

Scenes from the Alcestis of Euripides / Euripdes ; done into English by Victor Plarr.

Contributors

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SCENES

FROM THE

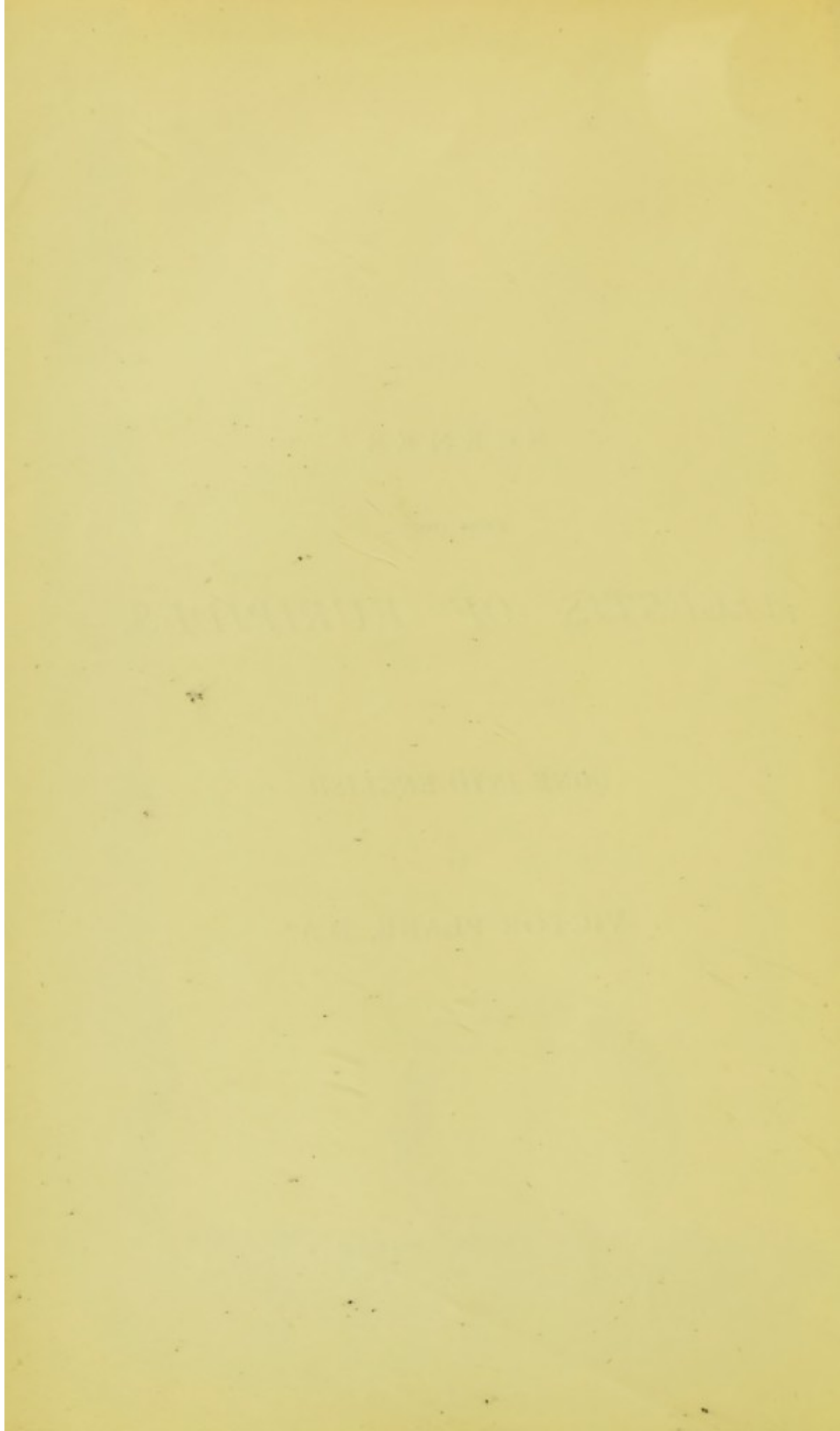
ALCESTIS OF EURIPIDES.

DONE INTO ENGLISH

BY

VICTOR PLARR, B.A.





DEDICATED, BY PERMISSION,

TO THE

STUDENTS OF QUEEN'S COLLEGE,

HARLEY STREET.



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Scenes from the "Alceestis" of Euripides.

SCENE I.

Enter the CHORUS.

(Part of Parode.)

Chor. NATHELESS before these gates mine eyes do mark
No holy well-water,
Such as men set by doors that death makes dark ;
Nor lie clipt tresses here,
Such as will fall in sorrow for the dead ;
Nor do young maidens mourn.
Yet is to-day the day—what's that I've said ?—
She sinks beyond return.

But, lo ! a hand-maid comes, all bathed in tears,
Forth of the house. What grief shall greet mine ears ?
Duly we mourn, if any evil turn
Chance on our lady ; now we fain would learn
Whether that lady breathe yet, or be sped.

Enter HAND-MAIDEN.

Hand. Ah, you may call her either quick or dead.

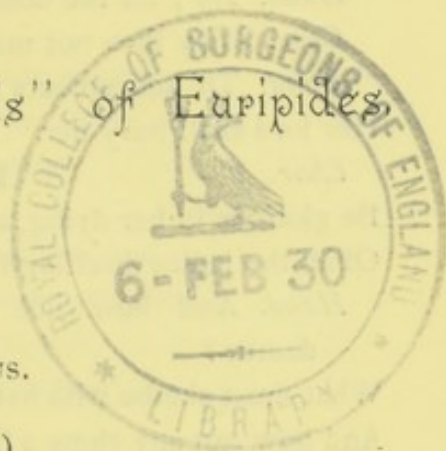
Chor. And how can the same frame both live and die ?

Hand. She bows in death ; her soul is lapsing by.

Chor. Being what thou'rt, of what a priceless being
Art reft, poor wretch !

Hand. Nay, till the day for dreeing
His bitter weird, Admetus knows it not.

Chor. Is there no hope of altering her lot ?



Hand. No ; for the destin'd day comes storming on !

Chor. Why then not make due preparation ?

Hand. Th' adornments are got ready wherewithal
Her lord shall bury her.

Chor. Let her know she shall
Be glorious in her dying, and most bright
Of all the ladies dwelling in the light !

Hand. And how not brightest? Who shall dare
demur ?

What must she be who hath surpassèd her ?
And how can any show a love more true
Towards her lord than when she willeth to
Be her lord's substitute in death ? And this
All folk within the city ramparts wis.
But when you hear the telling of the thing
She did indoors, you'll fall a wondering.
For when she knew the destined day had caught her,
She laved her white skin with fair flowing water,
And, taking from their cedarn presses sweet
Trinkets and robes, she bask'd in manner meet,
And standing at the altar, lifted so
The voice of prayer :—" Dear mistress, since I go
Beneath the earth, and now bow down toward
Thy face for the last time, I pray thee guard
Mine orphan children. To the boy afford
A loving wife, and to the girl a lord
Who shall be high of heart ; nor let them wane
Untimely like their mother, but remain
Happy in their birth-land, until at last
Life's joyous day be done !" Therewith she pass'd
To all the altars in Admetus' house,
Crown'd them, and pray'd and from the myrtle boughs
Shear'd off the leaves ; tearless, without a moan,
Nor marr'd the coming ill her cheeks' soft tone.
Then, rushing to the bedside in her room,
She weeping said :—" Oh couch, *his* couch for whom

I die, farewell ! Behold I hate thee not.
 'Tis only me thou lovest, for I wot
 'Twas fear of bringing thee and him to shame
 For which I die ; and now some other dame
 Shall be his lady, scarce a wifelier mate,
 But, haply, a less all-unfortunate."
 Then, casting herself down, she kiss'd the bed,
 And soak'd it with the tears her sweet eyes shed,
 But, when she had enough of tear on tear,
 She stoop'd away therefrom in wild career ;
 Yet oft departing she return'd again,
 And cast herself athwart the counterpane.
 The weeping babes who clung about their mother
 She clasp'd and kiss'd,—first one and then the other,
 As dying women will ; and all her folk
 Wept up and down the house Fate's heavy stroke ;
 But she gave each her hand, and none so plain
 But was bespoken and replied again.
 Such sorrows in Admetus' house abide :
 For, had he died, why then the man had died,
 But now that death's escaped such woes have come
 As he shall never win a respite from.

Chor. Surely, if he be robb'd of one so good,
 Admetus moans the hap in bitter mood !

Hand. Yes, he makes moan, and will not let her go.
 And prays her not to cheat him, seeking so
 What cannot be. For she grows waste and wan,
 Consumed by a great ill, yet lingering on,
 A pitiful burden in his arms. And yet,
 Albeit she scarce breathes, her heart is set
 On sunlight, just as though it would absorb
 Once and for all the sun's shaft and his orb.
 Now will I go and tell them you are here.
 For 'tis not all who hold their lords so dear
 As to stand by them to the bitter end,
 But thou of old hast been my lord's good friend.

Chor. O, Zeus, what 'scape is there, what setting-free
 From the ills our masters dree?
 O, Pæon, for Admetus the heartsick
 Contrive some healing trick!
 Find it, oh, find it; for in old days thou,
 Discoveredst it for him.
 Be our deliverer from Death's anger now,
 And frustrate Hades grim!
 Behold, behold, she comes from forth the house,
 And therewithal her spouse.
 Cry out! make moan!—O land of Pheres, O
 Lady most admirable,
 Whom some ill so consumes that she must go
 Down to the lord of hell.

SCENE II.

Enter ALCESTIS and ADMETUS.

Alc. Sun, and thou Light of Day, and high in heaven,
 Ye clouds that whirl and throng,—
Adm. The sun sees two poor wretches unforgiven,
 Though they have done no wrong.
Alc. O thou my home, Iolcos of my birth,
 And thou, O Mother Earth!
Adm. Lift up thyself, dear wretch, desert me not,
 But pray to heaven's strong lord
 To be a little piteous to our lot.
Alc. I see the boat two-oar'd!
 I see the ferryman of each man's soul;
 Yea, with mine eyes I see
 Old Charon with his hand upon the pole,
 And now he's calling me;
 "Why make delay? Aboard! Thou stoppest us!"
 Ay, thus he bids me haste.
Adm. Alas! an ill voyage thou'rt foretelling thus;
 What woes, poor love, we taste!

Alc. He drags me, some one drags me! Dost not see?

Down to the House of Death,
Glaring from underneath swart brows on me,
Wing'd Hades hurrieth!
What wouldst thou? Leave me! What a journey's this!
Most miserable me!

Adm. A grievous mourning to thy friends it is,
And to thy babes and me,
Whom this woe strikes in common.

Alc. Leave me now,
Leave me, for in my feet
Strength lacks, and dark night creeps across my brow.
Children, my children sweet,
You have no mother left; farewell, mine own;
May your sunset be late!

Adm. Alas! I hear a dread and bitter tone,
Sadder than any fate.
Ah, leave me not, 'fore heaven, and for their sake]
Whom thou wilt orphans make!
Arise, behold, I should not linger on
Wert thou once dead and gone.
We live and die by thee, dear, evermore,
For thy love we adore!

Alc. Admetus, thou beholdest all my state,
And I will tell thee, ere it be too late
What I would have. I, who so much adore thee
As to have given thee life by dying for thee,
Die, though I need not. For, although I could
Have wed with what Thessalian man I would,
And lived with him the dear tyrannic life,
I could not bear to be another's wife,
Or make my children orphans. So I had
Small care for that whereof I was so glad—
The gracious gift of blooming youth, whilst they
Who gave thee being hasted to betray,

Albeit in their life's late eventide
 They could right well have saved their son and died,
 Seeing thou wast their only one, and thou
 Being dead they could not hope for children now :
 Then I and thou our destined time had lived,
 And thou wouldst not make moan, being deprived
 Of thine own wife, nor nurse the motherless !
 Well, this is some god's work ! I know it, yes !
 Remember the repaying ; that's thy task !
 But 'tis not quits that ever I shall ask,—
 Nor life for life ! nought is more precious.
 But I'll hold just what thou shalt name to us,
 Since thy love for our babes equals my love.
 Ah, train them up to be the lords above
 Our royal house, nor give them a step-dame
 Who shall do worse than I, and so work shame
 In envious wise against thy babes and mine.
 Nay, do not this, I pray thee ; for in fine,
 Your second mother, through excess of spite,
 Entreats your children as a serpent might !
 Lo ! I must die the death, and this great sorrow
 Comes not about the third day, nor to-morrow,
 For now it is I'm number'd with the dead !
 Farewell, be prosperous ; let it be said,
 When you must boast :—" My wife, these children's mother,
 Was more adorable than any other !"

Chor. Cheer up ; I doubt not he'll make bold to boast
 As thou ordain'st, unless his wits be lost.

Adm. Nay, never fear me, love ; for all my life,
 Whether thou live or die, thou'rt still my wife !
 And no Thessalian bride shall take thy place
 However noble or divine of face.
 The children are enough, and so I pray
 I may have joy of them full many a day,
 For thee we joy no more in, and no years
 Can take away the load of sighs and tears,

But only death, beloved, will bring redress
 To one whose birth hath been but bitterness ;
 For they who gave me life loved with their lips,
 Not with their hearts, whilst thou in dear eclipse
 Hast saved me with thy life : shall I then cease
 Bemoaning such a wife ? Nay, I'll have peace
 Where erst were feasts, and gatherings to wine,
 And crowns, and songs, that made my home divine,
 And never more shall my hands touch the lute,
 Or my lips company the Libyan flute
 When heads are raised in songs ; for thou, my wife,
 Hast taken with thee all the light of life.
 But an I had the music and the tongue
 Of Orpheus, so that with a cadence sung
 Unto Demeter's daughter and her lord,
 I might but rescue thee from hell abhorr'd,
 I would go down, and neither Pluto's hound
 Nor Charon at his oar could set a bound
 Unto my steps till I again had given
 Thy life back to the light of upper heaven.
 Wait for me then ; and when death comes apace
 Prepare for us a common bidding-place.
 For I will bid these folk deposit me
 In the same cedarn house of rest with thee,
 And lay us side by side, that so at rest
 I be not severed from my faithfullest.

Chor. Lo, I will bear this heavy grief for her
 As friend for friend, since none is worthier.

Alc. Children, you've heard now what your sire hath said ;
 How that he will not with another wed,
 Who shall be o'er you so that I be shent.

Adm. I say it, and I swear accomplishment !

Alc. Ah, then, take thou these babes upon my arm.

Adm. I take the charming gift from one whose charm
 Is deathless.

Alc. Be their mother in my stead !

Adm. Alas, they'll need me, seeing thou wilt be dead,

Alc. O children mine, I sink away beneath
When most I ought to live.

Adm. After thy death
When will become of me?

Alc. Nay, time will soften ;
The dead, thou know'st, are not remember'd often.

Adm. Oh, in the god's name, take me too below.

Alc. Nay, I suffice in dying for thee so.

Adm. Of what a wife ye rob me, Destinies !

Alc. Oh, but they're heavy,—these poor darkening eyes.

Adm. And thou wilt leave me, wife, I am undone.

Alc. Ye'll not need mention the poor vanish'd one.

Adm. Lift up thy head, nor leave thy children.

Alc. Nay,
It is farewell, dears, though I long to stay.

Adm. Ah, look on them !

Alc. No, I'm a tale you tell !

Adm. What dost thou ? Wouldst thou leave us ?

Alc. Fare thee well !

Adm. I am undone ; woe for a wretched lot !

Chor. Look, she hath gone ; Admetus' wife is not.

Chor. Daughter of Pelias, who must sunless dwell
In Hades' house, farewell !
Let yon old ferryman with helm and oars,
Let black-tress'd Hades mind
That she whom now they ferry to their shores
Is best of all her kind.

Oft shall the servants of the Muses sing
To sound of seven-string'd lyres
Among the hill-tops or go sorrowing
In simply-chanting choirs,
What time in Sparta circling seasons win
To bright Carnean days
When the moon shines all night, and likewise in
Rich Athens sweet with praise.

Such is the poem that thy dying hath left
 To all who toil in song !
 Would that I were not of all power bereft
 To waft thy soul along
 Out of the house of Hades, o'er death's stream
 With the dark oar thereof !
 For thou alone wert hardy to redeem
 Thy lord with life and love.
 Light be the earth upon thee, lady mine !
 But an he wed another,
 He will be hated by these babes of thine,
 Nor shall I spurn their mother.
 His dam would not go down into the pit,
 His grey old sire withstood.
 The hoary-headed wretches dared not flit
 To save their flesh and blood ;
 But thou in the spring-tide of blooming life
 Wentest for him a-dying !
 Ah, could I meet the twin of such a wife,—
 For while old Time's a-flying,
 Such gifts are giv'n but rarely,—she would bring
 Love without term or sting !

Enter HERCULES.

Here. Tell me, strange sirs, who dwell in Pheres' land,
 Is your lord in his palace here at hand ?

Chor. The son of Pheres is, O, Hercules,
 But say what need compels thee from thine ease
 To Pheres' city on Thessalian soil ?

Herc. Eurystheus the Tirynthian claims my toil.

Chor. And on what roving venture art thou led ?

Herc. 'Tis the four chariot-steeds of Diomed
 The Thracian that I'm after.

Chor. Nay, but how
 Wilt thou prevail ? Knowest thy Thracian now ?

Herc. Nay, I've not seen Bistonian land as yet.

Chor. No horse is thine unless thou fight for it,

Herc. Ah, well, I can't say nay to promised pain.

Chor. So, then, thou'lt come back slayer or stay slain.

Herc. Not the first bout this that I shall contest !

Chor. How art advantaged if thou prove the best ?

Herc. I'll drive the nags to the Tirynthian.

Chor. Their jaws are hard to bit and bridle, man.

Herc. Not so, unless 'tis flame their nostrils breathe.

Chor. They'll tear men piecemeal with devouring teeth.

Herc. You talk of some poor quarry as it bleeds
Torn by wild mountain creatures, not by steeds.

Chor. Nay, mark the blood-stain'd stall of every nag.

Herc. Now, what descent does this horsekeeper brag ?

Chor. On high descent from Ares he'll enlarge,
Lord of the golden-mounted Thracian targe.

Herc. Ah, well ! this toil is portion of that fate
Which ever hath a stiff and up-hill gait,
An' I must fight the sons whom Mars begat,—
Lycaon first, then Cyenus ; after that
The master and his steeds. But no one must
Behold Alcmena's son afraid to trust
His frame before the foeman's armed hand.

Chor. And here, in sooth, the lord of all the land
From forth his palace hacteneth apace !

Adm. Hail, son of Zeus, and sprung of Perceus' race !

Herc. Hail, too, Admetus, king of Thessaly !

Adm. Would that I might hear thee smilingly :
I know thee well-wisher to me and mine.

Herc. Why show so plain these sad shorn locks of thine ?

Adm. To-day I shall be burying my dead.

Herc. May God turn ill from every little head !

Adm. My little ones are living safely here.

Herc. Thy father—an' he's gone—had many a year
Behind him !

Adm. No, he liveth, and she, too,
Who bore me, Hercules.

Herc. Nay, is it true
Thy wife, Alcestis, is no longer here?

Adm. There are two stories can be told of her.

Herc. Is it the quick thou namest, or the dead?

Adm. Living, she yet is gone: I'm tortured.

Herc. I'm in the dark: thou speakest words obscure.

Adm. Know'st not the destiny she should endure?

Herc. I know she took upon herself to give
Her life for thine.

Adm. How then can she yet live
If that she promised this?

Herc. Ah! do not cry
Until this happen, and she surely die.

Adm. Whoso will speed hath sped; he who goes hence
Is now no more!

Herc. Thou makest a difference
Betwixt to be and not to be.

Adm. I wis
Thou judgest that way, Hercules, I this.

Herc. Wherefore, then, weep? What friend of thine is gone?

Adm. A lady, one whose tale we spoke upon.

Herc. A stranger born, or some one of thy kin?

Adm. A stranger, yet beloved by all within
My palace on another count.

Herc. But then,
How did she die within thy palace?

Adm. When
Her sire was gone she lived here fatherless.

Herc. Would that I had not found thee in distress!
Alack, Admetus!

Adm. What wouldest be about,
That thou art speaking thus?

Herc. I shall go out
Unto the hearth of some more kindly host.

Adm. Nay king, let this not be at any cost.

Herc. To mourning folk a guest is troublesome.

Adm. Dead are the dead ; but come in hither, come !

Herc. Nay, 'tis ill done to feast with friends in tears,

Adm. The guest-rooms are apart from their compeers :
Thither we lead thee,

Herc. Let me go, and I
Will owe thee thousand thanks eternally.

Adm. Nay, journey not unto another's side !
When thou hast open'd those guest-chambers wide
Which stand apart, lead on, and bid the men
Who are acquainted with the regimen,
Get ready store of meat ; then in mid-hall
Close up the gates ; no moaning's musical
To ears of them that feast, nor is it fit
That our strange guests should be put out by it.

SCENE III.

Funeral March.

Chorus. Oh ! thou'rt unhappy for thy daring's sake ;
Noblest and best, farewell.
May Hades and the nether Hermes make
Thee welcome in their hell.
But if the good prevail there mayst thou bide
Blessèd by Hades' bride.

SCENE IV.

Enter SERVANT.

Serv. Full many guests out of full many lands
Have plagued Admetus' house, and at my hands
Feasted, but never yet have I been host
To one more plaguy, for he boldly cross'd
Our threshold though he saw my lord's despair.
And then it was not with your humble air
He took our pot-luck when he learnt our state,
But if we served him just a moment late
He shouted, "Quick !" and then he catches up
In hasty hands the ivy-wreathed cup,
And drinks the purple mother's unmix'd draught,
Until the sharp lash of the wine he quaff'd

Caught him, and stung him, and his head he crown'd
 With myrtle boughs and bawl'd a tuneless round.
 Then two songs in Admetus' house arose,
 For he howl'd on, nor reck'd the household woes,
 Whilst we, the house-folk, mourn'd our lady bright,
 Hiding our swoln eyes from the stranger's sight,
 For thus Admetus bade. So I receive
 A strange man who perchance may filch and thief
 For livelihood, whilst she, our lady's gone.
 Oh ! but I fail'd to follow and make moan
 With outstretch'd hand for one who was a mother
 To all our folk,—to me and every other,
 Seeing she saved us from full many a slight
 By smoothing her lord's wrath. Am I not right
 To hate this guest inopportune ?

Enter HERCULES.

Herc.

What ho !

What's all this look of gravity and woe ?
 Servants should not stand sulking at a guest,
 But meet him with an eye to each behest !

Serv. I know it well, but this is not a case
 For revelling, or for a laughing face.

Herc. The lady that is dead a stranger was,
 Wherefore grieve not too bitterly ; because
 The masters of the house are living yet.

Serv. Living ! Art ignorant of our regret ?

Herc. Nay, nay, unless thy master told untruth.

Serv. Ah, he's too kind a host !

Herc.

Must I in sooth

Meet with ill-treatment o'er a stranger's bier ?

Serv. Nay, surely she was very near and dear.

Herc. Say, hath thy master then forborne to tell
 All his calamity ?

Serv. I'll say farewell !

Our lord's calamities are our concern.

Herc. Now say, thy words begin at last to turn
 Upon some foreign loss ?

Serv. No, else I had
Not grieved to see thee feasting blithe and glad,

Herc. What hath my host so scantily treated me
As to have left me ignorant?

Serv. Nay, see,
Thou camest not when we could well receive—
We of the household,—for behold we grieve;
Behold our clipt hair and our swart attire!

Herc. Who, then, is dead? Is it his ancient sire,
Or either of his babes?

Serv. Nay, an' you will,
It is Admetus' wife!

Herc. What say'st? And still
Ye did receive me?

Serv. He had been ashamed
To thrust thee from the shelter thou hadst claim'd.

Herc. What a sweet wife hast lost, O hapless one!

Serv. Alas, we all are lost, not she alone!

Herc. Yes, when I saw the eyes with tears a brim,
The shorn locks, and the countenance of him,
I knew it all at once. But he so shook
My sure conviction, saying that he took
A stranger's corse unto the grave, that I
Within your gateway came unwillingly,
And drank within the kind man's house of fate,
And revell'd with a wreath about my pate.
But thine it was to bid me not carouse
When such a sorrow hung upon the house.
Say, now, where hath he buried her, and whither
Shall I go find her?

Serv. Thou must travel thither
By the straight path that goeth trending down
Unto Larissa; just outside the town
Thou shalt behold her smoothly-chisell'd tomb.

Herc. O; soul of mine and heart all-daring, come,
Show, once for all, what mighty manner of man
Was born to Zeus of the Tirynthian

Alcmena, daughter of Electryon !
 For I must rescue the late dead and gone,
 And set Alcestis back within this house,
 And toil a toil to please her lordly spouse.
 Yea, I will go lay wait for Thanatos,
 The sable-garbed king of earthly loss.
 I think that I shall find him drinking up
 The proffer'd contents of each funeral cup
 Hard by the tomb, and an' I shall waylay him,
 And, from my ambush rushing, catch and stay him,
 And make a circlet round him with my hands,
 Never a heaving athlete understands
 The way to wrest him out, till grace be given
 Unto the dame. But an' I've vainly striven
 To make such capture, an' I have not won
 Unto that blood-stain'd cup, then I go down
 To th' unsunn'd house of Cora and her king,
 And put forth my request, and trust to bring
 Alcestis earthward, so that she be put
 In that host's hands who took me in, nor shut
 His door upon my face, and though hard smit
 By a great grief, yet aye kept hiding it,
 Being the noblest, kindest of hosts !
 What man is there in these Thessalian coasts,
 What man in Hellas who receiveth so ?
 Wherefore he shall not ever say that, though
 He was himself so quick to do and feel,
 He did good service to a ne'er-do-weel !

Adm. Hateful approach, alas, and prospect hateful
 Of widow'd palaces !

Woe's me, woe's me, alack for what's so fateful !

Where can I flee from these ?

Where can I stand ? And what can I be saying ?

And what can I not say ?

Ah, would that I could die ! Without gainsaying,

'Twas to a weary way

My mother bred me up. I envy so
 The dead for whom I yearn ;
 I long to dwell beside them, down below !
 What time the sunbeams burn
 I like not to behold them, nor am fain
 Of treading through the land,
 So sweet a hostage hath the Death-god ta'en
 And given into Hell's hand !

Chor. Forward ! Go deep into the house.

Adm. Alack.

Chor. Thou hast of grief good store,—

Adm. Ah me !

Chor. Hast travell'd on a mournful track
 I know it well !

Adm. No more !

Chor. Thou nothing aidest her that's in her place.

Adm. Alack, and woe is me !

Chor. Never again to see thy dear wife's face
 Is very hard on thee !

Adm. Thou hast made mention of the woe that gnaws
 My spirit. What more grim

Than when a hero loseth her that was
 A faithful wife to him ?

Would that I had not wed nor dwelt with her,
 For I view jealously

The childless and unwedded wanderer
 Amidst mortality.

He hath one life for which such tears are shed
 As pain thee not too much.

But to behold sick children, and a bed
 Laid waste at Death's fell touch

Is not supportable, when man may stay
 Childless and mateless aye.

Chor. Fate, that's so hard to wrestle with hath come.

Adm. Alack !

Chor. But wilt not set
 A term unto thy griefs

Adm. Alas ! my doom !

Chor. Heavy it is, but yet—

Adm. Ah, woe on woe !

Chor. Endure ; thou'rt not the first
To lose.

Adm. (Oh, bitterness !)

Chor. The consort of thy love ; for fate accurst,
Weareth a different dress

To torture different men.

Adm. Oh, pains immense !

And grief for friends in gloom !

Why hinderedest thou me from leaping hence

Into her hollow tomb,

And lying dead beside earth's perfectest ?

Then o'er hell's lake had cross'd

Not one, but twain of all souls faithfullest,

And Hades had not lost !

Chor. This grief came quick upon thy happy state,

To thee unschool'd in fate ;

But thou hast saved thy life, and she hath lain

Hers down to rescue thee.

Full many a lady from her lord is ta'en ;

This is no novelty.

Adm. Dear friends, I deem her fortune less austere

Than mine is, though the cause be nowise clear ;

For her no sorrowful thing can touch again,

And splendid she hath ceased from every pain ;

But me, who should not live and yet have trick'd

My destiny, long sorrows shall afflict.

For how can I endure to enter in,

What words of mine, what words to me can win

A pleasant entrance into my sad home ?

And whither shall I turn me from my doom ?

But whoso hates me, meeting me, will cry :—

“ The living knave who fear'd himself to die,

And out of cowardice gave up instead

The woman he had married, and so fled

From Hades. Seemeth he a man and brother,
 Who, fearing death, yet hateth sire and mother?"
 This the report, then, that will add unto
 Mine other woes. Dear friends, oh, tell me true,
 Is it so glorious for a man to live
 Whom neither fates nor mortals ere forgive?

Chor. I also have been borne aloft through song,
 Reas'ning perpetually,
 And have found out not anything more strong
 Than is Necessity!
 Let not thy onslaught be more dread, O queen,
 Than hitherto 't hath been!
 And thee, Admetus, she hath seized upon
 In grasp inevitable.
 But peace! for to upraise the dead and gone
 No tears of thine are able.
 Even the sons the gods by stealth beget
 Must die, beyond forgiving;
 And being dead she is belovèd yet,
 Who was belovèd living.
 The noblest of the wives of mortal birth
 Thou tookest to thy side!
 Let not her tomb be counted but as earth
 Heap'd on death's daily bride,
 But honour it as you the gods would honour.
 Let foreign travelling men
 Pause and with wonder gaze adown upon her!
 Yea, haply some one then
 Leaving the path will say: "Once on a time
 She died to save her lord:
 But now 'tis a divinity sublime,
 All hail, O mine adored!
 Be thou propitious!" Such man's prayers will be
 But lo I think to see
 Alcmena's son, who cometh wandering
 Unto thy hearth, O king!

SCENE V.

Enter HERCULES and ADMETUS.

Herc. Free speech unto a friend's the better part ;
 I like not to be nursing blame at heart ;
 And I, sir, as thy friend, am not unworthy
 To stand by thee and find thy woes out for thee.
 But wherefore saidest not 'twas her was lost ?
 Wherefore didst take me in, and play the host
 As though thou mournedst some one out of door,
 So that I crown'd me and began to pour
 Libations in thy house calamitous ?
 And now because I have been treated thus
 I blame thee, blame thee, though I would not pain
 One whose whole heart with sorrow aches again.
 Now hearken why I came back hitherward.
 I'd have thee take this lady, and keep guard
 Upon her till what time I come once more
 Driving the Thracian brood-mares on before,
 And slayer of the king Bistonian.
 Yet if what least I pray for spoil my plan—
 For still I pray for safe return—why then
 I give her thee to be thy handmaiden !
 But as I said thou still shouldst care for her,
 Since she's no booty of a pilferer.
 But hath been won with toil. Some day, maybe,
 Thou'lt praise me.

Adm. Well, I nowise slighted thee,
 Nor set thee with the number of my foes,
 When that I hid my lady's fateful woes.
 It had been only grief heap'd up on grief
 An' thou hadst sought at other hands relief.
 My tears sufficed mine own calamity ;
 But for the woman, if the thing may be,
 I pray thee let some other guard her, king,—
 Some other who hath known less suffering ;

Since thou hast many friends in Pheres' land.
 An' thou refuse me this, th' old flame is fann'd,
 Th' old ills come haunting back. I could not bear
 Still to be tearless, were she sitting here !
 Add not another evil to my pack,
 I have enough of sorrow on my back.
 But, O fair lady, whoso'er thou art,
 Know thou hast dead Alcestis' every part !
 Yea, woe is me, take her from forth my sight,
 Lest you slay utterly a wretched wight,
 When I see her, 'tis *her* that I behold,
 And heart-beats come, and from mine eyes are roll'd
 Rivers of tears. Most miserable me,
 How new is this sharp taste of grief to thee !

Chor. I cannot praise thy fortune : yet I would
 Accept the gifts gods give with hardihood
 Whoe'er I be !

Herc. Ah ! would one might prevail
 To bring thy wife up from death's mansions pale,
 And set her in the sun, and serve thee thus !

Adm. I know thou hast the will to wait on us.
 Yet how can this be done ? The dead may never
 Return to daylight !

Herc. Use thy best endeavour
 Not to go mad, but still maintain the port
 Of decent patience.

Adm. Well, but to exhort
 Is easier than hardy suffering.

Herc. Yet how art help'd by endless sorrowing ?

Adm. I know thy meaning, but a love compelleth—

Herc. Such hopeless love as mourners' eyne aye filleth !

Adm. Me she hath slain, and more that passeth speech.

Herc. A noble wife hath slipt beyond thy reach ;
 Who will gainsay ?

Adm. Yes, surely, so that I
 No longer love to live.

Herc. Nay, time will ply.

His soothing process for thee, though this ill
Is vigorous, and hard upon thee still.

Adm. Speak thou of time, an' time be to transpire !

Herc. A wife shall stop such time, and the desire
Of a new bond !

Adm. Be still ! What have I heard ?
I ne'er had thought thou wouldst have used the word !

Herc. Take now this dame within thy goodly gates.

Adm. By Zeus, thy sire, my whole heart deprecates
This thy request !

Herc. Yet thou wilt surely err
An' thou refuse to take and welcome her !

Adm. And an' I play the host, remorse will gnaw
My vitals.

Herc. Nay, this kindly act may draw
A duty in its train : think thou thereof !

Adm. Ah, would that thou hadst never borne her off
From forth the contest !

Herc. Yet, where I prevail
Thou, too, art victor.

Adm. 'Tis a pretty tale,
But let the lady go !

Herc. She shall remove
When there's occasion,—which you first must prove.

Adm. There *is* occasion, an thou wilt refrain
From angering me.

Herc. I would not cause thee pain,
For I know somewhat.

Adm. Play the conqueror,
Yet art thou doing what I would defer !

Herc. Time will approve it ; only be persuaded.

Adm. Well, lead her in, an' th' house must be invaded.

Herc. Into thy servants' charge I give not her.

Adm. Nay, lead her in thyself, an' thou prefer !

Herc. Nay then, I'll give her into thy right hand.

Adm. I would not touch her ! Yet wide open stand
The doors.

Herc. I trust her to thy charge alone.

Adm. Nay, O my king, thou forcest me upon
The doing of a thing I would not do.

Herc. Dare to stretch out thy hand and touch her too !

Adm. I reach as to the Gorgon's sever'd poll.

Herc. Hast thou it ?

Adm. Yea.

Herc. Then hold it heart and soul,
And some time thou wilt say the son of Zeus
Was a good guest. Nay, do not now refuse
To look on her and see if aught remain
Of the lost wife's lost look, and then refrain
From sorrow, seeing thou art blest in this !

Adm. Great gods, what shall I say ? Unhoped-for
bliss !

Is it my wife I look on past a doubt,
Or hath some mock divine turn'd reason out ?

Herc. Not so, that is thy wife whom thou hast got.

Adm. Nay, but examine whether it be not
A phantom from below !

Herc. Thou hast not made
Thy guest into th' invoker of a shade.

Adm. But do I see the wife I buried under
The level ground ?

Herc. Thou dost, and yet no wonder
Thou doubttest of thy luck.

Adm. Ah, may I touch
A living wife, and talk to her as such ?

Herc. Bespeak her ! For thy wish hath gotten scope.

Adm. Dear face and form ! Sweet wife, I had no hope
Of ever seeing thee more, and yet thou'rt here.

Herc. She is, but of all jealous gods beware !

Adm. O noble son of Zeus, the mightiest,
Be prosperous, and fortunate, and blest !
And may thy sire assist thy every deed,
For thou alone hast helped me at my need.
Nay, tell me how thou broughtest her once more

Into the daylight from that darkling shore !

Herc. I strove with him who ruleth souls beneath.

Adm. Where, say'st thou, was this duel fought with Death ?

Herc. Hard by the very tomb I lay in wait,
And leapt, and gript him with the hands of hate !

Adm. But tell me why she standeth voiceless here ?

Herc. It hath not been allow'd thee to give ear
Unto her words, until in three days' space
The nether gods do purge her of their grace.
But lead her in ; and for the future greet us
In thine own kindly way, good king Admetus.
Farewell : for the proud son of Sthenelus
I go perform a toil.

Adm. Ah, stay with us,
And be our fireside comrade.

Herc. Well, some day
The thing might be, but now 'tis haste away !

Adm. Mayst thou return our prosperous visitor !
In the meantime I will speak up and stir
The townsfolk and the tetrachy, that they
Institute dances this auspicious day,
And make their altars odorous with freight
Of prayerful sacrifice ; for now our state
Is happier than ever heretofore,
Nor dare I say I sorrow any more !

Chor. Many the forms of things by Heaven perfected,
Many a hopeless thing
Is brought to pass of Heaven. What man expected
Still lacketh perfecting,
And God hath wrought th' undreamt accomplishment ;
And this hath been th' event.

END OF THE ALCESTIS.

