

After Antigone has been led out to find her death in the desolate cavern in which she is to be immured, Teiresias, the blind prophet, comes in, led by a boy, to tell Creon of the dreadful punishment which is impending over him. The altars of the gods have been infected by the vultures and dogs that have fed upon the unburied body of Polynices—the pollution of the altars must be visited upon the inhabitants of the city and especially upon its royal house.

Now then, my son, take thought. A man may err ;
But he is not insensate or foredoomed
To ruin who, when he hath lapsed to evil,
Stands not inflexible, but heals the harm.
The obstinate man still earns the name of fool.
Urge not contention with the dead, nor stab
The fallen. What valour is't to slay the slain ?
I have thought well of this, and say it with care ;
And careful council, that brings gain withal,
Is precious to the understanding soul.

And then he goes on :—

Not many courses of the rising sun
Shalt thou fulfil, ere of thine own true blood
Thou shalt have given a corpse in recompense
For one above whom thou hast cast beneath,
Entombing shamefully a living soul,
And one whom thou hast kept above the ground
And disappointed of all obsequies,
Unsanctified and godlessly forlorn.
Such violence the powers beneath will bear
Not even from the Olympian gods. For thee
The avengers wait. Hidden but near at hand,
Lagging but sure, the Furies of the grave
Are watching for thee to thy ruinous harm,
With thine own evil to entangle thee.

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(Exit).

Chorus.—Sire, there is sorrow in that prophecy.
He who is gone, since ever those my locks,
Once black, now white with age, waved o'er my brow,
Hath never spoken falsely to the state.

Creon.—I know it, and it shakes me to the core.
To yield is dreadful : but resisting
To face the blow of fate is full of dread.

Chorus.—The time calls loud on wisdom, good my lord.

Creon.—What must I do ? Advise me. I will obey.

Chorus.—Go and release the maiden from the vault,
And make a grave for the unburied dead.

Creon.—Is that your counsel ? Think you I will yield ?

Chorus.—With all the speed thou mayest : swift harms from heaven
Are keen to overtake the froward man.

Creon.—Oh it is hard. But I am forced to this
Against myself, I cannot fight with Destiny.

And so Creon departs in the hopes of averting evil by staying the execution of his own decree. But whilst he is on his way there comes the first news of sorrow.

Messenger.—They are dead ; and they that live
Are guilty of the death.

Chorus.—The slayer, who ?

And who the slain ? Declare.

Messenger.—Hæmon is dead,
And by a desperate hand.

Ere the messenger has had time to deliver his sorrowful message, Eurydice, the wife of Creon and the mother of Hæmon, enters and hears the news.

Messenger.—Dear lady, I will tell thee what I saw,
And hide no particle of truth ; for why
Should I smooth over the harsh fact, which soon
Must prove my tale a lie ? Truth aye is best.
I went among the attendants of thy lord
To the highest point of the plain, where still was lying
Cruelly mangled by the dogs, the corpse
Of Polynices. We besought Persephone
And Pluto gently to restrain their wrath,
And washed him pure and clean, and then we buried
The poor remains with brushwood freshly pulled,
And heaped a lofty mound of his own earth
Above him. Then we turned us to the vault,
The maiden's hollow bride-chamber of death.
And from afar, round the unhallowed cell,
One heard a voice of wailing, loud and long,
And went and told his lord ; who, coming near,

Was haunted by the dim and bitter cry,
And suddenly exclaiming on his fate,
Said lamentably, " My prophetic heart
Divined aright. I am going of all ways
That e'er I went, the unhappiest of to-day.
My son's voice strikes me. Go, my men, approach
With speed, and, where the stones are torn away,
Press through that passage to the door of death ;
Look hard and tell me if I hear aright
The voice of Hæmon, or the gods deceive me."

Thus urged by our despairing lord, we made
Th' espial. And in the furthest nook of the vault
We saw the maiden hanging by the neck,
With noose of finest muslin loosely tied.
And clinging to her on his knees the boy,
Lamenting o'er his ruined nuptial rite
Consummated in death, his father's crime
And his lost love. And when the father saw him,
With horrid exclamation bursting in
He went to him and called him piteously :
" What deed is this, unhappy youth ? What thought
O'er-mastered thee ? Where did the force of woe
O'erturn thy reason ? O come forth, my son,
I beg thee." But with savage eyes the youth
Glared scowling at him, and, without a word,
Pluck'd forth his two-edged blade. The father then
Fled and escaped : but the unhappy boy,
Wroth with himself, even where he stood, leant heavily
Upon his sword and plunged it in his side.
And while the sense remained, his slackening arm
Enfolded still the maiden, and his breath,
Gaspingly drawn and panted forth with pain,
Cast ruddy drops upon her pallid face ;
Then lay in death upon the dead, at last
Joined to his bride in Hades' dismal hall :
A monument unto mankind, that rashness
Is the worst evil of this mortal state.

But this is not the climax of Creon's sufferings. On hearing the news, Eurydice leaves the stage without a single word ; and in a few moments, as Creon enters on one side of the stage with the dead body of Hæmon in his arms, another messenger rushes in from the opposite side to tell him that Eurydice has committed suicide, and that Creon has

A slaughtered wife thrown on the pile of ruin.

Creon's cup of misery is now filled to the brim. He is hopelessly broken by the completeness of his sorrows

All that I can touch
Is falling—falling—round me, and o'erhead
Intolerable destiny descends.

And finally the chorus points the moral of the play by way of epilogue.

Wise thought hath the first thought in happiness
Before all else, and piety to Heaven
Must be preserved. High boastings of the proud
Bring sorrows to the height to punish pride :
A lesson men shall learn when they are old.

A modern dramatist would assuredly not have handled this subject in the way in which Sophocles has done.

Had Shakespeare been writing on this subject he would have made Antigone far more tender and woman-like than the Greek tragedian has represented her to be. The love between Antigone and Hæmon would have been brought into greater prominence. Antigone would have been torn asunder by conflicting affections : regard for her living lover on the one hand, and love for her dead brother on the other, would have striven for the master within her.

Hæmon again, in pleading with Creon for the life of Antigone, would have based his appeal, far more than he actually does, on the love he bore her as his affianced bride.

Eurydice, too, in an English play, would certainly have come to plead her son's cause. The explanation of this that seems to us almost a defect in the Greek tragedy is to be found in the fact that love and love-making as we understand it was all but unknown to the Greeks, and that to introduce it upon the stage at a festival held in honour of