

Prometheus bound

Aeschylus



FUNDACIÓN
Carlos Slim

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Play

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PROMETHEUS BOUND

ARGUMENT

In the beginning, Ouranos and Gaia held sway over Heaven and Earth. And manifold children were born unto them, of whom were Cronos, and Okeanos, and the Titans, and the Giants. But Cronos cast down his father Ouranos, and ruled in his stead, until Zeus his son cast him down in his turn, and became King of Gods and men. Then were the Titans divided, for some had good will unto Cronos, and others unto Zeus; until Prometheus, son of the Titan Iapetos, by wise counsel, gave the victory to Zeus. But Zeus held the race of mortal men in scorn, and was fain to destroy them from the face of the earth; yet Prometheus loved them, and gave secretly to them the gift of fire, and arts whereby they could prosper upon the earth. Then was Zeus sorely angered with Prometheus, and bound him upon a mountain, and afterward overwhelmed him in an earthquake, and devised other torments against him for many ages; yet could he not slay Prometheus, for he was a God.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

STRENGTH AND FORCE.
HEPHAESTUS.
PROMETHEUS.
CHORUS OF SEA-NYMPHS.
DAUGHTERS OF OCEANUS.
OCEANUS.
IO.
HERMES.

Scene—A rocky ravine in the mountains of Scythia.

STRENGTH.

Lo, the earth's bound and liminary land,
The Scythian steppe, the waste untrod of men!
Look to it now, Hephaestus—thine it is,
Thy Sire obeying, this arch-thief to clench
Against the steep-down precipice of rock,
With stubborn links of adamantine chain.
Look thou: thy flower, the gleaming plastic fire,
He stole and lent to mortal man—a sin
That gods immortal make him rue to-day,

Lessoned hereby to own th' omnipotence
Of Zeus, and to repent his love to man!

HEPHAESTUS.

O Strength and Force, for you the best of Zeus
Stands all achieved, and nothing bars your will:
But I—I dare not bind to storm-vext cleft
One of our race, immortal as are we.
Yet, none the less, necessity constrains,
For Zeus, defied, is heavy in revenge!
(*To PROMETHEUS*)

O deep-devising child of Themis sage,
Small will have I to do, or thou to bear,
What yet we must. Beyond the haunt of man
Unto this rock, with fetters grimly forged,
I must transfix and shackle up thy limbs,
Where thou shalt mark no voice nor human form,
But, parching in the glow and glare of sun,
Thy body's flower shall suffer a sky-change;
And gladly wilt thou hail the hour when Night
Shall in her starry robe invest the day,
Or when the Sun shall melt the morning rime.
But, day or night, for ever shall the load
Of wasting agony, that may not pass,
Wear thee away; for know, the womb of Time
Hath not conceived a power to set thee free.
Such meed thou hast, for love toward mankind
For thou, a god defying wrath of gods,
Beyond the ordinance didst champion men,
And for reward shalt keep a sleepless watch,
Stiff-kneed, erect, nailed to this dismal rock,
With manifold laments and useless cries
Against the will inexorable of Zeus.
Hard is the heart of fresh-usurpèd power!

STRENGTH.

Enough of useless ruth! why tarriest thou?
Why pitiest one whom all gods wholly hate,
One who to man gave o'er thy privilege?

HEPHAESTUS.

Kinship and friendship wring my heart for him.

STRENGTH.

Ay—but how disregard our Sire's command?
Is not thy pity weaker than thy fear?

HEPHAESTUS.

Ruthless as ever, brutal to the full!

STRENGTH.

Tears can avail him nothing: strive not thou,
Nor waste thine efforts thus unaidingly.

HEPHAESTUS.

Out on my cursed mastery of steel!

STRENGTH.

Why curse it thus? In sooth that craft of thine
Standeth assoiled of all that here is wrought.

HEPHAESTUS.

Would that some other were endowed therewith!

STRENGTH.

All hath its burden, save the rule of Heaven,
And freedom is for Zeus, and Zeus alone.

HEPHAESTUS.

I know it; I gainsay no word hereof.

STRENGTH.

Up, then, and hasten to do on his bonds,
Lest Zeus behold thee indolent of will!

HEPHAESTUS.

Ah well—behold the armlets ready now!

STRENGTH.

Then cast them round his arms and with sheer strength
Swing down the hammer, clinch him to the crags.

HEPHAESTUS.

Lo, 'tis toward—no weakness in the work!

STRENGTH.

Smite harder, wedge it home—no faltering here!
He hath a craft can pass th' impassable!

HEPHAESTUS.

This arm is fast, inextricably bound.

STRENGTH.

Then shackle safe the other, that he know
His utmost craft is weaker far than Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS.

He, but none other, can accuse mine art!

STRENGTH.

Now, strong and sheer, drive thro' from breast to back
The adamantine wedge's stubborn fang.

HEPHAESTUS.

Alas, Prometheus! I lament thy pain.

STRENGTH.

Thou, faltering and weeping sore for those
Whom Zeus abhors! 'ware, lest thou rue thy tears!

HEPHAESTUS.

Thou gazest on a scene that poisons sight.

STRENGTH.

I gaze on one who suffers his desert.
Now between rib and shoulder shackle him—

HEPHAESTUS.

Do it I must—hush thy superfluous charge!

STRENGTH.

Urge thee I will—ay, hound thee to the prey.
Step downward now, enring his legs amain!

HEPHAESTUS.

Lo, it is done—'twas but a moment's toil.

STRENGTH.

Now, strongly strike, drive in the piercing gyves—
Stern is the power that oversees thy task!

HEPHAESTUS.

Brutish thy form, thy speech brutality!

STRENGTH.

Be gentle, an thou wilt, but blame not me
For this my stubbornness and anger fell!

HEPHAESTUS.

Let us go hence; his legs are firmly chained.

STRENGTH (*To* PROMETHEUS).

Aha! there play the insolent, and steal,
For creatures of a day, the rights of gods!
O deep delusion of the powers that named thee
Prometheus, the Fore-thinker! thou hast need
Of others' forethought and device, whereby
Thou may'st elude this handicraft of ours!

[*Exeunt* HEPHAESTUS, STRENGTH and FORCE.—*A pause.*]

PROMETHEUS.

O Sky divine, O Winds of pinions swift,
O fountain-heads of Rivers, and O thou,
Illimitable laughter of the Sea!
O Earth, the Mighty Mother, and thou Sun,
Whose orb'd light surveyeth all—attest,
What ills I suffer from the gods, a god!
Behold me, who must here sustain
The marring agonies of pain,
Wrestling with torture, doomed to bear
Eternal ages, year on year!
Such and so shameful is the chain
Which Heaven's new tyrant doth ordain
To bind me helpless here.
Woe! for the ruthless present doom!
Woe! for the Future's teeming womb!
On what far dawn, in what dim skies,
Shall star of my deliverance rise?

Truce to this utterance! to its dimmest verge
I do foreknow the future, hour by hour,
Nor can whatever pang may smite me now
Smite with surprise. The destiny ordained
I must endure to the best, for well I wot
That none may challenge with Necessity.
Yet is it past my patience, to reveal,
Or to conceal, these issues of my doom.
Since I to mortals brought prerogatives,
Unto this durance dismal am I bound:
Yea, I am he who in a fennel-stalk,
By stealthy sleight, purveyed the fount of fire,
The teacher, proven thus, and arch-resource
Of every art that aideth mortal men.
Such was my sin: I earn its recompense,
Rock-riveted, and chained in height and cold.

[*A pause.*]

Listen! what breath of sound,
what fragrance soft hath risen
Upward to me? is it some godlike essence,
Or being half-divine, or mortal presence?
Who to the world's end comes, unto my craggy prison?
Craves he the sight of pain, or what would he behold?
Gaze on a god in tortures manifold,

Heinous to Zeus, and scorned by all
Whose footsteps tread the heavenly hall,
Because too deeply, from on high,
I pitied man's mortality!
Hark, and again! that fluttering sound
Of wings that whirr and circle round,
And their light rustle thrills the air—
How all things that unseen draw near
Are to me Fear!

Enter the CHORUS OF OCEANIDES in winged cars.

CHORUS.

Ah, fear us not! as friends, with rivalry
Of swiftly-vying wings, we came together
Unto this rock and thee!
With our sea-sire we pleaded hard, until
We won him to our will,
And swift the wafting breezes bore us hither.
The heavy hammer's steely blow
Thrilled to our ocean-cavern from afar,
Banished soft shyness from our maiden brow,
And with unsandalled feet we come, in winged car!

PROMETHEUS.

Ah well-a-day! ye come, ye come
From the Sea-Mother's teeming home—
Children of Tethys and the sire
Who around Earth rolls, gyre on gyre,
His sleepless ocean-tide!
Look on me—shackled with what chain,
Upon this chasm's beetling side
I must my dismal watch sustain!

CHORUS.

Yea, I behold, Prometheus! and my fears
Draw swiftly o'er mine eyes a mist fulfilled of tears,
When I behold thy frame
Bound, wasting on the rock, and put to shame
By adamantine chains!
The rudder and the rule of Heaven
Are to strange pilots given:
Zeus with new laws and strong caprice holds sway,
Unkings the ancient Powers, their might constrains,
And thrusts their pride away!

PROMETHEUS.

Had he but hurled me, far beneath

The vast and ghostly halls of Death,
Down to the limitless profound
Of Tartarus, in fetters bound,
Fixed by his unrelenting hand!
So had no man, nor God on high,
Exulted o'er mine agony—
But now, a sport to wind and sky,
Mocked by my foes, I stand!

CHORUS.

What God can wear such ruthless heart
As to delight in ill?
Who in thy sorrow bears not part?
Zeus, Zeus alone! for he, with wrathful will,
Clenched and inflexible,
Bears down Heaven's race—nor end shall be, till hate
His soul shall satiate,
Or till, by some device, some other hand
Shall wrest from him his sternly-clasped command!

PROMETHEUS.

Yet,—though in shackles close and strong
I lie in wasting torments long,—
Yet the new tyrant, 'neath whose nod
Cowers down each blest subservient god,
One day, far hence, my help shall need,
The destined stratagem to read,
Whereby, in some yet distant day,
Zeus shall be reaved of pride and sway:
And no persuasion's honied spell
Shall lure me on, the tale to tell;
And no stern threat shall make me cower
And yield the secret to his power,
Until his purpose be foregone,
And shackles yield, and he atone
The deep despite that he hath done!

CHORUS.

O strong in hardihood, thou striv'st amain
Against the stress of pain!
But yet too free, too resolute thy tongue
In challenging thy wrong!
Ah, shuddering dread doth make my spirit quiver,
And o'er thy fate sits Fear!
I see not to what shore of safety ever
Thy bark can steer—

In depths unreached the will of Zeus doth dwell,
Hidden, implacable!

PROMETHEUS.

Ay, stern is Zeus, and Justice stands,
Wrenched to his purpose, in his hands—
Yet shall he learn, perforce, to know
A milder mood, when falls the blow—
His ruthless wrath he shall lay still,
And he and I with mutual will
In concord's bond shall go.

CHORUS.

Unveil, say forth to us the tale entire,
Under what imputation Zeus laid hands
On thee, to rack thee thus with shameful pangs?
Tell us—unless the telling pain thee—all!

PROMETHEUS.

Grievous alike are these things for my tongue,
Grievous for silence—rueful everyway.
Know that, when first the gods began their strife,
And heaven was all astir with mutual feud—
Some willing to fling Cronos from his throne,
And set, forsooth, their Zeus on high as king,
And other some in contrariety
Striving to bar him from heaven's throne for aye—
Thereon I sought to counsel for the best
The Titan brood of Ouranos and Earth;
Yet I prevailed not, for they held in scorn
My glozing wiles, and, in their hardy pride,
Deemed that sans effort they could grasp the sway.
But, for my sake, my mother Themis oft,
And Earth, one symbol of names manifold,
Had held me warned, how in futurity
It stood ordained that not by force or power,
But by some wile, the victors must prevail.
In such wise I interpreted; but they
Deigned not to cast their heed thereon at all.
Then, of things possible, I deemed it best,
Joining my mother's wisdom to mine own,
To range myself with Zeus, two wills in one.
Thus, by device of mine, the murky depth
Of Tartarus enfoldeth Cronos old
And those who strove beside him. Such the aid
I gave the lord of heaven—my meed for which

He paid me thus, a penal recompense!
For 'tis the inward vice of tyranny,
To deem of friends as being secret foes.
Now, to your question—hear me clearly show
On what imputed fault he tortures me.
Scarce was he seated on his father's throne,
When he began his doles of privilege
Among the lesser gods, allotting power
In trim division; while of mortal men
Nothing he recked, nor of their misery
Nay, even willed to blast their race entire
To nothingness, and breed another brood;
And none but I was found to cross his will.
I dared it, I alone; I rescued men
From crushing ruin and th' abyss of hell—
Therefore am I constrained in chastisement
Grievous to bear and piteous to behold,—
Yea, firm to feel compassion for mankind,
Myself was held unworthy of the same—
Ay, beyond pity am I ranged and ruled
To sufferance—a sight that shames his sway!

CHORUS.

A heart of steel, a mould of stone were he,
Who could complacently behold thy pains
I came not here as craving for this sight,
And, seeing it, I stand heart-wrung with pain.

PROMETHEUS.

Yea truly, kindly eyes must pity me!

CHORUS.

Say, didst thou push transgression further still?

PROMETHEUS.

Ay, man thro' me ceased to foreknow his death.

CHORUS.

What cure couldst thou discover for this curse?

PROMETHEUS.

Blind hopes I sent to nestle in man's heart.

CHORUS.

This was a goodly gift thou gavest them.

PROMETHEUS.

Yet more I gave them, even the boon of fire.

CHORUS.

What? radiant fire, to things ephemeral?

PROMETHEUS.

Yea—many an art too shall they learn thereby!

CHORUS.

Then, upon imputation of such guilt,
Doth Zeus without surcease torment thee thus?
Is there no limit to thy course of pain?

PROMETHEUS.

None, till his own will shall decree an end.

CHORUS.

And how shall he decree it? say, what hope?
Seest thou not thy sin? yet of that sin
It irks me sore to speak, as thee to hear.
Nay, no more words hereof; bethink thee now,
From this ordeal how to find release.

PROMETHEUS.

Easy it is, for one whose foot is set
Outside the slough of pain, to lesson well
With admonitions him who lies therein.
With perfect knowledge did I all I did,
I willed to sin, and sinned, I own it all—
I championed men, unto my proper pain.
Yet scarce I deemed that, in such cruel doom,
Withering upon this skyey precipice,
I should inherit lonely mountain crags,
Here, in a vast tin-neighbour'd solitude.
Yet list not to lament my present pains,
But, stepping from your cars unto the ground,
Listen, the while I tell the future fates
Now drawing near, until ye know the whole.
Grant ye, O grant my prayer, be pitiful
To one now racked with woe! the doom of pain
Wanders, but settles, soon or late, on all.

CHORUS.

To willing hearts, and schooled to feel,
Prometheus, came thy tongue's appeal;
Therefore we leave, with lightsome tread,
The flying cars in which we sped—
We leave the stainless virgin air
Where winged creatures float and fare,
And by thy side, on rocky land,

Thus gently we alight and stand,
Willing, from end to end, to know
Thine history of woe.

The CHORUS alight from their winged cars.

Enter OCEANUS mounted on a griffin.

OCEANUS.

Thus, over leagues and leagues of space
I come, Prometheus, to thy place—
By will alone, not rein, I guide
The winged thing on which I ride;
And much, be sure, I mourn thy case—
Kinship is Pity's bond, I trow;
And, wert thou not akin, I vow
None other should have more than thou
Of my compassion's grace!
'Tis said, and shall be proved; no skill
Have I to gloze and feign goodwill!
Name but some mode of helpfulness,
And thou wilt in a trice confess
That I, Oceanus, am best
Of all thy friends, and trustiest.

PROMETHEUS.

Ho, what a sight of marvel! what, thou too
Comest to contemplate my pains, and darest—
(Yet how, I wot not!) leaving far behind
The circling tide, thy namefellow, and those
Rock-arched, self-hollowed caverns—thus to come
Unto this land, whose womb bears iron ore?
Art come to see my lot, resent with me
The ills I bear? Well, gaze thy fill! behold
Me, friend of Zeus, part-author of his power—
Mark, in what ruthlessness he bows me down!

OCEANUS.

Yea, I behold, Prometheus! and would warn
Thee, spite of all thy wisdom, for thy weal!
Learn now thyself to know, and to renew
A rightful spirit within thee, for, made new
With pride of place, sits Zeus among the gods!
Now, if thou choosest to fling forth on him
Words rough with anger thus and edged with scorn,
Zeus, though he sit aloof, afar, on high,
May hear thine utterance, and make thee deem
His present wrath a mere pretence of pain.

Banish, poor wretch! the passion of thy soul,
And seek, instead, acquittance from thy pangs!
Belike my words seem ancients to thee—
Such, nathless, O Prometheus, is the meed
That doth await the overweening tongue!
Meek wert thou never, wilt not crouch to pain,
But, set amid misfortunes, cravest more!
Now—if thou let thyself be schooled by me—
Thou must not kick against the goad. Thou knowest,
A despot rules, harsh, resolute, supreme,
Whose law is will. Yet shall I go to him,
With all endeavour to relieve thy plight—
So thou wilt curb the tempest of thy tongue!
Surely thou knowest, in thy wisdom deep,
The saw—*Who vaunts amiss, quick pain is his.*

PROMETHEUS.

O enviable thou, and unaccused—
Thou who wast art and part in all I dared!
And now, let be! make this no care of thine,
For Zeus is past persuasion—urge him not!
Look to thyself, lest thine emprise thou rue.

OCEANUS.

Thou hast more skill to school thy neighbour's fault
Than to amend thine own: 'tis proved and plain,
By fact, not hearsay, that I read this well.
Yet am I fixed to go—withhold me not—
Assured I am, assured, that Zeus will grant
The boon I crave, the loosening of thy bonds.

PROMETHEUS.

In part I praise thee, to the end will praise;
Goodwill thou lackest not, but yet forbear
Thy further trouble! If thy heart be fain,
Bethink thee that thy toil avails me not.
Nay, rest thee well, aloof from danger's brink!
I will not ease my woe by base relief
In knowing others too involved therein.
Away the thought! for deeply do I rue
My brother Atlas' doom. Far off he stands
In sunset land, and on his shoulder bears
The pillar'd mountain-mass whose base is earth,
Whose top is heaven, and its ponderous load
Too great for any grasp. With pity too
I saw Earth's child, the monstrous thing of war,

That in Cilicia's hollow places dwelt—
Typho; I saw his hundred-headed form
Crushed and constrained; yet once his stride was fierce,
His jaws gaped horror and their hiss was death,
And all heaven's host he challenged to the fray,
While, as one vowed to storm the power of Zeus,
Forth from his eyes he shot a demon glare.
It skilled not: the unsleeping bolt of Zeus,
The downward levin with its rush of flame,
Smote on him, and made dumb for evermore
The clamour of his vaunting: to the heart
Stricken he lay, and all that mould of strength
Sank thunder-shattered to a smouldering ash;
And helpless now and laid in ruin huge
He lieth by the narrow strait of sea,
Crushed at the root of Etna's mountain-pile.
High on the pinnacles whereof there sits
Hephaestus, sweltering at the forge; and thence
On some hereafter day shall burst and stream
The lava-floods, that shall with ravening fangs
Gnaw thy smooth lowlands, fertile Sicily!
Such ire shall Typho from his living grave
Send seething up, such jets of fiery surge,
Hot and unslaked, altho' himself be laid
In quaking ashes by Zeus' thunderbolt.
But thou dost know hereof, nor needest me
To school thy sense: thou knowest safety's road—
Walk then thereon! I to the dregs will drain,
Till Zeus relent from wrath, my present woe.

OCEANUS.

Nay, but, Prometheus, know'st thou not the saw—
Words can appease the angry soul's disease?

PROMETHEUS.

Ay—if in season one apply their salve,
Not scorching wrath's proud flesh with caustic tongue.

OCEANUS.

But in wise thought and venturous essay
Perceivest thou a danger? prithee tell!

PROMETHEUS.

I see a fool's good nature, useless toil.

OCEANUS.

Let me be sick of that disease; I know,
Loyalty, masked as folly, wins the way.

PROMETHEUS.

But of thy blunder I shall bear the blame.

OCEANUS.

Clearly, thy word would send me home again.

PROMETHEUS.

Lest thy lament for me should bring thee hate.

OCEANUS.

Hate from the newly-throned Omnipotence?

PROMETHEUS.

Be heedful—lest his will be wroth with thee!

OCEANUS.

Thy doom, Prometheus, cries to me *Beware!*

PROMETHEUS.

Mount, make away, discretion at thy side!

OCEANUS.

Thy word is said to me in act to go:
For lo, my hippogriff with waving wings
Fans the smooth course of air, and fain is he
To rest his limbs within his ocean stall.

[*Exit* OCEANUS.]

CHORUS.

For the woe and the wreck and the doom, Prometheus I utter my sighs;
O'er my cheek flows the fountain of tears from tender, compassionate eyes.
For stern and abhorred is the sway of Zeus on his self-sought throne,
And ruthless the spear of his scorn, to the gods of the days that are done.
And over the limitless earth goes up a disconsolate cry:
Ye were all so fair, and have fallen; so great and your might has gone by! So wails with a
mighty lament the voice of the mortals, who dwell
In the Eastland, the home of the holy, for thee and the fate that befel;
And they of the Colchian land, the maidens whose arm is for war;
And the Scythian bowmen, who roam by the lake of Maeotis afar;
And the blossom of battling hordes, that flowers upon Caucasus' height,
With clashing of lances that pierce, and with clamour of swords that smite.
Strange is thy sorrow! one only I know who has suffered thy pain—
Atlas the Titan, the god, in a ruthless, invincible chain!
He beareth for ever and ever the burden and poise of the sky,
The vault of the rolling heaven, and earth re-echoes his cry.

The depths of the sea are troubled; they mourn from their caverns profound,
And the darkest and innermost hell moans deep with a sorrowful sound;
And the rivers of waters, that flow from the fountains that spring without stain,
Are as one in the great lamentation, and moan for thy piteous pain.

PROMETHEUS.

Deem not that I in pride or wilful scorn
Restrain my speech; 'tis wistful memory
That rends my heart, when I behold myself
Abased to wretchedness. To these new gods
I and none other gave their lots of power
In full attainment; no more words hereof
I speak—the tale ye know. But listen now
Unto the rede of mortals and their woes,
And how their childish and unreasoning state
Was changed by me to consciousness and thought.
Yet not in blame of mortals will I speak,
But as in proof of service wrought to them.
For, in the outset, eyes they had and saw not;
And ears they had but heard not; age on age,
Like unsubstantial shapes in vision seen,
They groped at random in the world of sense,
Nor knew to link their building, brick with brick,
Nor how to turn its aspect to the sun,
Nor how to join the beams by carpentry,
In hollowed caves they dwelt, as emmets dwell,
Weak feathers for each blast, in sunless caves.
Nor had they certain forecast of the cold,
Nor of the advent of the flowery spring,
Nor of the fruitful summer. All they wrought,
Unreasoning they wrought, till I made clear
The laws of rising stars, and inference dim,
More hard to learn, of what their setting showed.
I taught to them withal that art of arts,
The lore of number, and the written word
That giveth sense to sound, the tool wherewith
The gift of memory was wrought in all,
And so came art and song. I too was first
To harness 'neath the yoke strong animals,
Obedient made to collar and to weight,
That they might bear whate'er of heaviest toil
Mortals endured before. For chariots too
I trained, and docile service of the rein,
Steeds, the delight of wealth and pomp and pride.
I too, none other, for seafarers wrought

Their ocean-roaming canvas-wingèd cars.
Such arts of craft did I, unhappy I,
Contrive for mortals: now, no feint I have
Whereby I may elude my present woe.

CHORUS.

A rueful doom is thine! distraught of soul,
And all astray, and like some sorry leech
Art thou, repining at thine own disease,
Unskilled, unknowing of the needful cure.

PROMETHEUS.

More wilt thou wonder when the rest thou hearest—
What arts for them, what methods I devised.
Foremost was this: if any man fell sick,
No aiding art he knew, no saving food,
No curing oil nor draught, but all in lack
Of remedies they dwindled, till I taught
The medicinal blending of soft drugs,
Whereby they ward each sickness from their side.
I ranged for them the methods manifold
Of the diviner's art; I first discerned
Which of night's visions hold a truth for day,
I read for them the lore of mystic sounds,
Inscrutable before; the omens seen
Which bless or ban a journey, and the flight
Of crook-clawed birds, did I make clear to man—
And how they soar upon the right, for weal,
How, on the left, for evil; how they dwell,
Each in its kind, and what their loves and hates,
And which can flock and roost in harmony.
From me, men learned what deep significance
Lay in the smoothness of the entrails set
For sacrifice, and which, of various hues,
Showed them a gift accepted of the gods;
They learned what streaked and varied comeliness
Of gall and liver told; I led them, too,
(By passing thro' the flame the thigh-bones, wrapt
In rolls of fat, and th' undivided chine),
Unto the mystic and perplexing lore
Of omens; and I cleared unto their eyes
The forecasts, dim and indistinct before,
Shown in the flickering aspect of a flame.
Of these, enough is said. The other boons,
Stored in the womb of earth, in aid of men—
Copper and iron, silver, gold withal—

Who dares affirm he found them ere I found?
None—well I know—save who would babble lies!
Know thou, in compass of a single phrase—
All arts, for mortals' use, Prometheus gave.

CHORUS.

Nay, aid not mortal men beyond their due,
Holding too light a reckoning of thyself
And of thine own distress: good hope have I
To see thee once again from fetters free
And matched with Zeus in parity of power.

PROMETHEUS.

Not yet nor thus hath Fate ordained the end—
Not until age-long pains and countless woes
Have bent and bowed me, shall my shackles fall;
Art strives too feebly against destiny.

CHORUS.

But what hand rules the helm of destiny?

PROMETHEUS.

The triform Fates, and Furies unforgiving.

CHORUS.

Then is the power of Zeus more weak than theirs?

PROMETHEUS.

He may not shun the fate ordained for him.

CHORUS.

What is ordained for him, save endless rule?

PROMETHEUS.

Seek not for answer: this thou may'st not learn.

CHORUS.

Surely thy silence hides some solemn thing.

PROMETHEUS.

Think on some other theme: 'tis not the hour,
This secret to unveil; in deepest dark
Be it concealed: by guarding it shall I
Escape at last from bonds, and scorn, and pain.

CHORUS.

O never may my weak and faint desire
Strive against God most high—
Never be slack in service, never tire
Of sacred loyalty;
Nor fail to wend unto the altar-side,

Where with the blood of kine
Steams up the offering, by the quenchless tide
Of Ocean, Sire divine!
Be this within my heart, indelible—
Offend not with thy tongue! Sweet, sweet it is, in cheering hopes to dwell,
Immortal, ever young,
In maiden gladness fostering evermore
A soft content of soul!
But ah, I shudder at thine anguish sore—
Thy doom thro' years that roll!
Thou could'st not cower to Zeus: a love too great
Thou unto man hast given—
Too high of heart thou wert—ah, thankless fate!
What aid, 'gainst wrath of Heaven,
Could mortal man afford? in vain thy gift
To things so powerless!
Could'st thou not see? they are as dreams that drift;
Their strength is feebleness
A purblind race, in hopeless fetters bound,
They have no craft or skill,
That could o'erreach the ordinance profound
of the eternal will.
Alas, Prometheus! on thy woe condign
I looked, and learned this lore;
And a new strain floats to these lips of mine—
Not the glad song of yore,
When by the lustral wave I sang to see
My sister made thy bride,
Decked with thy gifts, thy loved Hesione,
And clasped unto thy side.

Enter IO, horned like a cow.

IO.

Alack! what land, what folk are here?
Whom see I clenched in rocky fetters drear
Unto the stormy crag? for what thing done
Dost thou in agony atone?
Ah, tell me whither, well-a-day!
My feet have roamed their weary way?
Ah, but it maddens, the sting! it burns in my piteous side!
Ah, but the vision, the spectre, the earth-born, the myriad-eyed!
Avoid thee! Earth, hide him, thine offspring! he cometh—O aspect of ill!
Ghostly, and crafty of face, and dead, but pursuing me still!
Ah, woe upon me, woe ineffable!
He steals upon my track, a hound of hell—

Where'er I stray, along the sands and brine,
Weary and foodless, come his creeping eyne!
And ah, the ghostly sound—
The wax-stopped reed-flute's weird and drowsy drone!
Alack my wandering woes, that round and round
Lead me in many mazes, lost, foredone!
O child of Cronos! for what deed of wrong
Am I enthralled by thee in penance long?
Why by the stinging bruise, the thing of fear,
Dost thou torment me, heart and brain?
Nay, give me rather to the flames that sear,
Or to some hidden grave,
Or to the rending jaws, the monsters of the main!
Nor grudge the boon for which I crave, O king!
Enough, enough of weary wandering,
Pangs from which none can save!
Hearken! in pity hold
Io, the ox-horned maid, thy love of old!

PROMETHEUS.

Hear Zeus or not, I hear and know thee well,
Daughter of Inachus; I know thee driven,
Stung by the gadfly, mazed with agony.
Ay, thou art she whose beauty fired the breast
Of Zeus with passion; she whom Hera's hate
Now harasses o'er leagues and leagues of land.

IO.

Alack, thou namest Inachus my sire!
Wottest thou of him? how, from lips of pain,
Comes to my woeful ears truth's very strain?
How knowest thou the curse, the burning fire
The god-sent, piercing pest that stings and clings?
Ah me! in frenzied, foodless wanderings
Hither I come, and on me from on high
Lies Hera's angry craft! Ah, men unblest!
Not one there is, not one, that is unblest as I.
But thou—tell me the rest!
Utter the rede of woes to come for me;
Utter the aid, the cure, if aid or cure there be!

PROMETHEUS.

Lo, clearly will I show forth all thy quest—
Not in dark speech, but with such simple phrase
As doth befit the utterance of a friend.
I am Prometheus, who gave fire to men.

IO.

O daring, proven champion of man's race,
What sin, Prometheus, dost thou thus atone?

PROMETHEUS.

One moment since, I told my woes and ceased.

IO.

Then should I plead my suit to thee in vain?

PROMETHEUS.

Nay, speak thy need; nought would I hide from thee.

IO.

Pronounce who nailed thee to the rocky cleft.

PROMETHEUS.

Zeus, by intent; Hephaestus, by his hand.

IO.

For what wrongdoing do these pains atone?

PROMETHEUS.

What I have said, is said; suffice it thee!

IO.

Yet somewhat add; forewarn me in my woe
What time shall bring my wandering to its goal?

PROMETHEUS.

Fore-knowledge is fore-sorrow; ask it not.

IO.

Nay, hide not from me destiny's decree.

PROMETHEUS.

I grudge thee not the gift which I withhold.

IO.

Then wherefore tarry ere thou tell me all?

PROMETHEUS.

Nothing I grudge, but would not rack thy soul.

IO.

Be not compassionate beyond my wish.

PROMETHEUS.

Well, thou art fain, and I will speak. Attend!

CHORUS.

Nay—ere thou speak, hear me, bestow on me
A portion of the grace of granted prayers.
First let us learn how Io's frenzy came—

(She telling her disasters manifold)
Then of their sequel let her know from thee.

PROMETHEUS.

Well were it, Io, thus to do their will—
Right well! they are the sisters of thy sire.
'Tis worth the waste and effluence of time,
To tell, with tears of perfect moan, the doom
Of sorrows that have fallen, when 'tis sure
The listeners will greet the tale with tears.

IO.

I know not how I should mistrust your prayer;
Therefore the whole that ye desire of me
Ye now shall learn in one straightforward tale.
Yet, as it leaves my lips, I blush with shame
To tell that tempest of the spite of Heaven,
And all the wreck and ruin of my form,
And whence they swooped upon me, woe is me!
Long, long in visions of the night there came
Voices and forms into my maiden bower,
Alluring me with smoothly glozing words—
*O maiden highly favoured of high Heaven,
Why cherish thy virginity so long?
Thine is it to win wedlock's noblest crown!
Know that Zeus' heart thro' thee is all aflame,
Pierced with desire as with a dart, and longs
To join in utmost rite of love with thee.
Therefore, O maiden, shun not with disdain Th' embrace of Zeus, but hie thee forth
straightway
To the lush growth of Lerna's meadow-land,
Where are the flocks and steadings of thy home,
And let Zeus' eye be eased of its desire.*
Night after night, haunted by dreams like these,
Heartsick, I ventured at the last to tell
Unto my sire these visions of the dark.
Then sent he many a wight, on sacred quest,
To Delphi and to far Dodona's shrine,
Being fall fain to learn what deed or word
Would win him favour from the powers of heaven.
But they came back repeating oracles
Mystic, ambiguous, inscrutable,
Till, at the last, an utterance direct,
Obscure no more, was brought to Inachus—
A peremptory charge to fling me forth
Beyond my home and fatherland, a thing

Sent loose in banishment o'er all the world;
And—should he falter—Zeus should launch on him
A fire-eyed bolt, to shatter and consume
Himself and all his race to nothingness.
Bowing before such utterance from the shrine
Of Loxias, he drove me from our halls,
Barring the gates against me: loth he was
To do, as I to suffer, this despite:
But the strong curb of Zeus had overborne
His will to me-ward. As I parted thence,
In form and mind I grew dishumanized,
And horned as now ye see me, poison-stung
By the envenomed bitings of the brize,
I leapt and flung in frenzy, rushed away
To the bright waters of Cerchneia's stream
And Lerna's beach: but ever at my side,
A herdsman by his heifer, Argus moved,
Earth-born, malevolent of mood, and peered,
With myriad eyes, where'er my feet would roam.
But on him in a moment, unforeseen,
Came Fate, and sundered him from life; but I,
Still maddened by the gadfly's sting, the scourge
Of God's infliction, roam the weary world.
How I have fared, thou hearest: be there aught
Of what remains to bear, that thou canst tell,
Speak on! but let not thy compassion warm
Thy words to cheering falsehood. Worst of woes
Are words that break their promise to our hope!

CHORUS.

Woe! woe! avaunt—thou and thy tale of bane!
O never, never dared I dream
Such horror of strange sounds should pierce mine ear;
Such loathly sights, such tortures hard to bear,
Outrage, pollution, agony supreme,
Wasting my heart with double edge of pain!
Ah Fate, ah Fate! I gaze on Io's dole,
And shudder to my soul!

PROMETHEUS.

Thou wailest all too soon, fulfilled of fear—
Tarry awhile, till thou have learned the whole.

CHORUS.

Say on, reveal it! suffering souls are fain
To know aright what yet remains to bear.

PROMETHEUS.

Lightly, with help of mine, did ye achieve
That which ye first desired: from Io's mouth
craved to hear, recounted by herself,
The story of her strivings. Listen now
To what shall follow, to what woefulness
The wrath of Hera must compel this maid.

(*To Io*)

And thou, O child of Inachus, within
Thine inmost heart store up these words of mine,
That thou may'st learn thy wanderings and their goal.
First from this spot toward the sunrise turn,
And cross the steppe that knoweth not the plough:
Thus to the nomad Scythians shalt thou come,
Who dwell in wattled homes, not built on earth
But borne along on wains of sturdy wheel—
Equipped, themselves, with bows of mighty reach.
Pass them avoidingly, and leave their land,
And skirt the beaches where the tides make moan,
Till lo! upon the left hand thou shalt find
The Chalybes, stout craftsmen of the steel—
Beware of them! no gentleness is theirs,
No kindly welcome to a stranger's foot!
Thence to the Stream of Violence shalt thou come—
Like name, like nature; see thou cross it not,
(*'Tis fatal to the forder!*) till thou come
Right to the very Caucasus, the peak
That overtops the world, and from its brows
The river pants in spray its wrathful stream.
Thence, o'er the pinnacles that court the stars,
Onward and southward thou must take thy way,
And reach the warlike horde of Amazons,
Maidens through hate of man; and gladly they
Will guide thy maiden feet. That host, in days
That are not yet, shall fix their home and dwell
At Themiscyra, on Thermodon's bank,
Nigh whereunto the grim projecting fang
Of Salmydessus' cape affronts the main,
The seaman's curse, to ships a stepmother!
Then at the jutting land, Cimmerian styled,
That screens the narrowing portal of the mere,
Thou shalt arrive; pass o'er it, brave at heart,
And ferry thee across Macotis' ford.
So shall there be great rumour evermore,
In ears of mortals, of thy passage strange;

And Bosporos shall be that channel's name,
Because the ox-horned thing did pass thereby.
So, from the wilds of Europe wander'd o'er,
To Asia's continent thou com'st at last.

(To the CHORUS)

And ye, what think ye? Seems he not, that lord
And tyrant of the gods, as tyrannous
Unto all other lives? A high god's lust
Constrained this mortal maid to roam the world!

(To Io)

Poor maid! a brutal wooer sure was thine!
For know that all which I have told thee now
Is scarce the prelude of thy woes to come.

IO.

Alas for me, alas!

PROMETHEUS.

Again thou criest, with a heifer's low.
What wilt thou do, learning thy future woes?

CHORUS.

What, hast thou further sorrows for her ear?

PROMETHEUS.

Yea, a vext ocean of predestined pain.

IO.

What profit then is life to me? Ah, why
Did I not cast me from this stubborn crag?
So with one spring, one crash upon the ground,
I had attained surcease from all my woes.
Better it is to die one death outright
Than linger out long life in misery.

PROMETHEUS.

Ill would'st thou bear these agonies of mine—
Mine, with whose fate it standeth not to win
The goal of death, which were release from pain!
Now, there is set no limit to my woe
Till Zeus be hurled from his omnipotence.

IO.

Zeus hurled from pride of place! Can such things be?

PROMETHEUS.

Thou wert full fain, methinks, to see that sight!

IO.

Even so—his overthrow who wrought my pain.

PROMETHEUS.

Then may'st thou know thereof; such fall shall be.

IO.

And who shall wrench the sceptre from his hand?

PROMETHEUS.

By his own mindless counsels shall he fall.

IO.

And how? unless the telling harm, say on!

PROMETHEUS.

Wooing a bride, his ruin he shall win.

IO.

Goddess, or mortal? tell me, if thou may'st.

PROMETHEUS.

No matter which—more must not be revealed.

IO.

Doth then a consort thrust him from his throne?

PROMETHEUS.

The child she bears him shall o'ercome his sire.

IO.

And hath he no avoidance of this doom?

PROMETHEUS.

None, surely—till that I, released from bonds—

IO.

Who can release thee, but by will of Zeus?

PROMETHEUS.

Fate gives this duty to a child of thine!

IO.

How? Shall a child of mine undo thy woes?

PROMETHEUS.

Yea, of thy lineage, thirteen times removed.

IO.

Dark beyond guessing grows thine oracle.

PROMETHEUS.

Yea—seek not therefore to foreknow thy woes.

IO.

As thou didst proffer hope, withdraw it not.

PROMETHEUS.

Two tales I have—choose! for I grant thee one.

IO.

And which be they? reveal, and leave me choice.

PROMETHEUS.

I grant it: shall I in all clearness show
Thy future woes, or my deliverance?

CHORUS.

Nay! of the two, vouchsafe her wish to her
And mine to me, deigning a truth to each—
To her, reveal her future wanderings—
To me, thy future saviour, as I crave!

PROMETHEUS.

I will not set myself to thwart your will
Withholding aught of what ye crave to know.
First to thee, Io, will I tell and trace
Thy scared circuitous wandering mark it well,
Deep in retentive tablets of the soul.
When thou hast overpast the ferry's flow
That sunders continent from continent,
Straight to the eastward and the flaming face
Of dawn, and highways trodden by the sun,
Pass, till thou come unto the windy land
Of daughters born to Boreas: beware
Lest the strong spirit of the stormy blast
Snatch thee aloft, and sweep thee to the void,
On wings of raving wintry hurricane!
Wend by the noisy tumult of the wave,
Until thou reach the Gorgon-haunted plains
Beside Cisthene. In that solitude
Dwell Phorcys' daughters, beldames worn with time,
Three, each swan-shapen, single-toothed, and all
Peering thro' shared endowment of one eye;
Never on them doth the sun shed his rays,
Never falls radiance of the midnight moon.
But, hard by these, their sisters, clad with wings,
Serpentine-curved, dwell, loathed of mortal men,—
The Gorgons!—he of men who looks on them
Shall gasp away his life. Of such fell guard
I bid thee to beware. Now, mark my words
When I another sight of terror tell—
Beware the Gryphon pack, the hounds of Zeus,
As keen of fang as silent of their tongues!

Beware the one-eyed Arimasian band
That tramp on horse-hoofs, dwelling by the ford
Of Pluto and the stream that flows with gold:
Keep thou aloof from these. To the world's end
Thou comest at the last, the dark-faced tribe
That dwell beside the sources of the sun,
Where springs the river, Aethiopian named.
Make thou thy way along his bank, until
Thou come unto the mighty downward slope
Where from the overland of Byblis hills
Nile pours his hallowed earth-refreshing wave.
He by his course shall guide thee to the realm
Named from himself, three-angled, water-girt;
There, Io, at the last, hath Fate ordained,
For thee and for thy race, the charge to found,
Far from thy native shore, a new abode.
Lo, I have said: if aught hereof appear
Hard to thy sense and inarticulate,
Question me o'er again, and soothly learn—
God wot, I have too much of leisure here!

CHORUS.

If there be aught beyond, or aught pass'd o'er,
Which thou canst utter, of her woe-worn maze,
Speak on! if all is said, then grant to us
That which we asked, as thou rememberest.

PROMETHEUS.

She now hath learned, unto its utmost end,
Her pilgrimage; but yet, that she may know
That 'tis no futile fable she hath heard,
I will recount her history of toil
Ere she came hither; let it stand for proof
Of what I told, my forecast of the end.
So, then—to sum in brief the weary tale—
I turn me to thine earlier exile's close.
When to Molossia's lowland thou hadst come,
Nigh to Dodona's cliff and ridge sublime,
(Where is the shrine oracular and seat
Of Zeus, Thesprotian styled, and that strange thing
And marvel past belief, the prophet-oaks
That syllable his speech), thou by their tongues,
With clear acclaim and unequivocal,
Wert thus saluted—*Hail, O bride of Zeus*
That art to be—hast memory thereof?
Thence, stung anew with frenzy, thou didst hie

Along the shoreward track, to Rhea's lap,
The mighty main; then, stormily distraught,
Backward again and eastward. To all time,
Be well assured, that inlet of the sea
All mortal men shall call Ionian,
In memory that Io fared thereby.
Take this for proof and witness that my mind
Hath more in ken than ever sense hath shown.

(*To the CHORUS*)

That which remains, to you and her alike
I will relate, and, to my former words
Reverting, add this final prophecy.

(*To Io*)

There lieth, at the verge of land and sea,
Where Nilus issues thro' the silted sand,
A town, Canopus called: and there at length
Shall Zeus renew the reason in thy brain
With the mere touch and contact of his hand
Fraught now with fear no more: and thou shalt bear
A child, dark Epaphus—his very name
Memorial of Zeus' touch that gave him life.
And his shall be the foison and the fruit
Of all the land enriched by spreading Nile.
Thence the fifth generation of his seed
Back unto Argos, yet unwillingly,
Shall flee for refuge—fifty maidens they,
Loathing a wedlock with their next in blood,
More kin than kind, from their sire's brother sprung.
And on their track, astir with wild desire,
Like falcons fierce closing on doves that flee,
Shall speed the suitors, craving to achieve
A prey forbidden, a reluctant bride.
Yet power divine shall foil them, and forbid
Possession of the maids, whom Argive land
Shall hold protected, when unsleeping hate,
Horror, and watchful ambush of the night,
Have laid the suitors dead, by female hands.
For every maid shall smite a man to death,
Dyeing a dagger's edges in his throat—
Such bed of love befall mine enemies!
Yet in one bride shall yearning conquer hate,
Bidding her spare the bridegroom at her side,
Blunting the keen edge of her set resolve.
Thus of two scorns the former shall she choose,
The name of coward, not of murderess.

In Argos shall she bear, in after time,
A royal offspring. Long it were to tell
In clear succession all that thence shall be.
Take this for sooth—in lineage from her
A hero shall arise, an archer great,
And he shall be my saviour from these woes.
Such knowledge of the future Themis gave,
The ancient Titaness, to me her son.
But how, and by what skill, 'twere long to say,
And no whit will the knowledge profit thee.

IO.

O woe, O rending and convulsive pain,
Frenzy and agony, again, again
Searing my heart and brain!
O dagger of the sting, unforged with fire
Yet burning, burning ever! O my heart,
Pulsing with horror, beating at my breast!
O rolling maddened eyes! away, apart,
Raving with anguish dire,
I spring, by frenzy-fiends possess.
O wild and whirling words, that sweep in gloom
Down to dark waves of doom!

[*Exit* IO.]

CHORUS.

O well and sagely was it said—
Yea, wise of heart was he who first
Gave forth in speech the thought he nursed—
In thine own order see thou wed!
Let not the humble heart aspire
To the gross home of wealth and pride;
Nor be it to a hearth allied
That vaunts of many a noble sire.

O Fates, of awful empery!
Never may I by Zeus be wooed—
Never give o'er my maidenhood
To any god that dwells on high.

A shudder to my soul is sent,
Beholding Io's doom forlorn—
By Hera's malice put to scorn,
Roaming in mateless banishment.

From wedlock's crown of fair desire
I would not shrink—an idle fear!
But may no god to me draw near
With shunless might and glance of fire!

That were a strife wherein no chance
Of conquest lies: from Zeus most high
And his resolve, no subtlety
Could win me my deliverance.

PROMETHEUS.

And yet shall Zeus, for all his stubborn pride,
Be brought to low estate! aha, he schemes
Such wedlock as shall bring his doom on him,
Flung from his kingship to oblivion's lap!
Ay, then the curse his father Cronos spake
As he fell helpless from his agelong throne,
Shall be fulfilled unto the utterance!
No god but I can manifest to him
A rescue from such ruin as impends—
I know it, I, and how it may be foiled.
Go to, then, let him sit and blindly trust
His skyey rumblings, for security,
And wave his levin with its blast of flame!
All will avail him not, nor bar his fall
Down to dishonour vile, intolerable
So strong a wrestler is he moulding now
To his own proper downfall—yea, a shape
Portentous and unconquerably huge,
Who truly shall reveal a flame more strong
Than is the lightning, and a crash of sound
More loud than thunder, and shall dash to nought
Poseidon's trident-spear, the ocean-bane
That makes the firm earth quiver. Let Zeus strike
Once on this rock, he speedily shall learn
How far the fall from power to slavery!

CHORUS.

Beware! thy wish doth challenge Zeus himself.

PROMETHEUS.

I voice my wish and its fulfilment too.

CHORUS.

What, dare we look for one to conquer Zeus?

PROMETHEUS.

Ay—Zeus shall wear more painful bonds than mine

CHORUS.

Darest thou speak such taunts and tremble not?

PROMETHEUS.

Why should I fear, who am immortal too?

CHORUS.

Yet he might doom thee to worse agony.

PROMETHEUS.

Out on his dooming! I foreknow it all.

CHORUS.

Yet do the wise revere Necessity.

PROMETHEUS.

Ay, ay—do reverence, cringe and crouch to power
Whene'er, where'er thou see it! But, for me,
I reckon of Zeus as something less than nought.
Let him put forth his power, attest his sway,
Howe'er he will—a momentary show,
A little brief authority in heaven!
Aha, I see out yonder one who comes,
A bidden courier, truckling at Zeus' nod,
A lacquey in his new lord's livery,
Surely on some fantastic errand sped!

Enter HERMES.

HERMES.

Thou, double-dyed in gall of bitterness,
Trickster and sinner against gods, by giving
The stolen fire to perishable men!
Attend—the Sire supreme doth bid thee tell
What is the wedlock which thou vauntest now,
Whereby he falleth from supremacy?
Speak forth the whole, make all thine utterance clear,
Have done with words inscrutable, nor cause
To me, Prometheus! any further toil
Or twofold journeying. Go to—thou seest
Zeus doth not soften at such words as thine!

PROMETHEUS.

Pompous, in sooth, thy word, and swoln with pride,
As doth befit the lacquey of thy lords!
O ye young gods! how, in your youthful sway,
Ye deem secure your citadels of sky,

Beyond the reach of sorrow or of fall!
Have I not seen two dynasties of gods
Already flung therefrom? and soon shall see
A third, that now in tyranny exults,
Shamed, ruined, in an hour! What sayest thou?
Crouch I and tremble at these stripling powers?
Small homage unto such from me, or none!
Betake thee hence, sweat back along thy road—
Look for no answer from me, get thee gone!

HERMES.

Think—it was such audacities of will
That drove thee erst to anchorage in woe!

PROMETHEUS.

Ay—but mark this: mine heritage of pain
I would not barter for thy servitude.

HERMES.

Better, forsooth, be bond-slave to a crag,
Than true-born herald unto Zeus the Sire!

PROMETHEUS.

Take thine own coin—taunts for a taunting slave!

HERMES.

Proud art thou in thy circumstance, methinks!

PROMETHEUS.

Proud? in such pride then be my foemen set,
And I to see—and of such foes art thou!

HERMES.

What, blam'st thou me too for thy sufferings?

PROMETHEUS.

Mark a plain word—I loathe all gods that are,
Who reaped my kindness and repay with wrong.

HERMES.

I hear no little madness in thy words.

PROMETHEUS.

Madness be mine, if scorn of foes be mad.

HERMES.

Past bearing were thy pride, in happiness.

PROMETHEUS.

Ah me!

HERMES.

Zeus knoweth nought of sorrow's cry!

PROMETHEUS.

He shall! Time's lapse bringeth all lessons home.

HERMES.

To thee it brings not yet discretion's curb.

PROMETHEUS.

No—else I had not wrangled with a slave!

HERMES.

Then thou concealest all that Zeus would learn?

PROMETHEUS.

As though I owed him aught and should repay!

HERMES.

Scornful thy word, as though I were a child—

PROMETHEUS.

Child, ay—or whatso'er hath less of brain—
Thou, deeming thou canst wring my secret out!
No mangling torture, no, nor sleight of power
There is, by which he shall compel my speech,
Until these shaming bonds be loosed from me.
So, let him fling his blazing levin-bolt!
Let him with white and winged flakes of snow,
And rumbling earthquakes, whelm and shake the world!
For nought of this shall bend me to reveal
The power ordained to hurl him from his throne.

HERMES.

Bethink thee if such words can mend thy lot.

PROMETHEUS.

All have I long foreseen, and all resolved.

HERMES.

Perverse of will! constrain, constrain thy soul
To think more wisely in the grasp of doom!

PROMETHEUS.

Truce to vain words! as wisely wouldst thou strive
To warn a swelling wave: imagine not
That ever I before thy lord's resolve
Will shrink in womanish terror, and entreat,
As with soft suppliance of female hands,
The Power I scorn unto the utterance,

To loose me from the chains that bind me here—
A world's division 'twixt that thought and me!

HERMES.

So, I shall speak, whate'er I speak, in vain!
No prayer can melt or soften thy resolve;
But, as a colt new-harnessed champs the bit,
Thou strivest and art restive to the rein.
But all too feeble is the stratagem
In which thou art so confident: for know
That strong self-will is weak and less than nought
In one more proud than wise. Bethink thee now—
If these my words thou shouldst disregard—
What storm, what might as of a great third wave
Shall dash thy doom upon thee, past escape!
First shall the Sire, with thunder and the flame
Of lightning, rend the crags of this ravine,
And in the shattered mass o'erwhelm thy form,
Immured and morticed in a clasping rock.
Thence, after age on age of durance done,
Back to the daylight shall thou come, and there
The eagle-hound of Zeus, red-ravening, fell
With greed, shall tatter piecemeal all thy flesh
To shreds and ragged vestiges of form—
Yea, an unbidden guest, a day-long bane,
That feeds, and feeds—yea, he shall gorge his fill
On blackened fragments, from thy vitals gnawed.
Look for no respite from that agony
Until some other deity be found,
Ready to bear for thee the brunt of doom,
Choosing to pass into the lampless world
Of Hades and the murky depths of hell.
Hereat, advise thee! 'tis no feigned threat
Whereof I warn thee, but an o'er-true tale.
The lips of Zeus know nought of lying speech,
But wreak in action all their words foretell.
Therefore do thou look warily, and deem
Prudence a better saviour than self-will.

CHORUS.

Meseems that Hermes speaketh not amiss,
Bidding thee leave thy wilfulness and seek
The wary walking of a counselled mind.
Give heed! to err through anger shames the wise.

PROMETHEUS.

All, all I knew, whate'er his tongue
In idle arrogance hath flung.
'Tis the world's way, the common lot—
Foe tortures foe and pities not.
Therefore I challenge him to dash
His bolt on me, his zigzag flash
Of piercing, rending flame!
Now be the welkin stirred amain
With thunder-peal and hurricane,
And let the wild winds now displace
From its firm poise and rooted base
The stubborn earthly frame!
The raging sea with stormy surge
Rise up and ravin and submerge
Each high star-trodden way!
Me let him lift and dash to gloom
Of nether hell, in whirls of doom!
Yet—do he what extremes he may—
He cannot crush my life away!

HERMES.

Such are the counsels, such the strain,
Heard from wild lips and frenzied brain!
In word or thought, how fails his fate
Of madness wild and desperate?
(*To the CHORUS*)
But ye, who stand compassionate
Here at his side, depart in haste!
Lest of his penalty ye taste,
And shattered brain and reason feel
The roaring, ruthless thunder-peal!

CHORUS.

Out on thee! if thy heart be fain
I should obey thee, change thy strain!
Vile is thine hinted cowardice,
And loathed of me thy base advice,
Weakly to shrink from pain!
Nay, at his side, whate'er befall,
I will abide, endure it all!
Among all things abhorr'd, accurst,
I hold betrayers for the worst!

HERMES.

Nay, ye are warned! remember well—

Nor cry, when meshed in nets of hell,
Ah cruel fate, ah Zeus unkind—
Thus, by a sentence undivined,
To dash us to the realms below! It is no sudden, secret blow—
Nay, ye achieve your proper woe—
Warn'd and foreknowing shall ye go,
Through your own folly trapped and ta'en,
Into the net the Fates ordain—
The vast, illimitable pain!

[*Thunder and lightning.*]

PROMETHEUS.

Hark! for no more in empty word,
But in sheer sooth, the world is stirred!
The massy earth doth heave and sway,
And thro' their dark and secret way
The cavern'd thunders boom!
See, how they gleam athwart the sky,
The lightnings, through the gloom!
And whirlwinds roll the dust on high,
And right and left the storm-clouds leap
To battle in the skyey deep,
In wildest uproar unconfined,
An universe of warring wind!
And falling sky and heaving sea
Are blent in one! on me, on me,
Nearer and ever yet more near,
Flaunting its pageantry of fear,
Drives down in might its destined road
The tempest of the wrath of God!
O holy Earth, O mother mine!
O Sky, that biddest speed along
Thy vault the common Light divine,—
Be witness of my wrong!

[*The rocks are rent with fire and earthquake, and fall, burying PROMETHEUS in the ruins.*]