

THE SUPPLIANT WOMEN

BY AESCHYLUS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DANAUS, *with* CHORUS of DANAIDS, *and* their HANDMAIDS

PELASGUS, *King of Argos, with a* CHORUS of ARGIVE MEN

HERALD, *with a* CHORUS of EGYPTIAN SLAVES

LEADER *of the* CHORUS of DANAIDS

[The names Danäus, Danäid have three syllables, the accent being on the first *Dan-*.

The title *Supplikes* also has three syllables, with the accent on the first.]

There is no stage, only a large circular Orchestra, or Dancing Ground, in the centre of which—or perhaps at the back—rises a Sacred Hill surmounted by a Common Altar, with figures or emblems representing all the chief Gods of Argos.

Enter the Chorus of fifty DANAIDS led by their Father, DANAUS.

CHORUS.

May Zeus, the Eternal Suppliant, smile
In mercy on this suppliant band
Sea-lifted from the slender sand
That masks the mouths of Nile;
Outcast from that diviner land,
By Syrian gardens fringed, we fly
In exile, not with tainted hand
Nor by our city doomed to die:

A shrinking of the flesh inborn
From man's touch, from the lust and scorn
Of dark Aegyptus' sons, to shame
Hath cast us. For the King our sire,
Who leads our thought, who guides our choir,
'Mid all the mazes of a game
Where grief in every move must lie,
Deemed this the noblest grief: to fly
O'er seas, forsaking all, and find
That Argos where began, 'tis said,
The many wonders of our kind,
The Hand of Peace on one who fled
With tortured flesh, with hornèd head,
The life by God's breath poured.
Where should I seek a dearer city,
Armed with these olive-boughs of pity,
The suppliant's only sword?
O walls, O soil, O gleaming sea,
O gods of heaven above, and ye
Heroes beneath the ground, who hold
Your honoured graves, our fathers old;
And Zeus, O Zeus of the Third Day,
The Saviour, thou who holdest guard
Of good men's houses, be not hard,
But from the land's deep bosom send
A wind of mercy to befriend
Women who suffer and who pray!

[They take position for the Dance. DANAUS seats himself on the steps of the Great Altar.]

CHORUS.

(They speak in riddles, calling upon Epaphus, son of Io their ancestress, identified with the Egyptian Apis, son of Isis.)

[Strophe 1]

I call upon One far away
Over deep seas, our Help heaven born:

A babe among blossoms he lay,
Hornèd child of the Maid of the Horn,
Our Mother: of her was he born
And begotten by God's pure breath.
And the name of him ever for us
To the God's touch witnesseth,
For the babe was Epaphus.

[*Antistrophe 1*

I have called him, and, roaming again
In the flowery places, the fold
Where our Mother roamed in her pain,
I muse on the sorrows of old.
I will show to the princes who hold
Her meadows a sign ere the night;
Yea, things undreamed shall appear,
And a great word be spoken aright,
When the hour in its fulness is here.

*(Pursued and shut out from home, they mourn for ancient sorrows, like the
Nightingale:)*

[*Strophe 2*

If one of the bird-seer's art
Should hear in the waste our crying,
A thought will well in his heart
Of Tereus' bride, the undying,
The piteous, the unforgiven
Nightingale falcon-driven.

[*Antistrophe 2*

She is shut out from river and meadow;
There are tears in her old sunny places;
And weeping far off in the shadow
The sorrow of old she retraces,
Tells of the child she slew
And the mother's heart untrue.

[*Strophe 3*

Through me too sorrow runs
Like a strange Ionian song;
I rend a cheek that is warm with the suns
Of Egypt, and tender with benisons,
A heart unschooled by wrong.
I gather flowers and weave
A garland of thoughts that grieve;
For in dread of my kin, my own,
Away from the shore I flee,
Away to the mist, where none
Shall care for me.

[They turn to the Great Altar and address the Gods in prayer.]

[Antistrophe 3]

Give not the strength of youth
A portion beyond the laws,
Nor let man's pride be above God's ruth:
Gods of our race, turn to the truth
Your eyes, and hear our cause!
Only by loathing lust
Can ye to love be just.
A very shield in war
To them that in sorrow sit
Is an altar, and God's great star
Is over it.

(They speak of Zeus, the Inscrutable.)

[Strophe 4]

Oh, may the desire of God be indeed of God!
Is it not strong in the chase?
On all roads with dark issue, a burning rod,
It guides man's mortal race.

[Antistrophe 4]

It falleth firm, it slippeth not, whatso thought
In the brain of Zeus is formed: it is thought and deed.
Through tangled forest and shadow his paths are wrought,
Which none may trace nor read.

[*Strophe 5*

From the high towers of hope on which they stand
He casts men down; they perish utterly.
Yet he takes no sword, he lifts no violent hand.
Effortless all must be
That is of God. All things
Whereon his thought may light
Moveless to pass he brings
There on the height.

[*Antistrophe 5*

Let him look now on this ungodliness
Of man: it groweth strong as a green tree
In hearts unchanging-hard, hot to possess
This loveless flesh of me.
In dreams infatuate
To its own wound it cleaves,
Till it learn, all too late,
That sin deceives.

[*They turn again in prayer to Earth:*

SOME WOMEN.

[*Strophe 6*

As I speak there comes a crying
From within that checks my breath:
Tis a music full of tears
For some terror that it hears,
As a dirge over the dying;
For this life I count as death.

ALL.

Be ours, O bosomed Earth,
Earth o'er the sea!
No tongue of thine own birth
Is strange to thee.

Thou hear'st us, Earth, our friend!
Or, where words fail,
I beat my breast, and rend
This Tyrian veil.

SOME WOMEN.

[*Antistrophe 6*
Yet a full joy on the morrow
By the turning of God's hand,
May yet find us, night or day,
So but death be kept away!
Oh, the mystery of sorrow!
The wave bears us—to what land?

ALL.

Be ours, O bosomed Earth,
Earth o'er the sea!
No tongue of thine own birth
Is strange to thee.
Thou hear'st us, Earth, our friend:
Or, where words fail,
I beat my breast, and rend
This Tyrian veil

[*Strophe 7*
The driven oar, the flaxen gear,
A tower full-orbed against the brine,
Have borne me un-stormconquered here:
I blame not nor repine:
Only the end, the end,
Father All-seeing, send
Gentle to me and mine!

ALL.

[*to Epaphus:*

Great seed of the Untamed Mother, hark to me!
Hear my word spoken!
From the arms of the defiler keep me free,
Unwed, unbroken!

[*Antistrophe 7*
[*To Artemis, or Athena*
Thou of the Portal high,
Rock-built immutably,
My will in thine doth lie:
God's daughter, look on me!
Set thy protecting wrath
Across our hunters' path;
Oh, tameless even as I,
Virgin, our saviour be!

ALL.

Great seed of the Untamed Mother, hark to me!
Hear my word spoken!
From the arms of the defiler keep me free,
Unwed, unbroken!

[*Strophe 8*
[*To Zeus again.*
Else . . . dark our cheek doth glow;
Dark in the burning sun:
Earth knows a Zeus below,
Dark, who rejecteth none.
We know his strangling knot;
To him with suppliant breath,
If heaven will hearken not,
We turn for peace, for death.

ALL.

Ah, Zeus, alas for Io! The wrath above
Forgetteth naught. It searcheth the ways of the worm.

O ye that have conquered heaven, I know the love
Ye show unto men, and the bitter end thereof:
The great wind, the cold storm.

[*Antistrophe* 8

Then shall of Zeus indeed
A tale of shame be told,
Who helped not in his need
The Child of Her of old,
The Hornèd Child, returned
To thy land and his own:
Oh, let him not lie spurned
Before thy throne.

ALL.

Ah, Zeus, alas for Io! The wrath above
Forgetteth naught. It searcheth the ways of the worm.
O ye that have conquered heaven, I know the love
Ye show unto men, and the bitter end thereof:
The great wind, the cold storm.

DANAUS.

Bethink ye now, my children. By the thought
Of this old trusty pilot ye have wrought
Your voyage, and now on shore I charge ye bind
With counsel new the tablets of your mind.
I see that voiceless herald that doth speak
Of armies, dust: I hear the axles' creak;
And lo, a regiment under spear and shield,
With horses at the flank and chariots wheeled!
Methinks some Argive chief hath learnt from spies
Your coming, and would see with his own eyes.
But be it with good intent, or be it hard
With savage wrath he marcheth hitherward,
Both ways 'twere wiser, Maidens, here beside
The altars of the Gathered Gods to abide,

Kneeling. An altar is a flawless shield,
More true than any wall. Go near, and wield
In your left hands the olive-branch with wool
White-wreathèd, pledge of Zeus the Merciful.
And let your words be gentle, close to tears
And full of need, as fitteth sojourners
In a strange land, revealing earnestly
How guiltless from your fatherland ye flee.
Your voice be free from boldness, your calm eyes,
In chastened front, far from all vanities.
Your converse not too forward, nor too hot
To entice men's eyes. Such graces like me not.
Remember to give way. Ye have here nor gold
Nor home nor kin. Let not the weak be bold.
[He seats himself on the Altar Steps.]

LEADER.

Father, thy thought well answereth to the thought
Within me. I will keep thy charges, fraught
With wisdom. May but Zeus our grandsire see!

DANAUS.

Yea, surely: and with eyes of charity!

LEADER.

I fain would make my seat beside thine own.

DANAUS.

Delay not till the altar stair be won.

[They come to the steps of the Great Altar, and see the emblems of various gods.]

LEADER.

Zeus, pity our sorrows, and we perish not.

DANAUS.

If He but will, all grief shall be forgot.

LEADER.

We are with thee. Teach us now this people's use.

DANAUS.

Lift first your voices to the Bird of Zeus.

LEADER.

I hail the eagle Sun's all-seeing eye.

DANAUS.

And pure Apollo, exiled from the sky.

LEADER.

He knoweth exile, he can feel for man.

DANAUS.

Ah! Let him feel for us, if feel he can!

LEADER.

Whom shall I pray to next, of all this line?

DANAUS.

I see the Trident here, Poseidon's sign.

LEADER.

Our guide at sea: may he befriend us still!

DANAUS.

Lo, a strange Hermes, shaped as Hellenes will.

LEADER.

O Herald, speak the word that we are free!

DANAUS.

Now worship this whole altar-company
Of gods, and cower the holy place within,
Like doves in terror from your falcon kin:
Oh, kin of hate, who would defile our blood!
Shall bird be clean, that maketh bird his food?
Shall man be clean, who doth his lust fulfil,
Against her will, against her father's will,
On woman? Never more shall such an one,
Nay, not in death, escape the deed he has done.
A Zeus is there, not ours, on each bowed head
Who deals the unchanging judgement of the dead.
Watch, therefore, and, when questioned, keep the laws
I have shown you, that this day may speed our cause.
[Enter the KING with the Argive host.]

KING.

What company in all un-Greek array,
Rich with barbarian robes and coifing gay,
Awaits us here? For, sure, not Argolis,
Not Hellas knows such woman's garb as this.
And hither fearless, by no herald cried,
Ye come, none to receive you, none to guide;
At this I marvel. Yet your olive-wands,

With white bewreathèd by well-witting hands,
I see before the Gods of Gathering thrown.
In none save Hellene lands that rite is known.
And many another sign I well might seek,
But here ye stand, nor lack a voice to speak.

LEADER.

Touching the garb we wear, thy word is true.—
But first, how should we name thee as is due?
A citizen? Or is the watchful wand
Of Hermes thine? Or lordship of the land?

KING.

For that, speak on, and answer fearlessly.
Earthborn Palaichthon was my sire, and I
Pelagus, of these regions lord and king.
Whence a great race, duly inheriting
Their leader's name, Pelasgian, taketh due
Of all this soil. Yea, all the lands wherethrough
Pure Strymon floweth are mine own, away
To the sinking sun. The limits of my sway
Perrhaebia marketh, and the further side
Of Pindus, near the Paiones; then wide
Dodona's mountains; and, beyond, the cool
Dividing sea. Within those bounds I rule.
This land on which we tread of old did take
The name of Apia for its healer's sake,
Apis, who, crossing from Naupactus—son
Of Phoebus he, healer and priest in one—
Did cleanse the land of evil things and wild,
Which Earth, by ancient deeds of blood defiled,
Sent up to ease her fury, swarms of grim
Serpents, which dwelt with man and hated him.
Of these a swift and all-delivering purge
Wrought Apis. In all Argos none could urge
Failure or fault; for which good work he bears

No guerdon save a memory in our prayers.
Ye know me now; speak plainly—for no grace
Of fine words moves our folk—your name and race.

LEADER.

Brief is our tale and clear. Of Argive breed
We spring, a hornèd mother's high-born seed.
Hereof sure warrant ask, and I will give.

KING.

I hear your words, strange damsels, but believe
I cannot, that our blood is in your veins.
More like the rovers of the Libyan plains
Than Greek women are ye. Or by the flow
Of ancient Nile, methinks, such flowers may grow.
And Cyprus hath its type, on woman's mould
Impressed by male artificers of old;
And tales I know, how Indian women roam,
By camels drawn, each in her tented home,
Beyond the wallèd Ethiop, in waste lands.
Nay, were there bows and arrows in your hands,
As Amazons had I your lineage read,
The flesh-devourers, the unhusbanded.
Teach me this mystery, Maidens, till I see
How that of Argive race and blood ye be.

LEADER.

(She proves her descent by showing that she knows the secret story of Io.)

Men say that Io once of Hera's dome
Was key-bearer, in this her Argive home.

KING *(surprised)*.

'Tis a true tale; and wide the fame thereof . . .

And can it be that Zeus felt mortal love?

LEADER.

Not hid from Hera were those secret hours.

KING.

What end came to that strife of heavenly powers?

LEADER.

To a hornèd heifer Hera changed the maid.

KING.

And Zeus that hornèd one so fair betrayed?

LEADER.

Never! Himself took bull-form for her sake.

KING.

What answer, then, did Jove's dread consort make?

LEADER.

Set her all-seeing watcher o'er that cow.

KING.

What myriad-eyed kine-warden meanest thou?

LEADER.

Argos, whom Hermes slew, Earth's marvellous son.

KING.

What next befell that sad, that hornèd one?

LEADER.

A fiery goad, which spurred her, blind with fear . . .

KING.

Oistros they name it in the meadows here.

LEADER.

And drove her from the land, long leagues of way.

KING (*reflecting*).

Ye tell our own tale.—All was as ye say.

LEADER.

Then to Canôpus, then to Memphis shore
She came, till Jove's hand touched her, and she bore . . .

KING.

Of god and beast, what birth unknown before?

LEADER.

Epaphus she called him, from that saving hand.

KING.

And what was Epaphus' issue in the land?

LEADER.

Libya, who reapeth the world's widest plain.

KING.

And what new life from Libya bloomed again?

LEADER.

Two-childed Bêlus, sire of this my sire.

KING.

His gracious name to know were my desire.

LEADER.

Danaus; his brother, fifty-childed too . . .

KING.

His name? Fear not to tell thy story through.

LEADER.

Aegyptus.—Now ye know mine ancestries,
Oh, lift thine Argive suppliants from their knees.
[She kneels: the KING raises her.]

KING.

'Tis well. Ye have convinced me that ye share
Our blood and race. But say, how did ye dare
To fly your father's home? What thing befell?

LEADER.

Lord of Pelasgia, strange and variable
Is sorrow, never twice of the same wing.
Who could have thought or dreamed so dire a thing,
That our own kin, our cousins born, should drive
This band to Argos, lost and fugitive,
In fear of dark arms and a loathèd bed?

KING.

What fear, then, with white wands new-garlanded,
Leads ye before our Gathered Gods to fall?

LEADER.

To Egypt's sons I never will be thrall!

KING.

'Tis hate, or fear of sin, your spirit moves?

LEADER.

Doth woman dread the yoke of one she loves?

KING.

To wed your kin—to both 'twould bring increase.

LEADER.

And from our troubling give you quick release!

KING.

I seek not that. . . . What would ye I should do?

LEADER.

When Egypt claims, stand by us and be true!

KING.

A hard task! Is it war ye needs must bring?

LEADER.

Justice forsaketh not her friends, O King.

KING.

Aye, not if from the first her cause was theirs.

LEADER.

Your city's helm is wreathèd with our prayers!

KING.

I see those shadowy altars palm-bestrowed.

LEADER.

Dire is the anger of the Suppliants' God.

CHORUS.

[Strophe 1

Pelasgian king, O child of Earth, give ear!

Pity one sore afraid,

Who prays thee, in flight surrounded, as in rude

Untrodden rocks some heifer, wolf-pursued,

Lows to the herdsman in her extreme fear,

Sure of his strength to aid.

KING.

I see our Gathering Gods enshadowed all
With prayer: they sway, with new-cut branches fraught.
God grant this stranger's parleying may not fall
To ill, nor out of things unhop'd, unsought,
Our City suffer. Strife she needeth not.

CHORUS.

[*Antistrophe 1*
Thou ancient law of pity, that bindest Heaven,
This crimeless exile see!
The God who ordereth Fate must yet know ruth.
Wise King and aged, hearken to our youth;
Regard the suppliant and thine offerings given
In God's house blest shall be.

KING.

Not on my hearthstone do ye plant your prayer,
Nor need I tremble. If some general stain
Be near my city, 'tis my people's care.
For me, I plight no promise; it were vain
To answer till my people's will be plain.

CHORUS.

[*Strophe 2*
Thou art the City, thine the people's deed,
A judge no law hems in;
Thy nod doth move the central altar-stone
That is the City's hearth; thy staff alone
Decrees the City's act, fulfills her need.
O king, beware of sin!

KING.

Not on my head but on mine enemies'
Be sin! How can I help ye without harm

To Argos; yet how spurn such prayers as these?
Howe'er I turn, doubt holds me and alarm—
To accept, reject, or wait on Fortune's arm.

CHORUS.

[*Antistrophe 2*

Raise up thine eyes to the great Judge on high,
Guardian of suffering men
Who have knelt to man and been sent empty away!
The wrath of Zeus the Suppliant bides his day
'Gainst them whose bosoms melt not at the cry
Of wronged souls in their pain.

KING.

How if by law the Sons of Egypt claim,
As next in blood, the kinsman's rights on ye?
Who shall withstand them or deny that name?
By your own laws ye needs must shape your plea
That o'er your flesh they own no mastery.

CHORUS.

[*Strophe 3*

I will not suffer, like a hawk-torn bird,
The brute strength of the male!
Better fly on, yea fly to the abyss
Of stars, to save me from that loathèd kiss!
Choose thou the right, O King, and by thy word
Let fear of God prevail!

KING.

Make me not judge! The judgement is too hard.
Without my folk, I warn thee once again,
I speak not—though in power I be not barred—
Lest, if the end be evil, men complain:

"For strangers' love thou hast thy people slain."

CHORUS.

[*Antistrophe 3*

Kinsman to both, Zeus who upholds the scale,
On both now turns his sight,
And, watching, to the ungodly his offence
He reckons, to the just his innocence:
The scales are true; how then can after-bale
Follow the deed of right?

KING.

Now, like a diver plunging to the deep,
I need some saving thought; I need to keep
A seeing eye, not wild or flushed with wine,
If first to Argos, then to me and mine,
This whole emprise may without peril end;
Lest either war his hot reprisals send
To spoil our fields, or by betraying you
Who cleave to our gods' altars, suppliants true,
I waken some destroying Wrath, to dwell
For ever on my hearth—some power of Hell
From whom is no release, not in the grave.
Have we not dire need of the thoughts that save?

CHORUS (*kneeling to the KING*).

Think, then! For thy thought, O Friend,
Needs must save me and defend.
Not in thee is our undoing—
Suppliant, at our journey's end,
And the hate of Hell pursuing!

Shall they drag me from thy stair
And the great gods thronèd there?
In thy hand is all the City;

Know man's vileness, and beware!
There is anger in God's pity.

Shall I kneel to thee in vain?
Wilt thou see me torn amain
From God's image? Shall they hale me
Like a horse dragged by the mane?
Shall they rend the robes that veil me?

Lo, the deed thy hand hath done
Shall not end with thee alone;
Child and house in dateless title
Hold it from thee and atone!
'Tis God's law and just requital.

KING.

I have thought enough.—Here I must haul to land
My wavering barque, with war—upon one hand
Or the other—sure! The great bolts hold her hull,
And up the beach the windlass-cables pull;
But who can ground her safe on such a shore?
If a man's house be pillaged of its store
New gain, by God's will, may supplant the old,
And freight all loss surpassing fill his hold.
Or if his tongue shoots out some dangerous word
Till hearts be wounded and men's anger stirred,
The wound that speech hath stricken speech can heal.
But kindred blood . . . I charge ye, damsels, kneel
In prayer and sacrifice ere that be shed!
Let many a questioning embassy be sped
To many a god to avert it; or count me
A man most ignorant! Which verily
I would I were, of things so miserable!
I pray, but hope not, that the end be well.

LEADER.

Hear now the last word of our piteous prayer.

KING.

Say on. I listen. Ye have all my care.

LEADER.

Thou seest this twined zone below my breast?

KING.

Surely; 'tis suited to a woman's vest.

LEADER.

A goodly weapon can of these be wrought.

KING.

For what? What dark word trembles in thy thought?

LEADER.

Unless thou grant some pledge that cannot fail . . .

KING.

How then? To what end shall your zones avail?

LEADER.

These altars with strange sacrifice to bind.

KING.

Thy words are riddles. Plainlier show thy mind.

LEADER.

On these gods we will hang ourselves and die!

KING.

Not that! It stabs my heart like agony.

LEADER.

Thou knowest all. I have given our purpose eyes.

KING.

'Fore God, in many shapes this peril cries
Against us. 'Tis a shoreless river, poured
In flood, a waste of waters without ford
Or sounding, where I stand and searching see
No refuge. If I fail to succour ye,
A deed thou threatenest which for sin and stain
Passeth all arrows' flight; and if again
Against your kin, Aegyptus' sons, I stand
Before my walls and battle hand to hand,
A bitter waste of life were that, to make
Strong men to bite the dust for women's sake.
Yet come what may, I must the wrath revere
Of Zeus the Suppliant: 'tis man's highest fear.
O aged Father of this maiden crew,
Take in thine arm these branches, and pursue
Thy way through all the altars of the land,
Outspreading them, that folk may understand
Your needs here by that suppliant altar-gift.
But speak no word of me. My folk are swift
To blame their prince. The sight of these may stir
Pity and wrath against the ravisher,
And thus the people's will toward you be bowed.
All hearts are for the lowly against the proud.

DANAUS.

'Tis beyond treasure, to be granted thus
In exile a protector bounteous.
But with us send companions, guides to show
The country's secret ways, that we may know
What gods possess the City, and where lie
The temple-fronting altars and the high
Enwreathèd solitary thrones, that so
Safety be ours as through the streets we go:
For alien is the garb and face of us,
And Nile bears other fruit than Inachus.
Aye, hope too confident makes way for pain,
And man in blindness hath his brother slain.

KING.

Go show him—for the stranger reasoneth well—
All altars where the Gods of Argos dwell.
Greet no man as ye pass, but silently
Guide to his goal this rover of the sea.
[*Exit DANAUS with GUIDES.*

LEADER.

Thou speakest and he goes. Be it even thus.
But we? What comfort wilt thou make for us?

KING.

Yield up these branches, sign of sorrows past.

LEADER.

Take them; thy promise and thine hand shall last.

KING.

Then roam at will through all this level grove.

LEADER.

What safety that? Here any beast may rove.

KING.

We will not yield thee up to birds of prey!

LEADER.

To direr than a serpent's hate ye may.

KING.

Why such ill words, when ours to thee are kind?

LEADER.

Forgive me; 'tis the terror in my mind.

KING.

Kings have no part in terror. Tremble not.

LEADER.

Oh, comfort me with word and deed and thought!

KING.

Be sure your father will not leave you long.
I go to call my people to the throng
Of counsel, soften their stern hearts and seek
To show thy father the right words to speak.
Remain then, and with prayer and song implore

Our gods to grant the thing thou cravest for,
While I go forth to further our great quest.
Persuasion sweet be ours, and Fortune blest!
[Exit KING.

[*The DANAIDS meditate on the mystery of the dealings of Zeus with Io, her wrongs and her deliverance.*

CHORUS.

[*Strophe 1*
O King of Kings,
Blest beyond all things blest,
Of perfect things
In power the perfectest,
Hear in thy bliss,
Our prayer, and let it be!
Keep from us this
That is abhorred by thee,
The lust of man; Oh, dead beneath the dark
Blue water sink that black and evil barque!

[*Antistrophe 1*
To woman turn thine eye,
Regard us here:
The children's child am I
Of her once dear;
Remember; understand
Dear thoughts long dead,
Thou who didst lay thine hand
On Io's head!
From her who once was thine, O Zeus, we come,
Lost children, seeking Argos and our home.

[*Strophe 2*
I wander in the print of ancient feet:
'Mid these same blossoms haunted Io grazed;
From this same pasture sweet
She fled, by pain made fleet,

Through many tribes of men, with mind amazed,
Till all the fronting world she clove in twain,
And left deep-scored her pathway o'er the main.

[*Antistrophe 2*

On, on through Asia, flying vainly fast,
Through Phrygian sheepfolds, Mysia's royal keep,
Through Lydian vales she passed;
On over mountains vast
Cilician and Pamphylian, on by deep
Rivers that fail not, gold far hid from sight,
And corn-rich isles beloved of Aphrodite.

[*Strophe 3*

On, on—and by that wingèd herdsman's blow
Ever her heart was torn—
To God's great garden, fed by distant snow,
Where bloom all flowers and corn;
There Typhon burns, there floodeth Nile's soft flow
Untouched by sickness: there must Io go,
Mad with long shame and scorn,
Witness to Hera's greatness, and a cry
Of torment on her lips like prophecy.

[*Antistrophe 3*

Mortals in that day dwelling in the land,
Their hearts shook inwardly,
Seeing a sight they might not understand:
In pale fear every eye,
Gazed on a Being agonized, half-human,
Some part a tortured beast and some part woman:
Behold a mystery!
By whose word at the last was comfort given
To Io wounded, wandering, gadfly-driven?

[*Strophe 4*

Thou, Zeus, from everlasting ages Lord,
Didst set her free;

By thine unwounding strength, thy breath in-poured,
Wrath ceased to be;
In a last tenderness of tears her shame
Flowed forth to die:
She took into her body the great Name,
The word that cannot lie,
And bore a babe most flawless, without blame,

[*Antistrophe 4*

Through ages long perfect in happiness.
Wherefore all Earth
Lifteth her voice to praise the Father, and bless
The supreme birth.
This is the deed of Zeus, all deeds above.
Who else but He
Could tear the web of hate that Hera wove?
And thus are we, even we,
Born of that wrong, that agony, that love.

[*Strophe 5*

What God then shall I praise in thought and word
For works more justly planned?
O Father, Planter of the Garden, Lord,
Thou of the Healing Hand;
Thinker of ancient thought,
Artificer of man,
Zeus, by whose breath, as by the wind, is brought
To the harbour every plan!

[*Antistrophe 5*

Behold, He hasteth not to do the thing
That others speak;
Being more high than any lord or king,
He maketh strong the weak.
Above Him is no throne:
No prayers below can bind
His doings, for the deed and word are one,
And one the counselling mind.

[DANAUS *with his retinue* returns.]

DANAUS.

Rejoice, my children! Well for you and me
The people's voice hath passed its full decree.

LEADER.

I bless thee, Father. All thy words are well!
But tell us quick what way the issue fell,
What vote was passed, and by what multitude?

DANAUS.

All voted, all, with no divided mood,
Till my old heart was young again and stirred.
Gathered they stood, and at the herald's word
A myriad right hands quivered in the air
From that massed people, lifted to declare
That here we dwell, strangers within the gate,
By law protected and inviolate
'Gainst all who seek to take us, alien
Or Argive. And if war should follow, then
He who defends us not at need, shall stand
Dishonoured and go exiled from the land.
Thus spake Pelasgia's King, and turned their path
Toward mercy, warning of the eternal wrath
Of Zeus the Suppliant: "never let his folk
Uprouse it! For this day a twofold yoke
Full nigh the City lay, of grievous sin,
Wrong to the stranger, wrong to their own kin;
Whence in due time a monster should be reared,
Feeding on wounds and blood." All this they heard,
And straight, no question put nor heralding,
With lifted arms, cried to obey the King.

LEADER.

Ah, well the King his charmèd counsels spake,
Well the folk heard; but Zeus the end did make.
Speak upon Argos all ye would
Of prayers in recompense for good,
While Zeus, the Stranger and the Friend
Of strangers, watching, in good sooth
Our words of blessing turns to truth,
And guides them to their perfect end.

[The CHORUS again take position for the Dance; DANAUS mounts the Altar Steps.]

CHORUS.

Turn to me now your care,
Ye gods, ye children of God,
As I pour libation of prayer:
Let not this land be trod
By the feet of fire and lance
Nor a prey to Ares thrown,
Who singeth where none may dance,
Who reapeth, in fields not his own,
Men, as grain that is sown.
Argos hath pitied us:
Argos her vote hath given,
Aiding the lost army, who thus
Kneel unto Zeus in heaven.

They gave not to man his lust,
They mocked not the woman's war;
For they saw the Requital just
Of Zeus, they knew it afar.
It watcheth, yea it shall smite
In its season, a perilous foe;
The roof whereon it shall light
Shall be broken; a bird of woe,
Heavy it sits and slow.
These men, seeing their kin
Bowed before Zeus, revere them:

These at a shrine stainless of sin
Pray, and the gods shall hear them.

Therefore my veiled mouth
Under its veil entreats:
Never may plague nor drouth
Lay waste this City's streets,
Nor kindred strife make red
The valleys with Argive dead.
Pluck not the flower of youth!
Let not the War-god cruel,
Lover of lust, scorner of ruth,
Tear from the land its jewel!

Brave be the Elders too,
And the altars flame in use
Of a land that to Zeus is true,
And most to the Stranger Zeus,
Whose gentle laws make straight
The tangle of mortal fate.
Let not the kingly seed
Ever in Argos languish;
Thou of the Bow, Comfort in need,
Watch over woman's anguish!

No bane by which men die
Come hither to waste the land—
On the hills a sudden cry,
And a sword in Ares' hand:
Ares, of tears the sire,
Who knows not dance nor lyre.
Far be the Pests that swarm,
Darkly, with sickness laden:
Lift as a shield, Phoebus, thine arm
High over youth and maiden!

May Zeus the fruitful earth
Fulfil as the seasons pass;

Abundant be the birth
Of flocks in the grazing grass:
All gifts to the folk be given
As men that are loved of heaven!
Bards, to the altar fire
Carry your gifts of story!
Voices of love waken the lyre;
Stainless be Argos' glory!

LEADER.

The people, who this City's power hath wrought,
Preserve its ranks and orders undistraught:
So reigns with Brotherhood foreseeing Thought.

To strangers and strange lands let them afford
Without long strife, Law and the healing Word,
And Justice grant ere any draw the sword.

With offerings due let laurel-bearers pray
The native gods who hold the land in sway,
And yield the wild bull's blood in the ancient way.

Thy gods, thy law, thy parents—so I deem
The rule is written in the eternal scheme
Of Zeus the King, in glory all-supreme.

DANAUS.

Daughters, your prayer so gentle likes me well.
Now tremble not. I have a tale to tell
New and unlooked-for. From this refuge high
Outlooking, in the distance I descry
A ship of Egypt. Aye, 'tis all too clear.
I know the gathered sail. I know the sheer
Drop of the shielded sides, and in what guise
The black prow seeks its way with gleaming eyes,
Too well—to my mind—answering each turn

Of the helmsman's guiding wrist, far in the stern.
I see the shipmen there: they catch the light
With such black limbs against their robes of white.
The small boats too, and all the furniture
Of battle can be seen: to guide them sure
Toward land the leading ship has furled her sail,
And rows, with all oars, in.—Our best avail
Is patience and a chastened heart; to set
Eyes to the truth and not the gods forget.
I will go seek some champion, or may be
Some advocate. From them an embassy
Must come, or herald, and prepare the way
To claim their kindred—or to seize their prey.
They shall not have their will! Be not afraid
Of herald nor of host! Yet, if my aid
Be slow to arrive, forget not, through all fear,
Your surest comfort and defence is here.
[Pointing to the altars.]
Take heart. At last a day comes and an hour
When he who mocks the gods will feel their power.

LEADER.

Father, I shake with dread. The wingèd ship
Is here, is here! The cup is at my lip.

CHORUS.

[Strophe 1]
Terror uncomforted
Hath me. I fly from here . . .
Yet what help to have fled?
What refuge anywhere?
Father, I faint with fear.

DANAUS.

Take heart. Full sure the votes of Argos fell.

They will face war to save you, I know well.

LEADER.

Workers of death those wild Egyptians are—
Thou know'st them—and insatiate of war.

CHORUS.

[*Antistrophe 1*

They launched their blue-eyed barque
Built of bitter wood;
Their hate hath found its mark,
And here they swarm, a lewd
And black-limbed multitude.

DANAUS.

And multitudes they here shall find, with feet
And fists well toughened in the noonday heat.

LEADER.

But do not leave me, Father. Left alone
Woman is helpless: valour hath she none.

CHORUS.

[*Strophe 2*

Treason is in their soul,
Ever of craft they plot;
Their very heart is foul—
Like carrion crows, who rot
By the altars, caring not.

DANAUS.

Would it not suit us well, child, if they trod
That path—to your hate and the hate of God?

LEADER.

What do they care for trident or for sign
Of heaven? They will not spare this flesh of mine!

CHORUS.

[*Antistrophe 2*
Lifted with bitter pride,
With godless fury fraught,
Maddened with lust, they stride,
Shameless as dogs; and naught
Holy can pierce their thought.

DANAUS.

The wolf is stronger than the dog, 'tis said,
And byblus pith poor food by wheaten bread.

LEADER.

Oh, fierce and vain and noisome beasts they be,
Not dogs. Oh, let them not have hold on me!

DANAUS.

'Tis not so swift a business, to prepare
A landing force; to moor, to take full care
The cables hold; then, anchors, too, may slip,
And time goes ere the shepherd of the ship
Can lose his fears.—Aye, and they vex him most
Faced by an unknown and unharboured coast,
With the sun rolling nightward. Every night
Is pain to a pilot if he thinks aright,
And any landing needs must be delayed

Till safe the ship is moored.—Thou art still afraid?
Keep alway in thy mind, whate'er may chance,
The gods: while I go seek deliverance.
Argos will not disdain this herald, weak
In years belike, but strong to think and speak.
[Exit DANAUS

CHORUS.

[*Strophe 1*

O bosomed Earth, O altar of my prayer
What is upon us? Whither can I fly?
In all this Apian land is there no lair
Hid deep from every eye?
I'd be a wisp of smoke, up-curled
To the soft clouds above the world,
Up, without wings, in the bright day,
Like dust, in dying streamers whirled
To pass in nothingness away.

[*Antistrophe 1*

The heart within my breast is passion-tossed
And will not sleep; mine eyes see nothing clear.
That sight my father saw has left me lost,
And my strength gone, with fear.
Oh, better toward my doom to hie
In a rope's strangling agony,
Than lay this body down beside
The man I loathe. Oh, best to die!
Let Hades take his bride!

[*Strophe 2*

Some skyey throne—Oh, thither I would go,
Where the wet clouds, back-beaten, freeze to snow:
Some unbestriden, undescried,
Smooth vulture-crag, in lonely pride
Hanging; there to stand, and leap
Alone, alone, to the great deep,

Rather than face that forced Love
And the heart-stabbing shame thereof.

[*Antistrophe 2*

I fear not then a prey for dogs to lie,
A feast for all the vultures of the sky.
Once to be dead sets woman free
From every wrong and misery.
God give me to the grave instead
Of that polluting marriage bed.
What outlet can I hew, what path
To save us from this lust and wrath?

[*Strophe 3*

A sobbing voice, a music in the air,
Rising to God in prayers that still increase:
Thou hear'st them, Zeus! Let them fulfilment bear,
Fulfilment, freedom, stormless peace.

Look on this battle: mark the path
Of violence; let it know thy wrath:
And pity them that suppliant fall,
O Argive Zeus, O Lord of all!

[*Antistrophe 3*

The sons of Egypt, wantoning in pride,
In man's hot pride, pursue me as I fly:
They are swift of foot; their eyes mark where I hide:
Their hands grasp: shouting fills the sky.

O Zeus, in thy hands, come what may,
The scales of Fortune shift or stay,
And nothing to its end is sped
Save by the bowing of thy head.
Ah! Ah!

[*When they look up they see, already entering, the Egyptian HERALD with his fifty Black Slaves. The DANAIDS fly with confused cries, the Egyptians pursue. The cries become articulate.*

DANAIDS (*confusedly*).

The slaver is here
In the ship, on the shore
He graspeth, he claspeth:
Ah never! Before
That cometh, O grasper,
I shall fear thee no more!

From his galley on high
He swoopeth again:
The cry of my pain
Betrays where I lie.
See: it is here and begun, the day we must suffer or die,
The day that shall end us.
Away to refuge! On they come, tremendous
In scorn, luxurious scorn . . . I can no more!
A prison ship, and this a prison shore!
Lord of the Shore, defend us!

[In the following Dance the DANAIDS, seeking to escape from the circle, are gradually driven back to the Great Altar.]

HERALD.

Away, away to the galley!
Ye leaden feet of fear!
On, on, with you. Would ye dally?
Rendings of hair be here,
And irons your flesh to sear.
How? Would ye look on blood new-shed,
The trip-hook and the severed head?
Away, ye jades! Away, lest worse
Befall you, children of the curse!
Away to the galley!

CHORUS.

Oh, would, where the ways of disaster

Cross in the troughs of the brine,
Thou hadst died with the lust of thy master
And that black-morticed galley of thine.

HERALD.

To the galley, bloodily, back!
Though thy weeping be louder yet,
I command, I force thee. Slack
That failing hold, and forget
The desire and the madness. Back!
Leave the altar and come
To the black ship. Why should I pity
A woman lost, without home,
Without honour or city?

CHORUS.

Never again may I see
That water which filleth man's vein
With lifeblood, where wandereth free
The Hornèd One; never again!
My home is made evil by thee.

HERALD.

Am I not a guide, I trusty and true,
To the altar steps, to the sanctuary? . . .
But the peaceful places are not for you.
For you the ship, the ship shall it be,
Love it or loathe it, the ship and the sea;
Where rough force waiteth plain
By day and night,
A girdle deep with pain
And hands that smite.

CHORUS.

Aiai! Aiai!
Without help be thine hand
When upraised in despair!
Dead, dead, far from land
'Twixt the sea and the air
Mayst thou drift in the desert of waters
And beat on the sandshoals bare
Where dead Sarpêdon's grave
Rocks o'er the wandering wave,
And the winds rave!

HERALD.

Sob if you will, and shriek and pray! The ship
Of Egypt holds and will not let ye slip.

CHORUS.

Aiai! So strong, so vile!
Art thou a dog that howlest at the door?
Dost thou so foam with noise and rage? Therefore
May thine own god, who sees thee, the great Nile,
Sweep thy proud deeds to darkness evermore!

HERALD.

The ship's prow turns. Embark! Delay not there!
When once I drag, woe to the tressèd hair!

CHORUS.

The Gods fail me! They are not what they seem.
Seaward it makes me go,
This thing, this spider, slow,
Dark like an evil dream . . .
O Mother, Mother Earth, I am sore afraid;
Beat back my fear!
O Father, her first birth, Great Zeus, give aid!

Be with us here!

HERALD.

To these Greek gods we owe no vassalage;
Our youth they fed not, nor protect our age.

[The DANAIDS are by now driven to the topmost parts of the Great Altar.]

CHORUS.

It reaches, reaches, this two-handed snake:
'Tis near me as I kneel.
The asp of Egypt crawls. Ah, what firedrake
In the holy place? Its fang is in my heel.

[The HERALD has caught the LEADER by the foot.]

HERALD.

Come straightway to the ship, and be content;
Else ye shall come ashamed, with tunics rent.

CHORUS.

Chiefs of the City, bring
Aid, or they conquer me!

HERALD.

It seems then, since for my plain words ye care
So little, I must drag you by the hair.

[He seizes the LEADER by the hair and drags her down.]

CHORUS.

I am lost. O King! My King!
I dreamed not this could be!

HERALD.

King? Egypt's sons will show you kings galore,
And masters. Ye will never ask for more.

[Enter the KING with the Argive Host.]

KING.

Ho man, what wouldst thou? What possessed thy brain
To challenge with such brawling and disdain
This city of Argive men? Didst think that here
Were none but maids like these to meet thy spear?
Or doth the barbarous man so scorn the Greek?
Thy folly is much; thy wits seem far to seek.

HERALD.

Where is the wrong? What error have I wrought?

KING.

Not so demeaned thee as a stranger ought.

HERALD.

I have found the chattels I had lost. What more?

KING.

What strangers' Guardian didst appear before?

HERALD.

The greatest, Hermes, who the lost hath found.

KING.

He bade thee violate God's holy ground?

HERALD.

In Egypt dwell the Gods whom I obey.

KING.

And those of Greece are nothing, darest thou say?

HERALD.

Unless thieves hinder, here I take mine own.

KING.

But touch them, and thine every limb shall groan.

HERALD.

To a foreign guest this shows scant piety.

KING.

No wrecker of God's laws is guest to me.

HERALD.

That message I must bear to Egypt's sons?

KING.

It moves me little how thy message runs.

HERALD.

Still, I would fain for certain know my news

Ere I report: 'tis thus that heralds use.
What shall I say? Who is't, and by what powers,
Thus robs us of these damsels who are ours
By blood? 'Tis Ares that on this shall hold
Court, with no law nor witness; nor shall gold
Win for such deeds his pardon. For this day
Good men shall fall and lives be spurned away.

KING.

What boots my name to thee? In time enough
Thou and thy galley-mates shall hear thereof.
By their own will, in kindliness of heart,
With fair words, win these maidens to depart,
And none shall check you. . . . But one oath all through
My people hath prevailed, and standeth true,
Never these suppliant maidens to betray;
And fast with nails of iron that oath shall stay.
It is not writ on wax, not shut between
A book's dim pages, sealèd and unseen,
'Tis a clear word, outspoken to the light,
From a free tongue.
Go, get thee from my sight!

HERALD.

Ye know 'tis battle, if these maids prevail?
So be it! Power and victory to the male!

KING.

Not female shall ye find our dwellers here
In Argolis, nor drunk with barley beer!
[Exit HERALD with followers.
Take comfort now, and with your trusty band
Of handmaids seek the fortress of the land
Well-holden, girt with deep-devisèd towers.
Houses full many for your maiden bowers

Hath Argos, nor with puny strength am I
Be-castled. There in shelter ye may lie,
And ringed with swords. But if ye fain would use
Some single house alone, 'tis yours to choose.
Cull of these flowers whiche'er may please you best
And smell the sweetest. Here am I to attest
The City's will, and with me they whose charge
Is thus fulfilled. Who speaks with right more large?

LEADER.

O King of men, may blessings light
On thy good deeds! But prithee call
Our happy father: he, in all
Guiding our thought, will choose aright,

Some kindly place where we may dwell,
Fair-spoken, touched by no despite;
So swift is common speech to smite
The alien.—Thus may all be well!
[Exit KING with Retinue.]

Dear bondmaids, to your stations move;
[Enter CHORUS of HANDMAIDS.]

And each beside that mistress stand,
For whom of old our Father planned
The dowery of your trusty love.
[The HANDMAIDS take their position.]

DANAUS.

My children, to these Argives we must raise
Our voices, yea, give sacrifice and praise
As to Olympian gods. In our great need,
Not wavering in the scale, they were indeed
Our Saviours. For the tale of our distress
Woke in them love for us, and bitterness

'Gainst our pursuers. And these followers here
They have granted me, with many a trusty spear,
That neither in peace unhonoured I may go
Nor yet, chance-smitten by some random blow,
Die, and bring bane eternal on the state.
For such high bounties, see ye consecrate
Deep-hearted thankfulness; and one charge more
Grave in your hearts, with those ye have writ before,
Of this grey father's words. By time alone
In strange lands is the stranger judged and known;
Till then all men are quick to speak him wrong:
A thing so light and evil is man's tongue.
Wherefore I charge you bring me not to shame
With that young loveliness, which sets aflame
Man's longing. Hard to watch is ripening fruit.
All wild things gather round it, man and brute—
How else?—and all that crawls and all that flies.
"My grapes are ripe, are ripe," the Cyprian cries,
Nor leaves that momentary loveliness
To stay unchanged by longing. And no less
When such young grace and wonder passeth nigh
Of maidenhood, there leaps from every eye
An arrow of beseeching, and each heart
Faints with desire. Let us then play our part;
Lose not that prize for which ye have faced with me
Hard days of peril and long leagues of sea,
Lest our foes laugh and Danaus hide his head.
Behold, a choice of dwellings here is spread
Before you: one the City gives and one
Pelagus, free and feeless. 'Tis well done.
Only my charge remember. Steadfastly,
Dearer than life uphold your chastity.

LEADER.

By the Olympians' grace all peace be ours!
And fear not, Father, for my fruit nor flowers;
For, save God hides from me some purpose strange,

My bosom's path is clear, and shall not change.

[The DANAIDS and their HANDMAIDS compose a dance together, with prayers of fruitfulness for Argos and virginity—or at least no marriage without love—for themselves.]

CHORUS OF DANAIDS.

Come with me, and give blessing to the Blessèd
Of Argos, O ye who are his daughters,
To the City-gods and them beside the waters
Of old Erasînus many-tressèd.

Upgather now the prayer and the praising,
Ye handmaids; your benison deliver
To Argos, and forget the old raising
Of our voices to the flood of Egypt's river.

Give blessing to the small streams flowing
With their sweet bright water through the meadows,
With the children on their banks growing, growing,
And the soil they make soft with liquid shadows.

O Artemis, incline thee to the paean,
God's Virgin, of the virgins who implore thee!
And thou: not by force, O Cytherean,
Be thy touch upon our flesh, lest we abhor thee!

HANDMAIDS (*warning them*).

Yet the Cyprian we forget not in our dances;
Like Hera, she is close at Jove's hand.
Her light thought, it quivers and it glances,
But her works, they are wondrous in the land.

For of Her comes the dumb heart that longeth,
And the soft word that fails not, though afraid;
And the music of the world to Her belongeth,
And the whisper of a man with a maid.

Yet my spirit for the fugitives great wailing
Foreseeth, and red battles yet to be:
So untroubled was the black galley's sailing,
So swift came the hunters o'er the sea!

What is there against Fate? What abating
Of Jove's deep purposes untold?
Let it end, then, like many another mating
Of women, man-mastered as of old!

DANAIDS.

God shelter me from Egypt and his wooing!

HANDMAIDS.

It were best so, for all men and for thee!

DANAIDS.

Shalt thou melt the unmelted by thy suing?

HANDMAIDS.

Has thy spirit read the things that shall be?

DANAIDS.

Can I see into the Mind that hath no measure?

HANDMAIDS.

If thy prayer be not bold, thou canst pray.

DANAIDS.

What hope, then, what yearning may I treasure?

HANDMAIDS.

To welcome God's will and to obey.

DANAIDS.

Oh, shield me from that kiss of hate,
That mastery of an evil mate,
O Io's Aid, O Zeus above!
On her thy hand was laid, and healed
Her anguish, thine her life was sealed,
And violence turned to love.

Give freedom, Zeus, to woman's will!
I accept the better part of ill,
The twofold life I praise.
As Justice is let Judgement be!
For this shall God's hand set us free,
For this our prayer we raise.
[*Exeunt* OMNES.]