

ION

by Euripides

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translated by Robert Potter

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CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

MERCURY
ION
CREUSA, daughter of Erechtheus
XUTHUS, husband of CREUSA
TUTOR
ATTENDANT
PRIESTESS OF APOLLO
MINERVA
CHORUS OF HANDMAIDENS OF CREUSA
Attendants of the Temple of Apollo

(SCENE:—Before the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. The sun is about to rise. MERCURY enters.)

MERCURY Atlas, that on his brazen shoulders rolls
Yon heaven, the ancient mansion of the gods,
Was by a goddess sire to Maia; she
To supreme Jove bore me, and call'd me Hermes;
Attendant on the king, his high behests
I execute. To Delphi am I come,
This land where Phoebus from his central throne
Utters to mortals his high strain, declaring
The present and the future; this is the cause;
Greece hath a city of distinguish'd glory,
Which from the goddess of the golden lance
Received its name; Erechtheus was its king;
His daughter, call'd Creusa, to the embrace
Of nuptial love Apollo strain'd perforce,
Where northward points the rock beneath the heights
Crown'd with the Athenian citadel of Pallas,
Call'd Macrai by the lords of Attica.
Her growing burden, to her sire unknown
(Such was the pleasure of the god), she bore,
Till in her secret chamber to a son
The rolling months gave birth: to the same cave,
Where by the enamour'd god she was compress'd,
Creusa bore the infant: there for death
Exposed him in a well-compacted ark
Of circular form, observant of the customs
Drawn from her great progenitors, and chief

From Erichthonius, who from the Attic earth
 Deriv'd his origin: to him as guards
 Minerva gave two dragons, and in charge
 Consign'd him to the daughters of Aglauros:
 This rite to the Erechthidae hence remains,
 Mid serpents wreathed in ductile gold to nurse
 Their children. What of ornament she had
 She hung around her son, and left him thus
 To perish. But to me his earnest prayer
 Phoebus applied, "To the high-lineaged sons
 Of glorious Athens go, my brother; well
 Thou know'st the city of Pallas; from the cave
 Deep in the hollow rock a new-born babe,
 Laid as he is, and all his vestments with him;
 Bring to thy brother to my shrine, and place
 At the entrance of my temple; of the rest
 (For, know, the child is mine) I will take care."
 To gratify my brother thence I bore
 The osier-woven ark, and placed the boy
 Here at the temple's base, the wreathed lid
 Uncovering, that the infant might be seen.
 It chanced, as the orient sun the steep of heav'n
 Ascended, to the god's oracular seat
 The priestess entering, on the infant cast
 Her eye, and marvelled, deeming that some nymph
 Of Delphi at the fane had dared to lay
 The secret burden of her womb: this thought
 Prompts her to move it from the shrine: but soon
 To pity she resign'd the harsh intent;
 The impulse of the god secretly acting
 In favour of the child, that in his temple
 It might abide; her gentle hand then took it,
 And gave it nurture; yet conceived she not
 That Phoebus was the sire, nor who the mother
 Knew aught, nor of his parents could the child
 Give information. All his youthful years
 Sportive he wandered round the shrine, and there
 Was fed: but when his firmer age advanced
 To manhood, o'er the treasures of the god
 The Delphians placed him, to his faithful care
 Consigning all; and in this royal dome
 His hallow'd life he to this hour hath pass'd.
 Meantime Creusa, mother of the child,
 To Xuthus was espoused, the occasion this:—
 On Athens from Euboean Chalcis roll'd
 The waves of war; be join'd their martial toil,
 And with his spear repell'd the foe; for this
 To the proud honour of Creusa's bed
 Advanc'd; no native, in Achaea sprung
 From Aeolus, the son of Jove. Long time
 Unbless'd with children, to the oracular shrine

ION

Of Phoebus are they come, through fond desire
Of progeny: to this the god hath brought
The fortune of his son, nor, as was deem'd,
Forgets him; but to Xuthus, when he stands
This sacred seat consulting, will he give
That son, declared his offspring; that the child,
When to Creusa's house brought back, by her
May be agnized; the bridal rites of Phoebus
Kept secret, that the youth may claim the state
Due to his birth, through all the states of Greece
Named Ion, founder of the colonies
On the Asiatic coast. The laurell'd cave
Now will I visit, there to learn what fortune
Is to the boy appointed, for I see
This son of Phoebus issuing forth to adorn
The gates before the shrine with laurel boughs.
First of the gods I hail him by the name
Of Ion, which his fortune soon will give him.

(MERCURY vanishes. ION and the attendants of the temple enter.)

ION (chanting)

Now flames this radiant chariot of the sun
High o'er the earth, at whose ethereal fire
The stars into the sacred night retreat:
O'er the Parnassian cliffs the ascending wheels
To mortals roll the beams of day; the wreaths
Of incense—breathing myrrh mount to the roof
Of Phoebus' fane; the Delphic priestess now
Assumes her seat, and from the hallow'd tripod
Pronounces to the Greeks the oracular strains
Which the god dictates. Haste, ye Delphic train,
Haste to Castalia's silver—streaming fount;
Bathed in its chaste dew to the temple go;
There from your guarded mouths no sound be heard
But of good omen, that to those who crave
Admission to the oracle, your voice
May with auspicious words expound the answers.
My task, which from my early infancy
Hath been my charge, shall be with laurel boughs
And sacred wreaths to cleanse the vestibule
Of Phoebus, on the pavement moistening dew
To rain, and with my bow to chase the birds
Which would defile the hallow'd ornaments.
A mother's fondness, and a father's care
I never knew: the temple of the god
Claims then my service, for it nurtured me.

(The attendants leave. ION busies himself before
the temple as he continues to sing.)

ION

strophe

Haste, thou verdant new-sprung bough,
 Haste, thy early office know;
 Branch of beauteous laurel come,
 Sweep Apollo's sacred dome,
 Cropp'd this temple's base beneath,
 Where the immortal gardens breathe,
 And eternal dews that round
 Water the delicious ground,
 Bathe the myrtle's tresses fair.
 Lightly thus, with constant care,
 The pavement of the god I sweep,
 When over the Parnassian steep
 Flames the bright sun's mounting ray;
 This my task each rising day.
 Son of Latona, Paeon, Paeon, hail!
 Never, O never may thy honours fail!

antistrophe

Grateful is my task, who wait
 Serving, Phoebus, at thy gate;
 Honouring thus thy hallow'd shrine,
 Honour for the task is mine.
 Labouring with unwilling hands,
 Me no mortal man commands:
 But, immortal gods, to you
 All my pleasing toil is due.
 Phoebus is to me a sire;
 Grateful thoughts my soul inspire;
 Nurtured by thy bounty here,
 Thee, Apollo, I revere;
 As a father's I repeat.
 Son of Latona, Paeon, Paeon, hail!
 Never, O never may thy honours fail!

Now from this labour with the laurel bough
 I cease; and sprinkling from the golden vase
 The chaste drops which Castalia's fountain rolls,
 Bedew the pavement. Never may I quit
 This office to the god; or, if I quit it,
 Be it, good Fortune, at thy favouring call!
 But see, the early birds have left their nests,
 And this way from Parnassus wing their flight.
 Come not, I charge you, near the battlements,
 Nor near the golden dome. Herald of Jove,
 Strong though thy beak beyond the feather'd kind,
 My bow shall reach thee. Towards the altar, see,
 A swan comes sailing: elsewhere wilt thou move

ION

Thy scarlet–tinctured foot? or from my bow
The lyre of Phoebus to thy notes attuned
Will not protect thee; farther stretch thy wings;
Go, wanton, skim along the Delian lake,
Or wilt thou steep thy melody in blood.
Look, what strange bird comes onwards; wouldst thou fix
Beneath the battlements thy straw–built nest?
My singing bow shall drive thee hence; begone,
Or to the banks of Alpheus, gulfy stream,
Or to the Isthmian grove; there hatch thy young;
Mar not these pendent ornaments, nor soil
The temple of the god: I would not kill you:
'Twere pity, for to mortal man you bear
The message of the gods; yet my due task
Must be perform'd, and never will I cease
My service to the god who nurtured me.

(The CHORUS enters. The following lines between ION and the CHORUS are chanted responsively as they gaze admiringly at the decorations on the temple.)

CHORUS

The stately column, and the gorgeous dome
Raised to the gods, are not the boast alone
Of our magnificent Athens; nor the statues
That grace her streets; this temple of the god,
Son of Latona, beauteous to behold,
Beams the resplendent light of both her children.

ION

Turn thine eyes this way; look, the son of Jove
Lops with his golden scimitar the heads
Of the Lernean Hydra: view it well.

CHORUS

I see him.

ION

And this other standing nigh,
Who snatches from the fire the blazing brand.

CHORUS

What is his name? the subject, on the web
Design'd, these hands have wrought in ductile gold.

ION

The shield–supporting Iolaus, who bears
The toils in common with the son of Jove.
View now this hero; on his winged steed
The triple–bodied monster's dreadful force

ION

ION

He conquers through the flames his jaws emit.

CHORUS

I view it all attentively.

ION

Observe

The battle of the giants, on the walls

Sculptured in stone.

CHORUS

Let us note this, my friends.

ION

See where against Enceladus she shakes

Her gorgon shield.

CHORUS

I see my goddess, Pallas.

ION

Mark the tempestuous thunder's flaming bolt

Launch'd by the hand of Jove.

CHORUS

The furious Mimas

Here blazes in the volley'd fires: and there

Another earth-born monster falls beneath

The wand of Bacchus wreathed with ivy round,

No martial spear. But, as 'tis thine to tend

This temple, let me ask thee, is it lawful,

Leaving our sandals, its interior parts

To visit?

ION

Strangers, this is not permitted.

CHORUS

Yet may we make inquiries of thee?

ION

Speak;

What wouldst thou know?

CHORUS

Whether this temple's site

Be the earth's centre?

ION

Ay, with garlands hung,

And gorgons all around.

ION

CHORUS

So fame reports.

ION

If at the gate the honey'd cake be offer'd,
 Would you consult the oracle, advance
 To the altar: till the hallow'd lamb has bled
 In sacrifice, approach not the recess.

CHORUS

I am instructed: what the god appoints
 As laws, we wish not to transgress: without
 Enough of ornament delights our eyes.

ION

Take a full view of all; that is allow'd.

CHORUS

To view the inmost shrine was our lord's order.

ION

Who are you call'd? Attendants on what house?

CHORUS

Our lords inhabit the magnificent domes
 Of Pallas.—But she comes, of whom thou askest.
 (CREUSA and attendants enter.)

ION

Lady, whoe'er thou art, that liberal air
 Speaks an exalted mind: there is a grace,
 A dignity in those of noble birth,
 That marks their high rank. Yet I marvel much
 That from thy closed lids the trickling tear
 Water'd thy beauteous cheeks, soon as thine eye
 Beheld this chaste oracular seat of Phoebus.
 What brings this sorrow, lady? All besides,
 Viewing the temple of the god, are struck
 With joy; thy melting eye o'erflows with tears.

CREUSA

Not without reason, stranger, art thou seized
 With wonder at my tears: this sacred dome
 Awakes the sad remembrance of things past.
 I had my mind at home, though present here.
 How wretched is our sex! And, O ye gods,
 What deeds are yours! Where may we hope for right,
 If by the injustice of your power undone?

ION

Why, lady, this inexplicable grief?

ION

CREUSA

It matters not; my mind resumes its firmless:
I say no more; cease thy concern for me.

ION

But say, who art thou? whence? what country boasts
Thy birth? and by what name may we address thee?

CREUSA

Creusa is my name, drawn from Erechtheus
My high-born lineage; Athens gave me birth.
Illustrious is thy state; thy ancestry
So noble that I look with reverence on thee.

CREUSA

Happy indeed is this, in nothing farther.

ION

But tell me, is it true what fame has blazon'd?

CREUSA

What wouldst thou ask? Stranger, I wish to know.

ION

Sprung the first author of thy line from the earth?

CREUSA

Ay, Erichthonius; but my race avails not.

ION

And did Minerva raise him from the earth?

CREUSA

Held in her virgin hands: she bore him not.

ION

And gave him as the picture represents?

CREUSA

Daughters of Cecrops these, charged not to see him.

ION

The virgins ope'd the interdicted chest?

CREUSA

And died, distaining with their blood the rock.

ION

But tell me, is this truth, or a vain rumour?

CREUSA

What wouldst thou ask? I am not scant of time.

ION

Thy sisters did Erechtheus sacrifice?

CREUSA

He slew the virgins, victims for their country.

ION

And thou of all thy sisters saved alone?

CREUSA

I was an infant in my mother's arms.

ION

And did the yawning earth swallow thy father?

CREUSA

By Neptune's trident smote; and so he perish'd.

ION

And Macraï call you not the fatal place?

CREUSA

Why dost thou ask? What thoughts hast thou recall'd?

ION

Does Phoebus, do his lightnings honour it?

CREUSA

Honour! Why this? Would I had never seen it!

ION

Why? Dost thou hate the place dear to the god?

CREUSA

No: but for some base deed done in the cave.

ION

But what Athenian, lady, wedded thee?

CREUSA

Of Athens none, but one of foreign birth.

ION

What is his name? Noble he needs must be.

CREUSA

Xuthus, by Aeolus derived from Jove.

ION

ION

How weds a stranger an Athenian born?

CREUSA

Euboea is a state neighbouring on Athens.

ION

A narrow sea flows, I have heard, between.

CREUSA

Joining the Athenian arms, that state he wasted.

ION

Confederate in the war, thence wedded thee?

CREUSA

The dowral meed of war, earn'd by his spear.

ION

Comest thou with him to Delphi, or alone?

CREUSA

With him, gone now to the Trophonian shrine.

ION

To view it, or consult the oracle?

CREUSA

Both that and this, anxious for one response.

ION

For the earth's fruits consult you, or for children?

CREUSA

Though wedded long, yet childless is our bed.

ION

Hast thou ne'er borne a child, that thou hast none?

CREUSA

My state devoid of children Phoebus knows.

ION

Bless'd in all else, luckless in this alone.

CREUSA

But who art thou? Bless'd I pronounce thy mother.

ION

Call'd as I am the servant of the god.

CREUSA

Presented by some state, or sold to this?

ION

I know not aught save this, I am the god's.

CREUSA

And in my turn, stranger, I pity thee.

ION

As knowing not my mother, or my lineage.

CREUSA

Hast thou thy dwelling here, or in some house?

ION

The temple is my house, ev'n when I sleep.

CREUSA

A child brought hither, or in riper years?

ION

An infant, as they say, who seem to know.

CREUSA

What Delphian dame sustain'd thee at her breast?

ION

I never knew a breast. She nourish'd me.

CREUSA

Who, hapless youth? Diseased, I find disease.

ION

The priestess: as a mother I esteem her.

CREUSA

Who to these manly years gave thee support?

ION

The altars, and the still-succeeding strangers.

CREUSA

Wretched, whoe'er she be, is she that bore thee.

ION

I to some woman am perchance a shame.

CREUSA

Are riches thine? Thou art well habited.

ION

ION

ION

Graced with these vestments by the god I serve.

CREUSA

Hast thou made no attempt to trace thy birth?

ION

I have no token, lady, for a proof.

CREUSA

Ah, like thy mother doth another suffer.

ION

Who? tell me: shouldst thou help me, what a joy

CREUSA

One for whose sake I come before my husband.

ION

Say for what end, that I may serve thee, lady.

CREUSA

To ask a secret answer of the god.

ION

Speak it: my service shall procure the rest.

CREUSA

Hear then the tale: but Modesty restrains me.

ION

Ah, let her not; her power avails not here.

CREUSA

My friend then says that to the embrace of Phoebus—

ION

A woman and a god! Say not so, stranger.

CREUSA

She bore a son: her father knew it not.

ION

Not so: a mortal's baseness he disdains.

CREUSA

This she affirms; and this, poor wretch, she suffer'd.

ION

What follow'd, if she knew the god's embrace?

ION

CREUSA

The child, which hence had birth, she straight exposed.

ION

This exposed child, where is he? doth he live?

CREUSA

This no one knows; this wish I to inquire.

ION

If not alive, how probably destroyed?

CREUSA

Torn, she conjectures, by some beast of prey.

ION

What ground hath she on which to build that thought?

CREUSA

Returning to the place she found him not.

ION

Observed she drops of blood distain the path?

CREUSA

None, though with anxious heed she search'd around.

ION

What time hath pass'd since thus the child was lost?

CREUSA

Were he alive, his youth were such as thine.

ION

The god hath done him wrong: the unhappy mother—

CREUSA

Hath not to any child been mother since.

ION

What if in secret Phoebus nurtures him!

CREUSA

Unjust to enjoy alone a common right.

ION

Ah me! this cruel fate accords with mine.

CREUSA

For thee too thy unhappy mother mourns.

ION

ION

Ah, melt me not to griefs I would forget!

CREUSA

I will be silent: but impart thy aid.

ION

Seest thou what most the inquiry will suppress?

CREUSA

And to my wretched friend what is not ill?

ION

How shall the god what he would hide reveal?

CREUSA

As placed on the oracular seat of Greece.

ION

The deed must cause him shame: convict him not.

CREUSA

To the poor sufferer 'tis the cause of grief.

ION

It cannot be; for who shall dare to give
 The oracle? With justice would the god,
 In his own dome affronted, pour on him
 Severest vengeance, who should answer thee.
 Desist then, lady: it becomes us ill,
 In opposition to the god, to make
 Inquiries at his shrine; by sacrifice
 Before their altars, or the flight of birds,
 Should we attempt to force the unwilling gods
 To utter what they wish not, 'twere the excess
 Of rudeness; what with violence we urge
 'Gainst their consent would to no good avail us:
 What their spontaneous grace confers on us,
 That, lady, as a blessing we esteem.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

How numberless the ills to mortal man,
 And various in their form! One single blessing
 By any one through life is scarcely found.

CREUSA

Nor here, nor there, O Phoebus, art thou just
 To her; though absent, yet her words are present.
 Nor didst thou save thy son, whom it became thee
 To save; nor, though a prophet, wilt thou speak
 To the sad mother who inquires of thee;

ION

That, if he is no more, to him a tomb
 May rise; but, if he lives, that he may bless
 His mother's eyes. But even thus behooves us
 To omit these things, if by the god denied
 To know what most I wish.—But, for I see
 The noble Xuthus this way bend, return'd
 From the Trophonian cave; before my husband
 Resume not, generous stranger, this discourse,
 Lest it might cause me shame that thus I act
 In secret, and perchance lead on to questions
 I would not have explain'd. Our hapless sex
 Oft feel our husbands' rigour: with the bad
 The virtuous they confound, and treat us harshly.
 (XUTHUS and his retinue enter.)

XUTHUS

With reverence to the god my first address
 I pay: Hail, Phoebus! Lady, next to thee:
 Absent so long, have I not caused thee fear?

CREUSA

Not much: as anxious thoughts 'gan rise, thou'rt come.
 But, tell me, from Trophonius what reply
 Bearest thou; what means whence offspring may arise?

XUTHUS

Unmeet he held it to anticipate
 The answer of the god: one thing he told me.
 That childless I should not return, nor thou,
 Home from the oracle.

CREUSA

Goddess revered,
 Mother of Phoebus, be our coming hither
 In lucky hour; and our connubial bed
 Be by thy son made happier than before!

XUTHUS

It shall be so. But who is president here?

ION

Without, that charge is mine; within, devolved
 On others, stranger, seated near the tripod;
 The chiefs of Delphi these, chosen by lot.

XUTHUS

'Tis well: all that I want is then complete.
 Let me now enter: for the oracle
 Is given, I hear, in common to all strangers
 Before the shrine; on such a day, that falls
 Propitious thus, the answer of the god

ION

Would I receive: meanwhile, these laurel boughs
Bear round the altars; lady, breathe thy prayers
To every god, that from Apollo's shrine
I may bring back the promise of a son.

(XUTHUS, after giving the laurel boughs to CREUSA, enters the temple.)

CREUSA

It shall, it shall be so. Should Phoebus now
At least be willing to redress the fault
Of former times, he would not through the whole
Be friendly to us: yet will I accept
What he vouchsafes us, for he is a god.

(CREUSA departs to the shrines in the outer precinct of the temple.)

ION

Why does this stranger always thus revile
With obscure speech the god? Is it through love
Of her, for whom she asks? or to conceal
Some secret of importance? But to me
What is the daughter of Erechtheus? Naught
Concerns it me. Then let me to my task,
And sprinkle from the golden vase the dew.
Yet must I blame the god, if thus perforce
He mounts the bed of virgins, and by stealth
Becomes a father, leaving then his children
To die, regardless of them. Do not thou
Act thus; but, as thy power is great, respect
The virtues; for whoe'er, of mortal men,
Dares impious deeds, him the gods punish: how
Is it then just that you, who gave the laws
To mortals, should yourselves transgress those laws?,
If (though it is not thus, yet will I urge
The subject),—if to mortals you shall pay
The penalty of forced embraces, thou,
Neptune, and Jove, that reigns supreme in heaven,
Will leave your temples treasureless by paying
The mulcts of your injustice: for unjust
You are, your pleasures to grave temperance
Preferring: and to men these deeds no more
Can it be just to charge as crimes, these deeds
If from the gods they imitate: on those
Who gave the ill examples falls the charge.
(ION goes out.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe

ION

Thee prompt to yield thy lenient aid,
 And sooth a mother's pain:
 And thee, my Pallas, martial maid,
 I call: O, hear the strain!
 Thou, whom the Titan from the head of Jove,
 Prometheus, drew, bright Victory, come,
 Descending from thy golden throne above;
 Haste, goddess, to the Pythian dome,
 Where Phoebus, from his central shrine,
 Gives the oracle divine,
 By the raving maid repeated,
 On the hallow'd tripod seated:
 O haste thee, goddess, and with thee
 The daughter of Latona bring;
 A virgin thou, a virgin she,
 Sisters to the Delphian king;
 Him, virgins, let your vows implore,
 That now his pure oracular power
 Will to Erechtheus' ancient line declare
 The blessing of a long-expected heir!

antistrophe

To mortal man this promised grace
 Sublimest pleasure brings,
 When round the father's hearth a race
 In blooming lustre springs.
 The wealth, the honours, from their high-drawn line
 From sire to son transmitted down,
 Shall with fresh glory through their offspring shine,
 And brighten with increased renown:
 A guard, when ills begin to lower,
 Dear in fortune's happier hour;
 For their country's safety waking,
 Firm in fight the strong spear shaking;
 More than proud wealth's exhaustless store,
 More than a monarch's bride to reign,
 The dear delight, to virtue's lore
 Careful the infant mind to train.
 Doth any praise the childless state?
 The joyless, loveless life I hate;
 No; my desires to moderate wealth I bound,
 But let me see my children smile around.

epode

Ye rustic seats, Pan's dear delight;
 Ye caves of Macraï's rocky height,
 Where oft the social virgins meet,
 And weave the dance with nimble feet;

ION

Descendants from Aglauros they
In the third line, with festive play,
Minerva's hallow'd fane before
The verdant plain light-tripping o'er,
When thy pipe's quick-varying sound
Rings, O Pan, these caves around;
Where, by Apollo's love betray'd,
Her child some hapless mother laid,
Exposed to each night-prowling beast,
Or to the ravenous birds a feast;
For never have I heard it told,
Nor wrought it in historic gold,
That happiness attends the race,
When gods with mortals mix the embrace.
(ION re-enters.)

ION

Ye female train, that place yourselves around
This incense-breathing temple's base, your lord
Awaiting, hath he left the sacred tripod
And oracle, or stays he in the shrine,
Making inquiries of his childless state?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yet in the temple, stranger, he remains.

ION

But he comes forth; the sounding doors announce
His near approach; behold, our lord is here.

(XUTHUS enters from the temple. He rushes to greet ION.)

XUTHUS

Health to my son! This first address is proper.

ION

I have my health: be in thy senses thou,
And both are well.

XUTHUS

O let me kiss thy hand,
And throw mine arms around thee.

ION

Art thou, stranger,
Well in thy wits? or hath the god's displeasure
Bereft thee of thy reason?

XUTHUS

Reason bids,

ION

ION

That which is dearest being found, to wish
A fond embrace.

ION

Off, touch me not; thy hands
Will mar the garlands of the god.

XUTHUS

My touch
Asserts no pledge: my own, and that most dear,
I find.

ION

Wilt thou not keep thee distant, ere
Thou hast my arrow in thy heart?

XUTHUS

Why fly me,
When thou shouldst own what is most fond of thee?

ION

I am not fond of curing wayward strangers,
And madmen.

XUTHUS

Kill me, raise my funeral pyre;
But, if thou kill me, thou wilt kill thy father.

ION

My father thou! how so? it makes me laugh
To hear thee.

XUTHUS

This my words may soon explain.

ION

What wilt thou say to me?

XUTHUS

I am thy father,
And thou my son.

ION

Who declares this?

XUTHUS

The god,
That nurtured thee, though mine.

ION

Thou to thyself

ION

Art witness.

XUTHUS

By the oracle inform'd.

ION

Misled by some dark answer.

XUTHUS

Well I heard it.

ION

What were the words of Phoebus?

XUTHUS

That who first
Should meet me—

ION

How?—what meeting?

XUTHUS

As I pass'd.
Forth from the temple.

ION

What the event to him?

XUTHUS

He is my son.

ION

Born so, or by some other
Presented?

XUTHUS

Though a present, born my son.

ION

And didst thou first meet me?

XUTHUS

None else, my son.

ION

This fortune whence?

XUTHUS

At that we marvel both.

ION

Who is my mother?

XUTHUS

That I cannot say.

ION

Did not the god inform thee?

XUTHUS

Through my joy,
For this I ask'd not.

ION

Haply from the earth
I sprung, my mother.

XUTHUS

No, the earth no sons
Produces.

ION

How then am I thine?

XUTHUS

I know not.
To Phoebus I appeal.

ION

Be this discourse
Chang'd to some other.

XUTHUS

This delights me most.

ION

Hast thou e'er mounted an unlawful bed?

XUTHUS

In foolishness of youth.

ION

Was that before
Thy marriage with the daughter of Erechtheus?

XUTHUS

Since never.

ION

Owe I then my birth to that?

XUTHUS

The time agrees.

ION

How came I hither then?

XUTHUS

I can form no conjecture.

ION

Was I brought
From some far distant part?

XUTHUS

That fills my mind
With doubtful musing.

ION

Didst thou e'er before
Visit the Pythian rock?

XUTHUS

Once, at the feast
Of Bacchus.

ION

By some public host received?

XUTHUS

Who with the Delphian damsels—

ION

To the orgies
Led thee, or how?

XUTHUS

And with the Maenades
Of Bacchus—

ION

In the temperate hour, or warm
With wine?

XUTHUS

Amid the revels of the god.

ION

From thence I date my birth.

XUTHUS

And fate, my son,

ION

Hath found thee.

ION

How then came I to the temple?

XUTHUS

Perchance exposed.

ION

The state of servitude
Have I escaped.

XUTHUS

Thy father now, my son,
Receive.

ION

Indecent were it in the god
Not to confide.

XUTHUS

Thy thoughts are just.

ION

What else
Would we?

XUTHUS

Thou seest what thou oughtst to see.

ION

Am I the son then of the son of Jove?

XUTHUS

Such is thy fortune.

ION

Those that gave me birth
Do I embrace?

XUTHUS

Obedient to the god.

ION

My father, hail!

XUTHUS

That dear name I accept
With joy.

ION

This present day—

XUTHUS

Hath made me happy.

ION

O my dear mother, when shall I behold
Thy face? Whoe'er thou art, more wish I now
To see thee than before; but thou perchance
Art dead, and nothing our desires avail.

LEADER

We in the blessing of our house rejoice.
Yet wish we that our mistress too were happy
In children, and the lineage of Erechtheus.

XUTHUS

Well hath the god accomplish'd this, my son,
Discovering thee, well hath he joined thee to me;
And thou hast found the most endearing ties,
To which, before this hour, thou wast a stranger.
And the warm wish, which thou hast well conceived,
Is likewise mine, that thou mayst find thy mother;
I from what woman thou derivest thy birth.
This, left to time, may haply be discover'd.
Now quit this hallow'd earth, the god no more
Attending, and to mine accord thy mind,
To visit Athens, where thy father's sceptre,
No mean one, waits thee, and abundant wealth:
Nor, though thou grieve one parent yet unknown,
Shalt thou be censured as ignobly born,
Or poor: no, thou art noble, and thy state
Adorn'd with rich possessions. Thou art silent.
Why is thine eye thus fixed upon the ground?
Why on thy brow that cloud? The smile of joy
Vanish'd, thou strikest thy father's heart with fear.

ION

Far other things appear when nigh, than seen
At distance. I indeed embrace my fortune,
In thee my father found. But hear what now
Wakes sad reflections. Proud of their high race
Are your Athenians, natives of the land,
Not drawn from foreign lineage: I to them
Shall come unwelcome, in two points defective,
My father not a native, and myself
Of spurious birth: loaded with this reproach,
If destitute of power, I shall be held
Abject and worthless: should I rush among
The highest order of the state, and wish

ION

To appear important, inferior ranks
 Will hate me; aught above them gives disgust.
 The good, the wise, men form'd to serve the state,
 Are silent, nor at public honours aim
 Too hastily: by such, were I not quiet
 In such a bustling state, I should be deem'd
 Ridiculous, and proverb'd for a fool.
 Should I attain the dignity of those,
 Whose approved worth hath raised them to the height
 Of public honours, by such suffrage more
 Should I be watch'd; for they that hold in states
 Rule and pre-eminence, bear hostile minds
 To all that vie with them. And should I come
 To a strange house a stranger, to a woman
 Childless herself, who that misfortune shared
 Before with thee, now sees it her sole lot,
 And feels it bitterly, would she not hate me,
 And that with justice? When I stand before them.
 With what an eye would she, who hath no child,
 Look on thy child? In tenderness to her,
 Thy wife, thou must forsake me, or embroil
 Thy house in discord, if thou favour me.
 What murderous means, what poisonous drugs for men
 Have women with inventive rage prepared!
 Besides, I have much pity for thy wife,
 Now growing old without a child, that grief
 Unmerited, the last of her high race,
 The exterior face indeed of royalty,
 So causelessly commended, bath its brightness;
 Within, all gloom: for what sweet peace of mind,
 What happiness is his, whose years are pass'd
 In comfortless suspicion, and the dread
 Of violence? Be mine the humble blessings
 Of private life, rather than be a king,
 From the flagitious forced to choose my friends,
 And hate the virtuous through the fear of death.
 Gold, thou mayst tell me, hath o'er things like these
 A sovereign power, and riches give delight:
 I have no pleasure in this noisy pomp,
 Nor, while I guard my riches, in the toil:
 Be mine a modest mean that knows not care.
 And now, my father, hear the happy state
 I here enjoy'd; and first, to mortal man
 That dearest blessing, leisure, and no bustle
 To cause disturbance: me no ruffian force
 Shoved from the way: it is not to be borne,
 When every insolent and worthless wretch
 Makes you give place. The worship of the god
 Employ'd my life, or (no unpleasing task)
 Service to men well pleased: the parting guest
 I bade farewell—welcomed the new—arrived.

Thus something always new made every hour
 Glide sweetly on; and to the human mind
 That dearest wish, though some regard it not,
 To be, what duty and my nature made me,
 Just to the god: revolving this, my father,
 I wish not for thy Athens to exchange
 This state; permit me to myself to live;
 Dear to the mind pleasures that arise
 From humble life, as those which greatness brings.

LEADER

Well hast thou said, if those whom my soul holds
 Most dear shall in thy words find happiness.

XUTHUS

No more of this discourse; learn to be happy.
 It is my will that thou begin it here,
 Where first I found thee, son: a general feast
 Will I provide, and make a sacrifice,
 Which at thy birth I made not: at my table
 Will I receive thee as a welcome guest,
 And cheer thee with the banquet, then conduct thee
 To Athens with me as a visitant,
 Not as my son: for, mid my happiness,
 I would not grieve my wife, who hath no child.

ION

But I will watch the occasions time may bring,
 And so present thee, and obtain her leave
 That thou mayst hold the sceptre which I bear.
 Ion I name thee, as befits thy fortune,
 As first thou met'st me from the hallow'd shrine
 As I came forth; assemble then thy friends,
 Invite them all to share the joyful feast,
 Since thou art soon to leave the Delphic state.
 And you, ye females, keep, I charge you, keep
 This secret; she that tells my wife shall die.

ION

Let us then go; yet one thing to my fortune
 Is wanting: if I find not her that bore me,
 Life hath no joy. Might I indulge a wish,
 It were to find her an Athenian dame,
 That from my mother I might dare to assume
 Some confidence; for he whose fortune leads him
 To a free state proud of their unmix'd race,
 Though call'd a citizen, must close his lips
 With servile awe, for freedom is not his.
 (XUTHUS and ION go out.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe

Yes, sisters, yes, the streaming eye,
 The swelling heart I see, the bursting sigh,
 When thus rejoicing in his son
 Our queen her royal lord shall find,
 And give to grief her anguish'd mind,
 Afflicted, childless, and alone.
 What means this voice divine,
 Son of Latona, fate-declaring power?
 Whence is this youth, so fondly graced,
 That to ripe manhood, from his infant hour,
 Hath in thy hallow'd courts been plac'd
 And nurtured at thy shrine?
 Thy dark reply delights not me;
 Lurking beneath close fraud I see:
 Where will this end? I fear, I fear—
 'Tis strange, and strange events must hence ensue:
 But grateful sounds it to his ear,
 The youth, that in another's state
 (Who sees not that my words are true?)
 Enjoys the fraud, and triumphs in his fate.

antistrophe

Say, sisters, say, with duteous zeal
 Shall we this secret to our queen reveal?
 She, to her royal lord resign'd,
 With equal hope, with equal care,
 Form'd her his joys, his griefs to share,
 And gave him an her willing mind.
 But joys are his alone;
 While she, poor mourner, with a weight of woes,
 To hoary age advancing, bends;
 He the bright smile of prosperous fortune knows.
 Ev'n thus, unhonour'd by his friends,
 Plac'd on another's throne,
 Mischance and ruin on him wait,
 Who fails to guard its happy state.
 Him may mischance and ruin seize,
 Who round my lov'd queen spreads his wily trains.
 No god may his oblation please,
 No favouring flame to him ascend!
 To her my faith, my zeal remains,
 Known to her ancient royal house a friend.

epode

Now the father and the new-found son

The festive table haste to spread,
 Where to the skies Parnassus lifts his head,
 And deep beneath the hanging stone
 Forms in its rudely-rifted side
 A cavern wild and wide;
 Where Bacchus, shaking high his midnight flames,
 In many a light fantastic round
 Dances o'er the craggy ground,
 And revels with his frantic dames.
 Ne'er to my city let him come,
 This youth: no, rather let him die,
 And sink into an early tomb!
 With an indignant eye
 Athens would view the stranger's pride
 Within her gates triumphant ride:
 Enough for her the honour'd race that springs
 From old Erechtheus and her line of kings.
 (CREUSA and her aged TUTOR enter.)

CREUSA

Thou venerable man, whose guiding voice
 My father, while he lived, revered, advance
 Up to the oracular seat thy aged steps;
 That, if the royal Phoebus should pronounce
 Promise of offspring, thou with me mayst share
 The joy; for pleasing is it when with friends
 Good fortune we receive; if aught of ill
 (Avert it, Heaven!) befalls, a friend's kind eye
 Beams comfort; thee, as once thou didst revere
 My father, though thy queen, I now revere.

TUTOR

In thee, my child, the nobleness of manners
 Which graced thy royal ancestors yet lives;
 Thou never wilt disgrace thy high-born lineage.
 Lead me, then, lead me to the shrine, support me:
 High is the oracular seat, and steep the ascent;
 Be thou assistant to the foot of age.

CREUSA

Follow; be heedful where thou set thy steps.

TUTOR

I am: my foot is slow, my heart hath wings.

CREUSA

Fix thy staff firm on this loose-rolling ground.

TUTOR

That hath no eyes; and dim indeed my sight.

CREUSA

Well hast thou said; on cheerful then, and faint not.

TUTOR

I have the will, but o'er constraint no power.

CREUSA

Ye females, on my richly-broider'd works
 Faithful attendants, say, respecting children,
 For which we came, what fortune hath my lord
 Borne hence? if good, declare it: you shall find
 That to no thankless masters you give joy.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O fortune!

CREUSA

To thy speech this is a proem
 Not tuned to happiness.

LEADER

Unhappy fortune!
 But why distress me for the oracle
 Given to our lords? Be that as fate requires
 In things which threaten death, what shall we do?

CREUSA

What means this strain of woe? Whence are these fears?

LEADER

What! shall we speak, or bury this in silence?

CREUSA

Speak, though thy words bring wretchedness to me.

LEADER

It shall be spoken, were I twice to die.
 To thee, my queen, it is not given to clasp
 In thy fond arms a child, or at thy breast
 To hold it.

TUTOR

O my child, would I were dead!

CREUSA

Yes, this is wretchedness indeed, a grief
 That makes life joyless.

TUTOR

This is ruin to us.

CREUSA

Unhappy me! this is a piercing grief,
That rends my heart with anguish.

TUTOR

Groan not yet.

CREUSA

Yet is the affliction present.

TUTOR

Till we learn—

CREUSA

To me what tidings?

TUTOR

If a common fate
Await our lord, partaker of thy griefs,
Or thou alone art thus unfortunate.

LEADER

To him, old man, the god hath given a son,
And happiness is his unknown to her.

CREUSA

To ill this adds the deepest ill, a grief
For me to mourn.

TUTOR

Born of some other woman
Is this child yet to come, or did the god
Declare one now in being?

LEADER

One advanced
To manhood's prime he gave him: I was present.

CREUSA

What hast thou said? Thy words denounce to me
Sorrows past speech, past utterance.

TUTOR

And to me.

CREUSA

How was this oracle accomplish'd? Tell me
With clearest circumstance: who is this youth?

LEADER

Him as a son Apollo gave, whom first,

Departing from the god, thy lord should meet.

CREUSA

O my unhappy fate! I then am left
 Childless to pass my life, childless, alone,
 Amid my lonely house! Who was declared?
 Whom did the husband of this wretch first meet?
 How meet him? Where behold him? Tell me all.

LEADER

Dost thou, my honoured mistress, call to mind
 The youth that swept the temple? This is he.

CREUSA

O, through the liquid air that I could fly,
 Far from the land of Greece, ev'n to the stars
 Fix'd in the western sky! Ah me, what grief,
 What piercing grief is mine I

TUTOR

Say, by what name
 Did he address his son, if thou hast heard it?
 Or does it rest in silence, yet unknown?

LEADER

Ion, for that he first advanced to meet him.

TUTOR

And of what mother?

LEADER

That I could not learn:
 Abrupt was his departure (to inform the
 Of all I know, old man) to sacrifice,
 With hospitable rites, a birthday feast;
 And in the hallow'd cave, from her apart,
 With his new son to share the common banquet.

TUTOR

Lady, we by thy husband are betrayed,
 For I with thee am grieved, with contrived fraud
 Insulted, from thy father's house cast forth.
 I speak not this in hatred to thy lord,
 But that I love thee more: a stranger he
 Came to the city and thy royal house,
 And wedded thee, all thy inheritance
 Receiving, by some other woman now
 Discover'd to have children privately:
 How privately I'll tell thee: when he saw
 Thou hadst no child, it pleased him not to bear
 A fate like thine; but by some favourite slave,

His paramour by stealth, he hath a son.
 Him to some Delphian gave he, distant far,
 To educate; who to this sacred house
 Consign'd, as secret here, received his nurture.
 He knowing this, and that his son advanced
 To manhood, urged thee to attend him hither,
 Pleading thy childless state. Nor hath the god
 Deceived thee: he deceived thee, and long since
 Contrived this wily plan to rear his son,
 That, if convicted, he might charge the god,
 Himself excusing: should the fraud succeed,
 He would observe the times when he might safely
 Consign to him the empire of thy land.
 And this new name was at his leisure form'd,
 Ion, for that he came by chance to meet him.
 I hate those ill–designing men, that form
 Plans of injustice, and then gild them over
 With artificial ornament: to me
 Far dearer is the honest simple friend,
 Than one whose quicker wit is train'd to ill.
 And to complete this fraud, thou shalt be urged
 To take into thy house, to lord it there,
 This low–born youth, this offspring of a slave.
 Though ill, it had been open, had he pleaded
 Thy want of children, and, thy leave obtain'd,
 Brought to thy house a son that could have boasted
 His mother noble; or, if that displeas'd thee,
 He might have sought a wife from Aeolus.
 Behooves thee then to act a woman's part,
 Or grasp the sword, or drug the poison'd bowl,
 Or plan some deep design to kill thy husband,
 And this his son, before thou find thy death
 From them: if thou delay, thy life is lost:
 For when beneath one roof two foes are met,
 The one must perish. I with ready zeal
 Will aid thee in this work, and kill the youth,
 Entering the grot where he prepares the feast;
 Indifferent in my choice, so that I pay
 What to my lords I owe, to live or die.
 If there is aught that causes slaves to blush,
 It is the name; in all else than the free
 The slave is nothing worse, if he be virtuous.
 I too, my honour'd queen, with cheerful mind
 Will share thy fate, or die, or live with honour.

CREUSA (chanting)

How, o my soul, shall I be silent, how
 Disclose this secret? Can I bid farewell
 To modesty? What else restrains my tongue?
 To how severe a trial am I brought!
 Hath not my husband wrong'd me? Of my house

I am deprived, deprived of children; hope
 Is vanish'd, which my heart could not resign,
 With many an honest wish this furtive bed
 Concealing, this lamented bed concealing.
 But by the star-bespangled throne of Jove,
 And by the goddess high above my rocks
 Enshrined, by the moist banks that bend around
 The hallow'd lake by Triton form'd, no longer
 Will I conceal this bed, but ease my breast,
 The oppressive load discharged. Mine eyes drop tears,
 My soul is rent, to wretchedness ensnared
 By men, by gods, whom I will now disclose,
 Unkind betrayers of the beds they forced.
 O thou, that wakest on thy seven-string'd lyre
 Sweet notes, that from the rustic lifeless horn
 Enchant the ear with heavenly melody,
 Son of Latona, thee before this light
 Will I reprove. Thou camest to me, with gold
 Thy locks all glittering, as the vermeil flowers
 I gather'd in my vest to deck my bosom
 With the spring's glowing hues; in my white hand
 Thy hand enlocking, to the cavern'd rock
 Thou led'st me; naught avail'd my cries, that call'd
 My mother; on thou led'st me, wanton god,
 Immodestly, to Venus paying homage.
 A son I bare thee, O my wretched fate!
 Him (for I fear'd my mother) in thy cave
 I placed, where I unhappy was undone
 By thy unhappy love. Woe, woe is me!
 And now my son and thine, ill-fated babe,
 Is rent by ravenous vultures; thou, meanwhile,
 Art to thy lyre attuning strains of joy.
 Set of Latona, thee I call aloud
 Who from thy golden seat, thy central throne,
 Utterest thine oracle: my voice shall reach
 Thine ear: ungrateful lover, to my husband,
 No grace requiting, thou hast given a son
 To bless his house; my son and thine, unown'd,
 Perish'd a prey to birds; the robes that wrapp'd
 The infant's limbs, his mother's work, lost with him.
 Delos abhors thee, and the laurel boughs
 With the soft foliage of the palm o'erhung,
 Grasping whose round trunk with her hands divine,
 Latona thee, her hallow'd offspring, bore.

LEADER

Ah, what a mighty treasury of ills
 Is open'd here, a copious source of tears!

TUTOR

Never, my daughter, can I sate my eyes

With looking on thy face: astonishment
 Bears me beyond my senses. I had stemm'd
 One tide of evils, when another flood
 High–surging overwhelm'd me from the words
 Which thou hast utter'd, from the present ills
 To an ill train of other woes transferr'd.
 What say'st thou? Of what charge dost thou implead
 The god? What son hast thou brought forth? Where placed him
 A feast for vultures? Tell me all again.

CREUSA

Though I must blush, old man, yet I will speak.

TUTOR

I mourn with generous grief at a friend's woes.

CREUSA

Hear then: the northward–pointing cave thou knowest,
 And the Cecropian rocks, which we call Macrai.

TUTOR

Where stands a shrine to Pan, and altars nigh.

CREUSA

There in a dreadful conflict I engaged.

TUTOR

What! my tears rise ready to meet thy words.

CREUSA

By Phoebus drawn reluctant to his bed.

TUTOR

Was this, my daughter, such as I suppose?

CREUSA

I know not: but if truth, I will confess it.

TUTOR

Didst thou in silence mourn this secret ill?

CREUSA

This was the grief I now disclose to thee.

TUTOR

This love of Phoebus how didst thou conceal?

CREUSA

I bore a son. Hear me, old man, with patience.

TUTOR

Where? who assisted? or wast thou alone?

CREUSA

Alone, in the same cave where compress'd.

TUTOR

Where is thy son, that childless now no more

CREUSA

Dead, good old man, to beasts of prey exposed.

TUTOR

Dead! and the ungrateful Phoebus gives no aid?

CREUSA

None: in the house of Pluto a young guest.

TUTOR

Whose hands exposed him? Surely not thine own.

CREUSA

Mine, in the shades of night, wrapp'd in his vests.

TUTOR

Hadst thou none with thee conscious to this deed?

CREUSA

My misery, and the secret place alone.

TUTOR

How durst thou in a cavern leave thy son?

CREUSA

How? uttering many sad and plaintive words.

TUTOR

Ah, cruel was thy deed, the god more cruel.

CREUSA

Hadst thou but seen him stretch his little hands!

TUTOR

Seeking the breast, or reaching to thine arms?

CREUSA

To this, deprived of which he suffer'd wrong.

TUTOR

And what induced thee to expose thy child?

CREUSA

Hope that the god's kind care would save his son.

TUTOR

How are the glories of thy house destroy'd!

CREUSA

Why, thine head cover'd, dost thou pour these tears?

TUTOR

To see thee and thy father thus unhappy.

CREUSA

This is the state of man: nothing stands firm.

TUTOR

No longer then, my child, let grief oppress us.

CREUSA

What should I do? In misery all is doubt.

TUTOR

First on the god that wrong'd thee be avenged.

CREUSA

How shall a mortal 'gainst a god prevail?

TUTOR

Set this revered oracular shrine on fire.

CREUSA

I fear: ev'n now I have enough of ills.

TUTOR

Attempt what may be done then; kill thy husband.

CREUSA

The nuptial bed I reverence, and his goodness.

TUTOR

This son then, which is now brought forth against thee.

CREUSA

How? Could that be, how warmly should I wish it.

TUTOR

Thy train hath swords: instruct them to the deed.

CREUSA

I go with speed: but where shall it be done?

TUTOR

In the hallow'd tent, where now he feasts his friends.

CREUSA

An open murder, and with coward slaves!

TUTOR

If mine displeas, propose thou some design.

CREUSA

I have it, close and easy to achieve.

TUTOR

In both my faithful services are thine.

CREUSA

Hear then: not strange to thee the giants' war.

TUTOR

When they in Phlegra fought against the gods.

CREUSA

There the earth brought forth the Gorgon, horrid monster.

TUTOR

In succour of her sons to annoy the gods?

CREUSA

Ev'n so: her Pallas slew, daughter of Jove.

TUTOR

What fierce and dreadful form did she then wear?

CREUSA

Her breastplate arm'd with vipers wreathed around.

TUTOR

A well-known story; often have I heard it.

CREUSA

Her spoils before her breast Minerva wore.

TUTOR

The aegis; so they call the vest of Pallas.

CREUSA

So named, when in the war she join'd the gods.

TUTOR

But how can this, my child, annoy thy foes?

CREUSA

Thou canst not but remember Erichthonius.

TUTOR

Whom first of thy high race the earth brought forth.

CREUSA

To him while yet an infant Pallas gave—

TUTOR

What? Thy slow preface raises expectation.

CREUSA

Two drops of blood that from the Gorgon fell.

TUTOR

And on the human frame what power have these?

CREUSA

The one works death, the other heals disease.

TUTOR

In what around the infant's body hung?

CREUSA

Enclosed in gold: he gave them to my father.

TUTOR

At his decease then they devolved to thee?

CREUSA

Ay, and I wear it as a bracelet; look.

TUTOR

Their double qualities how temper'd, say.

CREUSA

This drop, which from her hollow vein distill'd,—

TUTOR

To what effect applied? What is its power?

CREUSA

Medicinal, of sovereign use to life.

TUTOR

The other drop, what faculties hath that?

CREUSA

It kills, the poison of the Gorgon dragons.

TUTOR

And dost thou bear this gore blended in one?

CREUSA

No, separate; for with ill good mixes not.

TUTOR

O my dear child, thou hast whate'er we want.

CREUSA

With this the boy shall die, and thou shalt kill him.

TUTOR

Where? How? 'Tis thine to speak, to dare be mine.

CREUSA

At Athens, when he comes beneath my roof.

TUTOR

I like not this; what I proposed displeased.

CREUSA

Dost thou surmise what enters now my thoughts?

TUTOR

Suspicion waits thee, though thou kill him not.

CREUSA

Thou hast judged well: a stepdame's hate is proverb'd.

TUTOR

Then kill him here; thou mayst disown the deed.

CREUSA

My mind ev'n now anticipates the pleasure.

TUTOR

Thus shalt thou meet thy husband's wiles with wiles

CREUSA

This shalt thou do: this little golden casket
 Take from my hand, Minerva's gift of old;
 To where my husband secretly prepares
 The sacrifice, bear this beneath thy vest.
 That supper ended, when they are to pour
 Libations to the gods, thou mayst infuse
 In the youth's goblet this: but take good heed,
 Let none observe thee; drug his cup alone
 Who thinks to lord it in my house: if once
 It pass his lips, his foot shall never reach
 Illustrious Athens: death awaits him here.

(She gives him the casket.)

TUTOR

Go thou then to the hospitable house
 Prepared for thy reception: be it mine,
 Obedient to thy word to do this deed.
 Come then, my aged foot, be once more young
 In act, though not in years, for past recall
 That time is fled: kill him, and bear him forth.
 Well may the prosperous harbour virtuous thought;
 But when thou wouldst avenge thee on thy foes,
 There is no law of weight to hinder thee.
 (They both go out.)

CHORUS (singing)

strophe 1

Daughter of Ceres, Trivia hear,
 Propitious regent of each public way
 Amid the brightness of the day,
 Nor less when night's dark hour engenders fear;
 The fulness of this goblet guide
 To check with death this stripling's pride,
 For whom my queen this fatal draught prepares,
 Tinged with the Gorgon's venom'd gore:
 That seat, which mid Erechtheus' royal heirs
 His pride claims, it shall claim no more:
 Never may one of alien blood disgrace
 The imperial honours of that high-born race!

antistrophe 1

Should not this work of fate succeed,
 Nor the just vengeance of my queen prevail;
 Should this apt time of daring fail,
 And hope, that flatters now, desert the deed;
 Slaughter shall other means afford,
 The strangling cord, the piercing sword;
 For rage from disappointed rage shall flow,
 And try each various form of death;
 For never shall my queen this torment know;
 Ne'er while she draws this vital breath,
 Brook in her house that foreign lords should shine,
 Clothed with the splendours of her ancient line.

strophe 2

Thou whom the various hymn delights,
 Then thy bright choir of beauteous dames among,
 Dancing the stream's soft brink along,

Thou seest the guardian of thy mystic rites,
 Thy torch its midnight vigils keep,
 Thine eye meantime disdainings sleep;
 While with thee dances Jove's star-spangled plain.
 And the moon dances up the sky:
 Ye nymphs, that lead to grots your frolic train,
 Beneath the gulfy founts that lie:
 Thou gold-crown'd queen, through night's dark regions fear'd,
 And thou, her mother, power revered,
 How should I blush to see this youth unknown!
 This Delphic vagrant, hope to seize the throne.

antistrophe 2

You, who the melting soul to move,
 In loose, dishonest airs the Muse employ
 To celebrate love's wanton joy,
 The joy of unallow'd, unholy love,
 See how our pure and modest law
 Can lavish man's lewd deeds o'erawe!
 Ye shameless bards, revoke each wanton air;
 No more these melting measures frame;
 Bid the chaste muse in Virtue's cause declare,
 And mark man's lawless bed with shame!
 Ungrateful is this Jove-descended lord;
 For, his wife's childless bed abhorr'd,
 Lewdly he courts the embrace of other dames,
 And with a spurious son his pride inflames.
 (An ATTENDANT of CREUSA enters.)

ATTENDANT

Athenian dames, where shall I find our queen,
 The daughter of Erechtheus? Seeking her,
 This city have I walked around in vain.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And for what cause, my fellow-slave? What means
 Thy hasty foot? What tidings dost thou bring?

ATTENDANT

We are discover'd; and the rulers here
 Seek her, that she may die o'erwhelm'd with stones.

LEADER

Ah me! what wouldst thou say? Are our designs
 Of secret ruin to this youth disclosed?

ATTENDANT

They are; and know, the worst of ills await you.

LEADER

How were our dark devices brought to light?

ATTENDANT

The god, that justice might receive no stain
Caused it to triumph o'er defeated wrong.

LEADER

How? as a suppliant, I conjure thee, tell me
Of this inform'd, if we must die, more freely
Wish we to die than see the light of heaven.

ATTENDANT

Soon as the husband of Creusa left
The god's oracular shrine, this new-found son
He to the feast, and sacrifice prepared
To the high gods, led with him. Xuthus then
Went where the hallow'd flame of Bacchus mounts,
That on each rock's high point the victim's blood
Might flow, a grateful offering for his son
Thus recognised, to whom he gave in charge,
"Stay thou, and with the artist's expert aid
Erect the sheltering tent: my rites perform'd
To the kind gods that o'er the genial bed
Preside, should I be there detain'd too long,
Spread the rich table to my present friends."
This said, he led the victims to the rocks.
Meanwhile with reverent heed the son 'gan rear
On firm supporters the wide tent, whose sides
No masonry require, yet framed to exclude
The mid-day sun's hot beams, or his last rays
When sinking in the west: the lengthen'd lines
Equally distant comprehend a square
Of twice five thousand feet (the skilful thus
Compute it), space to feast (for so he will'd)
All Delphi: from the treasures of the god
He took the sacred tapestry, and around
Hung the rich shade, on which the admiring eye
Gazes with fix'd delight: first over head,
Like a broad pennon spread the extended woof,
Which from the Amazonian spoils the son
Of Jove, Alcides, hallow'd to the god;
In its bright texture interwov'n a sky
Gathering the stars in its ethereal round,
While downwards to the western wave the sun
His steeds declines, and to his station high
Draws up the radiant flame of Hesperus.
Meanwhile the Night robed in her sable stole,
Her unreign'd car advances; on her state
The stars attend; the Pleiads mounting high,
And with his glittering sword Orion arm'd;
Above, Arcturus to the golden pole
Inclines; full-orb'd the month-dividing moon
Takes her bright station, and the Hyades

Marked by the sailor: distant in the rear,
 Aurora ready to relume the day,
 And put the stars to flight. The sides were graced
 With various textures of the historic woof,
 Barbaric arguments; in gallant trim
 Against the fleet of Greece the hostile fleet
 Rides proudly on. Here monstrous forms portray'd
 Human and brutal mix'd: the Thracian steeds
 Are seized, the hinds, and the adventurous chase
 Of savage lions: figured nigh the doors,
 Cecrops, attended by his daughter's, roll'd
 His serpent train: in the ample space within
 He spread the festal table, richly deck'd
 With golden goblets. Now the herald walk'd
 His round, each native that inclined to grace
 The feast inviting: to the crowded tent
 They hasten, crown'd with garlands, and partake
 The exquisite repast. The pleased sense
 Now satiate, in the midst an old man stood,
 Officious in his ministry, which raised
 Much mirth among the guests; for from the urns
 He fill'd the lavers, and with fragrant myrrh
 Incensed the place; the golden bowls he claim'd
 His charge. When now the jocund pipes 'gan breathe
 Harmonious airs, and the fresh goblet stood
 Ready to walk its round, the old man said,
 "Away with these penurious cups, and bring
 Capacious bowls; so shall you quickly bathe
 Your spirits in delight." With speed were brought
 Goblets of gold and silver: one he took
 Of choicer frame; and, seemingly intent
 To do his young lord honour, the full vase
 Gave to his hands, but in the wine infused
 A drug of poisonous power, which, it is said,
 His queen supplied, that the new son no more
 Might view the light of heav'n; but unobserved
 He mix'd it. As the youth among the rest
 Pour'd the libation, 'mid the attendant slaves
 Words of reproach one utter'd: he, as train'd
 Within the temple and with expert seers,
 Deem'd them of evil omen, and required
 Another goblet to be filled afresh—
 The former a libation to the god,
 He cast upon the ground, instructing all
 To pour, like him, the untasted liquor down.
 Silence ensued: the sacred bowls we fill
 With wines of Byblos; when a troop of doves
 Came fluttering in, for undisturb'd they haunt
 The dome of Phoebus: in the floating wine
 They dipp'd their bills to drink, then raised their heads,
 Gurgling it down their beauteous-plumed throats.

Harmless to all the spilt wine, save to her
 That lighted where the youth had pour'd his bowl:
 She drank, and straight convulsive shiverings seized
 Her beauteous plumes; around in giddy rings
 She whirl'd, and in a strange and mournful note
 Seem'd to lament: amazement seized the guests,
 Seeing the poor bird's pangs: her heart heaved thick,
 And stretching out her scarlet legs, she died.
 Rending his robes, the son of Phoebus given
 Sprung from the table, and aloud exclaim'd,—
 "What wretch design'd to kill me? Speak, old man:
 Officious was thy ministry; the bowl
 I from thy hand received." Then straight he seized
 His aged arm, and to the question held him,
 As in the fact discover'd: he thus caught,
 Reluctant and constrain'd, own'd the bold deed,
 The deadly goblet by Creusa drugg'd.
 Forth from the tent, the guests attending, rush'd
 The youth announced by Phoebus, and amid
 The Pythian regents says,—"O hallow'd land!
 This stranger dame, this daughter of Erechtheus
 Attempts my life by poison." Then decreed
 The Delphian lords (nor did one voice dissent)
 That she should die, my mistress, from the rock
 Cast headlong, as the deed was aim'd against
 A sacred life, and impiously presumed
 This hallow'd place with murder to profane.
 Demanded by the state, she this way bends
 Her wretched steps. Unhappy to this shrine
 She came through fond desire of children; here,
 Together with her hopes, her life is lost.

CHORUS (singing)

None, there is none, from death no flight,
 To me no refuge; our dark deed
 Betray'd, betray'd to open light;
 The festive bowl, with sprightly wine that flow'd
 Mix'd with the Gorgon's viperous blood,
 An offering to the dead decreed,
 All is betray'd to light: and I,
 Cast headlong from the rock, must die.
 What flight shall save me from this death,
 Borne on swift pinions through the air,
 Sunk to the darksome cave beneath,
 Or mounted on the rapid car?
 Or shall the flying bark unfurl its sails?
 Alas, my queen, no flight avails,
 Save when some god's auspicious power
 Shall snatch us from the dangerous hour.
 Unhappy queen, what pangs shall rend thy heart!
 Shall we, who plann'd the deathful deed,

Be caught within the toils we spread,
While justice claims severe her chast'ning part?
(CREUSA rushes in.)

CREUSA

I am pursued, ye faithful females, doom'd
To death: the Pythian council hath decreed it:
My life is forfeited.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Unhappy lady,
We know the dreadful ills that close thee round.

CREUSA

Ah, whither shall I fly? From instant death
Scarce hath my foot sped hither, from my foes
By stealth escaping.

LEADER

Whither wouldst thou fly,
But to this altar?

CREUSA

What will that avail me?

LEADER

To kill a suppliant there the law forbids.

CREUSA

But by the law I perish.

LEADER

If their hands
Had seized thee.

CREUSA

Dreadful contest, with drawn swords
They hastily advance.

LEADER

Now take thy seat
At the altar: shouldst thou die ev'n there, thy blood
Will call the vengeance of the god on those
That spilt it: but our fortune we must bear.

(She takes refuge at the altar as ION, guards, and Delphians enter.)

ION

Bull-visaged sire Cephisus, what a viper
Hast thou produced? a dragon from her eyes

Glaring pernicious flame. Each daring deed
 Is hers: less venomous the Gorgon's blood,
 With which she purposed to have poison'd me.
 Seize her, that the Parnassian rocks may tease
 Those nice-adjusted ringlets of her hair,
 As down the craggy precipice she bounds.
 Here my good genius saved me, e'er I came
 To Athens, there beneath my stepdame's wiles
 To fall; amid my friends thy fell intents
 Have I unravell'd, what a pest to me,
 Thy hate how deadly: had thy toils inclosed me
 In thine own house, thou wouldst at once have sent me
 With complete ruin to the shades below.
 But nor the altar nor Apollo's shrine
 Shall save thee. Pity, might her voice be heard,
 Would rather plead for me and for my mother,
 She absent, yet the name remains with me.
 Behold that sorceress; with what art she wove
 Wile after wile; the altar of the god
 Impress'd her not with awe, as if secure.
 No vengeance waited her unhallow'd deeds.

CREUSA

I charge thee, kill me not, in my own right,
 And in the god's, whose suppliant here I stand.

ION

What right hast thou to plead Apollo's name?

CREUSA

My person hallow'd to the god I offer.

ION

Yet wouldst thou poison one that is the god's.

CREUSA

Thou wast no more Apollo's, but thy father's.

ION

I have been, of a father's wealth I speak.

CREUSA

And now I am: thou hast that claim no more.

ION

But thou art impious: pious were my deeds.

CREUSA

As hostile to my house, I would have kill'd thee.

ION

ION

Did I against thy country march in arms?

CREUSA

And more; thou wouldst have fired Erechtheus' house.

ION

What torch, what brands, what flames had I prepared?

CREUSA

There wouldst thou fix, seizing my right by force.

ION

The land which he possess'd, my father gave me.

CREUSA

What claim hath there the race of Aeolus?

ION

He was its guardian, not with words but arms.

CREUSA

Its soldier then; an inmate, not its lord.

ION

Wouldst thou, through fear of what might happen, kill me?

CREUSA

Lest death should be my portion, if not thine.

ION

Childless thou enviest that my father found me.

CREUSA

And wilt thou make a childless house thy spoil?

ION

Devotes my father then no share to me?

CREUSA

His shield, his spear; be those thine heritage.

ION

Come from the altar, quit that hallow'd seat.

CREUSA

Instruct thy mother, whosoe'er she be.

ION

Shalt thou unpunish'd meditate my death?

ION

CREUSA

Within this shrine if thou wilt murder me.

ION

What pleasure mid these sacred wreaths to die?

CREUSA

We shall grieve one, by whom we have been grieved.

ION

Strange, that the god should give these laws to men,
Bearing no stamp of honour, nor design'd
With provident thought: it is not meet to place
The unrighteous at his altars; worthier far
To be chased thence; nor decent that the vile
Should with their touch pollute the gods: the good,
Oppress'd with wrongs, should at those hallow'd seats
Seek refuge: ill beseems it that the unjust
And just alike should seek protection there.

(As ION and his followers are about to tear CREUSA from the altar,
the PRIESTESS of Apollo enters from the temple.)

PRIESTESS

Forbear, my son, leaving the oracular seat,
I pass this pale, the priestess of the god,
The guardian of the tripod's ancient law,
Call'd to this charge from all the Delphian dames.

ION

Hail, my loved mother, dear, though not my parent.

PRIESTESS

Yet let me have the name, 'tis grateful to me.

ION

Hast thou yet heard their wily trains to kill me?

PRIESTESS

I have; but void of mercy thou dost wrong.

ION

Should I not ruin those that sought my life?

PRIESTESS

Stepdames to former sons are always hostile.

ION

And I to stepdames ill intreated thus.

PRIESTESS

Be not, this shrine now leaving for thy country.

ION

How, then, by thy monition should I act?

PRIESTESS

Go with good omens, pure to Athens go.

ION

All must be pure that kill their enemies.

PRIESTESS

So do not thou: attentive mark my words.

ION

Speak: from good will whate'er thou say'st must flow.

PRIESTESS

Seest thou the vase I hold beneath mine arm?

ION

I see an ancient ark entwined with wreaths.

PRIESTESS

In this long since an infant I received thee.

ION

What say'st thou? New is thy discourse and strange.

PRIESTESS

In silence have I kept them: now I show them.

ION

And why conceal'd, as long since thou received'st me?

PRIESTESS

The god would have thee in his shrine a servant.

ION

Is that no more his will? How shall I know it?

PRIESTESS

Thy father shown, he sends thee from this land.

ION

Hast thou preserved these things by charge, or how?

PRIESTESS

It was the god that so disposed my thought.

ION

With what design? Speak, finish thy discourse.

PRIESTESS

Ev'n to this hour to keep what then I found.

ION

What gain imports this to me, or what loss?

PRIESTESS

There didst thou lie wrapp'd in thy infant vests.

ION

Thou hast produced whence I may find my mother.

PRIESTESS

Since now the god so wills, but not before.

ION

This is a day of bless'd discoveries.

PRIESTESS

Now take them: o'er all Asia, and the bounds
 Of Europe hold thy progress: thou shalt know
 These tokens. To do pleasure to the god,
 I nurtured thee, my son; now to thy hand
 Restore what was his will I should receive
 Unbidden, and preserve: for what intent
 It was his will, I have not power to say.
 That I had these, or where they were conceal'd,
 No mortal knew. And now farewell: the love
 I bear thee equals what a parent feels.
 Let thy inquiries where they ought begin;
 First, if some Delphian virgin gave thee birth,
 And in this shrine exposed thee; next, if one
 Of Greece. From me, and from the god, who feels
 An interest in thy fortune, thou hast all.

(She goes into the temple after giving ION the ark.)

ION

Ah me! the moist tear trickles from mine eye,
 When I reflect that she who gave me birth,
 By stealth espoused, may with like secrecy
 Have sold me, to my infant lips her breast
 Denied: but in the temple of the god
 Without a name, a servile life I led.
 All from the god was gracious, but from fortune
 Harsh; for the time when in a mother's arms
 I in her fondness should have known some joy

ION

Of life, from that sweet care was I estranged,
 A mother's nurture: nor less wretched she,
 Thus forced to lose the pleasure in her son.
 But I will take this vase, and to the god
 Bear it, a hallow'd offering; that from thence
 I may find nothing which I would not find.
 Should she, that gave me being, chance to be
 A slave, to find her were a greater ill,
 Than to rest silent in this ignorance.
 O Phoebus, in thy temple hang I this.
 What am I doing? War I not against
 The pleasure of the god, who saved for me
 These pledges of my mother? I must dare,
 And open these: my fate cannot be shunn'd.
 (He opens the ark.)
 Ye sacred garlands, what have you so long
 Conceal'd: ye bands, that keep these precious relics?
 Behold the cover of this circular vase;
 Its freshness knows no change, as if a god
 So will'd; this osier-woven ark yet keeps
 Its soundness undecay'd; yet many a year,
 Since it contain'd this treasured charge, has pass'd.

CREUSA

What an unhoped-for sight do I behold!

ION

I thought thou long hadst known to keep thee silent.

CREUSA

Silence is mine no more; instruct not me;
 For I behold the ark, wherein of old
 I laid thee, O my son, an infant babe;
 And in the caves of Cecrops, with the rocks
 Of Macrai roof'd, exposed thee: I will quit
 This altar, though I run on certain death.

ION

Seize her; for by the impulse of the god
 She leaves the sculptured altar: bind her bands.

CREUSA

Instantly kill me, so that I embrace
 This vase, and thee, and these thy conceal'd pledges.

ION

Is not this strange? I take thee at thy word.

CREUSA

Not strange: a friend thou by thy friends art found.

ION

Thy friend! Yet wouldst thou kill me secretly.

CREUSA

My son: if that to parents is most dear.

ION

Forbear thy wiles; I shall refute them well.

CREUSA

Might I but to come to what I wish, my son!

ION

Is this vase empty, or contains it aught?

CREUSA

Thy infant vests, in which I once exposed thee.

ION

And wilt thou name them to me, ere thou see them?

CREUSA

If I recount them not, be death my meed.

ION

Speak then: thy confidence hath something strange.

CREUSA

A tissue, look, which when a child I wrought.

ION

What is it? Various are the works of virgins.

CREUSA

A slight, unfinish'd essay of the loom.

ION

What figure wrought? Thou shalt not take me thus.

CREUSA

A Gorgon central in the warp enwoven—

ION

What fortune haunts me, O supreme of gods!

CREUSA

And like an aegis edged with serpents round.

ION

Such is the woof, and such the vest I find.

ION

CREUSA

Thou old embroidery of my virgin bands!

ION

Is there aught else besides this happy proof?

CREUSA

Two dragons, an old work, their jaws of gold.

ION

The gift of Pallas, who thus nurtures children?

CREUSA

Emblems of Erichthonius of old times.

ION

Why? for what use? Explain these works of gold.

CREUSA

For ornaments to grace the infant's neck.

ION

See, here they are; the third I wish to know.

CREUSA

A branch of olive then I wreathed around thee,
Pluck'd from that tree which from Minerva's rock
First sprung; if it be there, it still retains
Its verdure: for the foliage of that olive,
Fresh in immortal beauty, never fades.

ION

O my dear mother! I with joy behold thee.
With transport 'gainst thy cheek my cheek recline.
(They embrace.)

CREUSA

My son, my son, far dearer to thy mother
Than yon bright orb (the god will pardon me),
Do I then hold thee in my arms, thus found
Beyond my hopes, when in the realms below,
I thought thy habitation 'mong the dead?

ION

O my dear mother, in thy arms I seem
As one that had been dead to life return'd.

CREUSA

Ye wide-expanded rays of heavenly light,
What notes, what high-raised strains shall tell my joy?
This pleasure whence, this unexpected transport?

ION

ION

There was no blessing farther from my thoughts
Than this, my mother, to be found thy son.

CREUSA

I tremble yet.

ION

And hast thou yet a fear,
Holding me, not to hold me?

CREUSA

Such fond hopes
Long time have I renounced. Thou hallow'd matron,
From whom didst thou receive my infant child?
What bless'd hand brought him to Apollo's shrine?

ION

It was the god's appointment: may our life
To come be happy, as the past was wretched.

CREUSA

Not without tears, my son, wast thou brought forth;
Nor without anguish did my hands resign thee.
Now breathing on thy cheek I feel a joy
Transporting me with heartfelt ecstasies.

ION

The words expressive of thy joys speak mine.

CREUSA

Childless no more, no more alone, my house
Now shines with festive joy; my realms now own
A lord; Erechtheus blooms again; no more
His high-traced lineage sees night darkening round,
But glories in the sun's refulgent beams.

ION

Now let my father, since he's present here,
Be partner of the joy which I have given you.

CREUSA

What says my son?

ION

Such, such as I am proved.

CREUSA

What mean thy words? Far other is thy birth.

ION

Ah me! thy virgin bed produced me base.

CREUSA

Nor bridal torch, my son, nor bridal dance
Had graced my nuptial rites, when thou wast born.

ION

Then I'm a wretch, a base-born wretch: say whence.

CREUSA

Be witness, thou by whom the Gorgon died,—

ION

What means this adjuration?

CREUSA

Who hast fix'd
High o'er my cave thy seat amid the rocks
With olive clothed.

ION

Abstruse thy words, and dark.

CREUSA

Where on the cliffs the nightingale attunes
Her songs, Apollo—

ION

Why Apollo named?

CREUSA

Led me in secret to his bed.

ION

Speak on;
Thy words import some glorious fortune to me.

CREUSA

Thee in the tenth revolving month, my son,
A secret pang to Phoebus did I bear.

ION

Thy words, if true, are grateful to my soul.

CREUSA

These swathing bands, thy mother's virgin work,
Wove by my flying shuttle, round thy body
I roll'd; but from thy lips my breast withheld,
A mother's nouriture, nor bathed thy bands
In cleansing lavers; but to death exposed thee,

ION

Laid in the dreary cave, to birds of prey
A feast, rent piecemeal by their ravenous beaks.

ION

Cruel, my mother, was thy deed.

CREUSA

By fear
Constrain'd, my son, I cast thy life away;
Unwillingly I left thee there to die.

ION

And from my hands unholy were thy death.

CREUSA

Dreadful was then my fortune, dreadful here,
Whirl'd by the eddying blast from misery there
To misery here, and back again to joy:
Her boisterous winds are changed; may she remain
In this repose: enough of ills are past:
After the storm soft breathes a favouring gale.

LEADER

From this example, mid the greatest ills
Never let mortal man abandon hope.

ION

O thou, that hast to thousands wrought a change
Of state ere this, involving them in ills,
And raising them to happiness again;
Fortune, to what a point have I been carried,
Ready to kill my mother, horrid thought!
But in the sun's bright course each day affords
Instruction. Thee, my mother, have I found,
In that discovery bless'd; nor hath my birth
Aught I can blame: yet one thing would I say
To thee alone:—walk this way: to thine ear
In secret would I whisper this, and throw
The veil of darkness o'er each circumstance.
Take heed, my mother, lest thy maiden fault
Seeks in these secret nuptials to conceal
Its fault, then charges on the god the deed;
And, fearing my reproach, to Phoebus gives
A son, to Phoebus whom thou didst not bear.

CREUSA

By her, who 'gainst the giants in her car
Fought by the side of Jove, victorious Pallas,
No one of mortal race is father to thee,
But he who brought thee up, the royal Phoebus.

ION

Why give his son then to another father?
 Why say that I was born the son of Xuthus?

CREUSA

Not born the son of Xuthus; but he gives thee,
 Born from himself (as friend to friend may give
 His son, and heir adopted to his house.

ION

True is the god, his tripod else were vain.
 Not without cause then is my mind perplex'd.

CREUSA

Hear what my thoughts suggest: to work thee good
 Apollo placed thee in a noble house.
 Acknowledged his, the rich inheritance
 Could not be thine, nor could a father's name;
 For I conceal'd my nuptials, and had plann'd
 To kill thee secretly: for this the god
 In kindness gives thee to another father.

ION

My mind is prompt to entertain such thoughts;
 But, entering at his shrine will I inquire
 If from a mortal father I am sprung,
 Or from Apollo.—Ha! what may this be?
 What god above the hallow'd dome unveils
 His radiant face that shines another sun?
 Haste, let us fly: the presence of the gods
 'Tis not for mortals to behold, and live.
 (MINERVA appears from above.)

MINERVA

Fly not; in me no enemy you fly;
 At Athens friendly to you, and no less
 Here. From that land I come, so named from me,
 By Phoebus sent with speed: unmeet he deems it
 To show himself before you, lest with blame
 The past be mention'd; this he gave in charge,
 To tell thee that she bore thee, and to him,
 Phoebus thy father; he to whom he gave thee,
 Not as to the author of thy being gives thee,
 But to the inheritance of a noble house.
 This declaration made, lest thou shouldst die,
 Kill'd by thy mother's wily trains, or she
 By thee, these means to save you he devised.
 These things in silence long conceal'd, at Athens
 The royal Phoebus would have made it known
 That thou art sprung from her, thy father he:
 But to discharge my office, and unfold

ION

ION

The oracle of the god, for which you yoked
Your chariots, hear: Creusa, take thy son,
Go to the land of Cecrops: let him mount
The royal throne; for, from Erechtheus sprung,
That honour is his due, the sovereignty
Over my country: through the states of Greece
Wide his renown shall spread; for from his root
Four sons shall spring, that to the land, the tribes,
The dwellers on my rock, shall give their names.
Geleon the first, Hopletes, Argades,
And from my aegis named Aegicores:
Their sons in fate's appointed time shall fix
Their seats along the coast, or in the isles
Girt by the Aegean sea, and to my land
Give strength; extending thence the opposite plains
Of either continent shall make their own,
Europe and Asia, and shall boast their name
Ionians, from the honour'd Ion call'd.
To thee by Xuthus shall a son be born,
Dorus, from whom the Dorian state shall rise
To high renown; in the Pelopian land,
Another near the Rhian cliffs, along
The sea-wash'd coast, his potent monarchy
Shall stretch, Achaeus; and his subject realms
Shall glory in their chief's illustrious name.
Well hath Apollo quitted him in all:
First, without pain he caused thee bear a son.
That from thy friends thou mightst conceal his birth;
After the birth, soon as his infant limbs
Thy hands had clothed, to Mercury he gave
The charge to take the babe, and in his arms
Convey him hither; here with tenderness
He nurtured him, nor suffer'd him to perish.
Guard now the secret that he is thy son,
That his opinion Xuthus may enjoy
Delighted: thou too hast thy blessings, lady.
And now, farewell: from this relief from ills
A prosperous fortune I to both announce.

ION

O Pallas, daughter of all-powerful Jove!
Not with distrust shall we receive thy words:
I am convinced that Phoebus is my father,
My mother she, not unassured before.

CREUSA

Hear me too, now: Phoebus I praise, before
Unpraised; my son he now restores, of whom
Till now I deem'd him heedless. Now these gates
Are beauteous to mine eyes; his oracles
Now grateful to my soul, unpleasant late.

ION

With rapture on these sounding rings my hands
Now hang; with rapture I address the gates.

MINERVA

This I approve, thy former wayward thoughts
Resign'd, with honour that thou name the god.
Slow are the gifts of Heaven, but found at length
Not void of power.

CREUSA

My son, let us now go
To Athens.

MINERVA

Go; myself will follow you.

CREUSA

A noble guard, and friendly to the state.

MINERVA

But seat him high on thy paternal throne.

CREUSA

A rich possession, and I glory in him.
(MINERVA disappears.)

CHORUS (singing)

Son of Latona and all-powerful Jove,
Apollo, hail! Though fortune's blackest storms
Rage on his house, the man whose pious soul
Reveres the gods, assumes a confidence,
And justly: for the good at length obtain
The meed of virtue; but the unholy wretch
(Such is his nature) never can be happy.

–THE END–