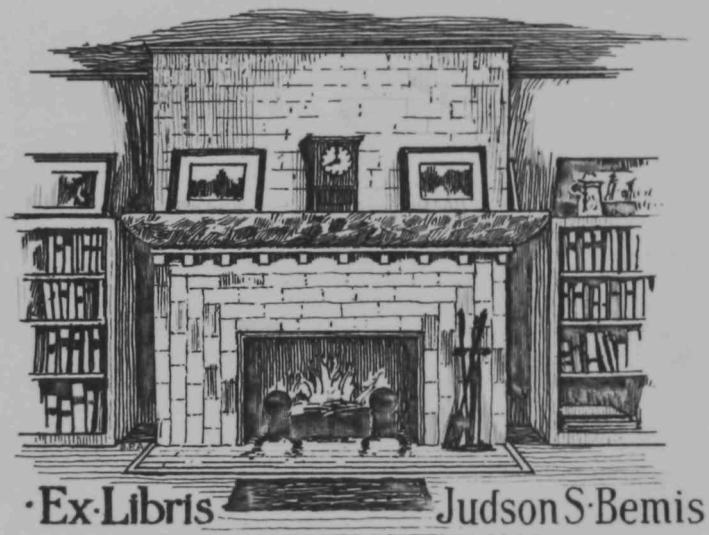


EMPEDOCLES  
ON  
ETNA  
A  
DRAMATIC POEM  
BY  
MATTHEW  
ARNOLD





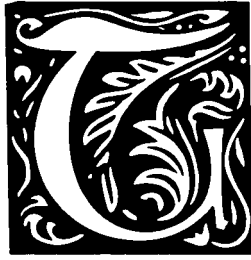
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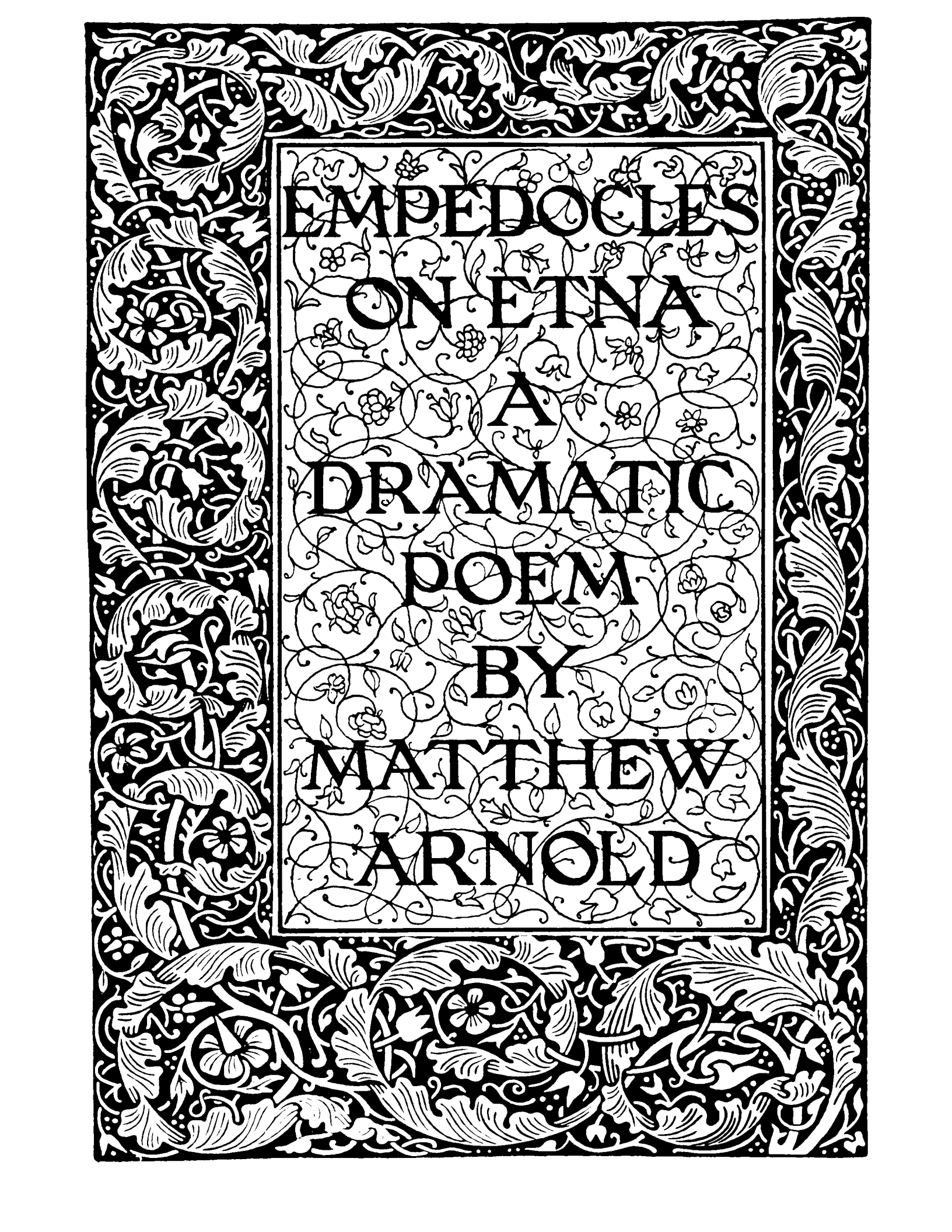


EMPEDOCLES  
ON  
ETNA  
A  
DRAMATIC POEM.  
BY  
MATTHEW  
ARNOLD.

PERSONS.  
EMPEDOCLES.  
PAUSANIAS, a Physician.  
CALLICLES, a young Harp-player.



THE Scene of the Poem is on Mount Etna; at first in the forest region, afterwards on the summit of the mountain.



EMPEDOCLES  
ON ETNA  
A  
DRAMATIC  
POEM  
BY  
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ARNOLD



ACT I.

SCENE I.

MORNING. A Pass in the forest  
region of Etna.

CALLICLES.

(Alone, resting on a rock  
by the path.)



THE MULES, I THINK,  
WILL NOT BE HERE,  
THIS HOUR; THEY  
FEEL THE COOL WET  
TURF UNDER THEIR  
FEET BY THE  
STREAM-SIDE, AFTER  
THE DUSTY LANES IN WHICH  
THEY HAVE TOIL'D ALL NIGHT  
FROM CATANA, AND SCARCELY  
WILL THEY BUDGE A YARD. O PAN,  
HOW GRACIOUS IS THE MOUN-  
TAIN AT THIS HOUR! A  
THOUSAND TIMES HAVE I BEEN  
HERE ALONE, OR WITH THE  
REVELLERS FROM THE MOUN-  
TAIN-TOWNS, BUT NEVER  
ON SO FAIR A MORN;—THE SUN,

Is shining on the brilliant mountain-crests,  
 And on the highest pines; but farther down,  
 Here in the valley, is in shade; the sward  
 Is dark, and on the stream the mist still hangs;  
 One sees one's footprints crush'd in the wet grass,  
 One's breath curls in the air; and on these pines  
 That climb from the stream's edge, the long grey tufts,  
 Which the goats love, are jewell'd thick with dew.  
 Here will I stay till the slow litter comes.  
 I have my harp too — that is well. — Apollo!  
 What mortal could be sick or sorry here?  
 I know not in what mind Empedocles,  
 Whose mules I follow'd, may be coming up,  
 But if, as most men say, he is half mad  
 With exile, and with brooding on his wrongs,  
 Pausanias, his sage friend, who mounts with him,  
 Could scarce have lighted on a lovelier cure.  
 The mules must be below, far down. I hear  
 Their tinkling bells, mix'd with the song of birds,  
 Rise faintly to me — now it stops! — Who's here?  
 Pausanias! and on foot? alone?

## PAUSANIAS.

And thou, then?  
 I left thee supping with Peisianax,  
 With thy head full of wine, and thy hair crown'd,  
 Touching thy harp as the whim came on thee,  
 And praised and spoil'd by master and by guests  
 Almost as much as the new dancing-girl.  
 Why hast thou follow'd us?

CALLICLES.

The night was hot,  
And the feast past its prime; so we slipp'd out,  
Some of us, to the portico to breathe; —  
Peisianax, thou know'st, drinks late; — and then,  
As I was lifting my soil'd garland off,  
I saw the mules and litter in the court,  
And in the litter sate Empedocles;  
Thou, too, wast with him. Straightway I sped home;  
I saddled my white mule, and all night long  
Through the cool lovely country follow'd you,  
Pass'd you a little since as morning dawn'd,  
And have this hour sate by the torrent here,  
Till the slow mules should climb in sight again.  
And now?

PAUSANIAS.

And now, back to the town with speed!  
Crouch in the wood first, till the mules have pass'd;  
They do but halt, they will be here anon.  
Thou must be viewless to Empedocles;  
Save mine, he must not meet a human eye.  
One of his moods is on him that thou know'st;  
I think, thou wouldst not vex him.

CALLICLES.

No — and yet  
I would fain stay, and help thee tend him. Once  
He knew me well, and would oft notice me;  
And still, I know not how, he draws me to him,

And I could watch him with his proud sad face,  
 His flowing locks and gold-encircled brow  
 And kingly gait, for ever; such a spell  
 In his severe looks, such a majesty  
 As drew of old the people after him,  
 In Agrigentum and Olympia,  
 When his star reign'd, before his banishment,  
 Is potent still on me in his decline.  
 But oh! Pausanias, he is changed of late;  
 There is a settled trouble in his air  
 Admits no momentary brightening now,  
 And when he comes among his friends at feasts,  
 'Tis as an orphan among prosperous boys.  
 Thou know'st of old he loved this harp of mine,  
 When first he sojourn'd with Peisianax;  
 He is now always moody, and I fear him;  
 But I would serve him, soothe him, if I could,  
 Dared one but try.

### PAUSANIAS.

Thou wast a kind child ever!  
 He loves thee, but he must not see thee now.  
 Thou hast indeed a rare touch on thy harp,  
 He loves that in thee, too; — there was a time  
 (But that is pass'd), he would have paid thy strain  
 With music to have drawn the stars from heaven.  
 He hath his harp and laurel with him still,  
 But he has laid the use of music by,  
 And all which might relax his settled gloom.  
 Yet thou may'st try thy playing, if thou wilt —  
 But thou must keep unseen; follow us on,

But at a distance ! in these solitudes,  
In this clear mountain-air, a voice will rise,  
Though from afar, distinctly ; it may soothe him.  
Play when we halt, and, when the evening comes  
And I must leave him (for his pleasure is  
To be left musing these soft nights alone  
In the high unfrequented mountain-spots),  
Then watch him, for he ranges swift and far,  
Sometimes to Etna's top, and to the cone ;  
But hide thee in the rocks a great way down,  
And try thy noblest strains, my Callicles,  
With the sweet night to help thy harmony !  
Thou wilt earn my thanks sure, and perhaps his.

#### CALLICLES.

More than a day and night, Pausanias,  
Of this fair summer-weather, on these hills,  
Would I bestow to help Empedocles.  
That needs no thanks ; one is far better here  
Than in the broiling city in these heats.  
But tell me, how hast thou persuaded him  
In this his present fierce, man-hating mood,  
To bring thee out with him alone on Etna ?

#### PAUSANIAS.

Thou hast heard all men speaking of Pantheia,  
The woman who at Agrigentum lay  
Thirty long days in a cold trance of death,  
And whom Empedocles call'd back to life.  
Thou art too young to note it, but his power

Swells with the swelling evil of this time,  
And holds men mute to see where it will rise.  
He could stay swift diseases in old days,  
Chain madmen by the music of his lyre,  
Cleanse to sweet airs the breath of poisonous streams,  
And in the mountain-chinks inter the winds.  
This he could do of old ; but now, since all  
Clouds and grows daily worse in Sicily,  
Since broils tear us in twain, since this new swarm  
Of sophists has got empire in our schools  
Where he was paramount, since he is banish'd  
And lives a lonely man in triple gloom —  
He grasps the very reins of life and death.  
I ask'd him of Pantheia yesterday,  
When we were gather'd with Peisianax,  
And he made answer, I should come at night  
On Etna here, and be alone with him,  
And he would tell me, as his old, tried friend,  
Who still was faithful, what might profit me ;  
That is, the secret of this miracle.

#### CALLICLES.

Bah ! Thou a doctor ! Thou art superstitious.  
Simple Pausanias, 'twas no miracle !  
Pantheia, for I know her kinsmen well,  
Was subject to these trances from a girl.  
Empedocles would say so, did he deign ;  
But he still lets the people, whom he scorns,  
Gape and cry wizard at him, if they list.  
But thou, thou art no company for him !

Thou art as cross, as sour'd as himself !  
 Thou hast some wrong from thine own citizens,  
 And then thy friend is banish'd, and on that,  
 Straightway thou fallest to arraign the times,  
 As if the sky was impious not to fall.  
 The sophists are no enemies of his ;  
 I hear, Gorgias, their chief, speaks nobly of him,  
 As of his gifted master, and once friend.  
 He is too scornful, too high-wrought, too bitter.  
 'Tis not the times, 'tis not the sophists vex him ;  
 There is some root of suffering in himself,  
 Some secret and unfollow'd vein of woe,  
 Which makes the time look black and sad to him.  
 Pester him not in this his sombre mood  
 With questionings about an idle tale,  
 But lead him through the lovely mountain-paths,  
 And keep his mind from preying on itself,  
 And talk to him of things at hand and common,  
 Not miracles ! thou art a learned man,  
 But credulous of fables as a girl.

### PAUSANIAS.

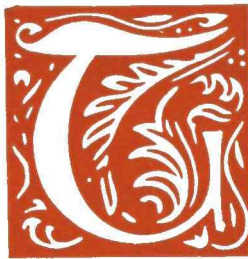
And thou, a boy whose tongue outruns his  
     knowledge,  
 And on whose lightness blame is thrown away.  
 Enough of this ! I see the litter wind  
 Up by the torrent-side, under the pines.  
 I must rejoin Empedocles. Do thou  
 Crouch in the brushwood till the mules have pass'd ;  
 Then play thy kind part well. Farewell till night !

SCENE II.

☛ NOON. A Glen on the highest skirts of  
the woody region of Etna. ☛

EMPEDOCLES. PAUSANIAS.

PAUSANIAS.



HE noon is hot. When we have  
cross'd the stream,  
We shall have left the woody tract,  
and come  
Upon the open shoulder of the hill.  
See how the giant spires of yellow  
bloom

Of the sun-loving gentian, in the heat,  
Are shining on those naked slopes like flame!  
Let us rest here; and now, Empedocles,  
Pantheia's history!

(A harp-note below is heard.)

EMPEDOCLES.

Hark! what sound was that  
Rose from below? If it were possible,  
And we were not so far from human haunt,  
I should have said that some one touch'd a harp.  
Hark! there again!



PAUSANIAS.

'Tis the boy Callicles,  
The sweetest harp-player in Catana.  
He is for ever coming on these hills,  
In summer, to all country-festivals,  
With a gay revelling band ; he breaks from them  
Sometimes, and wanders far among the glens.  
But heed him not, he will not mount to us ;  
I spoke with him this morning. Once more,  
                  therefore,  
Instruct me of Pantheia's story, Master,  
As I have pray'd thee.

EMPEDOCLES.

That ? and to what end ?

PAUSANIAS.

It is enough that all men speak of it.  
But I will also say, that when the Gods  
Visit us as they do with sign and plague,  
To know those spells of thine which stay their hand  
Were to live free from terror.

EMPEDOCLES.

Spells ? Mistrust them !

Mind is the spell which governs earth and heaven.  
Man has a mind with which to plan his safety ;  
Know that, and help thyself !

PAUSANIAS.

But thine own words?  
"The wit and counsel of man was never clear,  
Troubles confound the little wit he has."  
Mind is a light which the Gods mock us with,  
To lead those false who trust it.  
(The harp sounds again.)

EMPEDOCLES.

Hist! once more!  
Listen, Pausanias!—Ay, 'tis Callicles;  
I know these notes among a thousand. Hark!

CALLICLES.

(Sings unseen, from below.)  
The track winds down to the clear stream,  
To cross the sparkling shallows; there  
The cattle love to gather, on their way  
To the high mountain-pastures, and to stay,  
Till the rough cow-herds drive them past,  
Knee-deep in the cool ford; for 'tis the last  
Of all the woody, high, well-water'd dells  
On Etna; and the beam  
Of noon is broken there by chestnut-boughs  
Down its steep verdant sides; the air  
Is freshen'd by the leaping stream, which throws  
Eternal showers of spray on the moss'd roots  
Of trees, and veins of turf, and long dark shoots  
Of ivy-plants, and fragrant hanging bells  
Of hyacinths, and on late anemonies,

That muffle its wet banks ; but glade,  
And stream, and sward, and chestnut-trees,  
End here ; Etna beyond, in the broad glare  
Of the hot noon, without a shade,  
Slope behind slope, up to the peak, lies bare ;  
The peak, round which the white clouds play.

In such a glen, on such a day,  
On Pelion, on the grassy ground,  
Chiron, the aged Centaur lay,  
The young Achilles standing by.  
The Centaur taught him to explore  
The mountains ; where the glens are dry  
And the tired Centaurs come to rest,  
And where the soaking springs abound  
And the straight ashes grow for spears,  
And where the hill-goats come to feed,  
And the sea-eagles build their nest.  
He show'd him Phthia far away,  
And said : O boy, I taught this lore  
To Peleus, in long distant years !  
He told him of the Gods, the stars,  
The tides ; — and then of mortal wars,  
And of the life which heroes lead  
Before they reach the Elysian place  
And rest in the immortal mead ;  
And all the wisdom of his race.

The music below ceases, and EMPEDO-  
CLES speaks, accompanying himself in a  
solemn manner on his harp.

The out-spread world to span  
A cord the Gods first slung,  
And then the soul of man  
There, like a mirror, hung,  
And bade the winds through space impel the gusty  
toy.

Hither and thither spins  
The wind-borne, mirroring soul,  
A thousand glimpses wins,  
And never sees a whole ;  
Looks once, and drives elsewhere, and leaves its last  
employ.

The Gods laugh in their sleeve  
To watch man doubt and fear,  
Who knows not what to believe  
Since he sees nothing clear,  
And dares stamp nothing false where he finds noth-  
ing sure.

Is this, Pausanias, so ?  
And can our souls not strive,  
But with the winds must go,  
And hurry where they drive ?  
Is fate indeed so strong, man's strength indeed so  
poor ?

I will not judge. That man,  
Howbeit, I judge as lost,  
Whose mind allows a plan,  
Which would degrade it most ;  
And he treats doubt the best who tries to see least ill.

Be not, then, fear's blind slave!  
Thou art my friend; to thee,  
All knowledge that I have,  
All skill I wield, are free.

Ask not the latest news of the last miracle,

Ask not what days and nights  
In trance Pantheia lay,  
But ask how thou such sights  
May'st see without dismay;

Ask what most helps when known, thou son of  
Anchitus!

What? hate, and awe, and shame  
Fill thee to see our time;  
Thou feelest thy soul's frame  
Shaken and out of chime?

What? life and chance go hard with thee too, as  
with us;

Thy citizens, 'tis said,  
Envy thee and oppress,  
Thy goodness no men aid,  
All strive to make it less;

Tyranny, pride, and lust, fill Sicily's abodes;

Heaven is with earth at strife,  
Signs make thy soul afraid,  
The dead return to life,  
Rivers are dried, winds stay'd;

Scarce can one think in calm, so threatening are the  
Gods;

And we feel, day and night,  
The burden of ourselves —  
Well, then, the wiser wight  
In his own bosom delves,  
And asks what ails him so, and gets what cure he  
can.

The sophist sneers: Fool, take  
Thy pleasure, right or wrong.  
The pious wail: Forsake  
A world these sophists throng.  
Be neither saint nor sophist-led, but be a man!

These hundred doctors try  
To preach thee to their school.  
We have the truth! they cry;  
And yet their oracle,  
Trumpet it as they will, is but the same as thine.

Once read thy own breast right,  
And thou hast done with fears;  
Man gets no other light,  
Search he a thousand years.  
Sink in thyself! there ask what ails thee, at that  
shrine!

What makes thee struggle and rave?  
Why are men ill at ease? —  
'Tis that the lot they have  
Fails their own will to please;  
For man would make no murmuring, were his will  
obey'd.

And why is it, that still  
Man with his lot thus fights ? —  
'Tis that he makes this will  
The measure of his rights,  
And believes Nature outraged if his will's gainsaid.

Couldst thou, Pausanias, learn  
How deep a fault is this ;  
Couldst thou but once discern  
Thou hast no right to bliss,  
No title from the Gods to welfare and repose ;

Then thou wouldst look less mazed  
Whene'er of bliss debarr'd,  
Nor think the Gods were crazed  
When thy own lot went hard.  
But we are all the same — the fools of our own  
woes !

For, from the first faint morn  
Of life, the thirst for bliss  
Deep in man's heart is born ;  
And, sceptic as he is,  
He fails not to judge clear if this be quench'd or no.

Nor is the thirst to blame.  
Man errs not that he deems  
His welfare his true aim,  
He errs because he dreams  
The world does but exist that welfare to bestow.

We mortals are no kings  
For each of whom to sway  
A new-made world up-springs,  
Meant merely for his play ;  
No, we are strangers here ; the world is from of old.

In vain our pent wills fret,  
And would the world subdue.  
Limits we did not set  
Condition all we do ;  
Born into life we are, and life must be our mould.

Born into life ! — man grows  
Forth from his parents' stem,  
And blends their bloods, as those  
Of theirs are blent in them ;  
So each new man strikes root into a far fore-time.

Born into life ! — we bring  
A bias with us here,  
And, when here, each new thing  
Affects us we come near ;  
To tunes we did not call our being must keep chime.

Born into life ! — in vain,  
Opinions, those or these,  
Unalter'd to retain  
The obstinate mind decrees ;  
Experience, like a sea, soaks all-effacing in.



Born into life! — who lists  
May what is false hold dear,  
And for himself make mists  
Through which to see less clear;  
The world is what it is, for all our dust and din.

Born into life! — 'tis we,  
And not the world, are new;  
Our cry for bliss, our plea,  
Others have urged it too —  
Our wants have all been felt, our errors made  
before.

No eye could be too sound  
To observe a world so vast,  
No patience too profound  
To sort what's here amass'd;  
How man may here best live no care too great to  
explore.

But we — as some rude guest  
Would change, where'er he roam,  
The manners there profess'd  
To those he brings from home —  
We mark not the world's course, but would have it  
take ours.

The world's course proves the terms  
On which man wins content;  
Reason the proof confirms —  
We spurn it, and invent  
A false course for the world, and for ourselves, false  
powers.

Riches we wish to get,  
Yet remain spendthrifts still ;  
We would have health, and yet  
Still use our bodies ill ;  
Bafflers of our own prayers, from youth to life's last  
scenes.

We would have inward peace,  
Yet will not look within ;  
We would have misery cease,  
Yet will not cease from sin ;  
We want all pleasant ends, but will use no harsh  
means ;

We do not what we ought,  
What we ought not, we do,  
And lean upon the thought  
That chance will bring us through ;  
But our own acts, for good or ill, are mightier  
powers.

Yet, even when man forsakes  
All sin, — is just, is pure,  
Abandons all which makes  
His welfare insecure, —  
Other existences there are, that clash with ours.

Like us the lightning-fires  
Love to have scope and play ;  
The stream, like us, desires  
An unimpeded way ;  
Like us, the Libyan wind delights to roam at large.

Streams will not curb their pride  
The just man not to entomb,  
Nor lightnings go aside  
To give his virtues room ;  
Nor is that wind less rough which blows a good  
man's barge.

Nature, with equal mind,  
Sees all her sons at play ;  
Sees man control the wind,  
The wind sweep man away ;  
Allows the proudly-riding and the foundering bark.

And, lastly, though of ours  
No weakness spoil our lot,  
Though the non-human powers  
Of Nature harm us not,  
The ill deeds of other men make often our life dark.

What were the wise man's plan? —  
Through this sharp, toil-set life,  
To work as best he can,  
And win what's won by strife. —  
But we an easier way to cheat our pains have found.

Scratch'd by a fall, with moans  
As children of weak age  
Lend life to the dumb stones  
Whereon to vent their rage,  
And bend their little fists, and rate the senseless  
ground ;

So, loath to suffer mute,  
We, peopling the void air,  
Make Gods to whom to impute  
The ills we ought to bear ;  
With God and Fate to rail at, suffering easily.

Yet grant — as sense long miss'd  
Things that are now perceived,  
And much may still exist  
Which is not yet believed —  
Grant that the world were full of Gods we cannot  
see ;

All things the world which fill  
Of but one stuff are spun,  
That we who rail are still,  
With what we rail at, one ;  
One with the o'erlabour'd Power that through the  
breadth and length

Of earth, and air, and sea,  
In men, and plants, and stones,  
Hath toil perpetually,  
And travaills, pants, and moans ;  
Fain would do all things well, but sometimes fails in  
strength.

And patiently exact  
This universal God  
Alike to any act  
Proceeds at any nod,  
And quietly declaims the cursings of himself.

This is not what man hates,  
Yet he can curse but this.  
Harsh Gods and hostile Fates  
Are dreams! this only is —  
Is everywhere; sustains the wise, the foolish elf.

Nor only, in the intent  
To attach blame elsewhere,  
Do we at will invent  
Stern Powers who make their care  
To embitter human life, malignant Deities;

But, next, we would reverse  
The scheme ourselves have spun,  
And what we made to curse  
We now would lean upon,  
And feign kind Gods who perfect what man vainly  
tries.

Look, the world tempts our eye,  
And we would know it all!  
We map the starry sky,  
We mine this earthen ball,  
We measure the sea-tides, we number the sea-sands;

We scrutinise the dates  
Of long-past human things,  
The bounds of effaced states,  
The lines of deceased kings;  
We search out dead men's words, and works of dead  
men's hands;

We shut our eyes, and muse  
How our own minds are made,  
What springs of thought they use,  
How righten'd, how betray'd —  
And spend our wit to name what most employ  
unnamed.

But still, as we proceed  
The mass swells more and more  
Of volumes yet to read,  
Of secrets yet to explore.  
Our hair grows grey, our eyes are dimm'd, our heat  
is tamed ;

We rest our faculties,  
And thus address the Gods :  
“ True science if there is,  
It stays in your abodes !  
Man's measures cannot mete the immeasurable All.

“ You only can take in  
The world's immense design.  
Our desperate search was sin,  
Which henceforth we resign,  
Sure only that your mind sees all things which  
befal.”

Fools ! That in man's brief term  
He cannot all things view,  
Affords no ground to affirm  
That there are Gods who do ;  
Nor does being weary prove that he has where to  
rest.

Again. — Our youthful blood  
Claims rapture as its right;  
The world, a rolling flood  
Of newness and delight,  
Draws in the enamour'd gazer to its shining breast;

Pleasure, to our hot grasp,  
Gives flowers after flowers;  
With passionate warmth we clasp  
Hand after hand in ours;  
Now do we soon perceive how fast our youth is  
spent.

At once our eyes grow clear!  
We see, in blank dismay,  
Year posting after year,  
Sense after sense decay;  
Our shivering heart is mined by secret discontent;

Yet still, in spite of truth,  
In spite of hopes entomb'd,  
That longing of our youth  
Burns ever unconsumed,  
Still hungrier for delight as delights grow more rare.

We pause; we hush our heart,  
And thus address the Gods:  
“The world hath fail'd to impart  
The joy our youth forebodes,  
Fail'd to fill up the void which in our breasts we  
bear.

“Changeful till now, we still  
Look’d on to something new;  
Let us, with changeless will,  
Henceforth look on to you,  
To find with you the joy we in vain here require!”

Fools! That so often here  
Happiness mock’d our prayer,  
I think, might make us fear  
A like event elsewhere;  
Make us, not fly to dreams, but moderate desire.

And yet, for those who know  
Themselves, who wisely take  
Their way through life, and bow  
To what they cannot break,  
Why should I say that life need yield but moderate  
bliss?

Shall we, with temper spoil’d,  
Health sapp’d by living ill,  
And judgment all embroil’d  
By sadness and self-will,  
Shall we judge what for man is not true bliss or is?

Is it so small a thing  
To have enjoy’d the sun,  
To have lived light in the spring,  
To have loved, to have thought, to have done;  
To have advanced true friends, and beat down baf-  
fling foes —



That we must feign a bliss  
Of doubtful future date,  
And, while we dream on this,  
Lose all our present state,  
And relegate to worlds yet distant our repose?

Not much, I know, you prize  
What pleasures may be had,  
Who look on life with eyes  
Estranged, like mine, and sad;  
And yet the village-churl feels the truth more than  
you,

Who's loath to leave this life  
Which to him little yields —  
His hard-task'd sunburnt wife,  
His often-labour'd fields,  
The boors with whom he talk'd, the country-spots  
he knew.

But thou, because thou hear'st  
Men scoff at Heaven and Fate,  
Because the Gods thou fear'st  
Fail to make blest thy state,  
Tremblest, and wilt not dare to trust the joys there  
are!

I say: Fear not! Life still  
Leaves human effort scope.  
But, since life teems with ill,  
Nurse no extravagant hope;  
Because thou must not dream, thou need'st not then  
despair!

(A long pause. At the end of it the notes of a harp below are again heard, and CALLICLES sings :—)

Far, far from here,  
The Adriatic breaks in a warm bay  
Among the green Illyrian hills ; and there  
The sunshine in the happy glens is fair,  
And by the sea, and in the brakes.  
The grass is cool, the sea-side air  
Buoyant and fresh, the mountain flowers  
More virginal and sweet than ours.  
And there, they say, two bright and aged snakes,  
Who once were Cadmus and Harmonia,  
Bask in the glens or on the warm sea-shore,  
In breathless quiet, after all their ills ;  
Nor do they see their country, nor the place  
Where the Sphinx lived among the frowning hills,  
Nor the unhappy palace of their race,  
Nor Thebes, nor the Ismenus, any more.

There those two live, far in the Illyrian brakes !  
They had stay'd long enough to see,  
In Thebes, the billow of calamity  
Over their own dear children roll'd,  
Curse upon curse, pang upon pang,  
For years, they sitting helpless in their home,  
A grey old man and woman ; yet of old  
The Gods had to their marriage come,  
And at the banquet all the Muses sang.

Therefore they did not end their days  
In sight of blood; but were rapt, far away,  
To where the west-wind plays,  
And murmurs of the Adriatic come  
To those untrodden mountain-lawns; and there  
Placed safely in changed forms, the pair  
Wholly forget their first sad life, and home,  
And all that Theban woe, and stray  
For ever through the glens, placid and dumb.

EMPEDOCLES.

That was my harp-player again! — where is he?  
Down by the stream?

PAUSANIAS.

Yes, Master, in the wood.

EMPEDOCLES.

He ever loved the Theban story well!  
But the day wears. Go now, Pausanias,  
For I must be alone. Leave me one mule;  
Take down with thee the rest to Catana.  
And for young Callicles, thank him from me;  
Tell him, I never fail'd to love his lyre —  
But he must follow me no more to-night.

PAUSANIAS.

Thou wilt return to-morrow to the city?

## EMPEDOCLES.

Either to-morrow or some other day,  
In the sure revolutions of the world,  
Good friend, I shall revisit Catana.  
I have seen many cities in my time,  
Till mine eyes ache with the long spectacle,  
And I shall doubtless see them all again;  
Thou know'st me for a wanderer from of old.  
Meanwhile, stay me not now. Farewell, Pausanias!

(He departs on his way up the mountain).

## PAUSANIAS (alone).

I dare not urge him further — he must go;  
But he is strangely wrought! — I will speed back  
And bring Peisianax to him from the city;  
His counsel could once soothe him. But, Apollo!  
How his brow lighten'd as the music rose!  
Callicles must wait here, and play to him;  
I saw him through the chestnuts far below,  
Just since, down at the stream. — Ho! Callicles!

(He descends, calling).



ACT II.

EVENING. The Summit of Etna.

EMPEDOCLES.



LONE! —

On this charr'd,  
blacken'd melancholy  
waste,

Crown'd by the awful  
peak, Etna's great  
mouth.

Round which the sullen  
vapour rolls — alone!

Pausanias is far hence, and  
that is well,

For I must henceforth speak no more with man.  
He hath his lesson too, and that debt's paid;  
And the good, learned, friendly, quiet man,  
May bravelier front his life, and in himself  
Find henceforth energy and heart. But I —  
The weary man, the banish'd citizen,  
Whose banishment is not his greatest ill,  
Whose weariness no energy can reach,  
And for whose hurt courage is not the cure —  
What should I do with life and living more?

No, thou art come too late, Empedocles !  
And the world hath the day, and must break thee,  
Not thou the world. With men thou canst not live,  
Their thoughts, their ways, their wishes, are not  
thine ;  
And being lonely thou art miserable,  
For something has impair'd thy spirit's strength,  
And dried its self-sufficing fount of joy.  
Thou canst not live with men nor with thyself —  
O sage ! O sage ! — Take then the one way left ;  
And turn thee to the elements, thy friends,  
Thy well-tried friends, thy willing ministers,  
And say : Ye helpers, hear Empedocles,  
Who asks this final service at your hands !  
Before the sophist-brood hath overlaid  
The last spark of man's consciousness with words —  
Ere quite the being of man, ere quite the world  
Be disarray'd of their divinity —  
Before the soul lose all her solemn joys,  
And awe be dead, and hope impossible,  
And the soul's deep eternal night come on —  
Receive me, hide me, quench me, take me home !

(He advances to the edge of the crater. Smoke  
and fire break forth with a loud noise, and  
CALLICLES is heard below singing: —)

The lyre's voice is lovely everywhere ;  
In the court of Gods, in the city of men,  
And in the lonely rock-strewn mountain-glen,  
In the still mountain air.

Only to Typho it sounds hatefully ;  
To Typho only, the rebel o'erthrown,  
Through whose heart Etna drives her roots of stone,  
To imbed them in the sea.

Wherefore dost thou groan so loud ?  
Wherefore do thy nostrils flash,  
Through the dark night, suddenly,  
Typho, such red jets of flame ? —  
Is thy tortured heart still proud ?  
Is thy fire-scathed arm still rash ?  
Still alert thy stone-crush'd frame ?  
Doth thy fierce soul still deplore  
Thine ancient rout by the Cilician hills,  
And that curst treachery on the Mount of Gore ?  
Do thy bloodshot eyes still weep  
The fight which crown'd thine ills,  
Thy last mischance on this Sicilian deep ?  
Hast thou sworn, in thy sad lair,  
Where erst the strong sea-currents suck'd thee down,  
Never to cease to writhe, and try to rest,  
Letting the sea-stream wander through thy hair ?  
That thy groans, like thunder prest,  
Begin to roll, and almost drown  
The sweet notes whose lulling spell  
Gods and the race of mortals love so well,  
When through thy caves thou hearest music swell ?

But an awful pleasure bland  
Spreading o'er the Thunderer's face,  
When the sound climbs near his seat,

The Olympian council sees ;  
And he lets his lax right hand,  
Which the lightnings doth embrace,  
Sink upon his mighty knees.  
And the eagle, at the beck  
Of the appeasing, gracious harmony,  
Droops all his sheeny, brown, deep-feather'd neck,  
Nestling nearer to Jove's feet ;  
While o'er his sovran eye  
The curtains of the blue films slowly meet.  
And the white Olympus-peaks  
Rosily brighten, and the soothed Gods smile  
At one another from their golden chairs,  
And no one round the charmed circle speaks.  
Only the loved Hebe bears  
The cup about, whose draughts beguile  
Pain and care, with a dark store  
Of fresh-pull'd violets wreathed and nodding o'er ;  
And her flush'd feet glow on the marble floor.

#### EMPEDOCLES.

He fables, yet speaks truth !  
The brave, impetuous heart yields everywhere  
To the subtle, contriving head ;  
Great qualities are trodden down,  
And littleness united  
Is become invincible.

These rumblings are not Typho's groans, I know !  
These angry smoke-bursts  
Are not the passionate breath



Of the mountain-crush'd, tortured, intractable Titan  
king —

But over all the world  
What suffering is there not seen  
Of plainness oppress'd by cunning,  
As the well-counsell'd Zeus oppress'd  
That self-helping son of earth!  
What anguish of greatness,  
Rail'd and hunted from the world,  
Because its simplicity rebukes  
This envious, miserable age!

I am weary of it.  
— Lie there, ye ensigns  
Of my unloved preëminence  
In an age like this!  
Among a people of children,  
Who throng'd me in their cities,  
Who worshipp'd me in their houses,  
And ask'd, not wisdom,  
But drugs to charm with,  
But spells to mutter —  
All the fool's-armoury of magic! — Lie there,  
My golden circlet,  
My purple robe!

CALLICLES (from below).

As the sky-brightening south-wind clears the day,  
And makes the mass'd clouds roll,  
The music of the lyre blows away  
The clouds which wrap the soul.

Oh! that Fate had let me see  
That triumph of the sweet persuasive lyre,  
That famous, final victory,  
When jealous Pan with Marsyas did conspire;

When, from far Parnassus' side,  
Young Apollo, all the pride  
Of the Phrygian flutes to tame,  
To the Phrygian highlands came;  
Where the long green reed-beds sway  
In the rippled waters grey  
Of that solitary lake  
Where Mæander's springs are born;  
Whence the ridged pine-wooded roots  
Of Messogis westward break,  
Mounting westward, high and higher.  
There was held the famous strife;  
There the Phrygian brought his flutes,  
And Apollo brought his lyre;  
And, when now the westering sun  
Touch'd the hills, the strife was done,  
And the attentive Muses said:  
"Marsyas, thou art vanquished!"  
Then Apollo's minister  
Hang'd upon a branching fir  
Marsyas, that unhappy Faun,  
And began to whet his knife.  
But the Mænads, who were there,  
Left their friend, and with robes flowing  
In the wind, and loose dark hair  
O'er their polish'd bosoms blowing,

Each her ribbon'd tambourine  
Flinging on the mountain-sod,  
With a lovely frighten'd mien  
Came about the youthful God.  
But he turn'd his beauteous face  
Haughtily another way,  
From the grassy sun-warm'd place  
Where in proud repose he lay,  
With one arm over his head,  
Watching how the whetting sped.

But aloof, on the lake-strand,  
Did the young Olympus stand,  
Weeping at his master's end ;  
For the Faun had been his friend.  
For he taught him how to sing,  
And he taught him flute-playing.  
Many a morning had they gone  
To the glimmering mountain-lakes,  
And had torn up by the roots  
The tall crested water-reeds  
With long plumes and soft brown seeds,  
And had carved them into flutes,  
Sitting on a tabled stone  
Where the shoreward ripple breaks.  
And he taught him how to please  
The red-snooded Phrygian girls,  
Whom the summer evening sees  
Flashing in the dance's whirls  
Underneath the starlit trees  
In the mountain-villages.

Therefore now Olympus stands,  
At his master's piteous cries  
Pressing fast with both his hands  
His white garment to his eyes,  
Not to see Apollo's scorn; —  
Ah, poor Faun, poor Faun! ah, poor Faun!

### EMPEDOCLES.

And lie thou there,  
My laurel bough!  
Scornful Apollo's ensign, lie thou there!  
Though thou hast been my shade in the world's  
heat —  
Though I have loved thee, lived in honouring  
thee —  
Yet lie thou there,  
My laurel bough!

I am weary of thee.  
I am weary of the solitude  
Where he who bears thee must abide —  
Of the rocks of Parnassus,  
Of the gorge of Delphi,  
Of the moonlit peaks, and the caves.  
Thou guardest them, Apollo!  
Over the grave of the slain Pytho,  
Though young, intolerably severe!  
Thou keepest aloof the profane,  
But the solitude oppresses thy votary!  
The jars of men reach him not in thy valley —

But can life reach him?  
Thou fencest him from the multitude —  
Who will fence him from himself?  
He hears nothing but the cry of the torrents,  
And the beating of his own heart.  
The air is thin, the veins swell,  
The temples tighten and throb there —  
Air! air!

Take thy bough, set me free from my solitude;  
I have been enough alone!

Where shall thy votary fly then? back to men? —  
But they will gladly welcome him once more,  
And help him to unbend his too tense thought,  
And rid him of the presence of himself,  
And keep their friendly chatter at his ear,  
And haunt him, till the absence from himself,  
That other torment, grow unbearable;  
And he will fly to solitude again,  
And he will find its air too keen for him,  
And so change back; and many thousand times  
Be miserably bandied to and fro  
Like a sea-wave, betwixt the world and thee,  
Thou young, implacable God! and only death  
Can cut his oscillations short, and so  
Bring him to poise. There is no other way.

And yet what days were those, Parmenides!  
When we were young, when we could number  
friends

In all the Italian cities like ourselves,  
When with elated hearts we join'd your train,  
Ye Sun-born Virgins! on the road of truth.  
Then we could still enjoy, then neither thought  
Nor outward things were closed and dead to us;  
But we received the shock of mighty thoughts  
On simple minds with pure natural joy;  
And if the sacred load oppress'd our brain,  
We had the power to feel the pressure eased,  
The brow unbound, the thoughts flow free again,  
In the delightful commerce of the world.  
We had not lost our balance then, nor grown  
Thought's slave, and dead to every natural joy.  
The smallest thing could give us pleasure then —  
The sports of the country-people,  
A flute-note from the woods,  
Sunset over the sea;  
Seed-time and harvest,  
The reapers in the corn,  
The vinedresser in his vineyard,  
The village-girl at her wheel.

Fulness of life and power of feeling, ye  
Are for the happy, for the souls at ease,  
Who dwell on a firm basis of content!  
But he, who has outlived his prosperous days —  
But he, whose youth fell on a different world  
From that on which his exiled age is thrown —  
Whose mind was fed on other food, was train'd  
By other rules than are in vogue to-day —  
Whose habit of thought is fix'd, who will not  
change,

But, in a world he loves not, must subsist  
In ceaseless opposition, be the guard  
Of his own breast, fetter'd to what he guards,  
That the world win no mastery over him —  
Who has no friend, no fellow left, not one ;  
Who has no minute's breathing space allow'd  
To nurse his dwindling faculty of joy —  
Joy and the outward world must die to him,  
As they are dead to me.

(A long pause, during which EMPEDOCLES  
remains motionless, plunged in thought.  
The night deepens. He moves forward and  
gazes round him, and proceeds : —)

And you, ye stars,  
Who slowly begin to marshal,  
As of old, in the fields of heaven,  
Your distant, melancholy lines !  
Have you, too, survived yourselves ?  
Are you, too, what I fear to become ?  
You, too, once lived ;  
You too moved joyfully  
Among august companions,  
In an older world, peopled by Gods,  
In a mightier order,  
The radiant, rejoicing, intelligent Sons of Heaven.  
But now, ye kindle  
Your lonely, cold-shining lights,  
Unwilling lingerers  
In the heavenly wilderness,

For a younger, ignoble world;  
And renew, by necessity,  
Night after night your courses,  
In echoing, unnear'd silence,  
Above a race you know not —  
Uncaring and undelighted,  
Without friend and without home;  
Weary like us, though not  
Weary with our weariness.

No, no, ye stars! there is no death with you,  
No languor, no decay! languor and death,  
They are with me, not you! ye are alive —  
Ye, and the pure dark ether where ye ride  
Brilliant above me! And thou, fiery world,  
That sapp'st the vitals of this terrible mount  
Upon whose charr'd and quaking crust I stand —  
Thou, too, brimmest with life! — the sea of cloud,  
That heaves its white and billowy vapours up  
To moat this isle of ashes from the world,  
Lives; and that other fainter sea, far down,  
O'er whose lit floor a road of moonbeams leads  
To Etna's Liparëan sister-fires  
And the long dusky line of Italy —  
That mild and luminous floor of waters lives,  
With held-in joy swelling its heart; I only,  
Whose spring of hope is dried, whose spirit has  
fail'd,  
I, who have not, like these, in solitude  
Maintain'd courage and force, and in myself  
Nursed an immortal vigour — I alone



Am dead to life and joy, therefore I read  
In all things my own deadness.

(A long silence. He continues :—)

Oh, that I could glow like this mountain !  
Oh, that my heart bounded with the swell of the sea !  
Oh, that my soul were full of light as the stars !  
Oh, that it brooded over the world like the air !

But no, this heart will glow no more ; thou art  
A living man no more, Empedocles !  
Nothing but a devouring flame of thought —  
But a naked, eternally restless mind !

(After a pause :—)

To the elements it came from  
Everything will return —  
Our bodies to earth,  
Our blood to water,  
Heat to fire,  
Breath to air.  
They were well born, they will be well entomb'd —  
But mind ? . . .

And we might gladly share the fruitful stir  
Down in our mother earth's miraculous womb ;  
Well would it be  
With what roll'd of us in the stormy main ;  
We might have joy, blent with the all-bathing air,  
Or with the nimble, radiant life of fire.

But mind, but thought—  
If these have been the master part of us—  
Where will they find their parent element?  
What will receive them, who will call them home?  
But we shall still be in them, and they in us,  
And we shall be the strangers of the world,  
And they will be our lords, as they are now;  
And keep us prisoners of our consciousness,  
And never let us clasp and feel the All  
But through their forms, and modes, and stifling  
veils.

And we shall be unsatisfied as now;  
And we shall feel the agony of thirst,  
The ineffable longing for the life of life  
Baffled for ever; and still thought and mind  
Will hurry us with them on their homeless march,  
Over the unallied unopening earth,  
Over the unrecognising sea; while air  
Will blow us fiercely back to sea and earth,  
And fire repel us from its living waves.  
And then we shall unwillingly return  
Back to this meadow of calamity,  
This uncongenial place, this human life;  
And in our individual human state  
Go through the sad probation all again,  
To see if we will poise our life at last,  
To see if we will now at last be true  
To our own only true, deep-buried selves,  
Being one with which we are one with the whole  
world;  
Or whether we will once more fall away

Into some bondage of the flesh or mind,  
Some slough of sense, or some fantastic maze  
Forged by the imperious lonely thinking-power.  
And each succeeding age in which we are born  
Will have more peril for us than the last ;  
Will goad our senses with a sharper spur,  
Will fret our minds to an intenser play,  
Will make ourselves harder to be discern'd.  
And we shall struggle awhile, gasp and rebel —  
And we shall fly for refuge to past times,  
Their soul of unworn youth, their breath of  
    greatness ;  
And the reality will pluck us back,  
Knead us in its hot hand, and change our nature.  
And we shall feel our powers of effort flag,  
And rally them for one last fight — and fail ;  
And we shall sink in the impossible strife,  
And be astray for ever.

  Slave of sense  
I have in no wise been ; — but slave of thought ? . . .  
And who can say : I have been always free,  
Lived ever in the light of my own soul ? —  
I cannot ; I have lived in wrath and gloom,  
Fierce, disputatious, ever at war with man,  
Far from my own soul, far from warmth and light.  
But I have not grown easy in these bonds —  
But I have not denied what bonds these were.  
Yea, I take myself to witness,  
That I have loved no darkness,  
Sophisticated no truth,

Nursed no delusion,  
Allow'd no fear!

And therefore, O ye elements! I know —  
Ye know it too — it hath been granted me  
Not to die wholly, not to be all enslaved.  
I feel it in this hour. The numbing cloud  
Mounts off my soul; I feel it, I breathe free.

Is it but for a moment?  
— Ah, boil up, ye vapours!  
Leap and roar, thou sea of fire!  
My soul glows to meet you.  
Ere it flag, ere the mists  
Of despondency and gloom  
Rush over it again,  
Receive me, save me!

(He plunges into the crater).

CALLICLES (from below).



THROUGH the black,  
rushing smoke-bursts,  
Thick breaks the red  
flame;  
All Etna heaves fiercely  
Her forest-clothed frame.

Not here, O Apollo!  
Are haunts meet for  
thee.

But, where Helicon breaks down  
In cliff to the sea,

Where the moon-silver'd inlets  
Send far their light voice  
Up the still vale of Thisbe,  
O speed, and rejoice!

On the sward at the cliff-top  
Lie strewn the white flocks,  
On the cliff-side the pigeons  
Roost deep in the rocks.

In the moonlight the shepherds,  
Soft lull'd by the rills,  
Lie wrapt in their blankets  
Asleep on the hills.

—What forms are these coming  
So white through the gloom?  
What garments out-glistening  
The gold-flower'd broom?

What sweet-breathing presence  
Out-perfumes the thyme?  
What voices enrapture  
The night's balmy prime? —

'Tis Apollo comes leading  
His choir, the Nine.  
—The leader is fairest,  
But all are divine.

They are lost in the hollows!  
They stream up again!  
What seeks on this mountain  
The glorified train? —

They bathe on this mountain,  
In the spring by their road;  
Then on to Olympus,  
Their endless abode.

—Whose praise do they mention?  
Of what is it told? —  
What will be for ever;  
What was from of old.

First hymn they the Father  
Of all things; and then,  
The rest of immortals,  
The action of men.

The day in his hotness,  
The strife with the palm;  
The night in her silence,  
The stars in their calm.

 THE END.   
 





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