

enterprise, and Eteocles prayed to Pallas of the Golden Shield, whose temple stood hard by. Then they crouched, each covered with his shield, and holding his spear in his hand, if by chance his enemy should give occasion to smite him; and if one showed so much as an eye above the rim of his shield the other would strike at him. But after a while King Eteocles slipped upon a stone that was under his foot, and uncovered his leg, at which straightway Polynices took aim with his spear, piercing the skin. But so doing he laid his own shoulder bare, and King Eteocles gave him a wound in the breast. He brake his spear in striking, and would have fared ill but that with a great stone he smote the spear of Polynices, and brake this also in the middle. And now were the two equal, for each had lost his spear. So they drew their swords and came yet closer together. But Eteocles used a device which he had learnt in the land of Thessaly; for he drew his left foot back, as if he would have ceased from the battle, and then of a sudden moved the right forward; and so smiting sideways, drave his sword right through the body of Polynices. But when thinking that he had slain him he set his weapons in the earth, and began to spoil him of his arms, the other, for he yet breathed a little, laid his hand upon his sword, and though he had scarce strength to smite, yet gave the King a mortal blow, so that the two lay dead together on the plain. And the men of Thebes lifted up the bodies of the dead, and bare them both into the city.

When these two brothers, the sons of King Oedipus, had fallen each by the hand of the other, the kingdom fell to Creon their uncle. For not only was he the next of kin to the dead, but also the people held him in great

honour because his son Menoeceus had offered himself with a willing heart that he might deliver his city from captivity.

Now when Creon was come to the throne, he made a proclamation about the two princes, commanding that they should bury Eteocles with all honour, seeing that he died as beseemed a good man and a brave, doing battle for his country, that it should not be delivered into the hands of the enemy; but as for Polynices he bade them leave his body to be devoured by the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field, because he had joined himself to the enemy, and would have beaten down the walls of the city, and burned the temples of the gods with fire, and led the people captive. Also he commanded that if any man should break this decree he should suffer death by stoning.

Now Antigone, who was sister to the two princes, heard that the decree had gone forth, and chancing to meet her sister Ismene before the gates of the palace, spake to her, saying:

"O my sister, hast thou heard this decree that the King hath put forth concerning our brethren that are dead?"

Then Ismene made answer: "I have heard nothing my sister, only that we are bereaved of both of our brethren in one day, and that the army of the Argives is departed in this night that is now past. So much I know, but no more."

"Hearken then. King Creon hath made a proclamation that they shall bury Eteocles with all honour; but that Polynices shall lie unburied, that the birds of the air and the beasts of the field may devour him; and that whosoever shall break this decree shall suffer death by stoning."

"But if it be so, my sister, how can we avail to change it?"

"Think whether or no thou wilt share with me the doing of this deed."

"What deed? What meanest thou?"

"To pay due honour to this dead body"

"What? Wilt thou bury him when the King hath forbidden it?"

"Yea, for he is my brother and also thine, though, perchance, thou wouldst not have it so. And I will not play him false."

"O my sister, wilt thou do this when Creon hath forbidden it?"

"Why should he stand between me and mine?"

"But think now what sorrows are come upon our house. For our father perished miserably, having first put out his own eyes; and our mother hanged herself with her own hands; and our two brothers fell in one day, each by the other's spear; and now we two only are left. And shall we not fall into a worse destruction than any, if we transgress these commands of the King? Think, too, that we are women and not men, and of necessity obey them that are stronger. Wherefore, as for me, I will pray the dead to pardon me, seeing that I am thus constrained; but I will obey them that rule."

"I advise thee not, and, if thou thinkest thus, I would not have thee for helper. But know that I will bury my brother, nor could I better die than for doing such a deed. For as he loved me, so also do I love him greatly. And shall not I do pleasure to the dead rather than to the living, seeing that I shall abide with the dead for ever? But thou, if thou wilt, do dishonour to the laws of the gods?"

"I dishonour them not. Only I cannot set myself against the powers that be."

"So be it; but I will bury my brother."

"O my sister, how I fear for thee!"

"Fear for thyself. Thine own lot needeth all thy care."

"Thou wilt at least keep thy counsel, nor tell the thing to any man."

"Not so: hide it not. I shall scorn thee more if thou proclaim it not aloud to all."

So Antigone departed; and after a while came to the same place King Creon, clad in his royal robes, and with his sceptre in his hand, and set forth his counsel to the elders who were assembled, how he had dealt with the two princes according to their deserving, giving all honour to him that loved his country and casting forth the other unburied. And he bade them take care that this decree should be kept, saying that he had also appointed certain men to watch the dead body.

But he had scarcely left speaking when there came one of these same watchers and said:

"I have not come hither in haste, O King, nay, I doubted much, while I was yet on the way, whether I should not turn again. For now I thought, 'Fool, why goest thou where thou shalt suffer for it'; and then, again, 'Fool, the King will hear the matter elsewhere, and then how wilt thou fare?' But at the last I came as I had purposed, for I know that nothing may happen to me contrary to fate."

"But say," said the King, "what troubles thee so much?"

"First hear my case. I did not the thing, and know not who did it, and it were a grievous wrong should I fall into trouble for such a cause."

"Thou makest a long preface, excusing thyself, but yet hast, as I judge, something to tell."

"Fear, my lord, ever causeth delay."

"Wilt thou not speak out thy news and then begone?"

"I will speak it. Know then that some man hath thrown dust upon this dead corpse, and done besides such things as are needful."

"What sayest thou? Who hath dared to do this deed?"

"That I know not, for there was no mark as of spade or pick-axe; nor was the earth broken, nor had wagon passed thereon. We were sore dismayed when the watchman showed the thing to us; for the body we could not see. Buried indeed it was not, but rather covered with dust. Nor was there any sign as of wild beast or of dog that had torn it. Then there arose a contention among us, each blaming the other, and accusing his fellows, and himself denying that he had done the deed or was privy to it. And doubtless we had fallen to blows but that one spake a word which made us all tremble for fear, knowing that it must be as he said. For he said that the thing must be told to thee, and in no wise hidden. So we drew lots, and by evil chance the lot fell upon me. Wherefore I am here, not willingly, for no man loveth him that bringing evil tidings."

Then said the chief of the old men:

"Consider, O King, for haply this thing is from the gods."

But the King cried:

"Thinkest thou that the gods care for such an one as this dead man, who would have burnt their temples with fire, and laid waste the land which they love, and set at naught the laws? Not so. But there

are men in this city who have long time had ill will to me, not bowing their necks to my yoke; and they have persuaded these fellows with money to do this thing. Surely there never was so evil a thing as money, which maketh cities into ruinous heaps, and banisheth men from their houses, and turneth their thoughts from good unto evil. But as for them that have done this deed for hire, of a truth they shall not escape, for I say to thee, fellow, if ye bring not here before my eyes the man that did this thing, I will hang you up alive. So shall ye learn that ill gains bring no profit to a man."

So the guard departed; but as he went he said to himself:

"Now may the gods grant that the man be found; but however this may be, thou shalt not see me come again on such errand as this, for even now have I escaped beyond all hope."

Notwithstanding, after a space he came back with one of his fellows; and they brought with them the maiden Antigone, with her hands bound together.

And it chanced that at the same time King Creon came forth from the palace. Then the guard set forth the thing to him, saying:

"We cleared away the dust from the dead body, and sat watching it. And when it was now noon, and the sun was at his height, there came a whirlwind over the plain, driving a great cloud of dust. And when this had passed, we looked, and lo! this maiden whom we have brought hither stood by the dead corpse. And when she saw that it lay bare as before, she sent up an exceeding bitter cry, even as a bird whose young ones have been taken from the nest. Then she cursed them that had done this deed; and brought dust and sprinkled it upon

the dead man, and poured water upon him three times. Then we ran and laid hold upon her, and accused her that she had done this deed; and she denied it not. But as for me, 'tis well to have escaped from death, but it is ill to bring friends into the same. Yet I hold that there is nothing dearer to a man than his life."

Then said the King to Antigone:

"Tell me in a word, didst thou know my decree?"

"I knew it. Was it not plainly declared?"

"How daredst thou to transgress the laws?"

"Zeus made not such laws, nor Justice that dwelleth with the gods below. I judged not that thy decrees had such authority that a man should transgress for them the unwritten sure commandments of the gods. For these, indeed, are not of to-day or yesterday, but they live for ever, and their beginning no man knoweth. Should I, for fear of thee, be found guilty against them? That I should die I knew. Why not? All men must die. And if I die before my time, what loss? He who liveth among many sorrows even as I have lived, counteth it gain to die. But had I left my own mother's son unburied, this had been loss indeed."

Then said the King:

"Such stubborn thoughts have a speedy fall, and are shivered even as the iron that hath been made hard in the furnace. And as for this woman and her sister — for I judge her sister to have had a part in this matter — though they were nearer to me than all my kindred, yet shall they not escape the doom of death. Wherefore

let some one bring the other woman hither."

And while they went to fetch the maiden Ismene, Antigone said to the King:

"Is it not enough for thee to slay me? What need to

say more? For thy words please me not nor mine thee. Yet what nobler thing could I have done than to bury my mother's son? And so would all men say but fear shutteth their mouths."

"Nay," said the King, "none of the children of Cadmus thinketh thus, but thou only. But, hold, was not he that fell in battle with this man thy brother also?"

"Yes, truly, my brother he was."

"And dost thou not dishonour him when thou honourest his enemy?"

"The dead man would not say it, could he speak."

"Shall then the wicked have like honour with the good?"

"How knowest thou but that such honour pleaseth the gods below?"

"I have no love for them I hate, though they be dead."

"Of hating I know nothing; 'tis enough for me to love."

"If thou wilt love, go love the dead. But while I live no woman shall rule me."

Then those that had been sent to fetch the maiden Ismene brought her forth from the palace. And when the King accused her that she had been privy to the deed she denied not, but would have shared one lot with her sister.

But Antigone turned from her, saying:

"Not so; thou hast no part or lot in the matter. For thou hast chosen life, and I have chosen death; and even so shall it be."

And when Ismene saw that she prevailed nothing with her sister, she turned to the King and said:

"Wilt thou slay the bride of thy son?"

"Ay," said he, "there are other brides to win!"



"But none," she made reply, "that accord so well with him."

"I will have no evil wives for my sons," said the King.

Then cried Antigone:

"O Haemon, whom I love, how thy father wrongeth thee!"

Then the King bade the guards lead the two into the palace. But scarcely had they gone when there came to the place the Prince Haemon, the King's son, who was betrothed to the maiden Antigone. And when the King saw him, he said:

"Art thou content, my son, with thy father's judgment?"

And the young man answered:

"My father, I would follow thy counsels in all things."

Then said the King:

"'Tis well spoken, my son. This is a thing to be desired, that a man should have obedient children. But if it be otherwise with a man, he hath gotten great trouble for himself, and maketh sport for them that hate him. And now as to this matter. There is naught worse than an evil wife. Wherefore I say let this dam-el

wed a bridegroom among the dead. For since I have found her, alone of all this people, breaking my decree, surely she shall die. Nor shall it profit her to claim kinship with me, for he that would rule a city must first deal justly with his own kindred. And as for obedience, this it is that maketh a city to stand both in peace and in war."

To this the Prince Haemon made answer:

"What thou sayest, my father, I do not judge. Yet bethink thee, that I see and hear on thy behalf what is

hidden from thee. For common men cannot abide thy look if they say that which pleaseth thee not. Yet do I hear it in secret. Know then that all the city mourneth for this maiden, saying that she dieth wrongfully

for a very noble deed, in that she buried her brother. And 'tis well, my father, not to be wholly set on thy thoughts, but to listen to the counsels of others."

"Nay," said the King; "shall I be taught by such an one as thou?"

"I pray thee regard my words, if they be well, and not my years."

"Can it be well to honour them that transgress? And hath not this woman transgressed?"

"The people of this city judgeth not so."

"The people, sayest thou? Is it for them to rule, or for me?"

"No city is the possession of one man only."

So the two answered one the other, and their anger waxed hot. And at the last the King cried:

"Bring this accursed woman, and slay her before his eyes."

And the Prince answered:

"That thou shalt never do. And know this also, that thou shalt never see my face again."

So he went away in a rage; and the old men would have appeased the King's wrath, but he would not hearken to them, but said that the two maidens should die.

"Wilt thou then slay them both?" said the old men.

"'Tis well said," the King made answer. "Her that meddled not with the matter I harm not."

"And how wilt thou deal with the other?"

"There is a desolate place, and there I will shut her

up alive in a sepulchre; yet giving her so much of food as shall quit us of guilt in the matter, for I would not have the city defiled. There let her persuade Death whom she loveth so much, that he harm her not."

So the guards led Antigone away to shut her up alive in the sepulchre. But scarcely had they departed when there came an old prophet Tiresias, seeking the King. Blind he was, so that a boy led him by the hand; but the gods had given him to see things to come.

And when the King saw him he asked:

"What seekest thou, wisest of men?"

Then the prophet answered:

"Hearken, O King, and I will tell thee. I sat in my seat, after my custom, in the place whither all manner of birds resort. And as I sat I heard a cry of birds that I knew not, very strange and full of wrath. And I knew that they tare and slew each other, for I heard the fierce flapping of their wings. And being afraid, I made inquiry about the fire, how it burned upon the altars. And this boy, for as I am a guide to others so he guideth me, told me that it shone not at all, but smouldered and was dull, and that the flesh which was burnt upon the altar spluttered in the flame, and wasted away into corruption and filthiness. And now I tell thee, O King, that the city is troubled by thy ill counsels. For the dogs and the birds of the air tear the flesh of this dead son of Oedipus, whom thou sufferest not to have due

burial, and carry it to the altars, polluting them therewith.

Wherefore the gods receive not from us prayer or sacrifice; and the cry of the birds hath an evil sound, for they are full of the flesh of a man. Therefore I bid thee be wise in time. For all men may err; but he that