

Prometheus Bound, and other poems — Prometheus Bound

Elizabeth Barrett Browning



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PROMETHEUS BOUND.

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PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

PROMETHEUS.

HEPHÆSTUS.

OCEANUS.

IO, daughter of Inachus.

HERMES.

STRENGTH and FORCE.

CHORUS of Ocean Nymphs.

SCENE.—STRENGTH *and* FORCE, HEPHÆSTUS *and* PROMETHEUS, *at the Rocks*.

Strength.

WE reach the utmost limit of the earth,
The Scythian track, the desert without man,—
And now, Hephæstus, thou must needs fulfill
The mandate of our father, and, with links
Indissoluble of adamantine chains,
Fasten against this beetling precipice,
This guilty god! Because he filched away
Thine own bright flower, the glory of plastic fire,
And gifted mortals with it,—such a sin,
It doth behoove he expiate to the gods,
And learn free service to the rule of Zeus,
And leave disused his trick of loving man.

Hephæstus. O Strength and Force,—for you, our Zeus's will
Presents a deed for doing.—No more!—but *I*,
I lack your daring, up this storm-rent chasm,
To fix with violent hands a kindred god,
Howbeit necessity compels me so
That I must dare it,—and our Zeus commands
With word as heavy as bolts—inevitable!
Ho!—lofty son of Themis, who is sage,
Thee loth, I loth, must rivet fast in chains
Against this rocky height unclomb by man,
Where never human voice nor face shall find
Out thee, who lov'st them!—where thy beauty's flower,
Scorched in the sun's clear heat, shall fade away,

And night come up with garniture of stars
To comfort thee with shadow, and the sun
Disperse, with retriect beams, the morning frosts;
And through all changes, sense of present woe
Shall vex thee sore, because, with none of them
There comes a hand to free. Such fruit is plucked
From love of man!—for in that thou, a god,
Didst brave the wrath of gods, and give away
Undue respect to mortals; for that crime
Thou art adjudged to guard this joyless rock,
Erect, unslumbering, bending not the knee,
And many a cry and unavailing moan
To utter on the air! For Zeus is stern,
And new-made kings are cruel.

Strength. Be it so.
Why loiter in vain pity? Why not hate
A god the gods hate?—one too who betrayed
Thy glory unto men?

Hephæstus. An awful thing
Is kinship joined to friendship.

Strength. Grant it be;
Is disobedience to the Father's word
A possible thing? Dost quail not more for *that*?

Hephæstus. Thou, at least, art a stern one! ever bold!

Strength. Why, if I wept, it were no remedy!

And do not *thou* spend labor on the air
To bootless uses.

Hephæstus. Cursed handicraft!
I curse and hate thee, O my craft!

Strength. Why hate
Thy craft, most plainly innocent of all
These pending ills?

Hephæstus. I would some other hand
Were here to work it!

Strength. All work hath its pain,
Except to rule the gods. There is none free
Except King Zeus.

Hephæstus. I know it very well:
I argue not against it.

Strength. Why not, then,
Make haste, and bind the fetters over HIM,
Lest Zeus behold thee lagging.

Hephæstus. Here be chains—
Zeus may behold these.

Strength. Seize him,—strike amain!
Strike with the hammer on each side his bands—
Rivet him to the rock.

Hephæstus. The work is done,
And thoroughly done.

Strength. Still faster grapple him,—
Wedge him in deeper,—leave no inch to stir!
He's terrible for finding a way out
Where others could not.

Hephæstus. Here's an arm, at least,
Grappled past freeing.

Strength. Now, then, clench along
The other strongly. Let the sophist learn
He's duller than our Zeus.

Hephæstus. Oh, none but HE
Accuse me justly!

Strength. Now, straight through the chest,
Take him and bite him with the clenching tooth
Of the adamantine wedge, and rivet him.

Hephæstus. Alas, Prometheus! what thou sufferest here,
I sorrow over.

Strength. Dost thou shrink again,
And breathe groans for the enemies of Zeus?
Beware, lest thine own pity find thee out.

Hephæstus. Thou dost behold a spectacle that turns
The sight o' the eyes to pity.

Strength. I behold
A sinner suffer his sin's penalty.
But lash the thongs about his sides.

Hephæstus. So much,
I must do. Urge no farther than I must.

Strength. Ay, but I *will* urge!—and, with shout on shout,
Will hound thee at this quarry! Get thee down
And ring amain the iron round his legs!

Hephæstus. That work was not long doing.

Strength. Heavily now
Let fall the strokes upon the perforant gyves!
For He who rates the work has a heavy hand.

Hephæstus. Thy speech is savage as thy shape.

Strength. Be thou
Gentle and tender! but revile not me
For the firm will and the untruckling hate.

Hephæstus. Let us go! He is netted round with chains.

Strength. Here, now, taunt on! and having spoiled the gods
Of honors, crown withal thy mortal men
Who live a whole day out! Why how could *they*
Draw off from thee one single of thy griefs?
Methinks the Demons gave thee a wrong name,
Prometheus, which means Providence,—because

Thou dost thyself require a providence,
To escape the crushing of this rolling Doom.

Prometheus alone. O holy Æther, and swift-winged Winds,
And River-wells, and laughter infinite
Of yon Sea-waves! Earth, mother of us all,
And all-viewing cyclic Sun, I cry on you!—
Behold me a god, what I endure from gods!

Behold, with throe on throe,
How, wasted by this woe,
I wrestle down the myriad years of Time!

Behold, how, fast around me,
The new King of the happy ones sublime
Has flung the chain he forged, has shamed and bound me!
Woe, woe! to-day's woe and the coming morrow's,
I cover with one groan! And where is found me

A limit to these sorrows?
And yet what word do I say? I have foreknown
Clearly all things that should be—nothing done,
Comes sudden to my soul—and I must bear
What is ordained with patience, being aware
Necessity doth front the universe
With an invincible gesture. Yet this curse
Which strikes me now, I find it hard to brave
In silence or in speech. Because I gave
Honor to mortals, I have yoked my soul
To this compelling fate! Because I stole
The secret fount of fire, whose bubbles went
Over the ferule's brim, and manward sent
Art's mighty means and perfect rudiment,

That sin I expiate in this agony;
Hung here in fetters, 'neath the blanching sky!
 Ah, ah me! what a sound,
What a fragrance sweeps up from a pinion unseen
Of a god, or a mortal, or nature between,—
Sweeping up to this rock where the earth has her bound,
To have sight of my pangs,—or some guerdon obtain—
Lo! a god in the anguish, a god in the chain!
 The god, Zeus hateth sore,
 And his gods hate again,
As many as tread on his glorified floor,—
Because I loved mortals too much evermore!
Alas me! what a murmur and motion I hear,
 As of birds flying near!
 And the air undersings
 The soft stroke of their wings—
And all life that approaches, I wait for in fear.

Chorus of Sea Nymphs, 1st Strophe.

Fear nothing! our troop
Floats lovingly up,
With a quick-oaring stroke
Of wings steered to the rock;
Having softened the soul of our father below!
For the gales of swift-bearing have sent me a sound,—
And the clank of the iron, the malleted blow,
 Smote down the profound

Of my caverns of old,
And struck the red light in a blush from my brow,—
Till I sprang up unsandalled, in haste to behold,
And rushed forth on my chariot of wings manifold.

Prometheus. Alas me!—alas me!
Ye offspring of Tethys who bore at her breast
Many children; and eke of Oceanus,—he,
Who coils around earth with perpetual unrest;
Behold me and see,
How transfixed with the fang
Of a fetter, I hang
On the high-jutting rocks of this fissure, and keep
An uncoveted watch o'er the world and the deep.

Chorus, 1st Antistrophe.

I behold thee, Prometheus—yet now, yet now,
A terrible cloud, whose rain is tears,
Sweeps over mine eyes that witness how
Thy body appears
Hung awaste on the rocks by infrangible chains!
For new is the hand and the rudder that steers
The ship of Olympus through surge and wind—
And of old things passed, no track is behind.

Prometheus. Under earth, under Hades,
Where the home of the shade is,
All into the deep, deep Tartarus,
I would he had hurled me adown!
I would he had plunged me, fastened thus
In the knotted chain, with the savage clang,
All into the dark, where there should be none,
Neither god nor another, to laugh and see!
But now the winds sing through and shake
The hurtled chains wherein I hang,—
And I, in my naked sorrows, make
Much mirth for my enemy.

Chorus, 2d Strophe.

Nay! who of the gods hath a heart so stern,
As to use thy woe for a root of mirth?
Who would not turn more mild to learn
Thy sorrows? who of the heaven and earth,
Save Zeus? But he
Right wrathfully
Bears on his sceptral soul unbent,
And rules thereby the heavenly seed;
Nor will he cease, till he content
His thirsty heart in a finished deed;
Or till Another shall appear,
To win by fraud, to seize by fear
The hardly captured government.

Prometheus. Yet even of *me* he shall have need,
That monarch of the blessed seed;
Of me, of me, who now am cursed
 Beneath his fetters dire!
To wring my secret out withal,
 And learn by whom his sceptre shall
Be filched from him—as was, at first,
 His heavenly fire!
Yet he never shall enchant me
 With his honey-lipped persuasion;
Never, never shall he daunt me
 With the oath and threat of passion,
Into speaking as they want me,
Till he loose this savage chain,
 And accept the expiation
Of my sorrow, by his pain.

Chorus, 2d Antistrophe.

Thou art, sooth, a brave god,
 And, for all thou hast borne
From the stroke of the rod,
 Naught relaxest from scorn!
But thou speakest unto me
 Too free and unworn—
And a terror strikes through me,

And festers my soul,—
And I fear, in the roll
Of the storm, for thy fate,
In the ship far from shore—
Since the son of Saturnius is hard in his hate,
And unmoved in his heart evermore.

Prometheus. I know that Zeus is stern!
I know he metes his justice by his will!
And yet, I also know his soul shall learn
More softness when once broken by this ill,—
That, curbing his unconquerable wrath,
He shall rush on in fear, to meet with me
Who rush to meet with him, in agony,
To issues of harmonious covenant.

Chorus. Remove the veil from all things, and relate
The story to us!—of what crime accused,
Zeus smites thee with dishonorable pangs.
Speak! if to teach us do not grieve thyself.

Prometheus. The utterance of these things is torture to me,—
But so, too, is their silence! each way lies
Woe strong as fate!—

When gods began with wrath,
And war rose up between their starry brows,—
Some choosing to cast Chronos from his throne,
That Zeus might king it there; and some in haste

With opposite oaths that they would have no Zeus
To rule the gods for ever,—I, who brought
The counsel I thought meetest, could not move
The Titans, children of the Heaven and Earth,—
Because, disdainig in their rugged souls
My subtle machinations, they assumed
It was an easy thing for force to take
The mastery of fate. My mother, then,
Who is called not only Themis, but Earth too,
(Her single beauty joys in many names,)
Did teach me, with reiterant prophecy,
What future should be,—and how conquering gods
Should not prevail by strength and violence,
But by guile only. When I told them so,
They would not deign to contemplate the truth
On all sides round;—and thus, I deemed it best
To lead my mother upwards, willingly,
And set my Themis face to face with Zeus,
As willing to receive her! Tartarus,
With its abysmal cloister of the Dark,
Because I gave that counsel, covers up
The antique Chronos and his siding hosts;
And, by that counsel helped, the king of gods
Hath recompensed me by these bitter pangs—
For kingship wears a cancer at the heart,—
To have no faith in friends. And then, ye ask,
What crime it is for which he tortures me—
It shall be clear before you. When at first
He filled his father's throne, he made direct
And various gifts of glory to the gods,

And dealt the empire out. Alone, of men,
Of miserable men, he took no count,
But yearned to sweep their track off from the world,
And plant a newer race there! And was none
Resisted that desire except myself!
I dared it! *I* drew mortals back to light,
From meditated ruin deep as hell,—
And, for that wrong, I bow down in these pangs,
Dreadful to suffer, mournful to behold,—
And I, who pitied man, am thought myself
Unworthy pity,—while I render out
Deep rhythms of anguish 'neath the harping hand
That strikes me thus!—a sight that shames your Zeus!

Chorus. Hard as thy chains, and cold as all these rocks,
Is he, Prometheus, who withholds his heart
From joining in thy woe. I yearned before
To fly this sight—and, now I gaze on it,
I sicken inwards.

Prometheus. To my friends, indeed,
I must be a sad sight.

Chorus. And didst thou sin
No more than so?

Prometheus. I did restrain, besides,
My mortals from premeditating death.

Chorus. How didst thou medicine the plague-fear of death?

Prometheus. I set blind Hopes to inhabit in their house.

Chorus. By that gift, thou didst help thy mortals well.

Prometheus. I gave them also,—fire.

Chorus. And have they now,
Those creatures of a day, the red-eyed fire?

Prometheus. They have! and shall learn by it, many arts.

Chorus. And, truly, for such sins Zeus tortures thee,
And will relax no anguish? Canst behold
No limit to thy wrestling agony?

Prometheus. No other! only what seems good to HIM.

Chorus. And how will it seem good? what hope remains?
Seest thou not that thou hast sinned? And that thou hast sinned
It glads me not to speak of, and grieves *thee*—
Then let it pass from both! and seek thyself
Some outlet from despair.

Prometheus. It is in truth
An easy thing to stand aloof from pain
And lavish exhortation and advice
On one vexed sorely by it. I have seen
All in prevision!—By my choice, my choice,
I freely sinned—I will confess my sin—
And helping mortals, found mine own despair!—
I did not think indeed that I should pine

Beneath such pangs against such skiey rocks,—
Doomed to this drear hill and no neighboring
Of any life!—but mourn not *ye* for griefs
I bear to-day!—drop rather to the plain,
And hear how other woes creep on to me,
And learn the consummation of my doom.
Beseech you, nymphs, beseech you!—grieve for me,
Who now am grieving!—for grief walks the earth,
And sits down at the foot of each by turns.

Chorus. We hear the deep dash of thy words,
Prometheus, and obey!
And I spring with a rapid foot away
From the rushing car, and the holy air
The track of birds—
And I drop to the rugged ground, and, there,
Await the tale of thy despair.

Enter OCEANUS.

Oceanus. I reach the bourne of my weary road,
Where I could see and answer thee,
Prometheus, in thine agony!
On the back of the quick-winged bird I glode,
And I bridled him in
With the will of a god,—
And know, thy sorrow aches in me,
Constrained by the force of kin.

Nay, though that tie were all undone,
For the life of none beneath the sun,
Would I seek a larger benison,
 Than I seek for thine!—
And thou shalt learn my words are truth,—
That no fair parlance of the mouth
 Grows falsely out of mine!
Then give me a deed to prove my faith,—
For no faster friend is named in breath,
 Than I, Oceanus, am thine.

Prometheus. Ha! what has brought thee? Hast thou also come
To look upon my woe? How hast thou dared
To leave the depths called after thee, the caves
Self-hewn and self-roofed with spontaneous rock,
To visit Earth, the mother of my chain?
Hast come indeed to view my doom, and mourn
That I should sorrow thus? Gaze on, and see
How I, the fast friend of your Zeus,—how I
The erector of the empire in his hand,—
Am bent beneath that hand, in this despair!

Oceanus. Prometheus, I behold,—and I would fain
Exhort thee, though already subtle enough,—
To a better wisdom. Titan, know thyself,
And take new softness to thy manners, since
A new king rules the gods. If words like these,
Harsh words and sharp ones, thou wilt fling abroad,

Zeus haply, though he sit so far and high,
May hear thee do it; and, so, this wrath of his
Which now affects thee fiercely, shall appear
A mere child's sport at vengeance! Wretched god,
Rather dismiss the passion which thou hast,
And seek a change from grief. Perhaps I seem
To address thee with old saws and outworn sense,—
Yet such a curse, Prometheus, waits indeed
On lips that speak too proudly!—ne'ertheless,
Thou dost not grow the meeker, nor dost yield
To evil rule the sooner,—yearning still
To swell the account of grief, with other griefs
Than what are borne! Beseech thee, use me then
For counsel! Do not spurn against the pricks,—
Seeing that who reigns, reigns by cruelty,
And not by right. And now, I go from hence,
And will endeavor if a power of mine
Can break thy fetters through. For thee,—be calm,
And smooth thy words from passion. Knowest thou not
Of perfect knowledge, thou who knowest too much,
That where the tongue wags, ruin never lags?

Prometheus. I gratulate thee, who hast shared and dared
All things with me, except their penalty!
But now cease! leave these thoughts! It cannot be
That thou shouldst move HIM. HE may *not* be moved!
And *thou*, beware lest, this way, thou meet woe.

Oceanus. Ever thou wert more wise, for others' use,
Than for thine own: the event, and not the word,

Attests it to me. Yet where now I rush,
Thy wisdom hath no power to drag me back;
Because I glory—glory in this aim—
To win for thee deliverance from thy pangs,
As a free gift from Zeus.

Prometheus. Why there, again,
I give thee gratulation and applause!
Thou lackest no good-will. But, as for deeds,
Do naught! 'twere all done vainly! helping naught,
Whatever thou wouldst do. Rather take rest,
And keep thyself from evil. If I grieve,
I do not therefore wish to multiply
The griefs of others. Verily, not so!
For still my brother's doom doth vex my soul,—
My brother Atlas, standing in the west,
Shouldering the column of the heaven and earth,
Mete burden for a giant! And I have seen,
And pitied as I saw, the earth-born one,
The habitant of old Cilician caves,
The great war-monster of the hundred heads,
(All taken and bowed beneath the violent Hand,)
Typhon the fierce, who did resist the gods,
And, hissing slaughter from his dreadful jaws,
Did flash out from his eyes a glory askance,
As if to storm the throne of Zeus! But so,
The sleepless arrow of Zeus flew straight to him,—
The headlong bolt of thunder breathing flame,
And struck him downward from his eminence
Of boastful exaltation! Through the soul,

It struck him mainly; and his strength was shrunk
To ashes, thunder-blasted. Now, he lies
A helpless trunk supinely, at full length,
Beside the strait of ocean; over-ridden
By roots of Ætna,—high upon whose tops
Hephæstus sits and strikes the flashing ore,
From which the great fire-rivers shall burst away
Hereafter, and devour with savage jaws
The equal plains of fruitful Sicily!—
Such passion he shall boil back in hot darts
Of an insatiate fury and sough of flame,—
Fallen Typhon;—howsoever struck and charred
By Zeus's bolted thunder! But for thee,
Thou art not so unlearned as to need
My teaching—let thy knowledge save thyself.
I quaff the full cup of a present doom,
And wait till Zeus's soul hath quenched its wrath.

Oceanus. Hast thou no knowledge, then, of this, Prometheus
—
That words do medicine anger?

Prometheus. If the word
With seasonable softness touch the heart,
And, where the soul is ulcerous, sear it not
With any rudeness.

Oceanus. With a noble aim
To dare as nobly—is there harm in *that*?
Dost thou discern it? Teach me.

Prometheus. I discern
An empty wish,—and unresultive work.

Oceanus. Then let me bear the harm of punishment!
Since it most profits that the truly wise
Should seem not wise at all.

Prometheus. And this will seem
A crime of mine.

Oceanus. In truth thine argument
Sends me back home.

Prometheus. Because thy grief for me
Might cast thee down to hate.

Oceanus. The hate of Him,
Who sits a new king on the general throne?

Prometheus. Beware of him,—lest thine heart grieve by him.

Oceanus. Thy doom, Prometheus, be my teacher!

Prometheus. Go!
Depart—beware!—and keep the mind thou hast.

Oceanus. Thy words drive after, as I rush before—
Lo! my four-footed Bird sweeps smooth and wide
The flats of air with balanced pinions, glad
To bend his knee at home, in the ocean-stall.

[*Exit* OCEANUS.]

1st Strophe.

I moan thy fate, I moan for thee,
Prometheus! From my restless eyes,
Drop by drop intermittently,
A trickling stream of tears supplies
My cheeks all wet from fountains free,—
Because that Zeus, the sternly bold,
Whose law is taken from his breast,
Uplifts his sceptre manifest
Over the gods of old.

1st Antistrophe.

All the land is moaning
With a murmured plaint to-day!
All the mortal nations,
Having habitations
Near the holy Asia,
Are a dirge entoning
For thine honor and thy brother's,
Once majestic beyond others
In the old belief,—
Now are groaning in the groaning
Of thy deep-voiced grief.

2d Strophe.

Mourn the virgins, 'habitant
Of the Colchian land,
Who with white, calm bosoms, stand
In the battle's roar—
Mourn the Scythian tribes that haunt
The verge of earth, Mæotis' shore—

2d Antistrophe.

And Arabia's battle crown,
And dwellers in the lofty town
Mount Caucasus sublimely nears,—
An iron squadron, thundering down
With the sharp-prowed spears.

But one other before, have I seen to remain,
By invincible pain
Bound and vanquished,—one Titan!—'twas Atlas who bears,
In a curse from the gods, by that strength of his own
Which he evermore wears,
The weight of the heaven on his shoulder alone,
While he sighs up the stars!
And the ocean-tides bellow, in bursting their bars,—
Murmurs stir the profound,—

And black Hades roars up through the chasm of the ground,—
And the founts of the pure-running rivers moan low
 In the pathos of woe.

Prometheus. Beseech you, think not I am silent thus
Through pride or scorn! I only gnaw my heart
With meditation, seeing myself so wronged!
For so—their honors to these new-made gods,
What other gave but I,—and shared them out
With distribution? Ay—but here I am dumb;
For here, I should repeat your knowledge to you,
If I spake aught. List rather to the works
I did for mortals, and how, fools before,
I made them wise and true in aim of soul!—
And I will tell you—not as taunting them,
But teaching you the intention of my gifts;
How, first beholding, they beheld in vain,
And hearing, heard not, but, like shapes in dreams,
Mixed all things wildly down the tedious time;
Nor knew to build a house against the sun,
With wicketed sides; nor any woodwork knew;
But lived, like silly ants, beneath the ground
In hollow caves unsunned. There, came to them
No steadfast sign of winter, nor of spring
Flower-perfumed, nor of autumn full of fruit,—
But all things they did blindly and lawlessly,
Until I taught them how the stars do rise
And set in mystery; and devised for them

Number, the inducer of philosophies,
 The synthesis of Letters, and beside
 The artificer of all things, Memory,
 That sweet Muse-mother. I was first to yoke
 The servile beasts in couples, carrying
 An heirdom of man's burdens on their backs!
 I joined to chariots, steeds, that love the bit
 They champ at—the chief pomp of golden ease!
 And no one else but I, achieved, beside,
 The seaman's chariots, wandering on the brine
 With linen wings! And I—oh, miserable!—
 Who did devise for mortals all these arts,
 Have no device left now to save myself
 From the woe I suffer!

Chorus. Very shameful woe,
 Thou sufferest, and dost stagger from the sense,
 Bewildered! Like a bad leech falling sick,
 Thou'rt faint at heart, and canst not find the drugs
 Required to save thyself.

Prometheus. Hearken the rest,
 And marvel further—what more arts and means
 I did invent,—this, greatest!—if a man
 Fell sick, there was no cure, nor esculent,
 Nor chrism, nor liquid; but, for lack of drugs,
 Men pined and wasted, till I showed to them
 Those mixtures of emollient remedies
 Whereby they might be rescued from disease.
 I fixed the various rules of mantic art,

Discerned the vision from the common dream,
And made them wise in vocal auguries
Hard to interpret; and defined as plain
The wayside omens,—flights of crook-clawed birds,—
Showed which are, by their nature, fortunate,
And which not so, and what the food of each,
And what the hates, affections, social needs,
Of all to one another; and what sign
Of visceral lightness, colored to a shade,
May charm the genial gods, and what fair spots
Commend the lung and liver. Burning so,
The limbs encased in fat, and the long chine,
I led my mortals on to an art abstruse,
And cleared their eyes to the image in the fire,
Erst filmed in dark. Enough said now of this.
And for those helps of man hid underground,
The iron, and the brass, silver, and gold,
Can any dare say that he found them out
Before me? None, I know! Unless he choose
To vaunt a vain lie. Learn the whole, in brief,
That all arts came to mortals from Prometheus.

Chorus. Give mortals no unseasonable help,
Neglecting thine own sorrow; since, for me,
I have hope to see thee break these fetters still,
And stand up strong as Zeus.

Prometheus. This ends not thus,
The oracular Fate ordains. I must be bowed
By infinite woes and pangs, to escape this chain.

Necessity is stronger than mine art.

Chorus. Who holds the helm of that Necessity?

Prometheus. The threefold Fates and the unforgetting Furies.

Chorus. Is Zeus less absolute than these are?

Prometheus. Yes,
And therefore cannot fly what is ordained.

Chorus. What is ordained for Zeus, except to be
A king for ever?

Prometheus. 'Tis too early yet
For thee to learn it: ask no more.

Chorus. Perhaps
Thy secret may be holy?

Prometheus. Turn thy mind
To another matter! this, it is not time
To speak abroad, but to veil utterly
In silence still. For by that secret kept,
I 'scape this chain's dishonor, and its woe.

Chorus, 1st Strophe.

Never, oh never,

May Zeus, the all-giver,
Wrestle down from his throne,
In that might of his own,
To antagonize mine!
Never let me delay
To bend on my way
To the gods of the shrine,
Where the altar is full
Of the blood of the bull,
Near the tossing brine
Of Ocean my father.

Nor my sin, be it sped in the word that is said,
But my vow, be it rather
Consummated,
Nor evermore fail, nor evermore pine.

1st Antistrophe.

'Tis sweet to have
Life lengthened out
With hopes that are brave
By the very doubt,
Till the spirit swells bold
With the joys foretold!
But I thrill to behold
Thee, victim doomed,
By the countless cares
And the drear despairs,

Lifelong, consumed.
And all because thou, who art fearless now,
 With Zeus above,
Dost overflow, for mankind below,
 With a free-souled, reverent love.

O friend, behold and see!
What's all the beauty of humanity?
 Can it be fair?
What's all the strength?—is it strong?
 And what hope can they bear,
These dying livers—living one day long?
 And seest thou not, my friend,
 How feeble and slow,
 And like a dream, doth go
This poor blind manhood, drifted from its end?
 And how no mortal wranglings can confuse
 The harmony of Zeus?

Prometheus. I have learnt these things,
 From the sorrow in thy face!
 Another song did drop its wings
 Upon my lips in other days,—
 When round the bath, and round the bed,
 The hymeneal chant instead,
 I sang for thee, and smiled,—
 And thou didst lead, with gifts, and vows,

Hesione, my father's child,
To be thy wedded spouse.

Io enters.

Io. What land is this? what people is here?
And who is he, who writhes, I see,
 In the rock-hung chain?
Now what is the crime that hath brought thee to pain?
And what is the land—make answer free—
Which I wander through, in my wrong and fear?—

 Ah! ah! ah me!

The gad-fly stingeth to agony!
O Earth, keep off that phantasm pale
Of earth-born Argus!—ah!—I quail
 When my soul descries
That herdsman with the myriad eyes—
Which seem, as he comes, one crafty eye!
Graves hide him not, though he should die,—
But he doggeth me in my misery
From the roots of death, on high—on high—
And along the sands of the siding deep,
All famine-worn, he follows me,
And his waxen reed doth undersound
 The waters round,
And giveth a measure that giveth sleep.

Woe, woe, woe!

Where shall my weary course be done?—
What wouldst thou with me, Saturn's son?
And in what have I sinned, that I should go,
Thus yoked to grief by thine hand for ever?

Ah! ah! dost vex me so.

That I madden and shiver,
Stung through with dread?

Flash the fire down, to burn me!

Heave the earth up, to cover me!

Or plunge me in the deep, with the salt waves over me,

Where the sea-beasts may be fed!

And, O king, do not spurn me

In my prayer!

For this wandering, everlonger, evermore,

Hath overworn me,—

And I know not on what shore

I may rest from my despair.

Chorus. Hearest thou what the ox-horned maiden saith?

Prometheus. How could I choose but hearken what she saith,
The frenzied maiden?—Inachus's child?—
Who love-warms Zeus's heart, and now is lashed
By Here's hate, along the unending ways?

Io. Who taught thee to articulate that name,—

My father's? Speak to his child,
By grief and shame defiled!
Who art thou, victim, thou—who dost acclaim
Mine anguish in true words, on the wide air?
And callest too by name, the curse that came
From Here unaware,
To waste and pierce me with the maddening goad.
Ah—ah—I leap
With the pang of the hungry—I bound on the road—
I am driven by my doom—
I am overcome
By the wrath of an enemy strong and deep!
Are any of those who have tasted pain,
Alas!—as sad as I?
Now tell me plain, doth aught remain
For my soul to endure beneath the sky?
Is there any help to be holpen by?
If knowledge be in thee, let it be said—
Cry aloud—cry
To the wandering, woeful maid.

Prometheus. All thou wouldst learn, I will make clear to thee

No riddle upon my lips, but such straight words,
As friends should use to each other when they talk.
Thou seest Prometheus, who gave mortals fire.

Io. O common Help of all men, known of all,

O miserable Prometheus,—for what cause
Dost thou endure thus?

Prometheus. I have done with wail
For my own griefs—but lately—

Io. Wilt thou not
Vouchsafe this boon to me?

Prometheus. Say which thou wilt,
For I vouchsafe all.

Io. Speak then, and reveal
Who shut thee in this chasm.

Prometheus. The will of Zeus,
The hand of his Hephæstus.

Io. And what crime,
Dost expiate so?

Prometheus. I have told enough for thee,
In so much only.

Io. Nay—but show besides
The limit of my wandering, and the time
Which yet is lacking to fulfill my grief.

Prometheus. Why, not to know were better than to know,
For such as thou.

Io. Beseech thee, blind me not
To that which I must suffer.

Prometheus. If I do
The cause is not because I grudge the boon.

Io. What is the cause, then, mars thy speaking out?

Prometheus. No grudging! but a fear to break thine heart.

Io. Less care for me, I pray thee! Certainty,
I count for sweetness.

Prometheus. Thou wilt have it so,
And, therefore, I must speak. Now hear—

Chorus. Not yet!
Give half the sweetness my way. Let us learn
First, what the curse is that befell this maid,—
Her own voice telling her own wasting woes!—
For what remains of anguish; let it wait
The teaching of thy lips.

Prometheus. It doth behoove
That thou, maid *Io*, should vouchsafe to these
The grace they pray; and more, because they are called
Thy father's sisters; since to open out
And mourn out grief, where it is possible
To draw a tear from the audience, is a work
That pays its own price well.

Io.

I cannot choose

But trust you, nymphs, and tell you all ye ask,
In clear words—though I sob amid my speech
In speaking of the storm-curse sent from Zeus,
And of my beauty, from which height it took
Its swoop on me, poor wretch! left thus deformed,
And monstrous to your eyes. For evermore
Around my virgin-chamber, wandering went
The nightly visions, and entreated me
With syllabled smooth sweetness.—"Blessed maid,
Why lengthen out thy maiden hours, when fate
Permits the noblest spousal in the world?
For Zeus burns with the arrow of thy love,
And fain would touch thy beauty.—And for thee,—
Girl—spurn not Zeus! but fly to Lerne's mead,
That's green around thy father's flocks and stalls,
Until the passion of the heavenly eye
Be quenched in sight." Such dreams did, all night long,
Constrain me—me, unhappy!—till I dared
To tell my father how they trod the dark
With visionary steps; whereat he sent
His frequent heralds to the Pythian fane,
And also to Dodona, and inquired
How best, by act or speech, to please the gods,—
And these returning, brought back oracles
Of doubtful sense, indefinite response,
Dark to interpret. Then, at last, there came
To Inachus an answer that was clear,—
Thrown straight as any bolt, and spoken out.
This—"he should drive me from my home and land,

And bid me wander to the extreme verge
Of all the earth—or, if he willed it not,
Should have a thunder, with a fiery eye,
Leap straight from Zeus, to burn up all his race,
To the last root of it." By which Toxean word,
Subdued, he drove me forth, and shut me out,
He loth, me loth,—but Zeus's forceful bit
Compelled him to the deed!—And instantly
My body and soul were changed and distraught,
And, horned as ye see, and spurred along
By the fanged insect, with a maniac leap
I rushed on to Kenchrea's limpid stream,
And Lerne's fountain-well, And there, the earth-born,
The herdsman Argus, most immitigable
Of wrath, did find me out, and track me out
With countless eyes, set staring at my steps!—
An unexpected and most sudden doom
Drew him from life—but I—curse-stricken still,
Am driven from land to land before the scourge
That gods hold o'er me. So, thou hast heard the past,
And if the bitter future thou canst tell,
Speak on! I charge thee, do not flatter me
Through pity, with false words! for, in my mind,
Deceiving works more shame than torturing.

Chorus.

Hush! silence here!

Nevermore, nevermore,
Would I languish for
The stranger's word
To thrill mine ear!—
Nevermore for the wrong and the woe and the fear,
So hard to behold,
And so hard to bear,
To pierce my soul with a double-edged sword,
And a sliding cold!
Ah Fate!—ah me!—
I shudder to see
This wandering maid in her agony.

Prometheus. Grief is too quick in thee, and fear too full!
Be patient till thou hast learnt the rest!

Chorus. Speak—teach!—
To those who are sad already, it seems sweet,
By clear foreknowledge, to make perfect, pain.

Prometheus. The boon ye asked me first was lightly won,—
For first ye asked to hear this maiden's grief
As her own lips might tell it—now remains
To list what other sorrows she so young
Must bear from Here!—Inachus's child,
O thou!—drop down thy soul, my weighty words,
And measure thence the landmarks which are set,
To end thy wandering! Toward the orient sun

First turn thy face from mine, and journey on
Along the desert flats, till thou shalt come
Where Scythia's shepherd peoples dwell aloft,
Perched in wheeled wagons under woven roofs,
And twang the rapid arrow past the bow—
Approach them not; but siding in thy course,
The rugged shore-rocks sounding from the sea,
Depart that country. On the left hand dwell
The iron-workers, called the Chalybes,
Of whom beware! for certes they are stern,
And nowise bland to strangers. Reaching so
The stream Hybristes, (well the *scorner* called,)
Attempt no passage;—it is hard to pass.
Or ere thou come to Caucasus itself,
That highest of mountains,—where the river's strength
Is juttred from the heights—and thou must climb
Those mountain-tops that neighbor with the stars,
And tread the southward way, and near, at last,
The Amazonian host that hateth man,
Who shall inhabit Themiscyra, close
Upon Thermodon, where the sea's rough jaw
Doth gnash at Salmydessa, and provide
A cruel host to seamen, and to ships
A stepdame harsh! The same shall lead thee on
With unreluctant hand, till thou shalt drive
Just where the ocean gates show narrowest,
On the Cimmerian isthmus,—leaving which,
Behooves thee swim with ghastly fortitude
That strait Mæotis. Ay! and evermore
That traverse shall be famous on men's lips,

That strait, called Bosphorus, the horned one's road,
So named because of thee! Thou so wilt pass
From Europe's plain to Asia's continent.
How think ye, nymphs? the king of gods appears
Impartial in his violent deeds? For lo!
The god desirous of this mortal's love
Hath cursed her with these wanderings. Ah, fair child,
Thou hast met a bitter groom for bridal troth!
For all thou yet hast heard, can only prove
The incompleated prelude of thy doom.

Io. Ah, ah!

Prometheus. Is't thy turn, now, to shriek and moan?
How wilt thou, when thou hast hearkened what remains?

Chorus. Besides the grief thou hast told, can aught remain?

Prometheus. A sea—of foredoomed evil worked to storm.

Io. What boots my life, then? why not cast myself
Down headlong from this miserable rock,
That, dashed against the flats, I may redeem
My soul from sorrow? Better once to die,
Than day by day to suffer.

Prometheus. Verily,
It would be hard for thee to bare my woe,
For whom it is appointed not to die.
For Death redeems from woe: and now I see
In all my far prevision, not a bound

To all I suffer, ere that Zeus shall fall
From being a king.

Io. And can it ever be
That Zeus shall fall from empire?

Prometheus. *Thou*, methinks,
Wouldst take some joy to see it.

Io. Could I choose;
I, who endure such pangs, now, by that Zeus?

Prometheus. Learn from me, therefore, that the event shall
be.

Io. By whom shall his imperial sceptred hand
Be emptied so?

Prometheus. Himself shall spoil himself,
Through his imprudent counsels.

Io. How? declare;
Unless the word bring evil.

Prometheus. He shall wed—
And in the marriage-bond be joined to grief.

Io. A heavenly bride—or human? Speak it out,
If it be utterable.

Prometheus. Why should I say which?

It ought not to be uttered, verily.

Io. Then,
It is his wife shall tear him from his throne?

Prometheus. It is his wife shall bear a son to him,
More mighty than the father.

Io. From this doom
Hath he no refuge?

Prometheus. None—or ere that I,
Loosed from these fetters—

Io. Yea—but who shall loose thee
While Zeus is adverse?

Prometheus. One who is born of *thee*,—
It is ordained so.

Io. What is this thou sayest—
A son of mine shall loose thee from thy woe?

Prometheus. After ten generations, count three more,
And find him in the third.

Io. The oracle
Remains obscure.

Prometheus. And search it not, to learn
Thine own griefs from it.

Io. Point me not to a good,
To leave me straight bereaved.

Prometheus. I am prepared
To grant thee one of two things.

Io. But which two?
Set them before me—grant me power to choose.

Prometheus. I grant it—choose—if I shall name aloud
What griefs remain to wound thee, or what hand
Shall save me out of mine.

Chorus. Vouchsafe, O god,
The one grace of the twain to her who prays,
The next to me—and turn back neither prayer
Dishonored by denial. Thus, to her,
Declare the future wandering of her feet—
Then point me to the looser of thy chain—
Because I yearn to know it.

Prometheus. Since ye will,
Of absolute will, this knowledge, I will set
No contrary against it, nor keep back
A word of all ye ask for. *Io*, first
To thee I must recount thy wandering course
Far winding; as I tell it, write it down
In thy soul's book of memories. When thou hast past
The flowing bound that parts two continents,
Track on the footsteps of the orient sun

In his own fire—across the roar of seas,
Fly, till thou hast reached the Gorgonæan flats
Beside Cisthene—there the Phorcides,
Three ancient maidens, live, with shape of swan,
One tooth between them, and a common eye,
On whom the sun doth never look at all
With all his rays, nor evermore the moon,
When she looks through the night. And nigh to these
The Gorgon sisters three, en clothed with wings,
And wearing snakes for curls, and man-abhorred.
There is no mortal gazes in their face,
And gazing can breathe on. I speak of such
To guard thee from their horror. Ay! and list
Another tale of a dreadful sight! beware
The Griffins, those unbarking dogs of Zeus,
Those sharp-mouthed dogs, and the Arimaspians host,
One-eyed, that moves on horseback, habiting
Beside the river that runs bright with gold,
The stream of Pluto—near them not! anon
Thou'lt come to a distant land, a dusky tribe
Of dwellers at the fountain of the Sun,
Whence flows the river Æthiops!—wind along
Its banks and turn off at the cataracts,
Just as the Nile pours, from the Byblin hills,
His holy and sweet wave!—his course shall guide
Thine own to that triangular Nile-ground,
Where, Io, is ordained for thee and thine,
A distant exile. Have I said, in this,
Aught darkly or incompletely?—now repeat
The question, make the knowledge full! Behold

I have more leisure than I covet, here.

Chorus. If thou canst tell us aught that's left untold
Or loosely told of her most dreary flight,
Declare it straight! but if thou hast uttered all,
Grant us that latter grace for which we prayed,
Remembering how we prayed it.

Prometheus. She has heard
The fullness of the wandering of her woe—
But that she may have knowledge not to have heard
All vainly, I will tell what she endured,
Ere coming hither, and invoke the past
To prove my prescience true. And so—to leave
All crowd of jostling words, and pass at once
To the first step of thy course—when thou hadst gone
To those Molossian plains which sweep around
Dodona shouldering Heaven, whereat the fane
Of Zeus Thesprotian keepeth oracle,—
And, wonder past belief, the oaks do wave
Articulate adjurations—ay, and they
Did so salute thee in no phrase perplexed,
But clear with glory, noble wife of Zeus
Who shouldst be—(Here some sweetness took thy sense!)
Thou didst rush further onward,—stung along
The ocean-shore,—toward Rhea's mighty bay,—
And, tost back from it, wert tost to it again
In stormy evolution!—and, know well,
In coming time that hollow of the sea
Shall bear the name Ionian, and present

A monument of Io's passage through,
Unto all mortals. These words be the signs
Of my soul's power to look beyond the veil
Of visible things. The rest, to you and her,
I will declare in common audience, nymphs,
Returning thither where my speech brake off.
There is a town Canobus, built upon
The earth's far margin, at the mouth of Nile,
And on the mound washed up by it!—Io, there
Shall Zeus give back to thee thy perfect mind,
And only by the touch and by the stroke
Of his undreadful hand! and thou shalt bear
A dusky son to Zeus, who shall be called
Thence, Epaphus, the Touched! That son shall pluck the fruit
From all that land wide-watered by the flow
Of flooding Nile,—and, counting from his life
The fifth full generation,—which involves
Full fifty maidens, a fair woman-race,
Shall back to Argos turn reluctantly,
To fly the proffered nuptials of their kin,
Their father's brother's. But they, passion-struck,
Like falcons bearing hard on flying doves,
Shall drive on, hunting on that quarry of love
They should not hunt—till envious Heaven shall lay
A curse betwixt that beauty and their desire,
And Greece receive them, to be overcome
In murderous woman-war, by fierce red hands,
Round which the night keeps watch. For every wife
Shall slay her husband, dyeing deep in blood
The sword of double edges—(now do I wish

As fair a marriage-joy to all my foes!)
One bride alone shall fail to smite to death
The head upon her pillow, touched with love,
And blunted in her purpose, and impelled
To choose the lesser evil, and prefer
The wearing on her cheeks the coward's shame,
To blood-guilt on her hands. She shall give birth
To a royal race in Argos—tedious speech
Were needed to speak clearly and at large
Of these things—'tis enough that, from this seed,
Shall spring the strong He—famous with the bow,
Whose arm shall break my fetters off! Behold,
My mother Themis, that old Titaness,
Instructed me in this oracular truth;
But how and when, I should be long to speak,
And thou, in hearing, wouldst not gain at all.

Io. Eleleu, eleleu!

How the spasm and the pain,
And the fire on the brain,

Strike, burning me through!

How the sting of the curse, all aflame as it flew,
Pricks me onward again!

How my heart, in its terror, is spurning my breast,—
And my eyes, like the wheels of a chariot, roll round,—
I am whirled from my course, to the east, to the west,
In the whirlwind of frenzy all madly inwound—
And my mouth is unbridled for anguish and hate,
And my words beat in vain, in wild storms of unrest,
On the sea of my desolate fate.

Chorus.—Strophe.

Oh! wisest of the wise is he
Who first within his spirit knew,
And with his tongue declared it true,
That love comes best that comes unto
 The equal of degree!
And that the poor and that the low
Should seek no love from those above,
Whose souls are fluttered with the flow
Of airs about their golden height,
Or proud because they see arow
 Ancestral crowns of light!

Antistrophe.

Oh! never, never, may ye, Fates,
Behold me with your awful eyes
Lift mine too fondly up the skies
Where Zeus, upon the purple, waits!—
Nor let me step too near—too near—
To any suitor, bright from heaven—
Because I see—because I fear—
This loveless maiden vexed and laden
By this fell curse of Here,—driven
On wanderings dread and drear!

Epode.

Nay, grant an equal troth instead,
Of nuptial love to bind me by!—
It will not hurt—I shall not dread
To meet it in reply.
And let not love, from those above,
Revert and fix me, as I said,
With that inevitable Eye!
I have no sword to fight that fight—
I have no strength to tread that path—
I know not if my nature hath
The power to bear,—I cannot see,
Whither, from Zeus's infinite,
I can have power to flee.

Prometheus. Yet Zeus, howbeit most absolute of will,
Shall turn to meekness,—such a marriage-rite
He holds in preparation, which anon
Shall thrust him headlong from his gerent seat,
And leave no track behind! and so the curse
His father Chronos muttered in his fall,
As he fell from his ancient throne and cursed,
Shall be accomplished wholly—no escape
From all this ruin shall the filial Zeus
Have granted to him, from one of all his gods,

Unless I teach it—I, the refuge, know,
And I, the means—Now, therefore, let him sit
And brave the imminent doom, and fix his faith
On his supernal noises, hurtling on
With restless hand, the bolt that breathes out fire—
For these things shall not help him—none of them—
Nor hinder his perdition when he falls
To shame, and lower than patience,—such a foe,
He doth himself prepare against himself,
A wonder of unconquerable Hate,
A new deviser of a nobler fire
Than shines in lightnings, and of grander sound
Than aught the thunder rolls,—outthundering it,—
Of power to shatter in Poseidon's fist
The trident-spear, which, while it plagues the sea,
Doth shake the shores around it. Ay, and Zeus,
By this destruction, lost, shall mete at length
The gulf which severs rule from servitude.

Chorus. Thou makest threats for Zeus of thy desires.

Prometheus. I tell you, all these things shall be fulfilled,
As, also, I desire them.

Chorus. Must we then
Look out for one to come, to master Zeus?

Prometheus. These chains weigh lighter than his sorrows
shall.

Chorus. How art thou not afraid to speak such words?

Prometheus. What should *I* fear, who cannot die?

Chorus. But *he*
Can visit thee with dreader woe than death's.

Prometheus. Why let him do it!—I am here, prepared
For all things and their pangs.

Chorus. The wise are they
Who reverence Adrasteia.

Prometheus. Reverence thou,
Adore thou, flatter thou, whomever reigns,
Whenever reigning—but for me, your Zeus
Is less than nothing! Let him act and reign
His brief hour out according to his will—
He will not, therefore, rule the gods too long!—
But lo! I see that courier-god of Zeus,
That new-made menial of the new-crowned king—
He doubtless comes to tell us something new.

HERMES *enters.*

Hermes. I speak to thee, that sophist, speaker down
Of scorn by scorn,—that sinner against gods,—
That reverencer of men,—that thief of fire,—
I speak to and adjure thee! Zeus commands

Thy declaration of what marriage-rite
Is this, to move thy vaunt, and cause his fall
From absolute rule! And do not wrap thy speech
In riddles, but speak clearly! Do not cast
Ambiguous paths, Prometheus, for my feet—
Since Zeus, thou mayst perceive, is scarcely won
To mercy, by such means.

Prometheus. A speech well-mouthed
In th' utterance, and full-minded in the sense,
As doth befit a servant of the gods!
New gods, ye newly reign, and think forsooth
Ye dwell in towers too high for any dart
To take a wound there!—Have I not stood by
While two kings fell from thence? and shall I not
Behold the third, the same who rules you now,
Fall, shamed to sudden ruin?—Do I seem
To tremble and quail before your modern gods?
I cast the thought off far!—For thee, depart,
Re-tread thy steps in haste! To all, so asked,
I answer nothing.

Hermes. 'Twas this wind of pride
That took thee of yore full sail upon these rocks.

Prometheus. I would not barter—learn thou soothly that!—
My suffering for thy service! for I hold
It is a nobler thing to serve this rock
Than live a faithful slave to father Zeus—
And thus on scorers I retort their scorn.

Hermes. It seems that thou dost glory in thy despair.

Prometheus. I, glory? would my foes did glory so,
And I stood by to see!—and naming them,
Thou art not unremembered.

Hermes. Dost thou charge
Me also with the blame of any grief?

Prometheus. I tell thee, I loathe the universal gods,
Who for the good I gave them rendered back
The ill of their injustice.

Hermes. Thou art mad—
I hear thee raving, Titan, at the full!

Prometheus. If it be madness to abhor my foes,
May I be mad!

Hermes. If thou wert prosperous,
Thou wouldst be unendurable.

Prometheus. Alas!

Hermes. Zeus knows not that word.

Prometheus. But maturing time
Doth teach all things.

Hermes. Howbeit, thou hast not learnt
The wisdom yet, thou needest.

Prometheus. If I had,
I should not talk thus with a slave like thee.

Hermes. Thou dost vouchsafe no answer, as I think,
To the great Sire's requirements.

Prometheus. Verily
I owe him grateful service,—and should pay it.

Hermes. Why thou dost mock me, Titan, as I stood
A child before thy face.

Prometheus. No child, forsooth,
But yet more foolish than a foolish child,
If thou expect that I should answer aught
Thy Zeus can ask. No torture from his hand
Nor any machination in the world
Shall force mine utterance, ere he loose, himself,
These cankerous fetters from me! For the rest,
Let him now hurl his blenching lightnings down,
And with his white-winged snows, and mutterings deep
Of subterranean thunders, mix all things;
Confound them in disorder! None of this
Shall bend my sturdy will, and make me speak
The name of his dethroner who shall come.

Hermes. Can this avail thee? Look to it!

Prometheus. Long ago
It was looked forward to,—precounselled of.

Hermes. Vain god, take righteous courage!—dare for once
To apprehend and front thine agonies
With a just prudence!

Prometheus. Vainly dost thou chafe
My soul with exhortation, as the sea
Goes beating on the rock. Oh! think no more
That I, fear-struck by Zeus to a woman's mind,
Will supplicate him, loathed as he is
With womanly upliftings of my hands,
To break these chains! Far from me be the thoughts!

Hermes. I have indeed, methinks, said much in vain,—
For still thy heart, beneath my showers of prayers,
Lies dry and hard!—nay, leaps like a young horse
Who bites against the new bit in his teeth,
And tugs and struggles against the new-tried rein,—
Still fiercest in the weakest thing of all,
Which sophism is,—for absolute will alone,
When left to its motions in perverted minds,
Is worse than null, for strength! Behold and see,
Unless my words persuade thee, what a blast
And whirlwind of inevitable woe
Must sweep persuasion through thee! For at first
The Father will split up this jut of rock
With the great thunder and the bolted flame,
And hide thy body where the hinge of stone
Shall catch it like an arm!—and when thou hast passed
A long black time within, thou shalt come out
To front the sun; and Zeus's winged hound,

The strong carnivorous eagle, shall wheel down
To meet thee,—self-called to a daily feast,—
And set his fierce beak in thee, and tear off
The long rags of thy flesh, and batten deep
Upon thy dusky liver! Do not look
For any end, moreover, to this curse,
Or ere some god appear, to bear thy pangs
On his own head vicarious, and descend
With unreluctant step the darks of hell,
And the deep glooms enringing Tartarus!—
Then ponder this!—the threat is not a growth
Of vain invention: it is spoken and meant!
For Zeus's mouth is impotent to lie,
And doth complete the utterance in the act—
So, look to it, thou!—take heed!—and nevermore
Forget good counsel, to indulge self-will!

Chorus. This Hermes suits his reasons to the times—
At least I think so!—since he bids thee drop
Self-will for prudent counsel. Yield to him!
When the wise err, their wisdom proves their shame.

Prometheus. Unto me the foreknower, this mandate of
power,

 He cries, to reveal it!
And scarce strange is my fate, if I suffer from hate,
 At the hour that I feel it!
Let the locks of the lightning, all bristling and whitening,
 Flash, coiling me round!
While the æther goes surging 'neath thunder and scourging

Of wild winds unbound!
Let the blast of the firmament whirl from its place
The earth rooted below,—
And the brine of the ocean, in rapid emotion,
Be it driven in the face
Of the stars up in heaven, as they walk to and fro!
Let him hurl me anon, into Tartarus—on—
To the blackest degree,
With Necessity's vortices strangling me down!
But he cannot join death to a fate meant for *me!*

Hermes. Why the words that he speaks and the thoughts that he thinks,

Are maniacal—sad!
And if Fate, who hath bound him, just loosens the links,—
Yet he's nigh to be mad.
Then depart ye who groan with him,
Leaving to moan with him—
Go in haste! lest the roar of the thunder, in nearing,
Should blast you to idiocy, living and hearing.

Chorus. Change thy speech for another, thy thought for a new,

If to move me and teach me, indeed be thy care!
For thy words swerve so far from the loyal and true,
That the thunder of Zeus seems more easy to bear.
How! couldst teach me to venture such vileness? Behold!
I *choose*, with this victim, this anguish foretold!
For I turn from the traitor in hate and disdain,—
And I know that the curse of the treason is worse

Than the pang of the chain.

Hermes. Then remember, O nymphs, what I utter before,—
Nor, when pierced by the arrows that Até will throw you,
Cast the blame on your fate, and declare evermore
That Zeus thrust you on anguish he did not foreshow you.
Nay, verily, nay! for ye perish anon
For your deed—by your choice!—by no blindness of doubt,
No abruptness of doom!—but by madness alone,
In the great net of Até, whence none cometh out,
Ye are wound and undone!

Prometheus. Ay! in act, now—in word, now, no more!
Earth is rocking in space!
And the thunders crash up with a roar upon roar—
And red eddies of lightning flash fires in my face—
And the whirlwinds are whirling the dust round and round—
And the blasts of the winds universal, leap free,
And blow each upon each, with a passion of sound,—
And æther goes mingling in storm with the sea!
Such a curse on my head, in a manifest dread,
From the hand of your Zeus has been hurtled along!
O my mother's fair glory! O, Æther, enringing,
All eyes, with the sweet common light of thy bringing.
Dost thou see how I suffer this wrong?



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