

THE ARGONAUTS

BY

ALEISTER CROWLEY



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SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH
BOLESKINE, FOYERS, INVERNESS

1904

ARGONAUTAE

ACTUS
PRIMUS

JASON

JASON.

AFFECTIONATELY TO THE AUTHOR OF

'ION';

ADMIRINGLY TO

DR. A. W. VERRALL

AND

THE REV. F. F. KELLY

ON

THE

OCCASION

OF

MY VOYAGE OF 1904

ARGONAUTAE.

ACTUS PRIMUS.

PELIAS. JASON. *Semi-chorus of Iolchian Men.*
Semi-chorus of Iolchian Women.

SCENE : *The Throne-chamber of KING PELIAS.*

SEMI-CHORUS OF MEN.

The prophecies are spoken in vain,
The auguries vainly cast,
Since twenty years of joyous reign
In peace are overpast;
And those who cursed our King's desires
Are branded in the brow for liars.

SEMI-CHORUS OF WOMEN.

We heard the aged prophet speak
The doom of woe and fear.
We wait with blanched and icy cheek
The one-and-twentieth year:
For Justice lies, as seeds lie, dead,
But lifts at last a Gorgon head!

MEN.

What fear can reach our Thessaly?
What war disturb our peace?

ARGONAUTAE

Long stablished is young amity
Maid-blushing over Greece:
And fair Iolchus stands sublime,
A monument to lesson time.

WOMEN.

But if such fear were come indeed,
Who reads the riddle dread
Spoken in frenzy by the seer
Against the royal head?
We know the Rhyme's involving spell—
Its purport is impenetrable.

MEN.

We heard his foolish maundering:
But, bred in wiser ways,
We have forgotten: do ye sing
The rune of ancient days!
To-day his curse cacophonous
Shall earn at least a laugh from us!

WOMEN.

“O! when the armed hand is nigh,
Iolchus shall not see
Peace shining from Athena's sky
Until the Fleece be free;
Until the God of War shall scorn
The sting, and trust him to the horn.

“Until the Sun of Spring forsake
His eastern home, and rise

ACTUS PRIMUS

5

Within our temple-walls and make
One glory of the skies—
Until the King shall die and live,
Athena never shall forgive.”

MEN.

Surely, O friends, at last 'tis clear
The man was mad indeed!
Such nonsense we did never hear
As this prophetic screed!
More, as 'tis never like this land
Should ever see an armed hand.

JASON.

Where is the son of Tyro and Poseidon?

MEN.

Iolchus' King has here a dwelling-place.

WOMEN.

See you the sword shake—and the iron hand
Not shaking? The man's mood is full of wrath.

MEN.

Peace, foolish! Were it so, we would not see.

WOMEN.

Ay me! this stranger seems most ominous.

JASON.

Where is the son of Tyro and Poseidon?

MEN.

This is the Palace-place of Pelias,
Son of Poseidon, of Iolchus King.

JASON.

Iolchus' King is here, in very truth.
Where is the son of Tyro?

MEN.

Who art thou?

JASON.

Know me for Jason and great Aeson's heir.

MEN.

We learn good news, most enviable sir;
That Aeson hath such grand inheritance.

JASON.

You have grown fat beneath an evil rule.
Your period is at hand. Go, one of you,
And drag the impious wretch before my sight!

MEN.

Aeson? Thy father?

JASON.

Play not with my wrath!
My mood is something dangerous.

MEN.

Dangerous sir,
I go indeed, to bring some danger more
Hither.

JASON.

Poltroonery dislikes the wise.
Fair maidens, I salute you pleasantly.

ACTUS PRIMUS

7

WOMEN.

Welcome, O welcome to the land,
Young heir of prophecy!
The armed hand, the glittering brand,
The scabbard's jewellery!
That wealth avails not: cast it down!
The sword alone may win the crown!

JASON.

Ye languish wretched in the tyrant's rule?

WOMEN.

Most happy are we, King. But change is sweet.

JASON.

A short-lived omen of success to me.

WOMEN.

Nay, but adventure and the prophecy!

JASON.

I see I have but small support in you.

WOMEN.

Not so, great Jason! Had I suffered much,
My spirit had been broken to the scourge.
Now, being strong and happy, with what joy
I cry: Evohe! Revolution!
I have grown weary of this tiresome peace.

JASON.

I promise you intense unhappiness.

WOMEN.

Here is the ugly monster! Out! To think

We once believed him reverend and refined,
Saw majesty in all that tottering gait,
And honour in the goat-like beard of him!

FIRST WOMAN.

A week ago your blue eyes were in tears,
Sidelong regarding the old mountebank.

SECOND WOMAN.

To-day I would not be his concubine
For all Iolchus—for all Thessaly!

THIRD WOMAN.

I see the same glance seek out Jason now.

SECOND WOMAN.

Ay, there's a man! What muscles! What fine fire
In the quick eye! What vigour and warm strength!

FIRST WOMAN.

Yes, in your wishes. But indeed he is
A proper man. Away, you ancient egg!

PELIAS.

With what audacious foot and impious voice
Strides this young man and talks? Let him advance,
Trembling at our offended majesty.
Who art thou whose rude summons startles us
From work of state to listen a young mouth
Beardless? Speak, man, for shortly thou shalt die.

JASON.

Athena speaks.

ACTUS PRIMUS

9

WOMEN.

Ah, there's a fine retort !

PELIAS.

Goddesses speak and men list reverently.
Could she not find a fitter messenger?

JASON.

Her cause is Jason's. Jason therefore speaks.

PELIAS.

Aha! A suppliant to our clemency!
I did mistake the gesture and the sword
Angrily gripped, the foot flung terribly
Foremost, the fierce, constrained attitude.
But—as a suppliant! Tell thy woeful tale,
Sad youth! Some woman thou hast loved and lost?

JASON.

Thou hast robbed me of this kingdom. Thou hast kept
My father (poor half-witted man!) a slave
And parasite about thy court (one grief
The more I add to this account of thine!)
Myself a babe thou didst seek out to slay,
And, I being hid, with fish-hooks bent with lies
And gilded with most specious promises,
Cunningly angled for old Chiron's grace
To catch me yet. Athena hears me swear
To right all this—nay, answer me before
Anger get all the spoil of me, and drink
Thy life-blood in one gulp! Descend that dais!

Bend thou a suppliant at my awful knee,
And thus—perhaps—at least get grace of life.

PELIAS.

And if I say I will not yield the throne?

JASON.

I am of force to take it.

PELIAS.

Are my friends
Not faithful? Who draws sword for Pelias?

MEN.

Shall we not slay thee this presumptuous fool?

JASON.

I am of force, I say. I wrestled once
From sunrise to sunset with Heracles,
Great Heracles! Not till the full moon rose
Availed his might to lay me prone. Beware!
Ye weakling knaves! I am of force, I say.

PELIAS.

Rebellious youth, the justice of thy cause
And force I will admit—where force goes far.
But think'st thou wait no wild Erinnyes
For thee a guest in these my halls, for thee
Whose hands are dipped not yet in blood so deep
As to have murdered an old man, and him
Thy father's brother?

ACTUS PRIMUS

11

JASON.

Justice covers all.

The Furies cannot follow if a man
To his own heart be reconciled. They feed
On his own bosom, nay! are born thereof.
An alien clan he might elude, but these,
Blood of his blood, he shall nor slay nor 'scape.
My heart hath never pastured on regret
Or pang for thee. My justice covers all.

PELIAS.

That one word "justice" covers all indeed
To thine own self. But think'st thou for a word
To ruin many years of commonweal,
And poison in an hour the politics
Of states and thrones for—justice? Thou art just;
But wisdom, but the life of innocents,
The happiness of all, are better served
By solemn thought and weighty counsel held.

JASON.

This is more simple. I abolish thee—
One sword-sweep—and assume thy "politics."

PELIAS.

Thou art this "simple"! Will my liege allies
(Willing with age and wisdom to accord)
Not tremble at thy firebrand breed, not think
Who hath in blood, an old man's blood, made fast
A perilous footing, may betimes discover
More "justice"—and invasion footing it

Hard after? Wilt thou plunge all Thessaly,
All Greece, in haste and sudden armament,
Fury of thought and frenzy of deed, at once
For justice? Wouldst thou be so violent
For justice, save in thine own cause, O boy?
And wilt thou pity not the happy days
And storm-unshatteréd abodes of Greece?

JASON.

Athena, who is Justice, also is
Wisdom: and also "She who buildeth towns."

PELIAS.

Think also, I am born of deity.
I am inured to majesty; I know
How venerable is the sight of kings,
And how the serpent Treason writhes beneath
The royal foot, conscious of its own shame,
And how the Lion of Rebellion cowers
Before the presence of a king unarmed,
Quelled by one mild glance of authority.

JASON.

A king unjust is shorn of majesty.

PELIAS.

Still the one fool's-word—justice—answers all.
Would thou wert older and more politic!

JASON.

Would I were liar with thine own foul brand!
The gods are weary of thy cozening.

PELIAS.

To proof, then, boy. I lay my sceptre by,
Put off my crown, descend the steps to thee.
Here is my breast. Look firmly in my face,
And slay me. Is there fear writ large and deep
In mine old eyes? Or shudderest thou with fear?

JASON.

More hate than fear. In sooth, I cannot strike.

PELIAS.

A king is not so slain—except a madman
May fall upon him with averted head.
Indeed, I conquer. [*Aside.*] Even so, beware!
Victory ill-nurtured breeds the babe defeat.
[*Aloud.*] Listen, my brother's son! Nay, stoop not so,
Bending ashamed brows upon the earth!
I am well weary of the world of men.
I grow both old and hateful to myself,
Most on the throne: power which to youth is sweet
To age looks fearful. Also I have wept—
Alas! how often!—and repented me
Of those unkingly deeds whereby I gained
This throne whose joy is turned to bitterness.
I will make peace with thee, and justice still
Shall have a home and shrine in Thessaly.
Be patient notwithstanding! Prove thyself
Valiant and wise—and reign here! If in sooth
An aged counsellor, whose reverend hair
Commands a hearing, may assist at all,

Wisdom to wisdom added, I am here.
Yet would I rather slide into my grave,
Untroubled with the destinies of states,
Even of such an one so dear to me
Who thus a score of years have nurtured it.

JASON.

I hear thee. Thou art grown like royal wine
Better with age. Forgive my violence!

PELIAS.

[*Aside.*] The fish bites hard. [*Aloud.*] There is a prophecy:
"Once stirred, Iolchus never shall know peace
Till in its temple hangs the Golden Fleece."
Now thou hast so disquieted our days,
The time is come: seek thou Aea's isle,
And hang this trophy on our temple walls!

JASON.

Tell me what is this fleece.

PELIAS.

Let women sing.

WOMEN.

In Ares' grove, the sworded trees,
The world's heart wondering,
Hangs evermore the Golden Fleece,
The glory of the spring,
The light of far Aea's coast,
Such glamour as befits a ghost.

Before that glittering woof the Sun
Shrinks back abashed in shame,
The splendour of the shining one,
One torrent-fleece of flame!
What heart may think, what tongue may sing
The glory of the golden thing?

About the grove the scorpion coils
Inextricably wind
Within the wood's exceeding toils,
The shadow hot and blind;
There lurk his serpent sorceries,
The guardian of the Golden Fleece.

The dragon lifts his nostrils wide
And jets a spout of fire;
The warrior questing turns aside,
Not daring to desire;
And Madness born of Ares lurks
Behind the wonder of his works.

Be sure that were the woodland way
Tracked snakewise to the core,
The dragon slain or driven away,
The good Fleece won by war,
Not yet should Ares sink his spear,
Or fail of flinging forth a fear.

The torch of Madness should be lit,
And follow him afar;

Upon his prow should Madness sit,
A baleful beacon-star;
And in his home Despair and Strife
Lie in his bosom for a wife!

But oh, the glory of the quest,
The gainless goodly prize!
The fairest form man e'er caressed,
The word he heard most wise;—
All lures of life avoid and cease
Before the winning of the Fleece!

O nameless splendour of the Gods,
Begotten hardly of Heaven!
Unspoken treasure of the abodes
Beyond the lightning levin!
No misery, no despair may pay
The joy to hold thee for a day!

JASON.

Athena's servant recks not much of Ares.

PELIAS.

Are thine eyes kindled at the golden thought?

JASON.

Mine eyes see farther than the Fleece of Gold.

PELIAS.

What heroes can attain so fair a thing?

JASON.

I have some friends who would esteem this quest

ACTUS PRIMUS

17

Lightly—a maiden's pleasure-wandering
Through lilled fields a summer's afternoon.

PELIAS.

The Gods give strength! I pray them send thee back
Safe to this throne.

JASON.

I will not see thy face
Ever again until the quest be won.
Rule thou with justice in my sacred seat
Until I come again.

PELIAS.

The Gods thy speed.

MEN.

The hardy hero goes to find
The living Fleece of Gold;
Or else, some death may chance to bind
Those limbs of manly mould.
In sooth, I doubt if I shall earn
The singer's fee for his return.

PELIAS.

Think now—I feared that fool. It must be true
That guilt is timorous. Ay! when danger's none!
Let but swords flash—and guilt grows God for might!
Indeed I rule—until he come again.
Ay, when the stars fall, Jason shall be king!

EXPLICIT ACTUS PRIMUS.

ARGONAUTAE

ACTUS
SECUNDUS

ARGO

ARGO.

TO THE HON. P. RAMANATHAN, C.M.G.

AND

RUDYARD KIPLING

ON

THE OCCASION

OF

SUNRISE

ARGONAUTAE.

ACTUS SECUNDUS.

ARGUS *the son of* PHRIXUS, JASON, HERACLES, CASTOR,
POLLUX, THESEUS, ORPHEUS. *Chorus of* Heroes.
Chorus of Shipbuilders.

SCENE: *An open place near Iolchus.*

CHORUS OF SHIPBUILDERS.

The sound of the hammer and steel!
The song of the level and line!
The whirr of the whistling wheel!
The ring of the axe on the pine!

The joy of the ended labour,
As the good ship plunges free
By sound of pipe and tabor
To front the sparkling sea!

The mystery-woven spell!
The voyage of golden gain!
The free full sails that swell
On the swell of the splendid main!

The song of the axe and the wedge!
The clang of the hammer and chain!
Keen whistle of chisel and edge!
Smooth swish of the sliding plane!

Hail to the honour of toil!
Hail! to the ship flown free!
Hail! to the golden spoil,
And the glamour of all the sea!

HERACLES.

A good stout song, friend Argus, matching well
The mighty blows thou strikest: yet methinks
One blow should serve to drive yon nail well home
Where thou with tenfold stroke——

THESEUS.

Good Heracles!
Not all men owe thy strength——

ARGUS.

Nay, let him try!
Take my toy hammer!

HERACLES.

I have split the wood!

THESEUS.

Vexation sits tremendous on his brow.
Beware a hero's fury! Thou art mad,
Argus, to play so dangerous a trick.

ACTUS SECUNDUS

5

ARGUS.

True, Theseus—if he had but hit his thumb!

CASTOR.

Cease this fool's talk. The moon waits not the work.

POLLUX.

The sun will sink no later for your pleasure.
On to thy work, man.

THESEUS.

He that traps a lion
And baits him for an hour, and lets him go,
Does well to think before he tempt again
The forest paths.

HERACLES.

The wise man wisely thinks
That nothing is but wisdom—and myself
Think strongly that no other thing exists
But strength: so with his subtleties of mind
He baffles me; and I lift up my club,
And with one blow bespatter his wise brains.

JASON.

Ay, not for nothing did the darkness reign
Those eight-and-forty hours, O Zeus-begot!

THESEUS.

Tell me, friend master, how the work goes on.
When shall our gallant vessel breast the deep?
When shall we see the sun sink o'er the poop,
And look toward moonrise, and the land be lost,

And the perched watcher on the mast behold
The melting mirror of the ocean meet
The crystallizing concave of the sky?

ARGUS.

All this shall happen when the work is done.

JASON.

How many moons, friend fool, before that day?

ARGUS.

These things are known not even to the Gods.
Except the Father only.

HERACLES.

Fools must talk.

ARGUS.

I talk, divulging nothing.

HERACLES.

I strike thee,

Yet act not.

ARGUS.

Hero, stay that heavy hand!
The ship shall sail ere spring.

THESEUS.

But now you talk
More as befits a workman to a king.

JASON.

Be gentle now, my friends! These shipbuilders,
Reared in the rugged borders of the North,

ACTUS SECUNDUS

7

Have northern manners; surly if attacked
But genial when——

ARGUS.

The proper treatment is
Kindness—like lions whom Demeter tamed.

THESEUS.

I promise thee, the next time thou art wroth,
A second kindness from Alcides' hand.

ARGUS.

Spare me that, King, and take, thyself, a club.

JASON.

King Theseus, thou art far reputed wise.
Hast thou not learnt a lesson from the hap
Of Heracles supreme in—shipbuilding?
I by my meekness will abash thy strength.
Good Argus, thou art unsurpassed in art
To curve the rougher timbers, to make smooth
The joints and girders, and to plane and work
The iron and the nailheads, and to lift
Row after row the tiers of benches thrice
In triple beauty, and to shape the oars,
To raise the mast——

ARGUS.

Thy knowledge staggers me!
How wast thou thus instructed?

JASON.

By much thought.

To clamp the decks——

ARGUS.

I stand with brows abashed.

Thou art the master—build the ship thyself.

JASON.

Nay, but my knowledge is of mind alone.

I cannot so apply it as to build

An Argo.

ARGUS.

Yet I verily believe

Such mind must pierce far deeper than these names,

Seeking the very nature of the things

Thou namest thus so pat. Perchance to thee

These logs, nails, bolts, tools, have some life of sense,

Some subtle language. Tell us what they say!

THESEUS.

'Tis but a giber—leave the churl alone.

JASON.

Indeed I spake of things I knew not of.

ARGUS.

You speak more wisely when you float away

Into pure dream, and talk of mystic things

That no man born of woman understands,

And therefore does not dare to contradict.

ACTUS SECUNDUS

9

JASON.

He who speaks much and bitterly at last
Lays himself open to retort. I think
I never heard such contradictions fly
As when men talk of gods—that never were!

ARGUS.

Thou wouldst do better to leave men alone.
The wisest talk is folly when work waits.
Look! how these sturdy villains gape around,
Fling down their task, and hang upon the words
That flow like nectar from your majesty.

CASTOR.

In truth, my friend, if you would wear your crown
This side of Orcus, you should go away.

POLLUX.

Ay! let the men work! For a mind as yours
Is good, and skill as theirs is also good.

CASTOR.

But mix the manual and the mental—well,
No ship was built by pure philosophy.

POLLUX.

Nor yet designed by artisans.

JASON.

Enough
Come, great Alcides, it is time to go.

ARGUS.

A fool allows a moment's irritation

To move the purpose of a thousand years.
Go, go!

HERACLES.

Remember! We are met this day
To call upon the name with praise and prayer
Of great Athena, since our ship is built
With sculptured olive pregnant in the prow,
And all the length of pine is coiled and curled
With the swift serpent's beauty, and the owl
Sits in huge state upon the midmost bench.
Thus, therefore, by the manifest design,
Joining the wisdom to the power and will,
We build the Argo.

ARGUS.

What a heavy club
We carry! And how well becomes our figure
The lion's skin!

HERACLES.

Be still, thou art an ass!

ARGUS.

The fabled ass, O Zeus-descended one?

HERACLES.

What ass?

ARGUS.

The one that wore the lion's skin!

THESEUS.

This fellow were beneath a man's contempt.
How should a God-born heed him?

ACTUS SECUNDUS

11

JASON.

We are here,

Then, to invoke Athena, immolate
The sacred cock upon her altar-stone,
That She, who sprang in armour from the brain
Of the All-Father, may descend to bless
Our labours, since delay grows dangerous,
If haply by Her power and subtlety
She please to aid the work, and to perform
A prodigy to save us! Mighty Queen,
That art the balance and the sword alike
In cunning Argus' brain——

HERACLES.

Ay! Mighty Wisdom,

Who thus can overshadow such a fool,
And make him capable to build a ship.

ARGUS.

O Thou! Athena, whose bright wisdom shone
In this beef-witted fellow, making him
Competent even to sweep a stable out!
Glorious task!—I shall return anon.

JASON.

Nay, follow not! The Goddess were displeased,
Coming, to find our greatest hero gone.

THESEUS.

This is the midmost hour of day.

JASON.

Arise,

All heroes, circling round the sacred stone
In beautiful order and procession grave,
While our chief priest, our mightiest in song,
The dowered of Phoebus, great Oeager's heir,
Invokes that glory on the sacrifice
That kindles all its slumber into life
And vivid flame descending on the wheel
And chariot of lightning, licking up
The water of the loud-resounding sea
Lustral, poured seven times upon the earth
And in one flash consuming wood and stone
And the sweet savour of the sacrifice.

ORPHEUS.

But when the flame hath darted from the eye
Of my divine existence, and hath left
Nothing, where was the altar and the earth,
The water and the incense and the victim—
Nothing of all remains! Then look to it
That ye invoke not Wisdom by the Name
Of bright Athena!

JASON.

We are here to call
Upon that Wisdom by that mighty Name!

ORPHEUS.

Who calleth upon Wisdom is not wise.
Is it not written in the Sibyl's book

ACTUS SECUNDUS

13

That Wisdom crieth in the streets aloud
And none regardeth her? Obey my voice.

JASON.

O master of Apollo's lyre and light!
We are not wise—and for that very cause
We meet to-day to call on Wisdom.

ORPHEUS.

Well!

The altar stands, shadowing the Universe
That with my fire of Knowledge I destroy—
And there is Wisdom—but invoke Her not,
Friends, Who is only when none other is.

JASON.

Let us begin: the hour draws on apace.
Drive off the demons from the sacrifice!

ORPHEUS.

Let all the demons enter and dwell therein!
My friends, ye are as ignorant as priests!
Let there be silence while the sleeper wakes!

O coiled and constricted and chosen!
O tortured and twisted and twined!
Deep spring of my soul deep frozen,
The sleep of the truth of the mind!
As a bright snake curled
Round the vine of the World!

E

O sleeper through dawn and though daylight,
O sleeper through dusk and through night!
O shifted from white light to gray light,
From gray to the one black light!
O silence and sound
In the far profound!

O serpent of scales as an armour
To bind on the breast of a lord!
Not deaf to the Voice of the Charmer,
Not blind to the sweep of the sword!
I strike to the deep
That thou stir in thy sleep!

Rise up from mine innermost being!
Lift up the gemmed head to the heart!
Lift up till the eyes that were seeing
Be blind, and their life depart!
Till the Eye that was blind
Be a lamp to my mind!

Coil fast all thy coils on me, dying,
Absorbed in the sense of the Snake!
Stir, leave the flower-throne, and up-flying
Hiss once, and hiss thrice, and awake!
Then crown me and cling!
Flash forward—and spring!

Flash forth on the fire of the altar,
The stones, and the sacrifice shed;

ACTUS SECUNDUS

15

Till the Three Worlds flicker and falter,
And life and her love be dead!
In mysterious joy
Awake—and destroy!

JASON.

It is enough!

HERACLES.

Too great for a god's strength!

THESEUS.

Speak!

CASTOR.

Change! Not to be borne!

POLLUX.

But this is death!

ORPHEUS.

Let the light fade. The oracle is past.

JASON.

The Voice is past. We are alive again.

ORPHEUS.

What spake That Silence?

HERACLES.

“This is not a quest
Where strength availeth aught.” I shall not go.

JASON.

Nay, brother. The voice was: “The end is sorrow!”

THESEUS.

Ye heard not, O dull-witted! Unto me
(Alone of all ye wise) the great voice came,
"The Gates of Hell shall not in all prevail."

CASTOR.

I heard, "Regret not thy mortality!
Love conquers death!"

POLLUX.

But I, "Regret not thou
Thine immortality! Love conquers life!"

ORPHEUS.

A partial wisdom to a partial ear.

JASON.

But what speech came to thee?

ORPHEUS.

I heard no voice.

ARGUS.

What means this? Here's my labour thrown away,
My skill made jest of, all my wage destroyed
At one fell stroke.

JASON.

What? Is the Argo burnt?

ARGUS.

Burnt! Should I then complain? The ship is finished.

JASON.

The Goddess, furious at thine absence, Argus,
Hath frenzied thee with some delusion.

ACTUS SECUNDUS

17

HERACLES.

Calm!

Control thy madness! I am sorry now
My pungent wit so shamed his arrogance
As made him seem to scorn Athena.

ARGUS.

Thou!

But see me, I am ruined. The good ship
Is finished! Where's my daily wage?

JASON.

Be sure

I pay thee treble if thy tale be true.

ARGUS.

Ay! treble nothing! I shall buy a palace.

JASON.

Treble thine utmost wish.

ARGUS.

Two evils then

Thou pilest on one good! But come and see!
The Argo is discovered.

CHORUS OF HEROES.

By Wisdom framed from ancient days
The stately Argo stands above;
Too firm to fear, too great to praise,
The might of bright Athena's love!
Oh! ship of glory! tread the foam,
And bring our guerdon from its home!

The silent thought, the hand unseen,
The rayless majesty of light
Shed from the splendour of our Queen
Athena! mystery and might;
These worked invisibly to bring
The end of triumph to our King.

Great Jason, wronged by hate of man,
Shall pass the portals of the deep;
Shall seek the waters wide and wan;
Shall pass within the land of sleep;
And there the guardians of the soil
Shall rest at last from pain and toil.

O ruler of the empyréan,
Behold his fervour conquering
The fury of the breed Cadmean,
The dragons of the Theban king;
And armed men shall spring from earth
In vain to ward the gloomy girth!

But thou, Athena, didst devise
Some end beyond our mortal ken,
Thy soul impenetrably wise
Shines not to us unthinking men,
O guard the warrior band of Greece,
And win for us the Golden Fleece!

ACTUS SECUNDUS

19

By miracle this happy day
The ship is finished for our quest.
Bring thou the glory from the gray!
Bring thou our spirits into rest!
O Wisdom, that hast helped so far,
Sink never thou thy guiding star!

CHORUS OF WORKMEN.

Then let us gather one and all,
And launch our dragon on the main
With paeans raised most musical,
Until our heroes come again.
With watching and with prayer we wait
The imperious Destinies of Fate!

EXPLICIT ACTUS SECUNDUS.

ARGONAUTAE

ACTUS
TERTIUS

MEDEA

MEDEA.

To
WHOMSOEVER
AND
THE BRITISH ARMY
ON
THE OCCASION
OF
READING 'MAN AND SUPERMAN'

ARGONAUTAE.

ACTUS TERTIUS.

AEETES, JASON, MEDEA, Messengers, *Chorus of* Heroes.

SCENE : *The palace of* AEETES.

AEETES.

Were this man son of Zeus, beloved of Heaven,
And skilled with very craft of Maia's son,
Stronger than Phoebus, subtler than the Sphinx,
This plague should catch him, nor my wisdom spare.

CHORUS OF HEROES.

Thus hast thou sent him unto Hades, king.

AEETES.

Not otherwise were such gain possible.
Ye are the witnesses that with much skill,
And eloquence of shining words, and thought
Darkling behind their measured melody,
I did dissuade him.

CHORUS.

Such an enterprise
After such toils no man should lightly leave.

Remember all the tasks impossible
This hero hath already done, before
He ever touched this sounding coast of thine.

AEETES.

Alas! but now his weird is loneliness!

CHORUS.

Was that from Destiny, or will of thine?

AEETES.

I love him little. Yet my words were true,
Nor would it skill him aught if myriad men
Bucklered his back and breast. For when a man
Batters with sword-hilt at the frowning gates
That lead to the Beyond, not human force—
Hardly the favour of the gods themselves—
Shall stead him in that peril.

CHORUS.

Yet we know

Courage may conquer all things.

AEETES.

Such a man

Is greater than the gods!

CHORUS.

If only he

Know who he is—that all these gods and men
And things are but the shadows of himself!

AEETES.

I cannot give you hope. Await the end.

ACTUS TERTIUS

5

CHORUS.

We fear indeed that in the trap
Of wiles our king is taken.
Lachesis shakes a careless lap
And dooms divine awaken!
A desolate and cruel hap
In this sad hour is shaken.

The desperate son and violent
Of Helios hath designed
A fate more hard than Pelias meant,
Revolving in his mind
Mischief to catch the coiled ascent
Of groaning humankind.

O bright Athena, hitherto
Protectress of the quest,
Divide the deep descending blue!
Be present, ever-blest!
Bring thou the hero Jason through
To victory—and rest!

MEDEA.

Not by Athena's calm omnipotence,
O heroes, look for safety! Little men,
Looking to God, are blinded; mighty ones,
Seeking His presence, reel before the glance;
And They, the greatest that may be of men,
Become that Light, and care no whit for earth.

But all your prayers are answered by yourselves,
As I myself achieve this thought of mine.

CHORUS.

To me thou seemest to blaspheme the gods.

MEDEA.

Belike I seem, O ye of little wit.

CHORUS.

Surely thy tender years and gentle looks
Belie such hatred to our king! I scorn
To triumph on an enemy once fallen.

MEDEA.

Fools always! I am tenderer than my years,
And gentler than my glances.

CHORUS.

Sayst thou—what?

MEDEA.

Ye know me a most powerful sorceress.

CHORUS.

So I have heard, O lotus-footed one!
Nathless I see not any miracle.

MEDEA.

Last night the heavy-hearted audience
Broke up, and Jason wended wearily
His way, oppressed by direful bodements of
The fate of this forenoon. I saw him go
Sad, and remembered how sublime he stood,

ACTUS TERTIUS

7

Bronzed with a ruder sun than ours, and scarred
(Rough tokens of old battles) yet so calm
And mild (with all that vigour) that to me
Came a swift pity—the enchanter's bane.
That I flung from me. But my subtle soul
Struck its own bosom with the sword of thought,
So that I saw not pity, but desire!

CHORUS.

Surely a bane more potent than the first.

MEDEA.

Love is itself enchantment!

CHORUS.

Some kind god
Whispers from this a little light of hope.

MEDEA.

Only the hopeless are the happy ones.

CHORUS.

But didst thou turn him from his gleaming goal?
Cover that shame with sweeter shame than this?

MEDEA.

Thou knowest that his vigil was to keep,
Invoking all Olympus all the night,
And then to yoke the oxen, and to plough
The fearful furrow, sow the dreadful seed,
Smite down the armies, and assuage the pest
Of slime thrice coiled about the sacred grove.

CHORUS.

Thy bitter love disturbed that solitude?

MEDEA.

Not bitter, heroes. See ye yet the end?

CHORUS.

Our good quest ended by thy father's hate,
And by thy own hour's madness! This I see.

MEDEA.

But if he gain the Fleece?

CHORUS.

A blissful end.

MEDEA.

This end and that are moulded diversely.

CHORUS.

Riddle no more, nor ply with doubtful hope
Hearts ready to rejoice and to despair
Equally minded.

MEDEA.

At the midmost hour,
His mind given up to sleepless muttering
Of charms not mine—decrees Olympian—
All on a sudden he felt fervent arms
Flung round him, and a sweet hot body's rush
Lithe to embrace him, and a cataract
Of amber-scented hair hissing about
His head, and in the darkness two great eyes
Flaming above him, and the whole face filled

ACTUS TERTIUS

9

With fire and shapen as kisses. And those arms
And kisses and mad movements of quick love
Burnt up his being, and his life was lost
In woman's love at last!

CHORUS.

Unseemly act!

Who dared thus break on meditation?

MEDEA.

I.

CHORUS.

Surely thy passion mastered thee, O queen!

MEDEA.

I tell you—thus the night passed.

CHORUS.

Verily,

The woman raves.

MEDEA.

Such victory as this
Outsails all shame. Before the dawn was up
I bound such talismans about his breast
That fire and steel grow dew and flowery wreaths
For all their power to hurt him. Presently
I made a posset, drugged with somnolence,
Sleepy with poppy and white hellebore,
Fit for the dragon. This was my design.

CHORUS.

Beware thy father's anger when he finds
His plans thus baffled! He will murder us.

G

MEDEA.

Heroes indeed ye are, and lion hearts.

CHORUS.

No woman need school me in bravery.

MEDEA.

Rather a hare.

CHORUS.

Most impudent of whores!

MEDEA.

But when my husband comes victorious
Fleece-laden, he will rather——

CHORUS.

Wilt thou then

Further my ruin, making known this shame?

MEDEA.

Here is the Argive sense of gratitude.
Let me stir up its subtler thought, and show
What favours ye may gather afterward
From hands and lips ye scorn—not courteously.

CHORUS.

What? Canst thou save me from this newer doom?

MEDEA.

I love your leader with no mortal love,
But with the whole strength of a sorceress.

CHORUS.

It seems indeed thy hot will can bewitch
Our chaste one with one action impudent.

ACTUS TERTIUS

11

MEDEA.

I will not leave him ever in the world.

CHORUS.

Persistence in these ills—will cure them not.

“Worst” is the hunter, “worse” the hound, when “bad”

Is the stag’s name.

MEDEA.

We rule Iolchus’ land.

CHORUS.

Indeed the hunter follows. I despise
Lewd conduct in the lowest, and detest
Spells hurtful to the head, when ancient hags
Brew their bad liquors at the waning moon,
Barking their chants of murder. But to rule
A land, and wive a king, and breed to him
Kings—then such persons are unsuitable.

MEDEA.

Unless these words were well repented of
I might transform ye into——

CHORUS.

Stay, great queen!

MEDEA.

Well for your respite comes this messenger.

MESSENGER.

Queen and fair mother of great kings unborn,
And mighty chosen of the land of Greece,
A tidings of deep bliss is born to you.

CHORUS.

Tell me that Jason has achieved the quest.

MESSENGER.

Truth is no handmaid unto happiness.

CHORUS.

What terror dost thou fill my heart withal?

MEDEA.

O timorous heroes! Let the herald speak!
Who meets fear drives her back; who flees from fear
Stumbles; who cares not, sees her not. Speak on!

THE MESSENGER.

Terrible bellowings as of angry bulls
Broke from the stable as the first swift shaft
Of dawn smote into it: and stampings fierce
Resounded, shaking the all-mother earth.
Whereunto came the calm and kingly man,
Smiling as if a sweet dream still beguiled
His waking brows; not caring any more
For spring or summer; heeding least of all
That tumult of ox-fury. Suddenly
A light sprang in his face; the great hand shot
Forth, and broke in the brass-bound door; the day
Passed with him inwards; then the brazen hoofs
Beat with a tenfold fury on the stone.
But Jason, swiftly turned, evaded these,
And chose two oxen from that monstrous herd
To whose vast heads he strode, and by the horns

Plucked them. Then fire, devouring, sprang at him
From furious nostrils: and indignant breath,
Fountains of seething smoke, spat forth at him.
But with no tremor of aught that seemed like fear
Drew them by sheer strength from their place, and yoked
Their frenzy to his plough, and with the goad
Urged them, thrice trampling the accurséd field
Until the furrows flamed across the sun,
Treading whose glory stood Apollo's self
As witness of the deed. Then a last thrust
Savage, drove them less savage to their stalls,
And Jason turned and laughed. Then drew he out
The dreadful teeth of woe, Cadmean stock
Of Thebes' old misery, and presently
Pacing the furrowed field, he scattered them
With muttered words of power athwart the course
Of the bright moon, due path of pestilence
And terror. Ere the last bone fell to earth
The accurséd harvest sprang to life. Armed men,
Fiery with anger, rose upon the earth
While Jason stood, one witnessing a dream,
Not one who lives his life. The sword and spear
Turn not to him, but mutual madness strikes
The warriors witless, and fierce wrath invades
Their hearts of fury, and with arms engaged
They fell upon each other silently
And slew, and slew. As in the middle seas
A mirage flashes out and passes, so
The phantoms faded, and the way was clear.

Thus, stepping ever proud and calm, he went
Unto the grove of Ares, where the worm,
Huge in his hatred, guarded all. But now
Sunk in some stupor, surely sent of Zeus,
He stirred not. Stepping delicately past
The dragon, then came Jason to the grove
And saw what tree umbrageous bore the fruit
That he had saddened for so long. And he,
Rending the branches of that wizard Oak,
With a strong grasp tore down the Fleece of Gold.
Then came a voice: "Woe, woe! Aea's isle!
The glory is departed!" And a voice
Answered it "Woe!" Then Jason seemed to see
Some Fear behind the little former fears;
And his face blanched a moment, as beholding
Some Fate, some distant grief. Then, catching sight
Now of the glory of his gain, he seemed
Caught in an ecstasy, treading the earth
As in a brighter dream than Aphrodite
Sent ever to a man, he turned himself
(We could not see him for the golden flame
Burning about him!) moving hitherward.
But I took horse and hasted, since reward
May greet such tidings, and for joy to see
Your joy exceed my joy.

MEDEA.

Reward indeed
Awaits thee from such folk as us, who stand

ACTUS TERTIUS

15

In fear of life, when great Aeetes hears
This news, and how all came.

MESSENGER.

My lady's smile
Is the reward I sought, not place nor gold.

MEDEA.

Thou hast it, child.

SECOND MESSENGER.

The hero is at hand.

CHORUS.

O happy of mortals!
O frontier of fear,
The impassible portals!
Ye heavens, give ear!
Our song shall be rolled in the praise of the gold, and its
glory be told where the heavenly fold rejoices to
hold the stars in its sphere.

O hero Iolchian!
Warrior king!
From the kingdom Colchian
The Fleece dost bring!
Our song shall be sung and its melody flung where the
Lyre and the Tongue are fervid and young, all
islands among where the Sirens sing.

Thou bearest, strong shoulder,
The sunbright fleece!
Glow swifter and bolder
And brighter—and cease!
O glory of light! O woven of night! O shining and
bright! O dream of delight! How splendid the
sight for the dwellers of Greece!

Gained is the guerdon!
The prize is won.
The fleecy burden,
The soul of the sun!
The toil is over; the days discover high joys that hover
of lover and lover, and fates above her are fallen
and done.

JASON.

Queen of this people! O my heart's desire
Spotless, the Lady of my love, and friends
By whose heroic ardours I am found
Victor at last, well girded with the spoil
Of life in gleaming beauty, and this prize
Thrice precious, my Medea—all is won!
Needs only now the favouring kiss of Eurus,
Bright-born of Eos, to fulfil for us
The last of all the labours, to inspire
The quick-raised sail, and fill that flushing gold
With thrice desired breath, that once again

Our prow plunge solemn in the Argive waters
To strains of music—victory at peace
Mingling with sweeter epithalamy—
To tell our friends how happy was the quest.

MEDEA.

But not those strains of music, though divine
From Orpheus' wingéd lyre, exalt at all
Our joy to joy, beyond all music's power!

CHORUS.

I fear Aeetes and the Pelian guile.

JASON.

Fear is but failure, herald of distress!

MEDEA.

What virtue lives there in the coward's heart?

CHORUS.

In sooth, I have no fear at all—to flee.

JASON.

Night, like a mist, steals softly from the East.
The hand of darkness gathers up the folds
Of day's gold garment, and the valleys sink
Into slow sadness, though the hills retain
That brilliance for a little.

CHORUS.

Let us go!

Methinks that under cover of the night
I may escape Aeetes.

JASON.

If he chase,
Our Argo is not battered by rough winds
So far but what some fight were possible.

MEDEA. [*Leads forward ABSYRTUS.*]

I know a better way than that, my lord.
This boy shall come with us.

JASON.

Ah, not to Greece!
Aea needs to-morrow's king.

MEDEA.

"With us"
I said. "To Greece"—I said not.

CHORUS.

What is this?
Thou hintest at some dangerous destiny.

MEDEA.

Come, love, to the long years of love with me!

JASON.

Form, heroes, and in solemn order stride;
The body-guardians of the Golden Fleece!

ACTUS TERTIUS

19

MEDEA.

Guarding your king and queen on every side—

CHORUS.

We sail triumphant to the land of Greece.

MEDEA.

A woman's love, a woman's power be told
Through ages, gainers of the Fleece of Gold.

EXPLICIT ACTUS TERTIUS.

ARGONAUTAE

ACTUS
QUARTUS

SIRENAE

SIRENAE.

To
COUNCILLOR VON ECKARTSHAUSEN
AND
LAURA GRAEME,
LUCILE HILL,
MARY BEATON,
ON
THE OCCASION
OF
HOMECOMING

ARGONAUTAE.

ACTUS QUARTUS.

JASON, MEDEA, ORPHEUS, THESEUS, HERACLES,
Chorus of Heroes, the Sirens.

SCENE: *The Argo.*

MEDEA.

Ay! I would murder not my brother only,
But tear my own limbs, strew them on the sea,
To keep one fury from the man I love!

CHORUS.

This act and speech are much akin to madness.

MEDEA.

Remember that your own skins pay the price.

CHORUS.

I now remember somewhat of the voice
Of the oracle, that Madness should hunt hard
On the thief's furtive track, upon the prow
Brooding, and at the table president,
And spouse-like in the bed.

ARGONAUTAE

MEDEA.

But this is like
That Indian fable of a king: how he,
Taking some woman—an indecent act
Not proper to be done!—against the will
Of priests or princes, sought the nuptial bed
And

“Climbed the bed’s disastrous side,
He found a serpent, not a bride;
And scarcely daring to draw breath,
He passed the dumb night-hours with death,
Till in the morning cold and gray
The hooded fear glided away.
Which morning saw ten thousand pay
The price of jesting with a king!”—

JASON.

Indeed these toils and dangerous pursuits,
Labours and journeys, go to make one mad.
Well were it to beguile our weariness
With song.

MEDEA.

And here is the sole king of song.

ORPHEUS.

My song breaks baffled on the rocks of time
If thy bewitching beauty be the theme.

MEDEA.

Sing me thy song, sweet poet, of the sea



ACTUS QUARTUS

5

That song of swimming when thy love lost sense
Before the passion of the Infinite.

JASON.

The more so as my master warns me oft
Of late how near that island is, where dwell
The alluring daughters of Melpomene.

ORPHEUS.

Light shed from seaward over breakers bending
 Kiss-wise to the emerald hollows: light divine
 Whereof the sun is God, the sea his shrine;
Light in vibrations rhythmic; light unending;
Light sideways from the girdling crags extending
 Unto this lone and languid head of mine;
 Light, that fulfils creation as with wine,
Flows in the channels of the deep: light, rending
 The adamantine columns of the night,
 Is laden with the love-song of the light.

Light, pearly-glimmering through dim gulf and hollow,
 Below the foam-kissed lips of all the sea;
 Light shines from all the sky and up to me
From the amber floors of sand: Light calls Apollo!
The shafts of fire fledged of the eagle follow
 The crested surf, and strike the shore, and flee
 Far from green cover, nymph-enchanted lea,
Fountain, and plume them white as the sea-swallow,
 And turn and quiver in the ocean, seeming
 The glances of a maiden kissed, or dreaming.

Light, as I swim through rollers green and gleaming,
Sheds its most subtle sense to penetrate
This heart I thought impervious to Fate.
Now the sweet light, the full delight, is beaming
Through me and burns me: all my flesh is teeming
With the live kisses of the sea, my mate,
My mistress, till the fires of life abate
And leave me languid, man-forgotten, deeming
I see in sleep, in many-coloured night,
More hope than in the flame-waves of the light.

Light! ever light! I swim far out and follow
The footsteps of the wind, and light invades
My desolate soul, and all the cypress shades
Glow with transparent lustre, and the hollow
I thought I had hidden in my heart must swallow
The bitter draught of Truth; no Nereid maids
Even in my sea are mine; the whole sea's glades
And hills and springs are void of my Apollo—
The Sea herself my tune and my desire!
The Sun himself my lover and my lyre!

CHORUS.

This song is sweeter than the honeycomb.

MEDEA.

Nearly as sweet as good friends quarrelling.

JASON.

Look, friends, methinks I see a silvern shape
Like faint mist floating on the farthest sea.

ACTUS QUARTUS

7

MEDEA.

I see a barren rock above the tides.

JASON.

I hear a sound like water whispering.

MEDEA.

I hear a harsh noise like some ancient crone
Muttering curses.

JASON.

Now I hear a song.

'Tis like some shape of sleep that moans for joy,
Some bridal sob of love!

MEDEA.

O Son of God!

My poet, swiftly leap the live lyre forth!
Else we are all enchanted—yet to me
This song is nowise lovely. But in him
I note the live look of the eyes leap up,
And all his love for me forgotten straight
At the mere echo of that tune.

ORPHEUS.

Hark, friends!

Aea's tune—my Colchian harbour-song!

I hear the waters faint and far,
And look to where the Polar Star,
Half hidden in the haze, divides
The double chanting of the tides;

But, where the harbour's gloomy mouth
Welcomes the stranger to the south,
The water shakes, and all the sea
Grows silver suddenly.

As one who standing on the moon
Sees the vast horns in silver hewn,
Himself in darkness, and beholds
How silently all space unfolds
Into her shapeless breast the spark
And sacred phantom of the dark ;
So in the harbour-horns I stand
Till I forget the land.

Who sails through all that solemn space
Out to the twilight's secret place,
The sleepy waters move below
His ship's imaginary flow.
No song, no lute, so lowly chaunts
In woods where still Arisbe haunts,
Wrapping the wanderer with her tresses
Into untold caresses.

For none of all the sons of men
That hath known Artemis, again
Turns to the warmer earth, nor vows
His secrets to another spouse.
The moon resolves her beauty in
The sea's deep kisses salt and keen ;

The sea assumes the lunar light,
And he—their eremite!

In their calm intercourse and kiss
Even hell itself no longer is;
For nothing in their love abides
That passes not beneath their tides,
And whoso bathes in light of theirs,
And water, changes unawares
To be no separate soul, but be
Himself the moon and sea.

Not all the wealth that flowers shed,
And sacred streams, on that calm head;
Not all the earth's spell-weaving dream
And scent of new-turned earth shall seem
Again indeed his mother's breast
To breathe like sleep and give him rest;
He lives or dies in subtler swoon
Between the sea and moon.

So standing, gliding, undeterred
By any her alluring word
That calls from older forest glades,
My soul forgets the gentle maids
That wooed me in the scarlet bowers,
And golden cluster-woof of flowers;
Forgets itself, content to be
Between the moon and sea.

No passion stirs their depth, nor moves;
No life disturbs their sweet dead loves;
No being holds a crown or throne;
They are, and I in them, alone,
Only some lute-player grown star
Is heard like whispering flowers afar;
And some divided, single tune
Sobs from the sea and moon.

Amid thy mountains shall I rise,
O moon, and float about thy skies?
Beneath thy waters shall I roam,
O sea, and call thy valleys home?
Or on Daedalian oarage fare
Forth in the interlunar air?
Imageless mirror-life! to be
Sole between moon and sea.

CHORUS.

No song can lure us while he sings so well.

JASON.

But look! I see entrancing woman-forms
That beckon—fairy-like and not of earth.
So, fitter than the bed of this my queen
To rest heroic limbs!

MEDEA.

The wretched one!
Thou knowest that their kiss is death!

ACTUS QUARTUS

11

JASON.

Perhaps.

It were their kiss.

MEDEA.

Are not my kisses sweet?

JASON.

Listen, they sing. This time the words ring true,
Sailing across that blue abyss between.
Like young birds winging their bright flight the notes
Glimmer across the sea.

MEDEA.

They sing, they sing !

PARTHENOPE.

O mortal, tossed on life's unceasing ocean,
Whose waves of joy and sorrow never cease,
Eternal change—one changeless thing, commotion !
Even in death no hint of calm and peace!—
Here is the charm, the life-assuaging potion,
Here is a better home for thee than Greece!
Come, lover, to my deep, soft, sleepy breast!
Here is thy rest!

O mortal, sad is life! But in my kisses
Thou may'st forget its fever-parchéd thirst.
Age, death, and sorrow fade in slender blisses:
My swoon of love drinks up the draught accurst.
And all thy seasons grow as sweet as this is,
One constant summer in sleep's bosom nursed.

All storm and sunlight, star and season, cease
Here is thy peace.

O mortal, sad is love! But my dominion
Extends beyond love's ultimate abode.
Eternity itself is but a minion,
Lighting my way on the untravelled road.
Gods shelter 'neath one shadow of my pinion.
Thou only tread the path none else hath trode!
Come, lover, in my breast all blooms above,
Here is thy love!

MEDEA.

My poet, now! The one song in the world!

ORPHEUS.

Above us on the mast is spread
The splendour of the fleece!
Before us, Argive maidens tread
The glowing isles of Greece!
Behind us, fear and toil are dead:
Below, the breakers cease!
The Holy Light is on my head—
My very name is Peace!

The water's music moves; and swings
The sea's eternal breast.
The wind above us whistles, rings,
And wafts us to the West.

ACTUS QUARTUS

13

Greece lures us on with beckonings
And sighs of slumber blest.
I am not counted with the kings—
My very name is Rest!

Medea shoots her sweetest glance
And Jason bends above—
Young virgins in Iolchus dance,
Hearing the news thereof.
The heroes—see their glad advance!
Hath Greece not maids enough?
I lie in love's ecstatic trance.
My very name is Love!

LIGIA.

Come over the water, love, to me!
Come over the little space!
Come over, my lover, and thou shalt see
The beauty of my face!
Come over the water! I will be
A bride and a queen and a lover to thee!

Come over the water, love, and lie!
All day and all night to kiss!
Come over, my lover, an hour to die
In the language-baffling bliss!
Come over the water! Must I sigh?
Thy lover and bride and queen am I!

Come over the water, love, and bide
An hour in my swift caress!
So short is the space, and so smooth the tide—
More smooth is my loveliness!
Come over the water, love, to my side!
I am thy lover and queen and bride!

MEDEA.

Sing, poet, ere the rash fool leap!

JASON.

Ah, Zeus!

ORPHEUS.

The hearts of Greeks with sharper flames
Burn than with one fire of all fire,
We have the Races and the Games,
The song, the chisel, and the lyre;
We have the altar, we the shrine,
And ours the joy of love and wine.

Why take one pleasure, put aside
The myriad bliss of life diverse?
Unchanging joy will soon divide
Into the likeness of a curse.
Have we no maidens, slender, strong,
Daughters of tender-throated song?

I swear by Aphrodite's eyes
Our Grecian maids are fairer far!
What love as sweet as theirs is lies

In Sun or planet, moon or star?
What nymphs as sweet as ours are dwell
By foreign grove and alien well?

With every watchman's cheery cry,
 "Land ho!" through all the journeying years
Our ever-hoping hearts reply,
 "A land of bliss at last appears."
But what land laps a foreign foam
So sweet as is the hero's home?

At every port the novel sights
 Charm for an hour—delusive bliss.
On every shore the false delights
 Of maidens ply the barbarous kiss.
But where did hero think to stay
Lulled in their love beyond a day?

No shoreland whistles to the wind
 So musically as Thrace: no town
So gladdens the toil-weary mind
 As brave Athenae: no renown
Stands so divine in war and peace
As the illustrious name of Greece.

This island of the subtle song
 Shall vanish as the shaken spray
Tossed by the billow far and strong
 On marble coasts: we will not stay!

Dreams lure not those who ply the sail
Before, the home! behind, the gale!

JASON.

Ah! I am torn, I am torn!

MEDEA.

God's poet, hail!
Help us, Apollo! Light of Sun, awake!
This is the desperate hour.

JASON.

I have no strength.

MEDEA.

Beware the third, the awful ecstasy!

ORPHEUS.

A higher spell controls a lower song.
Listen, they sing!

JASON.

Joy! Joy! they sing, they sing!

LEUCOSIA.

O lover, I am lonely here!
O lover, I am weeping!
Each pearl of ocean is a tear
Let fall while love was sleeping.

A tear is made of fire and dew
And saddened with a smile;
The sun's laugh in the curving blue
Lasts but a little while.

ACTUS QUARTUS

17

The night-winds kiss the deep: the stars
Shed laughter from above;
But night must pass dawn's prison bars:
Night hath not tasted love.

With me the night is fallen in day;
The day swoons back to night;
The white and black are woven in gray,
Faint sleep of silken light.

A strange soft light about me shed
Devours the sense of time:
Hovers about my sleepy head
Some sweet persistent rhyme.

Beneath my breast my love may hear
Deep murmur of the billows—
O gather me to thee, my dear,
On soft forgetful pillows!

O gather me in arms of love
As maidens plucking posies,
Or mists that fold about a dove,
Or valleys full of roses!

O let me fade and fall away
From waking into sleep,
From sleep to death, from gold to gray,
Deep as the skies are deep!

O let me fall from death to dream,
Eternal monotone ;
Faint eventide of sleep supreme
With thee and love alone !

A jewelled night of star and moon
Shall watch our bridal chamber,
Bending the blue rays to the tune
Of softly-sliding amber.

Dim winds shall whisper echoes of
Our slow ecstatic breath,
Telling all worlds how sweet is love,
How beautiful is death.

MEDEA.

Sing, Orpheus, this doth madden them the most.
Should one man leap—This tune is terrible !

ORPHEUS.

I am not moved, although I am a man.
So strong a safeguard is cool chastity.

MEDEA.

But love thou me ! My husband is distraught.

ORPHEUS.

Madness is on him for thy punishment.

MEDEA.

Sing, therefore !

ORPHEUS.

This last song of theirs was sweet.

ACTUS QUARTUS

19

MEDEA.

Thine therefore should be sweeter.

ORPHEUS.

The Gods grant it!

Lift up this love of peace and bliss,
The starry soul of wine,
Destruction's formidable kiss,
The lamp of the divine :
This shadow of a nobler name
Whose life is strife, whose soul is fame !

I rather will exalt the soul
Of man to loftier height,
And kindle at a livelier coal
The subtler soul of Light.
From these soft splendours of a dream
I turn, and seek the Self supreme.

This world is shadow-shapen of
The bitterness of pain.
Vain are the little lamps of love !
The light of life is vain !
Life, death, joy, sorrow, age and youth
Are phantoms of a further truth.

Beyond the splendour of the world,
False glittering of the gold,
A Serpent is in slumber curled
In wisdom's sacred cold.

Life is the flaming of that flame.
Death is the naming of that name.

The forehead of the snake is bright
With one immortal star,
Lighting her coils with living light
To where the nenuphar
Sleeps for her couch. All darkness dreams
The thing that is not, only seems.

That star upon the serpent's head
Is called the soul of man :
That light in shadows subtly shed
The glamour of life's plan.
The sea whereon that lotus grows
Is thought's abyss of tears and woes.

Leave Sirenusa ! Even Greece
Forget ! they are not there !
By worship cometh not the Peace,
The Silence not by prayer !
Leave the illusions, life and time
And death, and seek that star sublime—

Until the lotus and the sea
And snake no longer are,
And single through eternity
Exists alone the Star,
And utter Knowledge rise and cease
In that which is beyond the Peace !

ACTUS QUARTUS

21

JASON.

Those isles have faded : was this vision true ?

HERACLES.

I know not what hath passed : I seem asleep
Still, with the dream yet racing in my brain.

THESEUS.

There was a sweetness : whether sight or song
I know not.

JASON.

But my veins grew strong and swollen,
And madness came upon me.

MEDEA.

You are here,
Let that suffice. Remember not !

ORPHEUS.

But now
I see the haze lift on the water-way,
And hidden headlands loom again.

JASON.

I know
The pleasant portals.

CHORUS.

Here is home at last.

ORPHEUS.

The sunset comes: the mist is lifted now
To let the last kiss of the daylight fall
Once ere night whisper "Sleep!"

ARGONAUTAE

JASON.

And see! the ship
Glides between walls of purple.

MEDEA.

The green land
Cools the tired eyes.

CHORUS.

The rocks stand sentinel.

MEDEA.

Let still the song that saved us gladden us.
Lift up thy lyre, sweet Orpheus, on the sea.

ORPHEUS.

Over a sea like stained glass
At sunset like a chrysopras:—
Our smooth-oared vessel over-rides
Crimson and green and purple tides.
Between the rocky isles we pass,
And greener islets gay with grass;
Between the over-arching sides
Our pinnacle glides.

Just by the Maenad-haunted hill
Songs rise into the air, and thrill,
Like clustered birds at evening
When love outlingers rain and spring.
Faint faces of strange dancers spill
Their dewy scent; and sweet and chill
The wind comes faintly whispering
On wanton wing.

Between the islands sheer and steep
Our craft treads noiseless o'er the deep.
 Turned to the gold heart of the west,
 The sun's last sigh of love expressed
Ere the lake glimmer, borrow sleep
From clouds and tinge their edges; weep
 That night brings love not to his breast,
 But only rest.

We move toward the golden track
Shed in the water: we look back
 Eastward, where rose is set to warn
 Promise and prophecy of dawn
Reflected, lest the ocean lack
In any space serene or slack
 Some colour, blushing o'er the fawn
 Dim-lighted lawn.

And under all the shadowy shapes
Of steep and silent bays and capes
 The water takes its darkest hue;
 Catches no laughter from the blue;
No purple ray or gold escapes,
But dim green shadow comes and drapes
 Its lustre: thus the night burns through
 Tall groves of yew.

Thither, ah thither! Hollow vales
Trembling with early nightingales!

Languish, O sea of sleep! Young moon!
Dream on above in maiden swoon!
None daring to invoke the gales
To shake our sea, and swell our sails.
Not song, but silence, were a boon—
Save for this tune.

Round capes grown darker as night falls,
We see at last the splendid walls
That ridge the bay; the town lies there
Lighted (the temple's hour for prayer)
At grave harmonious intervals.
The grand voice of some seaman calls,
Just as the picture fades, aware
How it was fair.

JASON.

A thousand victories bring us to the shore
Whence we set out: look forth! The people come
Moving with lights about the anchorage
To greet the heroes of the Golden Fleece.
My Queen! Medea! Welcome unto Greece!

EXPLICIT ACTUS QUARTUS.

ARGONAUTAE

ACTUS
QUINTUS

ARES

ARES.

L

To
COMMON SENSE
AND TO THE
QABALISTS
CLERGYMEN
PEERS
ALCHEMISTS
SUBALTERNS
SORCERERS
THIEVES
NECROMANCERS
MISSIONARIES
LUNATICS
DOCTORS
AND
ROSICRUCIANS
PROSTITUTES
AMONG WHOM I HAVE LIVED
(BEING IN ENGLAND)
ON
THE OCCASION
OF
MY GOING AWAY

ARGONAUTAE.

ACTUS QUINTUS.

JASON, MEDEA, PELIAS, ACASTUS, ALCESTIS *and her*
Sisters, MADNESS.

SCENE : *The Palace at Iolchus.*

MADNESS.

Black Ares hath called
Me forth from the deep!
Blind and appalled,
Shall the palace high-walled
Shake as I leap
Over the granite,
The marble over,
One step to span it,
One flight to hover,
Like a moon round a planet,
A dream round a lover!

How shall I come?
Shrieking and yelling?

ARGONAUTAE

Or quiet and dumb
 To the heart of the dwelling?
Silently striding,
 Whispering terror
 Into their ears;
Watching, abiding,
 Madness and error,
 Brooder of fears!

Thus will I bring
 Black Ares to honour,
Draw the black sting
 Of the serpent upon her!
How foolish to fight
 With the warrior God
Who brings victory bright
 Or defeat with a nod,
Who standeth to smite
 With a spear and a rod!
Here is the woman,
 Thinking no evil,
Wielding the human
 By might of a devil!
But I will mock her
 With cunning design
In my malice lock her.
 The doom is divine!

MEDEA.

Ai! Ai! This rankles sorely in my mind

ACTUS QUINTUS

5

That Pelias should wander, free to slide
His sidelong looks among our courtiers
Ripe ever for some mischief. Yet methinks
There is a wandering other than this present—
Say, by the Stygian waves, unburied corpse!—
But, for the means? It ill befits our power
And grace—my husband's honour—to stretch forth
The arm of murder o'er the head of age.
But surely must be means——

MADNESS.

The prophecy!

MEDEA.

Happy my thought be! I have found it! Ha!
“Athena shall relent not till the king
Shall die and live.” Vainly the prophet meant
Mere transference of the crown. I'll twist his saying
To daze the children—fools they are! So mask
Evil beneath the waxen face of Good,
Trick out Calamity in robes of Luck—
Come, children! Is the sun bright? And your eyes?

ALCESTIS.

Dear queen, all's well with us. Such happiness
Crowds daylight—even sleep seems sorrowful,
Though bright with dainty dreams!

FIRST DANAID.

But you are sad!

M

MEDEA.

I meditate the ancient prophecy.
Thus a foreboding is upon my heart,
Seeing some danger follow yet, o'erhang
Our heads, poised gaily in incertitude!

SECOND DANAID.

Nay, grieve not, dear Medea! All men say
The prophecy is well fulfilled.

MEDEA.

Ay me!

"Until the king shall die and live again."

ALCESTIS.

What means that?

MEDEA.

I have meditated long.

SECOND DANAID.

To what sad end?

MEDEA.

At the full end I see

Allusion to my magic—to that spell
Whereby an old man may renew his youth.

ALCESTIS.

Our father!

MEDEA.

You have guessed aright, my child.
Your father must abandon his old age
And—by my magic—find sweet youth again!

ACTUS QUINTUS

7

DANAIDES.

But this is very difficult to do.

MEDEA.

For me such miracles are merely play,
Serving to while away the idle hours
While Jason hunts——

ALCESTIS.

How grand it were to see
Our aged father rival the strong youths
In feats of great agility!

MEDEA.

Agreed!

But surely you should work the charm yourselves.
For children magic is a blithesome game!

DANAIDES.

Dear lady! teach us how to say the spell!

MEDEA.

Words must be aided by appalling deeds!

ALCESTIS.

O! O! you frighten us.

MEDEA.

Be brave, my child!

I too passed through unutterable things!

ALCESTIS.

Let me fetch father!

MEDEA.

Nay, consider first.
Would he consent? The process is severe!

DANAIDES.

We know the sire is not exactly brave,
Though very wise and good.

MEDEA.

'Tis clear to me;
Without his knowledge we must do the deed.

ALCESTIS.

What is this "deed"?

MEDEA.

A caldron is prepared;
And, having hewn your father limb from limb,
We seethe him in a broth of magic herbs.

ALCESTIS.

And then?

MEDEA.

The proper incantations said,
There rises from the steam a youthful shape
More godlike than like man. And he will fall
In kind embraces on his children's necks.

ALCESTIS.

O queen, this process seems indeed severe.

MEDEA.

Without his knowledge must the thing be done..

ACTUS QUINTUS

9

DANAIDES.

This also seems to us no easy task.

MEDEA.

He sleeps through noon, while others are abroad.

ALCESTIS.

Let us make haste ! Dear queen, how good you are !

MEDEA.

One thing remember ! While you say the spell—
Here is the parchment !—let no thought arise
In any of your minds !

ALCESTIS. [*To her Sisters.*]
Remember that !

MEDEA.

Else—Ototototoi !

FIRST DANAID.

What woe is this ?

MEDEA.

The charm is broken.

SECOND DANAID.

And our father——

MEDEA.

Lost !

DANAIDES.

Ai Ai ! Ai Ai ! Ai Ai !

MEDEA.

Ai Ai ! Ai Ai !

ALCESTIS.

Be brave, dear sisters, pluck your courage up !
Easy this one condition ! All is safe.

MEDEA.

Haste then ! Good luck attend you ! When the hunt
Returns, how joyful——

FIRST DANAID.

Striding vigorous
The man renewed grasps Jason in embrace
Worthy of Heracles.

ALCESTIS.

Thanks, thanks, dear queen !
We go, we go !

MEDEA.

The Goddess be your speed !
Thus will the danger pass ! That vicious fool
Shall cease his plots against my best beloved.
No taint of fell complicity shall touch
My honour in this matter. I will sleep
Through the delicious hours of breezy noon,
Lulled by sweet voices of my singing maids ;
Secure at least that no one will attempt
To wreck my virtue or—restore my youth !

CHORUS.

O sleep of lazy love, be near
In dreams to lift the veil,
And silence from the shadowy sphere
To conjure in our lady's ear !—

ACTUS QUINTUS

11

The voices fall and fail;
The light is lowered. O dim sleep,
Over her eyelids creep!

The world of dreams is shapen fair
Beyond a mortal's nod :
A fragrant and a sunny air
Smiles : a man's kisses vanish there,
Grow kisses of a god ;
And in dreams' darkness subtly grows
No Earth-flowered bloom of rose.

O dreams of love and peace, draw nigh !
Hover with shadowy wings !
Let shining shapes of ecstasy
Cover the frail blue veil of sky,
And speak immortal things !
Dream, lady, dream through summer noon,
Lulled by the sleepy tune !

The sense is riven, and the soul
Goes glimmering to the abode,
Where aeons in one moment roll,
And one thought shapes to its control
Body's forgotten load.
Our lady sleeps! Our lady smiles
In far Elysian isles !

FIRST WOMAN.

Thrice have I crept towards the bed, and thrice

An unseen hand has caught the uplifted knife,
A grinning face lurked out from the blank air
Between me and that filthy sorceress.

SECOND WOMAN.

Daily I poison the she-devil's drink,
And nothing harms her!

THIRD WOMAN.

I have a toad whose breath
Destroys all life——

CHORUS.

Thou dealest in such arts?

THIRD WOMAN.

Ay! for this hate's sake. Are we sisters all
Herein?

CHORUS.

True sisters!

THIRD WOMAN.

The familiar soul
Sucks at her mouth—She sickens not nor dies;
More poisonous than he.

FIRST WOMAN.

Ah! beast of hell!

What may avail us?

SECOND WOMAN.

Jason is quite lost
In her black sorceries.

ACTUS QUINTUS

13

FOURTH WOMAN.

Our chance gone!

FIRST WOMAN.

Our life

Degraded to her service.

SECOND WOMAN.

We who are

Born nobly, are become her minions.

THIRD WOMAN.

Slaves, not handmaidens!

ALCESTIS.

Ototototoi!

Ai Ai! What misery!

FIRST WOMAN.

See! the lady weeps!

ALCESTIS.

Ai Ai! the black fiend, how he dogs my feet!

The fatal day! Ai! Ai!

CHORUS.

What sorrow thus,

Maiden, removes the feet of fortitude?

ALCESTIS.

Who shall arouse him?

CHORUS.

Peace, our lady sleeps

N

ALCESTIS.

Ah me! but she must wake! A black, black deed
Hangs on the house.

MEDEA.

What meets my waking ear?

Alcestis!

ALCESTIS.

Ah, dear queen, lament, lament!
I am undone by my own——

MEDEA.

What! the work?

ALCESTIS.

Alas! Alas! the work!

MEDEA.

Thy father?

ALCESTIS.

Slain

CHORUS.

Ai Ai! the old man slain!

MEDEA.

Ai Ai!

ALCESTIS.

Ai Ai!

MEDEA.

The strong spell broken?

ALCESTIS.

Nay, but thoughts arose,

ACTUS QUINTUS

15

So many thoughts—or ever I was ware—
And he—the cauldron seethes——

MEDEA.

He rises not?

ALCESTIS.

Nought but moist smoke springs up.

MEDEA.

Alas! for me!

All is but lost.

ALCESTIS.

Canst thou do anything?

MEDEA.

Nothing. Ai Ai!

ALCESTIS.

Ai Ai!

CHORUS.

Ai Ai! Ai Ai!

JASON.

What! Shall the hunter find his joy abroad,
And sorrow in his house?

MEDEA.

Thy very hearth
Polluted with the old man's blood!

ACASTUS.

What blood?

Answer me, woman!

MEDEA.

To thy knees, false hound,
Fawning to snap!

ACASTUS.

What misery, pale slaves,
Lament ye?

CHORUS.

Ah! the ill omen! Ah, the day!
Alcestis hath her sire in error slain.

ACASTUS.

Sister!

ALCESTIS.

O brother, bear thine anger back!

ACASTUS.

Speak!

ALCESTIS.

Ah, the prophecy! Ai Ai!

CHORUS.

Ai Ai!

ACASTUS.

What folly masks what wickedness? Speak on!

ALCESTIS.

I cannot speak.

JASON.

Speak thou, Medea!

ACTUS QUINTUS

17

MEDEA.

The child
Hath hewn her sire asunder, seething him
In herbs of sacred power.

ACASTUS.

By thy decree?

MEDEA.

Nay!

MADNESS.

Safer is it to admit to these
Fools—charge the child with lack of fortune!

MEDEA.

Yea!

I bade her take a waxen shape, carved well
To look like the old man——

ALCESTIS.

Nay! nay! the Sire
Himself we stole on sleeping——

CHORUS.

Hewn apart!

Ai Ai!

MEDEA.

I said not thus!

ALCESTIS.

I am so wild,
Bewildered with these tears.

ACASTUS.

Enough of this!

It is the malice of that sorceress
Disguised—she well knows how.

CHORUS.

Thus, thus it is!

We know the witch's cunning.

JASON.

Dogs and fools!

For this ye die.

MADNESS.

Nobility and love

Urge my own sanction to support the wife!

JASON.

I bade my queen prepare this spell. Disputes
Your arrogance my kingship?

ACASTUS.

Ay, indeed!

Now justice turns against thee, fickle jade
As fortune. Mine is a boy's arm, but I
Advance against thee an impervious blade,
And give thee in thy throat and teeth the lie!

JASON.

Boy's bluster!

MADNESS.

Justice will be satisfied.

It will be best to flee!

ACTUS QUINTUS

19

JASON.

But what is this?

A sword? I scorn a sword. I scorn a boy.
Let none suppose me fearful!

MEDEA.

Give not back!

MADNESS.

It will be finer far to go away
As those disdaining aught but their own love.

MEDEA.

Ay! let us leave these folk's ingratitude,
My husband! in thy love alone I rest.
This splendour and this toil alike resume
Our life from the long honeymoon of love
We wish at heart.

JASON.

To Corinth!

MEDEA.

Creon bears
The name of favourable to suppliants.

ACASTUS.

How virtue tames these tameless ones! To-day
I am indeed a man.

MEDEA.

Thou brainless boy!
Thus, thus, and thus I smite thee on the cheek—
Thus, thus I spit upon thy face. Out, dog!

SEMICHORUS 1.

His patience shows as something marvellous.

SEMICHORUS 2.

Virtue takes insult from the fortuneless.

MEDEA.

The curse of Ares dog you into Hades!
I have my reasons [*doubtfully*] ay, my reasons plain!
Going, not forced.

CHORUS.

Yet going—that is good!

JASON.

To Corinth! Bride of my own heart, Medea,
Well hast thou put thy power off for the time
Preferring love to pomp, and peace to revel——

MEDEA.

And the soft cushions of the moss-grown trees
To royal pillows, and the moon's young light
To gaudy lamps of antique workmanship——

JASON.

And music of the birds to harps of gold
Struck by unwilling fingers for gold coin.

MEDEA.

Come! lest the curse I call upon this house
Eat us up also! May the red plague rot
Their bones! I lift my voice and prophesy:
The curse shall never leave this house of fear;
But one by treachery shall slay another,

ACTUS QUINTUS

21

And vengeance shall smite one, and one lay bare
Her breasts in vain for love: until the house
Perish in uttermost red ruin.

CHORUS.

Bah!

Speared wild-cats bravely spit!

JASON.

To Creon, come!

MADNESS.

Black Ares hath chosen
Me wisely, to send
A doom deep-frozen
From now to the end.
Never the curse
Shall pass from the house,
But gather a worse
Hate for a spouse.
The lovers are better
Escaped from my toils
Than these in the fetter
Of the golden spoils.

Yet still lies a doom
For the royal lovers.
Time bears in her womb
That darkness covers
A terror, and waits
The hour that is Fate's.

The work is done. Let miracle inspire
Iolchian voices to the holy hymn,
Praise to black Ares, echo of this doom.

CHORUS.

So fearful is the wrath divine,
That once aroused it shall not sleep,
Though prostrate slaves before the shrine
Pray, praise, do sacrifice, and weep.
Ten generations following past
Shall not exhaust the curse at last.

From father unto son it flees,
An awful heritage of woe.
Wives feel its cancerous prodigies
Invade their wombs; the children know
The inexpiable word, exhaust
Not by a tenfold holocaust.

Thus let mankind abase in fear
Their hearts, nor sacrilege profane
The awful slumber of the seer,
The dread adytum of the fane;
Nor gain the mockery of a fleece,
Losing reality of peace.

Hail to wild Ares! Men, rejoice
That He can thus avenge his shrine!
One solemn cadence of that voice
Peal through the ages, shake the spine

Of very Time, and plunge success
False winged into sure-foot distress!

Hail to black Ares! Warrior, hail!
Thou glory of the shining sword!
What proven armour may avail
Against the vengeance of the Lord?
Athena's favour must withdraw
Before the justice of thy law!

Hail to the Lord of glittering spears
The monarch of the mighty name,
The Master of ten thousand Fears
Whose sword is as a scarlet flame!
Hail to black Ares! Wild and pale
The echo answers me: All Hail!

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