

To touch the virgin fillets of the goddess
With blood-stained hands, and carry off
The image much revered,—through such a crime
The hope of Greece began to wane, and, losing ground,
Went retrograde; their strength seemed broken down,
From them the will divine was turned away.
Nor did Tritonia give them these her signs
Of wrath with doubtful omen; hardly placed
Had been the image in the camp, when flames
All flashing darted from its eyes uplift,
And from its joints exuded briny sweat,
While, wonderful to tell, it thrice did leap
Upon the ground, still holding by its shield
And trembling spear. Forthwith did Calchas say,—
’Twas theirs to attempt the sea in flight, since now
’Twas not with Grecian spears the Trojan realm would fall;
Nor need they omens seek for Greece, nor think
To appease the will divine, which they had borne
With them across the sea in curving ships.
And now, nor seek they did with favouring breeze
Mycenae, fatherland,—they arms select
And gods, meet company; and then they embark
In sudden haste on the returning voyage.
Thus Calchas did the oracles arrange,
And, so advised, they build this image here,
In place of the Palladian defile,
To make atonement for their awful crime
In presence of the goddess-power offended.
This towering mass, with oaken beams immense,
Did Calchas order them to raise aloft
To lift it heavenwards, impossible
To be received within a city’s gates,
Or to be led beyond a city’s walls,
Or even protect a nation under ancient rites.
For if your hands Minerva’s gift profane,
Then ruin great shall on the Trojans fall,