

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

by Sophocles

translated by R. C. Jebb

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

OEDIPUS

his daughters:

ANTIGONE

ISMENE

A MAN OF COLONUS

THESEUS, King of Athens

CREON, of Thebes

POLYNEICES, the elder son of OEDIPUS

A MESSENGER

CHORUS OF ELDERS OF COLONUS

OEDIPUS_AT_COLONUS

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

(SCENE: -At Colonus in Attica, a little more than a mile north-west the Acropolis at Athens. The back-scene shows the grove sacred to the Erinyes or Furies, there worshipped under the propitiatory name of the Eumenides, or Kindly Powers. The grove is luxuriant with laurel, olive, and vine. Near the middle of the stage is seen a rock, affording a seat which is supposed to be just within the bounds of the grove. The hero Colonus is perhaps represented by a statue on the stage.

The blind OEDIPUS, who is conceived as coming into Attica from the west or north-west, enters on the spectators' left, led by ANTIGONE. He is old and way-worn, his haggard face bearing the traces of the self-inflicted wounds. The garb of both the wanderers betokens indigence and hardship. After replying to his first questions, his daughter leads him to the rocky seat.)

OEDIPUS

DAUGHTER of the blind old man, to what region have we come, Antigone, or what city of men? Who will entertain the wandering Oedipus to-day with scanty gifts? Little crave I, and win yet less than that little, and therewith am content; for patience is the lesson of suffering, and of the years in our long fellowship, and lastly of a noble mind. -My child, if thou seest any resting-place, whether on profane ground or by groves of the gods, stay me and set me down, that we may inquire where we are: for we stand in need to learn as strangers of denizens, and to perform their bidding.

ANTIGONE

Father, toil-worn Oedipus, the towers that guard the city, to judge by sight, are far off; and this place is sacred, to all seeming, -thick-set with laurel, olive, vine; and in its heart a feathered choir of nightingales makes music. So sit thee here on this unhewn stone; thou hast travelled a long way for an old man.

OEDIPUS

Seat me, then, and watch over the blind.

ANTIGONE

If time can teach, I need not to learn that.

OEDIPUS

Canst thou tell me, now, where we have arrived?

ANTIGONE

Athens I know, but not this place.

OEDIPUS

Aye, so much every wayfarer told us.

ANTIGONE

Well, shall I go and learn how the spot is called?

OEDIPUS

Yes, child, -if indeed 'tis habitable.

ANTIGONE

Nay, inhabited it surely is; -but I think there is no need;
-yonder see a man near us.

OEDIPUS

Hitherward moving and setting forth?

ANTIGONE

Nay, he is at our side already. Speak as the moment prompts
thee, for the man is here.

(A STRANGER, a man of Colonus, enters.)

OEDIPUS

Stranger, hearing from this maiden, who hath sight for herself and
for me, that thou hast drawn nigh with timely quest for the solving of
our doubts-

STRANGER

Now, ere thou question me at large, quit this seat; for thou art
on ground which 'tis not lawful to tread.

OEDIPUS

And what is this ground? To what deity sacred?

STRANGER

Ground inviolable, whereon none may dwell: for the dread goddesses
hold it, the daughters of Earth and Darkness.

OEDIPUS

Who may they be, whose awful name I am to hear and invoke?

STRANGER

The all-seeing Eumenides the folk here would call them: but
other names please elsewhere.

OEDIPUS

Then graciously may they receive their suppliant! for nevermore
will I depart from my rest in this land.

STRANGER

What means this?

OEDIPUS

'Tis the watchword of my fate.

STRANGER

Nay, for my part, I dare not remove thee without warrant from the.

city, ere I report what I am doing.

OEDIPUS

Now for the gods' love, stranger, refuse me not, hapless wanderer that I am, the knowledge for which I sue to thee.

STRANGER

Speak, and from me thou shalt find no refusal.

OEDIPUS

What, then, is the place that we have entered?

STRANGER

All that I know, thou shalt learn from my mouth. This whole place is sacred; awful Poseidon holds it, and therein is the fire-fraught god, the Titan Prometheus; but as for the spot whereon thou treadest, 'tis called the Brazen Threshold of this land, the stay of Athens; and the neighbouring fields claim yon knight Colonus for their primal lord, and all the people bear his name in common for their own. Such, thou mayest know, stranger, are these haunts, not honoured in story, but rather in the life that loves them.

OEDIPUS

Are there indeed dwellers in this region?

STRANGER

Yea, surely, the namesakes of yonder god.

OEDIPUS

Have they a king? Or doth speech rest with the folk?

STRANGER

These parts are ruled by the king in the city.

OEDIPUS

And who is thus sovereign in counsel and in might?

STRANGER

Theseus he is called, son of Aegeus who was before him.

OEDIPUS

Could a messenger go for him from among you?

STRANGER

With what aim to speak, or to prepare his coming?

OEDIPUS

That by small service he may find a great gain.

STRANGER

And what help can be from one who sees not?

OEDIPUS

In all that I speak there shall be sight.

STRANGER

Mark me now, friend -I would not have thee come to harm, -for thou art noble, if one may judge by thy looks, leaving thy fortune aside;-stay here, e'en where I found thee, till I go and tell these things to the folk on this spot, -not in the town: they will decide for thee whether thou shalt abide or retire.

(The STRANGER departs.)

OEDIPUS

My child, say, is the stranger gone?

ANTIGONE

He is gone, and so thou canst utter what thou wilt, father, in quietness, as knowing that I alone am near.

OEDIPUS

Queens of dread aspect, since your seat is the first in this land whereat I have bent the knee, show not yourselves ungracious to Phoebus or to myself; who, when he proclaimed that doom of many woes, spake of this as a rest for me after long years, -on reaching my goal in a land where I should find a seat of the Awful Goddesses, and a hospitable shelter, -even that there I should close my weary life, with benefits, through my having dwelt therein, for mine hosts, but ruin for those who sent me forth -who drove me away. And he went on to warn me that signs of these things should come, in earthquake, or in thunder, haply, or in the lightning of Zeus.

Now I perceive that in this journey some faithful omen from you hath surely led me home to this grove: never else could I have met with you, first of all, in my wanderings, -I, the austere, with you who delight not in wine, -or taken this solemn seat not shaped by man.

Then, goddesses, according to the word of Apollo, give me at last some way to accomplish and close my course, -unless, perchance, I seem beneath your grace, thrall that I am evermore to woes the sorest on the earth. Hear, sweet daughters of primeval Darkness! Hear, thou that art called the city of great Pallas, -Athens, of all cities most honoured! Pity this poor wraith of Oedipus, -for verily 'tis the man of old no more.

ANTIGONE

Hush! Here come some aged men, I wot, to spy out thy resting-place.

OEDIPUS

I will be mute, -and do thou hide me in the grove, apart from the road, till I learn how these men will speak; for in knowledge is the safeguard of our course.

(OEDIPUS and ANTIGONE withdraw into the grove. The CHORUS OF ELDERS OF COLONUS enter the orchestra, from the right of the spectators, as if in eager search.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe 1

Give heed -who was he, then? Where lodges he? -whither hath he rushed from this place, insolent, he, above all who live? Scan the ground, look well, urge the quest in every part.

A wanderer that old man must have been, -a wanderer, not dweller in the land; else never would he have advanced into this untrodden grove of the maidens with whom none may strive, whose name we tremble to speak, by whom we pass with eyes turned away, moving our lips, without sound or word, in still devotion.

But now 'tis rumoured that one hath come who in no wise reveres them; and him I cannot yet discern, though I look round all the holy place, nor wot I where to find his lodging.

(OEDIPUS Steps forward, with ANTIGONE, from his place of concealment in the grove.)

OEDIPUS

systema 1

Behold the man whom ye seek! for in sound is my sight, as the saying hath it.

CHORUS

O! O!

Dread to see, and dread to hear!

OEDIPUS

Regard me not, I entreat you, as a lawless one.

CHORUS

Zeus defend us! who may the old man be?

OEDIPUS

Not wholly of the best fortune, that ye should envy him, O guardians of this land! -'Tis plain: else would I not be walking thus by the eyes of others, and buoying my strength upon weakness.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

Alas! wast thou sightless e'en from thy birth? Evil have been thy days, and many, to all seeming; but at least, if I can help, thou shalt not add this curse to thy doom. Too far thou goest -too far! But, lest thy rash steps intrude on the sward of yonder voiceless glade, where the bowl of water blends its stream with the flow of honied offerings (be thou well ware of such trespass, unhappy stranger) retire, -withdraw! -A wide space parts us: hearest thou, toil-worn wanderer? If thou hast aught to say in converse with us, leave forbidden ground, and speak where 'tis lawful for all; but, till then, refrain.

OEDIPUS

systema 2

Daughter, to what counsel shall we incline?

ANTIGONE

My father, we must conform us to the customs of the land, yielding, where 'tis meet, and hearkening.

OEDIPUS

Then give me thy hand.

ANTIGONE

'Tis laid in thine.

OEDIPUS

Strangers, oh let me not suffer wrong when I have trusted in you, and have passed from my refuge!

CHORUS

strophe 2

Never, old man, never shall any one remove thee from this place of rest against thy will.

(OEDIPUS now begins to move forward,.)

OEDIPUS (pausing in his gradual advance)

Further, then?

CHORUS

Come still further.

OEDIPUS (having advanced another step)

Further?

CHORUS

Lead him onward, maiden, for thou understandest.

[A verse for ANTIGONE, a verse for OEDIPUS, and then another verse for ANTIGONE, seem to have been lost here.]

ANTIGONE

Come, follow me this way with thy dark steps, father, as I lead thee.

[Here has been lost a verse for OEDIPUS.]

CHORUS

A stranger in a strange land, ah, hapless one, incline thy heart to abhor that which the city holds in settled hate, and to reverence what she loves!

OEDIPUS

systema 3

Lead me thou, then, child, to a spot where I may speak and listen within piety's domain, and let us not wage war with necessity.

(Moving forward, he now sets foot on a platform of rock at the verge of the grove.)

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

There! -bend not thy steps beyond that floor of native rock.

OEDIPUS

Thus far?

CHORUS

Enough, I tell thee.

OEDIPUS

Shall I sit down?

CHORUS

Yea, move sideways and crouch low on the edge of the rock.

ANTIGONE

Father, this is my task: to quiet step.

OEDIPUS

Ah me! ah me!

ANTIGONE

Knit step, and lean thy aged frame upon my loving arm.

OEDIPUS

Woe for the doom of a dark soul!

(ANTIGONE seats him on the rock.)

CHORUS

Ah, hapless one, since now thou hast ease, speak, -whence art thou sprung? In what name art thou led on thy weary way? What is the fatherland whereof thou hast to tell us?

OEDIPUS

Strangers, I am an exile -but forbear...

CHORUS

What is this that thou forbiddest, old man?

OEDIPUS

-forbear, forbear to ask me who I am; -seek -probe -no further!

CHORUS
What means this?

OEDIPUS
Dread the birth...

CHORUS
Speak!

OEDIPUS (to ANTIGONE)
My child -alas! -what shall I say?

CHORUS
What is thy lineage, stranger, -speak! -and who thy sire?

OEDIPUS
Woe is me! -What will become of me, my child?

ANTIGONE
Speak, -for thou art driven to the verge.

OEDIPUS
Then speak I will -I have no way to hide it.

CHORUS
Ye twain make a long delay -come, haste thee!

OEDIPUS
Know ye a son of Laius...O!... (The CHORUS utter a cry)... and the race of the Labdacidae?...

CHORUS
O Zeus!...

OEDIPUS
The hapless Oedipus?...

CHORUS
THOU art he?

OEDIPUS
Have no fear of any words that I speak-
(The CHORUS drown his voice with a great shout of execration, half turning away, and holding their mantels before their eyes.)

OEDIPUS
Unhappy that I am!... (The clamour of the CHORUS continues)...
Daughter, what is about to befall?

CHORUS
Out with you! forth from the land!

OEDIPUS
And thy promise -to what fulfilment wilt thou bring it?

CHORUS
No man is visited by fate if he requites deeds which were first done to himself; deceit on the one part matches deceits on the other, and gives pain, instead of benefit, for reward. And thou -back with thee! out from these seats! avaunt! away from my land with all speed, lest thou fasten some heavier burden on my city!

ANTIGONE
Strangers of reverent soul, since ye have not borne with mine aged father, -knowing as ye do, the rumour of his unpurposed deeds, -pity, at least, my hapless self, I implore you, who supplicate you

for my sire alone, -supplicate you with eyes that can still look on your own, even as though I were sprung from your own blood, that the sufferer may find compassion.

On you, as on a god, we depend in our misery. Nay, hear us! grant the boon for which we scarce dare hope! By everything sprung from you that ye hold dear, I implore you, yea, by child -by wife, or treasure, or god! Look well and thou wilt not find the mortal who, if god should lead him on, could escape.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nay, be thou sure, daughter of Oedipus, we pity thee and him alike for your fortune; but, dreading the judgment of the gods, we could not say aught beyond what hath now been said to thee.

OEDIPUS

What good comes, then, of repute or fair fame, if it ends in idle breath; seeing that Athens, as men say, has the perfect fear of Heaven, and the power, above all cities, to shelter the vexed stranger, and the power, above all to succour him?

And where find I these things, when, after making me rise up from these rocky seats, ye then drive me from the land, afraid of my name alone? Not, surely, afraid of my person or of mine acts; since mine acts, at least, have been in suffering rather than doing -were it seemly that I should tell you the story of my mother or my sire, by reason whereof ye dread me -that know I full well.

And yet in nature how was I evil? I, who was but requiting a wrong, so that, had I been acting with knowledge, even then I could not be accounted wicked; but, as it was, all unknowing went I -whither I went-while they who wronged me knowingly sought my ruin.

Wherefore, strangers, I beseech you by the gods, even as ye made me leave my seat, so protect me, and do not. while ye honour the gods, refuse to give those gods their due; but rather deem that they look on the god-fearing among men, and on the godless, and that never yet hath escape been found for an impious mortal on the earth.

With the help of those gods, spare to cloud the bright fame of Athens by ministering to unholy deeds; but, as yet have received the suppliant under your pledge, rescue me and guard me to the end; nor scorn me when ye look on this face unlovely to behold: for I have come to you as one sacred, and pious, and fraught with comfort for this people. But when the master is come, whosoever he be that is your chief, then shall ye hear and know all; meanwhile in no wise show yourself false.

LEADER

The thoughts urged on thy part, old man, must needs move awe; they have been set forth in words not light; but I am content that the rulers of our country should judge in this cause.

OEDIPUS

And where, strangers, is the lord of this realm?

LEADER

He is at the city of his father in our land; and the messenger who sent us hither hath gone to fetch him.

OEDIPUS

Think ye that he will have any regard or care for the blind man,
so as to come hither himself?

LEADER

Yea, surely, so soon as he learns thy name.

OEDIPUS

Who is there to bring him that message?

LEADER

The way is long, and many rumours from wayfarers are wont to go
abroad; when he hears them, he will soon be with us, fear not. For thy
name, old man, hath been mightily noised through all lands; so that,
even if he is taking his ease, and slow to move, when he hears of thee
he will arrive with speed.

OEDIPUS

Well, may he come with a blessing to his own city, as to me! -What
good man is not his own friend?

ANTIGONE

O Zeus! what shall I say, what shall I think, my father?

OEDIPUS

What is it, Antigone, my child?

ANTIGONE

I see a woman coming towards us, mounted on a colt of Etna; she
wears a Thessalian bonnet to screen her face from the sun. What
shall I say? Is it she, or is it not? Doth fancy cheat me? Yes -no
-I cannot tell -ah me! It is no other -yes! -she greets me with bright
glances as she draws nigh, and shows that Ismene, and no other, is
before me.

OEDIPUS

What sayest thou, my child?

ANTIGONE

That I see thy daughter and my sister; -thou canst know her
straightway by her voice.

(ISMENE enters, attended by one servant.)

ISMENE

Father and sister, names most sweet to me! How hardly have I found
you! and now I scarce can see you for my tears.

OEDIPUS

My child, thou hast come?

ISMENE

Ah, father, sad is thy fate to see!

OEDIPUS

Thou art with us, my child!

ISMENE

And it hath cost me toil.

OEDIPUS

Touch me, my daughter!

ISMENE

I give a hand to each.

OEDIPUS

Ah, children -ah, ye sisters!

ISMENE

Alas, twice-wretched life!

OEDIPUS

Her life and mine?

ISMENE

And mine, hapless, with you twain.

OEDIPUS

Child, and why hast thou come?

ISMENE

Through care, father, for thee.

OEDIPUS

Through longing to see me?

ISMENE

Yes, and to bring thee tidings by mine own mouth, -with the only faithful servant that I had.

OEDIPUS

And where are the young men thy brothers at our need?

ISMENE

They are -where they are: 'tis their dark hour.

OEDIPUS

O, true image of the ways of Egypt that they show in their spirit and their life! For there the men sit weaving in the house, but the wives go forth to win the daily bread. And in your case, my daughters, those to whom these toils belonged keep the house at home like girls, while ye, in their stead, bear your hapless father's burdens.

One, from the time when her tender age was past and she came to woman's strength, hath ever been the old man's guide in weary wanderings, oft roaming, hungry and barefoot, through the wild wood, oft sore-vexed by rains and scorching heat, -but regarding not the comforts of home, if so her father should have tendance.

And thou, my child, in former days camest forth, bringing thy father, unknown of the Cadmeans, all the oracles that had been given touching Oedipus; and thou didst take on thee the office of a faithful watcher in my behalf, when I was being driven from the land. And now what new tidings hast thou brought thy father, Ismene? On what mission hast thou set forth from home? For thou comest not empty-handed, well I wot, or without some word of fear for me.

ISMENE

The sufferings that I bore, father, in seeking where thou wast living, will pass by; I would not renew the pain in the recital. But the ills that now beset thine ill-fated sons, -'tis of these that I have come to tell thee.

At first it was their desire that the throne should be left to Creon, and the city spared pollution, when they thought calmly on the blight of the race from of old, and how it hath clung to thine ill-starred house. But now, moved by some god and by a sinful mind, an evil rivalry hath seized them, thrice infatuate!-to grasp at rule

and kingly power.

And the hot-brained youth, the younger born, hath deprived the elder, Polyneices, of the throne, and hath driven him from his fatherland. But he, as the general rumour saith among us, hath gone, an exile, to the hill-girt Argos, and is taking unto him a new kinship, and warriors for his friends, -as deeming that Argos shall soon possess the Cadmean land in honour, or lift that land's praise to the stars.

These are no vain words, my father, but deeds terrible; and where the gods will have pity on thy griefs, I cannot tell.

OEDIPUS

What, hadst thou come to hope that the gods would ever look on me for my deliverance?

ISMENE

Yea, mine is that hope, father, from the present oracles.

OEDIPUS

What are they? What hath been prophesied, my child?

ISMENE

That thou shalt yet be desired, alive and dead, by the men of that land, for their welfare's sake.

OEDIPUS

And who could have good of such an one as I?

ISMENE

Their power, 'tis said, comes to be in thy hand.

OEDIPUS

When I am nought, in that hour, then, I am a man?

ISMENE

Yea, for the gods lift thee now, but before they were working thy ruin.

OEDIPUS

'Tis little to lift age, when youth was ruined.

ISMENE

Well, know, at least, that Creon will come to thee in this cause-and rather soon than late.

OEDIPUS

With what purpose, daughter? Expound to me.

ISMENE

To plant thee near the Cadmean land, so that they may have thee in their grasp, but thou mayest not set foot on their borders.

OEDIPUS

And how can I advantage them while I rest beyond their gates?

ISMENE

Thy tomb hath a curse for them, if all be not well with it.

OEDIPUS

It needs no god to help our wit so far.

ISMENE

Well, therefore they would fain acquire thee as a neighbour, in a place where thou shalt not be thine own master.

OEDIPUS

Will they also shroud me in Theban dust?

ISMENE

Nay, the guilt of a kinsman's blood debars thee, father.

OEDIPUS

Then never shall they become my masters.

ISMENE

Some day, then, this shall be a grief for the Cadmeans.

OEDIPUS

In what conjuncture of events, my child?

ISMENE

By force of thy wrath, when they take their stand at thy tomb.

OEDIPUS

And who hath told thee what thou tellest, my child?

ISMENE

Sacred envoys, from the Delphian hearth.

OEDIPUS

And Phoebus hath indeed spoken thus concerning me?

ISMENE

So say the men who have come back to Thebes.

OEDIPUS

Hath either of my sons, then, heard this?

ISMENE

Yea, both have heard, and know it well.

OEDIPUS

And then those base ones, aware of this, held the kingship
dearer than the wish to recall me?

ISMENE

It grieves me to hear that, -but I must bear it.

OEDIPUS

Then may the gods quench not their fated strife, and may it become
mine to decide this warfare whereto they are now setting their
hands, spear against spear! For then neither should he abide who now
holds the sceptre and the throne, nor should the banished one ever
return; seeing that when I, their sire, was being thrust so shamefully
from my country, they hindered not, nor defended me; no, they saw me
sent forth homeless, they heard my doom of exile cried aloud.

Thou wilt say that it was mine own wish then, and that the city
meetly granted me that boon. No, verily: for in that first day, when
my soul was seething, and my darling wish was for death, aye, death by
stoning, no one was found to help me in that desire: but after a time,
when all my anguish was now assuaged, and when I began to feel that my
wrath had run too far in punishing those past errors, -then it was
that the city, on her part, went about to drive me perforce from the
land -after all that time; and my sons, when they might have brought
help -the sons to the sire -would not do it: no -for lack of one
little word from them, I was left to wander, an outcast and a beggar
evermore.

'Tis to these sisters, girls as they are, that, so far as nature
enables them, I owe my daily food, and a shelter in the land, and

the offices of kinship; the brothers have bartered their sire for a throne, and sceptred sway, and rule of the realm. Nay, never shall they win Oedipus for an ally, nor shall good ever come to them from this reign at Thebes; that know I, when I hear this maiden's oracles, and meditate on the old prophecies stored in mine own mind, which Phoebus hath fulfilled for me at last.

Therefore let them send Creon to seek me, and whoso beside is mighty in Thebes. For if ye, strangers, -with the championship of the dread goddesses who dwell among your folk, -are willing to succour, ye shall procure a great deliverer for this State, and troubles for my foes.

LEADER

Right worthy art thou of compassion, Oedipus, thou, and these maidens; and since to this plea thou addest thy power to save our land, I fain would advise thee for thy weal.

OEDIPUS

Kind sir, be sure, then, that I will obey in all, -stand thou my friend.

LEADER

Now make atonement to these deities, to whom thou hast first come, and on whose ground thou hast trespassed.

OEDIPUS

With what rites? instruct me, strangers.

LEADER

First, from a perennial spring fetch holy drink-offerings, borne in clean hands.

OEDIPUS

And when I have gotten this pure draught?

LEADER

Bowls there are, the work of a cunning craftsman: crown their edges and the handles at either brim.

OEDIPUS

With branches, or woollen cloths, or in what wise?

LEADER

Take the freshly-shorn wool of an ewe-lamb.

OEDIPUS

Good; and then, -to what last rite shall I proceed?

LEADER

Pour thy drink-offerings, with thy face to the dawn.

OEDIPUS

With these vessels whereof thou speakest shall I pour them?

LEADER

Yea, in three streams; but empty the last vessel wholly.

OEDIPUS

Wherewith shall I fill this, ere I set it? Tell me this also.

LEADER

With water and honey; but bring no wine thereto.

OEDIPUS

And when the ground under the dark shade hath drunk of these?

LEADER

Lay on it thrice nine sprays of olive with both thine hands, and make this prayer the while.

OEDIPUS

The prayer I fain would hear -'tis of chief moment.

LEADER

That, as we call them Benign Powers, with hearts benign they may receive the suppliant for saving: be this the prayer, -thine own, or his who prays for thee; speak inaudibly, and lift not up thy voice; then retire, without looking behind. Thus do, and I would be bold to stand by thee; but otherwise, stranger, I would fear for thee.

OEDIPUS

Daughters, hear ye these strangers, who dwell near?

ANTIGONE

We have listened; and do thou bid us what to do.

OEDIPUS

I cannot go; for I am disabled by lack of strength and lack of sight, evils twain. But let one of you two go and do these things. For I think that one soul suffices to pay this debt for ten thousand, if it come with good will to the shrine. Act, then, with speed; yet leave me not solitary; for the strength would fail me to move without help or guiding hand.

ISMENE

Then I will go to perform the rite; but where I am to find the spot-this I fain would learn.

LEADER

On the further side of this grove, maiden. And if thou hast need of aught, there is a guardian of the place, who will direct thee.

ISMENE

So to my task: -but thou, Antigone, watch our father here. In parents' cause, if toil there be, we must not reck of toil.

(ISMENE departs.)

CHORUS (chanting)

strophe 1

Dread is it, stranger, to arouse the old grief that hath so long been laid to rest: and yet I yearn to hear...

OEDIPUS

What now?...

CHORUS

-of that grievous anguish, found cureless, wherewith thou hast wrestled.

OEDIPUS

By thy kindness for a guest, bare not the shame that I have suffered!

CHORUS

Seeing, in sooth, that the tale is wide-spread, and in no wise wanes, I am fain, friend, to hear it aright.

OEDIPUS

Woe is me!

CHORUS

Be content, I pray thee!

OEDIPUS

Alas, alas!

CHORUS

Grant my wish, as I have granted thine in its fulness.

OEDIPUS

antistrophe 1

I have suffered misery, strangers, -suffered it through
unwitting deeds, and of those acts -be Heaven my witness! -no part was
of mine own choice.

CHORUS

But in what regard?

OEDIPUS

By an evil wedlock, Thebes bound me, all unknowing, to the bride
that was my curse....

CHORUS

Can it be, as I hear, that thou madest thy mother the partner of
thy bed, for its infamy?

OEDIPUS

Woe is me! Cruel as death, strangers, are these words in mine
ears; -but those maidens, begotten of me-

CHORUS

What wilt thou say?-

OEDIPUS

-two daughters -two curses-

CHORUS

O Zeus!

OEDIPUS

-sprang from the travail of the womb that bore me.

CHORUS

strophe 2

These, then, are at once thine offspring, and...

OEDIPUS

-yea, very sisters of their sire.

CHORUS

Oh, horror!

OEDIPUS

Horror indeed -yea, horrors untold sweep back upon my soul!

CHORUS

Thou hast suffered-

OEDIPUS

Suffered woes dread to bear.-

CHORUS

Thou hast sinned-

OEDIPUS

No wilful sin-

CHORUS

How?-

OEDIPUS

A gift was given to me -O, broken-hearted that I am, would I had never won from Thebes that meed for having served her!

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

Wretch! How then? ... thine hand shed blood? ...

OEDIPUS

Wherefore this? What wouldst thou learn?

CHORUS

A father's blood?

OEDIPUS

Oh! oh! a second stab-wound on wound!

CHORUS

Slayer!

OEDIPUS

Aye, slayer -yet have I a plea-

CHORUS

What canst thou plead?-

OEDIPUS

-a plea in justice....

CHORUS

What?

OEDIPUS

Ye shall hear it; they whom I slew would have taken mine own life: stainless before the law, void of malice, have I come unto this pass!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Lo, yonder cometh our prince, Theseus son of Aegeus, at thy voice, to do the part whereunto he was summoned.

(THESEUS enters from the right of the spectators.)

THESEUS

Hearing from many in time past concerning the cruel marring of thy sight, I have recognised thee, son of Laius; and now, through hearsay in this my coming, I have the fuller certainty. For thy garb, and that hapless face, alike assure me of thy name; and in all compassion would I ask thee, ill-fated Oedipus, what is thy suit to Athens or to me that thou hast taken thy place here, thou and the hapless maiden at thy side. Declare it; dire indeed must be the fortune told by thee, from which I should stand aloof; who know that I myself also was reared in exile, like to thine, and in strange lands wrestled with perils to my life, as no man beside. Never, then, would I turn aside from a stranger, such as thou art now, or refuse to aid in his deliverance; for well know I that I am a man, and that in the morrow my portion is no greater than thine.

OEDIPUS

Theseus, thy nobleness hath in brief words shown such grace that for me there is need to say but little. Thou hast rightly said who I am, from what sire I spring, from what land I have come; and so nought else remains for me but to speak my desire, -and the tale is told.

THESEUS

Even so -speak that -I fain would hear.
OEDIPUS
I come to offer thee my woe-worn body as a gift, -not goodly to
look upon; but the gains from it are better than beauty.
THESEUS
And what gain dost thou claim to have brought?
OEDIPUS
Hereafter thou shalt learn; not yet, I think.
THESEUS
At what time, then, will thy benefit be shown?
OEDIPUS
When I am dead, and thou hast given me burial.
THESEUS
Thou cravest life's last boon; for all between thou hast no
memory,-or no care.
OEDIPUS
Yea, for by that boon I reap all the rest.
THESEUS
Nay, then, this grace which thou cravest from me hath small
compass.
OEDIPUS
Yet give heed; this issue is no light one, -no, verily.
THESEUS
Meanest thou, as between thy sons and me?
OEDIPUS
King, they would fain convey me to Thebes.
THESEUS
But if to thy content, then for thee exile is not seemly.
OEDIPUS
Nay, when I was willing, they refused.
THESEUS
But, foolish man, temper in misfortune is not meet.
OEDIPUS
When thou hast heard my story, chide; till then, forbear.
THESEUS
Say on: I must not pronounce without knowledge.
OEDIPUS
I have suffered, Theseus, cruel wrong on wrong.
THESEUS
Wilt thou speak of the ancient trouble of thy race?
OEDIPUS
No, verily: that is noised throughout Hellas.
THESEUS
What, then, is thy grief that passeth the griefs of man?
OEDIPUS
Thus it is with me. From my country I have been driven by mine own
offspring; and my doom is to return no more, as guilty of a father's
blood.
THESEUS

How, then, should they fetch thee to them, if ye must dwell apart?

OEDIPUS

The mouth of the god will constrain them.

THESEUS

In fear of what woe foreshown?

OEDIPUS

That they must be smitten in this land.

THESEUS

And how should bitterness come between them and me?

OEDIPUS

Kind son of Aegeus, to the gods alone comes never old age or death, but all else is confounded by all-mastering time. Earth's strength decays, and the strength of the body; faith dies, distrust is born; and the same spirit is never steadfast among friends, or betwixt city and city; for, be it soon or be it late, men find sweet turn to bitter, and then once more to love.

And if now all is sunshine between Thebes and thee, yet time, in his untold course, gives birth to days and nights untold, wherein for a small cause they shall sunder with the spear that plighted concord of to-day; when my slumbering and buried corpse, cold in death, shall one day drink their warm blood, if Zeus is still Zeus, and Phoebus, the son of Zeus, speaks true.

But, since I would not break silence touching mysteries, suffer me to cease where I began; only make thine own word good, and never shalt thou say that in vain didst thou welcome Oedipus to dwell in this realm, -unless the gods cheat my hope.

LEADER

King, from the first yon man hath shown the mind to perform these promises, or the like, for our land.

THESEUS

Who, then, would reject the friendship of such an one? -to whom, first, the hearth of an ally is ever open, by mutual right, among us; and then he hath come as a suppliant to our gods, fraught with no light recompense for this land and for me. In reverence for these claims, I will never spurn his grace, but will establish him as a citizen in the land. And if it is the stranger's pleasure to abide here, I will charge you to guard him; or if to come with me be more pleasing, -this choice, or that, Oedipus, thou canst take; thy will shall be mine.

OEDIPUS

O Zeus, mayest thou be good unto such men!

THESEUS

What wouldst thou, then? wouldst thou come to my house?

OEDIPUS

Yea, were it lawful; -but this is the place-

THESEUS

What art thou to do here? I will not thwart thee.

OEDIPUS

-where I shall vanquish those who cast me forth,

THESEUS

Great were this promised boon from thy presence.

OEDIPUS

It shall be -if thy pledge is kept with me indeed.

THESEUS

Fear not touching me; never will I fail thee.

OEDIPUS

I will not bind thee with an oath, as one untrue.

THESEUS

Well, thou wouldst win nought more than by my word.

OEDIPUS

How wilt thou act, then?

THESEUS

What may be thy fear?

OEDIPUS

Men will come-

THESEUS

Nay, these will look to that.

OEDIPUS

Beware lest, if thou leave me-

THESEUS

Teach me not my part.

OEDIPUS

Fear constrains-

THESEUS

My heart feels not fear.

OEDIPUS

Thou knowest not the threats-

THESEUS

I know that none shall take thee hence in my despite. Oft have threats blustered, in men's wrath, with threatenings loud and vain; but when the mind is lord of himself once more, the threats are gone. And for yon men, haply, -aye, though they have waxed bold to speak dread things of bringing thee back, -the sundering waters will prove wide, and hard to sail. Now I would have thee be of a good courage, apart from any resolve of mine. if indeed Phoebus hath sent thee on thy way; still, though I be not here, my name, I wot, will shield thee from harm.

(THESEUS departs.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe 1

Stranger, in this land of goodly steeds thou hast come to earth's fairest home, even to our white Colonus; where the nightingale, constant guest, trills her clear note in the covert of green glades, dwelling amid the wine-dark ivy and the god's inviolate bowers, rich in berries and fruit, unvisited by sun, unvexed by wind of any storm; where the reveller Dionysus ever walks the ground, companion of the nymphs that nursed him.

antistrophe 1

And, fed of heavenly dew, the narcissus blooms morn by morn with fair clusters, crown of the Great Goddesses from of yore; and the crocus blooms with golden beam. Nor fail the sleepless founts whence the waters of Cephissus wander, but each day with stainless tide he moveth over the plains of the land's swelling bosom, for the giving of quick increase; nor hath the Muses' quire abhorred this place, nor Aphrodite of the golden rein.

strophe 2

And a thing there is such as I know not by fame on Asian ground, or as ever born in the great Dorian isle of Pelops, -a growth unconquered, self-renewing, a terror to the spears of the foemen, a growth which mightily flourishes in this land, -the grey-leafed olive, nurturer of children. Youth shall not mar it by the ravage of his hand, nor any who dwells with old age; for the sleepless eye of the Morian Zeus beholds it, and the grey-eyed Athena.

antistrophe 2

And another praise have I to tell for this the city our mother, the gift of a great god, a glory of the land most high; the might of horses, the might of young horses, the might of the sea.

For thou, son of Cronus, our lord Poseidon, hast throned her in this pride, since in these roads first thou didst show forth the curb that cures the rage of steeds. And the shapely oar, apt to men's hands, hath a wondrous speed on the brine, following the hundred-footed Nereids.

ANTIGONE

O land that art praised above all lands, now is it for thee to make those bright praises seen in deeds!

OEDIPUS

What new thing hath chanced, my daughter?

ANTIGONE

Yonder Creon draws near us, -not without followers, father.

OEDIPUS

Ah, kind elders, now give me, I pray you, the final proof of my safety!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Fear not -it shall be thine. If I am aged, this country's strength hath not grown old.

(CREON enters with a train of attendants.)

CREON

Sirs, noble dwellers in this land, I see that a sudden fear hath troubled your eyes at my coming; but shrink not from me, and let no ungente word escape you.

I am here with no thought of force;-I am old, and I know that the city whereunto I have come is mighty, if any in Hellas hath might; -no, -I have been sent, in these my years, to plead with yonder man that he return with me to the land of Cadmus; -not one man's envoy am I, but with charge from our people all; since 'twas mine, by kinship, to mourn his woes as no Theban beside.

Nay, unhappy Oedipus, hear us, and come home! Rightfully art

thou called by all the Cadmean folk, and in chief by me, even as I -unless I am the basest of all men born -chiefly sorrow for thine ills, old man, when I see thee, hapless one, a stranger and a wanderer evermore, roaming in beggary, with one handmaid for thy stay. Alas, I had not thought that she could fall to such a depth of misery as that whereunto she hath fallen -yon hapless girl! -while she ever tends thy dark life amid penury, -in ripe youth, but unwed, -a prize for the first rude hand.

Is it not a cruel reproach -alas! -that I have cast at thee, and me, and all our race? But indeed an open shame cannot be hid; then -in the name of thy fathers' gods, hearken to me, Oedipus! -hide it thou, by consenting to return to the city and the house of thy fathers, after a kindly farewell to this State, -for she is worthy: yet thine own hath the first claim on thy piety, since 'twas she that nurtured thee of old.

OEDIPUS

All-daring, who from any plea of right wouldst draw a crafty device, why dost thou attempt me thus, and seek once more to take me in the toils where capture would be sorest? In the old days -when, distempered by my self-wrought woes, I yearned to be cast out of the land -thy will went not with mine to grant the boon. But when my fierce grief had spent its force, and the seclusion of the house was sweet, then wast thou for thrusting me from the house and from the land -nor had this kinship any dearness for thee then; and now, again-when thou seest that I have kindly welcome from this city and from all her sons, thou seekest to pluck me away, wrapping hard thoughts in soft words. And yet what joy is there here, -in kindness shown to us against our will? As if a man should give thee no gift, bring thee no aid, when thou wast fain of the boon; but after thy soul's desire was sated, should grant it then, when the grace could be gracious no more: wouldst thou not find that pleasure vain? Yet such are thine own offers unto me, -good in name, but in their substance evil.

And I will declare it to these also, that I may show thee false. Thou hast come to fetch me, not that thou mayest take me home, but that thou mayest plant me near thy borders, and so thy city may escape unscathed by troubles from this land. That portion is not for thee, but this, -my curse upon the country, ever abiding therein; -and for my sons, this heritage -room enough in my realm wherein -to die.

Am I not wiser than thou in the fortunes of Thebes? Yea, wiser far, as truer are the sources of my knowledge, even Phoebus, and his father, Zeus most high. But thou hast come hither with fraud on thy lips, yea, with tongue keener than the edge of the sword; yet by thy pleading thou art like to reap more woe than weal. Howbeit, I know that I persuade the not of this, -go! -and suffer us to live here; for even in this plight out life would not be evil, so were we content therewith.

CREON

Which, thinkest thou, most suffers in this parley, -I by thy

course, or thou by thine own?

OEDIPUS

For me, 'tis enough if thy pleading fails, as with me, so with yon men who are nigh.

CREON

Unhappy man, shall it be seen that not even thy years have brought thee wit? Must thou live to be the reproach of age?

OEDIPUS

Thou hast a ready tongue, but I know not the honest man who hath fair words for every cause.

CREON

Words may be many, and yet may miss their aim.

OEDIPUS

As if thine, forsooth, were few, but aimed aright.

CREON

No, truly, for one whose wit is such as thine.

OEDIPUS

Depart -for I will say it in the name of yon men also! -and beset me not with jealous watch in the place where I am destined to abide.

CREON

These men -not thee -call I to witness: but, as for the strain of thine answer to thy kindred, if ever I take thee-

OEDIPUS

And who could take me in despite of these allies?

CREON

I promise thee, thou soon shalt smart without that.

OEDIPUS

Where is the deed which warrants that blustering word?

CREON

One of thy two daughters hath just been seized by me, and sent hence, -the other I will remove forthwith.

OEDIPUS

Woe is me!

CREON

More woeful thou wilt find it soon.

OEDIPUS

Thou hast my child?

CREON

And will have this one ere long.

OEDIPUS

Alas! friends, what will ye do? Will ye forsake me? will ye not drive the godless man from this land?

LEADER

Hence, stranger, hence -begone! Unrighteous is thy present deed-unrighteous the deed which thou hast done.

CREON (to his attendants)

'Twere time for you to lead off yon girl perforce, if she will not go of her free will.

ANTIGONE

Wretched that I am! whither shall I fly? -where find help from gods or men?

LEADER (threateningly, to CREON)

What wouldst thou, stranger?

CREON

I will not touch yon man, but her who is mine

OEDIPUS

O, elders of the land!

LEADER

Stranger, -thy deed is not just.

CREON

'Tis just.

LEADER

How just?

CREON

I take mine own.

(He lays his hand on ANTIGONE.)

OEDIPUS

strophe

Hear, O Athens!

CHORUS

What wouldst thou, stranger? Release her! Thy strength, and ours, will soon be proved.

(They approach him with threatening gestures.)

CREON

Stand back!

CHORUS

Not from thee, while this is thy purpose.

CREON

Nay, 'twill be war with Thebes for thee, if thou harm me.

OEDIPUS

Said I not so?

CHORUS

Unhand the maid at once!

CREON

Command not where thou art not master.

CHORUS

Leave hold, I tell thee!

CREON

(to one of his guards, who at a signal seizes ANTIGONE)

And I tell thee -begone!

CHORUS

To the rescue, men of Colonus -to the rescue! Athens -yea, Athens-is outraged with the strong hand! Hither, hither to our help!

ANTIGONE

They drag me hence -ah me! -friends, friends!

OEDIPUS (blindly seeking for her)

Where art thou, my child?

ANTIGONE

I am taken by force

OEDIPUS

Thy hands, my child!-

ANTIGONE

Nay, I am helpless.

CREON (to his guards)

Away with you!

OEDIPUS

Ah me, ah me!

(The guards lead ANTIGONE off.)

CREON

So those two crutches shall never more prop thy steps. But since 'tis thy will to worst thy country and thy friends -whose mandate, though prince, I here discharge -then be that victory thine. For hereafter, I wot, thou wilt come to know all this, -that now, as in time past, thou hast done thyself no good, when, in despite of friends, thou hast indulged anger, which is ever thy bane.

(He turns to follow his guards.)

LEADER

Hold, stranger!

CREON

Hands off, I say

LEADER

I will not let thee go, unless thou give back the maidens.

CREON

Then wilt thou soon give Thebes a still dearer prize: -I will seize more than those two girls.

LEADER

What -whither wilt thou turn?

CREON

Yon man shall be my captive.

LEADER

A valiant threat!

CREON

'Twill forthwith be a deed.

LEADER

Aye, unless the ruler of this realm hinder thee.

OEDIPUS

Shameless voice! Wilt thou indeed touch me?

CREON

Be silent!

OEDIPUS

Nay, may the powers of this place suffer me to utter yet this curse! Wretch, who, when these eyes were dark, hast reft from me by force the helpless one who was mine eyesight! Therefore to thee and to thy race may the Sun-god, the god who sees all things, yet grant an old age such as mine!

CREON

See ye this, people of the land?

OEDIPUS

They see both me and thee; they know that my wrongs are deeds, and my revenge -but breath.

CREON

I will not curb my wrath -nay, alone though I am, and slow with age, I'll take yon man by force.

(He approaches OEDIPUS as if to seize him.)

OEDIPUS

antistrophe

Woe is me!

CHORUS

'Tis a bold spirit that thou hast brought with thee, stranger, if thou thinkest to achieve this.

CREON

I do.

CHORUS

Then will I deem Athens a city no more.

CREON

In a just cause the weak vanquishes the strong.

OEDIPUS

Hear ye his words?

CHORUS

Yea, words which he shall not turn to deeds, Zeus knows!

CREON

Zeus haply knows -thou dost not.

CHORUS

Insolence!

CREON

Insolence which thou must bear.

CHORUS

What ho, people, rulers of the land, ho, hither with all speed, hither! These men are on their way to cross our borders!

(THESEUS enters with his attendants in haste.)

THESEUS

What means this shout? What is the trouble? What fear can have moved you to stay my sacrifice at the altar unto the sea-god, the lord of your Colonus? Speak, that I may know all, since therefore have I sped hither with more than easeful speed of foot.

OEDIPUS

Ah, friend, -I know thy voice, -yon man, but now, hath done me foul wrong.

THESEUS

What is that wrong? And who hath wrought it? Speak!

OEDIPUS

Creon, whom thou seest there, hath torn away from me my two children, -mine all.

THESEUS

What dost thou tell me?

OEDIPUS

Thou hast heard my wrong.

THESEUS (to his attendants)

Haste, one of you, to the altars yonder, -Constrain the folk to leave the sacrifice, and to speed -footmen, -horsemen all, with slack rein, -to the region where the two highways meet, lest the maidens pass, and I become a mockery to this stranger, as one spoiled by force. Away, I tell thee- quick!- (Some guards go out. Turning towards CREON) As for yon man -if my wrath went as far as he deserves -I would not have suffered him to go scatheless from my hand. But now such law as he himself hath brought, and no other, shall be the rule for his correction.- (Addressing CREON) Thou shalt not quit this land until thou bring those maidens, and produce them in my sight; for thy deed is a disgrace to me, and to thine own race, and to thy country. Thou hast come unto a city that observes justice, and sanctions nothing without law,- yet thou hast put her lawful powers aside,- thou hast made this rude inroad,- thou art taking captives at thy pleasure, and snatching prizes by violence, as in the belief that my city was void of men, or manned by slaves, and I- a thing of nought.

Yet 'tis not by Theban training that thou art base; Thebes is not wont to rear unrighteous sons; nor would she praise thee, if she learned that thou art spoiling me,- yea spoiling the gods, when by force thou ledest off their hapless suppliants. Now, were my foot upon thy soil, never would I wrest or plunder, without licence from the ruler of the, land, whoso he might be- no, though my claim were of all claims most just: I should know how an alien ought to live among citizens. But thou art shaming a city that deserves it not, even thine own; and the fulness of thy years brings thee an old age bereft of wit.

I have said, then, and I say it once again- let the maidens be brought hither with all speed, unless thou wouldst sojourn in this land by no free choice;-and this I tell thee from my soul, as with my lips.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Seest thou thy plight, O stranger? Thou art deemed to come of a just race; but thy deeds are found evil.

CREON

Not counting this city void of manhood, son of Aegeus, nor of counsel, -as thou sayest, -have I wrought this deed; but because I judged that its folk could never be so enamoured of my kinsfolk as to foster them against my will. And I knew that this people would not receive a parricide, -a polluted man, -a man with whom had been found the unholy bride of her son. Such the wisdom, I knew, that dwells on the Mount of Ares in their land; which suffers not such wanderers to dwell within this realm. In that faith, I sought to take this prize. Nor had I done so, but that he was calling down bitter curses on me, and on my race; when, being so wronged, I deemed that I had warrant for this requital. For anger knows no old

age, till death come; the dead alone feel no smart.

Therefore thou shalt act as seems to thee good; for, though my cause is just, the lack of aid makes me weak: yet, old though I am, I will endeavour to meet deed with deed.

OEDIPUS

O shameless soul, where, thinkest thou, falls this thy taunt, -on my age, or on thine own? Bloodshed -incest -misery -all this thy lips have launched against me, -all this that I have borne, woe is me! by no choice of mine: for such was the pleasure of the gods, wroth, haply, with the race from of old. Take me alone, and thou couldst find no sin to upbraid me withal, in quittance whereof I was driven to sin thus against myself and against my kin. Tell me, now, -if, by voice of oracle, some divine doom was coming on my sire, that he should die by a son's hand, how couldst thou justly reproach me therewith, who was then unborn, -whom no sire had yet begotten, no mother's womb conceived? And if, when born to woe -as I was born -I met my sire in strife, and slew him, all ignorant what I was doing, and to whom, -how couldst thou justly blame the unknowing deed?

And my mother -wretch, hast thou no shame in forcing me to speak of her nuptials, when she was thy sister, and they such as I will now tell -for verily I will not be silent, when thou hast gone so far in impious speech. Yea, she was my mother, -oh, misery! -my mother, -I knew it not, nor she -and, for her shame, bare children to the son whom she had borne. But one thing, at least, I know, -that thy will consents thus to revile her and me; but not of my free will did I wed her, and not of free will do I speak now.

Nay, not in this marriage shall I be called guilty, nor in that slaying of my sire which thou ever urgest against me with bitter reviling. Answer me but one thing that I ask thee. If, here and now, one should come up and seek to slay thee -thee, the righteous -wouldst thou ask if the murderer was thy father, or wouldst thou reckon with him straightway? I think, as thou lovest thy life, thou wouldst requite the culprit, nor look around thee for thy warrant. But such the plight into which I came, led by gods; and in this, could my sire come back to life, methinks he would not gain-say me.

Yet thou, -for thou art not a just man, but one who holds all things meet to utter, knowing no barrier betwixt speech and silence -thou tauntest me in such wise, before yon men. And thou findest it timely to flatter the renowned Theseus, and Athens, saying how well her State hath been ordered: yet, while giving such large praise, thou forgettest this, -that if any land knows how to worship the gods with due rites, this land excels therein; whence thou hadst planned to steal me, the suppliant, the old man, and didst seek to seize me, and hast already carried off my daughters. Wherefore I now call on yon goddesses, I supplicate them, I adjure them with prayers, to bring me help and to fight in my cause, that thou mayest learn well by what manner of men this realm is guarded.

LEADER

The stranger is a good man, O king; his fate hath been accurst;

but 'tis worthy of our succour.

THESEUS

Enough of words: -the doers of the deed are in flight, while we, the sufferers, stand still.

CREON

What, then, wouldst thou have a helpless man to do?

THESEUS

Show the way in their track, -while I escort thee, -that, if in these regions thou hast the maidens of our quest, thou thyself mayest discover them to me; but if thy men are fleeing with the spoil in their grasp, we may spare our trouble; the chase is for others, from whom they will never escape out of this land, to thank their gods.

Come, -forward! The spoiler hath been spoiled, I tell thee -Fate hath taken the hunter in the toils; gains got by wrongful arts are soon lost. And thou shalt have no ally in thine aim, for well wot I that not without accomplice or resource hast thou gone to such a length of violence in the daring mood which hath inspired thee here: no, -there was some one in whom thou wast trusting when thou didst essay these deeds. And to this I must look, nor make this city weaker than one man. Dost thou take my drift? Or seem these words as vain as seemed the warnings when thy deed was still a-planning?

CREON

Say what thou wilt while thou art here, -I will not cavil: but at home I, too, will know how to act.

THESEUS

For the present, threaten, but go forward. -Do thou, Oedipus, stay here in peace, I pray thee, -with my pledge that, unless I die before, I will not cease till I put thee in possession of thy children.

OEDIPUS

Heaven reward thee, Theseus, for thy nobleness, and thy loyal care in my behalf!

(THESEUS and attendants, with CREON, go out on spectators' left.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe 1

Oh, to be where the foeman, turned to bay, will soon join in the brazen clangour of battle, haply by the shores loved of Apollo, haply by that torch-lit strand where the Great Goddesses cherish dread rites for mortals, on whose lips the ministrant Eumolpidae have laid the precious seal of silence; where, methinks, the war-waking Theseus and the captives twain, the sister maids, will soon meet within our borders, amid a war-cry of men strong to save!

antistrophe 1

Or perchance they will soon draw nigh to the pastures on the west of Oea's snowy rock, borne on horses in their flight, or in chariots racing at speed.

Creon will be worsted! Terrible are the warriors of Colonus, and the followers of Theseus are terrible in their might. Yea, the steel of every bridle flashes, -with slack bridle-rein all the knighthood

rides apace that worships our Queen of Chivalry, Athena, and the earth-girdling Sea-god, the son of Rhea's love.

strophe 2

Is the battle now, or yet to be? For somehow my soul woos me to the hope that soon I shall be face to face with the maidens thus sorely tried, thus sorely visited by the hand of a kinsman.

To-day, to-day, Zeus will work some great thing: I have presage of victory in the strife. O to be a dove with swift strength as of the storm, that I might reach an airy cloud, with gaze lifted above the fray!

antistrophe 2

Hear, all-ruling lord of heaven, all-seeing Zeus! Enable the guardians of this land, in might triumphant, to achieve the capture that gives the prize to their hands! So grant thy daughter also, our dread Lady, Pallas Athena! And Apollo, the hunter, and his sister, who follows the dappled, swift-footed deer -fain am I that they should come, a twofold strength, to this land and to her people.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah, wanderer friend, thou wilt not have to tax thy watcher with false augury, -for yonder I see the maidens drawing near with an escort.

OEDIPUS

Where -where? How? What sayest thou?

(ANTIGONE and ISMENE enter, with THESEUS and his attendants, on the spectators' left.)

ANTIGONE

O father, father, that some god would suffer thine eyes to see this noble man, who hath brought us here to thee!

OEDIPUS

My child!-ye are here indeed?

ANTIGONE

Yea, for these strong arms have saved us -Theseus, and his trusty followers.

OEDIPUS

Come ye hither, my child, -let me embrace you -restored beyond all hope!

ANTIGONE

Thy wish shall be granted -we crave what we bestow.

OEDIPUS

Where, then, where are ye?

ANTIGONE

Here approaching thee together.

OEDIPUS

My darlings!

ANTIGONE

A father loves his own.

OEDIPUS

Props of mine age!

ANTIGONE

And sharers of thy sorrow.

OEDIPUS

I hold my dear ones; and now, should I die, I were not wholly wretched, since ye have come to me. Press close to me on either side, children, cleave to your sire, and repose from this late roaming, so forlorn, so grievous! And tell me what hath passed as shortly as ye may; brief speech sufficeth for young maidens.

ANTIGONE

Here is our deliverer: from him thou shouldst hear the story, father, since his is the deed; so shall my part be brief.

OEDIPUS

Sir, marvel not, if with such yearning I prolong my words unto my children, found again beyond my hope. For well I wot that this joy in respect of them hath come to me from thee, and thee alone: thou hast rescued them, and no man beside. And may the gods deal with thee after my wish, -with thee, and with this land; for among you, above all human kind, have I found the fear of heaven, and the spirit of fairness, and the lips that lie not. I know these things, which with these words I requite; for what I have, I have through thee, and no man else.

Stretch forth thy right hand, O king, I pray thee, that I may touch it, and, if 'tis lawful, kiss thy cheek. -But what am I saying? Unhappy as have become, how could I wish thee to touch one with whom all stain of sin hath made its dwelling? No, not I, -nor allow thee, if thou wouldst. They alone can share this burden, to whom it hath come home. -Receive my greeting where thou standest; and in the future still give me thy loyal care, as thou hast given it to this hour.

THESEUS

No marvel is it to me, if thou hast shown some mind to large discourse, for joy in these thy children, and if thy first care hath been for their words, rather than for me; indeed, there is nought to vex me in that. Not in words so much as deeds would I make the lustre of my life. Thou hast the proof; I have failed in nothing of my sworn faith to thee, old man; here am I, with the maidens living, -yea scatheless of those threats. And how the fight was won, what need that I should idly boast, when thou wilt learn it from these maidens in converse?

But there is a matter that hath newly chanced to me, as I came hither; lend me thy counsel thereon, for, small though it be, 'tis food for wonder; and mortal man should deem nothing beneath his care.

OEDIPUS

What is it, son of Aegeus? Tell me; -I myself know nought of that whereof thou askest.

THESEUS

A man, they say, -not thy countryman, yet thy kinsman, -hath somehow cast himself, a suppliant, at our altar of Poseidon, where I was sacrificing when I first set out hither.

OEDIPUS

Of what land is he? What craves he by the supplication?

THESEUS

I know one thing only; they say, he asks brief speech with thee, which shall not irk thee much.

OEDIPUS

On what theme? That suppliant posture is not trivial.

THESEUS

He asks, they say, no more than that he may confer with thee, and re. turn unharmed from his journey hither.

OEDIPUS

Who can he be who thus implores the god?

THESEUS

Look if ye have any kinsman at Argos, who might crave this boon on thee.

OEDIPUS

O friend! Say no word more!

THESEUS

What ails thee?

OEDIPUS

Ask it not of me-

THESEUS

Ask what? Speak!

OEDIPUS

By those words I know who is the suppliant.

THESEUS

And who can he be, against whom I should have a grief?

OEDIPUS

My son, O king, -the hated son whose words would vex mine ear as the words of no man beside.

THESEUS

What? Canst thou not listen, without doing what thou wouldst not? Why should it pain thee to hear him?

OEDIPUS

Most hateful, king, hath that voice become to his sire:- lay me not under constraint to yield in this.

THESEUS

But think whether his suppliant state constrains thee: what if thou hast a duty of respect for the god?

ANTIGONE

Father, hearken to me, though I be young who counsel. Allow the king to gratify his own heart, and to gratify the god as he wishes; and, for thy daughter's sake, allow our brother to come. For he will not pluck the perforce from thy resolve, -never fear, -by such words as shall not be spoken for thy good. But to hear him speak, -what harm can be in that? Ill-devised deeds, thou knowest, are bewrayed by speech. Thou art his sire; so that, e'en if he were to wrong thee with the most impious of foul wrongs, my father, it is not lawful for thee to wrong him again.

Oh, let him come: other men, also, have evil offspring, and are

swift to wrath; but they hear advice, and are charmed from their mood by the gentle spells of friends.

Look thou to the past, not to the present, -think on all that thou hast borne through sire and mother; and if thou considerest those things, well I wot, thou wilt discern how evil is the end that waits on evil wrath; not slight are thy reasons to think thereon, bereft, as thou art, of the sight that returns no more.

Nay, yield to us! It is not seemly for just suitors to sue long; it is not seemly that a man should receive good, and thereafter lack the mind to requite it.

OEDIPUS

My child, 'tis sore for me, this pleasure that ye win from me by your pleading; -but be it as ye will. Only, if that man is to come hither, - friend, let no one ever become master of my life!

THESEUS

I need not to hear such words more than once, old man: -I would not boast; but be sure that thy life is safe, while any god saves mine.

(THESEUS goes out, to the right of the spectators.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe

Whoso craves the ampler length of life, not content to desire modest span, him will I judge with no uncertain voice; he cleaves to folly.

For the long days lay up full many things nearer unto grief than joy; but as for thy delights, their place shall know them no more. when a man's life hath lapsed beyond the fitting term; and the Deliverer comes at the last to all alike, -when the doom of Hades is suddenly revealed, without marriage-song, or lyre, or dance, -even Death at the last.

antistrophe

Not to be born is, past all prizing, best; but, when a man hath seen the light, this is next best by far, that with all speed he should go thither, whence he hath come.

For when he hath seen youth go by, with its light follies, what troublous affliction is strange to his lot, what suffering is not therein? -envy, factions, strife, battles and slaughters; and, last of all, age claims him for her own, -age, dispraised, infirm, unsociable, unfriended, with whom all woe of woe abides.

epode

In such years is yon hapless one, not I alone: and as some cape that fronts the North is lashed on every side by the waves of winter, so he also is fiercely lashed evermore by the dread troubles that break on him like billows, some from the setting of the sun, some from the rising, some in the region of the noon-tide beam, some from the gloom-wrapped hills of the North.

ANTIGONE

Lo, yonder, methinks, I see the stranger coming hither, -yea, without attendants, my father, -the tears streaming from his eyes.

OEDIPUS

Who is he?

ANTIGONE

The same who was in our thoughts from the first; -Polyneices hath come to us.

(POLYNEICES enters, on the spectators' left.)

POLYNEICES

Ah me, what shall I do? Whether shall I weep first for mine own sorrows, sisters, or for mine aged sire's, as I see them yonder? Whom I have found in a strange land, an exile here with you twain, clad in such raiment, whereof the foul squalor hath dwelt with that aged form so long, a very blight upon his flesh, -while above the sightless eyes the unkempt hair flutters in the breeze; and matching with these things, meseems, is the food that he carries, hapless one, against hunger's pinch.

Wretch that I am! I learn all this too late: and I bear witness that am proved the vilest of men in all that touches care for thee: -from mine own lips hear what I am. But, seeing that Zeus himself, in all that he doeth, hath Mercy for the sharer of his throne, may she come to thy side also, my father; for the faults can be healed, but can never more be made worse.

(A pause)

Why art thou silent?... 9 Speak, father: -turn not away from me. Hast thou not even an answer for me? Wilt thou dismiss me in mute scorn, without telling wherefore thou art wroth?

O ye, his daughters, sisters mine, strive ye, at least, to move our sire's implacable, inexorable silence, that he send me not away dishonoured, -who am the suppliant of the god, -in such wise as this, with no word of response.

ANTIGONE

Tell him thyself, unhappy one, what thou hast come to seek. As words flow, perchance they touch to joy, perchance they glow with anger, or with tenderness, and so they somehow give a voice to the dumb.

POLYNEICES

Then will I speak boldly, -for thou dost admonish me well, -first claiming the help of the god himself, from whose altar the king of this land raised me, that I might come hither, with warranty to speak and hear, and go my way unharmed. And I will crave, strangers, that these pledges be kept with me by you, and by my sisters here, and by my sire. -But now I would fain tell thee, father, why I came.

I have been driven, an exile, from my fatherland, because, as eldest-born, I claimed to sit in thy sovereign seat. Wherefore Eteocles, though the younger, thrust me from the land, when he had neither worsted me in argument, nor come to trial of might and deed, -no, but won the city over. And of this I deem it most likely that the curse on thy house is the cause; then from soothsayers also I so hear. For when I came to Dorian Argos, I took the daughter of Adrastus to wife; and I bound to me by oath all of the Apian land who are foremost

in renown of war, that with them I might levy the sevenfold host of spearmen against Thebes, and die in my just cause, or cast the doers of this wrong from the realm.

Well, and wherefore have I come hither now? With suppliant prayers. my father, unto thee -mine own, and the prayers of mine allies, who now, with seven hosts behind their seven spears, have set their leaguer round the plain of Thebes; of whom is swift-speared Amphiaraus, matchless warrior, matchless augur; then the son of Oeneus, Aetolian Tydeus; Eteoclus third, of Argive birth; the fourth, Hippomedon, sent by Talaos, his sire; while Capaneus, the fifth, vaunts that he will burn Thebes with fire, unto the ground; and sixth, Arcadian Parthenopaeus rushes to the war, named from that virgin of other days whose marriage in after time gave him birth, trusty son of Atalanta. Last, I, thy son, -Or if not thine, but offspring of an evil fate, yet thine at least in name, -lead the fearless host of Argos unto Thebes.

And we, by these thy children and by thy life, my father, implore the all, praying thee to remit thy stern wrath against me, as I go forth to chastise my brother, who hath thrust me out and robbed me of my fatherland. For if aught of truth is told by oracles, they said that victory should be with those whom thou shouldst join.

Then, by our fountains and by the gods of our race, I ask thee to hearken and to yield; a beggar and an exile am I, an exile thou; by court to -others we have a home, both thou and I, sharers of one doom; while he, king in the house -woe is me! -mocks in his pride at thee and me alike. But, if thou assist my purpose, small toil or time, and I will scatter his strength to the winds: and so will I bring thee and stablish thee in thine own house, and stablish myself when I have cast him out by force. Be thy will with me, and that boast may be mine: without thee, I cannot e'en return alive.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

For his sake who hath sent him, Oedipus, speak, as seems thee good, ere thou send the man away.

OEDIPUS

Nay, then, my friends, guardians of this land, were not Theseus he who had sent him hither to me, desiring that he should have my response, never should he have heard this voice. But now he shall be graced with it, ere he go, -yea, and hear from me such words as shall never gladden his life: -villain, who when thou hadst the sceptre and the throne, which now thy brother hath in Thebes, dravest me, thine own father, into exile, and madest me citiless, and madest me to wear this garb which now thou weapest to behold, when thou hast come unto the same stress of misery as I. The time for tears is past: no, I must bear this burden while I live, ever thinking of thee as of a murderer; for 'tis thou that hast brought my days to this anguish, 'tis thou that hast thrust me out; to thee I owe it that I wander, begging my daily bread from strangers. And, had these daughters not been born to be my comfort, verily I had been dead, for aught of help from thee. Now, these girls preserve me, these my

nurses, these who are men, not women, in true service: but ye are aliens, and no sons of mine.

Therefore the eyes of Fate look upon thee-not yet as they will look anon, if indeed those hosts are moving against Thebes. Never canst thou overthrow that city; no, first shalt thou fall stained with bloodshed, and thy brother likewise. Such the curses that my soul sent forth before against you twain, and such do I now invoke to fight for me, that ye may deem it meet to revere parents, nor scorn your father utterly, because he is sightless who begat such sons; for these maidens did not thus. So my curses have control of thy 'supplication' and thy 'throne,' -if indeed justice, revealed from of old, sits with Zeus in the might of the eternal laws.

And thou -begone, abhorred of me, and unfathered! -begone, thou vilest of the vile, and with thee take these my curses which I call down on thee -never to vanquish the land of thy race, no, nor ever return to hill-girt Argos, but by a kindred hand to die, and slay him by whom thou hast been driven out. Such is my prayer; and I call the paternal darkness of dread Tartarus to take thee unto another home, -I call the spirits of this place, -I call the Destroying God, who hath set that dreadful hatred in you twain. Go, with these words in thine ears -go, and publish it to the Cadmeans all, yea, and to thine own staunch allies, that Oedipus hath divided such honours to his sons.

LEADER

Polyneices, in thy past goings I take no joy; and now go thy way with speed.

POLYNEICES

Alas, for my journey and my baffled hope: alas, for my comrades' What an end was that march to have, whereon we sallied forth from Argos: woe is me! -aye, such an end, that I may not even utter it to any of my companions, or turn them back, but must go in silence to meet this doom.

Ah ye, his daughters and my sisters, -since ye hear these hard prayers of your sire, -if this father's curses be fulfilled, and some way of return to Thebes be found for you, oh, as ye fear the gods, do not, for your part, dishonour me,- nay, give me burial, and due funeral rites. And so the praise which ye now win from yonder man, for your service, shall be increased by another praise not less, by reason of the office wrought for me.

ANTIGONE

Polyneices, I entreat thee, hear me in one thing!

POLYNEICES

What is it, dearest Antigone? Speak!

ANTIGONE

Turn thy host back to Argos, -aye, with all speed, -and destroy not thyself and Thebes.

POLYNEICES

Nay, it cannot be: for how again could I lead the same host, when once I had blenched?

ANTIGONE

But why, my brother, should thine anger rise again? What gain is promised thee in destroying thy native city?

POLYNEICES

'Tis shame to be an exile, and, eldest born as I am, to be thus mocked on my brother's part.

ANTIGONE

Seest thou, then, to what sure fulfilment thou art bringing his prophecies, who bodes mutual slaying for you twain?

POLYNEICES

Aye, for he wishes it:-but I must not yield.

ANTIGONE

Ah me unhappy! -But who will dare to follow thee, hearing what prophecies yon man hath uttered?

POLYNEICES

I will not e'en report ill tidings: 'tis a good leader's part to tell the better news, and not the worse.

ANTIGONE

Brother! Thy resolve, then, is thus fixed?

POLYNEICES

Yea, -and detain me not. For mine it now shall be to tread yon path, with evil doom and omen from this my sire and from his Furies; but for you twain, may Zeus make your path bright, if ye do my wishes when I am dead, -since in my life ye can do them no more.- (He gently disengages himself from their embrace.) Now, release me, -and farewell; for nevermore shall ye behold me living.

ANTIGONE

Woe is me!

POLYNEICES

Mourn not for me.

ANTIGONE

And who would not bewail thee, brother, who thus art hurrying to death foreseen?

POLYNEICES

If 'tis fate, I must die.

ANTIGONE

Nay, nay, -hear my pleading!

POLYNEICES

Plead not amiss.

ANTIGONE

Then woe is me, indeed, if I must lose thee!

POLYNEICES

Nay, that rests with Fortune, -that end or another. -For you twain, at least, I pray the gods that ye never meet with ill; for in all men's eyes ye are unworthy to suffer.

(He goes out on the spectators' left.)

CHORUS (chanting)

strophe 1

Behold, new ills have newly come, in our hearing, from the

sightless strangers -ills fraught with a heavy doom; unless,
perchance, Fate is finding its goal. For 'tis not mine to say that a
decree of Heaven is ever vain: watchful, aye watchful of those decrees
is Time, overthrowing some fortunes, and on the morrow lifting others,
again, to honour. -Hark that sound in the sky!-Zeus defend us!

(Thunder is heard.)

OEDIPUS

My children, my children! If there be any man to send, would
that some one would fetch hither the peerless Theseus!

ANTIGONE

And what, father, is the aim of thy summons?

OEDIPUS

This winged thunder of Zeus will lead me anon to Hades: nay, send,
and tarry not.

(A second peal is heard.)

CHORUS (chanting)

antistrophe 1

Hark! With louder noise it crashes down, unutterable, hurled by
Zeus! The hair of my head stands up for fear, my soul is sore
dismayed; for again the lightning flashes in the sky. Oh, to what
event will it give birth? I am afraid, for never in vain doth it
rush forth, or without grave issue. O thou dread sky! O Zeus!

OEDIPUS

Daughters, his destined end hath come upon your sire; he can
turn his face from it no more.

ANTIGONE

How knowest thou? What sign hath told thee this?

OEDIPUS

I know it well. -But let some one go, I pray you, with all
speed, and bring hither the lord of this realm.

(Another peal is heard.)

CHORUS (chanting)

strophe 2

Ha! Listen! Once again that piercing thunder-voice is around us!
Be merciful, O thou god, be merciful, if thou art bringing aught of
gloom for the land our mother! Gracious may I find thee, nor,
because I have looked on a man accurst, have some meed, not of
blessing for my portion! O Zeus our lord, to thee I cry!

OEDIPUS

Is the man near? Will he find me still alive, children, and master
of my mind?

ANTIGONE

And what is the pledge which thou wouldst have fixed in thy mind?

OEDIPUS

In return for his benefits, I would duly give him the requital
promised when I received them.

CHORUS (chanting)

antistrophe 2

What ho, my son, hither, come hither! Or if in the glade's

inmost recess, for the honour of the sea-god Poseidon, thou art hallowing his altar with sacrifice, -come thence! Worthy art thou in the

STRANGER's sight, worthy are thy city and thy folk, that he should render a just recompense for benefits. Haste, come quickly, O king!
(THESEUS enters, on the spectators' right.)

THESEUS

Wherefore once more rings forth a summons from you all, -from my people as clearly as from our guest? Can a thunderbolt from Zeus be the cause, or rushing hail in its fierce onset? All forebodings may find place, when the god sends such a storm.

OEDIPUS

King, welcome is thy presence; and 'tis some god that hath made for thee the good fortune of this coming.

THESEUS

And what new thing hath now befallen, son of Laius?

OEDIPUS

My life hangs in the scale: and I fain would die guiltless of bad faith to and to this city, in respect of my pledges.

THESEUS

And what sign of thy fate holds thee in suspense?

OEDIPUS

The gods, their own heralds, bring me the tidings, with no failure in the signs appointed of old.

THESEUS

What sayest thou are the signs of these things, old man?

OEDIPUS

The thunder, peal on peal, -the lightning, flash on flash, hurled from the unconquered hand.

THESEUS

Thou winnest my belief, for in much I find thee a prophet whose voice is not false; -then speak what must be done.

OEDIPUS

Son of Aegeus, I will unfold that which shall be a treasure for this thy city, such as age can never mar. Anon, unaided, and with no hand to guide me, I will show the way to the place where I must die. But that place reveal thou never unto mortal many -tell not where it is hidden, nor in what region it lies; that so it may ever make for thee a defence, better than many shields, better than the succouring spear of neighbours.

But, for mysteries which speech may not profane, thou shalt mark them for thyself, when thou comest to that place alone: since neither to any of this people can I utter them, nor to mine own children, dear though they are. No, guard them thou alone; and when thou art coming to the end of life, disclose them to thy heir alone; let him teach his heir; and so thenceforth.

And thus shalt thou hold this city unscathed from the side of the Dragon's brood; -full many States lightly enter on offence, e'en though their neighbour lives aright. For the gods are slow, though

they are sure, in visitation, when men scorn godliness, and turn to frenzy. Not such be thy fate, son of Aegeus. -Nay, thou knowest such things, without my precepts.

But to that place -for the divine summons urges me -let us now set forth, and hesitate no more.- (As if suddenly inspired, he moves with slow but firm steps towards the left of the scene, beckoning the others onward.) My children, follow me, -thus, -for I now have in strange wise been made your guide, as ye were your sire's. On, -touch me not, -nay, suffer me unaided to find out that sacred tomb where 'tis my portion to be buried in this land.

This way, -hither, -this way! -for this way doth Guiding Hermes lead me, and the goddess of the dead!

O light, -no light to me, -mine once thou wast, I ween, -but now my body feels thee for the last time! For now go I to hide the close of my life with Hades. -Truest of friends! blessed be thou, and this land, and thy lieges; and, when your days are blest, think on me the dead, for your welfare evermore.

(He passes from the stage on the spectators' left, followed by his daughters, THESEUS, and attendants.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe

If with prayer I may adore the Unseen Goddess, and thee, lord of the children of night, O hear me, Aidoneus, Aidoneus! Not in pain, not by a doom that wakes sore lament, may the stranger pass to the fields of the dead below, the all-enshrouding, and to the Stygian house. Many were the sorrows that came to him without cause; but in requital a just god will lift him up.

antistrophe

Goddesses Infernal! And thou, dread form of the unconquered hound, thou who hast thy lair in those gates of many guests, thou untameable Watcher of Hell, gnarling from the cavern's jaws, as rumour from the beginning tells of thee!

Hear me, O Death, son of Earth and Tartarus! May that Watcher leave a clear path for the stranger on his way to the nether fields of the dead! To thee I call, giver of the eternal sleep.

(A MESSENGER enters from the left.)

MESSENGER

Countrymen, my tidings might most shortly be summed thus: Oedipus is gone. But the story of the hap may not be told in brief words, as the deeds yonder were not briefly done.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

He is gone, hapless one?

MESSENGER

Be sure that he hath passed from life.

LEADER

Ah, how? by a god-sent doom, and painless?

MESSENGER

There thou touchest on what is indeed worthy of wonder. How he moved hence, thou thyself must know, since thou wast here, -with no

friend to show the way, but guide himself unto us all.

Now, when he had come to the sheer Threshold, bound by brazen steps to earth's deep roots, he paused in one of many branching paths, near the basin in the rock, where the inviolate covenant of Theseus and Peirithous hath its memorial. He stood midway between that basin and the Thorician stone, -the hollow pear-tree and the marble tomb; then sate him down, and loosed his sordid raiment.

And then he called his daughters, and bade them fetch water from some fount, that he should wash, and make a drink-offering. And they went to the hill which was in view, Demeter's hill who guards the tender plants, and in short space brought that which their father had enjoined; then they ministered to him with washing, and dressed him, as use ordains.

But when he had content of doing all, and no part of his desire was now unheeded, then was thunder from the Zeus of the Shades: and the maidens shuddered as they heard; they fell at their father's knees, and wept, nor ceased from beating the breast, and wailing very sore.

And when he heard their sudden bitter cry, he put his arms around them, and said: 'My children, this day ends your father's life. For now all hath perished that was mine, and no more shall ye bear the burden of tending me, -no light one, well I know, my children; yet one little word makes all those toils as nought; love had ye from me, as from none beside; and now ye shall have me with you no more, through all your days to come.'

On such wise, close-clinging to each other, sire and daughters sobbed and wept. But when they had made an end of wailing, and the sound went up no more, there was a stillness; and suddenly a voice of one who cried aloud to him, so that the hair of all stood up on their heads for sudden fear, and they were afraid. For the god called him with many callings and manifold: 'Oedipus, Oedipus, why delay we to go? Thou tarriest too long.'

But when he perceived that he was called of the god, he craved that the king Theseus should draw near; and when he came near, said: 'O my friend, give, I pray thee, the solemn pledge of thy right hand to my children, and ye, daughters, to him; and promise thou never to forsake them of thy free will, but to do all things for their good, as thy friendship and the time may prompt.' And he, like a man of noble spirit, without making lament sware to keep that promise to his friend.

But when Theseus had so promised, straightway Oedipus felt for his children with blind hands, and said: 'O my children, ye must be nobly brave of heart, and depart from this place, nor ask to behold unlawful sights, or to hear such speech as may not be heard. Nay, go with all haste; only let Theseus be present, as is his right, a witness of those things which are to be.'

So spake he, and we all heard; and with streaming tears and with lamentation we followed the maidens away. But when we had gone apart, after no long time we looked back, and Oedipus we saw nowhere

any more, but the king alone, holding his hand before his face to screen his eyes, as if some dread sight had been seen, and such as none might endure to behold. And then, after a short space, we saw him salute the earth and the home of the gods above, both at once, in one prayer.

But by what doom Oedipus perished, no man can tell, save Theseus alone. No fiery thunderbolt of the god removed him in that hour, nor any rising of storm from the sea; but either a messenger from the gods, or the world of the dead, the nether adamant, riven for him in love, without pain; for the passing of the man was not with lamentation, or in sickness and suffering, but, above mortal's, wonderful. And if to any I seem to speak folly, I would not woo their belief, who count me foolish.

LEADER

And where are the maidens, and their escort?

MESSENGER

Not far hence; for the sounds of mourning tell plainly that they approach.

(ANTIGONE and ISMENE enter, chanting their song of lamentation.)

ANTIGONE

strophe 1

Woe, woe! Now, indeed, is it for us, unhappy sisters, in all fulness to bewail the curse on the blood that is ours from our sire! For him, while he lived, we bore that long pain without pause; and at the last a sight and a loss that baffle thought are ours to tell.

CHORUS

And how is it with you?

ANTIGONE

We can but conjecture, friends.

CHORUS

He is gone?

ANTIGONE

Even as thou mightest wish: yea, surely, when death met him not in war, or on the deep, but he was snatched to the viewless fields by some swift, strange doom. Ah me! and a night as of death hath come on the eyes of us twain: for how shall we find our bitter livelihood, roaming to some far land, or on the waves of the sea?

ISMENE

I know not. Oh that deadly Hades would join me in death unto mine aged sire! Woe is me! I cannot live the life that must be mine.

CHORUS

Best of daughters, sisters twain, Heaven's doom must be borne: be no more fired with too much grief: ye have so fared that ye should not repine.

ANTIGONE

antistrophe 1

Ah, so care past can seem lost joy! For that which was no way sweet had sweetness, while therewith I held him in mine embrace. Ah, father, dear one, ah thou who hast put on the darkness of the

under-world for ever, not even there shalt thou ever lack our love,-
her love and mine.

CHORUS

He hath fared-

ANTIGONE

He hath fared as he would.

CHORUS

In what wise?

ANTIGONE

On foreign ground, the ground of his choice, he hath died; in
the shadow of the grave he hath his bed for ever; and he hath left
mourning behind him, not barren of tears. For with these streaming
eyes, father, I bewail thee; nor know I, ah me, how to quell my sorrow
for thee, my sorrow that is so great. -Ah me! 'twas thy wish to die in
strange land; but now thou hast died without gifts at my hand.

ISMENE

Woe is me! What new fate, think'st thou, awaits thee and me, my
sister, thus orphaned of our sire?

CHORUS

Nay, since he hath found a blessed end, my children, cease from
this lament; no mortal is hard for evil fortune to capture.

ANTIGONE

strophe 2

Sister, let us hasten back.

ISMENE

Unto what deed?

ANTIGONE

A longing fills my soul.

ISMENE

Whereof?

ANTIGONE

To see the dark home-

ISMENE

Of whom?

ANTIGONE

Ah me of our sire.

ISMENE

And how can this thing be lawful? Hast thou no understanding?

ANTIGONE

Why this reproof?

ISMENE

And knowest thou not this also-

ANTIGONE

What wouldst thou tell me more?-

ISMENE

That he was perishing without tomb, apart from all?

ANTIGONE

Lead me thither, and then slay me also.

ISMENE

Ah me unhappy! Friendless and helpless, where am I now to live
my hapless life?

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

My children, fear not.

ANTIGONE

But whither am I to flee?

CHORUS

Already a refuge hath been found-

ANTIGONE

How meanest thou?-

CHORUS

-for your fortunes, that no harm should touch them.

ANTIGONE

I know it well.

CHORUS

What, then, is thy thought?

ANTIGONE

How we are to go home, I cannot tell.

CHORUS

And do not seek to go.

ANTIGONE

Trouble besets us.

CHORUS

And erstwhile bore hardly on you.

ANTIGONE

Desperate then, and now more cruel than despair.

CHORUS

Great, verily, is the sea of your troubles.

ANTIGONE

Alas, alas! O Zeus, whither shall we turn? To what last hope
doth fate now urge us?

(THESEUS enters.)

THESEUS

systema

Weep no more, maidens; for where the kindness of the Dark Powers
is an abiding grace to the quick and to the dead, there is no room for
mourning; divine anger would follow.

ANTIGONE

Son of Aegeus, we supplicate thee!

THESEUS

For the obtaining of what desire, my children?

ANTIGONE

We fain would look with our own eyes upon our father's tomb.

THESEUS

Nay, it is not lawful.

ANTIGONE

How sayest thou, king, lord of Athens?

THESEUS

My children, he gave me charge that no one should draw nigh unto that place, or greet with voice the sacred tomb wherein he sleeps. And he said that, while I duly kept that word, I should always hold the land unharmed. These pledges, therefore, were heard from my lips by the god, and by the all-seeing Watcher of oaths, the servant of Zeus.

ANTIGONE

Nay, then, if this is pleasing to the dead, with this we must content us. But send us to Thebes the ancient, if haply we may hinder the bloodshed that is threatened to our brothers.

THESEUS

So will I do; and if in aught beside I can profit you, and pleasure the dead who hath lately gone from us, I am bound to spare no pains.

CHORUS

Come, cease lamentation, lift it up no more; for verily these things stand fast.

-THE END-