I transgressed divine law?” she cried. “Ah, why should I, unhappy one, look to the gods any more—on whom call for succour—since my pious dealing is counted unto me for impiety? . . . Nay, if indeed the gods approve my punishment, I shall learn in the other world that I have

sinned. But if he that condemns me is the sinner—I wish him no sorer doom than he unjustly inflicts on me!”

Beholding the maiden's face, as it were the face of an angel, her guards hung back while she spoke, like men afraid. Creon himself listened scowling until the impassioned voice was mute; then fiercely bade them do their office without more delay, or they should rue their slackness. Whereupon, though loth, they closed round Antigone, and would have laid hands on her; but she, waving them back, of her own accord stepped onward in the midst of them to the place of doom. And as she went, thus she said, “O town of my fathers in the Theban land! O gods, forefathers of my race! Behold, now, even very now, I am led hence, and make no tarrying! Look upon me, O ye Elders, rulers in Thebes . . . look on the last daughter of your ancient kings . . . behold what I endure, and at whose hands, in recompense for cleaving unto holiness.”

In this manner the daughter of Oedipus went forth for the last time from that old, unhappy palace of her race which had witnessed so many tragedies, but never one more fraught with pity and terror than her own. Some sense of this came to the Theban Elders as they watched her exit, but lacking resolution to address Creon, who stood smiling like an image of triumphant hate, the old men solaced themselves with recalling other examples of high-born persons suffering cruel imprisonment. They instanced Danae the fair; and Thracian Lycurgus, straitly confined when Dionysus had

smitten him with madness for his impiety; and Cleopatra, injured wife of Phineus, whom he immured in a dungeon to pleasure a wicked rival. And so quieted their consciences with the reflection that Antigone's fate, though hard, was not unparalleled. . . . While they yet spoke together, a blind and aged man drew near, habited like a priest, and led by a young boy; at sight of whom the King exclaimed, "What news, reverend Teiresias?"

"I shall instruct thee," replied the ancient in solemn, oracular tones, "and do thou give heed unto the Seer."

"Why, so I do at all times," said Creon, "and with good reason, for I bear witness that I have ever found thy counsels profitable."

"And by obeying them," said Teiresias, "thou hast piloted our State on a safe course hitherto. But mark me—thou art standing once again on the razor-edge of fortune."

"What meanest thou? My flesh creeps to hear thee," said Creon, turning pale.

And the blind Seer, stretching forth his right hand, thus answered, "All shall be plain to thee, when thou hast heard the signs I have read by mine art. For as I sat me down on mine old, bird-haunted seat of augury . . . I heard a new note in the voices of the birds. . . . They were clamouring with evil fury that made gibberish of their Greek speech! . . . Came, also, such beating of wings all round me that I knew they were at deadly fray with beak and claw. . . . Alarmed, I forthwith essayed

divination by the flame of a burnt-sacrifice; but the fire would not kindle on the altar . . . slimy drops exuded from the thigh-bones so that they smoked and crackled . . . the gall-bladder burst asunder . . . the fat melted from the bones as it had been water, and left them bare. . . . Even so fruitless was my seeking after a sign by fire, as I learned from this boy here . . . who is eyes and sight to me, as I am to others. . . . And 'tis by *thy* counsel, O Creon, that our State is afflicted thus. For all our altars and our hearths are defiled by dogs and birds with carrion morsels of their meal on the corse lying unburied . . . the ill-starred son of Oedipus; and therefore the gods will no longer accept our prayers and sacrifices and burnt-offerings; neither doth any bird shrill out a distinct omen, for they are glutted with the rich blood of a slain man. . . . But do thou, my son, ponder these things. To err is common to all men; but wise and happy he that, when in fault, repairs his mistake, instead of persisting therein. Ever note, that self-will earns the reproach of stupidity. Nay, concede the dead his due; goad not the lifeless; what valiancy is there in slaying afresh him that is already slain? . . . Out of my goodwill toward thee, I give thee good advice—and *that* is never more pleasant hearing for a man than when, as now, it chimes with his advantage."

To whom Creon, much in wrath—"Old man, ye all make *me* the target of your shafts, like so many bowmen; and spare not to work on me with seer-craft also. Ay, I have long been bought and sold

among ye, augur-tribe! Amass your gains; traffic, if you list, in the precious alloy of Sardis, and the gold of India; but that man ye shall not hide in a tomb . . . no, though the eagles of Zeus should carry gobbets of his flesh to the throne on high . . . no, not for dread of *that* pollution will I grant him burial . . . for I wot well that 'tis not in mortals to pollute the gods. But what a fall is there, ancient Teiresias, when the wise and prudent clothe base counsels with fair speech through greed of gain!"

"Alas!" said the Seer, "is there none that knows, none that considers, how far good counsel outvalues riches?"

"As far, methinks, as folly exceeds all other plagues," retorted Creon.

"And natheless," said Teiresias, "thy whole being is infected with that same plague."

"I would not return railing for railing—to a seer," answered the King, and bowed his head with mock deference.

"It needs not," said Teiresias sternly; "worse taunt thou canst not utter than to say I prophesy falsely."

Somewhat daunted, the King growled out, "What I say is, seers are a money-loving race."

"As tyrants, bred and born," said the other, "are lovers of dishonest gains."

"Knowest thou 'tis thy King of whom thou speakest such words?" blustered Creon.

"Full well I know it," rejoined Teiresias, "for who but I made thee both saviour and ruler of this city?"

“O, thou art a skilled seer, past question,” said the King, “but one that loves unrighteous dealing.”

“Thou wilt provoke me to utter a secret that should be locked for ever in my breast,” exclaimed the Seer passionately.

“Out with it,” said Creon, “but prithee, let it be no fee’d prophecy . . . and rest assured thou canst not make merchandise of my resolve, for never wilt thou earn the bribe the Thebans have offered thee to change it.”

“Then . . . be *thou* well assured,” said Teiresias, slowly, “that ere the sun hath fulfilled many times more his diurnal course, thou shalt have rendered one begotten of thee unto the tomb, in lieu of that other dead man; forasmuch as thou hast cast the living into the Nether World, but detainest here a vassal of the Nether Gods . . . a corpse unhouseled, disappointed, unanealed. . . . For which things’ sake the late-avenging Destroyers, the Erinyes of Hades and the gods, lie in ambush for thee, that thou mayest be caught in the self-same toil of mischief. . . . Mark now if my words be those of an hireling! Full soon shall thy house ring to the lamentations of men and of women; moreover, a storm of hatred is rising against thee in all the cities that sent warriors to the Argive host, because dogs and wild beasts and feathered fowls have been the buriers of their mangled dead.¹ *All shoot their*

¹ According to Athenian tradition, Creon refused burial to the fallen Argives, and Theseus recovered their bodies by armed force at the entreaty of their women-folk. Euripides dramatised this story in his *Suppliant Women*.

darts at me, sayest thou? Yea, since thou dost provoke me to wrath, *these* arrows have I shot at thee, archer-wise—arrows that shall not miss their mark—in thy heart's core! Now lead me home, boy, that he may vent his rage on younger men than me . . . and learn to curb his tongue, and harbour better thoughts within his breast."

There was dead silence while the Seer's tall, majestic figure passed out of view; so hedged with divinity was he in the eyes of every Theban that his withdrawal in anger was enough to fill them with misgivings. He was gone . . . he had done with their King and them . . . and whom Teiresias cast off, the gods would most surely forsake also. In a trembling voice the Chief Elder said, "The man hath gone from us, my liege, prophesying terrible things . . . and since this head of mine grew white, I well know that he hath never uttered a false prophecy to our city."

"I, too, know it," replied Creon, heavily, "and my soul is disquieted. . . . 'Tis a bitter thing to give way . . . and yet, by opposing, to bring destruction on my pride . . . that, again, were a bitter choice."

Encouraged by his altered tone, the Elder said, "It behoves thee, son of Menoeceus, to take wise counsel on this matter."

"What ought I to do, then?" said the King. "Speak . . . I will be guided by thee."

"Go and free the maiden from her cavern-cell," answered the old man eagerly, "and give burial to the unburied corpse. Yea, King, we would have

thee yield, and that instantly; for fleet mischiefs from the gods cut off the foolish in mid-career."

"'Tis hard," groaned the King, "but I forego my heart's resolve . . . I will do as thou sayest. One must not wage bootless war against Fate."

"Go thyself, then," urged the Chief Elder; "do not commit the task to others."

"I'll set forth e'en as I am," exclaimed Creon with sudden energy; "on, on, my henchmen all . . . take pickaxes with you, and speed to yonder hill-side! Since my purpose hath veered thus, I myself will release her, whom I myself imprisoned. For I misdoubt 'tis best to keep the commandments of the gods till life shall end. . . ."

In a few moments the King and his retainers departed; but still the Elders lingered at the palace-gate. Old, feeble, and overwrought by the scenes they had just witnessed, they were content to wait there for tidings of Antigone's deliverance, rather than attempt to follow her rescuers. Meanwhile their relief from distress and dark misgivings found utterance in a joyous hymn to Bacchus, the child of a Theban mother and her glory. By his many holy names, by all places of his dominion, and above all by his love for Thebes, they conjured the god to draw near and heal the city, now languishing under the grievous plague of divine displeasure. Yes, for she must bear the burden of her ruler's guilt . . . but now Creon had repented, the gods would forgive, and all would yet be well. . . .

Scarcely was their psalm ended, when the ancients descried one of Creon's retainers hastening towards

them; and looking on his face, they perceived that he brought tidings of dismay. They gathered round that messenger with sinking hearts, and none durst ask what had befallen. And he, staring mournfully at them, began—"Ah, neighbours to the home of Cadmus and of Amphion, there is no man upon this earth whom I would venture to pronounce either blest or unblest in his lot! Fortune setteth up him that is down, and pulleth down him that is high, from one day to another; and none can foretell to mortals what is in store for them. For Creon was once thrice-blest, meseems; he had delivered Thebes from the invader, and become monarch of this land, and was the proud father of noble offspring; and now hath he lost all! *All*, I say, for when a man is bereft of his delight, I reckon him as good as dead . . . a live corpse! Ay, heap up treasure in thy house an thou wilt, and dwell in regal pomp; but if joy be lacking therewithal, I would not give a smoke-wreath's shadow to buy the rest."

"But thy news, thy news?" exclaimed the Chief Elder. "What ill hath befallen our royal house?"

"There is death among them," said the messenger in a hollow voice, "and those who live are the cause of it."

As he said this, there came a stifled cry from within the half-open gates of the palace; but neither he nor the Elders marked it. "Speak plainly," they begged him, trembling. "Who hath done murder? Who is the victim?"

Then said he, "Haemon hath perished; his own

hand spilt his blood, in fury against his sire for murder. . . .”

“O Seer, how true, then, was thy prophecy,” groaned the Chief Elder. “But hush, friends . . . here comes Eurydice the Queen . . . whether by chance, or because she hath overheard the tidings . . .”

The wife of Creon, a fair and gentle lady, now appeared in the gateway, followed by two or three handmaids. “Citizens,” she said, “I was about to go forth that I might pray at the shrine of Pallas, when words of dreadful import reached mine ears . . . announcing household disaster. My hand dropped from the latch, and I fell back, swooning, into the arms of my women. But now tell me that news again, for I shall hear it as one familiar with sorrows.”

“I will tell thee all that passed, dear mistress, even as I saw it,” answered the messenger, “and keep back nothing. Why should I soothe thee with a lie, when it must be found out anon? Truth is aye the best—listen, then. I followed thy lord to the far end of the plain, where the corpse of Polyneices, mangled by dogs, was still lying unpitied; and we laved him with water of hallowing, beseeching the Goddess of the Cross Ways, and Pluto, of their mercy to withhold their wrath. Next, we burned all that was left of him on a pyre of newly-plucked branches, and raised a lofty grave-mound of his native soil. And after those rites we set forward again to enter the maiden’s rock-paved cell—her bride-bower and death-chamber in one! Now

one of us, going ahead of the rest, heard from afar a mournful outcry at that unhallowed marriage-chamber, and ran back to tell Creon our lord. And as he approached with quickened pace, a confused noise of bitter lamentation rang about him; he groaned, and dolorously exclaimed, 'Me miserable, is my soul indeed prophetic? Am I going on the most luckless way that ever my feet have trod? . . . 'Tis my son's voice salutes me! . . . Quick, quick, my servants—look, the wall-work is torn down at the cavern's mouth . . . in through the gap, and see whether 'twas Haemon's voice that I recognised . . . or some delusion from the gods.' We looked, and saw that some one had indeed broken into the tomb, by wrenching away two or three of the great stones that were piled up at the entrance. And we were afraid, for that task was beyond one man's strength, unless he were a giant—or a madman. Howbeit, at our desperate lord's command, we entered in, and in the farthest recess of the tomb we could discern—Haemon and his bride. . . . She was hanging by the neck, with her fine-spun veil for halter . . . he had flung his arms about her waist . . . and stood bemoaning his lost love and buried marriage-joys and his father's cruel work. . . . But suddenly he tore the noose asunder by main force, and laid the body gently down. Then the King, beholding him, groaned horribly, and went in, and called to him in a lamentable voice—'Unhappy boy, what is this that thou hast done? What thought hath entered thy mind—nay, what evil hath crazed thee—that thou shouldst be *here*?

Come away, my child, I humbly entreat thee!'
But the lad glared with wild eyes, spat in his face,
and, without speaking, drew his cross-hilted sword
. . . his father avoided the blow and fled out . . .
then, seized by remorse, that ill-fated one straight-
way bowed his whole weight on the brand, and
drove it halfway into his side . . . till sense forsook
him, he clung with failing hands to the maiden, and,
gasping, showered her white cheek with bloody
drops. . . . There he lies, dead bride in his dead
arms; he hath achieved his nuptial rites, poor boy,
though not in this world, but in the house of Hades;
a warning he, to all mankind, that of all the ills
that beset them imprudence is the worst."

While the messenger told his tale, the Queen stood
mute and rigid, like one spellbound; as he uttered
the last words, she turned swiftly from him and
disappeared within the gateway. "What bodes
that, think ye?" said the Chief Elder, looking un-
easily at the messenger; "the noble lady is gone
without a word."

"It alarmed me, too," replied the other, "but
my hope is that she deigns not to give way to
her grief for her son in public, and hath gone to set
up the death-lament with her handmaids in the
house. For being so discreet a lady, she is not likely
to do anything . . . amiss."

"I cannot tell," said the Elder, shaking his grey
head; "but in my poor thought, an unnatural
silence is no less ominous than vain excess of
lamentation."

"Why, very well said," answered the messenger;

" 'tis most true, silence carried too far may betoken danger. So I will e'en go within, and make sure she is not hiding some leashed purpose in her throbbing heart."

So saying, he went quickly into the palace. At the same instant, the Elders saw a mournful procession approaching; Creon himself walked first, beating his breast; his retainers followed, carrying a bier whereon lay a shrouded corpse. Then the old men wept aloud, and the King lifted up his voice and wept with them, and said, " Alas for the fatal, stubborn sins of a mind misguided! Lo, ye behold us two of the one blood, the slayer and the slain! Alas, my child, thou art gone—thou hast died in thy flower, untimely—not by thy recklessness—but mine! "

" Too late, alas, thine eyes are opened to the right," sighed an Elder.

" Woe's me, now have I thoroughly learned my misery," answered the King; " but *then*—in that fatal hour—some god, I ween, dealt me a crushing blow from above, and drove me into cruel courses, alack . . . and laid my joy in ruins, trampling it underfoot. Woe and alas, for the toils and tribulations of mortals! "

So saying, he kneeled beside the bier—for the bearers had set it down meanwhile—and embraced that shrouded form, weeping bitterly. . . . At this moment, the messenger came running out from the palace; seeing the King, he went up to him, and with a compassionate look—" My lord and master," he said, " thou art come . . . like one that hath his

hands full . . . and store laid up at home, to boot; for bringing *this* load with thee thou must presently behold . . . trouble . . . under thy roof."

"What now?" exclaimed Creon, springing to his feet. "Comes there yet worse to follow the ills we have?"

Then said the man, "Thy wife is even now dead . . . true mother, she, to him that lies here . . . dead, ill-starred lady, by a newly-stricken blow."

"O, O," sobbed the King, "implacable Hades, thou bourn of all, why, O why, dost persecute me? . . . O harbinger of doleful tidings—what message art thou crooning there? Ay me—'tis one already even as dead thou woundest afresh. How saidst thou, good youth . . . that my Queen hath perished . . . woe's me! . . . to crown mine undoing?"

"Thou mayest see for thyself," mournfully exclaimed the Chief Elder; "behold, they fling wide the doors . . . look there, look there!"

And Creon, turning, saw Eurydice's weeping handmaids on the threshold, supporting the lifeless body of their mistress. "Ah, ah," he moaned, "these wretched eyes see yet another, a second woe before them! Why, then, what doom can be left in store for me? I turn, wretched man, from embracing this my son—only to look again upon a corpse. Alas, alas, hapless mother . . . alas, my son!"

The Elders bent questioning eyes on the messenger, but none dared ask what all were fain to hear; then said he, "She stabbed herself with a keen blade at the altar yonder . . . after bewailing Megareus,¹

¹ See p. 93.

that so nobly died erewhile, and then his brother here . . . and with her latest breath she called down ill fortunes on thee, as thy sons' murderer."

"Out and alas," shrieked the King; "my heart thrills with terror! Will none of you take his sword and strike me dead? O, miserable that I am, and steeped in miserable torments!"

"Ay," said the messenger, stolidly, "for this dead Queen laid the deaths of *both* thy sons to thy charge."

"Ah me, the guilt *was* mine—it cleaves to me and none other," groaned the King. "I, even I, slew thee, wretched as I am—I confess the truth." He reeled, dizzy with anguish; then in fainter tones, "Lead me away, my servants, quickly . . . have me into the house . . . I can no more . . . I *am* no more."

Two trusty henchmen sprang to support him; and leaning heavily on their strong arms, he approached the gateway.

"Thou biddest what is for thy good," murmured the Chief Elder, "if any good there be in such an evil plight. When troubles beset us, the shortest way is the best."

Then Creon, in a fresh access of grief—"O, let it come soon, soon . . . swift be its appearing . . . that fate, loveliest in mine eyes, which shall end my days . . . ay, that crowning blessing! Now, now, let it come, that I may never see to-morrow's sun!"

"That end is . . . not yet," responded the Elder, gravely; and pointing to the dead mother and son, he added—"We have work to do in the present . . .

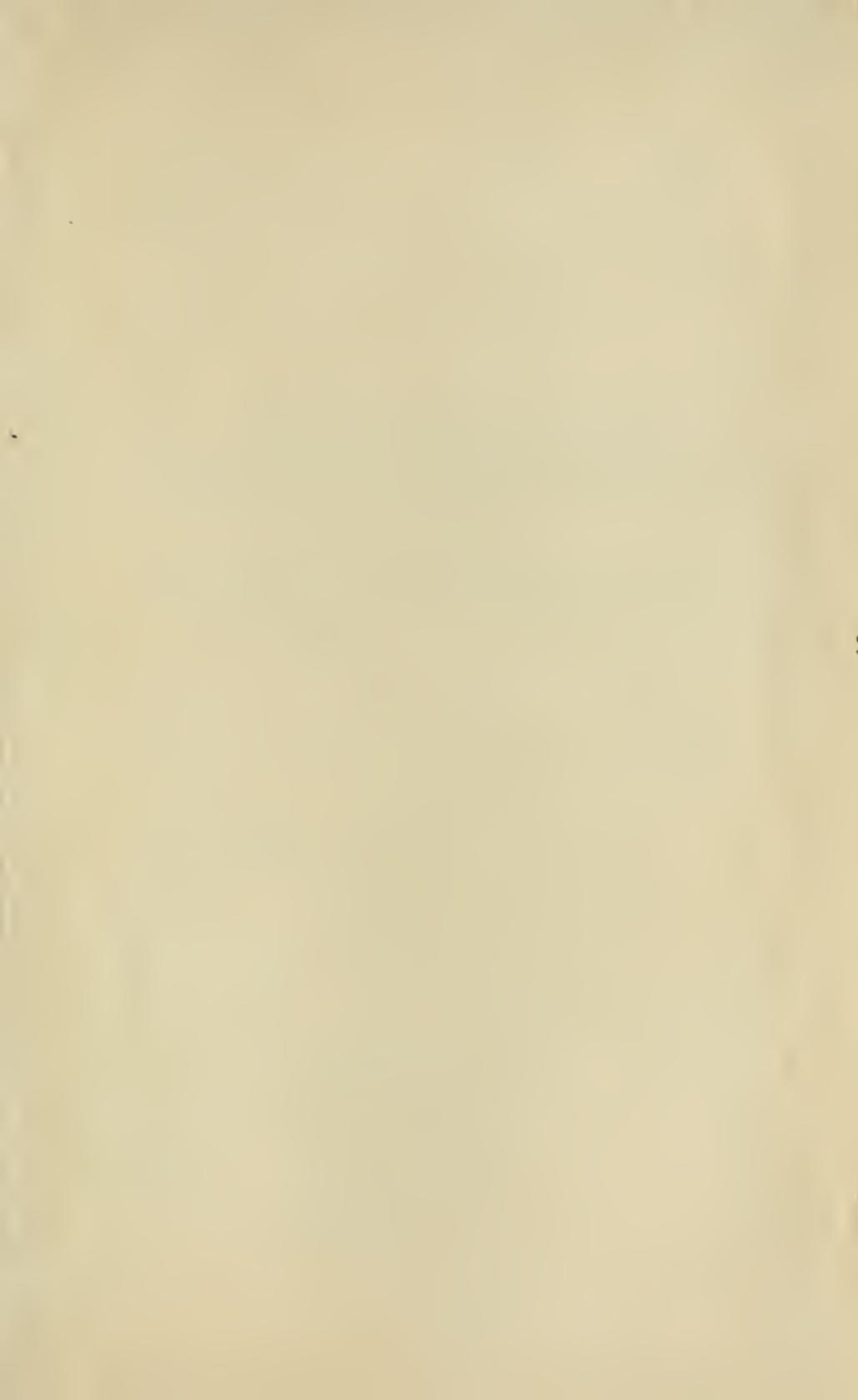
the future is in their care to whom such care belongs." Creon looked at him dully. "I put all I have left to wish for into my prayer just now," he said, with a kind of weary indifference.

"Pray thou not at all," answered the old Theban; "for no mortal may win release from destined misfortune."

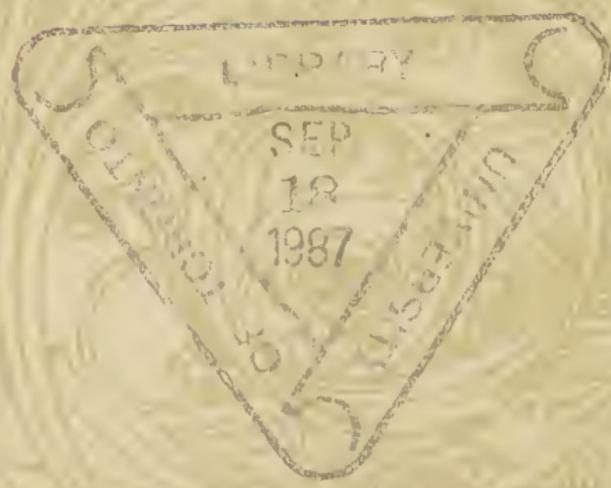
But Creon passed on, unheeding; his gait and aspect were now those of a very aged man; and as the retainers half led, half carried, him into the palace, his last words came to the trembling hearers in the broken, high-pitched tones of extreme old—
"Pray you now, lead me away . . . a fond fool . . . that have slain thee, O my son . . . and thee, too, lady mine . . . in my wretched ignorance! . . . I know not whither I should look for comfort . . . nor on whom to lean; for all goes awry with the work I have in hand . . . when I should be ordering *his* obsequies, lo, again, an overpowering stroke of Fate descends upon my head!"

Silently the Theban Elders watched their king pass, a forlorn figure, into the old, unhappy palace of his race; silently his retainers followed him, bearing Haemon's corpse; and the great gate closed behind them without a sound. . . . Then thus spake the Chief Elder to his fellows—"Wisdom by far excels all other blessings, and the things that belong unto the gods must be held sacred. Great words of arrogant men are ever requited by great afflictions, and so teach these men wisdom in their latter years."

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