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ION

Translated by Gilbert Murray

AESCHYLUS

AGAMEMNON (*17th Thousand*)

THE CHOEPHOROË

THE EUMENIDES

THE SUPPLIANT WOMEN (SUPPLICES)

PROMETHEUS BOUND

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

THE PERSIANS

ARISTOPHANES

THE FROGS (*24th Thousand*)

THE BIRDS

EURIPIDES

ALCESTIS (*24th Thousand*)

ELECTRA (*50th Thousand*)

HIPPOLYTUS (*38th Thousand*)

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS (*32nd Thousand*)

MEDEA (*33rd Thousand*)

RHESUS

BACCHÆ (*31st Thousand*)

TROJAN WOMEN (*49th Thousand*)

MENANDER

THE ARBITRATION

THE RAPE OF THE LOCKS

SOPHOCLES

OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES (*24th Thousand*)

ANTIGONE

THE WIFE OF HERACLES

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

*

THE ORESTEIA

(collected edition)

THE COMPLETE PLAYS OF AESCHYLUS

EURIPIDES

ION

Translated into English rhyming
verse with explanatory notes

by

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WOKING AND LONDON

ION

The *Ion* belongs to a particular class of tragedy in which the hero is the Son of a God and a mortal princess. The birth is concealed, the babe is cast out or hidden and in danger of death from a cruel king, but in the end is recognized as a son of god and established as founder of a New Kingdom and ancestor of a royal house. This was the plot of some eight recorded plays of Euripides and some four of Sophocles, besides various others. If we ask why this form of play should be so common the answer is plain. Tragedy was the ritual drama of Dionysus, performed on his festival in his theatre, under the presidency of his priest, by actors who were known as "the Artists of Dionysus." The name Dionysus means "Zeus-Young" or "Zeus-Son," and the subject of the Dithyramb from which tragedy is derived, is described by Plato as a "birth of Dionysus, I suppose" (*Laws* 700B). His festival celebrates the birth of the Young King or the New Life of the earth, who brings food and fertility to man and beast after the barren winter. The general history is outlined in Hesiod's three generations of kings, each superseded by his son, and is made explicit in one of the ancient Orphic fragments where Zeus introduces Dionysus to the gods of the Cosmos and warns them "This is your King." We children of an industrial age find it hard to understand the terrible anxiety with which men of the agricultural or merely fruit-gathering ages met the awful recurrent danger of a foodless earth, and the eager longing with which they looked for the first sign of spring, the blessed New King or Saviour, without whose coming they would die. It forms, as is well known, the very centre of ancient Mediterranean religion.

It is curious that none of the other plays of this class is preserved in complete form; it may be that the *Ion* was selected as the best representative of a well-known type which did not need to be repeated. But what is more remarkable is that when formal tragedy came to an end this dramatic celebration of a symbolic "Birth of Dionysus" survived. It was obviously felt to be an essential element in the Dionysiac ritual, and it forms the regular and perhaps universal subject of the plays of the New Comedy.

In those comedies, amid all their ingenious variations, interest always centres on a seduced mother, an exposed foundling baby, and a final triumphant recognition of the outcast, who at last comes into his own. The chief difference from a "tragedy" like the *Ion* is that the father is not a god but an erring mortal. He can only raise the outcast slave-child to his own rank of free citizen. On the other hand, being human, he can,—and in Menander certainly does—show a great deal more human feeling and self-reproach than can ever be expected of a god.

The plot is really better suited to comedy. In tragedy the god cuts too bad a figure. Of course in the simple Year-Myth that lies behind the story-telling there is nothing to trouble the mind of a Greek audience. If the Sky or Sun impregnates the Earth with his rain or pierces her body with his lightning there is no case for moral criticism. Even when Sky and Earth are given personal names like Ouranos and Gaia, or perhaps like Zeus and Semelê, there is not much difference of feeling. But when the story becomes more individual and dramatic, as on the stage it must, when we find that a god has ravished a mortal maiden, and the maiden, to save her own life and that of the child has exposed the infant, we cannot but feel that the maiden has been treated very badly, and the god, even if one does not quite apply human standards to gods, comes near to being the villain of the piece.

Hence we find that the bald, hard myth is sometimes made in various ways more sympathetic. It may become a romantic love-story; the princess Tyro fell in love

with the River God Enipeus, the Muse who was mother to Rhesus was beloved by the River Strymon and returned his love. Of course they had their troubles, but who can blame them? But when it comes to the persecution of Io by Zeus, Prometheus can outspokenly denounce the god for his brutal lust and cruelty (Aesch. Prom. 435-740). In another account of the birth of Heracles, too, the desire to give that superlative hero a greater father than his mother's husband, Amphitryon, led to the unfortunate suggestion that it was really Zeus disguised as Amphitryon who deceived Alcmena. But that is obviously going too far. All three characters become a butt for ribald laughter. At times, on the other hand, and especially as Plutarch ^[1] tells us, in Egyptian myths, the whole divine birth is a virgin birth. In the case of Io, for instance, it is explained that the birth was caused by the laying on of the divine hand; in that of Danae it was by the golden sunlight. There was no lust, and the god's real purpose was the birth of a great saviour of mankind (Aesch. Supp. 524-600).

In the *Ion* however, no excuses or re-shapings are made. Euripides just takes for his subject an existing traditional myth and treats it as he would treat a story of real life. It is his usual method. He represents the human characters as real people with real human feelings. He makes us sympathize with them and understand them. About the gods he takes little trouble. He leaves Apollo passionately condemned and rather perfunctorily defended. We cannot but sympathize with Ion's last, or almost last, words:

Is the god true, or he and all his art
Falsehood?

and with his resolve not to be content with so cheap an answer as his mother here suggests and Athena afterwards expounds. But it would be most disproportionate to suggest that the discrediting of Apollo is the main purpose of the play. The fact is that these "gods of the poets" were not taken very seriously by a fifth century Athenian audience. Partly they belong to an imaginary world, and often seem not much more solid than Oberon and Titania. Partly, no doubt, there is a real clash between the idea of gods as personifications of natural forces and that which makes them divine persons who see what man cannot see and will satisfy our longing for an ultimate correction of the manifold injustices of the world.

As for the *Ion* itself, if we can once swallow—that is the right word—the myth on which it is based, it is a singularly skilful and charming play, a true Dionysiac tragedy in its outward form, but veering towards serious comedy in its happy ending, in the variety and tenderness of its effects and in the intimacy of its long conversations. One character, indeed, the rude soldier Xuthus, comes near to being a stock figure of the *comédie rosse*, the husband who is made to think that his wife's irregular offspring is his own, who imagines he is hoodwinking others by telling them the story with which they are hoodwinking him, and who, by general agreement at the end of the play is never to be undeceived. There is also a touch of satire in Ion's account of the turmoil of political life at Athens as contrasted with the peace and innocence of his own life at Delphi, in which no ill-omened word may be spoken. But the chief beauty of the play, I think, comes out in the long scene of mutual attraction between the mother and son, in the desperate confession of Creusa and her solemn curse upon the false and heartless god, and perhaps most of all in the scene between the despairing princess and the faithful Old Retainer, with his tender and disastrous fidelity.

It is curious to reflect that this play is the work of the same author as the *Trojan Women* and the *Bacchae*. In those tragedies the mystery of life or of human suffering cried out to be illuminated by the poet's lyrical inspiration. Those in fact were great

lyrical poems, this is almost a prose play of incident and character.

[\[1\]](#) *Numa 4, Quast. Conv. viii, i.*

CHARACTERS

in order of Appearance

The God HERMES

ION, Temple Servant of Apollo at Delphi

CHORUS, Handmaids of CREUSA

CREUSA, daughter of Erechtheus, King of Athens

XUTHUS, an Achaean of Aeolid race, married to CREUSA

AN OLD RETAINER, devoted slave to CREUSA

A MESSENGER, Servant of CREUSA

THE PYTHIA, or Inspired Prophetess of Delphi

The Goddess ATHENA

ION

Scene: the front of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. The God HERMES discovered.

HERMES

Atlas, whose brazen shoulders hold on high
The gods' primaeval home, the vaulted sky,
Begot, by his divine and only love,
Maia, who bore to the All-Father Jove
Me, Hermes, courier to the gods. And, lo,
Today I am come to Delphi, whence doth flow
From Phoebus, throned above Earth's midmost heart,
Music eternal, with prophetic art
Revealing that which Is or Is To Be.

There lives a City, proud in history,
True-named from Pallas of the Spear of Gold,
Where Phoebus once in mastering arms did hold
Creusa, the king's daughter. By the hill
Of virgin Pallas the god wrought his will,
Where northward opening lies a cave they call
In Athens the Long Rocks. The maid withal,
Secret and unsuspected by her sire,
Held her womb's burden—so the god's desire
Guided—until her hour came and she bore
Her child. Back to that cavern where of yore
She had known the god she took him and, arrayed
For death, left him to lie. A cradle made
To the ancient rule she laid with him, a round
Casket, with golden serpents interwound.
Twas thus to Erichthonius, child of earth,
Athena gave, as guardians of his birth,
Two serpents, and the Aglaurid maidens set
To watch his cradle; the rule lingers yet
In Athens, round their cradled young to fold
Two golden snakes. All that she had of gold
Or maiden treasures then Creusa gave,
Weeping, to deck that infant to the grave.

Meantime my brother Phoebus asked of me
A brother's service; "Prithee go," said he,
"To Athens and the earth-born race who dwell,
Unchanging, round our sister's citadel—
Thou know'st the place—there, brother, seek and save
A babe new-born, laid secret in a cave.
Bring him, his cradle and his tokens, all,
To Delphi, and beside my temple wall,
Just at the entrance, leave him. All beside—
For, know, the child is mine—I will provide."
I did my brother's will. I bore away
The babe with all his tokens and array
To Pytho, and left the casket with its lid

Uplifted, that his face might not be hid.
The sun's great wheel just then across the sky
Was mounting, and the Priestess, passing by
Toward the prophetic chamber, chanced to see
An infant by the doors. Amazed was she,
That any damsel in god's house should dare
Cast down the secret fruit her travail bare,
And first would fain have barred it from the door;
Then pity stayed her from such harshness, nor
Would Phoebus see his child so cast away.
She took the babe, and reared it to this day,
Not dreaming that 'twas Phoebus who begot
That life, nor of his mother knowing aught;
Nor does the child aught of his parents know.
Playing amid the altars, to and fro,
His childhood passed, then, as to man he grew,
The Delphians made him treasure-guard and true
Steward of all, and in the sanctuaries
Of Phoebus still an honoured life is his.

Meantime Creusa, nurse of this young life,
As changing fortunes fell, was given as wife
To Xuthus. For in time there chanced to be
Twixt Athens and the Chalcodontidae,
Who hold Euboea's isle, an angry swell
Of war, wherein, since Xuthus shared so well
The spear's long toils and eke the victories,
Creusa's hand was granted as his prize,
A stranger he, of Zeus-born Aeolus
Begot, by race Achaean. Wedded thus
For long years Xuthus and Creusa stayed
Childless. And that is why at last they have made
Their pilgrim way to Apollo's oracle,
To ask god for a child. Aye, Loxias well
Guideth the car of fortune. He hath not,
As men might fancy, his own child forgot.
He means, when Xuthus enters the great hall
To give this boy to him and say withal
He is truly Xuthus' child. So shall the son
Return to his own mother, and be known
As hers. So shall Apollo's loves in night
Be hidden, but the boy possess his right.
A famous name for him hath Phoebus planned,
Ion, first founder of the Ionian land.

But there he comes, out from the temple door,
The son of the great god, to sweep the floor
With broom of laurel! I will wait to see,
Hid in this myrtle grove, how Fate's decree
Works for this strippling, Ion; thus I claim
First of the gods to have spoke his destined name.

[Exit HERMES. Enter ION from inside the Temple with a group of Temple Attendants.]

Lo, where the Sun his chariot bright
 Above the rim of earth hath driven,
 And star by star creeps to the night
 For refuge from the fire of heaven.
 Up on Parnassus' peaks untrod
 It flashes, and their answering ray
 Hails for mankind the circling day,
 And fragrant is the dome of God,
 As wreaths of myrrh their smoke entwine.
 Now is the Virgin of the Shrine
 Mounting in song her mystic throne
 Three-pillared, song that shall impart
 To Hellas whatso lore unknown
 Phoebus hath whispered to her heart.

Go, Delphians, servants of our god,
 First to Castalia's fount, and lave
 Your bodies in her silvery wave;
 Then only may his floor be trod.
 Your lips let holy silence bless:
 And teach the pilgrim hosts who seek
 God's oracle, no word to speak,
 Saving of joy and holiness.

[The Attendants disperse; ION proceeds with his sweeping and sprinkling, and then driving off the Birds.]

I in the service undefiled
 Wherein I have laboured from a child,
 With hallowed wreaths and laurel boughs
 Will clean the entrance ways, and pour
 Libation to make sweet the floor
 Of Lord Apollo's House,
 And turn to flight those flocking wings
 Of birds who soil our offerings.

Motherless and fatherless,
 This House of God I serve and bless,
 Which nursed me in my helplessness.
 To work, thou gentle broom of bay
 Who com'st our altar floor to keep!
 Gardens immortal gave thee birth,
 Where, issuing from the heart of earth,
 A stream doth leap,
 To wash the myrtle and the bay,
 Wherewith alway from dawn of day,
 I sweep, I sweep.

Paian, O Healer mine,
 Thou Leto's Son divine,
 All life, all joy, be thine!

O happy slavery! 'Tis well,
Lord Phoebus, at thy door to dwell
And bow before thine oracle.
No task to mortal man I ply
Of service, but to One on high
And deathless, nor can I think of shame
In toil that bears so great a name.
The hand that feedeth me I bless.
And that which gives me happiness
I name my father: here is He,
Father and life-giver to me,
Lord Phoebus in his sanctuary.

Paian, O Healer mine,
Thou Leto's Son divine,
All life, all joy, be thine!

Lo, from the laurel boughs I turn;
I take me to my golden urn,
And sprinkle earth-born waters, drawn
From eddies deep of Castaly;
Pure is my body in the dawn,
And holy must that water be.
Thus serving Phoebus may I cease
Never, or but in blessed peace!

Ha! There the birds come flocking down
From old Parnassus, where they haunt.
Ah, perch not on the cornice crown
Nor near the golden house! Avaunt,
Thou herald high of Zeus, begone!
Wilt taste again my arrow's bite,
Great eagle, thou whose taloned might
Surpasseth all? . . . And there, a swan!
Hovering above the altar. Go!
Away, white wings and crimson feet!
Small help will be that music sweet
Meeting the clang of Phoebus' bow.
Turn, turn thy wing, and distant make
Thy landing on the Delian Lake.
Obey, or must a blood-stain wrong
Thy sweet-voiced ecstasy of song?

What strange fowl thou, that hoverest
So near? Dost think to build below
Our eaves thy children's grassy nest?
Ah, fear the music of my bow!
Off to Alpheios' eddying flood
To nurse them, or the Isthmian wood!
Not to be fouled by thee or thine
Are votive gifts and walls divine.
To kill you I have not the heart,
You prophets, who to man commend
The signs of God. And yet my part

Is fixed, His Temple to defend.
His am I, and shall never be
False to the hand that feedeth me.

[ION goes back into the Temple. Enter the CHORUS of handmaids visiting the Temple and studying with excitement the scenes on the frieze, Heracles' Labours, Bellerophon slaying the Chimæra, and the War of the Gods and Giants.

LEADER

Not only Athens, our home divine,
Hath temples then, with an ordered line
Of pillars, and streets with many a sign
 To guide through the Holy Places!
This House of Loxias Leto-born
With eyelid shining accosts the morn
 And light from its twofold faces.

VARIOUS MAIDENS [*in conversation*]:

—Ah, look this way; Look!
 'Tis the Snake of Lerna, shorn
 Of her heads by a golden hook.
 'Tis He, the Alcmæna-born!
—Here, darling, turn thine eyes.
—I see.—And to help him hies,
 With a fire-brand in his hold . . .
 Is it he of whom they told
 Those stories beside my loom?
 Armed Iolaüs, long in use
 To share alway with the Son of Zeus
 The Labours of his doom?
—Ah, and look yonder too.
 Yonder, a wondrous deed;
 'Tis one on a wingèd steed
 Quelling that awful thing
 Three-formed, fire-vomiting.
—All round I turn my view.

—See ye the wild affray
 In the Giants' stony lair?
—Nay, friends, I look this way.
—Enkelados! Seest him there?
 Seest thou against him wield
 Her gorgon-bordered shield
 Some goddess . . . ?—I see. I see!
 Pallas, my own! 'Tis she.
—And there! The fiery thunder-rod
 Terrific in the hand of God,
 Smiting afar it flies!
 And yonder! 'Tis some giant dire
 In rage that he consumes with fire.

—I see. 'Tis Mimas!—There again
Another Earth-child lieth slain,
Quelled by the peaceful ivy-rod
Of mystic Dionyse.

LEADER

[addressing ION, as he returns from the Temple.]

Thou by the portal, thee I call!
Is it permitted that we go
Beyond the threshold: we are all
Bare-footed?

ION

Nay, stranger maids, it may not be.

LEADER

May we even so
Have speech with thee, and seek to learn . . .

ION

What is it ye would know or see?

LEADER

Doth Phoebus' precinct here inurn
Truly the Earth's mid-navel stone?

ION

Surely 'tis here, with garlands tied,
And gorgon heads on either side.

LEADER

Aye, far that tale hath flown.

ION

If in the forecourt ye have slain
The offering due, and now would fain
Put your own questions to the god,

Pass to the sanctuary within.
But without sacrifice of blood
The Holy Place ye may not win.

LEADER

I understand. Nowise
Would we transgress the rule.
That which is here in full
Measure will feast our eyes.

ION

'Tis lawful; feast your eyes on all.

LEADER

O'er all Apollo's field to roam
My mistress sets me free.

ION

And what great house doth hold you thrall?

LEADER

Neighbour to Pallas is the home
Of her whose thralls we be.
But see who comes. 'Tis she.

*[Enter slowly CREUSA; she stands still, gazing at the Temple with tears in her eyes.
ION cannot take his eyes from her.]*

ION *[to himself]*

What nobleness! Thy bearing is a sign,
Thou unknown woman, of a lordly line.
How oft in human kind one glance can trace
By look and bearing a man's noble race.
Ha! Strange! She gazes at the holy fane
Of Loxias; then shuts her eyes again,
And all that noble cheek is wet with tears.

Lady, what thoughts have touched thee, or what fears?
Here, at the god's pure Temple, which to see
Makes all men glad, thou weapest silently.

CREUSA

Fair youth, I count it no discourteous thing
To wonder at these tears and whence they spring.
'Tis that, on seeing Apollo's dwelling-place,
My mind fled off to my own home, to trace
Lines of a far-off wrong . . . Ah, women still
Are born to suffer, gods to work their will!
How else? What help is there, when those who do
The wrong that slays us are our judges too?

ION

What dark grief, lady, lies on thee so sore?

CREUSA

'Tis naught, I have shot my arrow, and no more
Will speak of it. Give thou no thought thereto.

ION

Who art thou, and whence journeying? Would I knew
Thy land, and how 'tis meet to speak thy name.

CREUSA

Creusa, King Erechtheus' child. I claim
As birthplace the Athenian citadel.

ION

So noble a city, and so memorable
A lineage! Truly, high is thy estate.

CREUSA

So far, no further, I am fortunate.

ION

Is it true, in God's name, as the legends go . . .

CREUSA

What legends, youth? What is it thou wouldst know?

ION

Thy father's primal father sprang from earth?

CREUSA

Small help to me is Erichthonius' birth.

ION

Athena raised him from the furrowed sod?

CREUSA

With virgin hands. She knew no motherhood.

ION

And gave him, by the pictures I have seen . . .

CREUSA

To Cecrops' daughters to keep safe, unseen.

ION

And they, I have heard, the veiling coffer broke?

CREUSA

And died therefor. Their life-blood stained the rock.

ION

Marvellous!

Is this, then, true or just vain fantasy?

CREUSA

What? Ask thy fill. No business presseth me.

ION

Thy sire, Erechtheus, his own daughters slew?

CREUSA

In sacrifice to save the land; 'tis true.

ION

How came it thou wast slain not with the rest?

CREUSA

I was a babe, then, at my mother's breast.

ION

And him the earth yawned and swallowed? Can it be?

CREUSA

He sank where struck the trident of the sea . . .

[A pause

ION

"The Long Rocks" is a place there, is it not?

CREUSA

Why ask me that? . . . It stirs a sleeping thought.

ION

The Pythian and his fires fill it with grace.

CREUSA

Grace?—Would to god I had never seen the place.

ION

Why shrinkest thou from what our god holds dear?

CREUSA

'Tis naught . . . I know a vile deed plotted there.

ION

What lord of Athens, lady, won thy hand?

CREUSA

None. 'Twas one summoned from an alien land.

ION

Alien? Then surely of some royal line.

CREUSA

Xuthus, an Aeolid of race divine.

ION

How could an alien a bride so grand?

CREUSA

Euboea's name you know, our neighbour land? . . .

ION

The lapping wave, they say, all round it runs.

CREUSA

That isle he conquered, leagued with Athens' sons.

ION

A friend in war, who thus became thy lord?

CREUSA

Even so; my dowry was his spear's reward.

ION

Is it with him thou travellest, or alone?

CREUSA

With him. But to Trophonius now he is gone.

ION

To see the cave, or seek the oracle?

CREUSA

To ask one question, there and here as well.

ION

'Tis fruits of the earth, or children, brings thee here?

CREUSA

We are childless still, though married many a year.

ION

Hast ne'er borne child, ne'er known a mother's stress?

CREUSA

Well Phoebus knows my utter childlessness.

ION

Poor lady!
'Mid all thy fortune this is misery.

CREUSA

But who art thou? Proud must thy mother be.

ION

Apollo's slave I am called—and rightly called.

CREUSA

A city's gift? Or by some master sold?

ION

They call me His; no more is known of me.

CREUSA

Poor boy! Then I in turn must pity thee.

ION

No mother, nor yet father, have I known.

CREUSA

Thou dwellest here, with no place of thine own?

ION

All God's house; sleeping where sleep falls on me.

CREUSA

Thou camest in boyhood here, or infancy?

ION

I was a babe, they say who claim to know.

CREUSA

Some woman suckled you, who found you so?

ION

I knew never the breast. She picked me up.

CREUSA

Who, poor child? . . . Others then have drunk my cup!

ION

The Prophetess. My only mother she.

CREUSA

And on to manhood, who supported thee?

ION

The altars feed me, and visitors who pass.

CREUSA

Thy mother has suffered sore, who'er she was.

ION

Some woman's wrong produced me, I should guess.

CREUSA

Thou hast some wealth? this is no beggar's dress.

ION

Thralls to the God, his livery we wear.

CREUSA

Didst never seek to know . . . didst never care?

ION

Lady, how can I seek? I have no clue.

CREUSA

Alas!

Much the same thing befell a girl I knew.

ION

Who? She might help me. That were happiness.

CREUSA

'Tis for her sake I have come here . . . husbandless.

ION

What is thy wish? For service, count on me.

CREUSA

To ask the God one question . . . secretly.

ION

Tell me. I will prepare the oracle.

CREUSA

Her tale . . . No; 'tis a thing I cannot tell.

ION

A vain thing, shame! Thou wilt see no fruit thereof.

CREUSA

She says with Phoebus she was joined . . . in love.

ION

With the God! She, a woman! Speak it not.

CREUSA

And bore a secret child, by him begot.

ION

Impossible! . . . 'Tis some man's foul deed she hides.

CREUSA

By her tale . . . she hath had more wrong besides.

ION

How . . . if 'tis true that with a God she lay?

CREUSA

The babe she bore she hid and put away.

ION

Exposed? And that child, is he living still?

CREUSA

Who knows? That I must ask the oracle.

ION

If not alive, how came it by its death?

CREUSA

Poor baby, torn by wild beasts, so she saith.

ION

Wild beasts? What reason had she for that thought?

CREUSA

She searched where he had lain and found him not.

ION

Were any marks of blood about the place?

CREUSA

No. She searched well, she says, but found no trace.

ION

Since he thus vanished, how long would it be?

CRUESA

If living, he would be a lad like thee.

ION

The god has wronged her, left her to her pain!

CREUSA

The woman never has borne child again.

ION

Did the god take and rear him as his own?

CREUSA *[Indignantly]*

Steal what was hers and make it his alone?

ION

How the tale chimes with my own history!

CREUSA

For sure, some mother somewhere pines for thee.

ION

That grief was half forgotten; let it rest!

CREUSA

Forgive me.—What of my sad friend's request?

ION

One thing makes me despair of helping her.

CREUSA

In her whole life what is there but despair?

ION

Canst make him speak the thing he seeks to hide?

CREUSA

Shall Truth in Truth's own temple be denied?

ION

Question him not. Great shame to him it were.

CREUSA

His be the shame! 'Tis agony to her.

ION

No man on earth would ask that question. No;
'Twould be at his own altar-fire to show
The god unrighteous. He would surely smite
A questioner who so misused his right.
Forget thy quest, lady. 'Twould like me ill
To use his oracle to thwart his will.
And 'tis to that stark madness we should fall,
Trying to force the god, in front of all,
To show what most he hides, by offerings
Of slaughtered sheep or signs of fluttering wings.
Be sure, a gift that gods unwilling give
Itself unwilling comes, and will not live.
That only blesseth which is meant to bless.

LEADER

Man has his multitudes, and grief no less
Her multitudinous shapes; but who shall find
One single cloudless life in all mankind?

CREUSA

Thou god, unrighteous art thou still today
As erstwhile to that woman far away
Whose words are here! Thy son thou couldst have saved;
And wouldst not; nor the knowledge that she craved
Share with his mother, that if dead she might
Build him some tomb, pay him some funeral rite.
If living . . . But no more! God will not let
Me know the thing I crave. I must forget.

Fair youth, I see mine honoured lord, who there
Approacheth from Trophonius' caverned lair.
Prithee, no word of this our colloquy.
'Twould shame me thus to have my secret plea
Discovered; and the matter might be wrought
Further, to issues other than I thought.
Ah, hard to tread are woman's ways with men;
The true confounded with the false, and then
All hated! We are born but to be cursed.

[*Enter XUTHUS. He goes straight to the entrance of the shrine. CREUSA, much shaken, has time to recover.*

XUTHUS

The god must have my salutation first.
All hail, Lord! (*Returning*) And thou, too, wife. Do I see
That my late coming has affrighted thee?

CREUSA

Not so. It chimed full closely with my thought.
What answer from Trophonius hast thou brought
Whereby our mating may not fruitless fall?

XUTHUS

The word of Phoebus he would not forestall,
But this he said; that from this journey now
I shall return not childless . . . no, nor thou!

CREUSA

O holy mother of Phoebus, blessed be
This journey! . . . And for him, assuredly
He knows the whole tale of us twain; Oh, may
It change and turn even now a happier way.

XUTHUS

It will.—Now, where is the god's minister?

ION

Outside, 'tis I. Within, 'twill be the care
Of others round the tripod throned in state,
High Delphians, by the god's lot designate.

XUTHUS

Enough. That gives me all I need to know.
I had best go straight within. Already, so
They tell me, there is held outside the doors
A general sacrifice for visitors.
At once, therefore, the day being favourable,
I must seek answer from the oracle.
Meantime, go thou, my wife, with fronds of bay,
And in my name at all the altars pray
That fruitful words may meet me from the throne.

CREUSA

I will, I will. (*Exit XUTHUS into the Temple*) If Loxias will atone
That wrong even now . . . he cannot be a friend
In full, but I will take what God may send.

[*Exit CREUSA out to the Precinct.*]

ION

What can the woman mean, her every word
With secret cavil charged against our Lord?
Loves she so much that friend for whom she pleads,
Or is she holding back some tale that needs
Silence? . . . But why this fond anxiety
About the strange princess? She is naught to me . . .
Where are my golden ewers? I must away
And fill the sprinklers for the holy spray.

But Phoebus, what possessed him? Aye, and who
Can chide him? Force a maiden . . . can he do
Such deeds? And then forsake her? Propagate
A child unknown and leave him to his fate!
No, no! Ye that have power, seek to pursue
Goodness. If mortal man does wrong, 'tis you,
The gods, who rightly punish him. Shall they
Who wrote the laws their own laws disobey?
If ever—well I know it could not be;
I play with fancy—if, in equity,
Thou and Poseidon, aye, and Zeus above
Paid forfeit for your deeds of lawless love,

The fines would soon strip all your temples bare.
Unrighteous, only for your joys ye care,
Not for wise thought! Blame not weak men who stray
In gods' footsteps. Blame them who showed the way.

[Exit

CHORUS

[*They pray Athena and Artemis, the virgin goddesses, to help in blessing the House of Erechtheus with children.*

Thou who hast never known [Str.
Mother nor child nor travail, Thou our own
Athena, by Promethean fire
Flashed from the brain of Zeus, thy sire,
Thou conquering Thought, whose name is blest
Down from Olympus' golden crest
Come to the Pythian Way, whereon,
'Mid dancers round the tripod throne,
A voice from Earth's mid Altar tells
The God's unfailing oracles.
Thou too be with her, child of bliss,
Letoan daughter, Artemis;
Ye twain divine and virgins twain,
Plead, for ye shall not plead in vain,
With sister voices, and implore
That by your brother's sovereign hest
The old House of Erechtheus evermore
With child on child be blest.

Where shall man find of bliss [Antistr.
A fount that fails not ever, like to this;
An old dark house lit up in truth
With children's beauty, children's youth,
Who shall to lives unborn uphold
The steadfast heritage of old.
A father's joy when skies are clear,
Comfort when clouds about him stand,
A strong arm and a faithful spear
When foes surround the fatherland.
Oh, precious above riches rare
Or palaces of royal art
I hold the toil and tender care
Of children, children true of heart.
In barren life there is no health;
I praise not the delights thereof.
Poor let me be, ye gods, in land and wealth,
But rich in a child's love.

O haunts of Pan, O heights that sleep [Epode.
Above the Long Rocks' caverned steep,
Where ghostlike on the grassy floor
The Aglaurid sisters by the door

Of Pallas wind and wave:
They dance to music echoing
And failing from an unknown spring,
Where thou, O Pan, dost pipe and sing
Deep in thy sunless cave.

And there a maid, alone, forlorn,
By Phoebus mastered, bore a child . . .
Alas, strange tale of lust and scorn! . . .
And did she cast him to the wild,
By dogs and vultures to be torn!
Ah me, 'twas ever so;
Never in histories of old,
Or tales that round our loom were told,
A child gotten of god hath borne
To woman aught but woe.

[*Enter ION.*

ION

Ye handmaids, keep ye still your watch about the altars, where they burn
Their incense to the god? Ye wait, methinks, your mistress's return.
But what of Xuthus? Hath he left the tripod and the holy place?
Or waits he still within to seek the god's word on his childlessness?

LEADER

He is still within, fair youth. No sign as yet of his return we see.
But hark! A noise of opening doors; 'tis someone coming. Aye, 'tis he.
[*Enter XUTHUS wildly excited.*

XUTHUS

Bless you, my child! Be that my word of hail, to greet you as is due.

ION [Coldly.

'Tis a good word, but pray be still. Tis best so, both for me and you.

XUTHUS

Oh, let me kiss your hand and fold your body close in my embrace.

ION

Man, are you sane? Or struck by some strange frenzy from the holy place?

XUTHUS

Most sane. I see the thing I love and will not let it pass away.

ION

Keep further back! Do not derange these wreaths that are the god's array.

XUTHUS

Clasp you I will! No robbery this, my own that I had lost I claim.

ION

I give you warning, let me go! Or will you test this arrow's aim?

XUTHUS

Why do you seek to shun me? Try to know your best-beloved, your own!

ION

I love not to teach manners to a madman, alien and unknown.

XUTHUS

Then kill me; lay me on my pyre! Your father's murderer you will be.

ION

How can you be my father? Do you seek to make a jest of me?

XUTHUS

Not so; the tale I have to tell will like a flowing river run.

ION

What are you trying to say?

XUTHUS

I am your father, boy, and you my son.

ION

Who says this?

XUTHUS

Loxias; he gave you shelter, knowing you were mine.

ION

Who vouches for your tale?

XUTHUS

Myself; I heard, I saw, his word and sign.

ION

Some riddling word that you misread!

XUTHUS

You think I cannot hear aright?

ION

What were Apollo's actual words?

XUTHUS

That he who first should meet my sight . . .

ION

Who first should meet you—how and when?

XUTHUS

Now, as I issue from the shrine.

ION

What did he say of him?

XUTHUS

That man would be my son, he told me, mine.

ION

Your own by birth, or by his gift?

XUTHUS

His gift, yes; but by me begot.

ION

There was no other man you met before me?

XUTHUS

No, child; there was not.

ION

How can such things have come about?

XUTHUS

It leaves you wondering; me as well.

ION

Enough.—My mother, who was she who gave me birth?

XUTHUS

I cannot tell.

ION

And Phoebus never said?

XUTHUS

Delight so filled me that I asked no more.

ION

Am I some fruit of earth?

XUTHUS

There springs no human fruit from that hard floor.

ION

Then how can I be yours?

XUTHUS

My child, I know not, but the God must know.

ION

Another question we must raise and leave that.

XUTHUS

Yes, child, better so.

ION

Love outside wedlock have you known?

XUTHUS

Yes, in the lawlessness of youth.

ION

Before you wedded this princess?

XUTHUS

Oh, never afterwards, in truth.

ION

Can that, then, be the time that you begat me?

XUTHUS

Well, the times would fit.

ION

And then I came to Delphi; how was that?

XUTHUS

I cannot fathom it.

ION

Such a long journey from your land.

XUTHUS

I cannot make it out at all.

ION

But stay; have you been here before?

XUTHUS

Once, for a Bacchic Festival.

ION

You stayed with some appointed host?

XUTHUS

Yes, and some Delphian girls were there.

ION

He took you to their orgies?

XUTHUS

Yes;

Maenads, possessed of god they were.

ION

You kept your head? or did the wine . . .

XUTHUS

I yielded to the Bacchic trance.

ION

Ah, that is where my life began.

XUTHUS

Revealed now by the wheel of Chance.

ION

How came I to this sacred place?

XUTHUS

Perchance the girl exposed you here.

ION

Slave-birth at least I have escaped!

XUTHUS

Now greet your father. All is clear.

ION

Surely. I must not doubt the god.

XUTHUS

Against all reason that would be.

ION

And what more can I ask of fate . . .

XUTHUS

You see now as you ought to see.

ION

Than to be born to one in line from Zeus?

XUTHUS

And that fate brings to you!

ION *[after hesitation*

Father; I greet thee by that name.

XUTHUS

Oh, truest name, and happiest!

ION

And blessed be this day that now is with us!

XUTHUS

It has made me blest.

ION *[A pause: then with longing.*

Mother! Dear Mother! Can it be that some day I shall see you too
Before me? More than ever yet, where'er you are, I long for you.
And now it may be, you are dead. Then there is nothing I can do.

[ION makes a gesture of despair and remains sad.

LEADER

The fortunes of the House are as mine own.
Yet, would my mistress were not thus alone
Childless—and through her, old Erechtheus' line!

XUTHUS

My son, most featly did the god design
Thy finding. I have thee, and thou hast won
The ties of home and love, who erst had none.
But that upleaping of thy heart: I vow
I understand. I feel it even as thou.
Thou cravest for thy mother; I too would see
What manner of woman bore this child to me . . .
But that can wait. In due time we may well
Find her. But first, now, bid a long farewell
To the god's precinct and this vagabond
Service; come forth, one-hearted with thy fond
Father, to Athens. Think what waits thee there;
A father's royal sceptre and a share
In wealth abundant. Here thou art forlorn,
Poor, fatherless; there rich and nobly born.
Art silent?
Thine eye to earth cast down? Hast fallen to thought,
So sudden sad, and our great joy forgot?
To see thee flings on me a cloud of fear.

ION

Things wear not the same face, when looked at near,
As at first sight, far off. Most truly I greet
With joy this fortune that hath let me meet
At last my Father . . . Yet, give ear to me
Now, till I open all my mind to thee.
Athens! A folk born of the soil, not brought
From other lands at all, so I am taught,
Has made that city. Think; should I not bear
A twofold stain, to come intruding there,
My father alien and myself base-born?
How should I bear that twofold weight of scorn?
If with that shame I rest, ambitionless,
What shall I be? A blank, a nothingness—
Yet, if among the princes of the state
I claim to sit, shall I not earn much hate
Of the weaker folk? All power breeds jealousy.
Besides, many good men, who well might be
Wise leaders, hold their peace and seek no rule
Nor office; such as they would call me fool
And vain, lacking the wisdom to stand clear
Of conflict in a city racked with fear.
Others there are with famous names, who play
Great parts in the land's guidance; will not they,
The more I rise in power, the keenlier throw
Their voice against me? Sure, 'tis always so;
Those who rule cities, counted patriots great,
Keep for their rivals their most lively hate.
And then, at home, an alien in your fold,
Forced on a childless woman, who of old

Had in all fortunes a full share with thee,
Which now is lost! Will she not bitterly
Resent her loneliness? Will she not hate—
And with good reason—me, standing in state
Close to thy throne and smiled on as thy son?
Will every word not stab that heart, alone
And childless? . . . And thyself, what choice for thee?
Slight me and look to her? Or else give me
Preferment, and have all the house distraught . . .
What deeds of blood, what poisonings, have been wrought
By women on men who wronged them! But apart
From that, father, I pity from my heart
Thy wife, a childless wife, nearing old age.
'Tis all unmeet that one of heritage
So noble by this wrong should be struck down.

I know men count it great to wear a crown;
No, 'tis a fair front, but the house within
A place of pain. What king hath ever been
At peace or happy, striving, amid fears
And sidelong glances, to prolong his years
Unmurdered? Nay, for joy in common things
Give me the plain man's circuit, not the king's,
Kings have no friends, save of the baser kind.
They hate, from sick fear, those of nobler mind.
"Gold," you say, "outweighs all; a king enjoys
His riches." No; to start at every noise,
Clutching my gold, is not the life for me.
Better a low estate from troubles free.

Think, Father, what good things were round me here.
First, what men reckon beyond all things dear,
Leisure; then no great turmoil; no base crowd
To thrust me from my path. To have some loud
Ill-bred man jostling one is hard to bear.
Round me were pilgrims whom I led in prayer;
Not men with gloomy faces, but all glad.
To those departing on their way I bade
God-speed; the newcomers 'twas mine to greet,
Fresh faces alway, which is alway sweet.
Then, what all pray for, though some like it not,
An innocent life, was here my natural lot
In the god's service, both by law and by
My natural bent. Revolving carefully
All these things, better in this quiet shrine
Is life to me than in that city of thine.
Here let me live. Man's life can be as sweet
Content with little as with pride replete.

LEADER

Oh, noble words, if but the bent thereof
May help the peace of mind of her I love.

XUTHUS

Oh, cease such talk! Learn to be rich and great.
Here where I found thee, son, I will instate
Our joint life. First a banquet I will hold,
Then pay the Birth Rite that was due of old.
For thee, I now will treat thee as a guest
Whom to my house I welcome with a feast
And take with me to Athens. Thou shalt there
Still be no kin, only a sightseer;
I would not wound my wife, now left alone
Childless, with this good fortune of my own.
Later, I will persuade her in thy hand
To let my sceptre lie, ruling the land.
And now, since first when from the shrine I came
I looked on thee, ION I name thy name.
So fortune wills it.

Gather now a throng
Of thine old comrades here; bring them along
To a great feast of oxen slain. 'Twill be
Thy farewell, ere thou leave this land with me.

[Turning to the Chorus: abruptly.]

Ye thralls, of all this tale no word must fly
Abroad: speak to your mistress and you die!

[Exit XUTHUS.]

ION

Well, I will go. In this high fortune yet
Is one thing lacking. If I am ne'er to get
Nearer to her who bare me . . . there is naught
In life to live for! To speak all my thought,
Most would I pray it were a woman born
In Athens were my mother. Then no scorn
Were on me from her side, and speech were free.
If in a true-bred land one alien be,
Whate'er the laws may say, his tongue is still
A slave's tongue. He can speak not what he will.

[Exit ION.]

CHORUS *[Different members conversing.]*

—Tears I see, and murmuring *[Str.]*
Of grief, and sudden sobs that spring
Unbidden, when my Queen shall know
This tale—a child in secret born

Her husband's heir, while she must go
Childless, and her great house forlorn.
—Alas, thou prophet Leto-born,
How darkly doth thy music show
Its meaning! He, thy fosterling,
Whence comes he? from what woman's brood,
Of alien rearing, alien blood,
About thy temple wandering?

—That oracle, it likes me not;
Is there some guile, some hidden plot?
What means it, that such chances here
Together meet? 'Tis that I fear.
The unknown youth, the tale unknown
He tells; and something all his own
He dares not utter! Mystery
Or craft? Oh, craft, 'tis plain to see.

—Friends, shall we go to her, and fall
Before her, telling fearlessly
How he who was her all in all,
Whose every hope was as her own,
Clings to his secret prize alone,
And she is left, with greying head,
Unfriended and un comforted?

[*Antistr.*

—The schemer! To an alien throne
He hath mounted through her power alone,
Curse him! and now will give his wife,
No portion in his secret life.

—I pray no god to his desire
Give ear, nor bless his altar fire!
Soon he shall know how far above
All others 'tis my Queen I love.
—And that strange feast, how will it run
Today for that strange sire and son!

—Ye ridges of Parnassus, ye
Who guard the crest, the rocky height,
Where Bacchus in high revelry
His torches tosseth, leaping light
Amid the Maids of Mystery,
His dancers in the deep midnight;
Let not that alien youth to my
Belovèd City find his way.
Ere that, ere that . . . Oh, let him die!
Let darkness take his new-found day!
No place for an invading foe,
No place hath Athens for a new
Usurping King! One king we know,
Our own Erechtheus, old and true!

[*Epode.*

[*Enter CREUSA helping the Old Retainer.*

CREUSA

Old friend, who guided faithfully my dear
Father, Erechtheus, when he still was here,
Climb with me, up to the steep Temple Way,
To share my joy if Loxias today
About my child hath answered as is meet.
Joy shared with one we love is doubly sweet,
And if—which heaven forbid—our quest go ill,
To look into a friend's eyes giveth still
Some comfort . . . To my father you were true
In care, your mistress now must care for you.

RETAINER

My daughter, worthy of a noble race
Thy gentle heart is. Thou dost not disgrace
Thine ancient sires, true fruits of Attic land.
Lead, lead me to the place. Give me thy hand.
"Steep is the prophet's way." Thy hand to assuage
My aching limb brings medicine to mine age.

CREUSA

Follow. Be careful where your steps are put.

RETAINER

The mind is quick enough, though slow the foot.

CREUSA

Feel with your staff the pathway's winding rim.

RETAINER

The staff is blind too when the eyes are dim.

CREUSA

'Tis true; yet, though thou art weary, fall not back.

RETAINER

'Tis not the will, 'tis but the strength I lack.

[He sinks on the steps.]

CREUSA

Ye women, faithful workers of my loom,
Say, with what answer hath my husband come
From the god's chamber back, touching the quest
Of children that we came for. Ope your breast
And speak, for if the news ye bring is good,
In us ye will not find ingratitude.

CHORUS

Ah, word of fate!

RETAINER

The prelude of your message goes not well.

CHORUS

Unfortunate!

RETAINER

What aileth in my master's oracle?

LEADER

Ah me, what can we? 'Twould be death, he said . . .

CREUSA

What tone is this? What is it that ye dread?

LEADER

Speak or not speak—which is our choice to be?

CREUSA

Speak. Do ye know some evil touching me?

LEADER

Spoke it shall be, though doubly I should die.

No child of thine, mistress, shall ever lie
Nursed in thine arms or feed upon thy breast.

CREUSA

Oh, let me die!

RETAINER

My daughter!

CREUSA

Most unblest!
What can it mean? This blow
Teareth my life apart.
We are lost!

RETAINER

My child!

CREUSA

Ah, woe!
It stabs me to the heart.

RETAINER

Ah, weep not yet . . .

CREUSA

My grief is now and here.

RETAINER

Until we learn . . .

CREUSA

What more have I to fear?

RETAINER

Our Master's fortune; are ye both as one
In barrenness, or strikes it thee alone?

LEADER

To him a child is given by Loxias
Apart from her. A separate gift he has.

CREUSA

Alone! One insult more
Darker than all before!

RETAINER

This child; it shall hereafter be begot
Upon some woman? As yet he liveth not?

LEADER

Nay, born already and full grown withal
The son that Loxias gives. I heard it all.

CREUSA

Oh, 'tis a tale not to be told, a word
Not to be spoke nor heard!

RETAINER

So say I . . . But how ran the oracle?
Who is this son? Thy story plainly tell.

LEADER

"Whoever first shall meet thee from my shrine
Returning," the god said, "that child is thine."

CREUSA [*sobs.*

A life childless, childless!
'Tis his decree.
A house of loneliness,
Without hope, waits for me.

RETAINER

Who met him then? Whom did the god declare
To be his son? How was he seen, and where?

LEADER

Belovèd Queen, thou knowst him. Thou didst see
The youth who swept this temple. It is he.

CREUSA

Oh, but for wings to fly,
 Far from all Hellas, far,
Up through the yielding sky
 To some dim Western star!
Oh, friends, this agony!

RETAINER

Know ye what name the father gave this child?
Or was none spoken? Was he left unstyled?

LEADER

ION—the first sight seen upon his way.

RETAINER

Or who the mother was . . .

LEADER

 I cannot say.
Howbeit, to tell thee of Xuthus all I know,
Off on a twofold quest I saw him go,
A feast for a new friend; also a rite
For a son's birth. Out of our lady's sight,
Alone with this new son, 'tis his intent
To hold a great feast in some sacred tent.

RETAINER

We have been betrayed! We, for your wrongs are mine,
Mistress. Your husband by a thought-out line
Of outrage seeks to abuse and cast us out

From old Erechtheus' house. I speak without
Hate against him, only with love for you.
'Tis plain. He had no right of birth, but through
Marriage with you he planned to make his own
Your house, your heritage, your crown and throne,
While on another woman, safely hid,
Getting a secret son. 'Twas thus he did.
You being without child, he would not share
Your fortune nor with you his burden bear.
He took some slave, made her his secret bride,
Begot this son, and sent him here, to hide
And rear to manhood, to some Delphian guest,
Who, thinking what would hide the infant best,
Loose in the temple left him to be reared.
So he grew up, and Xuthus, when he heard
The babe was now a man, persuaded you,
Being childless still, to journey here and sue
The god for help . . . 'Twas not the god, 'twas he,
Who lied and wove this tangled history
To explain the child. Discovered, he would be
Apollo's gift; still hidden, patiently
Xuthus could wait for the right hour to hand
On to this boy the kingship of the land.

LEADER

Workers of wickedness! All such I hate,
Whose ugly aims smooth counsels decorate.
Rude but true-hearted be my friends in need,
Not great in word and wit but false in deed.

RETAINER

Then, last, worst insult to thy childless lot,
A motherless, unacknowledged, slave-begot
Bastard as master in thy house shall reign.
The wrong done were but single had he ta'en,
With thy consent, some maid of gentle race
To bear his child, pleading thy barrenness.
If that displeased thee, home he should have hied
And sought some Aeolid princess for his bride.

But now, what? What revenge doth best beseem
A woman? Take a sword? Think of a scheme?
A poison? Something swift to slay those two,
Father and son, ere they bring death to you?
To falter now is to give up your life.
Two foes beneath one roof—in such close strife
Or one head or the other quick must fall.
Lo, I am with thee to the end of all!
To slay that stripling, I can make my way
In where the feast is laid; and there repay

The house whose bread I have eaten. What care I
The deed once done, whether I live or die?
Slaves have a sorry name, but if they be
True-souled they have one honour with the free.

LEADER

Dear mistress, every grief that falls on you
Is mine. Come life come death, I will be true.

CREUSA *[To herself.]*

My heart, how can I hold my peace?
Yet how unveil that hour so black,
And let all thoughts of honour cease?
What is there now to hold me back?
What care I to be praised or loved?
My husband is a traitor proved;
My child, my home, are gone from me;
Gone all the hopes that silently
I fostered with a vain intent;
For that I hid my ravishment,
My motherhood, my agony.

[openly.]

No, by the heaven's all-starrèd zone,
By her upon the Rock, our own
Athena; yea, and by the shore
Of Triton's Lake, her holiest—
That hour of shame shall now no more
Lie hidden! I will clear my breast
Of secrets and at last have rest.

Mine eyes with tears are brimming o'er,
My whole soul sick with misery,
A victim of cold malice I,
From man, from god—a god now proved
A traitor, false to her he loved!

[To the Temple.]

O thou that from thy seven-fold lyre
Canst wake the dead bones of the wild
To song sweet as the Muses' choir,
Here, in the sun, I charge thee plain,
I cry thee scorn, thou god defiled!
Thou camest, thy brow all flashing gold,
Where I was playing with a chain
Of flowers that, in my garment's fold,
I saw flash back thy gold again . . .
There came an iron hold
Down on my wrist and I,

Frightened, I could but cry
"Mother, Mother," and there
Away to thy caverned lair,
Shamelessly, pitilessly,
Dragging, thou heldest me,
Thou god, to lie with thee,
Sating thy lust.—Aye, more,
Woe's me! The child I bore,
Fearing my mother's eye,
In thine own chamber, where
Thou hadst wrought my misery,
I laid him down. And he . . .
He is lost, lost! good meat
For vultures to rend and tear,
My child, Coward! and thine!

And thou . . . Oh, thy lyre is sweet,
And happy thy paeon's tone!
Hark, Son of Leto! thou
Who sufferest them alone
Whom the lot has marked thine own
By Mid Earth's central seat,
Fronting the golden throne,
Humbly thy name to greet—
I make no whispered prayer,
Here where thou needs must hear,
Out in the sun, I now
Blaspheme thee, I name thee, Thou
My lover and my betrayer!
Who now to my husband, one
Who has suffered naught for thee,
Hast given a son, not mine,
My great house to possess;
But my son, mine own,
And thine, false father! thine,
Uncradled, motherless,
Out to the vultures tossed
As carrion! Lost! Lost!

I hate thee! Delos hates thee! Thine own shoot
Of laurel hates thee, and thy tree,
The palm where Leto faithfully
Bore the Great Father's seed to fruit
And gave thee tendance, all hate thee!

LEADER

Oh, what a storehouse openeth, wide and deep,
Of sorrows! Who could hear thee and not weep?

RETAINER

Daughter, to gaze into thine eyes doth blind
Mine own with pity. I cannot rule my mind.
Great waves above us break and, as I bale
One, a worse flood bursts o'er me at thy tale.
Great wrongs I knew before, but thou art flown
Out on strange ways, towards miseries unknown.
What sayest thou? What dread witness dost thou bear
'Gainst Loxias? What babe was this? And where
In Athens was he cast away, to fall
A prey to some wild beast? . . . On, tell me all.

CREUSA

I will . . . Oh, I am shamed to speak thereof.

RETAINER

I have a heart to weep with those I love.

CREUSA

A cave called the Long Rocks, you know it well,
On the north edge of Cecrops' citadel.

RETAINER

Aye, with an altar and a shrine of Pan.

CREUSA

Once in that cave a deadly race I ran.

RETAINER

What race, Child? My tears run to meet thy tale.

CREUSA

'Gainst Phoebus' force striving, to no avail . . .

RETAINER

My daughter, can it be that time I knew . . .

CREUSA

What time? Speak, I will tell you if 'tis true.

RETAINER

You used to weep, you had some secret care.

CREUSA

That was the secret that I now lay bare.

RETAINER

How did you hide it then? What did you plan?

CREUSA

My babe came . . . Oh, bear with me if you can!

RETAINER

Where? Who could tend you? Were you all alone?

CREUSA

Alone; in that cave where the wrong was done.

RETAINER [*With sudden hope.*

Where is the babe? . . . Ah, now you have a child!

CREUSA

Dead! Outcast to the ravens of the wild.

RETAINER

Dead? And Apollo . . . Vile! . . . no succour gave?

CREUSA

No: left him to seek succour in the grave!

RETAINER

Who cast the baby out? . . . Not you, not you?

CREUSA

I, in the dark, swathed up and hid from view.

RETAINER

Had you no comrade? None to help or guide?

CREUSA

My misery and my secret, none beside.

RETAINER

How could you, in that cave, leave him to lie?

CREUSA

How? . . . With wild tears and whispers of good-bye!

RETAINER

Cruel! . . . But oh, the god! More cruel he.

CREUSA

Had you but seen those arms held out to me!

RETAINER

To find your breast? To lie in your embrace?

CREUSA

To rest where I had robbed him of his place.

RETAINER

That deed . . . how came it ever to thy mind?

CREUSA

Surely, I thought, the god would save his kind.

RETAINER

Ah me! The glory of thy house is fled.

[He covers his head with his cloak.]

CREUSA

Old friend! Why do you weep, why hide your head?

RETAINER

Thou art fallen, fallen, and all thy fathers' pride!

CREUSA

So fare all mortal things. Naught shall abide.

RETAINER *[Throwing off his cloak.]*

Child, you must act. No more weak tears for you!

CREUSA

I am beaten, helpless. What am I to do?

RETAINER

Take vengeance on the god who has done thee wrong.

CREUSA

How can I? I so weak and he so strong.

RETAINER

Set fire, even now, to Loxias' sacred fane.

CREUSA

I fear him . . . I have had enough of pain.

RETAINER

Strike where you can then. Your false husband's blood . . .

CREUSA

Ah, no . . . I loved him once, when he was good.

RETAINER

The boy, then, born and framed to wrong thee, slay.

CREUSA

How? . . . I could find the will, were there some way . . .

RETAINER

Arm your own thralls. Give every man his blade.

CREUSA

I might . . . But where should the attempt be made?

RETAINER

Here in the tent. He gives his banquet there.

CREUSA

In the open? No . . . And slaves would never dare

RETAINER

Shrinking? Well, you suggest what can be done.

CREUSA

I have a plan—a swift and secret one.

RETAINER

Swift, secret? Then I am with you, near or far.

CREUSA

Then listen . . . Know you of the Giants' War?

RETAINER

Against the gods, in Phlegra? Yes, I know.

CREUSA

There Earth brought forth the Gorgon, that dire foe.

RETAINER

Her sons to embolden and the gods to affright.

CREUSA

Even so; and Pallas slew her in the fight.

RETAINER

So ran the tale by ancient legends spread.

CREUSA

And wears on her own breast the snake-ringed head.

RETAINER

The Aegis, it is called, Athena's shield.

CREUSA

The sight of it spread panic in the field.

RETAINER

What help is that, against our enemy?

CREUSA [*A slight pause.*]

Does Erichthonius' name mean aught to thee?

RETAINER

Thy race's first forefather, born of Earth.

CREUSA

To him Athena granted at his birth . . .

RETAINER

What gift? Thy speech holds back, as if in dread.

CREUSA

Two blood-drops that the dying Gorgon shed.

RETAINER

Which have some power upon man's life and breath?

CREUSA

One medicines all disease, and one is death.

RETAINER

For the babe's keeping how were they made fast?

CREUSA

With golden chains. Then to my sire they passed.

RETAINER

And on thy father's death the jewel fell . . . ?

CREUSA

To me. Here on my wrist I guard it well.

RETAINER

How did the blood that double virtue gain?

CREUSA

One drop is heart's blood, from the hollow vein . . .

RETAINER

With some strange power? Say what its virtue is.

CREUSA

It fosters life and wards off all disease.

RETAINER

The second then, say what effect it makes.

CREUSA

Death, 'Tis the poison of the Gorgon snakes.

RETAINER

Thou hast not mixed them? They are separate still?

CREUSA

They are kept apart. Good mateth not with ill.

RETAINER

Sweet mistress, all we need is with thee now!

CREUSA

By this the youth shall die: his slayer thou.

RETAINER

Where? How? Speak thou: 'tis mine to do and dare.

CREUSA

In Athens, in my house. Once he is there . . .

RETAINER

Ah, no. You are wrong . . . You too found fault with me.

CREUSA

You spy some danger? . . . Yes, methinks I see.

RETAINER

There, cause or no, suspicions will be worse.

CREUSA

Ah, true. The stepmother, the children's curse!

RETAINER

Best slay him here; here all can be denied.

CREUSA

Yes, and my wrath the earlier satisfied!

RETAINER

And Xuthus snared in the very snare he planned!

CREUSA

To work then! Take this jewel from my hand,
Athena's gift, wrought work of ancient gold.
Go where my husband, hid from me, will hold
His treacherous feast; then, when the meats are o'er,
Wait till they stand in readiness to pour
Libations; then have this drop treasured up
Unseen, and slip it in the young man's cup—
Only in his, none other's, his alone
Who plotteth to usurp my house and throne.
Let this once pass his lips, he ne'er shall tread
Athenian soil, but stay in Delphi—dead!

[Exit CREUSA.]

RETAINER

Go thou, and in the chambers of thy host,
Lie quiet; I will fail not at my post!
O aged feet, be young to do and dare,
Though days and years gainsay thee. Forward fare,
Beside thy mistress; on with her to meet
Her foe, and slay and cast him from his seat.
The laws of God let happier men fulfill
Who live in peace; In war I mean to kill
Mine enemy, and no law shall baulk my will.

[*Exit.*

CHORUS

Dark Hecatê, thou Wender of the Way,
By dark, by daylight, Guide of them that slay,
 Darkly the cup of doom
 Guide to his lips, on whom
My mistress, mine own mistress, makes essay.
Surely 'tis not in vain she harboureth
The blood-drop from the Gorgon's dying breath
For him who would her ancient throne debase.
Oh, never be there set in our high place
An alien; none but high Erechtheus' race!

[*Str.*

But if that death be unaccomplishèd,
Her will denied, and the hour for striking fled,
 If the last hope whereby
 She is upborne, pass by,
What more hath Fate in keeping but the red
Sword, or taut noose, till in one pang her strife
Cease, and away to other forms of life
She pass; she will not here in sunshine stand
And see her house bowed in a stranger's hand,
She, the King's Daughter of a lordly land!

[*Antistr.*

O God of Songs, deep shamèd wilt thou be
If strange eyes share our vigil in the night,
And there, beside the dancing fountain, see
 Our mystic torch's light
Marking the numbered days that rise and die
When even god's starrèd ether danceth high,
Danceth the moon, and Nereids from the sea,
Two-score and ten, and rivers eddying down
To adore the Maiden of the Golden Crown
And the Holy Mother, dance in ecstasy,
Where, sent by thee, this wanderer, coveting
The toil of others, hopeth to be King.

[*Str.*

Alas, ye minstrels that for ever press
Your evil-sounding songs of woman's love,
The love exceeding law and holiness
 That Cypris wotteth of,
Behold how far in honour we outrange

[*Antistr.*

Man's faithless matings. Make your music change,
Your Muse in wrath show what man's deeds have been.
Hath not the Son of Jove's own son forgot
The holiest debt he owes, enduring not,
Childless, to share one fortune with his queen.
He hath turned him to another bed and won
For heir to her great house a bastard son!

[Enter a MESSENGER, slave of Creusa, running.]

MESSENGER

Fair damsels, say where can I find the Queen
My mistress? Through all quarters I have been
Of Delphi, searching, and can find her not.

LEADER

What is it, fellow servant? Why so hot
Your speed of foot? What tiding do you bear?

MESSENGER

We are hunted! The land's rulers everywhere
Seek her for death. By stoning she must bleed.

LEADER

Oh, God! What say you? Is our secret deed
Discovered, how we sought that youth to slay?

MESSENGER

You knew it? A quick price you too will pay.

LEADER

How was it? Who revealed the hidden plot?

MESSENGER

A deed of justice so unjust could not
Lie hidden. The god would not bear the stain.

LEADER

But how? In mercy make thy story plain.
It may be we must die; but even so
We crave . . . Oh, dead or living, let us know!

MESSENGER

Our lady's husband and that son of his
Together left this Temple's boundaries,
To arrange the promised feast and sacrifice.
Then up to where the flames of Dionyse
Dance on the ridges Xuthus took his way
To anoint the Twin Rocks with the appointed spray
For Birth-rite sacrifice. "Son, stay thou here"
He said, "and set the workmen's hands to rear
A great tent. Honour well the Gods of Birth,
And then wait not for me, but start the mirth
And feasting for thy gathered company."
So, with the calves of offering, off went he.

 Straightway the youth on uprights, sheet by sheet,
His tent erected, careful not to meet
The burning rays of noon or westering eve;
One plethron square he made it, to receive
As guests, if need be, the whole Delphian folk.
Then weavings from the sacred store he took
To clothe the frame, things marvellous to the eyes.
First, for the roof, a wing of broideries
He spread, a gift that Heracles, Jove's son
To Phoebus gave, spoils of the Amazon,
With symbols woven of Ouranos on high
And all the assembled wonders of the sky.
The sun toward the fading west his car
Drove, and behind him drew the evening star.
Then Night, black-robèd, on her traceless pair
Wheeled, with a train of stars about her chair.
Then up the mid sky moved the starry Dove
With sword-begirt Orion, and, above,
Revolving Arctos with his tail of gold.
An orbèd moon, still upward moving, told
The mid-month, and the Hyades, most true
Of guides to mariners; then upward drew
The Dawn, and the stars fled before her eyes.

 On the sides, too, were other broideries
Of eastern art, war-ships with prows that ran
To pierce Greek ships, and shapes half-beast half-man
And stags pursued on horseback, and the chase
Of lions ravening in the wilderness.
At the entry Cecrops, with his daughters three,
Writhing in coils —Athenian, sure, must be
That craftsman's hand. Then midway in the tent
He stood great mixing bowls, and forth was sent
A herald who, to full height straining, cried
That Delphians all who would should come inside
And share the banquet. When the room was full

They crowned them with fresh flowers, and bountiful
The feast was. Later, when desire for food
Was sated, in came that old man, and stood
Amid the feasters, and much merriment
He caused, so busily he came and went,
Carried the pitchers, poured the hand-water,
And burned sweet incense made with gum of myrrh.
Then all the golden goblets he alone
Must portion—by no orders but his own,
Then when the time for flutes and loving-cup
For all had come, this greybeard lifted up
His voice: "Away with these light bowls," he said,
"Bring larger vessels, that our guests be led
Quicker to mirth." So men were set to go
With silver cups and golden, to and fro,
Crowding, while he one beaker from the board
Chose out for offering to his new-found lord.
Into that wine he cast a drop of death
Which secretly the Queen—so rumour saith—
Had given to slay that young life in its joy.
No eye had seen it. In his hand the boy
Took with the rest his cup when, lo, he heard
Some slave let fall an inauspicious word.
The lad being temple-trained, true to his role,
Feared the bad sign and bade them bring a bowl
Of untouched wine; meantime out on the floor
He poured his draught and bade the others pour.
So all stood silent, while we filled those fine
Beakers with water pure and Byblian wine.
While this was doing, in there burst a flight
Of sudden pigeons, such as dwell of right
In Phoebus' house, and where the wine lay spilled
The dry beaks dipped and the soft throats were filled.
Harmless was that libation to the rest,
But one, which lighted where the birthday guest
Had poured his, while she there her pleasure took . . .
A-sudden all that feathery form was shook,
And wildly leapt and screamed with a strange cry
Incomprehensible. On every eye
Amazement fell to think what ailed the bird.
Then in one dying gasp she fell, and stirred
No more those roseate feet. Up leapt the young
Fore-destined son, cast off his mantle, flung
Across the table his bare arms, and caught
The old man with a shout; "Who was it, sought
To kill me? Thine was all the meddling; thine,
Greybeard, the hand that offered me the wine!
Confess!" With that he gript the old grey frame
Searching to find wherefrom the poison came.
Twas found, and with fierce questioning they broke
The old man down, and, telling all, he spoke,
Creusa's charge and how the drink was planned.
Then out into the city with his band
Of feasters went the youth of Phoebus' choice

And 'mid the Lords of Delphi raised his voice:
"O holy land, Erechtheus' daughter, she
An alien here, hath sought to murder me."
The rulers then decreed with one accord,
Seeing she had slain the servant of the Lord
Of Delphi, and with blood the sanctuary
Defiled, our mistress shall be stoned and die.
Now all the city is set forth to find
That woman, on a blind road wandering blind,
Who came to Phoebus for a child to pray,
And now child, life and all hath cast away.

[Exit.

CHORUS

- No escape, none. 'Tis death for me.
All seen, all known!
No refuge for my misery!
Poison, the swift echidna's own
In Bacchus' glad libation thrown:
All known, all seen!
New offerings to the dead are here:
My life undone, and for my Queen
Death, death by stone on stone.
Now all is clear.
- Oh, for some wingèd flight afar,
To clouds above or deeps beneath,
Or wind-spèd sail or thundering car,
To escape the horror of that death.
Methinks no secret shall abide
Unseen, save what god wills to hide.
- Unhappy Queen, what suffering still
Waits thee; me also; come it must!
Who sought to do their neighbour ill
That ill shall suffer; 'tis but just.

[Enter CREUSA.

CREUSA

My handmaidens, I am pursued. They come and for my blood they cry,
My blood and death! By Delphic law a thing cast out to death am I.

CHORUS

Unhappy mistress, all that fell we know, and what awaits thee now.

CREUSA

Where can I fly? Out of the house I stole—and none too soon, I trow—

To escape the slayers. Through their line I slipped and came to hide me here.

CHORUS

Where else but to the altar?

CREUSA

Why? How will that help me?

CHORUS

To kill a suppliant; 'tis the law.
They will fear

CREUSA

But 'tis the law that I must die!

CHORUS

Not till they have thee in their hands.

CREUSA

See! See, they come with swords on high!
They have beat me in the race!

CHORUS

Quick, kneel in the ashes.
So thy blood shall be
As god's wrath on thy slayer's head. Enough! Endure what comes to thee.

[CREUSA *clings to the Altar, kneeling in the ashes of sacrifice. Enter a troop of Delphians, led by ION.*

ION

O great bull-hornèd spirit of the flood,
Cephus, came there from thy royal blood
This asp, this dragon with the eyes of fire,
In whom all poison seeketh? Not so dire
Those Gorgon drops wherewith she sought my life.

Seize her; let those smooth-ordered locks in strife

With jagged rocks be torn as down yon steep,
Hurl'd by rude hands, we see her body leap.
My stepmother! She could not wait her hour,
Thank god, to have me in Athens in her power.
Here, with friends round me, I could safely test
What peril and what hate was in thy breast.
Once I were snared within thy doors, right well
I know thou hadst caught and flung my life to Hell.

[He sees that she is at the altar.]

Nay, not the altar, not Apollo's shrine
Shall save thee. "Mercy" wilt thou cry? Not thine
The right to mercy. Mercy is for me
And her, that Mother whom I ne'er may see.
Trick after trick! See what the wretch hath done
To escape us, cowering at the altar stone!
She thinks to evade all justice for her sin.

CREUSA

I charge you, slay me not! I charge you in
The god's name and in mine who am His own.

ION

Thou His! No portion hast thou in him, none!

CREUSA

I give my body to be His this day.

ION

While me, His true possession, thou wilt slay!

CREUSA

Possession? Thy new father's thou must be.

ION

In passing, but the god's eternally.

CREUSA

No, not now. I am now where you have been.

ION

You are outcast, stained with blood; my hands were clean.

CREUSA

Shall I not smite the foe of all my line!?

ION

Foe? Did I come in arms 'gainst thee and thine?

CREUSA

Yes, to burn down the old castle of my sires!

ION

To burn? Where are the torches, where the fires?

CREUSA

To rob me, and to steal my father's throne!

ION

My father's gift; the land he had made his own.

CREUSA

What right had the Aeolid in Pallas' land?

ION

He saved it, saved it by his own strong hand.

CREUSA

A foreign ally is no citizen.

ION

For what I might intend, you killed me, then?

CREUSA

What you intended you would soon have done.

ION

Childless, your envy grudged my sire his son.

CREUSA

If childless, must I needs have you for heir?

ION

In my own father's wealth have I no share?

CREUSA

His shield and spear! Take them! They were his own.

ION

Oh, leave that altar! From god's seat begone!

CREUSA

Ask thy lost mother! She may list to thee.

ION

Thinkst thou to go unpunished, murdering me?

CREUSA

Else on this altar my spilt blood will lie.

ION

Why seekst thou thus in the god's wreaths to die?

CREUSA

If I must suffer, thou shalt suffer too.

ION

'Tis strange, these sacred rules; how all untrue
The gods have made them, how unreasoning.
Why should the guilty have this right to cling
To the altar? Cast them out! God's sanctities
Should never endure the touch of such as these.
Only to save the wronged and innocent
This refuge in the sanctuaries was meant.
Not that, if once they reach the sacred place,
Wicked and good are equal in god's grace.

[*Enter from the inner shrine the PYTHIAN PRIESTESS, bearing in her arms an old cradle.*

PYTHIA

Son, hold thy hand! Behold, I leave my throne
Of prophecy and pass this threshold stone,
I, god's own virgin, chosen from all the land
To see the laws he made unbroken stand.

ION

Mother, though not in flesh, mother in love!

PYTHIA

Aye, call me that. Sweet is the sound thereof.

ION

Hast heard? This woman planned to murder me.

PYTHIA

I heard; nor do I praise thy cruelty.

ION

Must I not strike at one who seeks my life?

PYTHIA

Fierce to the stepson always is the wife.

ION

And I to stepmothers who poison me.

PYTHIA

Peace!
Seek thine own land. This temple sets thee free.

ION [*completely yielding.*

I accept thy charge; say all that I must do.

PYTHIA

Enter thy home unstained, with omens true.

ION

The hand is clean that slays an open foe.

PYTHIA

Such thoughts are not for thee . . . But mark me now

ION

Let me but hear. I know thy loving care.

PYTHIA

Thou seest what burden in my arms I bear?

ION

I see a cradle, old and swathed in bands.

PYTHIA

In this, new-born, thou camest to my hands.

ION

How? This is new; a tale I have never known.

PYTHIA

Before 'twas hid: at last it must be shown.

ION

Hid all these years! Why was it hid at all?

PYTHIA

'Twas His will, here to keep thee his own thrall.

ION

And now His will is changed? . . . How do we know?

PYTHIA

With thy new father now he bids thee go.

ION

Why was the cradle kept? His charge, or why?

PYTHIA

He put some feeling in my heart that I . . . [*she hesitates.*]

ION

That thou . . . Speak on. Complete what thou wouldst say.

PYTHIA

That I should keep it safe until this day.

ION

What bode it to me, of ill or good?

PYTHIA

It holds the tokens of thy babyhood.

[CREUSA watches with interest.

ION

Tokens? Whereby my mother might be sought?

PYTHIA

Even so. 'Tis now His will. Before 'twas not.

ION

O blessed light! This is a wondrous day!

PYTHIA

Take them and seek her. Faint not on thy way.

ION

Through Europe and all Asia till she is mine!

PYTHIA

That thou wilt judge. 'Twas by His will divine
I reared thee, child; and back to thee I give
These vestures which He willed me to receive
And keep, unbidden. Why He willed it so
I know not. That I have kept them none could know,
These long years; none their hiding place could tell.
And now, child, with a mother's love, farewell! [*She turns to go.*

Start on thy quest. Seek first, was there some maid
Of Delphi, ravished, gave thee birth, and laid
In the god's house the burden of her shame;
If not, then search all Hellas. In the name
Of Phoebus, that is the last word shall fall
From me or from the god who hath shared in all!

[Exit into the Temple.

ION

Alas, the tears are wet upon my eyes
Thinking of her, my mother, stealthy-wise
Wedded, who sought to expel me far away

Unwanted; never on her breast I lay;
A slave's life, nameless, in god's house I had.
Ah, good the god hath been to me, but bad
The ways of Fortune. All the time I should
Have lived enwrapped in happy babyhood,
And known life's joy, I was cut off, exiled
From that fond life a mother gives her child.
Poor mother, too! She likewise from the boy
She had born cut off, ne'er knew a mother's joy.

This cradle it were best, methinks, to take
Inside and to the god an offering make,
Lest, if I find, I find not what I crave.
The woman who bore me . . . if she were a slave
'Twere worse to find her than to let things be.
Lord Phoebus, here in offering to thee . . .
And yet, what is it with me? Would I fight
'Gainst the god's purpose, who hath brought to light
Her tokens? Open, then, and see, and dare!
The burden Fate ordains I needs must bear . . .

[He opens the cradle.]

Ah, look! The wrapping of the cradle's fold
By some strange providence hath grown not old.
No mould is on the straps. Yet year on year
These things have lain, hoarded and secret here.

CREUSA

What dream is this? What unimagined sign?

ION

Silence! We know enough of thee and thine . . .

CREUSA

My need will brook no silence. School me not.
The casket there—in that I once set out
In Cecrops' cavern, in the rock on high . . .
Thee, child! . . . I leave this altar though I die.

[Moves towards ION.]

ION

Seize her. She is god-maddened, and she stands
Clear of the altar's emblems.—Bind her hands!

CREUSA

Oh, hack me! Never falter! I cling fast
To this, to thee, and all thy hidden past!

ION

She claims me hers. Such brazenness unknown . . .

CREUSA

At last, she who is yours has found her own!

ION

Her own? . . . And then you tried to murder me!

CREUSA

My child; what more my own could ever be?

ION

Oh, cease this twisting. I will test your claim.

CREUSA

Let all be tested. 'Tis at that I aim.

ION

Is this urn empty, or has it aught within?

CREUSA

Your things, the swathings that I wrapped you in.

ION

Give them a name while yet unseen they lie.

CREUSA

That will I. If I fail thee let me die.

ION

Speak on. . . . Thy daring makes me half afraid.

CREUSA

Then look. A childish sampler that I made . . .

ION

What sort of sampler? Many kinds they make

CREUSA

Unfinished; a child's task for practice sake.

ION

What pattern has it? I will not be misled.

CREUSA

In the mid warp there is a Gorgon's head.

ION

O Zeus, what fate is this that tracks us out?

CREUSA

Ringed like an aegis, with snakes coiled about.

ION

Look . . .

Here is it—as one reads an oracle.

CREUSA

That old, old childwork, but remembered well!

ION

Is there aught else? Or did one happy guess . . .

CREUSA

Serpents, the old sign of our golden race,
Which Pallas left her children to adorn
In Erechthonius' way, the serpent-born.

ION

What mean the snakes? How are they used? Say on.

CREUSA

As necklace for a new-born babe, my son.

ION

'Tis here. And one thing more; oh, tell it me!

CREUSA

A crown of olive from the immortal tree,
The first, by Pallas planted in the rock,
I bound upon thy brow; if of true stock
The wreath is, it shall never lose its green
But bloom as verdant as it e'er hath been . . .

ION

Mother! . . . My own, my nearest. What I see
I welcome, and kiss this cheek that welcomes me.

CREUSA

O child, O light more lovely than the Sun—
The god forgive me!—I hold thee here, my own,
Found, found, the unhop'd for! I thought thee afar, without breath
Below, 'mid the tribes of the lost, with the Mother of Death.

ION

Nay, mother mine; but clasp with arms outspread

Thine own dream—one who died and is not dead.

CREUSA

The heavens break open above me. What cry, what word of flame
Can utter this joy, this sweetness, or tell from whence it came?

ION

What fancy could have seemed more wild to me
Than this—that I am thine, a part of thee?

CREUSA

I tremble still with fear.

ION

Nay, that is past;
Dost fear that still thou hast not what thou hast?

CREUSA

So long ago I had cast all hope away.

[To the PYTHIA who is no longer present.]

From where, O woman, say,
From where my babe fell to those arms of thine?
What hand had borne it to Apollo's shrine?

ION

Surely the hand of god . . . Ah, may the rest
Of life requite us for those years unblest.

CREUSA

My child, my child, 'twas among tears I bore thee,
With weeping wast thou ravished from my breast
And now in joy my cheek is breathing o'er thee,
In very joy, the blessing and the blest.

ION

What toucheth thy heart, mother, toucheth mine.

CREUSA

Childless no more, no more without a line;
My hearth has now its fire, my land its king!
Erechtheus young shall rise;
To the Earth-born House no more shall darkness cling;
To heaven it lifts its eyes.

[A pause.]

ION

Mother, my father should be with us, glad
To share with thee the joy ye both have had.

CREUSA

Father? . . . My child, my child! How fate hath found me out!

ION

What meanst thou?

CREUSA

From without thou camest, from without.

ION

Ah me! The bastard of a maiden's wrong!

CREUSA

No torch, no hallowed song
Helped in the wooing whence thy life was born.

ION

O God! Base-born. Whence, mother, am I sprung?

CREUSA

Lo, I am sworn
By Her, the Gorgon-slayer . . .

ION

What meanest thou?

CREUSA

By Her upon my native rocks I vow,
Throned on the eternal olive-planted hill . . .

ION

Alas, this likes me ill;
Crafty, not plain, these tales!

CREUSA

There in the shade where sing the nightingales
The god . . .

ION

The god?

CREUSA

In secret as I lay . . .

ION

Is this some good, some hope for me! Say on.

CREUSA

Held me, and when ten moons had gone their way,
I bore thee, thee, Apollo's secret son!

ION

A wondrous fortune, if thy tale be true.

CREUSA

Hid from my mother, covering thee I threw
A girl's poor wraps, what webs my shuttle wove,

But held thee not to rest,
Gave thee no mother's breast,
My hands to lave thy body never strove.
In one dread hour
Down in a lonely cave my babe was cast
For wild things to devour, for birds to tear,
And death at last!

ION

Mother, what things to suffer! . . . And to dare!

CREUSA

Fear was it, like a deadly chain, that lay
About me till I cast thy life away.
I killed thee, killed thee, all unwilling, I . . .

ION

And after, by my hands came near to die.

CREUSA

Ah, fearful were those days, and fearful these.
We are tossing to and fro
O'er the great deep
On changing storms that blow
For ever. Oh, let them sleep!
We have suffered enough. From here where winds are wild
May yet some peaceful breeze
Bear us, my child!

LEADER

Well may man see, from what is fallen here,
Naught is too high to hope, too dread to fear.

ION

O Fortune, who transformest in a day
Myriads of lives to triumph or dismay,
By what a narrow line my steps have swerved
From mother-murder and horrors undeserved!
Oh, could I, could I, now in daylight see,
In broad day, how all this has come to be . . .
'Tis sweet to have found you, and this lordly race
You give me, mother, 'tis a wondrous grace.

The rest . . . I fain would speak with you alone.
Come this way, mother mine. This in your own
Ear I would speak, and after veil in shade.
Bethink thee; didst thou not, like many a maid,
To secret love, in a girl's frailty, fall,
And now wilt make the god the cause of all?
Twas to save me, thy child, from a dark blot
Thou hast feigned me Phoebus-born, when I am not?

CREUSA

By Her I swear, who in her conquering car
To Zeus was comrade in the Giants' War,
Pallas, no mortal man thy father was,
But he who reared thee, our Lord Loxias.

ION

Why gave he to another sire his own
Offspring? Why say that I was Xuthus' son?

CREUSA

Not a son born; a gift; to be the heir
He craved; the act of a god's loving care.

ION *[breaking out.*

Is the god true, or he and all his art
Falsehood? 'Tis that, O Mother, racks my heart.

CREUSA

Child, listen. 'Tis a thought that just has come
Across me. In his love he sought a home
For thee, as scion of some noble race.
Hadst thou been known as the god's son, no place
Was thine, nor heritage, nor father's name.
Think; why did I myself not dare to claim
His fatherhood? I came near killing thee;
He gave thee to another and set thee free.

ION

Never so feebly shall this quest of mine
Be solved. I will confront him in his shrine,
And ask him, am I his or man-begot . . .

*[As he approaches the door of the Temple a crack of thunder drives him back and
ATHENA appears.]*

Ha, what is that above the temple? What
Divine face, shining like the sun on high?
Fly, lest we look on things forbidden! Fly,
Mother, unless . . . is this the hour for sight?

ATHENA

Fly not; not from a foe ye take your flight,
But a true friend in Athens and the same
Here. It is I who give your land its name,
Pallas; and from Apollo's side in fleet
Passage I come, who did not deem it meet
Himself to face you twain, lest there be cast
Open reproach against him for things past,
But sent me with his message, that indeed
This woman bore thee from Apollo's seed.
He gave thee to that other, not as son
To father, but to be received as one
By right the fruitage of a royal field.
Then, when the plan of Xuthus was revealed,
Lest thou shouldst perish by her plot or she
By thy revenge, his thought delivered thee.
He meant to keep all silent and make known
Only in Athens how indeed thine own
She is, thou hers, and eke of Phoebus born.
But now to make an end, I come to warn
Ye both of his decrees; for that I here
Have yoked my chariot. To his word give ear.

Departing hence, Creusa, take thy son
To Cecrops' land and on a royal throne
Establish him. He, of Erechtheus' line
True scion, rightly rules this land of mine,
And fame shall win through Hellas. Sons of his,
Four from one root, their names and dignities
Shall leave upon my land and all the folk
Who dwell divided round Athena's Rock.
One tribe shall Geleon gender; after these
Come the Hoplêtes, then the Argadês,
And they whose name doth to my aegis cling,
Aegicorês. From them again shall spring
Sons, who shall fill, when the due season smiles
The sea-born cities of the cyclad isles,
And eke of the Asian shores, all which shall claim
More greatness for the land that bears my name.
Aye, and the coastlands that across the strait
Face one another, this from Asia great,
That from great Europe, they shall hold, and fame
Majestic cleave to the Ionian name.

To thee and Xuthus also shall a child,
Dôrus, be born, from whom a city styled

Dôris shall have due fame in Pelops' land.
And after him Achaios, he whose hand
Shall o'er the shores by Rhion on the sea
Rule, and Achaioi shall that people be.

Blame not Apollo; wisely hath he done.
He made thy travail easy, so that none
Should know; and when the babe was born, and laid
With his due tokens in the cave, he bade
Hermes to take the child upon his arm
And bear him hither, sheltered from all harm;
And tended him nor let his offspring die.

Henceforth let all be secret; let no eye
Nor ear discover that the child is thine.
So the old hope in Xuthus' heart shall shine
Content and comforting, and thou alone,
Woman, shalt know what glory is thine own.
Farewell; to both hereafter rest is given
From suffering and long years of peace with heaven.

ION

O Daughter thou of Zeus most high, never in unbelief or scorn
I hear the word thou speakest. I believe that I in truth was born
Of Loxias and this woman . . . That indeed I doubted not before.

CREUSA

Let my voice too be heard. I praise the god I could not praise before.
He gives me back at last my child whom he forgot and recked not of.
These gates now wear a happy face; nay, all his Temple tells of love,
Which once with hate I hated; now in worship at his door I bend,
And gladly clasp its pendant ring and hail this portal as a friend.

ATHENA

'Tis well thy heart is changed to praise the god, where erst thou didst him wrong.
Slow-seeming are the ways of Heaven, but, e'er the end comes, passing strong.

CREUSA

Then forth, my son, and seek thine home.

ATHENA

Lead on; I too will homeward wend.

CREUSA

Our truest guide, our chosen, thou!

ATHENA

Aye, and for Athens' sake, your friend.

CREUSA

Forth, son, to mount thine ancient throne.

ION

My fortune I do not repel.

CREUSA

Now fare thee well, O Leto-born.
Zeus-child, for ever fare thee well!

[They go out in procession.]

CHORUS

Howso the blows of Fortune fall,
Man, let thy fears away be cast
If faithfully thou serve thy gods;
Being well assured that at the last
The true man hath his certain mede
In the good deeds his hand hath wrought,
But from the evil in his heart
He that is false escapeth not.

NOTES

The name Ion for the ancestor of the Ionians is natural enough, and it is in that connection that he is so named by Apollo. (v. 74 ff.) But various people seem to claim the honour of naming him; Hermes in v. 81, Xuthus in v. 661; compare the Chorus v. 802 and v. 831, and in each case the name is explained as a sort of participle of the verb *eimi*, to go. It looks as if some special significance or interest was attached to the name. Perhaps it carried an omen for the Ionians as travellers destined to "go" on and on till they populate the Aegean islands and sea shores and the plains on which Asia and Europe front one another, as is explained in vv. 1581-

Apart from this play Ion is a very shadowy figure, as indeed are Erechtheus, Erichthonius and all the early kings of Attica before Theseus. They all bear marks of the Athenian boast of being aboriginal or "earth-born." The typical earth-born creature was the snake, hence the Snake-form of Cecrops, of the baby Erichthonius, of the golden chains on the cradles.

P. 13. *Long Rocks*]. Identified with caverns on the N. Wall of the Acropolis.

P. 13. Hermes, like Apollo, is superior to mere human feelings. He treats the exposure of the child as a matter of course. Contrast the feelings of the Old Retainer and Creusa herself, pp. 71 ff.

P. 15, l. 58. *Creusa's hand . . . to Xuthus*]. Xuthus in this play is a rude Aeolid chief from Thessaly, perhaps banished from his own country and serving as a mercenary general in Attica.

P. 16, l. 82. The god disappears as the sun rises. Ion hails the dawn; the Prophetess is supposed to take her seat on the throne; the temple attendants come out to their work, and Ion starts his sweeping. Note that "purity" and even "holiness" mean chiefly "not touched by misfortune or unhappiness." The pilgrims must not speak of evil or look distressed.

Observe in all this scene the charm of peace and reverence: Apollo is still uncriticized and unstained, and Ion is proud of his "slavery."

P. 19, l. 154. *Ha, there the birds . . .*]. A late writer on style, *Demetrius de Eloquentia*, mentions this passage. "For example, the Ion of Euripides snatches up the bow and threatens the swan. The actor has many opportunities of rapid movement, to take the bow, look up to the sky as he talks to the swan and so on . . ." Such references to an actor's movements are very rare.

P. 20, l. 184. *Not only Athens*]. The handmaids are surprised to see such buildings and works of art. Delphi, though a small provincial town, seems quite like the Acropolis. The scenes which they see are probably bas reliefs on the metopes: first Heracles killing the Hydra; Bellerophon mounted on Pegasus killing the Chimaera; then come scenes from the War of the Gods and Giants.

How did women learn the myths and legends? Partly from pictures and sculptures, as here; still more, probably, from the regular practice of having stories told or sung to them as they sat at the loom. Cf. l. 506 p. 42.

P. 22, l. 224. *Earth's mid navel stone*]. Delphi, like Jerusalem in the Middle Ages, was considered the centre of the earth. Two eagles, despatched from opposite ends of the earth, had met there, and the Omphalos, or "Navel Stone," was set up to mark the place, with carvings upon it representing two winged and terrible figures, which might be eagles or gorgons.

P. 24, l. 238. *What nobleness*]. This long dialogue between the unknown mother and son is most skilfully written, and brings out well the attraction which they feel for one another.

P. 24 f., l. 238. This "cry of the blood" is rather discredited in modern times, partly because it has been used too much in centuries of sentimental plays, partly because a modern generation does not believe in it as a true fact. We must remember that in Euripides' time it was still an original effect in drama, and also perhaps that in days when family feeling was so much stronger and more vitally important than it is now

this instinctive "cry" may have been more a reality. Contrast Ion's complete lack of any sympathy towards his alleged father (517 ff.).

Ion observes Creusa with more interest than he would an ordinary pilgrim, and she is not at all offended by his questions. It was rather a breach of religious manners to have tears in your eyes when gazing at the Temple; tears are a bad omen. The earlier part about Erechtheus' sacrifice of his daughter is meant, I think, to suggest a primitive half-savage atmosphere, in which all kinds of strange things are possible.

P. 25, l. 265. *Is it true in God's name . . . ?*] Ion has heard rumours of these queer legends about the primaeval Athenian kings; can such things really be true?

P. 27, l. 277. Erechtheus, in order to save his city from destruction by the enemy, sacrificed his daughter, Chthonia. The other daughters voluntarily shared her death. Cf. the scene in Euripides' *Heraclidae* where Macaria claims the privilege of dying to save her brethren.

P. 27, l. 285. *The Long Rocks.*] It is natural for Ion to ask after the Long Rocks, as they had a special connection with Delphi. On three days and nights in each month watch was kept for lightning appearing at Harma on Mt. Parnes, which was supposed to be a message from the Delphian god. (There is some doubt whether the place of watch was really at the Long Rocks or elsewhere, at another part of the Acropolis.)

P. 29, l. 300. *Trophonius.*] This legendary Boeotian prophet had his oracle in a deep cavern about fifteen miles from Delphi, and almost on the way there from Athens. Of course Creusa wanted to get to Delphi alone, to ask her question.

P. 30, l. 303. *"Fruits of the earth or children."*] The two normal reasons for consulting an oracle.

P. 32, l. 323. *"The altars feed me."*] The sacrifices were a regular source of food both vegetable and animal, and visiting pilgrims would like to give the child food.

P. 37, l. 390. *I must forget.*] Creusa's disappointment is crushing, and in the midst of it she sees Xuthus coming. No wonder he finds her shaken and upset.

P. 38, l. 403. *My late coming.*] He has really come sooner than she expected. His manner is always brusque and businesslike.

P. 40, ll. 429-451. The first part of this speech is quite natural and effective. Ion must wonder at Creusa's behaviour; and also wonder why he should take such an interest in her. It is natural too that he should be shocked at her story of Apollo. But in the latter part he seems to take it all rather lightly. At first hearing he thought it utterly impossible. He seems to lump it with all the similar myths about the disreputable love-affairs of the gods, which may be just "the lies of the poets," much as Aristophanes does of the last scenes of *The Birds*.

This attitude is intelligible enough by itself, but it makes a discord with Ion's previous reverence for Apollo. The passage was seized upon by the Christian writers, Justin Martyr and Clement, to show the wickedness of Pagan gods.

P. 40 ff., ll. 452-509. *First stasimon.*] An appeal to Athena and Artemis to intercede with Apollo, their brother, so that the great House of Erechtheus may not fail for lack of children. Athena, the goddess of Athens, is not a mother, as Hera, for instance, is the mother of Argos. She is not only a virgin goddess but also is credited with a sort of "Immaculate Conception," that is, she was never conceived by woman but sprang like pure thought from the brain of Zeus. The Athenians were her spiritual children,

but not by any process of wedding and birth. She lifted Erichthonius out of the earth.

The cave of Pan is still conjecturally shown on the N.W. wall of the Acropolis, near the Long Rocks. The daughters of Cecrops, Hersê, Pandrosos and Aglauros opened the forbidden chest in which the babe Erichthonius was hidden, and finding a mysterious snake in place of the child went mad and threw themselves over the cliff. Their ghostly forms danced on the Acropolis by night. The wild music, dimly heard, which led the ghost dance, came from the piping of Pan in his deep, sunless cave. In such a place there might be such dreadful doings as Creusa has told of. "We have heard of such legends; the woman always suffers!"

P. 43-52, ll. 517-565. *Bless you my child.*] This false recognition scene is in the tone of Comedy. Xuthus is made ridiculous. Note also his natural embarrassment at Ion's questions in 544 ff.; and, in contrast to Ion, his comparative lack of interest in Ion's deserted mother. In the end Ion reflects with relief that he is not a mere slave; his father is at least of noble birth.

P. 53 ff. ll. 585-647. *Things wear not the same face when looked at near.*] Ion's reluctance to go to Athens is natural, but his speech is more suited to a clever Athenian man of the world than to the innocent temple servant at Delphi. He would still be an alien in Athens; and even true Athenians, if they are wise, had better not make themselves politically prominent in "a city full of fear" where the political leaders hate their rivals worse than their enemies. Then (607 ff.) comes the consideration for Creusa, whom of course he knows and is drawn to, so that he describes exactly what she actually feels and does; then the regular democratic sayings about the life of a king; then a truly felt description of the calm happiness of life in the religious community at Delphi. The personal parts of the speech have real feeling; the rest is rather in the style of conventional rhetoric.

P. 56, l. 650 ff. *Oh cease such talk.*] Xuthus has not much patience with these reflections. His plan is clear and he wastes no time. He will in due course make it all right with his wife. In the meantime—to the Handmaids, with barbaric brusqueness—"Remember; it is death to you if you speak a word of all this."

P. 58 f. ll. 646-724. *Tears I see and murmuring.*] A chorus of not much lyrical beauty but considerable dramatic use, to show how the Handmaids are gradually worked up to a wish for Ion's death. Xuthus' brutal threat is ringing in their ears. They cannot believe that the recognition of father and son has happened by chance. Clearly it is all a long-considered plot to get Xuthus' bastard made king. The boy is in it as well as his father. It is a deadly wrong to the true royal race.

P. 60-80, ll. 725-1047. *Old friend who guided . . .*] This deeply touching scene is the real heart of the tragedy. The tried friendship and affection between the Old Retainer and his mistress, puts all the past story, the ravishment, the exposure and disappearance of the child and the rest, into a different atmosphere. Consider the feelings of the Retainer, and consequently of Creusa herself about the exposure of the child.

After the last chorus it is easy to understand how the old man is worked up to the murder point; the first effect upon Creusa is despairing anger against the god; she will proclaim her own shame and misery, if only she can proclaim his infamy too. He is not only a brutal ravisher, but a false lover also, betraying her whom he has seduced. This most poignant and powerful scene is followed by another of the long and intimate dialogues which are conspicuous in this play.

P. 66, l. 808. *We have been betrayed.*] The Retainer is wrong in thinking that Xuthus has deliberately placed Ion in Delphi and plotted the whole intrigue; otherwise he is

right.

P. 74, 75, ll. 950-970. *Thou art fallen, fallen, and all thy father's pride.*] It is not the mere violation but the exposure of the child and the whole story that makes him feel that the whole house of Erechtheus is for ever fallen. In that state of despair, he feels, all that remains is to kill your enemy and die. Creusa could not kill her husband, who once at least loved her; but the usurping and plotting bastard she might.

P. 73, l. 956. The only abettors or accomplices of her horrible deed were her misery and her secret—that is, her need to be secret.

P. 77, l. 989. The Gorgon was essentially a terrifying face; it might turn you to stone if you looked at it, as with Medusa, or it might strike panic into an army. The actual creature whose face it originally was, is never made clear, but naturally its blood would be poison.

P. 78, l. 1001. *To him Athena granted.*] Creusa hesitates. These line for line dialogues show great skill in writing. The unfinished sentences sometimes seem artificial but there is always good reason for them. Here Creusa naturally hesitates to mention the terrible weapon that she proposes. A similar fear checks her in l. 1011; she shrinks from naming the poison.

P. 80, l. 1019. *In Athens. Not here. And you will do it, not I.*] She can think of killing the boy some time far off if someone else does it. So above (l. 979), she might kill—not the God, that is impossible; not her husband, she loved him once. The usurping heir? Yes; she would be willing to do that. But circumstances drive her into doing the deed at once. A feeble struggle of conscience appears in l. 1035: nobody else must taste the poison. The Old Retainer, acting not for himself but in loyalty to his wronged mistress has less scruple. See his last lines.

P. 82 f., ll. 1048-1105. *Dark Hecate.*] A long chorus like the fall of a curtain, marking an indefinite passage of time. It serves first to bring the thought of the poisoning nearer. A prayer to Hecate of the Ways, to whom belong strange paths in the dark, to help in the death of the usurper. If he is allowed to live, our beloved mistress will die. She cannot live on and see Erechtheus' ancient throne desecrated.

Then comes a rather puzzling strophe. It will be a disgrace to Apollo if alien eyes are admitted to see the mystic Dances of the Twentieth Days. We know little about these. Were they, like many secret rites, holy and beautiful to the initiated but somewhat ridiculous to the unprepared outsider?

The last strophe touches a well-known note, the injustice always done to women in the traditional poetry; women may have their passionate love-affairs but no woman ever treats her husband as Xuthus, high-born as he is, has treated his wife. Cf. the first stasimon in the *Medea*, which has been called the "suffragette Chorus."

P. 85-88, l. 1106. Messenger's speech. This was an essential element in a Greek tragedy. The death or catastrophe is not enacted, as it often is in Shakespeare, but always narrated, and narrated in a long formal narrative, beginning almost always in a calm tone, rising to height after height of pathos or excitement, and ending again in calm. Like similar narratives in Racine it is usually very effective on the stage and has been effectively imitated by some modern poets. The present Messenger does not attempt realistically to satisfy the anxiety of the Leader; he begins his long story at the beginning, telling of Xuthus' absence and the building of the tent with its sky-like roof, before he comes to the actual attempted murder and its failure.

P. 85, l. 1106. *Ouranos* is the sky; the Dove is the Pleiad, Arctos the Pole Star. The earth-born Cecrops is half a snake. The simplicity of the banqueting arrangements is probably true to Delphian custom. The tent is improvised; the invitation is proclaimed by a herald while the meal is preparing, and is quite general to all who wish to come. The Old Retainer, we may suppose, shared in Creusa's pardon.

P. 85, l. 1125. *The flames of Dionyse.*] Xuthus went to the sacred rocks at the top of Parnassus, where Bacchus with his inspired maidens danced with torches. He had two rites to perform, one for the Birth and one for the First Presentation of a child.

P. 89, ll. 1229-1249. *No escape, none.*] The chorus are first merely reduced to despair; then the Leader admits that they deserve their punishment. Then, when Creusa appears in flight, they think no more of anything but her. "Let her fly to the altar." How far the altar will save a criminal already condemned to death seems to be disputed. She kneels right in the ashes of sacrifice.

P. 91, l. 1261. *Bull-horned Cephîsus.*] The Athenian River Cephîsus was naturally one of the fathers of Athens; River gods were all conceived as bulls; only a Bull Spirit could rush with the force of their floods.

P. 92, l. 1285. *I give my body to be his.*] Creusa here dedicates herself to the god; she becomes his as Ion was his in the conversation with Creusa (l. 309). But now, she points out, Phoebus has given Ion to Xuthus. "That" says Ion, "was just an incident; essentially I belong to Phoebus."

P. 93, ll. 1291 ff. Creusa exaggerates her case. She assumes that all the possible evils she feared are real facts; thus Ion says; "you wanted to kill me not for anything I did but because of what you feared that I intended to do."

P. 95, l. 1320. The entrance of the prophetess alters everything, and calms Ion. The line "Nor do I praise thy cruelty" changes the atmosphere. L. 1330 (This temple sets thee free), makes the quest of his mother his main duty. Hence Ion's surprised interruption.

P. 100, l. 1370. *Thinking of her, my mother.*] It is worth noting how deeply the wrong to the betrayed girl is felt both by Ion, (here and at p. 40) and by the Chorus. To Hermes, p. 13, and presumably to Apollo it is of no great account; they are not human and do not care much about humans.

P. 101, l. 1390. *Ah, look, the wrappings on the cradle's fold.*] Creusa has been watching eagerly; indeed, though silent, she has been to the audience the centre of interest. The point that decides her is (l. 1433) the freshness of the miraculous olive wreath. She leaves the altar, and, before the attendants can bind her, is clinging to Ion and the cradle.

Note the preparation, ll. 1292 ff., of both Ion and Creusa for their great change of feeling. By l. 1394 (O blessed light) his mind is filled with the longing for his mother instead of vengeance on his murderess. Creusa has a much longer preparation, from the first sight of the cradle to the miraculously preserved coverings, for her first faint suspicions to grow to certainty. Ion is half sceptical, though in part prepared for a miracle, and is not carried away by his feelings even when he is convinced that he has found his mother. And then there is so much more for him to learn and believe.

P. 111, ll. 1523-1530. *I fain would speak with you alone.*] Again, as at l. 1477, doubt of the whole story assails him, and again Creusa's solemn oath silences his doubt. But, if Creusa's story is true, then Phoebus has lied in saying by oracle that

Ion was Xuthus' son. A false oracle! Are all his oracles false and the god himself a vain thing? This is what "racks his heart," and when Creusa suggests an excuse he will not be content with such a cheap answer; like Creusa herself in an earlier scene, p. 70, he will face the god and make him speak. . . . But at this moment there comes a supernatural crash of thunder and a supernatural apparition of Athena. The gods, whatever their nature by our human standards, are too strong for us. As Euripides says elsewhere "We are slaves of gods, whatever the gods may be."

Athena's speech seems deeply disappointing. This is not merely because Apollo does dare to appear and answer the question that "racks Ion's heart." At the end of Euripides' *Electra* he does the same. Castor appears instead of him and definitely blames him, yet that scene is fine and moving. Here perhaps the trouble is that we have just been through a series of scenes full of real human feeling and now are moved suddenly to a scene with no human feeling at all. Yet possibly by ancient convention that is actually as it should be. Gods do not have ordinary human feelings. Apollo had no particular love or carnal desire for Creusa; he had only a great purpose, the founding of the Ionian race. The sufferings of a few individual human beings counted for little or nothing in the great sum.

The ancient tribal names, Geleontes, Acrageis, Hoplêtes and Aegikoreis were traditional in Athens and some other Ionian cities, though they seem to have had no importance in historical times and the meaning of the names is not known. The Dorians were divided into three tribes, the Ionians into four. The idea of making Dorus and Achaïos Ionians of a younger and less divine branch would not be seriously considered outside the Ionian regions. The thought behind it is perhaps that the Athenians, the fathers of Ionia, are real aborigines, born of the soil, whereas the Dorians, and possibly the Achaeans too were only invaders.

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Transcriber's Notes:

The line numbers refer to the lines in the original Greek text, not the lines as

translated.

The following textual changes have been made:-

P. 7 "in another account of the birth of Heracles," changed to "In another account of the birth of Heracles,"

P. 24 "But see who comes, 'Tis she." changed to "But see who comes. 'Tis she."

P. 72 "Alone; in that cave were the wrong was done." changed to "Alone; in that cave where the wrong was done."

Pp. 117-8 Note ref. to P. 15, l. 58 put in correct order.

P. 118 "opportunités of rapid movement," changed to "opportunities of rapid movement,"

In Notes punctuation inconsistencies retained.

P. 120 "*Is it true in God's name ...?*" changed to "*Is it true in God's name ...?*]"

P. 124 "*Thou art fallen fallen and all thy father's pride.*]" changed to "*Thou art fallen, fallen, and all thy father's pride.*]"

P. 126 "called the "surffagette Chorus."" changed to "called the "suffragette Chorus.""

P. 127 "*Bull-horned Cephêsus.*]" changed to "*Bull-horned Cephîsus.*]"