

had used her veil to hang herself. Haemon, in a frenzied state, was embracing her corpse. He drew his sword upon his father, who fled. Then, in a swift agony of remorse, the son slew himself.

Having heard this news, Eurydicè silently retires into the house.

She has hardly withdrawn, when Creon enters, with attendants, carrying Haemon's shrouded corpse¹ upon a bier. He bewails his own folly as the cause of his son's death. Amid his laments, a Messenger from the house announces that Eurydicè has stabbed herself at the household altar, with imprecations on the husband. Wholly desolate and wretched, Creon prays for death; nor has the Chorus any gentler comfort for him than the stern precept of resignation,—‘Pray thou no more; mortals have no escape from destined woe.’ As he is conducted into the house, the closing words of the drama are spoken by the leader of the Chorus: ‘Wisdom is the supreme part of happiness, and reverence towards the gods must be inviolate. Great words of prideful men are ever punished with great blows, and in old age teach the chastened to be wise.’

§ 4. This sketch may serve to illustrate the powerful unity of the play. The issue defined in the opening scene,—the conflict of divine with human law,—remains the central interest throughout. The action, so simple in plan, is varied by masterly character-drawing, both in the two principal figures, and in those lesser persons who contribute gradations of light and shade to the picture. There is no halting in the march of the drama; at each successive step we become more and more keenly interested to see how this great conflict is to end; and when the tragic climax is reached, it is worthy of such a progress. It would not, however, be warrantable to describe the construction of the play as faultless. No one who seeks fully to comprehend and enjoy this great work of art can be content to ignore certain questions which are suggested by one part of it,—the part from v. 998 to 1243, which introduces and develops the catastrophe.

Unity of motive.

The mode of the catastrophe.

¹ *i.e.*, an effigy. The deuteragonist, who had acted Haemon, had been on the stage, as Messenger, up to v. 1256, and had still to come on as Second Messenger at v. 1278.