

Tranquille elle y monta ; quand, debout sur le faite,
 Elle vit ce bûcher, qui l'allait dévorer,
 Les bourreaux en suspens, la flamme déjà prête,
Sentant son cœur faillir, elle baissa la tête,
Et se prit à pleurer¹.

So it is that the Antigone of Sophocles, in the last scene of her life, feels her heart fail, bows her head, and weeps ; but the first verse of the passage just quoted suggests a difference which makes the Greek maiden the more tragic figure of the two : when Antigone looked to heaven, she could find no certain comfort.

Thus has Sophocles created a true heroine ; no fanatic enamoured of martyrdom, no virago, but a true woman, most tender-hearted, most courageous and steadfast ; whose sense of duty sustains her in doing a deed for which she knows that she must die ;—when it has been done, and death is at hand, then, indeed, there is a brief cry of anguish from that brave and loving spirit ; it is bitter to die thus : but human sympathy is denied to her, and even the gods seem to have hidden their faces. Nowhere else has the poetry of the ancient world embodied so lofty or so beautiful an ideal of woman's love and devotion. The Macaria of Euripides resigns her life to save the race of the Heracleidae ; his Iphigeneia, to prosper the course of the Greek fleet ; his Alcestis, to save the life of her husband. In each of these cases, a divine voice had declared that some one must die ; in each, the heroism required was purely passive ; and in each a definite gain was promised,—for it was at least a pious opinion in the wife of Admetus (when all his other friends had declined his request that some of them would oblige him by dying for him²) to think that his survival would be a gain. Not one of these Euripidean heroines, pathetic though they be, can for a moment be ranked with Fedalma in George Eliot's *Spanish Gypsy*, when

¹ Quoted by M. Patin in his *Études sur les Tragiques grecs*, vol. II., p. 271.

² Has the total absence of the sense of humour, in its disastrous effect upon tragic pathos, ever been more wonderfully illustrated than by Euripides in those lines of the *Alcestis*?—*πάντας δ' ἐλέγξας καὶ διεξελθὼν φίλους, | πατέρα, γεραιάν θ' ἢ σφ' ἔτικτε μητέρα, | οὐχ ἦνρε πλὴν γυναικὸς ὅστις ἤθελε | θανεῖν πρὸ κείνου μῆδ' ἔτ' εἰσορᾶν φάος ;* (vv. 15 ff.)