

The Persians

Aeschylus

A



The Persians

Argument

XERXES, SON OF Darius and of his wife Atossa, daughter of Cyrus, went forth against Hellas, to take vengeance upon those who had defeated his father at Marathon. But ill fortune befell the king and his army both by land and sea; neither did it avail him that he cast a bridge over the Hellespont and made a canal across the promontory of Mount Athos, and brought myriads of men, by land and sea, to subdue the Greeks. For in the strait between Athens and the island of Salamis the Persian ships were shattered and sunk or put to flight by those of Athens and Lacedaemon and Aegina and Corinth, and Xerxes went homewards on the way by which he had come, leaving his general Mardonius with three hundred thousand men to strive with the Greeks by land: but in the next year they were destroyed near Plataea in Boeotia, by the Lacedaemonians and Athenians and Tegeans. Such was the end of the army which Xerxes left behind him. But the king himself had reached the bridge over the Hellespont, and late and hardly and in sorry plight and with few companions came home unto the Palace of Susa.

CHORUS: Away unto the Grecian land
Hath passed the Persian armament:
We, by the monarch's high command,
We are the warders true who stand,
Chosen, for honour and descent,
To watch the wealth of him who went —
Guards of the gold, and faithful styled
By Xerxes, great Darius' child!

CHORUS: But the king went nor comes again —
And for that host, we saw depart
Arrayed in gold, my boding heart
Aches with a pulse of anxious pain,
Presageful for its youthful king!
No scout, no steed, no battle-car
Comes speeding hitherward, to bring

News to our city from afar!
Erewhile they went, away, away,
From Susa, from Ecbatana,
From Kissa's timeworn fortress grey,
Passing to ravage and to war —
Some upon steeds, on galleys some,
Some in close files, they passed from home,
All upon warlike errand bent —
Amistres, Artaphernes went,
Astaspes, Megabazes high,
Lords of the Persian chivalry,
Marshals who serve the great king's word
Chieftains of all the mighty horde!
Horsemen and bowmen streamed away,
Grim in their aspect, fixed to slay,
And resolute to face the fray!
With troops of horse, careering fast,
Masistes, Artembáres passed:
Imaeus too, the Bowman brave,
Sostháles, Pharandákes, drave —
And others the all-nursing wave
Of Nilus to the battle gave;
Came Susiskánes, warrior wild,
And Pegastágon, Egypt's child:
Thee, brave Arsámes! from afar
Did holy Memphis launch to war;
And Ariomardus, high in fame,
From Thebes the immemorial came,
And oarsmen skilled from Nilus' fen,
A countless crowd of warlike men:
And next, the dainty Lydians went —
Soft rulers of a continent —
Mitragathes and Arcteus bold
In twin command their ranks controlled,

And Sardis town, that teems with gold,
Sent forth its squadrons to the war —
Horse upon horse, and car on car,
Double and triple teams, they rolled,
In onset awful to behold.
From Tmolus' sacred hill there came
The native hordes to join the fray,
And upon Hellas' neck to lay
The yoke of slavery and shame;
Mardon and Tharubis were there,
Bright anvils for the foemen's spear!
The Mysian dart-men sped to war,
And the long crowd that onward rolled
From Babylon enriched with gold —
Captains of ships and archers skilled
To speed the shaft, and those who wield
The scimitar; — the eastern band
Who, by the great king's high command,
Swept to subdue the western land!

CHORUS: Gone are they, gone — ah, welladay!
The flower and pride of our array;
And all the Eastland, from whose breast
Came forth her bravest and her best,
Craves longingly with boding dread —
Parents for sons, and brides new-wed
For absent lords, and, day by day,
Shudder with dread at their delay!

CHORUS: Ere now they have passed o'er the sea,
the manifold host of the king —
They have gone forth to sack and to burn;
ashore on the Westland they spring!
With cordage and rope they have bridged
the sea-way of Helle, to pass
O'er the strait that is named by thy name,

O daughter of Athamas!
They have anchored their ships in the current,
they have bridled the neck of the sea —
The Shepherd and Lord of the East
hath bidden a roadway to be!
From the land to the land they pass over,
a herd at the high king's best;
Some by the way of the waves,
and some o'er the planking have pressed.
For the king is a lord and a god:
he was born of the golden seed
That erst upon Danae fell —
his captains are strong at the need!
And dark is the glare of his eyes,
as eyes of a serpent blood-fed,
And with manifold troops in his train
and with manifold ships hath he sped —
Yea, sped with his Syrian cars:
he leads on the lords of the bow
To meet with the men of the West,
the spear-armed force of the foe!
Can any make head and resist him,
when he comes with the roll of a wave?
No barrier nor phalanx of might,
no chief, be he ever so brave!
For stern is the onset of Persia,
and gallant her children in fight.
But the guile of the god is deceitful,
and who shall elude him by flight?
And who is the lord of the leap,
that can spring and alight and evade?
For Até deludes and allures,
till round him the meshes are laid,
And no man his doom can escape!

it was writ in the rule of high Heaven,
That in tramp of the steeds and in crash of the charge
the war-cry of Persia be given:
They have learned to behold the forbidden,
the sacred enclosure of sea,
Where the waters are wide and in stress
of the wind the billows roll hoary to lee!
And their trust is in cable and cordage,
too weak in the power of the blast,
And frail are the links of the bridge
whereby unto Hellas they passed.

CHORUS: Therefore my gloom-wrapped heart
is rent with sorrow

For what may hap to-morrow!

Alack, for all the Persian armament —

Alack, lest there be sent

Dread news of desolation, Susa's land

Bereft, forlorn, unmanned —

Lest the grey Kissian fortress echo back

The wail, *A A!*

The sound of women's shriek, who wail and mourn,

With fine-spun raiment torn!

The charioteers went forth nor come again,

And all the marching men

Even as a swarm of bees have flown afar,

Drawn by the king to war —

Crossing the sea-bridge, linked from side to side,

That doth the waves divide:

And the soft bridal couch of bygone years

Is now bedewed with tears,

Each princess, clad in garments delicate,

Wails for her widowed fate —

CHORUS: *A*

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CHORUS: But now, ye warders of the state,
Here, in this hall of old renown,
Behoves that we deliberate
In counsel deep and wise debate,
For need is surely shown!
How fareth he, Darius' child,
The Persian king, from Perseus styled?

CHORUS: Comes triumph to the eastern bow,
Or hath the lance-point conquered now?
[ATOSSA.

See, yonder comes the mother-queen,
Light of our eyes, in godlike sheen,
The royal mother of the king! —
Fall we before her! well it were
That, all as one, we sue to her,
And round her footsteps cling!

CHORUS: Queen, among deep-girded Persian dames thou highest and most royal,
Hoary mother, thou, of Xerxes, and Darius' wife of old!
To godlike sire, and godlike son, we bow us and are loyal —
Unless, on us, an adverse tide of destiny has rolled!

ATOSSA: Therefore come I forth to you, from chambers decked and golden,
Where long ago Darius laid his head, with me beside,
And my heart is torn with anguish, and with terror am I holden,
And I plead unto your friendship and I bid you to my side.

ATOSSA: Darius, in the old time, by aid of some Immortal,
Raised up the stately fabric, our wealth of long-ago:
But I tremble lest it totter down, and ruin porch and portal,
And the whirling dust of downfall rise above its overthrow!

ATOSSA: Therefore a dread unspeakable within me never slumbers, Saying,

—
We shudder for our light and king, though we have gold enow!

ATOSSA:

—

So runs the saw, ye aged men! and truth it says indeed —
On you I call, the wise and true, to ward us from disaster,
For all my hope is fixed on you, to prop us in our need!

CHORUS: Queen-Mother of the Persian land, to thy commandment
bowing,

Whate'er thou wilt, in word or deed, we follow to fulfil —
Not twice we need thine high behest, our faith and duty knowing,
In council and in act alike, thy loyal servants still!

ATOSSA: Long while by various visions of the night

Am I beset, since to Ionian lands

With marshalled host my son went forth to war.

Yet never saw I presage so distinct

As in the night now passed. — Attend my tale! —

A dream I had: two women nobly clad

Came to my sight, one robed in Persian dress,

The other vested in the Dorian garb,

And both right stately and more tall by far

Than women of to-day, and beautiful

Beyond disparagement, and sisters sprung

Both of one race, but, by their natal lot,

One born in Hellas, one in Eastern land.

These, as it seemed unto my watching eyes,

Roused each the other to a mutual feud:

The which my son perceiving set himself

To check and soothe their struggle, and anon

Yoked them and set the collars on their necks;

And one, the Ionian, proud in this array,

Paced in high quietude, and lent her mouth,

Obedient, to the guidance of the rein.

But restively the other strove, and broke

The fittings of the car, and plunged away

With mouth un-bitted: o'er the broken yoke

My son was hurled, and lo! Darius stood

In lamentation o'er his fallen child.
Him Xerxes saw, and rent his robe in grief.

ATOSSA: Such was my vision of the night now past;
But when, arising, I had dipped my hand
In the fair lustral stream, I drew towards
The altar, in the act of sacrifice,
Having in mind to offer, as their due,
The sacred meal-cake to the averting powers,
Lords of the rite that banisheth ill dreams.
When lo! I saw an eagle fleeing fast
To Phoebus' shrine — O friends, I stayed my steps,
Too scared to speak! for, close upon his flight,
A little falcon dashed in winged pursuit,
Plucking with claws the eagle's head, while he
Could only crouch and cower and yield himself.
Scared was I by that sight, and eke to you
No less a terror must it be to hear!
For mark this well — if Xerxes have prevailed,
He shall come back the wonder of the world:
If not, still none can call him to account —
So he but live, he liveth Persia's King!

CHORUS: Queen, it stands not with my purpose to abet these fears of thine,
Nor to speak with glazing comfort! nay, betake thee to the shrine!
If thy dream foretold disaster, sue to gods to bar its way,
And, for thyself, son, state, and friends, to bring fair fate
to-day.
Next, unto Earth and to the Dead be due libation poured,
And by thee let Darius' soul be wistfully implored —

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Such be thy words! my inner heart good tidings doth foretell,
And that fair fate will spring thereof, if wisdom guide us well.

ATOSSA: Loyal thou that first hast read this dream, this vision of the night,

With loyalty to me, the queen — be then thy presage right!

And therefore, as thy bidding is, what time I pass within

To dedicate these offerings, new prayers I will begin,

Alike to gods and the great dead who loved our lineage well.

Yet one more word — say, in what realm do the Athenians dwell?

CHORUS: Far hence, even where, in evening land, goes down our Lord the Sun.

ATOSSA: Say, had my son so keen desire, that region to o’errun?

CHORUS: Yea — if she fell, the rest of Greece were subject to our sway!

ATOSSA: Hath she so great predominance, such legions in array?

CHORUS: Ay — such a host as smote us sore upon an earlier day.

ATOSSA: And what hath she, besides her men? enow of wealth in store?

CHORUS: A mine of treasure in the earth, a fount of silver ore!

ATOSSA: Is it in skill of bow and shaft that Athens’ men excel?

CHORUS: Nay, they bear bucklers in the fight,
and thrust the spear-point well.

ATOSSA: And who is shepherd of their host and holds them in command?

CHORUS: To no man do they bow as slaves, nor own a master’s hand.

ATOSSA: How should they bide our brunt of war, the East upon the West?

CHORUS: That could Darius’ valiant horde in days of yore attest!

ATOSSA: A boding word, to us who bore the men now far away!

CHORUS: Nay — as I deem, the very truth will dawn on us to-day.

A Persian by his garb and speed, a courier draws anear —

He bringeth news, of good or ill, for Persia’s land to hear.

[A MESSENGER.

CHORUS: O walls and towers of all the Asian realm,

O Persian land, O treasure-house of gold!

How, by one stroke, down to destruction, down,

Hath sunk our pride, and all the flower of war

That once was Persia's, lieth in the dust!
Woe on the man who first announceth woe —
Yet must I all the tale of death unroll!
Hark to me, Persians! Persia's host lies low.

CHORUS: O ruin manifold, and woe, and fear!
Let the wild tears run down, for the great doom is here!

MESSENGER: This blow hath fallen, to the utterance, And I, past hope,
behold
my safe return!

CHORUS: Too long, alack, too long this life of mine,
That in mine age I see this sudden woe condign!

MESSENGER: As one who saw, by no loose rumour led,
Lords, I would tell what doom was dealt to us.

CHORUS: Alack, how vainly have they striven!
Our myriad hordes with shaft and bow
Went from the Eastland, to lay low
Hellas, beloved of Heaven!

MESSENGER: Piled with men dead, yea, miserably slain,
Is every beach, each reef of Salamis!

CHORUS: Thou sayest sooth — ah well-a-day!
Battered amid the waves, and torn,
On surges hither, thither, borne,
Dead bodies, bloodstained and forlorn,
In their long cloaks they toss and stray!

MESSENGER: Their bows availed not! all have perished, all,
By charging galleys crushed and whelmed in death.

CHORUS: Shriek out your sorrow's wistful wail!
To their untimely doom they went;
Ill strove they, and to no avail,
And minished is their armament!

MESSENGER: Out on thee, hateful name of Salamis,
Out upon Athens, mournful memory!

CHORUS: Woe upon this day's evil fame!

Thou, Athens, art our murderess;

Alack, full many a Persian dame

Is left forlorn and husbandless!

ATOSSA: Mute have I been awhile, and overwrought

At this great sorrow, for it passeth speech,

And passeth all desire to ask of it.

Yet if the gods send evils, men must bear.

(MESSENGER)

Unroll the record! stand composed and tell,

Although thy heart be groaning inwardly,

Who hath escaped, and, of our leaders, whom

Have we to weep? what chieftains in the van

Stood, sank, and died and left us leaderless?

MESSENGER: Xerxes himself survives and sees the day.

ATOSSA: Then to my line thy word renews the dawn

And golden dayspring after gloom of night!

MESSENGER: But the brave marshal of ten thousand horse,

Artembares, is tossed and flung in death

Along the rugged rocks Silenian.

And Dadaces no longer leads his troop,

But, smitten by the spear, from off the prow

Hath lightly leaped to death; and Tenagon,

In true descent a Bactrian nobly born,

Drifts by the sea-lashed reefs of Salamis,

The isle of Ajax. Gone Lilaeus too,

Gone are Arsames and Argestes! all,

Around the islet where the sea-doves breed,

Dashed their defeated heads on iron rocks;

Arcteus, who dwelt beside the founts of Nile,

Adeues, Pheresseues, and with them

Pharnuchus, from one galley's deck went down.

Matallus, too, of Chrysa, lord and king

Of myriad hordes, who led unto the fight

Three times ten thousand swarthy cavaliers,
Fell, with his swarthy and abundant beard
Incarnadined to red, a crimson stain
Outrivalling the purple of the sea!
There Magian Arabus and Artames
Of Bactra perished — taking up, alike,
In yonder stony land their long sojourn.
Amistris too, and he whose strenuous spear
Was foremost in the fight, Amphistreuus fell,
And gallant Ariomardus, by whose death
Broods sorrow upon Sardis: Mysia mourns
For Seisames, and Tharubis lies low —
Commander, he, of five times fifty ships,
Born in Lyrnessus: his heroic form
Is low in death, ungraced with sepulchre.
Dead too is he, the lord of courage high,
Cilicia's marshal, brave Syennesis,
Than whom none dealt more carnage on the foe,
Nor perished by a more heroic end.
So fell the brave: so speak I of their doom,
Summing in brief the fate of myriads!

ATOSSA: Ah well-a-day! these crowning woes I hear,
The shame of Persia and her shrieks of dole!
But yet renew the tale, repeat thy words,
Tell o'er the count of those Hellenic ships,
And how they ventured with their beakèd prows
To charge upon the Persian armament.

MESSENGER: Know, if mere count of ships could win the day,
The Persians had prevailed. The Greeks, in sooth,
Had but three hundred galleys at the most,
And other ten, select and separate.
But — I am witness — Xerxes held command
Of full a thousand keels, and, those apart,
Two hundred more, and seven, for speed renowned! —

So stands the reckoning, and who shall dare
To say we Persians had the lesser host?

ATOSSA: Nay, we were worsted by an unseen power
Who swayed the balance downward to our doom!

MESSENGER: In ward of heaven doth Pallas' city stand.

ATOSSA: How then? is Athens yet inviolate?

MESSENGER: While her men live, her bulwark standeth firm!

ATOSSA: Say, how began the struggle of the ships?
Who first joined issue? did the Greeks attack,
Or Xerxes, in his numbers confident?

MESSENGER: O queen, our whole disaster thus befell,
Through intervention of some fiend or fate —
I know not what — that had ill will to us.
From the Athenian host some Greek came o'er,
To thy son Xerxes whispering this tale —

.
Thy son believed the word and missed the craft
Of that Greek foeman, and the spite of Heaven,
And straight to all his captains gave this charge —

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. So spake the king,
Inspired at heart with over-confidence,

Unwitting of the gods' predestined will.
Thereon our crews, with no disordered haste,
Did service to his bidding and purveyed
The meal of afternoon: each rower then
Over the fitted rowlock looped his oar.
Then, when the splendour of the sun had set,
And night drew on, each master of the oar
And each armed warrior straightway went aboard.
Forward the long ships moved, rank cheering rank,
Each forward set upon its ordered course.
And all night long the captains of the fleet
Kept their crews moving up and down the strait.
So the night waned, and not one Grecian ship
Made effort to elude and slip away.
But as dawn came and with her coursers white
Shone in fair radiance over all the earth,
First from the Grecian fleet rang out a cry,
A song of onset! and the island crags
Re-echoed to the shrill exulting sound.
Then on us Eastern men amazement fell
And fear in place of hope; for what we heard
Was not a call to flight! the Greeks rang out
Their holy, resolute, exulting chant,
Like men come forth to dare and do and die
Their trumpets pealed, and fire was in that sound,
And with the dash of simultaneous oars
Replying to the war-chant, on they came,
Smiting the swirling brine, and in a trice
They flashed upon the vision of the foe!
The right wing first in orderly advance
Came on, a steady column; following then,
The rest of their array moved out and on,
And to our ears there came a burst of sound,
A clamour manifold. —

Then from our side swelled up the mingled din
Of Persian tongues, and time brooked no delay —
Ship into ship drave hard its brazen beak
With speed of thought, a shattering blow! and first
One Grecian bark plunged straight, and sheared away
Bowsprit and stem of a Phoenician ship.
And then each galley on some other's prow
Came crashing in. Awhile our stream of ships
Held onward, till within the narrowing creek
Our jostling vessels were together driven,
And none could aid another: each on each
Drave hard their brazen beaks, or brake away
The oar-banks of each other, stem to stern,
While the Greek galleys, with no lack of skill,
Hemmed them and battered in their sides, and soon
The hulls rolled over, and the sea was hid,
Crowded with wrecks and butchery of men.
No beach nor reef but was with corpses strewn,
And every keel of our barbarian host
Hurried to flee, in utter disarray.
Thereon the foe closed in upon the wrecks
And hacked and hewed, with oars and splintered planks,
As fishermen hack tunnies or a cast
Of netted dolphins, and the briny sea
Rang with the screams and shrieks of dying men,
Until the night's dark aspect hid the scene.
Had I a ten days' time to sum that count
Of carnage, 'twere too little! know this well —
One day ne'er saw such myriad forms of death!

ATOSSA: Woe on us, woe! disaster's mighty sea
Hath burst on us and all the Persian realm!

MESSENGER: Be well assured, the tale is but begun —
The further agony that on us fell
Doth twice outweigh the sufferings I have told!

ATOSSA: Nay, what disaster could be worse than this?
Say on! what woe upon the army came,
Swaying the scale to a yet further fall?

MESSENGER: The very flower and crown of Persia's race,
Gallant of soul and glorious in descent,
And highest held in trust before the king,
Lies shamefully and miserably slain.

ATOSSA: Alas for me and for this ruin, friends!
Dead, sayest thou? by what fate overthrown?

MESSENGER: An islet is there, fronting Salamis —
Strait, and with evil anchorage: thereon
Pan treads the measure of the dance he loves
Along the sea-beach. Thither the king sent
His noblest, that, whene'er the Grecian foe
Should 'scape, with shattered ships, unto the isle,
We might make easy prey of fugitives
And slay them there, and from the washing tides
Rescue our friends. It fell out otherwise
Than he divined, for when, by aid of Heaven,
The Hellenes held the victory on the sea,
Their sailors then and there begirt themselves
With brazen mail and bounded from their ships,
And then enringed the islet, point by point,
So that our Persians in bewilderment
Knew not which way to turn. On every side,
Battered with stones, they fell, while arrows flew
From many a string, and smote them to the death.
Then, at the last, with simultaneous rush
The foe came bursting on us, hacked and hewed
To fragments all that miserable band,
Till not a soul of them was left alive.

Then Xerxes saw disaster's depth, and shrieked,
From where he sat on high, surveying all —
A lofty eminence, beside the brine,
Whence all his armament lay clear in view.
His robe he rent, with loud and bitter wail,
And to his land-force swiftly gave command
And fled, with shame beside him! Now, lament
That second woe, upon the first imposed!

ATOSSA: Out on thee, Fortune! thou hast foiled the hope
And power of Persia: to this bitter end
My son went forth to wreak his great revenge
On famous Athens! all too few they seemed,
Our men who died upon the Fennel-field!
Vengeance for them my son had mind to take,
And drew on his own head these whelming woes.
But thou, say on! the ships that 'scaped from wreck —
Where didst thou leave them? make thy story clear.

MESSENGER: The captains of the ships that still survived
Fled in disorder, scudding down the wind,
The while our land-force on Boeotian soil
Fell into ruin, some beside the springs
Dropping before they drank, and some outworn,
Pursued, and panting all their life away.
The rest of us our way to Phocis won,
And thence to Doris and the Melian gulf,
Where with soft stream Spercheus laves the soil.
Thence to the northward did Phthiotis' plain,
And some Thessalian fortress, lend us aid,
For famine-pinched we were, and many died
Of drought and hunger's twofold present scourge.
Thence to Magnesia came we, and the land
Where Macedonians dwell, and crossed the ford
Of Axios, and Bolbe's reedy fen,
And mount Pangaeus, in Edonian land.

There, in the very night we came, the god
Brought winter ere its time, from bank to bank
Freezing the holy Strymon's tide. Each man
Who heretofore held lightly of the gods,
Now crouched and proffered prayer to Earth and Heaven!
Then, after many orisons performed,
The army ventured on the frozen ford:
Yet only those who crossed before the sun
Shed its warm rays, won to the farther side.
For soon the fervour of the glowing orb
Did with its keen rays pierce the ice-bound stream,
And men sank through and thrust each other down —
Best was his lot whose breath was stifled first!
But all who struggled through and gained the bank,
Toilfully wending through the land of Thrace
Have made their way, a sorry, scantied few,
Unto this homeland. Let the city now
Lament and yearn for all the loved and lost.
My tale is truth, yet much untold remains
Of ills that Heaven hath hurled upon our land.

CHORUS: Spirit of Fate, too heavy were thy feet,
Those ill to match! that sprang on Persia's realm.

ATOSSA: Woe for the host, to wrack and ruin hurled!
O warning of the night, prophetic dream!
Thou didst foreshadow clearly all the doom,
While ye, old men, made light of woman's fears!
Ah well — yet, as your divination ruled
The meaning of the sign, I hold it good,
First, that I put up prayer unto the gods,
And, after that, forth from my palace bring
The sacrificial cake, the offering due
To Earth and to the spirits of the dead.
Too well I know it is a timeless rite
Over a finished thing that cannot change!

But yet — I know not — there may come of it
Alleviation for the after time.
You it beseems, in view of what hath happed,
T' advise with loyal hearts our loyal guards:
And to my son — if, ere my coming forth,
He should draw hitherward — give comfort meet,
Escort him to the palace in all state,
Lest to these woes he add another woe!
[ATOSSA.

CHORUS: Zeus, lord and king! to death and nought
Our countless host by thee is brought.
Deep in the gloom of death, to-day,
Lie Susa and Ecbatana:
How many a maid in sorrow stands
And rends her tire with tender hands!
How tears run down, in common pain
And woeful mourning for the slain!
O delicate in dole and grief,
Ye Persian women! past relief
Is now your sorrow! to the war
Your loved ones went and come no more!
Gone from you is your joy and pride —
Severed the bridegroom from the bride —
The wedded couch luxurious
Is widowed now, and all the house
Pines ever with insatiate sighs,
And we stand here and bid arise,
For those who forth in ardour went
And come not back, the loud lament!

CHORUS: Land of the East, thou mournest for the host,
Bereft of all thy sons, alas the day!
For them whom Xerxes led hath Xerxes lost —
Xerxes who wrecked the fleet, and flung our hopes away!

CHORUS: How came it that Darius once controlled,
And without scathe, the army of the bow,
Loved by the folk of Susa, wise and bold?
Now is the land-force lost, the shipmen sunk below!

CHORUS: Ah for the ships that bore them, woe is me!
Bore them to death and doom! the crashing prows
Of fierce Ionian oarsmen swept the sea,
And death was in their wake, and shipwreck murderous!

CHORUS: Late, late and hardly — if true tales they tell —
Did Xerxes flee along the wintry way
And snows of Thrace — but ah, the first who fell
Lie by the rocks or float upon Cychrea's bay!

CHORUS: Mourn, each and all! waft heavenward your cry,
Stung to the soul, bereaved, disconsolate!
Wail out your anguish, till it pierce the sky,
In shrieks of deep despair, ill-omened, desperate!

CHORUS: The dead are drifting, yea, are gnawed upon
By voiceless children of the stainless sea,
Or battered by the surge! we mourn and groan
For husbands gone to death, for childless agony!

CHORUS: Alas the aged men, who mourn to-day
The ruinous sorrows that the gods ordain!
O'er the wide Asian land, the Persian sway
Can force no tribute now, and can no rule sustain.

CHORUS: Yea, men will crouch no more to fallen power
And kingship overthrown! the whole land o'er,
Men speak the thing they will, and from this hour
The folk whom Xerxes ruled obey his word no more.

CHORUS: The yoke of force is broken from the neck —
The isle of Ajax and th' encircling wave
Reek with a bloody crop of death and wreck
Of Persia's fallen power, that none can lift nor save!
[ATOSSA, .

ATOSSA: Friends, whosoe'er is versed in human ills,
Knoweth right well that when a wave of woe
Comes on a man, he sees in all things fear;
While, in flood-tide of fortune, 'tis his mood
To take that fortune as unchangeable,
Wafting him ever forward. Mark me now —
The gods' thwart purpose doth confront mine eyes,
And all is terror to me; in mine ears
There sounds a cry, but not of triumph now —
So am I scared at heart by woe so great.
Therefore I wend forth from the house anew,
Borne in no car of state, nor robed in pride
As heretofore, but bringing, for the sire
Who did beget my son, libations meet
For holy rites that shall appease the dead —
The sweet white milk, drawn from a spotless cow,
The oozing drop of golden honey, culled
By the flower-haunting bee, and therewithal
Pure draughts of water from a virgin spring;
And lo! besides, the stainless effluence,
Born of the wild vine's bosom, shining store
Treasured to age, this bright and luscious wine.
And eke the fragrant fruit upon the bough
Of the grey olive-tree, which lives its life
In sprouting leafage, and the twining flowers,
Bright children of the earth's fertility.
But you, O friends! above these offerings poured
To reconcile the dead, ring out your dirge
To summon up Darius from the shades,
Himself a shade; and I will pour these draughts,
Which earth shall drink, unto the gods of hell.

CHORUS: Queen, by the Persian land adored,
By thee be this libation poured,
Passing to those who hold command
Of dead men in the spirit-land!

And we will sue, in solemn chant,
That gods who do escort the dead
In nether realms, our prayer may grant —
Back to us be Darius led!

CHORUS: O Earth, and Hermes, and the king
Of Hades, our Darius bring!
For if, beyond the prayers we prayed,
He knoweth aught of help or aid,
He, he alone, in realms below,
Can speak the limit of our woe!

CHORUS: Doth he hear me, the king we adored, who is god
among gods of the dead?
Doth he hear me send out in my sorrow the pitiful,
manifold cry,
The sobbing lament and appeal? is the voice of my
suffering sped
To the realm of the shades? doth he hear me and
pity my sorrowful sigh?
O Earth, and ye Lords of the dead! release ye that
spirit of might,
Who in Susa the palace was born! let him rise up
once more to the light!

CHORUS: There is none like him, none of all
That e'er were laid in Persian sepulchres!
Borne forth he was to honoured burial,
A royal heart! and followed by our tears.
God of the dead, O give him back to us,
Darius, ruler glorious!
He never wasted us with reckless war —
God, counsellor, and king, beneath a happy star!
Ancient of days and king, awake and come —
Rise o'er the mounded tomb!
Rise, plant thy foot, with saffron sandal shod
Father to us, and god!

Rise with thy diadem, O sire benign,
Upon thy brow!
List to the strange new sorrows of thy line,
Sire of a woeful son!

CHORUS: A mist of fate and hell is round us now,
And all the city's flower to death is done!
Alas, we wept thee once, and weep again!
O Lord of lords, by recklessness twofold
The land is wasted of its men,
And down to death are rolled
Wreckage of sail and oar,
Ships that are ships no more,
And bodies of the slain!
[The GHOST OF DARIUS .

GHOST OF DARIUS: Ye aged Persians, truest of the true,
Coevals of the youth that once was mine,
What troubleth now our city? harken, how
It moans and beats the breast and rends the plain!
And I, beholding how my consort stood
Beside my tomb, was moved with awe, and took
The gift of her libation graciously.
But ye are weeping by my sepulchre,
And, shrilling forth a sad, evoking cry,
Summon me mournfully, *A* .
No light thing is it, to come back from death,
For, in good sooth, the gods of nether gloom
Are quick to seize but late and loth to free!
Yet among them I dwell as one in power —
And lo, I come! now speak, and speed your words,
Lest I be blamed for tarrying overlong!
What new disaster broods o'er Persia's realm?

GHOST OF DARIUS: With awe on thee I gaze,
And, standing face to face,
I tremble as I did in olden days!

GHOST OF DARIUS: Nay, but as I rose to earth again, obedient to your call,

Prithce, tarry not in parley! be one word enough for all —

Speak and gaze on me unshrinking, neither let my face appal!

CHORUS: I tremble to reveal,

Yet tremble to conceal

Things hard for friends to feel!

GHOST OF DARIUS: Nay, but if the old-time terror on your spirit keeps its hold,

Speak thou, O royal lady who didst couch with me of old!

Stay thy weeping and lamenting and to me reveal the truth —

Speak! for man is born to sorrow; yea, the proverb sayeth sooth!

'Tis the doom of mortal beings, if they live to see old age,

To suffer bale, by land and sea, through war and tempest's rage.

ATOSSA: O thou whose blissful fate on earth all mortal weal excelled —

Who, while the sunlight touched thine eyes, the lord of all wert held!

A god to Persian men thou wert, in bliss and pride and fame —

I hold thee blest too in thy death, or e'er the ruin came!

Alas, Darius! one brief word must tell thee all the tale —

The Persian power is in the dust, gone down in blood and bale!

GHOST OF DARIUS: Speak — by what chance? did man rebel, or pestilence descend?

ATOSSA: Neither! by Athens' fatal shores our army met its end.

GHOST OF DARIUS: Which of my children led our host to Athens? speak and say.

ATOSSA: The froward Xerxes, leaving all our realm to disarray.

GHOST OF DARIUS: Was it with army or with fleet on folly's quest he went?

ATOSSA: With both alike, a twofold front of double armament.

GHOST OF DARIUS: And how then did so large a host on foot pass o'er the sea?

ATOSSA: He bridged the ford of Helle's strait by artful carpentry.

GHOST OF DARIUS: How? could his craft avail to span the torrent of that tide?

ATOSSA: 'Tis sooth I say — some unknown power did fatal help provide!

GHOST OF DARIUS: Alas, that power in malice came, to his bewilderment!

ATOSSA: Alas, we see the end of all, the ruin on us sent.

GHOST OF DARIUS: Speak, tell me how they fared therein, that thus ye mourn and weep?

ATOSSA: Disaster to the army came, through ruin on the deep!

GHOST OF DARIUS: Is all undone? hath all the folk gone down before the foe?

ATOSSA: Yea, hark to Susa's mourning cry for warriors laid low!

GHOST OF DARIUS: Alas for all our gallant aids, our Persia's help and pride!

ATOSSA: Ay! old with young, the Bactrian force hath perished at our side!

GHOST OF DARIUS: Alas, my son! what gallant youths hath he sent down to death!

ATOSSA: Alone, or with a scanty guard — for so the rumour saith —

GHOST OF DARIUS: He came — but how, and to what end? doth aught of hope remain?

ATOSSA: With joy he reached the bridge that spanned the Hellespontine main.

GHOST OF DARIUS: How? is he safe, in Persian land? speak soothly, yea or nay!

ATOSSA: Clear and more clear the rumour comes, for no man to gainsay.

GHOST OF DARIUS: Woe for the oracle fulfilled, the presage of the war
Launched on my son, by will of Zeus! I deemed our doom afar
In lap of time; but, if a king push forward to his fate,
The god himself allures to death that man infatuate!
So now the very fount of woe streams out on those I loved,
And mine own son, unwisely bold, the truth hereof hath proved!

He sought to shackle and control the Hellespontine wave,
That rushes from the Bosphorus, with fetters of a slave! —
To curb and bridge, with welded links, the streaming water-way,
And guide across the passage broad his manifold array!
Ah, folly void of counsel! he deemed that mortal wight
Could thwart the will of Heaven itself and curb Poseidon's might!
Was it not madness? much I fear lest all my wealth and store
Pass from my treasure-house, to be the snatcher's prize once more!

ATOSSA: Such is the lesson, ah, too late! to eager Xerxes taught —
Trusting random counsellors and hare-brained men of nought,
Who said

!

Unto those sorry counsellors a ready ear he lent,
And led away to Hellas' shore his fated armament.

GHOST OF DARIUS: Therefore through them hath come calamity
Most huge and past forgetting; nor of old
Did ever such extermination fall
Upon the city Susa. Long ago
Zeus in his power this privilege bestowed,
That with a guiding sceptre one sole man
Should rule this Asian land of flock and herd.
Over the folk a Mede, Astyages,
Did grasp the power: then Cyaxares ruled
In his sire's place, and held the sway aright,
Steering his state with watchful wariness.
Third in succession, Cyrus, blest of Heaven,
Held rule and 'stablished peace for all his clan:
Lydian and Phrygian won he to his sway,
And wide Ionia to his yoke constrained,
For the god favoured his discretion sage.
Fourth in the dynasty was Cyrus' son,
And fifth was Mardus, scandal of his land
And ancient lineage. Him Artaphrenes,
Hardy of heart, within his palace slew,

Aided by loyal plotters, set for this.
And I too gained the lot for which I craved,
And oftentimes led out a goodly host,
Yet never brought disaster such as this
Upon the city. But my son is young
And reckless in his youth, and heedeth not
The warnings of my mouth. Mark this, my friends,
Born with my birth, coeval with mine age —
Not all we kings who held successive rule
Have wrought, combined, such ruin as my son!

CHORUS: How then, O King Darius? whitherward
Dost thou direct thy warning? from this plight
How can we Persians fare towards hope again?

GHOST OF DARIUS: By nevermore assailing Grecian lands,
Even tho' our Median force be double theirs —
For the land's self protects its denizens.

CHORUS: How meanest thou? by what defensive power?

GHOST OF DARIUS: She wastes by famine a too countless foe.

CHORUS: But we will bring a host more skilled than huge.

GHOST OF DARIUS: Why, e'en that army, camped in Hellas still,
Shall never win again to home and weal!

CHORUS: How say'st thou? will not all the Asian host
Pass back from Europe over Helle's ford?

GHOST OF DARIUS: Nay — scarce a tithe of all those myriads,
If man may trust the oracles of Heaven
When he beholds the things already wrought,
Not false with true, but true with no word false
If what I trow be truth, my son has left
A chosen rear-guard of our host, in whom
He trusts, now, with a random confidence!
They tarry where Asopus laves the ground
With rills that softly bless Boeotia's plain —

There is it fated for them to endure
The very crown of misery and doom,
Requital for their god-forgetting pride!
For why? they raided Hellas, had the heart
To wrong the images of holy gods,
And give the shrines and temples to the flame!
Defaced and dashed from sight the altars fell,
And each god's image, from its pedestal
Thrust and flung down, in dim confusion lies!
Therefore, for outrage vile, a doom as dark
They suffer, and yet more shall undergo —
They touch no bottom in the swamp of doom,
But round them rises, bubbling up, the ooze!
So deep shall lie the gory clotted mass
Of corpses by the Dorian spear transfixed
Upon Plataea's field! yea, piles of slain
To the third generation shall attest
By silent eloquence to those that see —

For pride grows rankly, and to ripeness brings
The curse of fate, and reaps, for harvest, tears!
Therefore when ye behold, for deeds like these,
Such stern requital paid, remember then
Athens and Hellas. Let no mortal wight,
Holding too lightly of his present weal
And passionate for more, cast down and spill
The mighty cup of his prosperity!
Doubt not that over-proud and haughty souls
Zeus lours in wrath, exacting the account.
Therefore, with wary warning, school my son,
Though he be lessoned by the gods already,
To curb the vaunting that affronts high Heaven!
And thou, O venerable Mother-queen,
Beloved of Xerxes, to the palace pass

And take therefrom such raiment as befits
Thy son, and go to meet him: for his garb
In this extremity of grief hangs rent
Around his body, woefully unstitched,
Mere tattered fragments of once royal robes!
Go thou to him, speak soft and soothing words —
Thee, and none other, will he bear to hear,
As well I know. But I must pass away
From earth above, unto the nether gloom;
Therefore, old men, take my farewell, and clasp,
Even amid the ruin of this time,
Unto your souls the pleasure of the day,
For dead men have no profit of their gold!
[GHOST OF DARIUS .

CHORUS: Alas, I thrill with pain for Persia's woes —
Many fulfilled, and others hard at hand!

ATOSSA: O spirit of the race, what sorrows crowd
Upon me! and this anguish stings me worst,
That round my royal son's dishonoured form
Hang rags and tatters, degradation deep!
I will away, and, bringing from within
A seemly royal robe, will straightway strive
To meet and greet my son: foul scorn it were
To leave our dearest in his hour of shame.
[ATOSSA.

CHORUS: Ah glorious and goodly they were,
the life and the lot that we gained,
The cities we held in our hand
when the monarch invincible reigned,
The king that was good to his realm,
sufficing, fulfilled of his sway,
A lord that was peer of the gods,
the pride of the bygone day!
Then could we show to the skies

great hosts and a glorious name,
And laws that were stable in might;
as towers they guarded our fame!
There without woe or disaster
we came from the foe and the fight,
In triumph, enriched with the spoil,
to the land and the city's delight.
What towns ere the Halys he passed!
what towns ere he came to the West,
To the main and the isles of the Strymon,
and the Thracian region possess'd!
And those that stand back from the main,
enringed by their fortified wall,
Gave o'er to Darius, the king,
the sceptre and sway over all!
Those too by the channel of Helle,
where southward it broadens and glides,
By the inlets, Propontis! of thee,
and the strait of the Pontic tides,
And the isles that lie fronting our sea-board,
and the Eastland looks on each one,
Lesbo and Chios and Paros,
and Samos with olive-trees grown,
And Naxos, and Myconos' rock,
and Tenos with Andros hard by,
And isles that in midmost Aegean,
aloof from the continent, lie —
And Lemnos and Icaros' hold —
all these to his sceptre were bowed,
And Cnidos and neighbouring Rhodes,
and Soli, and Paphos the proud,
And Cyprian Salamis, name-child of her
who hath wrought us this wrong!
Yea, and all the Ionian tract,

where the Greek-born inhabitants throng,
And the cities are teeming with gold —
Darius was lord of them all,
And, great by his wisdom, he ruled,
and ever there came to his call,
In stalwart array and unfailing,
the warrior chiefs of our land,
And mingled allies from the tribes
who bowed to his conquering hand!
But now there are none to gainsay
that the gods are against us; we lie
Subdued in the havoc of wreck,
and whelmed by the wrath of the sky!
[XERXES .

XERXES: Alas the day, that I should fall
Into this grimmest fate of all,
This ruin doubly unforeseen!
On Persia's land what power of Fate
Descends, what louring gloom of hate?
How shall I bear my teen?
My limbs are loosened where they stand,
When I behold this aged band —
Oh God! I would that I too, I,
Among the men who went to die,
Were whelmed in earth by Fate's command!

CHORUS: Ah welladay, my King! ah woe
For all our heroes' overthrow —
For all the gallant host's array,
For Persia's honour, pass'd away,
For glory and heroic sway
Mown down by Fortune's hand to-day!
Hark, how the kingdom makes its moan,
For youthful valour lost and gone,
By Xerxes shattered and undone!

He, he hath crammed the maw of hell
With bowmen brave, who nobly fell,
Their country's mighty armament,
Ten thousand heroes deathward sent!
Alas, for all the valiant band,
O king and lord! thine Asian land
Down, down upon its knee is bent!

XERXES: Alas, a lamentable sound,
A cry of ruth! for I am found
A curse to land and lineage,
With none my sorrow to assuage!

CHORUS: Alas, a death-song desolate
I send forth, for thy home-coming!
A scream, a dirge for woe and fate,
Such as the Asian mourners sing,
A sorry and ill-omened tale
Of tears and shrieks and Eastern wail!

XERXES: Ay, launch the woeful sorrow's cry,
The harsh, discordant melody,
For lo, the power, we held for sure,
Hath turned to my discomfiture!

CHORUS: Yea, dirges, dirges manifold
Will I send forth, for warriors bold,
For the sea-sorrow of our host!
The city mourns, and I must wail
With plashing tears our sorrow's tale,
Lamenting for the loved and lost!

XERXES: Alas, the god of war, who sways
The scales of fight in diverse ways,
Gives glory to Ionia!
Ionian ships, in fenced array,
Have reaped their harvest in the bay,
A darkling harvest-field of Fate,

A sea, a shore, of doom and hate!

CHORUS: Cry out, and learn the tale of woe!

Where are thy comrades? where the band

Who stood beside thee, hand in hand,

A little while ago?

Where now hath Pharandákes gone,

Where Psammis, and where Pelagon?

Where now is brave Agdabatas,

And Susas too, and Datamas?

Hath Susiscanes past away,

The chieftain of Ecbatana?

XERXES: I left them, mangled castaways,

Flung from their Tyrian deck, and tossed

On Salaminian water-ways,

From surging tides to rocky coast!

CHORUS: Alack, and is Pharnuchus slain,

And Ariomardus, brave in vain?

Where is Seualces' heart of fire?

Lilaeus, child of noble sire?

Are Tharubis and Memphis sped?

Hystaechmas, Artembáres dead?

And where is brave Masistes, where?

Sum up death's count, that I may hear!

XERXES: Alas, alas, they came, their eyes surveyed

Ancestral Athens on that fatal day.

Then with a rending struggle were they laid

Upon the land, and gasped their life away!

CHORUS: And Batanochus' child, Alpistus great,

Surnamed the Eye of State —

Saw you and left you him who once of old

Ten thousand thousand fighting-men enrolled?

His sire was child of Sesamas, and he

From Megabates sprang. Ah, woe is me,

Thou king of evil fate!
Hast thou lost Parthus, lost Oebares great?
Alas, the sorrow! blow succeedeth blow
On Persia's pride; thou tellest woe on woe!

XERXES: Bitter indeed the pang for comrades slain,
The brave and bold! thou strikest to my soul
Pain, pain beyond forgetting, hateful pain.
My inner spirit sobs and sighs with dole!

CHORUS: Another yet we yearn to see,
And see not! ah, thy chivalry,
Xanthis, thou chief of Mardian men
Countless! and thou, Anchares bright,
And ye, whose cars controlled the fight,
Arsaces and Diaixis wight,
Kegdadatas, Lythimnas dear,
And Tolmus, greedy of the spear!
I stand bereft! not in thy train
Come they, as erst! ah, ne'er again
Shall they return unto our eyes,
Car-borne, 'neath silken canopies!

XERXES: Yea, gone are they who mustered once the host!

CHORUS: Yea, yea, forgotten, lost!

XERXES: Alas, the woe and cost!

CHORUS: Alas, ye heavenly powers!
Ye wrought a sorrow past belief,
A woe, of woes the chief!
With aspect stern, upon us Ate looms!

XERXES: Smitten are we — time tells no heavier blow!

CHORUS: Smitten! the doom is plain!

XERXES: Curse upon curse and pang on pang we know!

CHORUS: With the Ionian power
We clashed, in evil hour!

Woe falls on Persia's race, yea, woe again, again!

XERXES: Yea, smitten am I, and my host is all to ruin hurled!

CHORUS: Yea verily — in mighty wreck hath sunk the Persian world!

CHORUS: XERXES ()

See you this tattered rag of pride?

CHORUS: I see it, welladay!

XERXES: See you this quiver?

CHORUS: Say, hath aught survived and 'scaped the fray?

XERXES: A store for darts it was, erewhile!

CHORUS: Remain but two or three!

XERXES: No aid is left!

CHORUS: Ionian folk such darts, unfearing, see!

XERXES: Right resolute they are! I saw disaster unforeseen.

CHORUS: Ah, speakest thou of wreck, of flight, of carnage that hath been?

XERXES: Yea, and my royal robe I rent, in terror at their fall!

CHORUS: Alas, alas!

XERXES: Yea, thrice alas!

CHORUS: For all have perished, all!

XERXES: Ah woe to us, ah joy to them who stood against our pride!

CHORUS: And all our strength is minished and sundered from our side!

XERXES: No escort have I!

CHORUS: Nay, thy friends are whelmed beneath the tide!

XERXES: Wail, wail the miserable doom, and to the palace hie!

CHORUS: Alas, alas, and woe again!

XERXES: Shriek, smite the breast, as I!

CHORUS: An evil gift, a sad exchange, of tears poured out in vain!

XERXES: Shrill out your simultaneous wail!

CHORUS: Alas the woe and pain!

XERXES: O, bitter is this adverse fate!

CHORUS: I voice the moan with thee!

XERXES: Smite, smite thy bosom, groan aloud for my calamity!

CHORUS: I mourn and am dissolved in tears!

XERXES: Cry, beat thy breast amain!

CHORUS: O king, my heart is in thy woe!

XERXES: Shriek, wail, and shriek again!

CHORUS: O agony!

XERXES: A blackening blow —

CHORUS: A grievous stripe shall fall!

XERXES: Yea, beat anew thy breast, ring out the doleful Mysian call!

CHORUS: An agony, an agony!

XERXES: Pluck out thy whitening beard!

CHORUS: By handfuls, ay, by handfuls, with dismal tear-drops smeared!

XERXES: Sob out thine aching sorrow!

CHORUS: I will thine best obey.

XERXES: With thine hands rend thy mantle's fold —

CHORUS: Alas, woe worth the day!

XERXES: With thine own fingers tear thy locks, bewail the army's weird!

CHORUS: By handfuls, yea, by handfuls, with tears of dole besmeared!

XERXES: Now let thine eyes find overflow —

CHORUS: I wend in wail and pain!

XERXES: Cry out for me an answering moan —

CHORUS: Alas, alas again!

XERXES: Shriek with a cry of agony, and lead the doleful train!

CHORUS: Alas, alas, the Persian land is woeful now to tread!

XERXES: Cry out and mourn! the city now doth wail above the dead!

CHORUS: I sob and moan!

XERXES: I bid ye now be delicate in grief!

CHORUS: Alas, the Persian land is sad and knoweth not relief!

XERXES: Alas, the triple banks of oars and those who died thereby!

CHORUS: Pass! I will lead you, bring you home, with many a broken sigh!

[