Children of the Dawn: Old Tales of Greece

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CHILDREN OF THE DAWN

OLD·TALES·OF·GREECE

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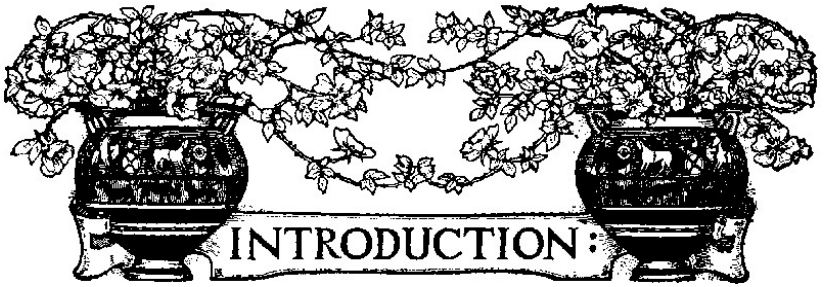

THE aim of this volume is to present, in a form suitable for young readers, a small selection from the almost inexhaustible treasure-house of the ancient Greek tales, which abound (it is needless to say) in all Greek poetry, and are constantly referred to by the prose-writers. These stories are found, whether narrated at length, or sometimes only mentioned in a cursory and tantalising reference, from the earliest poets, Homer and Hesiod, through the lyric age, and the Attic renaissance of the fifth century, when they form the material of the tragic drama, down to the second century B.C., when Apollodorus, the Athenian grammarian, made a prose collection of them, which is invaluable. They reappear at Rome in the Augustan age (and later), in the poems of Vergil, Ovid, and Statius—particularly in Ovid's "Metamorphoses." Many more are supplied by Greek or Roman travellers, scholars, geographers, or historians, of the first three centuries of our era, such as Strabo, Pausanias, Athenaeus, Apuleius and AElian. The tales are various-stories of love, adventure, heroism, skill, endurance, achievement or defeat. The gods take active part, often in conflict with each other. The heroes or victims are men and women; and behind all, inscrutable and inexorable, sits the dark figure of Fate. The Greeks had a rare genius for story-telling of all sorts. Whether the tales were of native growth, or imported from the East or elsewhere—and both sources are doubtless represented—once they had passed through the Greek hands, the Greek spirit, "finely touched to fine issues," marked them for its own with the beauty, vivacity, dramatic interest, and imaginative outline and detail, which were never absent from the

best Greek work, least of all during the centuries that lie between Homer and Plato.

The eleven tales here presented from this vast store are (as will be seen) very various both in date, character, and detail; and they seem well chosen for their purpose. The writer of these English versions of ancient stories has clearly aimed at a terse simplicity of style,while giving full details, with occasional descriptive passages where required to make the scene more vivid; and, for the same end, she has rightly made free use of dialogue or soliloquy wherever the story could thus be more pointedly or dramatically told.

The first story, called "The Riddle of the Sphinx," gives us in brief the whole Theban tale, from King Laius and the magical building of the city, to the incomparable scene from Sophocles' last play, describing the "Passing of OEdipus." It even includes the heroic action of Antigone, in burying with due rites her dead brother, in spite of the tyrant's threats, and at the cost of her own life. No tale was more often treated in ancient poetry than this tragedy of Thebes. Homer and Hesiod both refer to it, AEschylus wrote a whole trilogy, and Sophocles three separate dramas, on this theme. Euripides dealt with it in his "Phoenissae," which survives, and in his "OEdipus and Antigone," of which a few fragments remain. And several other poets whose works are lost are known by the titles of their plays to have dealt with the same subject.

One other tale in this selection rests in large measure on the Attic drama—namely, the story of Alcestis, the fourth in this series. As far as we know, Euripides alone of the ancients treated this theme, in his beautiful and interesting play "Alcestis," which is here closely followed by our author. The past history of Admetus, the king, which Euripides briefly summarises in the prologue, is here dramatized, and adds much interest to the story, including as it does the Argonauts' visit to Pelias, and the romantic imaginary scene of the king's first meeting with Alcestis.

The two charming love-stories which come second and third in this series, though unquestionably Greek in origin, reach us from Roman

sources, and bear clear evidence in their form and spirit of belonging to a later age. The character of the love romance in "Hero and Leander" and the transparent allegory of "Eros and Psyche" (Love and the Soul), leave little doubt on this point. The former tale is ascribed to a late Greek epic poet, Musaeus, of whom nothing else is known ; and the latter we owe to Apuleius, a Roman philosopher and man of letters in the second century A.D.

The fifth and tenth stories (in both of which Atalanta appears) rest in their present shape on the authority of Apollodorus; but the incidents of the Calydonian boarhunt, and the race for the hand of the princess, won by the suitor's clever trick of the golden apples, are found as local traditions connected with two different parts of Greece, Arcadia and Boeotia, and may be in. their earliest form of great antiquity.

The two fanciful stories of Echo and Narcissus, and Alpheus and Arethusa, which form the sixth and ninth in this series, are among the prettiest of Nature myths, and are characteristic Greek inventions. The chase of Arethusa under the sea by the river-god Alpheus was to a Greek the most natural of fancies, for to him all water was protected by, or identified with, some god, nymph, or spirit; and the fancy was especially easy to a dweller in the limestone district of Arcadia, where streams may run underground for long distances, and reappear as full-grown rivers from a cavern at the foot of the hills. The tale of Echo in its present form comes only from Latin poetry (Ovid); but the fancy that Echo was a spirit or nymph, which is the heart of the story, may well be of unknown antiquity, especially among the most imaginative of races, living in a land of rocky hills, the native home of echoes.

Of the remaining stories (Pygmalion, Orpheus, and OEnone), the briefest comment will suffice. The beautiful and pathetic tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, which is best known to us from the incomparable version of it at the close of Vergil's fourth "Georgic," we know on good evidence to have been extant at least as early as AEschylus (fifth century B.c.), and possibly much earlier. The touching story of OEnone is post-Homeric, and is known to us only

from Ovid and Apollodorus. It is familiar to all Englishmen from the two beautiful poems of Tennyson, which are respectively among the earliest and latest of his works. The strange yet striking tale of Pygmalion also comes to us from Apollodorus; and though it may be much older, it is perhaps not likely to belong to an earlier time than the fourth century B.C., a date which seems to be suggested both by the character of the story, and the development of the art of sculpture implied in it.

It only remains to commend these beautiful old stories, in their English dress, to the favour of those for whom they are intended.

A. SIDGWICK.

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CONTENTS

THE RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX

AR away towards the east and the regions of the rising sun lies the fair lands of Hellas, a land famous from of old for mighty deeds of mighty men, and famous to this day among the nations of the earth; for though the mighty men, her heroes, have long since passed away, their names live on for ever in the pages of her grand old poets, who sing of their deeds in strains which still kindle the hearts of men, and stir them up to be heroes too, and fight life's battle bravely.

Long ago, in the city of Thebes, there ruled a king named Laius and his queen Iocasta. They were children of the gods, and Thebes itself, men said, had been built by hands more than mortal; for Apollo had led Cadmus the Phœnician, the son of Zeus, to the sacred spot where he was to raise the citadel of Thebes, and Pallas Athene had helped him to slay the monstrous dragon that guarded the sacred spring of Ares. The teeth of the dragon, Cadmus took and planted in the plain of Thebes, and from this seed there sprang up a great host of armed men, who would have slain him; but he took a stone and cast it in their midst, whereupon the serpent-men turned their arms one against another, fighting up and down the plain till only five were left. With the help of these five, Cadmus built the citadel of Thebes, and round it made a wall so wide that a dozen men and more might walk upon it, and so huge were the stones and so strong was the masonry that parts of it are standing to this day. As for the city itself, the tale goes that Amphion, the mightiest of all musicians, came with his lyre, and so sweetly did he play that the hearts of the very stones were stirred within them, so that of their own free-will they fell into their places, and the town of Thebes rose up beneath the shadow of the citadel.

For many a long day did Laius and Iocasta rule over the people of Thebes, and all that time they had no children; for a dreadful curse lay on the head of Laius that, if ever he had a son, by that son's hand

he should die. At last a boy was born to them, and Laius, remembering the curse, swore that the child should never grow to manhood, and he bade Iocasta slay him forthwith. But she, being his mother, was filled with a great love and pity for the helpless child. When it nestled in her arms and clung to her breast she could not find it in her heart to slay it, and she wept over it many a bitter salt tear, and pressed it closer to her bosom. As the tiny fingers closed round hers, and the soft head pressed against her, she murmured, "Surely, so little a thing can do no harm? Sweet babe, they say that I must kill thee, but they know not a mother's love. Rather than that, I will put thee away out of my sight, and never see thee more, though the gods know I had sooner die than lose thee, my little one, my own sweet babe."

So she called a trusty house-slave, who knew the king's decree, and placing the child in his arms, she said,

"Go, take it away, and hide it in the hills. Perchance the gods will have pity on it, and put it in the heart of some shepherd, who feeds his flocks on distant pastures, to take the child home to his cot and rear it. Farewell, my pretty babe. The green grass must be thy cradle, and the mountain breezes must lull thee to sleep. May the gods in their mercy bless thy childhood's hours, and make thy name famous among men; for thou art a king's son, and a child of the Immortals, and the Immortals forget not those that are born of their blood."

So the man took the child from Iocasta; but, because he feared the king's decree, he pierced its ankles and bound them together, for he thought

"Surely, even if some shepherd wandering on the mountain-side should light upon the child, he will never rear one so maimed; and if the king should ask, I will say that he is dead."

But because the child wept for the pain in its ankles, he took it home first to his wife to be fed and comforted, and when she gave it back into his arms, it smiled up into his face. Then all the hardness died

out of his heart, for the gods had shed about it a grace to kindle love in the coldest breast.

Now Cithæron lies midway between Thebes and Corinth, and in winter-time the snow lies deep upon the summit, and the wild winds shriek through the rocks and clefts, and the pine-trees pitch and bend beneath the fury of the blast, so that men called it the home of the Furies, the Awful Goddesses, who track out sin and murder. And there, too, in the streams and caverns, dwell the naiads and the nymphs, wild spirits of the rocks and waters; and if any mortal trespass on their haunts, they drive him to madness in their echoing grottoes and gloomy caves. Yet, for all that, though men called it dark Cithæron, the grass about its feet grew fine and green, so that the shepherds came from all the neighbouring towns to pasture their flocks on its well-watered slopes. Here it was that Laius's herdsman fell in with a herdsman of Polybus, king of Corinth, and, seeing that he was a kindly man, and likely to have compassion on the child, he gave it to him to rear.

Now, it had not pleased the gods to grant any children to Polybus, king of Corinth, and Merope, his wife, though they wreathed their altars with garlands and burnt sweet savour of incense; and at last all hope died out of their hearts, and they said,

"The gods are angry, and will destroy our race, and the kingdom shall pass into the hands of a stranger."

But one day it chanced that the queen saw in the arms of one of her women a child she had not seen before, and she questioned her, and asked if it were hers. And the woman confessed that her husband, the king's herdsman, had found it on dim Cithæron, and had taken pity on it, and brought it home. Then the queen looked at the child, and seeing that it was passing fair, she said,

"Surely this is no common babe, but a child of the Immortals. His hair is golden as the summer corn, and his eyes like the stars in heaven. What if the gods have sent him to comfort our old age, and

rule the kingdom when we are dead? I will rear him in the palace as my own son, and he shall be a prince in the land of Corinth."

So the child lived in the palace, and became a son to Polybus and Merope, and heir to the kingdom. For want of a name they called him Œdipus, because his ankles, when they found him, were all swollen by the pin that the herdsman had put through them. As he grew up, he found favour in all men's eyes, for he was tall and comely and cunning withal.

"The gods are gracious," men said, "to grant the king such a son, and the people of Corinth so mighty a prince, to rule over them in days to come."

For as yet they knew not that he was a foundling, and no true heir to the throne.

Now, while the child was still young, he played about the courts of the palace, and in running and leaping and in feats of strength and hardihood of heart there was none to beat him among his playmates, or even to stand up against him, save one. But so well matched were these two, that the other children would gather round them in a ring to watch them box and wrestle, and the victor they would carry on their shoulders round the echoing galleries with shouting and clapping of hands; and sometimes it was Œdipus, and sometimes the other lad. But at length there came a time when again and again Œdipus was proved the stronger, and again and again the other slunk home beaten, like a cur that has been whipped; and he brooded over his defeat, and nourished hatred in his heart against Œdipus, and vowed that one day he would have his revenge by fair means or by foul.

But when Merope the queen saw Œdipus growing tall and fair, and surpassing all his comrades in strength, she took him up one day on to the citadel, and showed him all the lovely land of Hellas lying at his feet. Below them spread the shining city, with its colonnades and fountains and stately temples of the gods, like some jewel in the golden sands, and far away to the westward stretched the blue

Corinthian Gulf, till the mountains of Ætolia seemed to join hands with their sisters in Peloponnese. And she showed him the hills of Arcadia, the land of song and shepherds, where Pan plays his pipe beneath the oak-trees, and nymphs and satyrs dance all the day long. Away to the bleak north-west stood out the snowy peaks of Mount Parnassus and Helicon, the home of the Muses, who fill men's minds with wisdom and their hearts with the love of all things beautiful. Here the first narcissus blooms, and the olive and the myrtle and rosy almond-blossom gently kiss the laughing rivulets and the shining, dancing cascades. For Helicon was a fair and gentle youth whom his cruel brother Cithæron slew in his mad jealousy. Whereupon the gods changed them both into mountains, and Helicon is mild and fair to this day, and the home of all good things; but Cithæron is bleak and barren, because his hard heart had no pity, and the Furies haunt it unceasingly. Then Merope turned him to the eastward and the land of the Dawning Day, and showed him the purple peaks of Ægina and the gleaming Attic shore. And she said to him, "Œdipus, my son, seest thou how Corinth lies midway 'twixt north and south and east and west, a link to join the lands together and a barrier to separate the seas?"

And Œdipus answered,

"Of a truth, mother, he who rules in Corinth hath need of a lion's heart, for he must stand ever sword in hand and guard the passage from north to south."

"Courage is a mighty thing, my son, but wisdom is mightier. The sword layeth low, but wisdom buildeth up. Seest thou the harbours on either side, facing east and west, and the masts of the ships, like a forest in winter, and the traffic of sailors and merchants on the shore? From all lands they come and bring their wares and merchandise, and men of every nation meet together. Think not, my son, that a lion's heart and a fool's head therewith can ever be a match for the wisdom of Egypt or the cunning of Phœnicia."

Then Œdipus understood, and said,

"Till now I have wrestled and boxed and run races with my fellows on the sands the livelong day, and none can beat me. Henceforth I will sit in the market-place and discourse with foreigners and learned men, so that, when I come to rule in my father's place, I may be the wisest in all the land."

And Merope was pleased by his answer, but in her heart she was sad that his simple childish days were past; and she prayed that if the gods granted him wisdom they would keep his heart pure and free from all uncleanness.

So Œdipus sat in the market-place and talked with merchants and travellers, and he went down to the ships in the harbour and learned many strange things of strange lands—the wisdom of the Egyptians, who were the wisest of all men in the south, and the cunning of the Phœnicians, who were the greatest merchants and sailors in all the world. But in the evening, when the sun was low in the west, and the hills all turned to amethyst and sapphire, and the snow-mountains blushed ruby red beneath his parting kiss, then along the smooth, gold sands of the Isthmus, by the side of the sounding sea, he would box and wrestle and run, till all the ways were darkened and the stars stood out in the sky. For he was a true son of Hellas, and knew that nine times out of every ten a slack body and a slack mind go together.

So he grew up in his beauty, a very god for wisdom and might, and there was no question he could not answer nor riddle he could not solve, so that all the land looked up to him, and the king and queen loved him as their own son.

Now one day there was a great banquet in the palace, to which all the noblest of the land were bidden, and the minstrels played and the tumblers danced and the wine flowed freely round the board, so that men's hearts were opened, and they talked of great deeds and heroes, and boasted what they themselves could do. And Œdipus boasted as loud as any, and challenged one and all to meet him in fair fight. But the youth who had grown up with him in rivalry, and

nourished jealousy and hatred in his heart, taunted him to his face, and said,

"Base born that thou art, and son of slave, thinkest thou that free men will fight with thee? Lions fight not with curs, and though thou clothe thyself with purple and gold, all men know that thou art no true son to him thou callest thy sire."

And this he said being flushed with wine, and because myriad-mouthed Rumour had spread abroad the tale that Œdipus was a foundling, though he himself knew nought thereof.

Then Œdipus flushed red with rage, and swift as a gale that sweeps down from the mountains he fell upon the other, and seizing him by the throat, he shook him till he had not breath to beg for mercy.

"What sayest thou now, thou whelp? Begone with thy lying taunt, now that thou hast licked the dust for thy falsehood."

And he flung him out from the hall. But Merope leant pale and sad against a pillar, and veiled her face in her mantle to hide her tears. And when they were alone, Œdipus took her hand and stroked it, and said,

"Grieve not for my fiery spirit, mother, but call me thine own son, and say that I was right to silence the liar who would cast dishonour upon my father's name and upon thee?"

But she looked at him sadly and longingly through her tears, and spoke in riddling words,

"The gods, my child, sent thee to thy father and to me in answer to our prayers. A gift of God thou art, and a gift of God thou shalt be, living and dead, to them that love thee. The flesh groweth old and withereth away as a leaf, but the spirit liveth on for ever, and those are the truest of kin who are kin in the spirit of goodness and of love."

But Œdipus was troubled, for she would say no more, but only held his hand, and when he drew it away it was wet with her tears. Then he thought in his heart,

"Verily, my mother would not weep for nought. What if, after all, there be something in the tale? I will go to the central shrine of Hellas and ask the god of Truth, golden-haired Apollo. If he say it is a lie, verily I will thrust it back down that coward's throat, and the whole land shall ring with his infamy. And if it be true—the gods will guide me how to act."

So he set forth alone upon his pilgrimage. And he took the road that runs by the side of the sea and up past Mount Gerania, with its pine-clad slopes, where Megarus, the son of Zeus, took refuge, when the floods covered all the land and only the mountain-tops stood out like islands in the sea. For he followed the cry of the cranes as they sought refuge from the waters, and was saved, and founded the city of Megara, which is called by his name to this day. Right past Ægosthena—the home of the black-footed goats—went Œdipus to Creusis, along the narrow rocky path between the mountains and the sea, where a man must needs be sure of foot and steady of head, if he is to stand against the storms that seep down from bleak Cithæron. For the winds rush shrieking down the hills like Furies in their wrath, and they sweep all that stands in their way over the beetling cliffs into the yawning, seething gulf below, and those that fall into her ravening jaws she devours like some wild beast, and they are seen no more. Then he went through fertile Thisbe past the little port of Tipha, the home of Tiphys, helmsman of the famous Argonauts, who sailed to nameless lands and unknown seas in their search for the Golden Fleece. And many a roaring torrent did he cross, as it rushed foaming down from the steep white cliffs of Helicon, and over pathless mountains, past rocky Antieyra and the hills of hellebore, and through the barren plain of Cirrha, till he came to rock-built Crisa and the fair Crisean plain, the land of cornfields and vineyards and the grey-green olive-groves, where in spring-time the pomegranate and oleander flowers shine out red as beacon-fires by night.

There he had well-nigh reached his journey's end, and his heart beat fast as he mingled with the band of pilgrims, each bound on his different quest to the god of Light and Truth, golden-haired Apollo, the mightiest of the sons of Zeus and the slayer of Pytho, the famous dragon. At Delphi is his shrine and dwelling-place, and there within his temple stands the sacred stone which fell from heaven and marks the centre of the earth. A great gulf yawns beneath, a mighty fissure going deep down into the bowels of the earth to the regions of the dead and the land of endless night; and deadly fumes rise up and noxious mists and vapours, so that the Pythian priestess, who sits above on her brazen tripod, is driven to frenzy by their power. Then it is that she hears the voice of Apollo, and her eyes are opened to see what no mortal can see, and her ears to hear the secrets of the gods and Fate. Those things which Apollo bids her she chants to the pilgrims in mystic verse, which only the wise can interpret aright. So from north and south and east and west men flocked to hear her prophecies, and the fame of Apollo's shrine went out through every land$#8212from Ocean's stream and the Pillars of Heracles to the far Ionian shore and Euphrates, the mighty river of the East.

Œdipus drew near to the sacred place and made due sacrifice, and washing in the great stone basin, and put away all uncleaness from his heart, and went through the portals of rock to the awful shrine within, where the undying fire burns night and day and the sacred laurel stands. And he put his question to the god and waited for an answer. Through the dim darkness of the shrine he saw the priestess on her tripod, veiled in a mist of incense and vapour, and as the power of the god came upon her she beheld the things of the future and the hidden secrets of Fate. And she raised her hand towards Œdipus, and with pale lips spoke the words of doom,

"Œdipus, ill-fated, thine own sire shalt thou slay."

As she spoke the words his head swam round like a whirlpool, and his heart seemed turned to stone; then, with a loud and bitter cry, he rushed from the temple, through the thronging crowd of pilgrims down into the Sacred Way, and the people moved out of his path like shadows. Blindly he sped along the stony road, down through

the pass to a place where three roads meet, and he shuddered as he crossed them; for Fear laid her cold hand upon his heart and filled it with a wild, unreasoning dread, and branded the image of that awful spot upon his brain so that he could never forget it. On every side the mountains frowned down upon him, and seemed to echo to and fro the doom which the priestess had spoken. Straight forward he went like some hunted thing, turning neither to right nor left, till he came to a narrow path, where he met an old man in a chariot drawn by mules, with his trusty servants round him.

"Ho! there, thou madman!" they shouted; "stand by and let the chariot pass."

"Madmen yourselves," he cried, for his sore heart could not brook the taunt. "I am a king's son, and will stand aside for no man."

So he tried to push past them by force, though he was one against many. And the old man stretched out his hand as though to stop him, but as well might a child hope to stand up against a wild bull. For he thrust him aside and felled him from his seat, and turned upon his followers, and, striking out to right and left, he stunned one and slew another, and forced his way through in blind fury. But the old man lay stiff and still upon the road. The fall from the chariot had quenched the feeble spark of life within him, and his spirit fled away to the house of Hades and the kingdom of the Dead. One trusty servant lay slain by his side, and the other senseless and stunned, and when he awoke, to find his master and his comrades slain, Œdipus was far upon his way.

On and on he went, over hill and dale and mountain-stream, [mountainstream?] till at length his strength gave way, and he sank down exhausted. And black despair laid hold of his heart, and he said within himself,

"Better to die here on the bare hill-side and be food for the kites and crows than return to my father's house to bring death to him and sorrow to my mother's heart."

But sweet sleep fell upon him, and when he awoke hope and the love of life put other thoughts in his breast. And he remembered the words which Merope the queen had spoken to him one day when he was boasting of his strength and skill.

"Strength and skill, my son, are the gifts of the gods, as the rain which falleth from heaven and giveth life and increase to the fruits of the earth. But man's pride is an angry flood that bringeth destruction on field and city. Remember that great gifts may work great good or great evil, and he who has them must answer to the gods below if he use them well or ill."

And he thought within himself,

" 'Twere, ill to die if, even in the uttermost parts of the earth, men need a strong man's arm and a wise man's cunning. Never more will I return to far-famed Corinth and my home by the sounding sea, but to far-distant lands will I go and bring blessing to those who are not of my kin, since to mine own folk I must be a curse if ever I return."

So he went along the road from Delphi till he came to seven-gated Thebes. There he found all the people in deep distress and mourning, for their king Laius was dead, slain by robbers on the high road, and they had buried him far from his native land at a place where three roads meet. And, worse still, their city was beset by a terrible monster, the Sphinx, part eagle and part lion, with the face of a woman, who every day devoured a man because they could not answer the riddle she set them. All this Œdipus heard as he stood in the market-place and talked with the people.

"What is this famous riddle that none can solve?" he asked.

"Alas! young man, that none can say. For he that would solve the riddle must go up alone to the rock where she sits. Then and there she chants the riddle, and if he answer it not forthwith she tears him limb from limb. And if none go up to try the riddle, then she swoops down upon the city and carries off her victims, and spares not woman or child. Our wisest and bravest have gone up, and our eyes

have seen them no more. Now there is no man left who dare face the terrible beast."

Then Œdipus said,

"I will go up and face this monster. It must be a hard riddle indeed if I cannot answer it."

"Oh, overbold and rash," they cried, "thinkest thou to succeed where so many have failed?"

"Better to try, and fail, than never to try at all."

"Yet, where failure is death, surely a man should think twice?"

"A man can die but once, and how better than in trying to save his fellows?"

As they looked at his strong young limbs and his fair young face they pitied him.

"Stranger," they said, "who art thou to throw away thy life thus heedlessly? Are there none at home to mourn thee and no kingdom thou shouldst rule? For, of a truth, thou art a king's son and no common man."

"Nay, were I to return, my home would be plunged in mourning and woe, and the people would drive me from my father's house."

They marvelled at his answer, but dared question him no further; and, seeing that nothing would turn him from his purpose, they showed him the path to the Sphinx's rock, and all the people went out with him to the gate with prayers and blessings. At the gate they left him, for he who goes up to face the Sphinx must go alone, and none can stand by and help him. So he went through the Crenean gate and across the stream of Dirce into the wide plain, and the mountain of the Sphinx stood out dark and clear on the other side. Then he prayed to Pallas Athene, the grey-eyed goddess of Wisdom,

and she took all fear from his heart. So he went up boldly to the rock, where the monster sat waiting to spring upon her prey; yet for all his courage his heart beat fast as he looked on her. For at first she appeared like a mighty bird, with great wings of bronze and gold, and the glancing sunbeams played about them, casting a halo of light around, and in the midst of the halo her face shone out pale and beautiful as a star at dawn. But when she saw him coming near, a greedy fire lit up her eyes, and she put out her cruel claws and lashed her tail from side to side like an angry lion waiting for his prey. Nevertheless, Œdipus spoke to her fair and softly.

"Oh, lady, I am come to hear thy famous riddle and answer it or die."

"Foolhardy manling, a dainty morsel the gods have sent this day, with thy fair young face and fresh young limbs."

And she licked her cruel lips.

Then Œdipus felt his blood boil within him, and he wished to slay her then and there; for she who had been the fairest of woman was now the foulest of beasts, and he saw that by her cruelty and lust she had killed the woman's soul within her, and the soul of a beast had taken its place.

"Come, tell me thy famous riddle, foul Fury that thou art, that I may answer it and rid the land of this curse."

"At dawn it creeps on four legs; at noon it strides on two; at sunset and evening it totters on three. What is this thing, never the same, yet not many, but one?"

So she chanted slowly, and her eyes gleamed cruel and cold.

Then thought Œdipus within himself,

"Now or never must my learning and wit stand me in good stead, or in vain have I talked with the wisest of men and learnt the secrets of Phœnicia and Egypt."

SHE PUT OUT HER CRUEL CLAWS AND LASHED HER TAIL FROM SIDE TO SIDE LIKE AN ANGRY LION WAITING FOR HIS PREY.

And the gods who had given him understanding sent light into his heart, and boldly he answered,

"What can this creature be but man, O Sphinx? For, a helpless babe at the dawn of life, he crawls on his hands and feet; at noontide he walks erect in the strength of his manhood; and at evening he supports his tottering limbs with a staff, the prop and stay of old age. Have I not answered aright and guessed thy famous riddle?"

Then with a loud cry of despair, and answering him never a word, the great beast sprang up from her seat on the rock and hurled herself over the precipice into the yawning gulf beneath. Far away across the plain the people heard her cry, and they saw the flash of the sun on her brazen wings like a gleam of lightning in the summer sky. Thereupon they sent up a great shout of joy to heaven, and poured out from every gate into the open plain, and some raised Œdipus upon their shoulders, and with shouts and songs of triumph bore him to the city. Then and there they made him king with one accord, for the old king had left no son behind him, and who more fitted to rule over them than the slayer of the Sphinx and the saviour of their city?

So Œdipus became king of Thebes, and wisely and well did he rule, and for many a long year the land prospered both in peace and war. But the day came when a terrible pestilence broke out, and the people died by hundreds, so that at last Œdipus sent messengers to Delphi to ask why the gods were angry and had sent a plague upon the land. And this was the answer they brought back,

"There is an unclean thing in Thebes. Never has the murderer of Laius been found, and he dwells a pollution in the land. Though the vengeance of the gods is slow, yet it cometh without fail, and the shedding of blood shall not pass unpunished."

Then Œdipus made proclamation through the land that if any man knew who the murderer was, they should give him up to his doom and appease the anger of Heaven. And he laid a terrible curse on any who dared to give so much as a crust of bread or a draught of water

to him who had brought such suffering on the land. So throughout the country far and wide a search was made to track out the stain of blood and cleanse the city from pollution, but day after day the quest was fruitless, and the pestilence raged unceasingly, and darkness fell upon the soul of the people, as their prayers remained unanswered and their burnt-offerings smoked in vain upon the altars of the gods. Then at last Œdipus sent for the blind seer Teiresias, who had lived through six generations of mortal men, and was the wisest of all prophets on earth. He knew the language of birds, and, though his eyes were closed in darkness, his ears were opened to hear the secrets of the universe, and he knew the hidden things of the past and of the future. But at first when he came before the king he would tell him nothing, but begged him to question no further.

"For the things of the future will come of themselves," he cried, "though I shroud them in silence, and evil will it be for thee, O king, and evil for thine house if I speak out the knowledge that is hidden in my heart."

At last Œdipus grew angry at his silence, and taunted him,

"Verily, methinks thou thyself didst aid in the plotting of this deed, seeing that thou carest nought for the people bowed down beneath the pestilence and the dark days that are fallen on the land, so be it thou canst shield the murderer and escape thyself from the curse of the gods."

Then Teiresias was stung past bearing, and would hold his tongue no longer. "By thine own doom shalt thou be judged, O king," he said. "Thou thyself art the murderer, thyself the pollution that staineth the land with the blood of innocent men."

Then Œdipus laughed aloud,

"Verily, old man, thou pratest. What rival hath urged thee to this lie, hoping to drive me from the throne of Thebes? Of a truth, not thine eyes only, but thy heart, is shrouded in a mist of darkness."

"Woe to thee, Œdipus, woe to thee! Thou hast sight, yet seest not who thou art, nor knowest the deed of thine hand. Soon shalt thou wander sightless and blind, a stranger in a strange land, feeling the ground with a staff, and men shall shrink back from thee in horror when they hear thy name and the deed that thou hast done."

And the people were hushed by the words of the old man, and knew not what to think. But the wife of Œdipus, who stood by his side, said,

"Hearken not to him, my lord. For verily no mortal can search the secrets of Fate, as I can prove full well by the words of this same man that he spoke in prophecy. For he it was who said that Laius, the king who is dead, should be slain by the hand of his own son. However, that poor innocent never grew to manhood, but was exposed on the trackless mountain-side to die of cold and hunger; and Laius, men say, was slain by robber bands at a place where three roads meet. So hearken not to seer-craft, ye people, nor trust in the words of one who is proved a false prophet."

But her words brought no comfort to Œdipus, and a dreadful fear came into his heart, like a cold, creeping snake, as he listened. For he thought of his journey from Delphi, and of how in his frenzy he had struck down an old man and his followers at a place where three roads meet. When he questioned her further, the time and the place and the company all tallied, save only that rumour had it that Laius had been slain by robber bands, whilst he had been single-handed against many.

"Was there none left," he asked, "who saw the deed and lived to tell the tale?"

"Yea, one faithful follower returned to bear the news, but so soon as the Sphinx was slain and the people had made thee king he went into distant pastures with his flocks, for he could not brook to see a stranger in his master's place, albeit he had saved the land from woe."

"Go, summon him," said Œdipus. "If the murderers were many, as rumour saith, with his aid we may track them out; but if he was one man single-handed—yea, though that man were myself—of a truth he shall be an outcast from the land, that the plague may be stayed from the people. Verily, my queen, my heart misgives me when I remember my wrath and the deed that I wrought at the cross-roads."

In vain she tried to comfort him, for a nameless fear had laid hold of his heart.

Now, while they were waiting for the herdsman to come, a messenger arrived in haste from Corinth to say that Polybus was dead, and that Œdipus was chosen king of the land, for his fame had gone out far and wide as the slayer of the Sphinx and the wisest of the kings of Hellas. When Œdipus heard the news, he bowed his head in sorrow to hear of the death of the father he had loved, and turning to the messenger, he said,

"For many a long year my heart hath yearned toward him who is dead, and verily my soul is grieved that I shall see him no more in the pleasant light of the sun. But for the oracle's sake I stayed in exile, that my hand might not be red with a father's blood. And now I thank the gods that he has passed away in a green old age, in the fulness of years and of honour."

But the messenger wondered at his words.

"Knewest thou not, then, that Polybus was no father to thee in the flesh, but that for thy beauty and thy strength he chose thee out of all the land to be a son to him and heir to the kingdom of Corinth?"

What sayest thou, bearer of ill news that thou art?" cried Œdipus. "To prove that same tale of thine a slanderous lie I went to Delphi, and there the priestess prophesied that I should slay my own sire. Wherefore I went not back to my native land, but have I lived in exile all my days."

"Then in darkness of soul hast thou lived, O king. For with mine own hands I received thee as a babe from a shepherd on dim Cithæron, from one of the herdsmen of Laius, who was king before thee in this land."

"Woe is me, then! The curse of the gods is over me yet. I know not my sire, and unwittingly I may slay him and rue the evil day. And a cloud of darkness hangeth over me for the slaying of King Laius. But lo! they bring the herdsman who saw the deed done, and pray Heaven he may clear me from all guilt. Bring him forward that I may question him."

Then they brought the man forward before the king, though he shrank back and tried to hide himself. When the messenger from Corinth saw him he started back in surprise, for it was the very man from whose hands he had taken Œdipus on the mountain-side. And he said to the king,

"Behold the man who will tell thee the secret of thy birth. From his hands did I take thee as a babe on dim Cithæron."

Then Œdipus questioned the man, and at first he denied it from fear, but at last he was fain to confess.

"And who gave me to thee to slay on the barren mountain-side?"

"I pray thee, my king, ask me no more. Some things there are that are better unsaid."

"Nay, tell me, and fear not. I care not if I am a child of shame and slavery stains my birth. A son of Fortune the gods have made me, and have given me good days with the evil. Speak out, I pray thee. Though I be the son of a slave, I can bear it."

"No son of a slave art thou, but seed of a royal house. Ask me no more, my king."

"Speak, speak, man. Thou drivest me to anger, and I will make thee tell, though it be by force."

"Ah! lay not cruel hands upon me. For thine own sake I would hide it. From the queen thy mother I had thee, and thy father was—Laius the king. At the cross-roads from Delphi didst thou meet him in his chariot, and slew him unwittingly in thy wrath. Ah, woe is me! For the gods have chosen me out to be an unwilling witness to the truth of their oracles."

Then a great hush fell upon all the people like the lull before a storm. For the words of the herdsman were so strange and terrible that at first they could scarce take in their meaning. But when they understood that Œdipus was Laius's own son, and that he had fulfilled the dreadful prophecy and slain his sire, a great tumult arose, some saying one thing and some another; but the voice of Œdipus was heard above the uproar,

"Ah, woe is me, woe is me! The curse of the gods is upon me, and none can escape their wrath. Blindly have I done this evil, and when I was striving to escape Fate caught me in her hidden meshes. Oh, foolish hearts of men, to think that ye can flee from the doom of the gods; for lo! ye strive in the dark, and your very struggles bind you but closer in the snare of your fate. Cast me from the land, ye people; do with me what ye will. For the gods have made me a curse and a pollution and by my death alone will the land have rest from the pestilence."

And the people would have taken him at his word; for fickle is the heart of the multitude, and swayed this way and that by every breath of calamity. They were sore stricken, too, by the pestilence, and in their wrath against the cause of it they forgot the slaying of the Sphinx and the long days of peace and prosperity. But the blind seer Teiresias rose up in their midst, and at his voice the people were silent.

"Citizens of Cadmus, foolish and blind of heart! Will ye slay the saviour of your city? Have ye forgotten the man-devouring Sphinx

and the days of darkness? Verily prosperity blunteth the edge of gratitude. And thou, Œdipus, cue not the gods for thine evil fate. He that putteth his finger in the fire is burnt, whether he do it knowingly or not. As to thy sire, him indeed didst thou slay in ignorance; but the shedding of man's blood be upon thine own head, for that was the fruit of thy wrathful spirit, which, through, lack of curbing, broke forth like an angry beast. Hadst thou never slain a man, never wouldst thou have slain thy sire. But now thou are a pollution to the land of thy birth, and by long exile and wandering must thou expiate thy sin and die a stranger in a strange land. Yet methinks that in the dark mirror of prophecy I see thy form, as it were, a guardian to the land of thy last resting-place, and in a grove of sacred trees thy spirit's lasting habitation, when thy feet have accomplished the ways of expiation and the days of thy wandering are done."

So the people were silenced. But Œdipus would not be comforted, and in his shame and misery he put out his own eyes because he had looked on unspeakable things. Then he clothed himself in rags and took a pilgrim's staff, to go forth alone upon his wanderings. And the people were glad at his going, because the plague had hardened their hearts, and they cared nothing for his grey hairs and sightless eyes, nor remembered all he had done for them, but thought only how the plague might be stayed. Even Eteocles and Polyneices, his own sons, showed no pity, but would have let him go forth alone, that they might live on the fatness of the land. For their hardness of heart they were punished long after, when they quarrelled as to which should be king, and brought down the flood of war upon Thebes, and fell each by the other's hand in deadly strife. Of all his children, Antigone alone refused to let him go forth a solitary wanderer, and would listen to none of his entreaties when he spoke of the hardness of the way that would lie before them.

"Nay, father," she cried; "thinkest thou that I could suffer thee to wander sightless and blind in thine old age with none to stay thy feeble steps or lend thee the light of their eyes?"

"The road before us is hard and long, my child, and no man can say when my soul shall find rest. The ways of the world are cruel, and men love not the cursed of the gods. As for thee, Heaven bless thee for thy love; but thou art too frail and tender a thing to eat of the bread and drink of the waters of sorrow."

"Ah, father, thinkest thou that aught could be more bitter than to sit in the seat of kings whilst thou wanderest a beggar on the face of the earth? Nay, suffer me to go with thee, and stay thy steps in the days of thy trial."

Nothing he could say would dissuade her. So they two set out alone upon their wanderings, the old man bowed down beneath the weight of sorrow, and the young girl in the freshness of youth and beauty, with a great love in her heart—a bright, burning love which was the light by which she lived, and a light which never led her astray. For love guided her into desolate places and through many a pathless wilderness, and at length brought her in the flower of her maidenhood to the very gates of death; yet when the cloud of earthly sorrow hung darkest over her head, love it was that lifted the veil of doubt, and cast about her name a halo of glory that will never fade. And all the story of her love and how she buried her brother Polyneices, though she knew it was death to cast so much as a handful of dust upon his body, you may read in one of the noblest plays that has ever been written.

So she and Œdipus set out upon their wanderings. At first Œdipus was filled with shame and bitterness, and cursed the day of his birth and his evil fate; but as time went on he remembered the words of Teiresias—how at his death he should be a blessing to the land of his last resting-place; and the hope sprang up in his heart that the gods had not forsaken him, but would wipe out the stain of his sin, and make his name once more glorious among men. Daily this hope grew stronger and brighter, and he felt that the days of wandering and expiation were drawing to a close, and a mysterious power guided his steps he knew not whither, except that it was towards the goal of his release. So they wandered on across the Theban plain and over dim Cith&aeolig;ron, till they came to the torch-lit strand of

Eleusis and Demeter's sacred shrine, and the broad plain of Rarus, where Triptolemus first taught men to drive a furrow and sow the golden grain. And they went along the Sacred Way which leads to Athens, with the circling mountains on their left, and to the right the blue Saronic Gulf and the peaks of sea-girt Salamis. And many a hero's grave did they pass and many a sacred shrine, for all along that road men of old raised monuments to the undying glory of the dead and and the heritage of honour which they left to unborn generations. And always Antigone tended the old man's feeble steps, and lent him the light of her young eyes, till at length they came to white Colonus and the grove of the Eumenides. There she set him on a rock to rest his weary limbs. And the soft waters of Cephisus flowed sparkling at their feet to the fertile plain below. In the dark coverts and green glades the nightengale trilled her sweet song, and the grass was bright with many a golden crocus and white narcissus bloom. As he sat there a great calm filled the old man's heart, for he felt that the days of his wandering were done. But while they were resting a man from the village happened to pass, and when he saw them he shouted out,

"Ho! there, impious wanderers, know ye not that ye sit on sacred land and trespass on hallowed ground?"

Then Œdipus knew more surely than ever that the day of his release had come.

"Oh, stranger!" he cried, "welcome is that which thou sayest. For here shall the words of the prophet be fulfilled, when he said that in a grove of sacred trees my spirit should find rest."

But the man was not satisfied, and he called to a band of his countrymen who were in the fields close by. And they came up and spoke roughly to Œdipus, and they asked his name and business. When he told them they were filled with horror, for all men had heard of the slaying of Laius, and they would have turned him out by force. But Œdipus raised himself from the rock on which he was seated, and in spite of his beggar's rags and sightless eyes, there was

a majesty about his face and form that marked him as no common man.

"Men of Colonus," he said, "ye judge by the evil I have done, and not by the good. Have ye forgotten the days when the name of Œdipus was honoured throughout the land? Of a truth the days of darkness came, and the stain of my sin found me out. But now is my wrathful spirit curbed, and the gods will make me once more a blessing to men. Go, tell your king Theseus, who rules in Athena's sacred citadel, that Œdipus is here, and bid him come with all speed if he would win a guardian for this land, an everlasting safeguard for his city in days of storm and stress."

So they sent off a messenger in hot haste, for there was a mysterious power about the aged wanderer that none could withstand. And soon Theseus arrived, himself a mighty hero, who had made Athens a great city and rid the country of many a foul pestilence. And he greeted Œdipus courteously and kindly, as befitted a great prince, and offered him hospitality. But Œdipus said,

"The hospitality I crave, O king, is for no brief sojourn in this land. Nay, 'tis an everlasting home I ask. For the hand of Heaven is upon me, and full well I know that this day my soul shall leave this frail and broken body. And to thee alone is it given to know where my bones shall rest—to thee and thy seed after thee. As long as my bones shall remain in the land, so long shall my spirit watch over it, and men shall call upon my name to turn the tide of battle and stay the flood of pestilence and war. Wilt thou come with me, O king, whither the gods shall lead, and learn the secret of my grave?"

Then Theseus bowed his head, and answered,

"Show thou the way, and I will come."

So Œdipus turned and led the way into the grove, and Theseus and Antigone followed after. For a mysterious power seemed to guide him, and he walked as one who could see, and his steps were strong and firm as those of a man in his prime. Straight into the grove did

he go till they came to the heart of the wood, where there was a sacred well beneath a hollow pear-tree. Close by was a great chasm going deep down into the bowels of the earth, and men called it the Gate of Hades, the Kingdom of the Dead. Here, too, the Awful Goddesses were worshipped under a new and gentle name. For after they had driven the murderer Orestes up and down the land for his sin, he came at length to Athens to stand his trial before gods and men. And mercy tempered justice and released him from blood-guiltiness, and the Furies laid aside their wrath and haunted him no more. So the people of Athens built them shrines and sanctuaries, and worshipped them as Eumenides, the Kindly Maidens.

And now once more a wanderer was to find rest there from his sin.

When they reached the well, Œdipus sat down upon a rock and called his daughter to his side, and said,

"Antigone, my child, thy hand hath ministered to me in exile, and smoothed the path for the wanderer's feet. Go now, fetch water, and pour libation and drink-offering to the gods below. It is the last thing thou canst do for me on earth."

So Antigone fetched water from the well, and dressed and tended him, and poured libation to the gods. And when she had finished, Œdipus drew her to him and kissed her tenderly, and said,

"Grieve not for me, my child. Well I know that thy heart will ache, for love hath made light the burden of toil. But for me life's day is done, and I go to my rest. Do thou seek thy brethren, and be to them as thou hast been to me. My child, my child, hard is the way that lies before thee, and my soul yearneth over thee for the evil day that shall come. But look thou to thine own pure heart, on which the gods have set the seal of truth that changeth not with passing years, and heed not the counsels of men."

And he held her closely to him, and she clung weeping about his neck. As they sat a hush fell upon the grove, and the nightingales

ceased their song, and from the depths of the grove a voice was heard like the voice of distant thunder.

WITH FIRM, UNFALTERING STEPS HE LED THE WAY ONCE MORE, AND THESEUS FOLLOWED AFTER.*EROS AND PSYCHE*

"Œdipus, Œdipus, why dost thou tarry?"

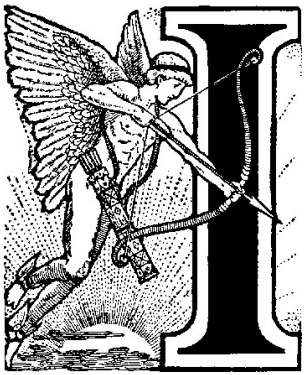
When they heard it they were afraid. But Œdipus rose up and gently put his daughter from him, saying,

"Lo! the voice of Zeus, who calleth me. Fare thee well, my child; thou canst go no further with me. For Theseus only is it meet to see the manner of my death, and he and I must go forward alone into the wood."

With firm, unfaltering steps he led the way once more, and Theseus followed after. And what happened there none can tell, for Theseus kept the secret to his dying day. But men say that when he came out of the wood his face was as the face of one who had seen things passing mortal speech. As for Œdipus, the great twin Brethren Sleep and Death carried his bones to Athens, where the people built him a shrine, and for many a long year they honoured him as a hero in the land of Attica. For though the sin that he sinned in his wrath and ignorance was great and terrible, yet his life had brought joy to many men and prosperity to more lands than one. For with wisdom and love he guided his days, and with sorrow and tears he wiped out the stain of his sin, so that, in spite of all he suffered, men love to tell the glory and wisdom of Œdipus, and of how he solved the riddle of the Sphinx.

EROS AND PSYCHE

I



N the blue waters of the Ægean Sea, midway between Greece and Egypt, lies the fertile land of Crete. Here, long, long ago, when the gods still walked on earth in human form and the sons of men were as children playing in a fair garden, there ruled a king who was the father of three lovely daughters. They lived in a palace in the rich Omphalian plain, beneath the shade of snow-capped Ida, surrounded by smiling gardens and fruitful vineyards, with a glimpse, away to the southward, of the sparkling Mediterranean Sea. So great was the beauty of these three maidens that their fame went abroad throughout all the land, and wealthy wooers flocked from far and wide to win their hands in marriage. The two elder sisters soon became the brides of two great princes, and were well content to pass their days in the sunshine of their husbands' love and admiration, and to deck themselves with gold and jewels, and listen to the praise of their beauty upon the lips of men. For the gods had given them grace of form and feature, but their souls within were vain and foolish, so that in after-years, when they found their sister more blessed than they, their vanity and envy brought them to an evil end.

The youngest sister, whose name was Psyche, continued to live on at home long after the other two were married. In face and form she was as fair as they, whilst her soul within was so pure and beautiful that it shed a heavenly radiance about her, so that when men looked into her face all thoughts of love and wooing died out of their hearts, and they worshipped her as one of the Immortals. Wherever she passed voices were hushed and heads were bowed in prayer, till at length it was rumoured that Aphrodite herself, the Queen of Love, had come to live with men. The temples stood deserted and the

altars bare of sacrifice, and from far and wide men flocked to Psyche with gifts and garlands and songs of praise.

Then foam-born Aphrodite, Queen of Love, was filled with jealousy and wrath that a mortal should usurp her place and name, and she cast about in her mind for some means of revenge.

"Verily, I must make this Cretan maiden rue the day when first men laid my offerings at her feet. I will smite her with so dire a malady that her very beauty shall be turned to scorn, and the heights to which her impious pride hath raised her shall be as nought to the depths of her shame and misery."

Thereupon she sent for her son, the great god Eros, who lords it over gods and men. The poison of his fiery darts none can withstand, and with him it rests to burn men's hearts with the fever of unsatisfied desire, or so to temper the venom of his shafts that it runs like heavenly nectar through the veins. Yet the joy that he gives withal is akin to madness, and the torture of his wrath a frenzy unquenchable.

"Best-beloved son," she said, "if thou carest aught for thy mother's name and fame, thou wilt hasten now to do my bidding. In midmost Crete there dwells a maid—Psyche by name—whose impious pride hath cast dishonour on my godhead. The offerings that are mine by right are cast before her feet. My temples stand devoid of worshippers, who flock to pay her court; and all this not in Crete alone, but from the farthest shores of Hellas men cross the sea in white-winged ships to gaze upon her face. Go now, I pray thee, and smite her with a poisoned arrow from thy bow. Make her to love some loathly monster, deformed in soul and body, and with a passion so shameless and all-consuming that men shall spurn her, even as now they haste to pay their vows. As thou lovest me, go with all speed and do my bidding."

So Eros sped away to fulfill Aphrodite's command, and plant in the heart of Psyche the image of a dark and dreadful monster, and make her love it. As she slept he came and stood beside her, armed with his bow and poisoned arrows. But when he looked upon her his arm

fell lifeless by his side, and the arrows slipped out of his hand, for never had he looked on one so fair; and her beauty smote his heart as surely as ever one of his own shafts had pierced a mortal's breast. From that moment he loved her with all his soul, and swore that no harm should ever come to her through him, but that he himself and no other, whether man or monster, should be her bridegroom. And he picked up the arrow and put it back into the sheath.

"If she can trust me," he said, "she shall never feel a wound from one of these. I will carry her away, and she shall be mine; but till the gods are reconciled that I should wed a mortal, and my mother's anger is appeased, I must visit her only in the night-time, and she must not know who I am nor see my face. When the gods have proved her and found her worthy of me, then will I reveal myself to her, and through my love she shall be immortal, and dwell with me for ever in the shining courts of heaven."

And he bent over and kissed her lightly on the lips. She smiled in her sleep and held out her arms towards him, and he knew that his kiss had kindled in her heart the light of love.

Aphrodite, meanwhile, with her mind at rest, took her way along the shell-strewn curve of a sandy bay, and laughing ripples made music at her feet. The Sun was slowly sinking to his bed in Ocean's stream, and Night rode in her crescent car across the calm green vault of heaven. From Aphrodite's feet a broad gold path of light led straight to the sunset realms of Helios, the sun-god, and as she waited on the shore, a band of dolphins ploughed the sea towards her. In their wake came Tritons blowing on soft-voiced conches, and some drew a pearly shell behind and pushed it to the shore and bade her enter.

"Great Helios bids thee to his midnight revelry, O Queen of Love," they cried, "and we are come to guide thee along the golden pathway to the glowing palaces of Sunset Land."

As the goddess stepped into the shell, they blew a loud salute upon their conches, and spread a silken sail above her head, and with

music and laughter they crossed the shining sea to the golden halls of Helios.

II

Psyche, meanwhile, all unconscious of the wrath she had kindled in the breast of Aphrodite, was pining away at home in loneliness of heart. Little did she care for th worship that men paid her or for the offerings that they laid at her feet. It was for the love of a husband that she longed, and her soul was starving in the midst of rich gifts and the rapt, adoring gaze of worshippers. Her melancholy fastened on the king her father, and on all the palace, and soothsayers and augurs crowded round the doors with omens, charms, and riddling words, and prophesied all manner of evil.

At last the king could bear it no longer, and he set forth on pilgrimage to Apollo's shrine at Delphi, and made question of the oracle.

"Have the gods ordained that Psyche, my daughter, should die unwed, though the fairest maid on earth, or doth some bridegroom await her who tarrieth long? O god of Light, reveal his name, and save my child from death."

Then the tripod shook, and from the midst of the incense and vapour the priestess made reply,

"Think not of marriage-songs, O king, or bridal torches. On a lonely rock on snow-clad Ida must thou leave thy child, the bride of no mortal man. But a savage monster shall come, the terror of gods and men, and shall bear her waay to his own land, and thine eyes shall see her no more. Wherefore make ready the funeral feast. Bring forth your sable robes of mourning, and bid the minstrels raise a dirge for the dead. For so the gods have willed it."

So the king went sadly home, and his heart was heavy within him. And all the people mourned with him; for they loved the fair princess, with her beautiful sad face and her kind and noble heart.

All manner of tales went abroad of the monster she must wed, some saying one thing and some another. But most men thought it must be Talus, the great giant who guarded Crete. Three times every day did he walk around the island, and woe to any stranger who fell in his path or tried to land when he was by. For from top to toe he was made of burning metal—gold and silver and bronze and iron—while through his body ran one single vein that was filled with fire and fastened in his head with a nail. If any man tried to thwart him, he would gather him up in his great bronze arms and hold him to his breast, red-hot with the fire in his vein, and when he was well cooked through he would devour him. Many a long year after, when Jason sailed by with the heroes of the Golden Fleece, Talus rushed down, and would have stopped them from watering their ship, and have turned them adrift on the salt seas to be tortured to death with thirst. But Medea, Jason's dark witch-wife, beguiled him with fair promises, and made him cool his burning body in the sea before she would come near. Then when she had him under her spells she softly drew the nail from his head, and the fire flowed forth from his vein, and all his strength departed, and he died with a curse on his lips for Medea and her wiles. But she only laughed loud, and bade Jason water the ship and thank the immortal gods that he had a witch-woman to wife. That, however, was long after, and Talus was now in the prime of life, and the terror of all the country-side.

Meanwhile, the land was plunged in mourning, and in the palace all was bustle and confusion in preparation for the funeral rites. All day long the old kiing sat in his chamber, and looked out towards the lonely heights of Ida, where his daughter was to be left.

"Better that she should die in her maidenhood," he cried, "then wed this terrible monster."

Psyche alone in all the palace was calm, and tried to comfort her father.

"Sire," she said, as she put her arms about his neck, "to look on thy tears is to me more bitter than my fate. Weep not for me, for something within me bids me take comfort, and I hear a sweet voice

say, 'Rejoice, beloved, and come with me.' Dark was that day, my father, when first men laid their offerings at my feet, and my heart dwelt apart in its loneliness. And now, if but for one day I may look upon the face of my bridegroom, I would gladly die. For, methinks, it is no monster I must wed."

But the king thought only of the words of the oracle, and would not be comforted.

At length the bridal day dawned, and the sad procession wound slowly from the palace towards Ida. Choruses of singers led the way with solemn dirges for the dead, and the king, uncrowned, followed with his nobles clad in armour and holding blazing torches in their hands. Next came Psyche, all in white, with a bridal veil and garlands, and surrounded by white-robed maidens; and last of all the people of the city followed with loud wailing and lamentation. Up the steep mountain road they went, and the path grew rougher and narrower step by step. On either side the dark rocks frowned down upon them, and echoed to and fro the wailings of the people as they passed, and above them the snow-capped peak of Ida stood out against the summer sky, like a lonely sentinel keeping watch over the plain below. Slowly the shadows of the rocks lengthened across the barren slopes, and the funeral torches shone pale in the glowing sunset light. At last they reached the appointed polace beneath the unmelting snow, and on the barren rock they set the maiden, and bade her a sorrowful good-bye. Ever and anon they turned back to look on her as they wound down the mountain-side, and only the snow-clad peak flashed like a ruby in the last rays of the sunk and as they looked backward for the last time they saw Psyche transformed in the golden light. Her white dress shone like a rainbow, and her golden hair fell about her shoulders like a stream of fire, and as she raised her arm to wave to them she looked like no mortal maid, but a goddess in all her beauty, so that the people hushed their voices and bowed their heads before her. Soon the light faded, and they could see her no more. Sadly they went their way, and all down the mountain-track and across the plain below the torches shone out like twinkling stars in the darkness.

Psyche, meanwhile, left alone, pondered sadly on her fate, and wondered what the night would bring. And as she sat and pondered, a soft breeze played about her, filling her veil and robe, and gently she felt herself lifted from the rock and borne through the air, till she was laid down upon a grassy bank sweet with the scent of thyme and violets. Here a deep sleep upon her, and she knew no more.

III

Day was dawning when Psyche awoke, and high up in the bright air the larks were singing their morning hymn to the sun, and calling on bird and beast and flower to awake and rejoice in the glad daylight. At first she could remember nothing of what had happened, and wondered where she was; then slowly all the sad ceremony of the day before came back to her—the funeral procession up Mount Ida, the lonely rock on which she had been left, and the soft west wind that had borne her away. So she rose up from the green bank on which she had slept all night, and looked round about her to see what manner of land she was in.

She found herself standing on a hillock in the midst of a fertile plain. Steep cliffs rose up on every side as though to guard the peaceful valley, and keep out any evil thing that would enter in. To the eastward only was there a break in the mountain-chain, and the dale widened out towards the sea. As Psyche gazed, the golden disc of the sun rose slowly from the water, and his bright rays lit up the grey morning sky and scattered the silvery mist that hung about the tree-tops. On either side of her was a wood, with a green glade between sloping up towards a marble temple, which flashed like a jewel in the rays of the rising sun. And Psyche was filled with wonder at the sight, for it seemed too fair to be the work of human hands.

"Surely," she thought, "it must be the handiwork of the lame fire-god Hephæstos, for he buildeth for the immortal gods, who sit on high Olympus, and none can vie with him in craft and skill."

Then she looked about her to see if anyone were near. But all around was quiet and still, with no signs of human habitation. Wondering the more, she drew near to the temple, and went up the marble stairs that led to the entrance. When she reached the top her shadow fell upon the golden gate, and, as she stood doubting what to do, they slowly turned on their hinges, and opened to her of their own acord, and she walked through them into the temple. She found herself in a marble court surrounded by pillars and porticoes which re-echoed the soft music of a fountain in the midst. Through the open doors of the further colonnade she caught a glimpse of cool dark rooms, with carvings of cedar-wood and silver and silken hangings. And now the air was filled with music and sweet voices calling her by name.

"Psyche, lady Psyche, all is thine. Enter in."

So she took courage and entered. All day long she wandered about the enchanted palace discovering fresh wonders at every step. Even before she knew it the mysterious voices seemed to guess every wish of her heart. When she would rest they led her to a soft couch. When she was hungry they placed a table before her spread with every dainty. They led her to the bath, and clothed her in the softest silks, and all the while the air was filled with songs and music.

All this time she had not said a word, for she feared she might drive away the kindly voices that ministered to her. But at last she could keep silence no longer.

"Am I a goddess," she asked, "or is this to be dead? Do those who pass the gates of Death feel no change, nor suffer for what they have done, but have only to wish for a thing to gain their heart's desire?"

The voices gave her never a word in answer, but led her to the chamber where her couch was spread with embroidered coverlets. The walls all round were covered with curious paintings, telling of the deeds of gods and heroes—how golden Aphrodite loved Ares, the god of War, and Apollo the nymph Daphne, whome he changed into a laurel-tree that never fades. There was Ariadne, too, upon her island, whom the young god Dionysus found and comforted in her

sore distress; and Adonis, the beautiful shepherd, the fairest of mortal men.

Psyche, tired out by all the wonders she had seen during the day, sank down upon her couch, and was soon asleep. But sleep had not long sealed her lids before she was awakened by a stir in the room. The curtain over her head rustled as though someone were standing beside her. She lay still, almost fainting with terror, scarcely daring to breathe, when she heard a voice softly call her by name.

"Psyche, my own, my beloved, at last I have got thee, my dear one."

And two strong arms were round her and a kiss upon her lips. Then she knew that at last the bridegroom she had waited for so long had come to claim her, and in her happiness she cared not to know who he was, but was content to feel his arms about her and hear her name upon his lips. And so she fell asleep again. When she awoke in the morning her first thought was to look upon the face of the husband who had come in the dark night, but nowhere could she find him. All the day she passed in company of the mysterious voices who had ministered to her before; but though their kindness and courtesy was never failing, she wandered disconsolately about the empty halls, longing for the night-time, and wondering whether her lover would come again. As soon as it was dark she went again to her chamber, and there once more he came to her and swore that she was his for evermore, and that nothing should part them. But always he left her before it was light and came to her again when night had fallen, so that she never saw his face nor knew what he was like. Yet so well did she love and trust him that she never cared to ask him his secret. So the days and nights sped swiftly by, for in the daylight Psyche found plenty to amuse her in the enchanted palace and garden, and she did not think of loneliness when every night she could hold sweet converse with her beloved.

But one evening when he came to her he was troubled, and said,

"Psyche, my dear one, great danger threatens us, and I must needs ask thee somewhat that shall grieve thy tender heart."

"Mine own lord," she said, "what can there be that I would not gladly do for thee?"

"Well do I know, beloved, that thou wouldst give thy life for me. But that which I ask will grieve thee sore, for thou must refuse the boon thy sisters shall ask thee."

"My sisters! They know not where I am. How, then, can they ask me a boon?"

"Even now they stand upon the lonely rock where thou wast left for me, to see if they can find thee or learn aught of thy fate. And they will call thee by name through the echoing rocks, but thou must answer them never a word."

"What, my lord! wouldst thou have my sisters go home disconsolate, thinking that I am dead? Nay, surely, thou wouldst not be so hard of heart? But let me bid the soft west wind, that wafted me hither, bring them too, that they may look upon my happiness and take back the tidings to mine aged sire."

"Psyche, thou knowest not what thou askest. Foolish of heart are thy sisters, and they love the trappings and outward show of woe, and with their mourning they wring their father's aching heart till he can bear it no more. So he hath sent them forth to see whether they can hear aught of thy fate. And, full of their own hearts' shallow grief, they seek thee on teh mountain-side, thinking to find thy bones bleaching in the rays of the sun. Were they to see thy happiness, their hearts would be filled with envy and malice. They would speak evil of me, and taunt thee on thine unknown lord, and bid thee look upon my face and see lest I be some foul monster. And Psyche, mine own wife, the night that thou seest my face shall be the night that shall part us for evermore, and thy first look shall be thy last. Therefore answer them not, I pray thee, but stay with me and be my bride."

And Psyche was troubled at these words, for she thought her husband wronged her sisters. Nevertheless, unwilling to displease him, she said,

"I will do thy will, my lord, even as thou sayest."

Yet all the day long she thought on her sisters wandering on the bleak mountain-side, and how they would call for her by name, and at length go sadly home to her father's house and bring no comfort. The more she thought on it the sadder she became, and when her husband came to her, her face was wet with tears. In vain he tried to comfort her. She only sobbed the more.

"All my joy is turned to bitterness," she said, "when I think on the grief that bows down my father's heart. If but for one day I could bring my sisters here and show them my happiness, they would bear the news to him, and in my joy he would be happy too. Let them but come and look at this fair home of mine, and surely it will not harm me or thee, my dear lord?"

"I have not the heart to refuse thee, Psyche," he said, "though it goeth against me to grant this. I fear that evil will come. If they ask thee of me, answer them not."

Psyche was overjoyed at his consent, and thanked him, and put her arms about his neck and said,

"My dearest lord, all thou sayest I will do. For wert thou Eros, the god of Love himself, I could not love thee more."

IV

The next day, when Psyche was left alone, she went out into the valley to see whether she could hear her sisters calling her. And sure enough, she had not gone far, when high up above her head, from the top of the cliff, she heard her name, "Psyche, O Psyche! where art thou?" At this she was overjoyed,

"O gentle Zephyr!" she called, "O fair west wind! waft, oh waft my sisters to me!"

Scarcely had she said the words than she saw her sisters gently borne down from the cliff above and set upon the ground beside her. She fell upon their necks and kissed them.

"Ah, my dear sisters," she cried, "how happy am I to see you! Welcome to my new home. See, I am not tortured, as you thought. Nay, my life is bliss, as you shall see for yourselves. Come, enter in with me."

And she took them by the hand and led them through the golden gates. The ministering voices played soft music in the air, and a rich feast was spread before them. All through the palace Psyche led them, and showed them all her treasures, and brought out her choicest jewels, and bade them choose out and keep as many as they wished.

All this time, though there was no corner of the palace that she kept hidden from them, she spoke no word of her mysterious husband. At length they could contain their curiosity no longer, and one made bold to ask her,

"Psyche, thou livest not here alone, of a surety. Yet where is thy lord? All thy treasures hast thou shown us, but him, the giver of all, we have not seen. Who is he, then? Surely he, whom the winds and bodiless voices obey, must be a god, and no mortal man. Tell us of him, we pray thee."

And Psyche remembered her husband's warning.

"My lord," she said, " is a huntsman bold, and over hill and dale he rides this day after the swift-footed stag. As fair as the dawn is he, and the first down of youth is on his cheek. All through the hours of sunlight he goeth forth to the chase, and at eventime he returneth to me."

It was now close on night, and the shadows fell long across the cool green lawns of the garden. Psyche bethought her that it was high time for her sisters to go, before they could ply her with questions. So, kissing them farewell, and sending many a loving message to the king her father, she called on Zephyr to waft them away to the top of the cliff.

Hitherto the surprise and wonder at all they had seen and heard had filled the minds of the two sisters. But when they found themselves once more alone upon the barren mountain-slopes, they had leisure to think and compare their lot with that of their sister. Before they had seen her golden halls they had been quite content with their own palaces. But these now seemed humble beside the splendours they had just left. Their shallow hearts were quite filled up with the image of themselves, and they had no room left for their sister. But now her good fortune forced the remembrance of her upon them, and they were filled with an envy and jealousy of her which conquered even their love for themselves. They could not be content to return once more to their homes, and receive the homage of their husbands and their households. Their one thought was how they might spoil her happiness. For the hatred that is born of self-love is an all-consuming passion that burns up every kind and noble thought, as a forest fire burns up the tall trees that stand in the path of its fury.

"How cruel and unjust," cried one, "that she, the youngest, should be blest so far above us both. My lord is a very beggar to him who giveth Psyche her golden halls to dwell in."

"Yea, and mine is an old man by the side of this beardless youth. Sister, thy grief and mine are one. Side by side let us work, and verily her cunning shall be great if she can avail against us and keep her ill-gotten wealth."

"Thou sayest well. 'Twas from pride that she welcomed us to her halls to flaunt her riches before us. Sister, I am with thee. Quickly let us plan some plot to unrobe this upstart maiden of her vaunted godhead."

Whereupon they agreed together to bring their father no word of Psyche's happiness. They tore their robes and loosed their hair, as though all this while they had been wandering over the rough mountain rocks.

"Ah, sire," they cried, "how can we tell thee the evil tidings? Nowhere can we find our sister, or any trace of her. Verily, the oracle lieth not, and she is the bride of some fell monster."

Their cruel words smote their father to the heart and quenched the feeble spark of hope that still burned in his breast. And when all hope leaves the heart of man, life leaves him, too. So the old king died, and his blood was on the hands of his own children, and one day they paid the penalty with their lives.

Meanwhile, Psyche lived on in the happy valley in blissful content. Her husband would often warn her that her sisters were plotting her ruin, but she would listen to nothing against them. At last one night he said,

"Psyche, to-morrow thy sisters will seek thee once again. This time they will not wait for Zephyr to bear them down, but, trusting themselves to the barren air, they will hurl themselves from the cliff, and be dashed to pieces on the rocks below. Leave them to their fate. 'Twill be due penalty for their crime, and 'tis the only way that we can be saved, beloved."

"My lord," cried Psyche, "thy cruelty would kill my love for thee, were it not immortal. But, in very truth, all my joy would be slain did I know that my sisters were killed when I could have saved them. Oh, dearest husband, by the love that makes us one, I beseech thee, send Zephyr once more to bear my sisters hither."

And she sobbed so pitifully and prayed so earnestly that once again he had not the heart to refuse.

So about noontide the next day Psyche heard loud knocking and cries at the door, and she hastened to open it herself to her sisters.

Again, she kissed them, and bade them welcome, and they deceived her with flattery and honeyed words, and when she was off her guard, one said,

"Come, tell us, Psyche, thy husband's name. Among the immortal gods, where doth he take his place, and why is he not here to greet us?"

"My husband," she replied, "is a rich merchant. Many a long year hath it taken to build up all the fortune you behold, for already the hair about his temples is touched with snow. And this day hath he gone a long journey to a distant town in search of rich merchandise, and he returneth not till the setting of the sun."

Then quickly she called on Zephyr to bear them away before they could ply her with questions.

When her husband came that night he was more troubled than before, and begged her to see them no more, but let them be dashed to death on the rocks if they troubled her again. Her pure heart, however, would believe no evil of them; and in this one thing she disobeyed her lord.

V

Meanwhile, the second visit of the sisters to Psyche in her beautiful home had but served to add fuel to the fire of their envy. When they remembered her confusion and the different tales she told them about her unknown lord, jealousy whispered in their ears that all her happiness depended on the keeping of her secret, and that secret they straightway determined to know.

" 'Tis a strange lord, methinks," said one, "who in the waxing and waning of a single moon doth change from a beardless boy to a grave and reverend merchant whose hair is touched with snow."

"True, sister. And therein lieth the secret of her happiness. Her lying tale but proves that she hath never seen her lord. And verily, he who

would hide his face from the queen of his heart must be some child of the Immortals, whose love for an earth-born maid must be hid from gods and men."

"Yea, and they who are loved of the Immortals are themselves immortal, too, and their seed after them. Truly, sister, that Psyche should be a goddess is more than I can bear."

"I feel with thee! It is not meet that the youngest should have all. Let us invent some lying tale which shall make her look upon her lord, and break the spell which binds him to her."

"What sayest thou to the words of the oracle that doomed her to wed a monster? Let us go to her and say that now we know this to be true, and beg her to flee from fate so vile."

So once more they trusted themselves to Zephyr, for Psyche had prevailed upon her lord to promise that, so long as her sisters should do her no harm, Zephyr should always be waiting to carry them to and fro from her.

Early the next day she was aroused from sleep by the sound of weeping and lamentation at her door, and she hastened to meet her sisters, fearing some ill news. And they fell upon her neck, crying,

"Alas, alas, for thine evil fate!"

"Mine evil fate, sisters? What mean ye? All is well with me."

"Ah, so thou thinkest in thine heart's innocence. Even so falleth the dove a victim to the hawk that wheeleth avove."

"What talk is this of doves and hawks? Come, my sisters, weep no more, for in this pleasant vale even the winds of heaven breath gently on me, so good and great is my lord who commandeth them."

"Thy lord! Hast ever seen his face, child, that thou callest him good and great?"

"Nay," she answered, blushing to think that they had guessed her secret, " 'tis true I have not seen his face, but what need to look upon him when all around me breathes of his love for me?"

"Hast never heard tell of foul monsters that wed with the daughters of men, and come to them only in the night season, when the darkness can hide their deformity? They cast a spell about their victims, and by their wiles and enchantments they make all things about them seem fair. But one day, when they have had their fill, and tire of the maid they have won, lo! at a word the pleasant palaces and gardens vanish into air, and she is left ashamed and deserted, and scorned by gods and men. Ah, sister, be warned by those who wish thee well, and flee from thy vile lot ere all is lost. Even yesterday, when we left thee, we saw a monstrous shape that glided after us through the wood, and we fled in terror, knowing it was thy lord, who would not have us near thee. Come with us now, and be saved."

When Psyche heard their words she was very troubled. Truly, 'twas strange that her lord should be loath for her to see her sisters, unless, indeed, it was even as they said, and she was the prey of some terrible beast. Yet his kind and loving words and his tender thought for her welfare and all the beauty that surrounded her gave the lie to such a thought.

"My dear sisters," she cried, "I thank you for your loving fears for me, but it cannot be as you say. Though I have never looked upon my lord, these fair halls and gardens do but mirror forth the beauty of his soul, and I know that he is true."

"Then why doth he hide his face? At least, if thou wilt not flee with us now, do but put him to the test when he comes this night. A glimpse at his form will tell thee that our tale is true; and if by some strange chance it be not so, what harm can one glance do?"

Thus they tempted her, and made her doubt her lord, though sore against her will. So it often happens that the pure of heart are tortured by the doubts which the wicked plant in their breasts. As

little does a young bird in the greenwood suspect the hunter's snare as did Psyche in her loving innocence suspect the malicious envy of her sisters.

But they were filled with joy at the success of their plot, and when Zephyr had borne them to the top of the cliff they could contain their gladness no longer, but fell upon each other's necks and kissed and danced for glee.

But Psyche at their bidding made ready to look upon her lord that night. Under a chair she placed a lighted lamp in readiness, and shrouded it about, that the light might not shine into the room and betray her purpose. Trembling she went to bed that night, for she hated the deed she must do. At the usual hour her lord came and spoke lovingly to her, and kissed her, but her words died away upon her lips, and she shuddered at his embrace. In time he fell asleep, and his breathing was gentle and even as that of a child sweetly dreaming in its innocence at heart. Then she rose up silently in the dead of night, and walking softly to the chair, she took the lamp from beneath and turned on tiptoe to the bed. High above her head she held the light, that the rays might fall more gently on him as he slept, and with bated breath she drew near and looked on him. As she looked, the blood rushed headlong through her veins, and her heart beat fast within her, and her limbs seemed turned to water as she bent forward to look more closely. For on the bed, wrapped in deep slumber, lay no terrible monster, as she feared, but the youngest and fairest of the Immortals—Eros, the great god of Love. The gleam of his golden locks was as sunshine on the summer sea, and his limbs like the eddying foam. From his shoulders sprang two mighty wings bright as the rainbow, and by his side lay his quiver and darts. As he moved restlessly in the light of the lamp she heard her name upon his lips. With a low cry she fell on her knees beside him, and as she did so her arm grazed the point of an arrow placed heedlessly in the sheath. The poison ran like liquid fire through her veins, and set her heart aflame, and with blazing cheeks she bent over and kissed him on the lips. As she did so the lamp trembled in her hand, and a drop of the burning oil fell upon his shoulder, and he started up and found her bending over him.

ON THE BED, WRAPPED IN DEEP SLUMBER, LAY NO TERRIBLE MONSTER, AS SHE FEARED, BUT THE YOUNGEST AND FAIREST OF THE IMMORTALS

"Ah, wretched, wretched Psyche!" he cried; "what hast thou done? Couldst thou not trust me, who gave thee all the happiness thou hast ever known?"

"My lord, my lord, forgive me! I would but prove to my sisters by mine own eyes' witness that thou wert not the monster that they dreaded."

"Thrice foolish maid! Knowest thou not that doubt driveth away love? Did I not tell thee that thy first look would be thy last? From a terrible fate I saved thee when Aphrodite bade me strike thee with my shaft and make thee love some terrible beast. When I went forth to do her bidding thy grace and beauty conquered me, and I took thee away to be my bride; and in time, hadst thou proved worthy, my mother and all the great gods that rule above would have forgiven me, and shed on thee the gift of immortality, to live with me for ever in the courts of heaven. But now all is lost, and I must leave thee."

"Ah, my lord, great is my sin, but I love thee, and my soul is thine. Over the whole wide world would I wander, or be slave to the meanest of men, so be it I could find thee again. Ah, dearest lord! tell me not that all hope is gone."

One moment he was silent, as though doubting her. Then he answered,

"One way there lieth before thee, if thy courage prove greater than thy faith—one only way, by which thou canst reach me—the long rough path of trial and sorrow. Heaven and earth shall turn against thee; for men win not immortality for a sigh. Yet will I help thee all I may. In thine own strength alone thou wouldst faint and die by the way, but for every step thou takest I will give thee strength for two. And now farewell! I can tell thee no more, neither linger beside thee. Fare thee well, fare thee well."

As he vanished from her eyes Psyche fell senseless on the floor, and for many a long hour she lay there, hearing and seeing nothing, as though life itself had fled.

VI

Meanwhile the two sisters were waiting in a frenzy of impatience to know whether success had crowned their evil plot. If the doubt they had planted in Psyche's breast had borne fruit, and she had dared to disobey her lord, they knew full well that all her happiness would have vanished like a dream. Yet, fearing the anger of him whom the winds of heaven obeyed, they dared not trust themselves to Zephyr, who had carried them down before. So they wandered restlessly from room to room, and peered from the windows, hoping that Psyche in her misery would come to them and beg for succour in her evil plight. There was nothing they would have loved better than to spurn her from their doors and taunt her on the retribution which had fallen on her vanity. But all day long they waited, and yet she came not, so that at length they parted and went each one to her couch.

But the night was hot and sultry, and the eldest sister lay on her bed and tossed restlessly from side to side, and could not sleep. At length she went to the casement and drew aside the curtain and looked out on the starry night, and when she had cooled her burning brow she went back to her couch. Just as she was about to fall asleep she felt a shadow pass between her and the light from the window, and she opened her eyes, and her heart beat fast; for straight in the path of the moonbeams stood Eros, the great god of Love, and his wings stood out black against the starlit sky as he leant on his golden bow. Though his face was dark in the shadow, his eyes seemed to pierce through to her heart as she lay still and trembling with fear. But he spoke softly to her with false, honeyed words.

"Lady, thy sister Psyche, whom I chose out from the daughters of men, hath proved false and untrue, and lo! now I turn my love to thee. Come thou in her stead and be mistress in my palace halls, and I will give thee immortality. Lo! even now Zephyr awaits thee on the mountain-top to bear thee away to my home."

So saying, he faded from her sight. Her wicked heart was filled with joy when she heard of Psyche's fall, and she rose up in the dead of

night and put on her gayest robe and brightest gems. Without so much as a look on the prince her husband she went out to the mountain-top. There she stood alone, and called softly to Zephyr,

"O Zephyr, O Zephyr, O fair west wind, waft me, oh waft me away to my love!"

Without waiting she threw herself boldly down. But the air gave way beneath her, and with a terrible cry she fell faster and faster, down, down, to the gulf below, and was dashed to pieces on the rocks; and from the four quarters of heaven the vultures gathered and fed upon her flesh.

As for the second sister, to her, too, the god appeared and spoke false honeyed words, and she too went forth alone; and in the morning her bones lay gleaming white beside her sister's on the rocks below.

VII

When Psyche awoke from her swoon, she looked around in bewilderment, for the scene which met her eyes was the same, and yet so different. The forest-trees waved their arms gently in the breeze, and whispered to each other in the glad morning light, and in the hedges the birds sang sweet songs of joy; for the skies were blue, and the grass was green, and summer was over the land. But Psyche sat up with a dull grief in her heart, feeling over her the dim shadow of a half-forgotten woe that meets those who awake from sleep. At first she wondered where she was, for her clothes were wet with dew, and looking round the still familiar scene, she saw the green glade in the forest, but no shining palace at the top. Then like a flash she remembered the night, and how by her doubt she had forfeited all her happiness, and she lay on the ground and sobbed and prayed that she might die. But soon tired out with weeping, she grew calmer, and remembered the words of her lord—how she could find him again only after long wandering and trial. Though her knees gave way beneath her, and her heart sank at the thought of setting out alone into the cruel world, she determined to begin her

search forthwith. Through the dark forest she went, and the sun hid his face behind the pine-tops, and great oaks threw shadows across her path, in weird fantastic forms, like wild arms thrust out to seize her as she passed. With hurrying steps and beating heart she went on her way till she came out on the bleak mountain-side, where the stones cut her tender feet and the brambles tore her without mercy. But on and on she struggled along the stony road, till the path grew soft beneath her, and sloped gently downwards to the plain. Here through green fields and smiling pastures a river wound slowly towards the sea, and beyond the further bank she saw the smoke from the homesteads rise blue against the evening sky. She quickened her steps, for already the shadows from the trees fell long across the fields, and the grass turned to gold in the light of the dying day. And still between her and shelter for the night lay many a broad meadow and silver stream to cross. As she drew nearer she looked this way and that for a ford, but seeing none, she gathered together her courage, and breathing a prayer to the gods, stepped into the water. But she was weak and faint with fasting, and at every step the water grew deeper and colder, and her strength more feeble, till at length she was borne off her feet, and swept away by the hurrying tide. In her agony she cried out,

"O god of Love, have mercy and save me ere I die, that I may come to thee!"

Just as she was about to sink, she felt a strong arm seize her and draw her up on the opposite shore. For a while she lay faint and gasping for breath; but as her strength returned, she heard close beside her soft notes of music, and she opened her eyes to see whence the sweet sounds came. She found herself lying beneath a willow-tree, against which leant a strange musician. For his head and shoulders and arms were those of a man, but his legs and feet were thin and hoofed, and he had horns and a tail like a goat. His ears were pointed, his nose was wide and flat, and his hair fell unkempt and wild about his face. Round his body he wore a leopard's skin, and he made sweet music on a pipe of reeds. At first she was terrified at the sight of this strange creature, but when he saw her look up at him, he stopped playing, and smiled at her; and

when he smiled he puckered his face in a thousand wrinkles, and his eyes twinkled merrily through his wild elf-locks, so that none could look on him and be sad. In spite of all her woes Psyche fairly laughed aloud as he began to caper round her on his spindle legs, playing a wild dance-tune the while. Faster and faster he went, and up and down, and round and round, till, with a last shrill note on his pipe and a mad caper in the air, he flung himself on the grass beside her.

"Have I warmed the blood back to thy heart, fair maid?" he asked, "or shall I dance again the mad dance that drives away cold and despair?"

"Nay, merry monster, even now my sides ache with laughter. But tell me, who art thou, that savest damsels in distress, and drivest away their sorrow with thy wild piping and dance?"

"I am the god of the forest and woodland and broad wide pasture lands. To me the shepherd prays to give increase to his flocks and the huntsman for a good day's sport. In the evening, when the moon shines high o'erhead, and the sky is bright with stars, I take my pipe and play my lays in the dim dark forest glades. To the sound of my music the brook murmurs sweetly, and leaves whisper softly o'erhead, the nymphs and naiads forget their shyness, and the hamadryad slips out from her tree. Then the eyes of the simple are opened, and on the cool, green grass by the side of the silver stream the goatherd, the neatherd and the young shepherd-lad dance hand-in-hand with the nymphs, and the poet, looking forth from his window, cries, 'How sweet are the pipes of Pan!'

"But when the dark storm-cloud rides over the sky, and the streams rush swollen with rain, with fleet foot I hurry through woodland and dell, and over the bleak mountain-tops; the crash of my hoofs on the rocks sounds like thunder in the ears of men, and the shriek of my pipe like the squall of the wild storm-wind. And I rush through the midst of the battle when the trumpets are calling to arms; but above the blare of the bugle men hear the shrill cry of my pipes. Then the archer throws down his bow, and the arm of the spearman falls limp,

and their hearts grow faint with panic at the sound of the pipes of Pan. Nay, turn not from me in terror, lady," he added, as Psyche made as though she would flee, "for I wish thee no ill. 'Tis gods mightier than I who have made me goat-footed, and with the horns and the tail of a beast. But my heart is kindly withal, or I would not have saved thee from the stream."

FASTER AND FASTER HE WENT, AND UP AND DOWN, AND ROUND AND ROUND.

Once more he smiled his genial smile, and puckered his face like the ripples on a lake when a breeze passes over,

"Come, tell me who art thou, and how can I help thee?"

Then Psyche told her tale, and when she had finished Pan was silent for a time, as though lost in thought. At length he looked up, and said,

"Thou seekest the great god Eros? I would that I could help thee, lady; but love once fled is hard to find again. Easier is it to win the dead to life than to bring back love that doubt hath put to flight. I cannot help thee, for I know not how thou canst find him, or where thou must seek. But, if thou wilt journey further, and cross many a long mile of pasture and woodland, though wilt come to the rich corn-lands and the shrine of Demeter, the great Earth Mother. She knows the secret of the growing corn, and how the rich fruits ripen in their season, and she will have pity on a maid like thee, because of her child Persephone, whom Hades snatched away from her flowery meadows and dragged below to be Queen of the Dead. Three months she lives with him, the bride of Death, in the dark world of shades, and all the earth mourns for her. The trees shed their leaves like tears on her grave, and through their bare branches the wind sings a dirge. But in the spring-time she returns to her mother, and the earth at her coming puts on her gayest robe, and the birds sing their brightest to welcome her back. At her kiss the almond-tree blushes into bloom, and the brook babbles merrily over the stones, and the primrose and violet and dancing daffodil spring up wherever her feet have touched. Go, then, to Demeter's shrine; for if thy love is to be sought on earth, she will tell thee where to go; but if to find him thou must cross the dark river of death, her child Persephone will receive thee."

He then pointed out to her the path to the village, where she could get shelter for the night, and Psyche, thanking him, went on her way, gladdened at heart by the genial smile of the wild woodland god.

That night she slept in a shepherd's cottage, and in the morning the children went out with her to point out the road she must go. The shepherd's wife, standing at the door, waved to her with her eyes full of tears. She had maidens of her own, and she pitied the delicate wanderer, for Psyche's beautiful face had shed a light in the rude shepherd's hut which the inmates would never forget.

VIII

So Psyche went on her journey, often weak and fainting for food, and rough men laughed at her torn clothes and bleeding feet. But she did not heed their jeers and insults, and often those who had laughed the loudest when she was a little way off, were the first to hush their rude companions when they saw here near. For her face was fairer than the dawn and purer than the evening star, so that the wicked man turned away from his sin when he saw it, and the heart of the watcher was comforted as he sat by the sick man's bed.

At length, as Pan had told her, she came to the rich corn-lands where Demeter has her shrine. Already the valleys were standing thick with corn, for it was close on harvest-time, and on the hill-sides the purple grapes hung in heavy clusters beneath the tall elm-branches. As she drew near the temple, a band of harvesters came out. They had just placed the first-fruits of the corn in the shrine, and now they were trooping to the fields, a merry throng of young men and maidens. Psyche stood back slyly as they passed, but they heeded her not, or at most cast a curious glance at her ragged clothes and bruised feet. When they had passed her, and she had heard their merry laughter and chatter die away down the lane, she ventured to enter the temple. Within all was dark and peaceful. Before the altar lay sheaves of corn and rich purple clusters of grapes, whilst the floor was strewn with the seeds and bruised fruits which the harvesters had let fall when they carried in their offerings. Hidden in a dark corner Psyche found the temple-sweeper's broom, and, taking it, she swept up the floor of the temple. Then, turning to the alter steps, she stretched forth her hands and prayed,

"O Demeter, great Earth Mother, giver of the golden harvest—O thou who swellest the green corn in the ear, and fillest the purple vine with gladdening juice, have mercy on one who has sinned. For the sake of thy child, Persephone, the Maiden, have pity on me, and tell me where in the wide world I can find Eros, my lord, or whether to the dark land I must go to search for him."

So she prayed, and waited for an answer; but all was still and dark in the temple, and at length she turned sorrowfully away, and leant her head against a pillar and wept. And, because she had walked many a long mile that day, and had not eaten since dawn, she sank down exhausted on the ground, and gradually her sobs grew fewer and fainter, and she fell asleep.

As she slept she dreamt the temple was dark no more, but into every corner shone a soft clear light, and looking round to see whence it came, she saw, on the alter steps, the form of a woman, but taller and grander than any woman of earth. Her robe of brown gold fell in stately folds to her feet, and on her head was a wreath of scarlet poppies. Her hair lay in thick plaits on her bosom, like ripe corn in the harvest, and she leant on a large two-handed scythe. With great mild eyes she looked at Psyche as one who has known grief and the loss of loved ones, and can read the sorrows of men's hearts.

"Psyche," she said, "I have heard thy prayer, and I know thy grief, for I, too, have wandered over the earth to find the child of my love. And thou must likewise wander and bear to the full the burden of thy sin; for so the gods have willed it. This much I tell thee, and no more. Thou must go yet further from the land of thy birth, and cross many a rough mountain and foaming torrent, and never let thy heart grow faint till thou come to a temple of Hera, the wife of Zeus the All-seeing. And if she find thee worthy, she will tell thee how thou must seek thy love."

So saying, she faded from her sight, and Psyche awoke and found the temple cold and dark. But in her heart she cherished the image of the great Earth Mother, with her large eyes full of pity, and set out comforted on her journey.

Too long would it be to tell of all her wanderings and all the hardships of the road, but many a moon had waxed and waned before she stood on the brow of a hill looking down on Hera's shining temple. Down the hill she went and up the marble steps, and men stood aside as she passed, for her face was fairer than before, and she no longer shrank back like a haunted thing, but walked with the swinging gait of those whose feet the kind earth has hardened, and the breezes of heaven have fanned the fire in their eyes. In her heart she knew that she had conquered and borne the terrors of the path with no coward's fears, and she prayed that Hera might find her worthy of doing great deeds to win back her lord. Then she stood before the altar, and made her prayer,

"O Hera, golden-throned, who sittest on the right hand of Zeus—O thou who, when the marriage-torch is lit, doth lead the bride and bridegroom to their home, and pourest blessings on their wedded love, have mercy on me, and show me where I may find my lord. Far have I wandered, and drunk deep of sorrow's cup, but my heart is strong for any task that shall win back my love to me."

Thus she prayed, and bowed her head before the great white statue of the goddess. Even as she spoke, the statue seemed to change and rise from the ivory throne in the shape of a woman tall and exceeding fair. Her robes were like the clouds at sunset, and her veil like the mountain mist; on her head she wore a crown of gold, and the lightning played about her feet as she gazed at Psyche with eyes that pierced through to her soul.

"Psyche," she said, "I have heard thy prayer, and I know that thou art true. For I am the wife of Zeus, who seeth all things, and he hideth naught from me. Well I know that thou has wandered far, and suffered at the hands of men. But greater trials await thee yet, before thou canst find thy lord. Thou must be a slave to foam-born Aphrodite, the pitiless goddess of Love. And she will try thee sorely, and put thee to many a hard test ere she will forgive thee and think thee worthy of her son Eros, or of the godhead men gave thee long ago. But if thou overcomest her wrath, thou hast overcome death itself, and naught can part thee from thy lord again. Go, then, to

where she holds her court in a pleasant valley by the sea, and forget not that the gods bless tenfold those who waste not the power that is given them, how feeble soe'er it be."

So saying, she faded slowly away till Psyche found herself standing once more before the pale white statue. Then she turned and went through the silent temple, and out into the sunlight, and asked for the road which would lead her to the sea and Aphrodite's pleasant vale.

IX

For many a long day she journeyed, till at length she saw the blue sea far away and a pleasant valley sloping to the shore. Here the waves broke in laughing ripples on the beach, and the leaves danced gaily on the trees in the soft west wind; for Aphrodite, born of the foam, the fairest of all the goddesses, held her court there, surrounded by her nymphs and maidens. As she sat on her golden throne they danced around her with their white arms gleaming, and crowned her with roses, singing the while the song of her beauty.

"O foam-born Aphrodite, Queen of Love, fairest of Time's deathless daughters. Thee the golden-snooded Hours kiss as they pass and the circling Seasons crown with grace. Before thee all was fire and chaos, but at thy coming like sped to like. The earth decked herself with flowers, and the nightingale sang to her mate on the bough, and in the pale moonbeams youth and maiden sped hand in hand through the glade. Thy smile is like sunshine on ripples, but the flash of thine eyes like the death-bearing gleam of the lightning; for not always art thou kind. The heart of the scorner thou breakest, and art jealous for thy rites. Wherefore north and south and east and west men worship thee, now and evermore, O goddess of ten thousand names!"

As Psyche drew near the nymphs espied her. With loud cries they rushed forward, and flinging chains of roses about her, dragged her forward before the throne.

"A prisoner, a prisoner!" they cried—"a mortal, O queen, who has dared to enter they sacred vale! What fate shall be hers?"

And Psyche knelt trembling before the throne. She dared not look up, for she felt the eyes of the goddess upon her, and the blaze of her anger burned through to her heart.

"Psyche, what doest thou here? Knowest thou not that long ago I loved thee not, because thy beauty taught men to forget my dues, and mine own son didst thou lead to disobey my word? By thy folly hast thou lost him; and glad am I that he is rid of thy toils. Think not that thy tears will move me. Those who enter my sacred vale become the lowest of my slaves, and woe to them if they fail to do the task I set them. Verily, thine shall be no light one, or I am not the Queen of Love and Beauty."

"O lady," answered Psyche, " 'twas to be thy slave and to do thy will that I came to thy sacred vale, if haply I might turn thy wrath to love and prove myself not all unworthy of thy son. Great was my sin, O goddess, when I doubted him; but many are the tears I have shed, and weary the way I have wandered in search of him—yea, even to the dark underworld would I go, if so be it I could find him there. As for the worship that men paid me, Zeus, who searcheth all hearts, knoweth that I lifted not mine in pride above thee. Nay, doth not every gift of beauty come from thee, O mighty one? If my face hath any fairness, 'tis that it shadoweth forth thine image. Weak are the hearts of men, lady, and hard is it for them to look on the sun in his might. Be not angry then, if through the mortal image that perisheth, they stretch forth blind hands towards the beauty that fadeth not away. And now on my hands and knees I beg thee, O queen, to set me thy hardest tasks, that I may prove my love or die for mine unworthiness."

As Psyche was speaking the face of the goddess softened, and she answered her more gently.

"Thy words please me, maiden, for the gods love those who shrink not back from trial. Three tasks I will set thee, and if in those thou

fail not, one harder than all the others will I give thee, whereby thou shalt win thy love and immortality. Go, maidens, and lead her to my garner, that she may sort the golden grain ere the sun's first rays gild the pine-tops."

X

At the command of the goddess the nymphs gathered round Psyche, and, binding her hands with chains of roses, led her away to the garner. Here they set her free, and with peals of merry laughter bade her farewell.

"Pray to the hundred-handed one, maiden, to help thee," cried one; "thy two hands will not go far."

"Nay, an hundred hundred hands could not sort the grain by sunrise," said another.

"Better to work with two hands," said Psyche, "than idly to pray for ten thousand."

But for all her brave answer her heart sank as she looked at the task before her; for she stood in the largest garner it had ever been her lot to see—wide and lofty as her father's palace-halls, and all the floor was strewn with seeds and grain of every kind—wheat, oats and barley, millet, beans and maize, which she must sort each after its kind into a separate heap before the sun should rise. However, she set diligently to work, and minute after minute, hour after hour passed swiftly by, and the heaps growing by her side; yet for all her toil 'twas but a tiny corner of the garner she had cleared. Feverishly she worked on, not daring to look at what remained to do. Her back ached, her arms grew stiff, and her eyes felt heavy as lead, but she worked as one in a dream, and her head kept falling on her breast for weariness, till at length she could hold out no longer, but fell fast asleep upon the cold stone floor.

While she slept a marvellous thing happened. From every hole and crack there appeared an army of ants—black ants, white ants, red

ants—swarming and tumbling over each other in their haste. Over the whole floor of the garner they spread, and each one carried a grain of seed, which it placed upon its own heap and ran quickly back for another. Such myriads were there, and so quickly did they work, that by the time the first ray of the sun peeped in at the windows the floor was clear, save for the heaps of sorted grain standing piled in the midst. The bright light pouring in at the window fell upon Psyche as she slept, and with a start she awoke and began feverishly to feel about for the grain. When her eyes became accustomed to the light, how great was her joy and thankfulness to see the neat heaps before her! And as she looked around, wondering who could have been so kind a friend, she saw the last stragglers of the ants hurrying away to every crack and cranny.

"O kind little people," she cried, "how can I thank you?"

She had no time to say more, for the door was thrown open, and in a golden flood of sunlight the nymphs came dancing in. Seeing the floor cleared and the bright heaps lying on the floor, they stopped short in amazement.

"Verily thou hast wrought to some purpose, maiden," said one.

"Nay, she could never have done it of herself," said another.

"True, O bright-haired ones!" answered Psyche. "I toiled and toiled, and my labour did but mock me, and at length my strength gave way and I fell asleep upon the floor. But the little folk had pity on me, and came out in myriads and sorted out the grain till all was finished. And lo! the task is accomplished."

"We will see what our queen shall say to this," they answered.

And binding her once more in their rosy chains, they led her to Aphrodite.

"Hast thou swept my garner, Psyche, and sorted the grain each after its kind?" she asked.

"Thy garner is swept and thy grain is sorted, lady," she replied, "and therein I wrought the little my feeble strength could bear. When I failed the little folk came forth and did the task."

Trembling, she waited for the answer, for she feared that in the very first trial she had failed. But Aphrodite answered,

"Why dost thou tremble, Psyche? The task is accomplished, and that is all I ask; for well do I know the little folk help only those who help themselves. Two more tasks must thou do before I put thee to the final proof. Seest thou yon shining river? On the other bank graze my flocks and herds. Precious are they beyond all telling, for their skins are of pure gold. Go, now, and fetch me one golden lock by sunset."

So saying, she signed to the nymphs to release Psyche, who went at once towards the stream, light-hearted; for this task, she thought, would be no hard one after the last.

As she approached the river she saw the cattle feeding on the further bank—sheep and oxen, cows and goats—their golden skins gleaming in the sunlight. Looking about for some means of crossing, she espied a small boat moored among the reeds. Entering it, she unloosed the rope and pushed out into the stream. As she did so, one of the bulls on the further shore looked up from his gazing and saw her. With a snort of rage he galloped down the field, followed by the rest of the herd. Right down to the water's edge they came, lashing their tails and goading with their horns, and an ill landing would it have been for Psyche had she reached the shore. Hastily she pushed back among the reeds, and pondered what she must do; but the more she thought the darker grew her lot. To get one single hair from the golden herd she must cross the stream, and, if she crossed, the wild bulls would goad her to death. At length in despair she determined to meet her doom, if only to show that her love was stronger than death. As she bent over the boat to loose the rope, a

light breeze set the reeds a-whispering, and one seemed to speak to her.

SHE UNLOOSED THE ROPE AND PUSHED OUT INTO THE STREAM.

"Fair lady, leave us not, for those who reach the further shore return not to us again."

"Farewell, then, for ever, gentle reed, for I have a task to do, though I die in the vain attempt."

"Ah, lady, stay here and play with us. Too young and fair art thou to die."

"No coward is young or fair, kind reed. And before sunset I must win a lock from a golden fleece yonder, or I shall never find my love again."

And she let loose the rope.

"Stay, stay, gentle maiden. There I can help thee, for all my life have I watched the golden herds, and I know their ways. All day long they feed in the pleasant pasture, and woe to those who would cross over when the sun is high in heaven. But towards the evening, when he is sinking in the far west, the herdsman of Aphrodite cometh and driveth them home to their stalls for the night. Then mayest thou cross with safety and win a lock from the golden herd."

But Psyche laughed aloud at his words.

"Thou biddest me to steal the apples when the tree is bare. Thy heart is kind, O reed, but thy tongue lacketh wisdom. Fare thee well."

"Not so fast, lady. Seest thou not the tall ram yonder by the thorn bush? Sweet grows the grass beneath its shade, yet to reach it he must leave a golden tribute on the thorns. Even now there is a lock of his fleece caught in the branches. Stay with us till the herds are gone, lady, and then canst thou win the lock of gold."

"O kindest of reeds, forgive my blindness. 'Tis more than my life thou has saved, for, with the task undone, I should lose my love for ever."

So all day long she stayed and talked with the reeds; and they told her that often folk came down to the stream and pushed out for the other bank. But when the cattle rushed raging to the water's edge they turned back afraid, and dared not venture forth again, but went home disconsolate. And so they heard not the whispering of the reeds nor learnt the secret of winning the golden lock.

Now the shadows were falling fast, and away in the distance Psyche heard the horn of the herdsman and his voice calling the cattle home. At the sound they lifted their heads, and made for the gate on the far side of the field. As soon as they were safely through, Psyche pushed out the boat and rowed to the other bank. Swiftly she made for the thorn-bush and picked the golden lock from the bough, and as the boat glided back to the reeds, the sun sank low behind the hills. Close at hand she heard the laughter of the nymphs as they came to see whether the task were done. With a smile she drew the lock of gold from her bosom, and, marvelling, they led her back to Aphrodite.

"Thou hast a brave heart, Psyche," said the goddess, as she looked at the golden lock at her feet.

"The bravest heart could not have won this lock, lady, without knowing the secret which the reeds whispered to me."

"Well do I know that, Psyche. But 'tis only the pure in heart that can understand the voice of the wind in the reeds; and thus doubly have I tried thee. Take now this crystal bowl for thy third task. Beyond this pleasant vale thou wilt come to a dark and barren plain. On the far side a mighty mountain rears his peak to heaven, and from the summit a spring gushes forth and falls headlong over the precipice down into the gulf below. Go now and get me a draught of that stream, but see that thou break not the goblet on the way, for its worth is beyond telling."

In truth, as she held it out, the crystal gleamed brighter than the rainbow. Psyche took the goblet, and the first rays of the sun found her already on the plain. Far away on the other side the mountain-

peak rose barren and black against the sky, and she hurried on as fast as her feet would go, lest night should fall ere she had filled the goblet. On and on she went, and at length she drew near to the mountain and looked about for a path leading up to the summit. But naught could she see save rocks and boulders and masses of crumbling stones, and there was nothing for it but to set to work to climb the rough mountain-side. Clasping the goblet tightly in one hand, she clung to the rocks as best she might with the other, fearing at every step that she would slip and break her precious burden. How she ever reached the top she never knew, but at length she stood, bruised and torn, upon the summit. What was her dismay when she saw that the mountain-peak was divided by a mighty cleft, and across the abyss she saw the stream of water gushing out from the steep rock a hundred feet and more below the summit! Even had she toiled down again and up on the other side the rock fell away so smooth and sheer that a mountain-goat would have no ledge on which to rest his foot.

Psyche sat down upon a rock to think what she must do, and the more she thought the more she felt that her last hour had come.

"For the only way I can reach the water is to throw myself into the bottomless abyss, where the steam flows deep down into the bowels of the earth; and I should be dashed to pieces, but perchance the King of the Underworld would have mercy on me, and let my soul return but once on earth to bear the crystal bowl to Aphrodite."

So saying, she stood and bade farewell to the earth and the pleasant sunlight and the fair flowers that she loved, and prepared to throw herself over the mountain-side. As she was about to spring from the edge, she heard the whirring of wings above her head, and a mighty eagle flew down and settled on the rock beside her.

"Far up above thy head, in the blue sky, have I watched thee, Psyche, and seen thy labours on the mountain-side. Too brave and true art thou to go to thy death. Give me the goblet, and I will fill it. Knowest thou that yonder stream is a jet which springeth up from dark Cocytus, the River of Wailing, which watereth the shores of the

dead? No mortal can touch of that water and live, or bear it away in a vessel of earth. But this goblet is the gift of Zeus almighty, and I am his messenger—the only bird of heaven that can look on the sun in his might. Give me the cup, then, and I will fill it, and bear it to the mountain-foot, that thou mayest carry it back in safety."

With tears of joy and thankfulness Psyche gave him the goblet, and as he flew away across the dark chasm, swift as an arrow from the bow, she turned and sped down the mountain-side, heeding not the stones and boulders, so glad was she at heart. At the foot she found the eagle awaiting her.

"O mightiest of birds, how can I thank thee?" she cried.

"To have served thee, lady, is all the thanks I need. Farewell, and may the gods prosper thee in thy last great trial."

And he spread his mighty wings and flew away. Psyche watched him till he grew but a tiny speck in the blue sky. Then she turned and hastened across the plain with her precious goblet of water.

The nymphs danced out to meet her as before, and led her to Aphrodite.

"I see thou art fearless and true, maiden," she said, when Psyche told her tale. "Twice hast thou faced death without flinching, and now must thou go down to his own land; for no woman is worthy of my son's love, if she possess not beauty immortal that fadeth not with passing years. And she alone, the Queen of the Dead, can give thee this gift. Take this casket, then, and go and kneel before her and beg her to give thee therein the essence of that beauty. When thou hast it, see thou hasten swiftly back and open not the casket; for if its fumes escape and overcome thee in the world below, thou must dwell for ever with the shades."

So Psyche took the casket, and her heart sank within her at the thought of that dread journey. And the nymphs waved sadly to her

as she went away, for never yet had they looked on one who had returned from the dark land of shadows.

XI

Away from the pleasant vale went Psyche, for she knew full well that nowhere in that fair place could she find a way down to the world below. As a child, when she lived in her father's halls, her nurse had told her strange tales of dark and fearsome caves which men called the mouth of Hades, and how those who went down them never returned; or if one perchance, more favoured than the rest, came back into the sunlight, his face was pale and his strength departed, and he talked wildly of strange things that none could understand.

Far over the country-side she wandered and asked for the gate of Hades, and some pitied her weakness, and some laughed at her foolishness, and all men thought her mad.

"For beggar and king, for wise and foolish, the road to Hades is one," they said, "and all must travel it soon or late. If thou seekest it, in very sooth, go throw thyself from off yon lofty tower, and thou wilt find it fast enough."

Sadly she went and stood on the tower, for she knew no other way. Once again she bid farewell to the earth and the sunlight, and was about to leap from a pinnacle, when she thought she heard a voice calling her by name, and she hushed her breath and listened.

"Psyche, Psyche," she heard, "why wilt thou pollute my stones with blood? I have done thee no wrong, yet thou wouldst make men hate me and shun the rock on which I stand. As for thee, it would avail thee nought, for thy soul would dwell for ever in the Kingdom of the Dead, and the shadow of thyself, faint and formless, would glide about my walls, and with thin-voiced wailing weep for thy lost love; men, hearing it, would flee from me, and for lack of the builder's care, my stones would fall asunder, and of all my proud beauty

naught would be left, save a mound of moss-grown stones and thy spirit's mournful guardianship."

"Poor tower," she said, "I would not harm thee. Thou canst tell me, perchance, some better way, for I must bear this casket to the Queen of the Dead, and beg for a gift of beauty immortal, that I may return to the earth worthy of my lord."

"Hadst thou thrown thyself over the edge, thou wouldst never have come to the Queen of the Dead, but wailing and forlorn wouldst have wandered on the shores of the Land that has no name; for betwixt that land and Hades flows the wide Stygian stream. One boat there is that can cross it, and therein sits Charon, the ferryman of souls. Greedy of gain is he and hard of heart, and none will he take across who bear not a coin of gold in their mouths. And the pale ghosts of those who have died away from their loved ones, when none were by to pay the last rites of the dead and place the gold coin in their mouths—all these flock wailing around him and beg him with heart-rending cries to take them over the stream. But to all their entreaties he turneth a deaf ear and beateth them back with his oar. E'en hadst thou prevailed on him and come to the palace of pale Persephone, thou couldst not have entered in; for at the gates sits Cerberus, the three-headed hound of Hell, and none may pass him without a cake of barley-bread. But his soul loveth the taste of earth-grown corn, and while he devours it the giver may pass unscathed."

"The coin of gold and the barley-cake I can get," she said, "but how can I reach the Underworld alive I know not."

"Not far from hence thou wilt find the cave men call the Gate of Hades. In ignorance they name it, for no math hath proved where it leads. All the long years I have stood upon this rock have I watched the entrance to that cave, and men have come up and looked inside, and the boldest have entered it; but always have they come swiftly back, staggering like drunken men, with pale faces and wild eyes full of fear, and about them hangs the smell of noisome vapours that rise up from the gates of the dead; and the old wives sitting by the fireside nod their grey heads together. ' 'Tis the tale that our mothers

told us long ago and their mothers before them,' they mutter. ' 'Tis surely the Gate of Hades, and those who venture too far will never come back again.' They have guessed aright, maiden, and down that dark cavern lies thy path."

"But if those who venture too far never return, how shall I bear back the essence of undying beauty in the casket?"

"Instead of one gold piece, take two, and two loaves of fresh-baked barley bread. One gold coin to the ferryman and one loaf to the hound must thou give as thou goest, and keep the rest for thy return, and from greed they will let thee pass back again. Tie the casket in thy bosom, and put the gold coins in thy mouth, and take the barley-loaves one in each hand. See that thou set them not down, or the pale ghosts will snatch them away; for the taste of the earth-grown meal giveth a semblance of warmth to their cold forms, and for a brief space they feel once more the glow of life. So by many a wile will they seek to make thee set down the bread; but do thou answer them never a word, for he who toucheth or answereth one of these becometh even as they are."

"Psyche thanked him for his counsel, and went forth to beg the two gold coins and barley-loaves, and for love of her fair face the people gave it gladly. When all was ready, she set out towards the cave. About its mouth the brambles grew tall and thick, and the ivy hung down in long festoons, for none had ventured in for many a long year. As best she might, she cut a way through the prickly hedge, and stood in the shadow of the cave, and the drip of the water from the roof sent a faint echo through the vaults. Through the dark pools she went, through mud and through mire, and the green slime hung like a dank pall about the walls. On and on she hastened, till her head swam round and her heart turned sick within her; for round her floated a mist of poisonous vapour, which choked her and made her gasp for breath, and monstrous shapes swept past—the Furies and Harpies and hundred-headed beasts which guard the gate to Hades. Their cries and shrieks filled the air, and every moment she shrank back, terrified that they would tear her limb from limb, as they bore down on her with the whirr of their mighty wings and

their wild locks flying in the wind. Across the path they stood and waved her back, and her heart turned cold with fear; but she pressed onward with hurrying steps, and lo! when she came up to them the shapes clove asunder like mist before the sun, and she passed through them, and found they were but smoke.

And so she came to the nameless land that lies betwixt earth and Hades; a barren, boundless plain it is, with never a tree or shrub to break the dulness of its sad mud flats. Up and down it wander the shades of those whose bodies the kind earth has never covered, and they wring their hands and wail to their dear ones above, to grant them burial and the rites of the dead. For Charon, the grim ferryman, beats them back from his boat, because they have no coin, and they are doomed to dwell for ever in the land that has no name.

As she was crossing the dismal plain, an old man came towards her beating a laden ass. Old and weak was he, and could scarce stagger along by the side of the beast, and as he came up to Psyche the cords broke that bound the burden on the ass's back, and the faggots he carried were scattered all about. And he set up a dismal wailing, and wrung his pale withered hands.

"Gracious damsel, have mercy on an old man, and help me load my ass once more."

But Psyche remembered the words of the tower, and she clung the tighter to the loaves of bread, though she longed to help the feeble shade.

Onward she went till she came to the banks of the Styx, the mighty river of Hell, by which the great gods swear. Nine times it winds its snaky coils about the shores of Hades, and across its leaden waters Charon, the boatman of the dead, ferries backward and forward for ever. When he saw Psyche, he hailed her, and asked for the coin. Answering him never a word, she held out one coin with her lips, and as he took it she shuddered. For his breath was as the north wind blowing across the snow, and his eyes were like a fish's, cold and dull.

"Welcome, sweet maiden. 'Tis not often we get a fare like thee, my boat and I;" and he laughed a hard, thin laugh, like the cracking of ice in a thaw, and beneath her weight the boat creaked in chorus.

Out into the stream he pushed with his pole, and then set to with his oar, and the rise and fall of the blade made never a sound in those dull leaden waters. As they neared the middle of the stream, Psyche saw two pale arms rise up above the waves, and the head of an old man, who cried out to her piteously,

"Help, help! I drown in this foul stream! Ah, for pity's sake put out one finger to save me!"

And Psyche turned aside to hide her tears; for the face was the face of her father, and his cries pierced through to her heart. As the boat passed by he sank with a moan beneath the waves, and she saw him no more.

At length they reached the shore of Hades, and she saw three paths before her leading upwards from the landing stage. As she stood, not knowing which to take, the old man beckoned to her.

"I know not whither thou are bound, lady, for thou bearest not on thee the mark of the dead. The souls of the wicked I know, for about them fly the Furies, the avengers of sin, and hound them down the left-hand path, through Periphlegethon, the river of fire—down, down to the utmost depths of Tartarus. And the souls of the brave shine forth like stars in the darkness, and they take the right hand path to the Elysian fields of light, where the breeze blows bright and fresh and the golden flowers are glowing. The middle path leadeth to the palace of pale Persephone, but that way only the gods and the children of the gods may go, or those who bear with them some token from the Immortals."

Then Psyche showed him Aphrodite's casket, and turned up the middle path. Through a dark wood she went, and came out upon a plain. Here she saw three aged women weaving at a loom, and they cried out to her in weak, quavering voices,

"Oh, maiden, thine eyes are young and thy fingers supple. Come help us unravel the thread."

"HELP, HELP! I DROWN IN THIS FOUL STREAM!"

But for the third time she turned aside, and went quickly on her way, and when she looked back over her shoulder the loom and the hags had vanished away.

So at length she came to the palace of Persephone. The roof and columns were all of pure silver, which shone with a pale light through the murk and gloom, like the shimmer of pale moonbeams on a cloudy night. Above the heads of the pillars ran a frieze of strange device. It told of Night and Chaos, and of the birth of Time, and how the sons Earth rose up against the gods in deadly battle, and were hurled into the depths of Tartarus by the thunderbolts of Zeus. And it showed how Prometheus the Titan gave fire to mortal man, so that they learnt all manner of crafts, and became the masters of all living things, and like the gods for wisdom. But they ruled by the law of the strongest and said that might was right, and begat the foul forms of Pestilence and War and red-handed Murder. The other side told of the things that would come to pass when Time and Death should be no more, and Love should rule the universe. On that side all the forms were fair and all the faces beautiful, and the breeze played through pleasant places where the flowers never fade. In the centre of the pediment, with mighty wings overshadowing either side, stood a mighty figure, Anangke, great Necessity, the mother of gods and men. From one side she looked dark and terrible, and the world trembled at her frown, but from the other she was fairer than the day, and by unchanging law she drew all things after her till they should be perfected.

On the palace steps before the doorway sat Cerberus, the three-headed watch-dog. When he saw Psyche approaching he began to growl, and his growl was like the rattle of thunder far away. As she drew nearer he barked furiously and snarled at her, baring his white gleaming fangs. Quickly she threw him one of the barley loaves, and while he was devouring it, she slipped gently past, and stood within the courtyard of the palace. All was silent and deserted, and her footsteps, as they fell on the marble pavement, sent no echo through the colonnades; for it seemed that even sound must die in that lifeless air. She passed through great doors of bronze into a lofty hall. In the shadowy depths of it she saw a great throne raised, and on it sat the Queen of the Dead. About her stood two handmaids, and their names were Memory and Sleep. One fanned her with great poppy-leaves, and as she did so the eyes of the queen grew heavy and dim, and she sat as one in a trance. But when this one grew

weary of fanning, anon the other would hold up before her a great mirror of polished steel, and when she looked into it the colour would rush into her pale cheeks, and her eyes would glow like coals of fire, for in the flash of the steel she saw earth's flowery meadows, and remembered that for three moths only did she live in the gloom and the shade; and she knew, moreover, that one day the circling seasons would stay their course, and decay and death would pass away, and when that time came she would return no more to the murk and gloom, but dwell for ever in the sunshine and the flowers. A magic mirror is that which Memory holds, and few are there who can bear to look on its brightness, but those whose eyes are strong gaze into its depths, and learn that knowledge and remembrance are one.

With timid steps did Psyche cross the hall, and knelt upon the steps of the throne.

"Child of Earth, what dost thou here?", asked the queen. "This is no place for living souls."

"O mighty one, 'tis a boon I beg of thee," said Psyche, and drew from her bosom Aphrodite's casket. "Give me, I pray thee, the gift of undying beauty in this casket, that I may return above worthy of my lord."

" 'Tis a great boon thou askest. Nevertheless, for thy bravery's sake I will give it thee. For many are they who set out to find it, but few have the heart to come so far."

Thereupon she took the casket in her hands, and breathed into it, and her breath was as the smoke of incense on the altar.

"Take it and return swiftly whence thou camest, and see thou open it not till thou comest upon earth. For in the land of the dead my breath is death, but above it is life and beauty immortal. Fare thee well."

With a glad heart Psyche rose from her knees, and sped through the silent palace. She threw the second loaf to Cerberus as she passed, and for the second coin of gold Charon took her once more across in his boat. This time no sad phantoms cried to her for help, and she knew that it was for the sake of the earth-grown meal that they had stood in her path before.

At last she stood once more in the sunlight, and joy lent wings to her feet as she sped across the plain and away to Aphrodite's pleasant vale. With the casket in her hand, she knelt before the throne, but Aphrodite put out her hand and raised her up.

"Kneel no more to me, Psyche, for now thou art one of us. But open the casket and drink into thy very soul the life and beauty that will never die."

Her smile was brighter than sunshine on the shimmering waves, and the touch of her hand made Psyche's blood run like fire through her veins. Scarce knowing what she did, she opened the casket. The fumes rose up in a cloud about her head, and she knew no more till she felt herself moving upwards, upwards. As life came slowly back she opened her eyes, and looked into the face of him she had seen but once. His rainbow wings were spread above her, and his strong arms held her close, and he looked into her eyes with the look that mingles two souls into one.

"Beloved," he whispered, "Love has conquered all things. In thy darkest hour of trial I watched over thee, and gave thee strength, and now we two will dwell for ever in the courts of heaven, and teach the hearts of men to love as we love."

HERO AND LEANDER

NE sunny day in April long ago a maiden sat in a lonely tower looking out across the Hellespont. At her feet the blue ripples lapped lazily on the beach and played a soothing lullaby upon the stones, and the white-sailed ships floated slowly down the stream from Sestos, carrying their rich freights of corn and merchandise. To the north she could see the port of Sestos, with the great walls running down from the city to the harbour, and the masts of the ships as they lay at anchor by the quay. Across the water facing the tower, stood Abydos, with its palaces and houses nestling white at the foot of the low green hills. So narrow is the sea that runs between Sestos and Abydos, and so swiftly does the current flow, that the ancients used to think it was a great river running down from Propontis and the stormy Euxine, and emptying their overflowing waters into the wide Ægean main. So they called it the broad Hellespont, for the rivers of Greece were but narrow streams beside it.

As she looked across the sunlit waters the maiden sighed, and turned wearily to an old dame who sat spinning in a corner of the room.

"Good mother," she said, "how many years didst thou say we two have lived in this wave-washed tower?"

" 'Tis close on twenty years, my dear, since I brought thee here, a tiny babe in my arms."

"Twenty years!" sighed the maiden. "Twenty centuries had passed by more swiftly in the bright busy world out yonder. How long is a woman's life, good nurse?"

"With the blessing of Heaven she may live for four score years, my child."

"Four score years—four times as long as I have lived already! I can well dispense with the blessing of Heaven."

"Nay; hush, hush!" cried the old woman, and stopped her spinning hastily. "What ails thee, Hero? Thou wast never wont to speak such dreadful words."

The girl threw herself on her knees beside her, and laid her head upon her lap and sobbed. The old nurse drew her fingers tenderly over her long black hair, and waited for the storm of passion to be spent.

"I am tired—tired of this lonely life," sobbed the maiden. "Why am I shut up here, all alone?"

"Thou knowest the reason full well, my child. If thou goest forth into the world, a great sorrow will come upon thee, and drive thee to death in the flower of thy youth. Such was the oracle of the gods concerning thee. Thy mother—poor young thing!—scarce lived to hold thee to her breast, and when she died she put thee in my arms. 'Take her away, nurse, far from the haunts of men, and never let her out into the cruel world. Go, live with her in some lonely tower by the sea, and make her a priestess to pitiless, foam-born Aphrodite. Night and day, as soon as she can lisp a baby prayer, let her burn incense before the altar of the goddess, and perchance she will have mercy on her, and save her from her fate. Full well I know that 'tis with her it rests to strike down my child or to save her, even as it was she, the goddess of Love, who laid her cruel hand on me, so that now I lie a-dying. Ah! save my child from the fate that has been mine.' I did as she bade me, and surely we have not been unhappy, thou and I, together, all these years?"

And she stroked the girl's cheek tenderly, and sighed as she thought how, for many months past, it had grown paler week by week.

"Ah, think me not ungrateful!" cried Hero. "Thou knowest that I love thee, and would never leave thee. But my heart is restless, and I long to set foot beyond this tower and see a great town and streets and the faces of my fellow-men."

Then she rose from her knees, and led the old nurse to the window.

"There!" she cried, pointing towards Sestos; "dost thou see where the white highway runs down into the city—how a crowd of pilgrims throng towards the gate? See, too, the steep pathway that winds upwards from the harbour—how the folk move ever one way, up, up, to the temple of Aphrodite on the hill! How often have I watched them year by year as they gather together for the great feast of Adonis! Yet I, who all my life long have been Aphrodite's priestess—I have never been inside her temple or joined with those who throng from far and wide to pay her worship at this glad season. Verily, the goddess hath good cause to be angered with me if I neglect her dues. Good nurse, let me go to-morrow and join in the procession of the maidens, and let me lay my tribute of flowers before her altar, that she may bless me and save me from my evil fate.

But the old nurse was very troubled at her words.

"My child, thou hast thine own shrine within the house where thou canst burn incense and offer up flowers to Aphrodite. She will answser thy prayers as well from here as from the crowded temple in the town."

"Then why do men build her great pillared temples, and throng from far and near to keep her feast, if the fireside shrine and the simple prayer would please her as well? Nay, she loveth rich gifts and music and singing and the heads of many bowing as one man before her image. Ah, nurse, let me go—let me go."

"My child, why wouldst thou go when thou knowest that the world can only bring thee sorrow? Stay here with me in peace."

"Nay, there is no peace here for me. Aphrodite is angry, and she will slay me by a slow and cruel death if I do not keep her feast this year. Should I, her priestess, stay away, when even the meanest of the folk gather together in her honour? All these years I have not gone and now she will stay her hand no more. As for the world and its cruelty, fear not for that. Thou thyself shalt go with me, and stay by my side till I join the procession of priestesses and maidens. Then I will go up with them to the temple, and in their midst I shall be as far from the world as in this tower. I long to stand within the great white temple and hear the chanting of the priests. I long to see the gleaming image of the goddess, and the statue of the risen Adonis, and the altars sweet with incense and flowers. Ah, nurse, let me go, and all the rest of the year, till the glad season comes round once more, I will stay with thee in this tower and pine no more."

So piteously did she beg that the old nurse had not the heart to refuse, though she feared what might come of it. But she tried to comfort herself with the thought that perchance, after all, the maiden was right, and that Aprhodite was killing her by a slow and cruel death, because she had never kept her solemn feast-day.

The next day broke bright and fair, and Hero, as she looked out from the window, was filled with joy. In the grey dawn she had risen, and sat looking anxiously across the narrow sea towards Abydos and the low line of hills on the further shore.

"O Helios," she prayed, "bright and beautiful, shine down upon the earth this day, and fill the hearts of all with gladness; for it is Aphrodite's solemn feast, and the greatest day of all my life."

And her prayer was not unanswered. Slowly the grey dawn turned to saffron, and the golden disc of the sun rose over the silent hills and scattered the rosy clouds north and south before him. With a cry of joy Hero turned away from the window and ran to rouse the old dame in the other room.

"Nurse, nurse!" she cried, "the sun is shining, and the world has awaked from sleep. It is time to pick the roses and the lilies fresh

with dew and weave them into garlands for the goddess. Come up, up, and out with me to the garden."

Without waiting for an answer, she tripped down the turret-stair and out into the garden, and the old nurse sighed and followed slowly behind. In the golden morning, they gathered the roses and lilies, and wove them into garlands and posies, and heaped up the loose flowers in baskets. When all was ready they set out for the town. Though it was yet early, the streets were thronged with pilgrims and folk hurrying this way and that to the houses of their friends and kinsmen. Yet, despite the bustle and confusion, there were few who had not leisure to turn and watch the maiden and the old woman hastening along.

"It is Hebe come down from the courts of heaven," they said—"she who giveth to the deathless gods eternal youth and joy. None can look on her face and be sad."

And, indeed, all the sunshine of the morning seemed reflected in Hero's face, so glad at heart was she. It was small wonder that men turned and looked at her; for she walked as one of the Immortals, full of dignity and grace. No evil thing had ever touched her or left its mark upon her soul. But in a fair garden she had grown to womanhood, where the breeze made music in the plane-trees and the waves beat time upon the shore, and on the hill behind, the tall dark cypress-trees kept silent watch above her. No angry word had ever reached her ears, but as long as she had lived the love of one faithful heart had shielded her. And now, though she knew it not, the call of life had come to her, as it comes to every living thing, and with eager, open arms she was answering it. In the midst of that bustling city crowd, she was like a fair flower that brings into some restless sick-room the scent of sunlit meadows and the murmur of dancing streams. As she went she laughed and talked merrily to the old nurse beside her, and ever and anon a flower would fall to the ground from the laden basket she was carrying; and one of the crowd would quickly pick it up and place it in his bosom, and carry away in his heart something of the music of her laughter and the sunshine of her eyes. The old nurse when she saw it was filled with

fear, and hastened faster along; but Hero saw none of these things, nor knew that she was different from other folk.

At length they reached the temple on the hill and went into the chamber where Aphrodite's priestesses and maidens were to meet; and they clad her in long white robes, and put a garland on her head. When all were ready, they went and stood before the priest of the temple, and he told them in what order they should walk. First came little children, who scattered rose-leaves in the path, and behind them followed maidens, playing upon pipes, and singing the hymn to Adonis and Aphrodite. Next came the priest himself, and on either side of him two maidens walked, and held above his head great fans of peacock's plumes. After him followed the long procession of priestesses and maidens, incense-bearers, and the keepers of the sacred doves. Last of all came Hero, bearing in her hands a garland of roses and lilies to lay at the feet of the great white statue of the goddess. Each year the fairest of the maidens was chosen for this task, and in all that throng of youth and beauty there was none more fair than she. With her eyes upon the gleaming statue that shone from the dark recess above the heads of the worshipping people, she walked as one in a dream. About her the smoke of the incense rose, and to her ears the voices of the singers sounded low and far away as they sang,

"All hail to thee, Aphrodite, foam-born Queen of Love! Adonis, all hail to thee! Thou art risen—thou art risen on this joyful day. No more doth Death detain thee in his dark domain, nor Persephone enshroud thee in the mists of the sad Underworld. But thou art come back to the daylight and the flowers; and Aphrodite has dried her tears. For once more by thy side, O fairest of mortal men, she wanders through green glades and echoing caverns and by the shore of the silver sea. The joy of her love has kindled the light of summer suns, and like the west wind in the roses, her breath stirs gently in the hearts of men, and the eyes of every living thing reflect the brightness of her smile. All hail to thee, Aphrodite! Adonis and Aphrodite, all hail!"

As they sang, the choir of maidens parted this way and that, and Hero walked up between them bearing the garland in her hands. When she had laid it at the feet of the statue, the procession formed once more, and, with music and singing, they marched round the colonnade to the shrine of Adonis, and all the people followed after. Still Hero walked as one in a dream, and when the procession halted, she turned into a small recess and leant against a pillar to rest; for her part was done, and the people pressed so close about her in the aisle that she was glad to stand aside till the procession moved again. With her eyes closed, she drank in the sweet scent of the incense and flowers, and listened to the chanting of the choir, as they sang of the love of Adonis and Aphrodite. How Adonis, the beautiful shepherd, the fairest of mortal men, was loved by the Queen of Beauty, and all the long summer days they shepherded his flocks together on the shady slopes of Ida. But there came a time when the people of the country held a great hunt, and chased the wild boar through grove and dale till he was brought to bay in the greenwood; and foremost of those who rushed in to the death was Adonis. But the boar in his agony turned round upon him and pierced him in the thigh with his tusk, and wounded him unto death, his followers bore him away and laid him in the shade of an oak. With a wild cry of sorrow Aphrodite came and knelt beside him, and tried to call him back to life, but his head fell limp upon her breast. The red drops of his blood were mingled with her tears, and both turned to flowers as they fell upon the ground—his blood to the crimson rose, and her tears to the pale, drooping windflower. All through the woods and the echoing hills a cry of mourning was heard, "Adonis, Adonis! O weep for Adonis! Adonis is dead." But though his spirit had crossed the gloomy river and fled to the dark halls of Hades, yet Death was not strong enough to hold him. The voice of his love and of Aphrodite's pleaded together, and heaven and earth, and the world of the dead, were moved by their prayer. Even the heart of Pluto, the black-browed god of Death, was touched, and he said that for only four months in the year must Adonis dwell beneath the earth, but for the other eight he might live his old life with Aphrodite in the sunlight. So he chose the season of the flowery spring-time to come back to his love each year, and only

the cold dark months of winter did he spend in the land below. So did a great love prevail an conquer even the black lord of Death.

As Hero listened to the well-known tale, her heart was moved, and she felt that if ever she loved, her love would be as the love of Adonis and Aphrodite—stronger than death; and she sighed as she remembered how she must live lonely all her days in the tower by the sea.

As though in answer in her sigh, she felt a light touch upon her arm, and, raising her head, she found herself face to face with a young man. She was about to turn away in anger and return to her place in the procession, but the look of his eyes held her spellbound, so full of fire and yet so sad were they. For a moment she stood gazing at him, and the fire of his eyes seemed to light another in her heart and set her whole frame aglow. The hot blood rushed to her face, and she lowered her eyes in confusion, and her limbs trembled beneath her, so that she leant back against the pillar for support.

"I ask your pardon, gentle lady," said the man; "forgive my rudeness. Though thou knowest me not, I have known thee for many a long year, and day and night have I prayed the gods that I might meet thee face to face. This day Aphrodite has heard my prayer. If I have seemed presumptuous, forgive me. 'Twas the goddess nerved my arm to touch thee."

And he stood with bowed head before her, awaiting her reply.

"Who art thou, stranger?" asked Hero. "Thou mistakest me, surely, for some other maid. Never till this day have I set foot beyond my tower, and to that lonely spot cometh no man, nor have I ever spoken with such as thee before."

"My name is Leander," said the stranger, "and I dwell in white Abydos across the water. Full well do I know thy lonely tower; for as I ply to and fro between Sestos and Abydos on my father's business, I pass close beneath its walls, and day by day have I seen thee sitting at they window looking out across the sea. Ah, lady, be not angry

with me! The first day I saw thee thy beauty set my heart aflame, and since then I have lived for thee alone."

SHE LOWERED HER EYES IN CONFUSION, AND HER LIMBS TREMBLED BENEATH HER, SO THAT SHE LEANT BACK AGAINST THE PILLAR FOR SUPPORT.

"Thy words stir me strangely, sir," answered Hero. "I know not what to say to thee."

"Thou art not angry, then?" he cried. "Thou wilt let me speak my love? Ah, maiden, all these years have I loved thee with a true heart's devotion! If my love could find but ever so faint an answer in thy heart, I would be content."

And he raised his eyes full of hope and joy to her face. But she turned aside her head to hide the answering fire of her eyes.

"Alas, sir!" she said, "mine is a heart that must never beat for any living man. I am doomed to dwell in yonder tower lonely all my days, for if I go forth and mix with the world, I shall die by the curse of Heaven before my time."

"I have heard thy tale, lady; for even the most secret things are noised abroad by rumour. Far be it from me to bring the curse upon thy head. If thou couldst give me thy love, there would be no need for thee to come forth into the world. I have thought of that. Each day we would live our lives as we have done till now. But at night when none would miss me, I would come to thee. No living soul should know my secret—no, nor yet the lifeless boards of my boat; for even dumb wood can tell a tale if need be. Nay, these two arms shall bear me. Look not fearful, lady. Full often have they borne me to and fro across this narrow sea from mere love of sport. With thee as the prize they would bear me twice as far."

As he spoke he held them out towards her, and, indeed, they were goodly arms to look upon, and his face and form did them no shame either.

Then Hero raised her eyes and looked him full in the face.

"Leander," she said, "I know not what charm or magic thou hast used, but I am as clay in thy hands. 'Tis not thy words have conquered me; in thy reasoning I could find many a flaw. Though one short hour ago I had never seen thee, yet now I feel that I have known thee always, and that life apart from thee were worse than death."

"Ah, Hero!" he cried, and took her hand in his; "the gods have heard my prayer. Though thine eyes had never seen me, the voice of my heart reached thee long ago, and thy soul came out to mine. 'Twas in answer to my call that thou didst come to-day to the feast; for I prayed to Aphrodite to move thy heart, or I knew not how I should ever speak to thee. This very night, beloved, I will come to thee, and the light which thou burnest in thy chamber shall be my guiding star."

"Ah, how carefully will I trim that torch to-night!" she said, "that it may burn brightly for thee. Every evening I put it there as a beacon-light for the ships that pass in the night; but to-night it shall burn for thee—for thee alone."

Now the service was ended before the shrine, and the train of people began to move once more. With one last look and a pressing of hands they parted, and Hero returned to her place in the procession.

When all was ended, the old nurse hastened to the robing-room. In the crowd inside the temple she has lost sight of Hero, and her heart was full of fears for the maiden. As she helped her to lay aside her festal robes and garland, she gazed anxiously at her.

"Art thou content to come home with me, my child," she asked, "or has the glamour of the world ensnared thee?"

"Ah, nurse!" she cried joyously, "never, never have I loved my tower so well. Let us hasten home, and in the quiet of the evening I will tell thee that of which my heart is full."

The old dame was glad when she found her so ready to go home, and they hastened silently through the crowded streets. As the sun was setting behind the hills, and the shadows fell cool and long across the garden slopes, Hero sat at her nurse's feet, and told her of the story of Leander's love, and how that night would make them man and wife. When she had ended her tale, the old dame took her face between her hands and looked her in the eyes.

"Hero," she said, "this thing can never be. I have failed in my trust. I have listened to thy pleading, and let thee out into the world, and now through this man the curse of the gods will be fulfilled. Think no more of him. Let this day be to thee as though it had never been, and thou mayst yet escape thy doom."

But Hero sprang to her feet.

"What!" she cried; "thou wouldst take away the only joy of my life now, when I have just found it? Never! Curse or no curse, Leander shall be my wedded husband. Ah, nurse!" she added, falling on her knees once more, "methinks that over all the joys of life the gods hang a curse, and that it lies not with us poor mortals to choose between them. We must take both and live, or neither and be dead all our days on earth. Thou canst not hold me now; I have chosen my lot."

Nothing that the old dame could say availed to change her purpose, but with her heart full of joy she put on her brightest robes and sat by the lighted torch in her chamber, looking out across the sea, and waiting for the night. True to his word, Leander came as soon as darkness fell, and the old dame let him in by the turret door. Carefully she shaded her lamp with her hand so that the light fell full upon his face, that she might see what manner of man he was. He had dried himself as best he might with leaves and grass from the garden, but his hair hung in damp clusters about his head, and his tunic clung wet about him. Yet, in spite of all, he was full fair to look upon—a very god for strength and beauty. The old dame was pleased when she saw him, for he had braved danger and discomfort to win his bride, and he was a proper man withal, and worthy of so fair a maid as Hero.

So she led him upstairs and gave him change of raiment, and when he was ready she took him to Hero's chamber. There before the shrine of Aphrodite they plighted their troth, with but one faithful soul to witness their vows, and the music of the wind and the waves for their marriage hymn. To the two lovers the night fled by on wings of lightning, and all too soon they had to say farewell; for ere

day dawned Leander must have reached the further shore. But parting was sweet sorrow for those who so soon would meet again.

So for many a day their lives ran smoothly on. Each night Hero lighted her torch; each night Leander was guided by its light, and, true to his word, swam across the narrow sea that divided him from his wife. The colour came back to Hero's cheeks and the brightness to her eyes, and she pined no more to leave the tower and go out into the world. When the old dame saw how happy she was, she was glad that things had fallen out so, and prayed that for many a long year the gods would be pleased to bless their wedded love.

Meantime Leander thought that no one knew of the nightly voyage save Hero and the old dame her nurse, yet, for all his secrecy, there was one who each night watched for him with a longing as great as Hero's own. In the depths of the blue Ægean the daughters of Nereus dwell—the fair nymphs of the ocean. All the day long they play beneath the waters, and dance hand in hand along the yellow sands and the shell-strewn hollows of the sea. But at night, when the eyes of men are darkened, they come up above the water and, cradled in the bosom of the waves, swing gently to and fro in the soft summer air; and the white gleam of their arms is the glint of ripples in the moonlight. But when the wild storm-wind shrieks over the sea and the skies are dark and lowering, they forget their fears, and are filled with madness. Then they chase each other across the black waters with wild locks flying in the wind, and woe to those who are out upon the high seas when the Nereids dance in the storm, for their dance is the dance of Death. The fire of the lightning runs hot in their veins as they fly on the wings of the whirlwind, and wherever they go the waves hiss white and angry behind them. On the crests of the billows they rise and fall, and with the voice of the storm-wind they shriek aloud, and call upon all things to join in their dance; and they leap on the decks of the travailing ships, and man, woman, and child they clasp in their cruel white arms, crying, "Come dance with us over the sea." With a force that none can withstand they bear them away, and whirl them round in the dance of Death, till they hang limp and lifeless in their arms. Then they toss them aside, nothing caring, to be washed ashore in the wan morning light, or to

sink to a nameless grave in the depths of the ocean. Wherever they have passed wreck and ruin lie behind; but they rush on, till the storm dies away, and they sink down exhausted to their home in the sea. Sometimes in the calm green waters below they find the bodies of those they have drowned in their frenzy, but they know them not; for all that they did when the spirit of the storm was upon them they forget, and it passes from their minds as a dream dies at break of day. So when they see the bodies lying still and lifeless, they call to them to come and play with them in the water, and when they get no answer, they creep closer, and find that their eyes are closed. Then they know that, however long they call, they will never get an answer, for they have learnt that those whose eyes are closed have neither life nor voice, but are as the rocks and stones. But the Nereids know not sleep nor death, and when they look upon one lying dead they think he has always been so; and they do not grieve nor weep for him, for the gods did not make them for grief, but to be the bringers of beauty wherever they go, and to turn all foul things fair. So they gather the shells and the bright seaweeds, and cover the body where it lies, and it sleeps in beauty and peace in the hollows of the sea.

One of these same Nereids it was who saw Leander as he swam across the Hellespont each night, and she loved him for his beauty, and longed to have him as her playfellow. So she swam near to him on the crest of the dancing waves, and called to him softly,

"O child of the green earth, come, come with me, and play with me and my sisters in the depths of the blue Ægean."

But he saw her not, nor listened to her pleading for his eyes were darkened. To him the gleam of her arms was the moonshine on the water, and the sound of her voice like the west wind on the waves.

So she followed him in vain across the channel, and when he went up into the tower she sat below upon a rock, and watched for him to appear at the window; and she saw Hero sitting by the torch waiting for her lover, and heard her cry of joy as she ran to greet him when he came. Then again she called to them softly,

"O children of the green earth, come and play with me. I will crown your heads with white sea-pearls, and you shall sit on coral thrones beneath the waves, and be king and queen over all the nymphs of the sea."

But as they stood hand in hand at the window, they saw her not, and heard only the murmur of the ripples on the beach. So she sat calling in vain all the night long. Before the grey morning dawned Leander came down, and when he reached the shore he turned and called,

"Farewell, Hero!"

And Hero, leaning from her window, answered,

"Leander, farewell!"

So the sea-nymph learnt to know their names, and every night she would sit sadly calling them, and they heard her not.

But one night all the winds of heaven were loosed, and they rushed with a wild shriek over the face of the waters, and lashed them to a fury of white-maned waves. With a deafening crash the thunder echoed through the hills, and the pale forked lightning lit the sky from east to west. With white cheeks and a heart full of fear, Hero knelt before the shrine in her chamber, and prayed the gods to have mercy on the sailors out at sea, and, above all, to grant that Leander had not set out ere the storm began.

Meanwhile Leander on the other side had seen the storm approaching, and he knew full well that when the seas ran high no man could swim the channel and reach the other shore alive. So he sat by his window and longed for the storm to be spent and the day to dawn; for the night without Hero was to him but misery. Across the stream he could see the torch burning fitfully in the gale.

"The gods grant she think me not faithless," he said, "for not going to her this night."

As he sat and watched, the storm grew wilder and more terrible. In the swirling, seething waters the Nereid danced with the madness of the tempest in her heart, up and down over the crested waves, with the storm wind whistling through her hair. In the gleam of the lightning-flash she held out her arms to the shore and called,

"Come and dance with me. Leander, O Leander, come!"

As she called, the east wind rushed with a wild shriek across the water, and blew out the beacon light in Hero's chamber. Leander at his window saw the pale light disappear and return no more. A blinding flash of lightning rent the sky, and the rattle of the thunder sounded as though the mountains of the earth were falling. Then the spirit of the storm came upon him too, and he heard the voice of the sea-nymph calling with a wild, unearthly shriek,

"Leander, O Leander, come!"

And he thought it was the voice of Hero calling him in deadly peril. Perchance the thunderbolt had struck her tower, and it had crashed in ruins about her and borne her with its falling stones into the rushing stream below. In a mad frenzy, scarce knowing what he did, he plunged into the seething waters and struggled in the waves with the strength of despair. With a wild cry of joy the sea-nymph caught him in her arms. "At last, at last, thou hast heard my call," she said.

Up and down through the hissing waves she bore him, now plunging down, deep, deep, into the calm green water below, now rushing round and round in a whirlpool, now leaping from the crest of one white wave into the boiling foam of the next, till he lay limp and breathless in her arms. She heeded not, but bore him on, ever on, across the water till they came beneath Hero's tower. Then, rising on the crest of the waves that beat against the wall, she called,

"Come, join with us in the storm-dance! Come, Hero, Hero!"

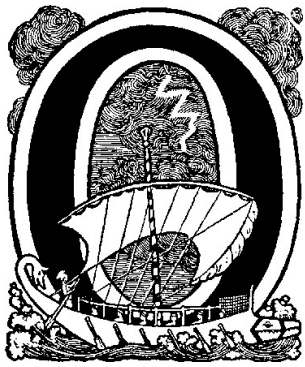
In the breath of the east wind the stinging foam beat against the window like one knocking in wild alarm, and the echo of the sea-

nymph's cry reached the maiden as she knelt before the shrine. Filled with terror, she rushed to the window and looked down on the seething water. A brilliant flash of lightning blazed across the sky, and for a moment all was light as day. On the bosom of a breaking wave she saw Leander with his arms tossed helpless about him, and his head thrown back pale and lifeless, and above him stood the sea-nymph in a robe of flashing foam. With a cry of despair Hero leaped to the sill and plunged into the roaring waves, and with her arms about Leander, she, too, was tossed along in the dance of Death, till the storm died away and the nymph bore them down side by side to the floor of the blue Ægean. There, true to her word, she set them on thrones of coral, and twined white sea-pearls in their hair, and in time the winding seaweeds and clinging ocean flowers wove a shroud of beauty about them; and their bodies slept side by side in the fair ocean depths. So did it come to pass that the curse of the gods was fulfilled.

But whether it was truly a curse or a blessing, who shall say? For they lived and loved with a love that has become famous among men, and side by side they died. And does not the poet tell us of the islands of the blest, where the souls of the brave and true abide for ever; where the breeze blows always bright and fresh, and the golden fruits are glowing, and the crimson-flowered meadows before the city are full of the shade of trees of frankincense? In that far land there is no death nor parting, no sorrow and no tears, but those who have been true on earth dwell ever side by side. If the poet is right, Hero and Leander are there together, where no storm can reach them and no sea can part them ever again.

THE SACRIFICE OF ALCESTIS

I



NCE upon a time when Pelias, the crafty king, ruled in Iolchos by the sea, his nephew Jason came and tried to win back from him the land that was his by right. But Pelias put him off with cunning words, and sent him forth to Colchis in search of the Golden Fleece, thinking that so he need never look upon his face again. Jason, therefore, who was brave and stout of heart, and feared not man nor beast, sent a proclamation through the land, bidding all who loved adventure to join him in the good ship *Argo*, and sail with him for the Golden Fleece. From the length and breadth of Hellas the heroes and sons of the Immortals flocked. Among them came Admetus of Pheræ, in the first bloom of his manhood; and sailing with the Argonauts, he braved all the terrors of that fearful voyage, and sat at his oar like a man in the midst of deadly peril.

After many a long day the remnant of the heroes who had sailed away from Iolchos returned with the Golden Fleece; and standing before proud Pelias, they laid it at his feet. In the great hall of the palace he received them sitting on his throne: on his right hand sat Philomache his wife, and all about him stood his daughters, Peisidice and Asteropæa, Hippothœ, and Evadne, and Alcestis—maidens whose beauty would gladden any father's heart. But fairest of the fair, as the moon among stars, was Alestis. When Admetus looked upon her face, his heart was filled with love for her, and he swore a great oath that he would live and die unwed, or else have Alcestis to wife.

When Pelias had welcomed back the Argonauts, he bid the henchmen spread the tables in the hall, and soon the king with his

son Acastus and all the menfolk were seated with the heroes round the well-filled board. Against a pillar leant a minstrel, who sang of great deeds and heroes, and how the good ship *Argo* had braved the terrors of the seas; while the daughters of Pelias bore round the sweet dark wine in flagons, and filled up the golden goblets. To Alcestis it fell to fill up the cup of Admetus, and as he held it out towards her their eyes met, and she blushed beneath his gaze, and tried to hide her confusion in the folds of her veil. She was vexed with herself for the blush and vexed with him for having called it forth. Yet withal her heart beat fast, and the beating of it was not altogether born of wrath; for Admetus was a proper man in the prime of life, who had sailed the high seas and seen danger face to face, and a brave man's admiration is ever dear to a woman's heart. So it came to pass that when Admetus drew from his breast a lock of the Golden Fleece, which Jason had given him for a memorial, and held it forth to her, she refused it not, but took it and hid it in the folds of her gown, and when Admetus was gone away she would draw it forth and sigh as she looked at it.

When Admetus saw that she did not altogether disdain him, he was glad at heart, and plucked up all his courage, and went and stood before the king her father, and boldly asked her hand in marriage. As he spoke the king's brow darkened, for he loved not Jason nor any of his crew. He had sent them forth, as he thought, to their death, and now they were come home to wrest the kingdom from him and give it to the lawful heir. So he cast about in his mind for some excuse; for Admetus was nobly born, and heir to a great kingdom, and he could not say him nay without good reason. In his trouble he bethought him of an ancient oracle which a soothsayer had spoken when Alcestis lay a babe upon her mother's breast. Till now he had put aside all thought of it, and had looked upon the seer as a mad prophet whose words were of no account. But now that they would serve him in his need, he pretended that he had always laid them up in his heart, and intended to abide by them.

"Young man," he said, "they who would woo my child Alcestis must woo and win her as the gods have ordered. When she lay in her mother's arms, there came a prophet and stood over her and

spake, saying, 'Child of evil fortune! whosoever thou weddest, woe to thy wedded life, sobeit thy lord come not to bear thee away in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar.' Thus spake the prophet of the gods, and his words shall surely come to pass. Think not, then, that I will give my daughter up to misery, or that thou hast but to look on her beauty and long for her, to have her for thine own. Nay; hence, away, and bethink thee how thou canst so beguile a lion's heart that he shall walk tamely in the yoke beside his lawful prey. Then, and then only, when thou comest driving this strange pair shalt thou have Alcestis for thy wife."

Admetus was sad at heart when he heard the king's words, and he set out sorrowfully home for the halls of Pheres, his father; for he thought that this thing was beyond the power of mortal man to do, and that all his life long he must live in loneliness of soul, without Alcestis to wife.

When they heard of their son's return, Pheres and Periclymene, his wife, came forth to greet him, and fell upon his neck and embraced him with tears of joy. A great feast was prepared, and the altars of the gods sent up to heaven the savoury smoke of sacrifice, and all the people rejoiced together at the return of the hero their land had sent forth.

After all the feasting and merrymaking was ended, Pheres drew his son aside to his chamber and said,

"My son, whilst thou hast been away in strange lands the hand of Time hath dealt heavily with me. My knees are weak beneath me, my hair is white with age, and all my strength is gone. Year by year it groweth harder for me to ride forth among my people, and the folk on the far boundary know my face no more, and I cannot say whether all is well with them. Time is it for me to give my crown and sceptre to a younger man, and thou hast shown thyself worthy to rule. Take now the kingdom from my hand, that thy mother and I may pass our last years in peace together. A mighty kingdom have I builded up for thee, and worthy of mighty kings. See to it, then, that

thou take to wife some princess of a royal house and rear up a son to rule the land when thou art dead."

And Admetus answered,

"The kingdom will I take from thee right gladly, my father, and rule it well and wisely so long as the gods give me strength. But as to taking a wife in my halls, that I can never do."

Then he told him of his love for Alcestis, and how he could never hope to win her. But his father laughed and shook his head.

" 'Tis the way of hot-headed youth to think that in all the wide world one woman alone hath a fair face and bright eyes. Time and the beauty of another woman shall heal thy malady, never fear."

"Time and another woman may drive me to my death," he answered hotly," but never will I wed with any maid save Alcestis alone, whom I love.

And he strode in anger from the room. But Pheres laughed the louder.

"Verily, young blood is the same the whole world through," said he.

So Admetus became King of Pheræ and ruled in his father's stead; and from the shores of the sea below Pelion to the land of the Molossians, the mountain-folk of the Far West, his name was held in honour among his people; for the land had peace in his day, and the valleys stood thick with corn, and by the fair-flowing waters of Boebe the shepherd played his pipes, and his flocks wandered browsing about the green meadows. No stranger was ever turned away from the palace doors, but, however poor and ragged he might be, he was welcomed right gladly, and feasted in the halls and sped upon his way with kindly words. So it came to pass that through the length and breadth of Hellas, when men spoke of good cheer and hospitality, they always raised the cup in honour of Admetus, the kindliest of hosts to rich and poor alike.

II

One day as Admetus sat at meat in the great hall with his parents and all the household, a thing befell which changed the course of his whole life. Inside the fire burnt brightly on the hearth, and the torches on the walls sent a cheerful gleam through the shadowy vastness. But outside the wind howled about the corners of the palace like Furies in their wrath, and anon it sunk down to a sob and a wail, while the lashing of the rain against the walls was as the whip of a furious driver urging on his steeds. And lo! from out the darkness of the storm there came a man, who stood in the doorway of the great hall and looked round about upon the company. Many a long mile must he have come that day in the teeth of the gale, for from head to foot he was splashed with mud, and the water ran from his ragged cloak in streamlets, making a pool upon the floor. In his hand he carried a staff; from a strap about his body hung a strange instrument such as no man in the hall had ever seen before; and he held his head up proudly and looked fearlessly about him, so that for all his sorry raiment he seemed no common beggar, but a young king in all his pride. A hush fell upon the people as they gazed, for his eyes shone strangely bright, and in the darkness of the shadowy doorway his stature seemed greater than that of mortal man. When he had looked his fill and saw where Admetus sat, he strode across the hall with great swinging strides, and came and stood before him. As he walked the people looked silently after him, for a great ship running before the wind was not more fair than he.

"O king," he said, and his voice rang clear and mellow through the hall, "a suppliant I stand before thee, and my hand is red with blood. Say, wilt thou receive me in thy halls, or wilt thou turn me forth into the storm and darkness?"

And Admetus marvelled at his words.

"Who art thou, stanger, to make this bold request? When a man's hand is stained with blood, 'tis to the altars of the gods that he should fly for cleansing, and not bring pollution to the palaces of kings."

"My name is behoveth thee not to know now, nor the deed I have done. Let it suffice thee when I say that not yet have the altars of that god been built who hath the power to cleanse me from blood-guiltiness. Nay, myself I must work out mine own cleansing, and for the waxing and the waning of twelve moons it is decreed that I must serve a mortal man. Wilt thou take me for thine herdsman—yea or nay?"

At this Admetus marvelled the more, and looked hard in the face of the stanger, but his eyes fell beneath the other's fearless gaze as those of a dog beneath his master's; and he answered him never a word, for he felt that the thought of his heart lay writ beneath that piercing look as clear as writing on a tablet. So he signed to his attendants, and they led the stranger forth and bathed him in warm water, and anointing him, clad him in fresh sweet linen and a tunic of silk. When all was accomplished, they led him back to the hall; and if the people had marvelled before at his beauty, their wonder was increased twofold as they gazed at him now.

When he had taken his fill of meat and wine, the stranger turned to Admetus and said,

"My noble host, fain would I, in some poor measure, requite thee and thy household for kindness to a wanderer and a suppliant. I have some small skill in song, and have fashioned me an instrument whereon I play sweet harmonies, that frame the melody of my song like the golden setting of a gem. Have I thy leave to sing before thee in thy halls?"

As Admetus bowed his head the stranger loosed the curious instrument from his girdle. The body of it was the hollow shell of a tortoise, in the rim of which two twisted horns were cunningly fitted, joined together towards the top by a silver band. The space between the band and the furthermost edge of the shell was spanned by seven strings of gold. Lovingly he drew his fingers across the strings, and the chords rang soft and true through the silence of the hall, as he played a prelude to his song, and anon raised his voice and sang. He sang a strange, sweet song, such as no man there had ever heard,

and yet in the depths of his soul each one of them felt that he had known it before he was born. For the song that the stranger sang was the song that the stars first sang together when the universe was born, and light sprang forth from the darkness. The melody they made that day vibrates for ever till the end of time. Musicians and artists and poets, and those whom the gods love, hear it and sing it, each in his separate way, for those who have forgotten the sound of it. Deep in the heart of every man it lies voiceless, till once at least in his lifetime the hand of the divine musician sets the chords vibrating, and opens the ears of the soul to hear the heavenly harmonics. Such was the song that the stranger sang, and the people sat breathless beneath his spell, and gazing deep into the red-hot heart of the fire, saw strange dreams and visions. The very dogs awoke from their sleep, and crept closer to the music, and with their heads between their paws, gazed with unblinking eyes at the singer; and a magic thrill ran round the circle of them that listened, both man and beast, and welded and fused their souls in one, so that they felt that the life in them all was the same. When the song was ended, silence fell upon all things—even the storm outside had ceased to rage; and Time stood still as each man sat motionless in his seat, with heart too full for speech. But at length the spell was broken, and with a sigh and a whisper, they glided away to their rest, till Admetus and the stranger were left face to face before the hearth.

"O divine musician," said Admetus, "I know not who thou art. This only do I know, that I could worship thee for the godlike beauty of thy song, and follow thee and see thee all my days."

"Nay, O king; 'tis destined that I must serve thee, and be thy servant for a year. To-morrow I will lay aside this silken doublet, and put on the dress that suits my station, and go forth with the other shepherds of thy flocks."

"O stranger, this thing can never be! Who am I that thou shouldst be my servant?"

"Thou art the man who turneth not the stranger from thy doors, though his hands, like mine, be red with blood. As for me, I must

work out my cleansing, as I told thee. For blood-guiltiness is mine, though I have not sinned in the shedding thereof. But even Zeus himself, thou knowest, hath not reached wisdom and might, save by sore struggle against powers less wise than he. Happy am I if by the service of an upright man I may be purified."

From that day forth the stranger became a herdsman in the halls of Admetus, and in no wise would he be treated differently from the other servants. Clad in the coarse, rough homespun of a shepherd, he would go forth at early dawn with the flocks, and at eventide return and sit among his fellows at the lower table. The hearts of all the household were warmed towards him, and it seemed that in his presence no evil thing could live; for if ever a quarrel or strife of tongues arose, a look from the stranger would take all the spirit from the combatants, and the matter fell dead between them like a ball at the feet of listless players—nay, it seemed that he could read the very thoughts of their inmost hearts, and all malice and unkindness withered away in the sunshine of his presence, like sprigs that have no root. Strange tales were told of how he shepherded his flocks, for the shepherd lads who went forth with him at dawn would lie at his feet in some shady grove whilst the flocks browsed close at hand; and he would take his lyre and sing to them of all things in heaven and earth, and at the sound of his voice the hearts of all living things were moved. From the rocky heights of Othrys the lion came down and fawned at his feet with bloodless fangs, and the spotted lynxes gambolled with the flocks. The shy fawns forgot their fears and left the shelter of the tall pine-woods, and danced about his lyre with fairy feet; for the magic of his singing made the whole world kin, and the bow and the arrow were laid aside in those days, and no watchman stood upon the heights to guard the herds from beasts of prey. But the flocks increased and multiplied, and the earth brought forth rich harvests of corn and fruit, and all the land had peace. So Admetus loved and honoured his strange herdsman above all his fellows, and took counsel with him, and followed his advice in all things.

III

Meanwhile in Iolchos by the sea the old king Pelias had died. His son Acastus succeeded to his throne, and, as the custom was, held great games in honour of his father. Far and wide through Hellas he sent the news, and bade all men of might come and take part in the contests of running and wrestling and hurling the quoit. To the victors in each trial he offered to give one of his sisters in marriage, but for Alcestis he made the contest doubly hard, for she was the fairest and noblest of the daughters of Pelias, and he knew that the suitors would flock without number for her hand if the task that was set them was not well-nigh impossible. So he ordained that he who would win her must prove himself the mightiest of all men in the field that day, and that, moreover, he must come to bear away his bride in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar; for so the king, her father, had ordered in obedience to the words of the prophet.

When Admetus heard the news, the fire of his love for Alcestis burst forth into flame, and he felt that he could conquer the whole world to win her. When he went to rest that night he could dream of nought but her, and of how all men would marvel when they saw him come to bear her away in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar. How he was to train this stranger yoke-pair he knew not, but he felt that Alcestis was not one whom the gods had fated to live unwedded all her days. From the length and breadth of Hellas men would flock to woo her, and surely from all the host one would be found to do this deed, and why should he not be that one? So he argued, and dreamed sweet dreams of love and happiness. But,—whether it be that sweet dreams take the heart from a man, because in sleep they put within his grasp visions which, on waking, he finds to be but shadows of a shade, and he longs to clasp them once again without the labour and toil which alone on earth can bring man happiness,—certain it is that when he awoke Admetus felt that the task was hopeless, and that all his efforts would be vain. His heart was in a tumult; his longing for Alcestis was as strong as ever, but the confidence of winning her was gone. He went out into the woodland and threw himself on the grass beside the stream and gazed moodily into the dark depths of a pool. Its silent stillness so

maddened him that he cast a pebble into the midst, and watched it as it slowly sank, feeling that it was an image of his own life. An hour or more he sat there idly playing with the pebbles and the water, heavy at heart, and a prey to morbid fancies. At length he was roused from his dreaming by the sound of music far away. Slowly it drew nearer, and from the shadow of the trees came the strange herdsman playing on his lyre, followed by his flocks and the wild creatures of the forest. Without a word he came and sat beside Admetus at the water's edge, and the animals lay grouped around. Then he changed the key of his song from a merry dance-tune to a solemn lay, and the burden of his song was love—how love, if it were but strong and pure, could conquer the whole world and accomplish deeds undreamt of. As Admetus listened, the tumult of his heart was stilled, and once again the flower of hope sprang up in his breast—not the phantom flower that springs from idle dreams, but the bright living flower whose roots are firmly planted in the will to do and dare all things to win the promised prize.

When the herdsman had ended his song, he laid aside his lyre and gazed at Admetus.

"Dost thou love this maiden with all thy heart and soul, Admetus?" he asked.

"I would face the whole world to win her," said he.

"Wouldst thou lay down thy life for her?"

"Why ask so poor a sacrifice? My life without her would be a thing of nought."

Again the herdsman gazed at him, and seemed to read his inmost soul.

"In sooth, I verily believe that, were death now to face thee, thou wouldst gladly die for her. Go forth, then, and win thy bride, and I will help thee all I can. If thou fulfil the first part of the test, I will see to it that thou fail not in the second."

FROM THE SHADOW OF THE TREES CAME THE STRANGE HERDSMAN PLAYING ON HIS LYRE.

"Master," cried Admetus, "what meanest thou?"

"Go thou and enter the lists for Alcestis, and show thyself the best man in the field that day. When they hail thee victor, and bid thee come to fetch away thy bride, as her father willed, answer boldy that the next day at noon thou wilt come in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar to bear her away to thine own land. Then do thou hasten alone to the wood that lies on the road to Pheræ, five miles from Iolchos, and there, by the temple of Hecate, wilt thou find me and the chariot ready harnessed. Believest thou that I can do this thing?"

"O master, do I not see before me the lion lying tamely by the sheep and the wolf by the side of the lamb? How can I doubt thy power?"

"So be it, then. One word of counsel would I give thee: in the day of thy triumph forget not the gods."

"From my youth upwards have I honoured the gods, O stranger. How, then, in the day of my triumph, should I forget them?"

"May they deliever thee in the hour of thy wealth, Admetus, and save thee from blindness and hardness of heart! Above all, when thou art coming home with thy bride, beware lest in thy haste thou pass by the altar of Hecate without the tribute of a prayer. Mighty is the goddess, and in her hands are life and death. The sun with his glad warm rays shines down upon the bosom of the earth, and draws forth the young corn from her breast, and with loving hand he paints the purple bloom of the grape. But when summer skies are cloudless, and the breath of the breeze smites hot upon the land, men pray for rain and the cooling veil of mists to hide the parched and thristy fields from the cruel shafts of his rays. Even so is the might of Hecate; in one hand she hath a blessing, in the other a curse. She may stand beside thy wife in the hour of her need, and bring thy children with joy into the world (for the life of all young things she loveth); or if she be slighted, she can blast the parent-stock ere it hath time to bear fruit, and cut off the fair promise of the race."

"Surely, I will not forget her," said Admetus.

"An hour before noon, then, on the day after the contest of the suitors, I will await thee in the wood. May the gods speed thee in thy trial!"

IV

On the day before the games were to be held Alcestis went on to the roof of the palace, and looked down upon the great courtyard below. All was bustle and confusion. The bronze gates stood wide upon their hinges, and a stream of people passed to and fro. The chariots of the suitors thundered across the pavement. Through the colonnades re-echoed the clattering of horses' hoofs and the clanging of harness chains, and from his post at the gateway the warder shouted his orders to the pages and attendants. Far out across the country Alcestis gazed and traced the white roadway where it wound over the bosom of the plain. He for whom she was looking had not entered the courtyard, and she strained her eyes to see whether, among all the folk who were wending their way towards the city, she could find him. But the palace stood high upon the hill, with the houses of the town nestling below, and the folk upon the road were like flies, so small and black they seemed upon the dusty highway. Many a long hour she watched upon the roof, and still he came not. At length the sun went down behind the mountains in a glory of crimson and gold, and the purple hills cast their shadow across the silent plain. Then Alcestis laid her head upon her arm, and great tears stole through her fingers, and fell upon the cold stone parapet.

"Ah me, the gods are cruel!" she sobbed. "They have planted the seed of love within my heart, and now they would have me tear it out. Hard is a woman's lot. In bitterness of soul she sits within, whilst out in the great world men fight for her beauty, as though she were some painted image or lifeless weight of gold. On the slipping of a foot or the cast of a die her fate may rest for weal or woe, and the happiness of her life hang upon the issue of a moment."

Then she felt in her bosom for the lock of the Golden Fleece which Admetus had given her, and drew it forth and kissed it.

"Alas, he has forgotten me! He is a great king now, and thinks no more of the maiden in whose eyes he looked when he first came back from his voyage."

Sadly she put the lock back in her bosom, and turned and went down the turret-stair. It was close upon the hour when all the suitors were to be feasted in the great hall, and with her sisters she was to sing the pæan song at the pouring of the third libation. Full often had she sung it in her father's halls; for only unwedded maidens, pure and innocent of soul, might sing it, and ask for blessings on their home and kindred, and return thanks to great Zeus, the saviour, for the gladness of a well-filled board and the happy faces of friends and kinsfolk round the hearth. Her heart was heavy within her when she thought that now for the last time this task would be hers, and that only one more sun would set before she would be far away in a strange land, the wife of a man whose very name she knew not yet. Her one hope lay in the words of the prophet and the will of her father, that she should wed that man only who could come to bear her away in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar; and from the depths of her soul she prayed that all might find the task impossible.

"Better to die a maiden," she thought, "than to be the prize of a man I do not love."

As she reached the bottom of the stair she heard her sisters calling.

"Alcestis, Alcestis, where art thou? The feast is well-nigh finished, and all men wait for us to sing the pæan song. Tarry no longer, but hasten and come."

"I come, I come," she answered. "Yet the song of joy upon my lips will echo like a dirge through the chambers of my soul."

And the sisters marvelled at her, and shook their heads.

"She hath always wayward fancies," they whispered, "and is different from other folk."

Their hearts were a-flutter with hope and joy, for on the morrow they would each one be wedded to a brave man, and go to a strange new land, and be queens in their own palaces. So they took no heed of her words, but tripped along the galleries with joyful feet, and took their places in the crowded hall. After them came Alcestis. Slowly, and with sad, unseeing eyes, she took her seat beside them.

Meanwhile Admetus had tarried alone outside the city walls. He had sent his servants before him with his chariot and his gear to secure a stabling for his horses and a sleeping-place for himself in the crowded alcoves of the king's palace. But his soul longed for peace and quiet, and he felt he could not face the noisy crowd before it was needful. Time enough if he slipped into the great hall when the company was gathering for the feast. Only then might he hope to see Alcestis. So he turned aside into the quiet fields and wandered by the winding stream. Behind him the dust rose in white clouds from the high-road as the chariots of the suitors thundered up towards the palace, and Admetus knew that many a brave and mighty hero would stand against him on the morrow. Yet hope burned high in his heart, and he felt that his love for Alcestis was a power which his rivals lacked—a power which would nerve his arm and give him the strength of ten. The desire of his heart went up the the throne of Zeus like the breath of a good man's prayer; and Zeus heard the cry of his soul, and into his veins he poured of that fire which runs in the veins of the Immortals. On earth men know not what to call it, and they name it with many names—inspiration, genius, and the spirit of prophecy, or, when it works too far beyond their understanding, they call it madness.

As the sun was sinking low in the sky, Admetus turned up the steep roadway to the palace. In the courtyard he found his servants, and they brought him water to wash with, and a change of raiment, and clothed him as befitted one who had come to woo a fair princess. As the shades of evening fell he entered the great hall, and mingled with the company, and when the tables were spread, he took his seat among the rest. But when his neighbour spoke to him, he would answer at random, and ever his eye wandered restlessly up and down the hall to find Alcestis. Now the feast drew to its close, and

yet no womenfolk appeared. At last one of the serving-men drew aside the great curtain that hung across the doorway, and as the daughters of Pelias entered Admetus felt his heart leap in his bosom, and he leant eagerly across the table. The moments that passed before Alcetis came seemed eternity, and when at length she entered, her eyes were cast upon the floor, and she saw him not. But when she had taken her seat, the silent voice of his soul sped across the great hall, and found an echo in her heart, and she raised her eyes and looked at him, and for one moment they two were alone in that crowded place.

And now the wine was mixed, and each man held out his cup for the pouring of the third libation. Then Alcestis rose from her seat, and her sisters played a prelude on their pipes. When the prelude was ended she raised her voice and sang.

"O all-bestowing Zeus, Father Almighty, for the mercies thou hast showered upon us, for the evil thou hast warded off, lo, with thankful hearts we make libation of the sweet dark wine! O friend of the stranger, who searchest out the secrets of men's hearts, midst the whirlwind rush of the chariots and the dust of the wrestling-ring, stand thou beside the brave man and the true! Make firm his axle-pin, and the earth beneath him sure, and chain blind Fortune's hands. So shall the prize fall to the most valiant. To those whose lives must be moulded by another's will, grant thou patience and an understanding soul, O Lord, and may the desire of their heart be according to thy will. O father of gods and men, cloud-enthroned, who ridest on the wings of the whirlwind, joy and sorrow by thee are blended into one harmonious whole. By the sunshine of thy mercy, by the scorching fire of thy wrath, open thou the blinded eyes of men to see the glory of thy works. All hail to thee, saviour and king most high!"

As she sang the people marveled, for her voice was as the voice of some priestess of the gods filled with the breath of heaven.

When the feast was ended, the pages took down the torches from the walls, and led forth the guests to the shadowy alcoves where each

man's couch was laid, and there was silence in the halls. On noiseless wings Sleep glided through the palace, and stood by each man's side. With gentle hands she soothed his weary limbs, and put fresh courage in his heart for the contest of the morrow. But when she came to Alcestis she found her gazing out upon the starlit sky.

"My daughter," she said, "come to my arms and lay thy head upon my breast, and I will ease the trouble of thine heart."

"Ah, sweet Sleep, not to-night," Alcestis answered, "for with Zeus a mortal's fervent prayer availeth much. I cannot stand beside Admetus in the lists, but at least he shall not fail for want of a true heart's prayer to-night."

So Sleep passed her by, and till the bright-haired dawn shone out in the east Alcestis sat by the open window. When it was light she went to rouse her sisters, for early in the morning they were to lead the procession of the maidens to the temples of the gods and lay wreaths and garlands before the shrines, while the men-folk gathered in the plain to watch the contest of the suitors.

Now once more there was bustle and confusion in the city, and the streets were thronged with eager folk hurrying to the lists. Ever and anon there was a shout, and the crowd parted this way and that, like the earth before a ploughshare, as a chariot thundered over the stones bearing some proud suitor to the games. Last of all, when everything was ready, came the king, Acastus, and took his seat beneath a canopy, and the people rose as one man, and greeted him with cheers. Then came a herald, and blew a call upon his trumpet, and one by one the suitors marched up and stood before the king, and with a loud voice the herald proclaimed each man's name and station and the contest he would enter for that day. Truly it was a goodly sight to see them marching past, strong men all, in the prime of life. B road were their shoulders, and their limbs were straight and brown, and the rhythm of their marching was like the swell of the sea. Never since the day when all the heroes gathered at the call of Jason for the search of the Golden Fleece had there been such a goodly concourse of men in fair lolchos. From all the wide plain of

Thessaly they flocked, from hill-girt Attica and the Spartan lowlands, from Argolis and the green valleys of Arcadia, and from the isles of the sea.

All the day long the people sat and watched the games, and ever and anon a shout went up to heaven when a strong man overthrew his adversary, or one swift of foot passed the others in the last lap of the race. There was hurling of quoits, and leaping and wrestling, and beneath the feet of the boxers the earth was trampled hard. Far away across the plain the chariots flew, and the people shaded their eyes with their hands, and strained to see which was foremost. But the dust rose in clouds about the horses' breasts, so that till they were close at hand no man could say who was leading.

At last the great day drew to a close, and once more the herald stood before the king and blew a call upon his trumpet. Each in turn the victorious suitors came forward, and when the herald had proclaimed his name and the contest he had won, the king placed a crown of leaves upon his head, and told him which of the daughters of Pelias was to be his bride. Brave men were they all, and bravely had they fought that day, but mightiest among the mighty had been Admetus of Pheraeæ. Last of all the victors, the herald called his name, and he came and stood before the throne; and the king placed the crown of leaves upon his head and said,

"In token that thou hast proved thyself the mightiest in the field, I place this garland on thine head, Admetus. Verily, the gods have stood upon thy side and filled thee with the fire of heaven, so that the strength of thine adversary was turned to weakness before thy might. May they grant thee, in like way, to fulfil the last part of the task; for, of a truth, it would grieve me to see one so mighty depart without a prize."

Then Admetus answered boldly,

"But one more sun shall set, O king, before Alcestis shall be my bride. To-morrow at noon will I come to bear her away in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar."

And those who heard him marveled at his confidence.

V

THE next day towards noon the king came forth and sat upon a throne in the portico before the palace, and all the nobles and suitors stood round about and waited to see if Admetus would fulfil his word. As the sun stood high in the heavens there fell upon his ears a sound like the moaning of the sea far away when a storm is at hand. Louder and louder it grew, drawing nearer every moment, till at length, like the break of a mighty wave, a host of cheering citizens surged through the great bronze gates. Into the wide courtyard they poured, and then stood back upon either side, and, up in the alley in the midst, drove Admetus in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar. Straight across the court he came, and, like well-trained steeds, the beasts looked neither to right nor left, nor heeded the cheers of the people. With a jingling of bells and the rattle of harness-chains, they trotted between the ranks, and came and stood before the king.

"I have kept my word, O king, and have come to bear away my bride, as the prophet of the gods ordained."

Then the king rose up and greeted Admetus.

"Right glad am I to see thee, Admetus," he cried, "and right glad that my sister shall be thy bride. May the gods bless thy wedded life, even as they have blessed thy suit this day!"

Thereupon the pages threw open the palace doors, and a chorus of maidens came forth playing upon pipes, and singing a marriage hymn. Last of all came Alcestis, clad in the saffron robes of a bride, and to Admetus she seemed like the sun heralded by the stars of dawn. Gently he took her hand and raised her into the car, and the people piled rich tapestries and vessels of gold and silver beside them for gifts of marriage. With a shouting and waving of hands the chariot passed once more across the court and down through the echoing streets, till at length they two were alone upon the white highway. The joy that was born of their hearts threw a magic light on

all the land. The green grass waved in the meadows, the leaves danced gaily on the trees, and from the thickets and bushes the birds sang songs of gladness. On and on they drove, as in a dream, heeding neither time nor distance. The glare of the dusty highway changed to the shade of the woodland path, with green arches overhead, and a murmur of dancing streams. Before the shrine of Hecate a shepherd had placed his offering, and was standing with his hands held high in prayer. But Admetus heeded neither shepherd nor shrine, nor remembered when last he had stood there and taken his strange team from his herdsman. Without a thought he passed the altar by. As the gleaming chariot grew dim in the distance, the shepherd turned and watched it, till the curve of the road hid it from sight. Even then he stood and listened to the jingling of the bells, as though he thought that still it might turn back. But the bells grew fainter and fainter, till he heard but a tinkle now and again borne back on the wings of the wind, and at last he could hear that no more. Sadly he turned back, and stood again before the shrine with outstretched hands, then silently disappeared into the depths of the wood.

On went the two till the shades of night began to fall, and one by one the stars came out in the sky. Now they drew near to Pheraeæ. High up upon the hill the palace gleamed bright with many a torch, for messengers had gone before to say that Admetus was coming with his bride, and all the folk had gathered together to greet him on his return. As they entered the city gates choruses of men and maidens came forth to meet them, and up the steep hill the glad procession wound, with the singing of hymns and playing of pipes. When they reached the palace gates the maidens raised Alcestis in their arms, and bore her over the brazen threshold, that no evil omen might befall her as she entered her new home. Long and merry was the marriage-feast, and ere it was over the night was far spent. But at length the last libation had been poured, the last cup had passed round the board, and the maidens stood waiting to take Alcestis to the marriage chamber. So she rose and went with them, and they decked her in the robes in which for the first time a young bride greets her lord. When all was ready, they took down the torches

from the walls, and left her. Outside the door they formed in chorus to sing the love song till Admetus should come to his bride.

ADMETUS HEEDED NEITHER SHEPHERD NOR SHRINE....WITHOUT A THOUGHT HE PASSED THE ALTAR BY.

Not long did they wait. With eager steps he came and drew aside the curtain from the doorway. In the middle of the chamber stood Alcestis, and never had she looked more fair. As the sweet notes of the love-song stole softly through the door, she held out her arms to Admetus. Her hair fell in a cloud about her shoulders, and her white robe touched the floor. From the casement the pale moonbeams fell slanting down, and cast about her a halo of light. With the silver shimmer of her hair and the gleam of her outstretched arms, she seemed to Admetus a messenger of the gods come down by the ladder of light. With a cry of joy he stepped towards her. As he did so a terrible thing befell. Between him and his bride there rose up two huge serpents, and as he rushed towards them they circled Alcetis about in their gleaming coils. The nearer he drew the more closely did they clasp her, and their forked tongues flashed like lightning about her head.

"Back, back!" she gasped, "or they will strangle me."

Unconsciously he fell back. As he did so the great beasts relaxed their grip, and fell down in shining coils upon the floor; but their heads waved to and fro above the ground, and when once more he took a step forward, they rose up again about her with an angry hiss.

"Oh, leave me, leave me!" cried Alcestis. "The gods are angry, and will not let thee touch me. Fight not against their will, or the serpents will slay me."

"Nay, with these hands will I strangle them," cried Admetus.

Again he rushed forward, and again, before he could cross the room, the monsters had wound themselves about Alcestis with a clasp of iron, so that she could scarcely breathe. Just in time Admetus drew back, or they would have squeezed the life from her. With a groan he turned and fled from the room, and the love-song changed to a shriek of terror as the maidens scattered this way and that before him. With head bowed down and wide eyes full of horror, he staggered on like a drunken man, and disappeared into the darkness of the silent hall. In terror the maidens clung together, with

whisperings like the twitter of frightened birds. At length one more bold than her companions drew aside the curtain from the door and looked into the chamber. Full in the path of the moonbeams Alcestis lay stretched upon the floor. Her eyes were closed, and her face was pale as with the paleness of death. Yet there seemed nothing in the room that should have cause dher to swoon away. The maiden called to her companions, and together they lifted Alcestis upon the couch, and ministered to her, till at length she opened her eyes.

Admetus meanwhile had rushed through the deserted hall and out into the moonlit court. All was quiet, save for one solitary figure, who walked up and down in the shadow of the colonnade. As Admetus staggered across the court, the man came out and stood across his path.

"Whither goest thou, O king?" he asked.

Raising his eyes, Admetus found himself face to face with his strange herdsman.

"My head burns from feasting in the crowded hall," he said, "and I am come out to get the cool night air."

His herdsman answered him never a word, but gazed at him with his strange piercing eyes. And Admetus glanced this way and that, but could not meet that steadfast look.

"Why do the gods torment me?" he cried hotly. "What have I done that I should be tortured on my bridal night?"

"Nay, think rather what thou hast left undone."

"Left undone?" cried Admetus, and pointed to the altar in the centre of the court. "Seest thou not the fire still red from the burning of the sacrifice? Not here only, but throughout the whole city, do they steam with the savoury smoke."

"Altars may steam while hearts are cold, Admetus. One fervent prayer before the solitary shrine availeth more than hecatombs of oxen slain without a thought. Did I not stand before thee in the path this day and lift my hands in prayer to Hecate? But with unseeing eyes didst thou pass me by, and the goddess is wroth at they neglect, and her anger standeth between thee and thy bride."

And Admetus stood with eyes downcast before him, and had never a word to say.

"Yet because I love thee I will help thee once again," the herdsman said. "Go back upon thy road and offer now thy prayers. I too will intercede for thee, and methinks that the voice of my pleadings she will not disdain."

Slowly and sorrowfully did Admetus return along the road he had traveled with so light a heart before. For three days and three nights he was not seen within the palace, and for three days and three nights Alcestis lay tossing to and fro upon her bed, with wild words upon her lips, and before her eyes fearful shapes that she alone could see. On the fourth day Ademtus came slowly up the hill. The dust of the highway clung white about his clothes, and the sweat of weariness stood out upon his brow. Yet straightway he came and stood beside Alcestis, and took her hand in his. Then she opened her eyes and looked at him, and for the first time since her marriage night she looked on a face with eyes that could see. The fearful shapes and visions fled away, and she smiled at him with tears of joy. Then Admetus knew that his prayers had not been vain, and that Hecate had heard his cry, and given him back his wife.

VI

QUICKLY the days and nights sped by, and the palace was full of joy and happiness. At last the season came round that had brought the strange herdsman to Admetus the year before. On the selfsame day of the month he came and stood once more before him.

"Twelve moons have waxed and waned, O king," he said, "since the day when first thou gavest me shelter in thy halls. The time of my cleansing is accomplished, and I am come to bid thee farewell."

"Farewell?" cried Admetus. "That is a bitter word in mine ears. Fain would I have thee with me always. Yet have I no heart to beg thee to remain, for thou art mightier than I, and even to call thee guest and friend would sound presumptuous in mine ears. Farewell, then. May the gods reward thee tenfold for the blessings thou hast showered upon my house!"

"When first I stood within thy halls thou didst say to me, 'Stranger, who art thou, and whose blood is on thy hands?' Dost thou not ask me that question now once more ere we part?"

"Master, I asked it then in ignorance of thee and of thy ways. To-day it lieth with thee to tell me or not as thou willest. If thou wouldst hide thy name from me still, I am content."

"Nay, I will tell thee, for 'tis meet thou shouldst know. The fame of the deed I wrought has spread far and wide throughout the world wherever men speak with awe the name of Delphi. Thou knowest how in the beginning Earth held the sacred shrine, and gave forth, from the mouth of her priestess, dark and dreadful oracles, and Chaos and Night had their seats there, and the wingless foul Furies, the trackers of blood. Round about the awful spot the mountains re-echoed the voice of lamentation and the cries of human victims led forth in sacrifice; and lest at any time one strong of arm and stout of heart should come to wrest away the shrine from the powers of darkness, there lay before the gates a guardian fierce and terrible—Python, the sleepless dragon. In and out and round about the portals he wound his monstrous length, and his scales threw back the light like points of flashing steel, and his eyes were like the red-tongued flame. No man in those days could pass that dreadful portal, but, like a dim, uncertain echo, the voice of the priestess floated down to the trembling folk below. At last one day there came a shining one whose sword was the sunlight, and his arrows were darts of living fire. With the strength of his right arm he slew the Python, and

stretched out his monstrous coils beneath the hot sun's rays, till the flesh melted and rotted away, and only his bones lay gleaming white upon the rocks, to show how once he had guarded the shrine against all comers; and the victor took the shrine and made it his own, and placed his priestess there to utter forth true oracles to men when the divine spirit filled her breast. The waters of the Castalian spring he purified, so that those who came might wash away their guilt, and stand with pure hearts before the shrine. And over the green lawns beneath Parnassus he led the choir of the Muses, the bright-haired sisters of poetry, and music, and dancing. Because their feet have touched the earth where Castalia has its fount, men say that those who drink of those waters are filled with their spirit, so that they words that they speak and the songs that they sing are immortal, and will live for ever upon the lips and in the hearts of men. He who did this thing and turned the darkness into light stands here before thee now."

"Apollo!" cried Admetus, "lord and master!" And he fell upon the ground before him, and clasped him by the knees. "Ah, forgive the blindness and presumption of my heart!" he begged.

"Nay, there is nought to forgive. They that shed blood must pay the price—yea, though it be the blood of a monster rightfully poured out upon the ground. Light was the cost of my purification, for thou art a kind master and an honourable man. But now my hands are clean, I go back to my seat on fair Olympus, where high above the clouds the deathless gods dwell evermore in the clear, bright light of heaven. Yet do I love thee, and will not forget thee. When the shadow of despair falls dark across thy path, call on me, and I will help thee."

So saying, he bent forward and took Admetus by the hand, and raised him up. Once more that piercing glance burned through to his very soul; then the stranger turned and strode away across the palace court. Like one changed to marble Admetus stood and watched him go. Then with a start he rushed to the gateway, and looked eagerly down the road. But though he shaded and strained his eyes, he could see that familiar form no more. Only far away on the dim horizon the veil of clouds which hung about Olympus

melted away beneath the sun's bright rays, and the snow-clad peak flashed clear and sparkling as a crystal against the summer sky.

"Lo, even dread Olympus smiles a welcome to the god of Light and Truth!" said Admetus.

Then with a sign he turned back into the palace.

VII

FOR ten long years Admetus and Alcestis ruled in Pheraeæ, and the gods gave them joy and happiness and two children to bless their wedded love. And when Admetus looked back to the days of the past, he was well pleased with the story of his life. Had he not held an oar in the good ship *Argo,* whose fame had reached to the uttermost parts of the earth? By the strength of his arm he had won to wife the fairest maid in Thessaly, and brought her home behind a pair such as no man before or since had dared to yoke together. Moreover, through the length and breadth of Hellas his house was famous as the home of hospitality and good cheer. Not men alone, but great Apollo, the bright-haired god of Light, had been his guest—nay, his very servant. Was he not king, too, of a rich and fruitful land, in which year by year the earth brought forth plenteous harvests, because the greatness of his name held back the tide of war, and peace with unfettered feet walked joyously through field and city? When he remembered all these things, his heart waxed big with vanity and pride, and he began to forget the gods and to look down upon his fellow-men, and think that he alone of all mankind had done great deeds, and that without him the world would be but a sorry place. This pride it was that made him do a mean thing that marred all the glory of his life.

One day Death came and stood beside him, and put his seal upon his brow, and Admetus knew that he must die. When he felt that now he stood upon the threshold of Hades, the dim dark world of the dead, where high and low, rich and poor, strong and weak, wander for ever as voiceless shades through the sunless groves, where

kingship and slavery are one, his heart was turned to water, and his spirit called aloud in his anguish,

"Apollo, O Apollo! Hear me in my sore distress, and deliver me from death."

Far away on the sunlit peak of Olympus Apollo heard his cry, and swift as the lightning crosses the sky he came and stood beside him.

"What wouldst thou with me, Admetus?" he asked "I have come in answer to thy prayer."

Then Admetus raised his head, and pointed to his brow, and Apollo gazed sadly at him. "I see the seal upon thy brow, my friend—the seal that none may break."

"Ah, say not that, my lord! Am I not even now in the prime of my manhood, when others look forward to many a long year of joyous life? Why should I die before my time? My mother and my aged father still live, and rejoice in the sunlight, yet no kingdom standeth by the might of their right arm. The meanest slave within my palace is more fortunate than I. Why, out of them all, hath Death laid his hand on me?"

"He is but the servant of the Fates, Admetus, whose ways neither gods nor men can understand."

"The Fates? Are they lower than the beasts, then, and will not listen to the voice of reason?"

"The voice of man's reason is to them as the baying of jackals in the wilderness, Ademtus."

"O god of Light, is there nothing that will touch their hearts? Canst thou by they music turn the souls of man and beast, and soothe the fury of the whirlwind and the crying of the rain, and yet over them alone hast thou no power? Ah! By the love thou once didst bear me, go, strike thy lyre before them, and sing thy song of magic. Surely

they will not withstand thee, but will put my life into thy hands in return for the beauty of thy song."

"Because I love thee I will go, Admetus. Yet, if I go, it is because they call me; and if I prevail, or if I fail, it is because they have willed it long ago. Farewell."

So Apollo sped away on the wings of the wind, far, far away beyond earth's widest bounds, beyond the region of unmelting snow and the land of the midnight sun, beyond the ever-rolling stream of ocean and the deserts of the air, till he came to the unchanging land where the three Great Sisters dwell together, without beginning and without end. In that land there is neither north nor south, east nor west. There is neither sun nor moon, night nor day, time nor change. On three great thrones of mist the mighty Sisters sit, and their forms are neither foul nor fair. On their brows are crown of sovereignty, and in their hands the destinies of man, which they sit spinning, for ever spinning, into the mighty web of Life. The first is Lachesis the Chooser. From the tangled mass beside her she picks out threads of varied hue and hands them to Clotho the Spinner, who weaves them into the web upon her knees. On the other side sits Atropos the Unswerving One. In her hands she holds a pair of shears, and as the ends of the threads hand loose on the wrong side of the web, she cuts them off and casts them at her feet.

So Apollo came and stood before them with his lyre in his hand. Softly he touched the golden strings, then raised his voice and sang. At the sound of that magic song Lachesis forgot to hand the threads to her sister, the web dropped low on Clotho's knee, and the hand of Atropos fell lifeless by her side, and till the ending of the song Time itself stood still. While the magic of his singing held them spellbound Apollo urged his plea.

"Almighty Sisters, from the ends of the world have I come, from the haunts of mortal man, to ask a boon for one I love."

"Say on, Apollo. Thou last turned or hearts to water by the magic of thy song. What wilt thou?"

"In the fertile land of Pheraeæ, Admetus lies a-dying. He is young, and the love of life runs hot within his veins. He is a great king, too, and rules his subjects well and wisely, and loud will be the wail of the people if he must die before his time. If my song has pleased you, mighty ones, O grant that he may live to a green old age."

"All mortals would live to a green old age, Apollo, and thou lovest many among the sons of men. There would be no end to our bounty if for every song we must grant thee a life. Nay, ask some other boon, for thy song has reached our hearts!"

But Apollo turned sadly away. "There is nothing else I would ask of you, great Sisters. For this, and for this alone, have I come."

"On one condition only can we grant thee thy boon, Apollo. Thou sayest that Ademtus is a great king, and well loved by all his folk. If among them all he can find one soul that will go to Hades in his place, we will let him live on to a green old age. Surely we ask not much. Some slave who loveth not his life, or some old man whose grey hairs are a burden, will gladly die that one so wise and great may live on for his people's joy."

"So be it, mighty ones. Yet methinks 'tis an empty boon thou hast given me, for men cling to life and the sunny days on earth, and Admetus may seek far ere he find one who will cast it aside for the darkness and gloom of the sad underworld. And, in any case, he is not one to live on at the price of another's life."

"We can grant no more," they said.

So Apollo went back by the way he had gone; and he came and stood beside Ademtus, and told him the word of the Fates. When Admetus heard it he was glad.

"O God of Light, thou wast ever my friend, and now I shall owe my very life to thee. How can I thank thee?"

But Apollo looked through to his inmost soul. “Dost thou accept the condition, then?” he asked

“What else can I do, master?” he replied.

“Thou canst die.”

“I know it,” cried Admetus; “but why must I die before my time? With the Argonauts I sailed the unknown seas; in the lists I have fought and prevailed against the flower of Hellas; and for twelve months a god deigned to dwell beneath my palace roof. Surely my life is worth more than most men’s, and I do well to keep it while I may.”

“So be it,” said Apollo, but his face was stern and terrible, and Admetus trembled at his frown. “Go now and find one who will die for thee.” And he turned and left him.

VIII

WHEN Admetus was left alone his heart was in a tumult. He felt the wrath of Apollo like the lash of a whip, and he knew that his anger was just. When he looked back on his life, he was ashamed at the change which long years of prosperity and peace had wrought in him; that much manliness at least was left him. When he thought of the great deeds he had done in his youth, and how, when he had but sipped of its joys, he had been ready a hundred times to cast life lightly aside, he felt like a thief slinking guiltily home by night, laden with the spoils that will make himself rich and leave his friend poor and starving. If he took another’s life as the price of his own, he felt he would never be able again to look a man straight in the face. And yet he could live his life but once; and life, with prosperity and ease, sunshine and riches, had become more dear to him than honour, more dear than the love and esteem of his fellow-men. His very deeds of valour had become a snare to entice him to the path of meanness and dishonour, to make him hold another’s life as a cheap price to pay for one so great as he. So he quenched the last spark of manliness that still struggled for life in his heart, and sent a

proclamation through the land, bidding all those who would die that their king might live, to come and stand before him in the palace, that he might choose between them; for he thought that many would be glad to die for him. For many along day he waited, and no man came. Then he sent forth trusty messengers to stir the people's hearts; but they returned with words instead of men.

"We will ride in the chase, we will sail the stormy seas, we will fight against our country's foes, and in all these things will we risk our lives to save the king. But we will not leave our wives and little ones and the pleasant life on earth, for no cause save that another may live beyond his fated time."

Such were the words of the people.

Then Ademtus sent for all his household—the slaves that had been born and bred within the palace. And they said that they would toil for him all their days, but die for him they would not; for even the life of a slave was better than the endless years of gloom in the kingdom of the dead.

Then the heart of Admetus grew bitter within him, and he hated the thought of death more than ever b efore when he found that even the meanest life was dear to the hearts of men. In his despair he turned to his aged parents, for he thought within himself,

"Surely one of them will be ready to die for their own son. At best they have not many years of life, and if I die before them they will have no son to bury them and perform the funeral rites and prayers, as only a son can do for his parents."

So he went to Pheres his father, and begged that he would die in his place. But his father answered,

"Dost thou think that because thou loves the sunlight thy father loves it not?"

"Nay, but in any case Death must lay his hand upon thee soon, whilst I am in the prime of life."

"Because the years that are left me are few, they are none the less sweet. Nevermore in the land of Hades shall I warm my old bones in the sun and I look forth upon the fruitful earth. So the years that are left are doubly dear."

"Then, when thou comest to die, men will point the finger of scorn at thy grave. 'Behold the coward, who, though his hair was grey and his limbs were feeble, yet refused to die for his own son!' Thy name will be a byword throughout all Hellas."

"When I am dead it matters little what men shall say of me," said Pheres.

"May the gods forgive thee for what thou hast said!" cried Admetus, and turned away in wrath. For it was a dreadful thing for a Greek to say he cared not what men would think of him when he was dead.

Then Admetus went to his mother. But she, no less than his father, clung to life, and refused to die in his stead.

Last of all he turned to his wife, Alcestis. From the beginning she had been ready to die for him, for she loved him, and placed his life above her own. But he had said there was no need that she should die and take away half the joy of his life, when another would do as well.

"It needs a great love to sacrifice life for the sake of another," she had answered, "and there is no one in all the world who loves thee as I do."

Now he found that her words were true, and that he must either die himself or take her life as the price of his own; and his self-love had the mastery, though he tried to persuade his heart that he was living beyond his appointed time for his country's sake and his people's good. Yet at bottom he was not satisfied, and his heart grew bitter

against all those who had refused to die for him, and he accused them of being the murderers of his wife. But he knew full well that it was his own hand that was sending her to the grave in the lower of her life.

At last the day of doom arrived on which Alcestis was to die. Till then she had put aside all thought of death, and had lived her life as though no shadow hung over her; for she thought within herself,

"At least I will be happy my last days on earth. I shall have long enough to mourn for my life in the kingdom of the dead."

But now the last day had come she could put away the thought of death no longer. Before a gleam of light shone forth on the far horizon she was up to greet the first rays of the sun, for she was a true daughter of Hellas, and she loved the glad sunshine and all that was bright and fair, while death and darkness and the gloom of the sad underworld filled her soul with horror. For the last time she looked upon the faint gleam in the east and watched it spread over the sky, and saw the red disc of the sun as he rose from the way of the sea and made the pale dawn blush. The clouds were tinged with glory, and the heavens were filled with light, and the earth awoke with a smile of flowers dancing in the glad morning breeze. Then she washed in the fresh fountain water, put on her gayest robes, and went and stood before the altar on the hearth, to pray her last prayer on earth.

"O lady Goddess! I am going far away across the dark river of Death, and for the last time do I make my prayer to thee. Ah, when I am gone, have mercy on my children. Hard are the ways of the world, and they are young to be left without a mother's love. Put forth the right hand of thy pity, lady, and bring them to a glad old age. Let them not perish, as I must, in the bloom of their life, but give to my son a loving wife, and a noble husband to my daughter; and may they be happy all their days!"

Then she went through the palace and bade farewell to all the servants. To each one she gave her hand, even in the meanest slave

of them all, and spoke kindly to them. And they bathed her hand with their tears, for they loved their mistress, and knew that when she died they would lose a good friend. As she went the children clung weeping about her skirts, for they, too, knew that she must die.

Last of all she went alone to her chamber, for she could endure no more; and she threw herself upon her couch, and wept as though her heart would break. She kissed the pillows and smoothed them tenderly with her hands.

"Alas, alas! For the happy days on earth," she cried, "and happiest of all the years that I have lived here as the wife of Admetus! Farewell, my cound—farewell for ever!"

She tried to rear herself away, but again and again when she had reached the door she turned back and fell once more weeping upon her couch. At last she felt the weakness of death creeping over her, and she knew if she did not leave her chamber then, she would leave it nevermore alive. All her tears were spent, and she had no strength left to weep any more. Outside in the great hall Admetus sat with his head upon his hands, weeping for his wife, and cursing the bitterness of his fate. And she went and stood beside him.

"Take me out into the sunlight, Admetus," she said; "the darkness within oppresses me. I can breathe more freely in the air."

When he looked at her he was afraid, for she was as pale as death. Gently he raised her in his arms, and placed her on a couch in the portico before the palace. And when she saw the blue sky and the sunshine she smiled.

"O sun and light of day," she said, "and ye dancing eddying clouds, farewell!"

"O ye gods, have mercy!" cried Admetus. "My dearest, look up, and leave me not all desolate."

But with a cry of fear she started up, and pointed in front.

"Look, look! The boat of the dead, and the ferryman of souls with his hand upon the pole—Charon! He calls, 'Alcestis, why dost thou tarry? Hasten and come with me.' "

"Ah, Fate, Fate—cruel Fate!" cried Ademtus.

"He is snatching me away—oh, save me! —down, down to the dark halls of death. Away, let me go! He frowns with his dark gleaming brows. Ah, the dread journey before me!"

"Leave me not, leave me not!" cried Admetus.

"Lay me down again," said Alcestis, and her voice was scarce more than a whisper. "The strength is gone out of my limbs, and darkness creeps over my eyes. My children, where are you? Come here, my little ones, and nestle close beside me."

And the children crept silently to her.

Then she held out her hand to Admetus.

"My lord," she said, "farewell. Already my feet are planted in the paths of death, and thou canst not hold me back. I have been a loving wife to thee, Admetus; my beauty, my youth, my joy of life—all these I give to thee. Ah, when I am dead, forget me not, for the children's sake, for these poor little ones—promise me. Promise me thou wilt not wed again, for a stepmother's heart would be hard against my children, and they would suffer. Promise me that thou wilt be a father and mother to them in one."

"I promise," said Admetus.

"Then into thy hands I give them. Poor little ones, what will you do without me? My son, for thee thy father will ever be s strong tower of defence, and will bring thee up to be a true man. But for thee, little maiden, my heart bleeds. Thou wilt have no mother to dress thee on

thy wedding-day, or to comfort thee in thy sorrows, when there is no love like a mother's. be doubly tender with her, Admetus."

AND THE CHILDREN CREPT SILENTLY TO HER.

"I will, I will. All that thou sayest I will do, and more also. Not for one year only, but all my life long, will I mourn for thee. Forget me not, I pray thee. Prepare a place for me below, that I may be with thee when I come to die."

"Nay, I will not forget thee. Lay me back now. I can say no more."

Gently he laid her back, and knelt down by her side, and all they that stood around bowed their heads in silence, for they knew that Death was standing in their midst.

At last Admetus looked up.

"My friends," he said, "she is gone. Help me now to carry her in, that the maidens may clothe her in the robes of death."

Gently and reverently, with heads bowed in grief, they carried her in. the maidens clad her in long white robes, and laid her on the bier, and the mourners stood round and sang a dirge for the dead. On the threshold before the palace Admetus placed the locks he had shorn from his head in token that within one lay dead, and he put on long black robes of mourning, and took off the golden circlet from his brow. Throughout the city he sent a proclamation to say the queen was dead.

"Men of Thessaly," it said, "all ye who own my sway, come, share with me in sorrow for my wife who is dead. Shave the bright locks from your heads, and don your sable robes. Harness your four-horsed chariots; put the bit in the mouths of your steeds. Cut off the long manes from their necks, and follow with me to her grave. Let not the voice of the flute be heard in your streets, nor the sound of the lyre, till full twelve moons have waxed and waned; for she was the noblest of women, and dearest of all on earth to me. Her life she sacrificed for mine. Pay her high honours, then, for she is most worthy."

IX

WHILST the preparations for the funeral were being made, anyone who chanced to look along the highroad would have seen a stranger making his way towards the palace. He was a strong man and tall—three cubits and more in height. The muscles of his arms and chest stood out like thongs of cord. In his hand he carried a huge knotted club, and over his shoulders hung a lion's skin. If the wind or the sun were too strong, he would draw the jaws of the beast over his head like a hood, and the great teeth shone out white and terrible over his brows and under his chin. He walked along with great swinging strides, balancing the club upon his shoulder as though it were some light twig, and now heavy as a sapling oak. As he went through the villages the people stood aside from his path in wonder, and even the strongest champion of them all would whisper, "May the gods deliver me from ever having to stand up against him in single combat. In his little finger is the strength of my right arm."

But he walked on, little heeding what folk thought of him, singing now and again snatches of some drinking-song, and passing the time of day, or cracking some joke with those he met upon the way; for, in truth, he had a merry heart, and wished well to all mankind. Those who were frightened when first they saw his club and lion's skin forgot their fears as soon as they could see his face, for his eyes were blue and laughing as the summer sky, and his smile was bright as the sun in spring. And yet there were lines and scars about his features which proved that he was no idler, but one who had looked labour and danger in the face.

So he came to Pheraeæ and went up the steep path to the palace. It changed that Admetus was standing in the portico on his way in. when the stranger saw him he shouted out,

"Hail to thee, Admetus! Turn back and greet an old friend."

When Admetus heard him, he turned and came towards him.

"Welcome, Heracles," he said, and held out his hand in greet him.

But when Heracles saw his black robes and shorn locks he was troubled.

"I have some at an evil hour, Admetus," he said; "thou art mourning for one who is dear to thee."

"Ay," he answered; "It is true."

"One of thy children, can it be, or thy father?"

"Nay, there is nought amiss with them. It is a woman I am carrying out to burial this day."

"Is she a stranger, or one of the family?"

"She is not one of the family. Yet she is very dear to us, for on her father's death she came and lived with us. She was a fair and noble woman, and all the house is plunged in grief at her death."

"Then I will leave thee and go elsewhere. A house of mourning is no place for guests."

"Nay," cried Admetus; "I beg of thee, do not go. Never yet have my halls turned away a traveler from the gates. The dead are dead. What more could we do for them? 'Twould do them small good to lack in friendship for the living. Come in, come in, I pray thee."

In spite of all his entreaties, he forced him to come in, and bade his steward take him to a guest-room apart, where he might eat and drink, and hear nothing of the sounds of mourning when the body was carried out to the tomb; and he did all in his power to hide from his guest that it was Alcestis who was dead; for he was ashamed for Heracles to know that he had allowed his wife to die for him.

Meanwhile all had been prepared for the funeral, and a train of citizens stood waiting in the court to follow behind the bier. Their long black robes fell trailing in the dust; their heads were shorn in grief, and with slow steps they followed behind the bier, whilst the mourners sang a dirge for the dead.

"O daughter of Pelias, farewell, farewell for evermore! Mayest thou have peace in the world below and such joy as may be in those sunless places! O thou black-haired god of Death, never has one more noble come down to dwell in thy halls; never, O Charon, thou grim ferryman of souls—never hast thou carried a burden more precious across the dark and dreadful stream! Oft shall thy praises be sung, lady, by minstrels of music in every land. On the seven-stringed mountain-lute shall they sing thee, and in hymns, without lyre or lute, in Sparta, when the circling seasons bring round the summer feast-time, and all night long the moon rides high in heaven. In bright and shining Athens shall they praise thee, too; for thou alone, O brightest and best, hast dared to die for thy lord, and give up thy young life for him. O dark Necessity, who shroudest all men about with death, how heavy is thy hand upon this house! From thee none can flee, and Zeus himself bows down before thee. Thou alone, O goddess, hast no temple, no images to which men turn in prayer, neither hearest thou the voice of victims slain. Alcestis is gone—gone for ever. Our eyes shall see her no more. Light may the earth lie above thee, lady. Dear wast thou when thou wast among us; dear shalt thou be, too, in death. No mere mound of the dead shall thy tomb be, but honoured of every passer-by, as some shrine of the Immortals. The stranger toiling up the winding way shall bow his head before it and say, 'Here lieth one who died for her lord; now she is a blessed spirit. O lady, have mercy upon me!' So great shall be thy glory among men for ever. Fare thee well, fare thee well, most beautiful."

So they laid her in the polished tomb, and placed rich gifts about her, and sacrifices of blood to the grim god of Death. When all the rites were accomplished, they went away sorrowful.

X

MEANWHILE Heracles had been led to a guest-chamber apart, and the servants ministered to all his wants, and brought him water to wash with, and change of raiment. As they waited on him, he talked gaily to them of his adventures on the way, and made them laugh in spite of their grief for their mistress. Only the old serving-man stood aloof, and looked darkly at the stranger who dared to make merry in a house of mourning.

When he had washed and dressed, he sat down to meal. They placed an ample meal before him, and brought him wine to drink. But in his eyes their bounty was dearth, and he kept calling for more till they could scarce contain their astonishment at his appetite. At length, when he had eaten his fill, he crowned his head with vine-leaves, and fell to drinking long and deep. The wine warmed his heart, and sent a cheerful glow through all his veins. So happy was he that he could not sit in silence, but raised his voice and sang, and his singing was like the roaring of a bull.

"Great Zeus, preserve us!" sighed the old waiting-man; "never have I heard anything more discordant and unseemly."

But the guest grew merrier and merrier, and the face of the serving-man, as he watched, grew longer and longer. At length Heracles himself noticed his disapproving countenance.

"Ho, there!" cried he; "why so dark and gloomy, my friend? I had as soon be welcomed by an iceberg as by thee, old sour-face."

The serving-man answered him never a word, but only scowled the more.

"What!" cried Heracles, "is this the sort of welcome thou art wont to give thy master's guests? Come hither, and I will teach thee better ways."

And he took hold of the old man and set him down beside him at the table.

"Alak! What a countenance! And all for a strange girl who has chanced to die. How wilt thou look when one of thy masters is laid in the grave? I like not this mask of hypocrisy, my friend. Thou carest not for her who is dead, but pullest a long face, and strikest a chill to the hearts of all beholders, because, forsooth, it is seemly to mourn for the dead. Why, we must all pay our tribute to death, every man of us, and no one knoweth whether he shall ever see the next day's light; then count the present as thine own, and eat and drink with me and make merry. A frowning face profits not the dead—nay, it serves but to blacken the sunshine of this life that we can live but once. Up, man, drink and wash away thy frowns! Believe me, life is no life at all—only labour and misfortune to those who walk through it with pompous steps and sour faces."

And he poured out a brimming goblet.

"All this I know full well, master," answered the old man, "but the shadow that has fallen on this house is too heavy for me to join in thy revelry."

"Thou makest too much of death. Thou canst not grieve for a stranger as thou wouldst for one of the household. Thy master and mistress live. Let that suffice thee."

"What! My master and mistress live? Alas! My master is too kind a host."

"Must I starve, then, because a strange girl is dead?"

"It is no stranger, I tell thee, but one most near and dear."

"Have I been deceived? Has he hidden some misfortune from me?"

"Ask no more, but go in peace. My master's sorrows are for me to bear, not for thee. And he bade me not speak of it."

"Speak, speak, man! I see he has hidden some great sorrow from me. Who is the woman who is dead?"

"Ask me not. My master told me not to say."

"And I forbid thee not to say. Tell me forthwith!"

So fierce and terrible did he look that the old man trembled before him.

"May my lord forgive me!" said he. "It is Alcestis, his wife."

"Alcestis!" cried Heracles. "And he would not share his sorrow with me, his friend, but let me come in and feast and sing while he went out to bury her. Woe is me! I thought he loved me."

"It was to spare thee pain that he did not tell thee, master."

"How came she to die?" asked Heracles, and took off the vine-leaves from his head, and poured out the wine upon the floor.

Then the old man told him the whole tale.

"Where have they buried her?" he asked, when it was ended.

"Out yonder, where the white highway leads to Larissa, in the plain. There, on the outskirts of the city, thou wilt find the tomb of the kings of Pheraeæ, where they are laying her."

"Is there no shorter way I can go and reach her quickly?"

"There is a footpath by the fields that I will show thee."

"Come, then, straightway. I must go and lie in wait for the black Lord of Death. He will come up to drink of the blood that is poured out for him beside the tomb. Then I will fall upon him from my ambush and wrestle with him and prevail, and he shall give me back Alcestis. Even if I must go down to Hades and fetch her, she shall

come back. She is too fair and too noble to pass her young life in the dark underworld."

The old man marveled at his words; but he went out with him, and showed him the footpath across the fields, and stood watching him till he passed out of sight.

"Verily, we talk and weep," he muttered to himself, "and he laughs and acts. He is worth ten of us."

XI Meanwhile the funeral procession was coming back along the highway. As they came into the city each man departed to his own house; only Admetus with his near friends and kinsmen returned to the palace to celebrate the funeral feast. Whilst they were waiting for the feast to be prepared, Admetus stayed outside alone in the court. He sat down on one of the stone seats beneath the colonnade, and buried his face in his hands. He could not bring himself to go into the house, where every thing would remind him of the wife he had lost—the chair in which she used to sit, empty now; the fire on the altar burning low, and the ashes scattered about, because she was there no more to feed the dying flames. The full force of the sacrifice came home to him now, and he shuddered as he thought of the deed he had done.

"I have slain her—I have slain her whom I loved, to save myself from death, because I loved my life, and hated to go to the dark world below. Woe is me!" he cried. "The sun is turned to darkness and the earth to Hades since she went away. I grasped at the substance, and all the while I followed after a shade. Fool that I was to upbraid them who refused to die for me and cast her death in their teeth! She is dead, dead—slain by my hand alone. Nevermore can I look my people in the face, nor glory in the deeds I have done. The shame of my cowardice will blot them all out, and I shall slink like a cur among my fellows. Would that I had died with her!"

Thus he sat making fruitless moan. His friends came out and tried to comfort him and bring him into the house, but he sent them away, and would not go in. All the evening he sat there alone till darkness

began to fall. At length he felt a heavy hand laid upon his shoulder, and, looking up, he saw Heracles standing beside him.

"Why couldst thou not trust me, Admetus?" he asked. "All thy household, all the city, knew that thy wife Alcestis was dead. Me only, thy familiar friend, didst thou keep in ignorance. I had thought to stand beside thee in thy sorrow, and thou didst not even tell me of it."

"I was ashamed," answered Admetus.

"Well, well, what is done cannot be undone. There is but one way now that thou canst prove thou art still my friend. After I had eaten, I walked out across the fields, and came upon a place where the people were holding games and giving rich prizes to the winners—horses and oxen, and a fair woman to the best man of all. When I saw the woman I determined to win her. So I entered for the contest and beat all my rivals. The woman I have brought back with me now, and beg of thee to keep her till I come back from the wild Thracian folk, for I cannot take her with me there. If by any chance I should never come back, but meet my fate away, I give her to thee to keep for thyself. I have brought her with me now to give into thy care."

As he spoke, he led forward by the hand a woman who had been standing near him. She was closely veiled, so that Admetus, when he glanced up at her, could not see her face, but only the outline of her form.

"Oh, take her away, take her away!" he cried. "In height and figure she is like my wife, and I cannot bear to look upon her. I would do much for thee, my friend, but ask not this of me. No woman shall ever live in my house again. Take her to some other of thy friends."

In spite of all Heracles could say, he refused to take her.

"I see that thou wouldst no more be my friend, Admetus," he said at last. "First thou wilt not tell me of thy sorrow, and now thou wilt not

do this little thing for me. I will go and trouble thee no more with my friendship."

At this Admetus was cut to the quick.

"Ah, say not that. Thou knowest that I love thee, but this is a hard thing thou askest. Whenever I look at her I shall be reminded of my wife. And the tongue of slander will not be silent. Men will say that I take comfort, and have forgotten the woman who gave her life for mine. Nevertheless, if thou wilt have it so, I yield. Take the woman in, or let one of the servants show her the way."

"Nay," said Heracles; "to thee alone will I trust her. She is fair and noble, and I would not have her treated as a common woman."

And he forced Admetus to take her by the hand.

"Now I know that thou wilt treat her honourably, thou mayst look upon her face," he said, and lifted up the veil which shrouded her.

When Admetus saw her face, he fell back terrified, for, pale and beautiful, scarce looking as though she breathed, Alcestis stood before him.

"Ye gods!" he gasped; "the spirit of my wife!"

"Nay," said Heracles, "but her very self."

"Thou mockest; it cannot be."

"It is no mockery, as who should know better than I who won her?" said Heracles. "By Zeus, I have wrestled many a tough match, but never a one so tough as this, the gods be praised! I have met Death face to face, and I hope I may never have to stand up against him more."

"Ah, my friend, how can I thank thee? I have not deserved so much joy," cried Admetus, and fell on his knees before them.

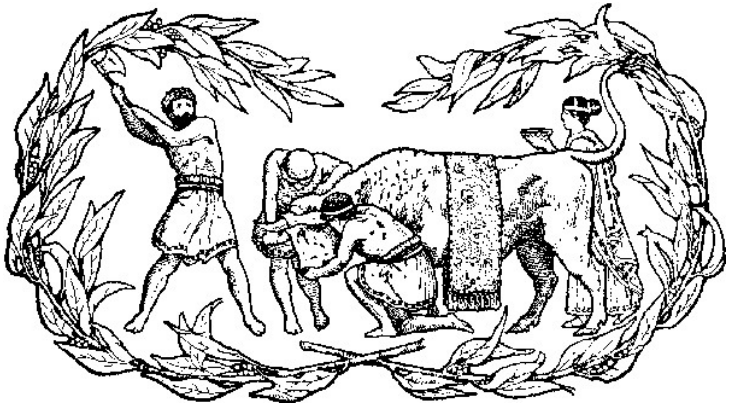
"I thought not of thy deserts, but of hers," said Heracles. "Come, take her in."

SHE ANSWERED HIM NEVER A WORD, BUT HELD OUT BOTH HER HANDS AND RAISED HIM FROM HIS KNEES.

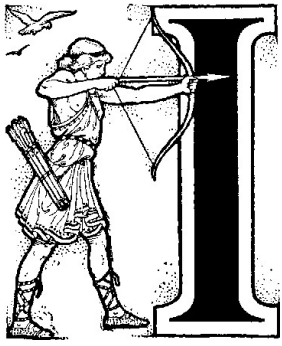
"I dare not touch her. Ah, lady, canst thou love one who sent thee to thy death?" he asked, with head bowed down before her.

She answered him never a word, but held out both her hands and raised him from his knees; and he looked deep into her eyes, and found them full of love. Tenderly and humbly he put his arm about her and led her away, and felt that, if anything on earth could ever raise him from the depths of selfishness and meanness to which he had fallen, it would be the boundless, measureless love of the woman before him.

"Now to change the funeral feast to a banquet of rejoicing," cried Heracles. "Truly, I could eat an ox after this last bout of mine."



THE HUNTING OF THE CALYDONIAN BOAR



N the city of Calydon long ago there were great rejoicings because the queen Althaeæa had given birth to a son, her first-born, who, it he grew to years of manhood, would in time sit upon the throne of his father Œneus, and rule the land. Some seven days after the child was born it chanced that the queen was lying alone in her chamber, with the babe upon her breast. It was winter-time, and the shades of evening had fallen early about the room, but a bright fire blazed upon the hearth, and the flickering flames threw dancing shadows on the walls. The queen was very happy as she pressed her bay to her breast, and held its soft little hand in hers, and whispered in its ear words which only a mother knows how to sue to her child.

As she lay she watched the shadows playing up and down upon the walls, and to her eyes they took strange forms of men and beasts. Now it was a great fight she saw, with horses and chariots rushing over a plain, and mighty warriors meeting face to face in battle; now it was a hunt, with winding of horns and dogs straining at the beast, and a white-tusked boar breaking through a thicket. But whether it was a hunt or whether it was a battle, everywhere there was one figure of a man she watched—a man tall and fair and brave, who stood out conspicuous among his fellows—shch a hero as her son might grow to be if he lived till years of manhood. And she prayed that her vision might come true, and her son grow up to be a hero—a man mighty in sport and mighty in battle. In time the flames died down, and the fire burned clear and still upon the hearth. The queen's eyes grew heavy, and she was about to turn on her side to sleep when a strange thing happened, which took from her all desire for rest. The wall of the room in front of her, which had glowed bright and cheery in the firelight, grew grey and misty and seemed to vanish before her eyes. And through the opening there came towards her the forms of three strange women, taller and more

terrible than any women of earth. The first one carried in her hand a skein of thread, the second a spindle, and the third a pair of great sharp shears. The queen lay still and motionless with terror as they came forward slowly arm in arm and stood beside the couch, looking down upon the child at her breast. At length the first one spoke.

"I give to thy child, Althaea, a thread of life exceeding bright and fair."

"And I," said the second, "will weave that thread into dark places, where it will shine the brighter for the darkness round about, and bring him honour and great renown."

The third one said never a word, but walked slowly round the couch till she stood before the fire on the hearth. A great brand had fallen from the grate, and lay smouldering on the stones. Bending down, she took it in her hand, and thrust it deep into the red-hot heart of the fire, and stood watching it till it was well alight, and the tongues of flame shot crackling upwards. Then she turned towards the queen.

"As soon as that brand upon the fire is consumed," she said, "I will cut the shining thread with my shears, and his life shall be as ashes cast forth upon the wind."

As she spoke, she held out the shears, and they gleamed sharp and cruel in the firelight.

With a cry of terror the queen sprang up from her couch, forgetful of her weakness, and thinking only of the life of her child; and she rushed across the room, and, drawing forth the blazing brand from the fire, she smothered it in her gown, and crushed it beneath her bare feet, till not a live spark remained about it. Then she hid it in a secret place where she alone could find it, and cast herself upon her couch and knew no more. When the attendants came in, they found the room empty, save for the queen and her child; and she lay

senseless on the couch, with her feet and her gown all scarred and burnt.

For many a long day she lay between life and death, but at last the gods had mercy, and her strength came slowly back to her. But when anyone asked her the cause of her burning, she would shudder and mutter some strange tale of a brand which fell from the fire, and would have burnt out the life of her child. What she meant no one ever knew, but they thought that the gods had stricken her with a sudden fever, and that, not knowing what she did, she had burnt herself in the fire. But of the half-burnt brand and of the word of the Fates they knew nothing, for Althaeæa had said in her heart,

"The Fates have spoken, and their word shall surely come to pass. A fine and fair thread of life has Lachesis given to my son, and Clotho will weave it into dark places, where it shall shine exceeding bright. The gifts they have given are good. The hand of Atropos alone is against him, and she has measured his life by the life of a frail piece of wood. But so long as the gods shall give me strength no careless hand shall place that brand upon the flames, and no man shall know the secret of his life, for grief or madness may turn even the heart of a friend. On me, and on me alone, shall my son's life rest; for well do I know that neither prayer nor sacrifice can avail to turn the heart of Atropos, the Unswerving One."

So she kept the brand securely hidden where she along could find it. Many other fair children did she bear to Œneus the king—Phereus and Agelaus and Periphas, and Gorge and Melanippe, and the hapless Dejaneira, who married Heracles, and unwittingly caused his death. But best of them all she loved Meleager, her first-born; for the word that the Fates had spoken came true. He grew to be a great warrior and a mighty man, and was feared by his foes and loved by his friends through the length and breadth of the land; for there were great wars in those days between the Curetes of Pleuron and the Ætolians of Calydon, and on either side fought men whose names were not despised among their fellows, but among them all there was none so famed as Meleager. In all the country-side there was no man who could hurl the javelin with such force and skill as he, and

whenever he went forth to battle the victory lay with the men of Calydon, and he was called the saviour and protector of his city.

When he was in the flower of his manhood, the call of Jason came from far Iolchos for all the heroes of Hellas to join him in his search for the Golden Fleece. Amongst them sailed Meleager in the good ship *Argo,* and came to the land of the dusky Colchians on the shores of the Euxine Sea. One tale goes that he slew Æetes their king, the child of the Sun, and saved his comrades from deadly peril. But whether this be true or no, certain it is that he played his part like a man, and came back to Calydon with a fair name for courage and endurance. Then was he hoisted on the shoulders of his countrymen and carried through the streets of the city, and feasted right royally in his father's house.

Soon after his return it chanced that the harvest was more plentiful than it had ever been within the memory of man. The golden corn stood high upon the plains, and on the sunny mountain-sides the olive-trees were thick with berries, and the vine-branches drooped low with their weight of purple fruit. Wherefore Œneus the king ordered a great thanksgiving to be held throughout the land in honour of Dionysus and Demeter and grey-eyes Pallas Athene, who had given such good gifts to men. At every shrine and temple the altars smoked with sacrifice, and glad bands of youths and maidens with garlands on their heads danced hand in hand around, singing the song of the harvest.

"All hail to thee, Demeter, great Earth-Mother! From Evenus to the silver eddying waters of wide Acheloös thou hast covered the bosom of the plain with golden ears of corn, and they dance beneath the west wind like the waves on summer seas. All hail to thee, Dionysus, who bringest joy to the heart of man! About thine altars the juice of the vine shall flow like water, and the souls of those who were bowed down beneath labour and toil shall be uplifted to thee in the glad harvest-time. And Pallas Athene, grey-eyed maiden, thee too we hail, for thy gift of the fragrant olive. The shade of thy trees lies cool upon the panting hill-sides, and thou hast looked with kindness on your land. Oh, come hither, all ye townsfolk and ye

dwellers on the plains and hills come hither in your hundreds, and dance about the altars, and sing thanksgiving to the great gods on high."

Thus did they dance and sing, and there was gladness and rejoicing through all the land, and not one soul among them all knew how soon their laughter would be burned to tears. For when Artemis, the huntress, saw that everywhere the altars smoked in honour of Demeter, and Dionysus, and Pallas Athene, but that never a single stone was raised to her, she was filled with jealousy and wrath. One night, when all the land lay sleeping, she left the mountains, where she loved to hunt, and came down to Calydon. The arrows in her quiver rattled as she strode along in her wrath, and the flash of her eyes was as the flash of summer lightning across the sky. With great swinging strides she came and stood over Œneus as he slept.

"O king," she said, "too long have I been patient and waited for my dues; but I will suffer thine ingratitude no more. When the young corn stands green upon the plain, and the vine-leaves are shooting, and the trees cast once more their shade upon the bare hill-side, then shall thou have cause to know my power. Demeter may sow her golden grain, and Dionysus and Pallas Athene may fill their fruits with gladdening juice, but thou hast yet to learn that, if it be my will, though the promise of the harvest be fair, the fruits thereof shall lie spoilt and ungathered where they grew. Broad and dark are the forests which cover wild Arachynthus, and deep the ravines, and many a wild beast lurks therein that is tame at my word alone. One of these will I let loose upon thy land. Many a fair field shall be trodden underfoot, and many a vineyard and olive-grove laid waste—yea, and red blood shall flow, ere my wrath be assuaged, and I take away the pest from your midst. I have spoken, and no sacrifice shall turn me from my word."

Thus did she speak, saying the words in his ear, and turned and left the room by the way she had come. With a start he awoke from his sleep and looked around him, but no one could he see. Only a sudden storm of wind lashed the branches of the trees against each other, and a dark cloud hid the face of the moon.

"The sad winter-time is coming," he thought, "with its storms and its darkened days. Yet, lest there be aught in my dream, I will remember Artemis to-morrow, and her altars, too, shall smoke with sacrifice."

So on the morrow a great festival was held in honour of Artemis, the maiden huntress, and Œneus laid aside all thought of his dream. But when the spring-time came and the early summer, he had cause to remember it with sorrow, for out of the forests of Arachynthus, there came a great boar which laid waste all the country, right and left. In size he was more huge than an ox of Epirus, whose oxen are the largest in the world, and the bristles on his neck stood up like spikes. His breath was as a flame of fire that burned up all that stood in his way, and his cruel little eyes gleamed red with blood. Over the cornfields he raged, and trampled the green blades beneath his hoofs, and with his strong white tusks he tore down the vine-branches and broke the overhanging boughs of the olive, so that the young berries and fruit lay spoilt upon the ground. Not only did he lay waste the fields, but the blocks and herds on the pasture-land were not safe from his attack, and neither shepherds nor dogs could protect them from his fury. Through all the country-side the people fled in terror for their lives, and hid within the city walls, only now and again a band of the bravest would go forth and lay nets and snares for him; but so great was the strength of the beast that he broke through every trap they could devise, and, killing any man who stood in his path, he would return, with greater fury than before, to his attack upon the fields and cattle. At length things came to such a pass that, unless the monster could be checked, famine would ere long stare the people in the face. When Meleager saw that neither prayer nor sacrifice would turn the heart of Artemis, nor any ordinary hunting put an end to the boar, he determined to gather around him a band of heroes who, for the sake of glory, would come together for the hunt, and either kill the beast or perish themselves in the attempt. So he sent a proclamation far and wide through all the kingdoms of Hellas.

"O men of Hellas," he said, "the fair plains of Calydon lie trodden underfoot by a grievous monster, and her people are fallen upon evil

days. Come hither and help us, all ye who love adventure, and fear not risk nor peril, ye seasoned warriors whose spirit is not dead within you, and ye young men who have yet your name to win. Come hither to us, and we will give you fair sport and good cheer withal."

In answer to his call there flocked from far and wide to Calydon a great host of brave men, and mighty was the muster which gathered beneath the roof of Œneus for the hunting of the boar. Jason himself came, the leader of the Argonauts, and Castor and Pollux, the great twin brethren, whose stars are in the sky. There was Theseus, too, who slew the Minotaur, and Peirithous his friend, who went down with him to Hades, and tried to carry off Persephone from the king of the Dead. And swift-footed Idas come, and Lynceus, his brother, whose eyes were so sharp that they could see into the centre of the earth. Others were there besides, whose names are too many to tell, and Toxeus and Plexippus, the brothers of Althæa the queen, whom she loved as she loved her own son Meleager. For as a little maid she had played with them in the palace of Thestius, her father, and she remembered how she would watch for them to come home from the hunt and clap her hands with joy, when from afar she saw them returning home with their spoil. And they would findle her and play with her, and so long as they wer with her she was as happy as a bird; but when they went away, her heart ached for them to come back. The memory of those days still shone bright within her heart, and when her brothers came with the other guests for the hunting of the boar, she welcomed them right gladly. In the great hall a sumptuous feast was spread, and loud was the laughter and bright were the faces, as one friend met another he had not seen for many a long day, and sat down by his side in good-fellowship with the groaning board before them. The feast was well under way when one of the attendants whispered in the ear of the king that yet another guest had come for the hunting of the boar.

"Who is he?" asked the king.

"My lord, I know not," the man replied.

"Well, keep him not standing without, at all events," said Œneus, "but show him in here, and we will make him welcome with the rest."

In a few moments the man returned, and held back he curtain of the great doorway for the new-comer to enter. All eyes were turned eagerly that way to see who it might be, and a murmur of surprise ran round the hall; for they saw upon the threshold no stalwart warrior, as they had expected, but a maiden young and beautiful. She was clad in a hunter's tunic, which fell to her knee, and her legs were strapped about with leathern thongs. Cross-wise about her body she wore a girdle, from which hung a quiver full of arrows, and with her right hand she leant on a great ashen bow like a staff. Her shining hair fell back in waves from her forehead, and was gathered up in a coil behind, and she held her head up proudly and gazed round on the company unabashed. The glow of her cheek and the spring of her step told of life in the open and of health-giving sport over hill and dale, so that she might have been Artemis herself come down from her hunting on the mountains. She looked round the hall till her eyes fell on Œneus, the host, in the place of honour, and in no wise troubled by the silence which her coming had caused, she said,

"Sire, for my late-coming I crave thy pardon. Doubtless some of thy guests have come from more distant lands than I, but, as ill-luck would have it, I chose to come by way of the sea instead of by the isthmus, and for a whole day I ate out my heart with waiting by the shrine of Poseidon for a favouring breeze; for the east wind blew like fury across the Crisaeæan Gulf, and any barque that had ventured to try the crossing had been blown to the isles of the Hesperides ere it had reached thy land. So I waited perforce till the wind fell and I could cross over in safety."

Concealing his surprise as best he could, Œneus answered,

"Maiden, we thank thee for thy coming, and make thee right welcome in our halls. Yet we fain would know thy name who, a woman all alone, hast crossed barren tracts of land and stormy seas

unflinching, and come to take part in a hunt which is no mere child's sport, but a perilous venture, in which strong men might hesitate to risk their lives and limbs."

As she listened to his words she smiled.

"O king," she said, "thou hidest thy surprise but ill. Yet am I not offended, nor will I make a mystery of who I am. My name is Atalanta, and I come from the moun- tains of Arcadia, where all day long I hunt with the nymphs over hill and over dale, and through the dark forests, following in the footsteps of her we serve, great Artemis the huntress. At her command I stand before thee now, for she said to me, 'Atalanta, the land of Calydon lies groaning beneath the curse, wherewith I cursed them because they forgot me, and gave me not my dues. But do thou go and help them, and for thy sake I will lay aside my wrath, and let them slay the monster that I sent against them. Yet without thee shall they not accomplish it, but the glory of the hunt shall be thine.' Thus did she speak, and in obedience to her word am I come."

When she had spoken, a murmur ran round the hall, and each man's gorge rose within him as he determined in his mind that no mere woman should surpass him in courage and strength. The sons of Thestius, the queen's brothers, especially looked askance at her, and their hearts were filled with jealousy and wrath; for her eye was bright and steady, and her limbs looked supple and swift, and there seemed no reason why she should not be a match for any man among them, in a trial where swiftness of foot and sureness of eye would avail as much as brute force. When Meleager saw their dark looks he was very angry that they should so far forget their good breeding as to fail in welcoming a guest, and he rose from his seat and went towards her.

"O maiden," he said, "we make thee right welcome to our halls, and we thank thee because thou hast heard our appeal, and art come to help us in the day of our trouble. Come, now, and sit thee down, and make glad thy heart with meat and wine, for thou must need it sorely after thy long journeying."

AS HE SPOKE, HE TOOK HER BY THE HAND AND SET HER IN A PLACE OF HONOUR BETWEEN HIS FATHER AND HIMSELF.

As he spoke, he took her by the hand and set her in a place of honour between his father and himself, and saw that she had her fill of the good fare on the board. As he sat beside her and talked with her, his heart was kindled with love, for she was exceeding fair to look upon;

and the more he thought upon the morrow's hunting, the more loath was he that she should risk her life in it. At length he said,

"Atalanta, surely thou knowest not what manner of beast it is that we are gathered together to destroy. Thou hast hunted the swift-footed stag, perchance, through the green wood, but never a monster so fierce as this boar that Artemis has sent against us. I till thee, it will be no child's play, but a matter of death to some of us. Hast thou no mother or father to mourn thee if any evil chance befall, or any lover who is longing for thy return? Think well ere it be too late."

But she laughed aloud at his words.

"Thou takest me for some drooping damsel that sits at home and spins, and faints if she see but a drop of blood. I tell thee, I know neither father, nor mother, nor husband, nor brother, and I love but little the lot of womenkind such as thou knowest. Never have I lived within four walls, and the first roof that covered me was the forest-trees of Mount Parthenius, which stands where three lands meet, on the borders of Sparta, Argolis, and wooded Arcadia, that I have chosen for my home. Whence I came or how I got to Parthenius no one can tell, and I have no wish to find out. As for savage beasts, had I not the eyes of a hawk and the feet of a doer, I had not been safe ten seconds on the uplands of Arcadia. For there, as doubtless thou hast heard, there dwells a fierce tribe of centaurs-monsters half human and half horse— who have the passions of men and the strength of beasts. These, when they set eyes upon me, were fired by my beauty, and pursued me over hill and dale, and I fled like the wind before them: but ever and anon I found time to turn and let fly from my bow a dart which fell but seldom short of the mark. So dire was the havoc I wrought in their herd that after a time they gave up in despair, and molested me no more. So talk not to me of fierce beasts or of danger. All my life long I have breathed in danger from the air about me, and I had as soon die outright, as sit with thy womenkind in safety within, whilst all of you went forth for the hunting of the boar."

And nothing that Meleager could say would turn her from her purpose.

"Dost think I have left the mountains of Arcadia, and the nymphs, and the joys and dangers of the hunt, to come and sit with the old wives round thy palace fire in Calydon?" she said with a laugh; and her white teeth shone like pearls in the torchlight, and the gleam of her hair and the fire of her eyes kindled yet more surely the flame of love in his heart, so that he could have fallen at her feet and begged her for his sake to keep away from danger. But across the board he saw the eyes of Toxeus and Plexippus, his mother's brothers, fixed upon him, and their brows were dark and lowering as they frowned upon him and Atalanta. So he said no more, lest they should discover his secret and taunt him for his passion; but in his heart he knew that on the morrow his thought would be as much for her safety as for the killing of the boar. As for Atalanta, a stone would have returned his love as readily as she. For a companion in the hunt she liked him full well, but to give up her maiden life for his sake was as far from her thoughts as the east is from the west. As yet she knew not the love of man, and had vowed in her heart that she never would. Howbeit, such things are not altogether within the power of mortals to will or not to will, and Atalanta, like any other woman, was destined one day to bow her proud head to the dust before a man's great love, though the gods had not ordained that Meleager should be the one to win her. But more of that hereafter.

When the morrow dawned, great was the bustle and confusion in the court of the palace, where all were to meet together for the hunting of the boar. Attendants ran this way and that to fetch and carry for their masters, and, as the huntsman blew his horn, the hounds barked impatiently, and strained, whining, at their leashes. At length, when all was ready, Althaeæa with her maidens came forth into the portico, and bade farewell to her guests, her husband, her brothers, and to Meleager, her son.

"God speed thee, my son," she said, as she looked proudly on him, "and good luck to thy hunting."

Then she stood on the step and waved to them with a smile as they turned to look back at her before the curve of the roadway hid them from sight. But though a smile was on her lips, her eyes were full of tears, and her heart within her was dark with a dim foreshadowing of evil. With a heavy step, she turned and went into the house, and as she passed the altar by the hearth she stopped and bowed her head.

"Great Artemis," she prayed, "have mercy and bring my loved ones safely back to me this day."

Then she went to her chamber and drew forth from its hiding place the half-burnt brand on which her son's life depended.

"His life, at any rate, is safe," she thought, "so long as this brand is in my keeping."

And she hid it away again where she knew no one could find it, and set to work restlessly, to while away the hours as best she could, till the hunters should come home.

They, meanwhile, had gone their way up the steep path which led into the mountains and deep into the heart of the forest, where they knew their prey was lurking. Soon they came upon the track of his hoofs leading to the dry bed of a stream, where the rushes and reeds grew high in the marsh-land, and the bending willows cast their shadow over the spot he had chosen for his lair. Here they spread the nets cautiously about, and stationed themselves at every point of vantage, and, when all was ready, let loose the hounds, and waited for the boar to come forth from his hiding-place. Not long did they have to wait. With a snort of rage he rushed out. The breath from his nostrils came forth like steam, and the white foam flew from his mouth and covered his bristly sides and neck. Quick as lightning, he made for the first man he could see, and the tramp of his hoofs re-echoed through the woods like thunder as he came upon the hard ground. As soon as he rushed out, a shower of missiles fell towards him from every side, but some were aimed awry or fell too far or too short of him, and those that touched him slipped aside on his tough

hide, as though they had been feathers instead of bronze; and he broke through the nets that had been spread to catch him, and galloped away unharmed, whilst behind him a hound lay dead among the reeds, pierced through with his tusk, and two of the hunters, who stood in his path, and had not been able to rush aside in time, lay groaning on the ground with the iron mark of his hoof upon them, and a gaping wound in the side of one. When the rest saw that he had escaped them, they gave chase with all speed, headed by Castor and Pollux, on their white horses, and Atalanta close beside them, running swiftly as the wind. Ahead of them the woodland track gave a sudden turn to the left, and the boar, rushing blindly forward, would have plunged into the undergrowth and bushes, and escaped beyond range of their darts. But Atalanta, seeing what must happen, stopped short in the chase. Quick as thought, she put an arrow to the string, and let fly at the great beast ahead; and Artemis, true to her word, guided the arrow so that it pierced him in the vital part behind the ear. With a snort of pain and fury, he turned round upon the hunters and charged down towards them as they came up from behind, and great would have been the havoc he had wrought among them but for Meleager. As the brute bore down, he leaped lightly to one side, and, gathering together all his strength, buried the spear deep into the beast's black shoulder, and felled him to the earth with the force of his blow. Immediately the others gathered round, and helped to finish the work that Meleager had begun, and soon the monster lay dead upon the ground in a pool of his own blood. Then Meleager, with his foot upon the boar's head, spoke to the hunters.

"My friends," he said, "I thank you all for the courage and devotion you have shown this day. My land can once more raise her head in joy, for the monster that wrought such havoc in her fields lies dead here at my feet. Yet the price of his death has not been light, my friends." And they bowed their heads in silence, as they remembered the two whom th boar had struck in the rush, one of whom was now dead. "Yet those who have suffered have suffered gloriously, giving up themselves, as brave men must, for the sake of others, and their names shall surely not be unremembered by us all. Once more, my trusty comrades, I thank you, every man of you. As for thee, lady,"

he continued, turning to Atalanta, "while all have played their part, yet the glory of the hunt is thine. But for thy sure hand and eye the beast might yet be lurking in the forest. Wherefore, as a token of our gratitude, I will give to thee the boar's head as a trophy to do with as thou wilt."

AS THE BRUTE BORE DOWN, MELEAGER BURIED THE SPEAR DEEP IN HIS SHOULDER.

At his words a murmur of applause went round the ring of them that listened. Only the voices of Toxeus and Plexippus were not heard, for they were mad with jealousy and wrath, and as soon as there was silence they spoke.

"By what right," asked Toxeus, "shall one bear off the trophy of a hunt in which each one of us has played his part?"

The insolence of his words and looks roused the anger of Meleager to boiling-point. All through the hunt the brothers had shown scant courtesy to Atalanta, and now their rudeness was past bearing.

"By the same right as the best man bears off the prize in any contest," he answered quietly, though he was pale with rage.

"Happy is that one who has first won the heart of the judge, then," said Plexippus with a sneer, as he looked at Atalanta.

By the truth and the falsehood of his words Meleager was maddened past all bearing. Scarce knowing what he did, he sprang upon him, and before anyone knew what he was about, he had buried his hunting-knife in the heart of Plexippus. When Toxeus saw his brother fall back upon the grass, he sprang upon Meleager, and for a moment they swung backwards and forwards, held each in the other's deadly grip. But Meleager was the younger and the stronger of the two, and soon Toxeus too lay stretched upon the ground beside his brother, and a cry of horror went through the crowd of those who stood by. Pale and trembling, Meleager turned towards them.

"My friends," he said, "farewell. You shall look upon my face no more. Whether I slew them justly or no, the curse of Heaven is upon me, and I know that night and day the Furies will haunt my steps, because my hand is red with the blood of my kinsmen. O fair fields of Calydon, that I have loved and served all my days, farewell for ever. Nevermore shall I look upon you, nor my home on te steep hill-side, nor the face of the queen, my mother; but I must hide my head in shame far from the haunts of men. As for thee, lady," he said,

turning to Atalanta, "their taunt was false, yet true. Right honourably didst thou win thy trophy, as all these here will testify;" and he pointed to the hunters standing round. "Yet my soul leapt with joy when I found that into thine hand and none other's I might give the prize of the hunt. Wherefore, think kindly on my memory, lady, when I am far away, for a grave man's heart is in thy keeping. Farewell."

And he turned and went away by the forest-path. So surprised were all the company that no man moved hand or foot to stop him. The first to speak was Atalanta.

"Comrades," she said, "do you bear home the dead and break the news as gently as may be to the queen, and I will follow him, if perchance I can comfort him, for the hand of Heaven is heavy upon him."

So firmly did she speak that no man found it in his heart to withstand her; and when she saw that they would do as she bid, she ran swiftly down the path by which he had gone, and disappeared from sight.

Meanwhile the day had been drawing towards its close, and Althæa had come out into the portico to watch for the return of the hunters. The rumour had reached the city that the boar had been killed, but not without loss among the gallant band that had gone out against him, and with a heavy heart Althæa was waiting to know who it was that had fallen. In time she saw them returning home, and in their midst four litters carried on the shoulders of some. When she saw them, her heart stood still with fear, and as they came up and laid down the litters before the doorway she was as one turned to marble, and moved neither hand nor foot. When Œneus the king saw her, he took her gently by the hand.

"Come within, lady," he said; "the hunting of the boar has cost us dear."

"Ah! tell me the worst at once," she cried. "I can bear it better so. The suspense is maddening me."

"Two of those who lie before thee are strangers who have given themselves for us," he said. "One of them is sore wounded, and the other is gone beyond recovery. The other two, Althæa, are very near and dear to us—Toxeus and Plexippus, thy brothers."

And he pointed to two of the bodies which lay side by side with their faces covered before her. With a wild cry she rushed to them, and drew back the covering, and gazed upon the faces that she loved so well. As she looked, she saw the wounds that had killed them, and she knew now that it was no wild beast that had slain them, but the hand of man. Drawing herself up to her full height, she looked round on those who stood by, and the gleam of her eyes was terrible to see.

"Deceive me no more," she said, "but tell me how these two came to fall by the hand of man."

"Lady," said Œneus, "they sought a quarrel with one of our company, and in anger he slew them both."

For a moment she was silent, then in a low voice, yet one that all could hear, she spoke.

"My curse be upon him, whosoe'er he be. O Daughters of Destruction, foul wingless Furies, by the blood of my brothers yet wet upon his hand, I bid you track his footsteps night and day. May no roof cover his head nor any man give him food or drink, but let him be a vagabond on the face of the earth till just vengeance overtake him. On thee, Œneus, do I lay this charge, and on my son Meleager, to avenge the death of these my kinsmen, who have been foully slain."

In vain did Œneus try to stop her. She was as one deaf to his entreaties. When she had finished, she looked round for Meleager, and when she could not see him, the blood froze in her veins.

"My son," she cried—"where is my son?"

"Lady," said Œneus, "even now the wingless bearers of thy curse are hunting him through the forest."

For a moment she swayed to and fro as though she would fall.

"Ye gods, what have I done?" she muttered.

Then with a cry she turned and rushed through the doorway, across the deserted palace to her own chamber, and barring the door behind her, she took from its hiding place the brand she had kept jealously so long. As on the day when the Fates had come to her, a bright fire was burning on the hearth, and deep into the heart of it she pushed the log with both her hands.

"Oh my son, my son!" she cried; "to think that I should come to this! But though the flame that devours thy life burns out my heart within me, yet must I do it. Thus only can I save thee from my curse. For the word, once spoken, never dies, and the Furies, once aroused, sleep never, night or day. Wherefore Death alone can give thee peace, O Meleager, my first-born and my dearest."

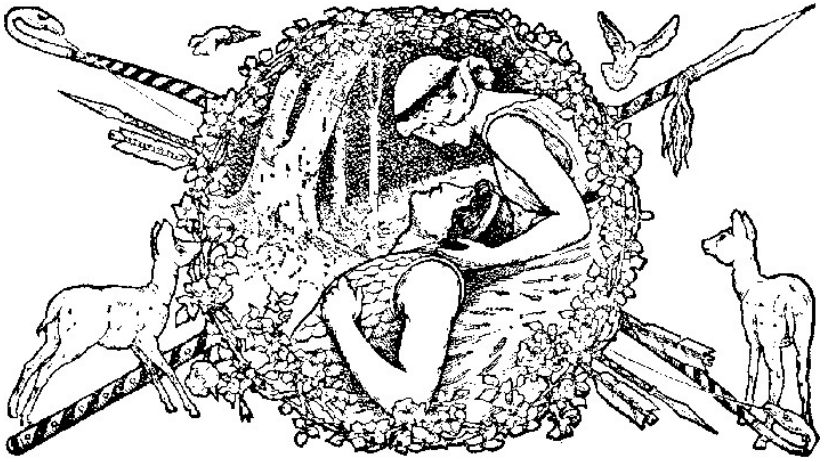
Œneus meanwhile had followed her, and stood without, asking her to open to him. But she cried out to him,

"All is well. I beg thee leave me. I would be alone."

So he left her; and she stood watching the flames slowly eat the wood away, and at last, when the log fell apart in ashes, she sank down upon the floor, and with her son's life hers too went out for grief.

Meleager meanwhile had gone blindly forward along the forest track, and from afar Atalanta followed him. For a time he went onward, straight as an arrow, never stopping, never turning. But when his mother's curse was spoken, faster than the whirlwind the Furies flew from the realms of endless night, and came and crouched

before his feet, loathsome shapes of darkness and of horror. With a cry he turned aside, and tried to flee from them, but wherever he looked they were there before him, and he reeled backwards and forwards like a drunken man. But soon his strength seemed to give way, and he fell forward on the grass, and Atalanta ran forward and took his head upon her knee. To her eyes they two were alone in the heart of the forest, for the foul shapes of the Furies he alone had seen. But now he lay with his eyes closed, faint and weak, and she thought that some time in the hunt he must have strained himself, and lay dying of some inward hurt that no man could heal, for on his body she could see not a scratch. So she sat in the gathering gloom with his head upon her lap. There was nought else she could do. Help lay so far away that he would have died alone had she left him. At last, when his heart beat so faint that she thought it had stopped once and for all, he opened his eyes and looked up at her, and when he saw her the fear and madness died out of his face, and he smiled.



"The gods are kind," he said. Once more he closed his eyes, and Atalanta knew that he would open them never again. Gently she laid him with his head on the moss-covered roots of a tree, and sped away to the city to bear the news of his death. In the darkness of night they bore him through the forest, and all the people gathered together and watched from the walls the torchlit procession as it came slowly up the hill; and the heart of each man of them was heavy within him as he thought that the hero and saviour of his

country was being carried dead into the walls of his native town. By the side of his mother they laid him, and burned above them the torches of the dead, and the mourners, with heads bowed in grief, stood around.

Thus did it come to pass that the hunting of the boar ended in grief for the land of Calydon, and Atalanta went back to the Arcadian woodlands with a sore place in her heart for Meleager, who had died happy because his head was resting on her knee.

THE CURSE OF ECHO

N the flowery groves of Helicon Echo was once a fair nymph who, hand in hand with her sisters, sported along the green lawns and by the side of the mountain-streams. Among them all her feet were the lightest and her laugh the merriest, and in the telling of tales not one of them could touch her. So if ever any among them were plotting mischief in their hearts, they would say to her,

"Echo, thou weaver of words, go thou and sit beside Hera in her bower, and beguile her with a tale that she come not forth and find us. See thou make it a long one, Echo, and we will give thee a garland to twine in thy hair."

And Echo would laugh a gay laugh, which rang through the grove.

"What will you do when she tires of my tales?" she asked.

"When that time comes we shall see," said they.

So with another laugh she would trip away and cast herself on the grass at Hera's feet. When Hera looked upon Echo her stern blow would relax, and she would smile upon her and stroke her hair.

"What hast thou come for now, thou sprite?" she would ask.

"I had a great longing to talk with thee, great Hera," she would answer, "and I have a tale—a wondrous new tale— to tell thee."

"Thy tales are as many as the risings of the sun, Echo, and each one of them as long as an old man's beard."

"The day is yet young, mother," she would say, "and the tales I have told thee before are as mud which is trampled underfoot by the side of the one I shall tell thee now."

"Go to, then," said Hera, "and if it pleases me I will listen to the end."

So Echo would sit upon the grass at Hera's feet, and with her eyes fixed upon her face she would tell her tale. She had the gift of words, and, moreover, she had seen and heard many strange things which she alone could tell of. These she would weave into romances, adding to them as best pleased her, or taking from them at will; for the best of tale-tellers are those who can lie, but who mingle in with their lies some grains of truth which they have picked from their own experience. And Hera would forget her watchfulness and her jealousies, and listen entranced, while the magic of Echo's words made each scene live before her eyes. Meanwhile the nymphs would sport to their hearts' content and never fear her anger.

But at last came the black day of reckoning when Hera found out the prank which Echo had played upon her so long, and the fire of her wrath flashed forth like lightning.

"The gift whereby thou hast deceived me shall be thine no more," she cried. "Henceforward thou shalt be dumb till someone else has spoken, and then, even if thou wilt, thou shalt not hold thy tongue, but must needs repeat once more the last words that have been spoken."

"Alas! alas!" cried the nymphs in chorus.

"Alas! alas!" cried Echo after them, and could say no more, though she longed to speak and beg Hera to forgive her. So did it come to pass that she lost her voice, and could only say that which others put in her mouth, whether she wished it or no.

Now, it chanced one day that the young Narcissus strayed away from his companions in the hunt, and when he tried to find them he

only wandered further, and lost his way upon the lonely heights of Helicon. He was now in the bloom of his youth, nearing manhood, and fair as a flower in spring, and all who saw him straightway loved him and longed for him. But, though his face was smooth and soft as a maiden's, his heart was hard as steel; and while many loved him and sighed for him, they could kindle no answering flame in his breast, but he would spurn them, and treat them with scorn, and go on his way, nothing caring. When he was born, the blind seer Teiresias had prophesied concerning him,

"So long as he sees not himself he shall live and be happy."

And his words came true, for Narcissus cared for neither man nor woman, but only for his own pleasure; and because he was so fair that all who saw him loved him for his beauty, he found it easy to get from them what he would. But he himself knew nought of love, and therefore but little of grief; for love at the best brings joy and sorrow hand in hand, and if unreturned, it brings nought but pain.

Now, when the nymphs saw Narcissus wandering alone through the woods, they, too, loved him for his beauty, and they followed him wherever he went. But because he was a mortal they were shy of him, and would not show themselves but hid behind the trees and rocks so that he should not see them; and amongst the others Echo followed him, too. At last, when he found he had really wandered astray, he began to shout for one of his companions.

"Ho, there! where art thou?" he cried.

"Where art thou?" answered Echo.

When he heard the voice, he stopped and listened, but he could hear nothing more. Then he called again.

"I am here in the wood—Narcissus."

"In the wood—Narcissus," said she.

"Come hither," he cried.

"Come hither," she answered.

Wondering at the strange voice which answered him, he looked all about, but could see no one.

"Art thou close at hand?" he asked.

"Close at hand," answered Echo.

Wondering the more at seeing no one, he went forward in the direction of the voice. Echo, when she found he was coming towards her, fled further, so that when next he called, her voice sounded far away. But wherever she was, he still followed after her, and she saw that he would not let her escape; for wherever she hid, if he called, she had to answer, and so show him her hiding-place. By now they had come to an open space in the trees, where the green lawn sloped down to a clear pool in the hollow. Here by the margin of the water she stood, with her back to the tall, nodding bulrushes, and as Narcissus came out from the trees she wrung her hands, and the salt tears dropped from her eyes; for she loved him, and longed to speak to him, and yet she could not say a word. When he saw her he stopped.

"Art thou she who calls me?" he asked.

"Who calls me?" she answered.

"I have told thee, Narcissus," he said.

"Narcissus," she cried, and held out her arms to him.

"Who art thou?" he asked.

"Who art thou?" said she.

"Have I not told thee," he said impatiently, "Narcissus?"

"Narcissus," she said again, and still held out her hands beseechingly.

"Tell me," he cried, "who art thou and why dost thou call me?"

"Why dost thou call me?" said she.

At this he grew angry.

"Maiden, whoever thou art, thou hast led me a pretty dance through the woods, and now thou dost nought but mock me."

"Thou dost nought but mock me," said she.

At this he grew yet more angry, and began to abuse her, but every word of abuse that he spoke she hurled back at him again. At last, tired out with his wanderings and with anger, he threw himself on the grass by the pool, and would not look at her nor speak to her again. For a time she stood beside him weeping, and longing to speak to him and explain, but never a word could she utter. So at last in her misery she left him, and went and hid herself behind a rock close by. After a while, when his anger had cooled down somewhat, Narcissus remembered he was very thirsty, and noticing for the first time the clear pool beside him, he bent over the edge of the bank to drink. As he held out his hand to take the water, he saw looking up towards him a face which was the fairest face he had ever looked on, and his heart, which never yet had known what love was, at last was set on fire by the face in the pool. With a sigh he held out both his arms towards it, and the figure also held out two arms to him, and Echo from the rock answered back his sigh. When he saw the figure stretching out towards him and heard the sigh, he thought that his love was returned, and he bent down closer to the water and whispered, "I love thee."

"I love thee," answered Echo from the rock.

At these words he bent down further, and tried to clasp the figure in his arms, but as he did so, it vanished away. The surface of the pool

was covered with ripples, and he found he was clasping empty water to his breast. So he drew back and waited awhile, thinking he had been over-hasty. In time, the ripples died away and the face appeared again as clear as before, looking up at him longingly from the water. Once again he bent towards it, and tried to clasp it, and once again it fled from his embrace. Time after time he tried, and always the same thing happened, and at last he gave up in despair, and sat looking down into the water, with the teardrops falling from his eyes; and the figure in the pool wept, too, and looked up at him with a look of longing and despair. The longer he looked, the more fiercely did the flame of love burn in his breast, till at length he could bear it no more, but determined to reach the desire of his heart or die. So for the last time he leaned forward, and when he found that once again he was clasping the empty water, he threw himself from the bank into the pool, thinking that in the depths, at any rate, he would find his love. But he found naught but death among the weeds and stones of the pool, and knew not that it was his own face he loved reflected in the water below him. Thus were the words of the prophet fulfilled, "So long as he sees not himself he shall live and be happy."

Echo, peeping out from the rock, saw all that had happened, and when Narcissus cast himself into the pool, she rushed forward, all too late, to stop him. When she found she could not save him, she cast herself on the grass by the pool and wept, till her flesh and her bones wasted away with weeping, and naught but her voice remained and the curse that was on her. So to this day she lives, a formless voice haunting rocks and caves and vaulted halls. Herself no man has seen since the day Narcissus saw her wringing her hands for love of him beside the nodding bulrushes, and no man ever shall see again. But her voice we all have heard repeating our words where we thought that no one was by; and though now she will say whatever we bid her, if once the curse were removed, the cry of her soul would be,

"Narcissus, Narcissus, my love, come back—come back to me!"

FOR THE LAST TIME HE LEANED FORWARD.

By the side of the clear brown pool, on the grass that Echo had watered with her tears, there sprang up a sweet-scented flower, with a pure white face and a crown of gold. And to this day in many a land men call that flower "Narcissus," after the lad who, for love of his own fair face, was drowned in the waters of Helicon.

THE SCULPTOR AND THE IMAGE

N the fair isle of Cyprus, long ago, lived a young sculptor named Pygmalion. As a child he had been quick to see beauty in the forms around him, and while he found nothing better, he would dig the clay in the gardens and sit for many a long hour happy in the shade of the trees, modelling horses and cows and human figures, whilst his mother was busied with her duties in the house. She, for her part, was glad he had found something to amuse him and keep him out of mischief, for he had no brothers or sisters to play with, and his father was dead, so they two lived alone together in a great white house between the mountains and the sea. From time to time she would come down into the garden to look at his figures and praise them; for though they were childish and crude, and sometimes grotesque, they were full of life and promise, and being a wise woman, she knew that where Nature points the way, it is well to make the road as smooth as may be. At first she gave him no better material to work with than the clay he could dig for himself, nor any master to teach him; for she wished to see how long he would persevere, and how far he would get alone. There are times, too, when a master can hinder more than he can teach.

One day when he was old enough, she took him down to the city below, where the people were keeping the feast of Aphrodite, and they watched the glad procession wind through the streets, and its choruses of priests and maidens, and little children scattering roses in the way. With the rest of the folk they followed the procession up the hill to the shining temple, and Pygmalion stood beside his mother, and wondered at the tapering white columns and the clouds of incense, and all the colours and fair forms such as he had never seen before. The picture of all these things he carried home in his mind, and thought of them by day and dreamt of them by night, till they became almost as real to him as the living forms he saw around

him. Then he worked more busily than ever at his modelling in the garden; but whereas before he had been content to leave the figures he had made, standing them out in rows for his mother to admire, now he was no longer pleased with his work. He would look at the figure he had made and compare it with the image of his mind, and he saw that while his ideal was fair and beautiful beyond measure, his work was clumsy and rude. Then he would set to work and alter his model. But whatever he did he was not satisfied, and when his mother came down from the house to see him, she found him with broken bits lying about him, and never a finished figure to show her.

Then she knew that one of two things had happened; either he had come to the limit of his powers, and as a child will, had grown tired of a thing in which he could make no further progress, or else he had reached an age when the mind sees fair forms which the hand cannot fashion, and in disgust at his failure he had broken his figures, though they were better than what he had done before, because they fell short of the ideal in his mind.

"Thou art tired of playing with clay, my child," she said; "come with me, and I will see if we cannot find something that will please thee better."

So she kept him with her, and taught him letters, and read to him tales of the gods and heroes, till the child's eyes grew big with wonder, and she saw that all she read passed before his mind like a moving picture. She read to him from the old Greek poets, tales bravery and might, of love and of adventure—tales, too, of cruelty and bloodshed, jealousy and hate. But whatever she read was beautiful, for the Greeks loved beauty above all things else, and clothed their thoughts in fair forms of words, so that even when they told of wickedness and wrong they left no stain of ugliness upon the mind. Pygmalion drank in eagerly all that was read to him, and because he had within him the soul of a poet he understood. The music of the words sank into his heart like seed planted in a fertile soil, which springs up to forms of loveliness and grace. So did the old tales bring before his eyes shapes of beauty, and once again he began to go down into the garden and try to mould them into figures

of clay. His mother watched him, and saw that he persevered, and that week by week his models grew more beautiful and more true, as the image in his own mind grew clearer. Then she knew that her reading had done what she hoped it would do, and that the vague and fleeting visions had become for him forms as clear as those he saw around him.

"At least my son has the soul of an artist," she thought, "but whether he has the hands and the fingers of one who can do more than play with clay, the gods alone can tell. He shall have a master to teach him, and in time we shall see whether he is one of the many in whom the divine fire burns, but whose bodies are instruments too coarse to carry out the thoughts of the soul, or whether he is one of the few who are able to do that of which others vainly dream."

So she gave him a master—a white-haired, venerable man, in whom lived the spirit of the old Greek sculptors, who had been the first to show mankind how stone and marble might be wrought into shapes of beauty. He taught the lad how to work in all kinds of stone and metal, and to copy faithfully the forms he saw around him. But he would not let him be satisfied with this alone, for he saw that he had in him the making of better things.

"Pygmalion," he would say, "in life there are many things that are not fair, but in art all things should be fair, and no art is truly great that is not beautiful. When thou lookest on the world, see only that which is beautiful; thou, because thou hast the soul of a poet, wilt see beauty where others cannot find it. Drink it in as a thirsty man will drink from the wayside stream, then give forth to the world, in stone, copies of those ideal forms thou seest with the eye of thy soul alone."

The child was an apt pupil; he understood, and did as his master bade him.

As the years flew by, he grew to be a man and a great sculptor, so that in the temples of the gods and the palaces of the rich his statues stood, and at the corners of the streets, a joy to the rich and poor. The

years, which had brought him to fame, had taken from him the white-haired old man, his master, and the mother who had helped to make him what he was; and now he lived alone in the great white house between the mountains and the sea. But he was happy, perfectly happy, working all day long at his images, and dreaming each night of fairer forms that he would some day work into stone and marble. His friends would come up from the town to look at his work, or to buy, and would say to him,

"Pygmalion, art thou not lonely here, all alone? Why dost thou not take thee a wife, and rear up children to be a comfort to thee in thine old age?"

And he would answer, "No, I am not lonely, for my art is to me both wife and children. I will never marry one of the daughters of men."

Whatever they said they could not move him from his resolve. But what his friends could not do Aphrodite accomplished. When she saw that there was one man among the Cyprians who had reached the prime of life without giving her a thought, or offering up one prayer before her shrine, she was angry, and determined that he should feel her power. So one night she sent into his mind the vision of a maiden, who in loveliness surpassed all other forms he had ever dreamed of, and she set his heart aflame, so that he thought he saw a living form before him. He started up in his bed and held out his arms towards her, but awoke with a start to find he was clasping the empty air. Then he knew it was only a vision he had seen; but it haunted him, and he tossed restlessly from side to side, unable to sleep. At last he could bear it no more; while the dawn was yet grey in the east he rose from his couch and went to his workroom. Gathering together his instruments and some clay, he set to work to model the figure of his dream. On and on he worked, scarce thinking of food or rest, and chose out a block of fair white marble, which day by day grew into shape beneath his fingers. In his hand there seemed a magic it had never had before, so that his chisel never failed nor slipped, till the marble stood transformed before him, shaped into the image of a perfect woman, the vision of his dream; and he loved her as other men love a woman in the flesh, with his whole heart and

soul. But small joy did he have of his love, for though he had fashioned her with eyes that spoke to him of love and hands held out towards him, yet when he spoke to her she could give no answer, and when he clasped her in his arms her touch was the cold, hard touch of marble. Then he tried to put her away from his mind, and covered her over with a curtain; but when he was not looking at the marble figure, her image was still present before his mind, and he could not forget her. Day by day his love grew, till it became a burning fever in his heart. He grew thin and ill from want of food and rest, and could neither work by day nor sleep by night. His friends, when they came up to see him, marvelled at the change in him; and when they asked to see what new work he had done he would answer,

"My friends, I have no new work to show you. The cunning has departed from my hand. Never again shall I fashion the white marble into shapes of beauty."

They wondered what had come over him, for the image that had been his undoing he never showed them, nor let them know what was troubling his heart. But he made a niche for her in his chamber where the light fell upon her from the window, and at night when he could not sleep he would sit with his arms clasped about her ankles and his head resting on her feet. Her face would look down on him full of pity and love, pale and beautiful in the cold white light of the moon. When the day dawned and the cloudlets clustered red about the rising sun, the warm rays would fall upon her giving to her some hue of life, and Pygmalion's heart would beat high with the hope that a miracle had been wrought, and that his love at the last had kindled a soul akin to his own in the marble statue before him. With a cry he would put his arms about her, but still she remained a cold, hard, unresponsive stone. So day by day and week by week he grew more wretched; for there is nought like a passionate love which is unreturned, and which never can be returned, to take out the life from a man.

At last Aphrodite had compassion on him, when she saw that he had suffered much and more than most men at her hands, and that he no

longer held her in disdain. One night, Pygmalion, as usual, had been kneeling before the statue with his arms clasped about her feet, till, tired out with longing, he had fallen asleep. On the breath of the night wind Aphrodite came in, and she kissed the statue on the lips.

ON THE BREATH OF THE NIGHT WIND APHRODITE CAME IN, AND SHE KISSED THE STATUE ON THE LIPS.

"Let love kindle life," she said. "Live, Galatea, thou milk-white maid, and bring joy to the heart of Pygmalion."

Then she stole forth again through the moonlit casement, and Pygmalion slept on unconscious. In the morning the sunlight streamed in through the window, and fell full upon his face. With a start he awoke, and looked up at the statue, and to his sun-dazed eyes it seemed to move.

"O Aphrodite," he cried, "mock me not! Thou hast deceived me so often."

In despair he cast his arms about the image, certain that once again he would find her a cold white stone. But lo! instead of unyielding marble he was clasping in his arms a living woman. Her arms were about his neck, her lips on his lips, and she looked into his eyes with a fire that answered the fire in his own.

"At last, at last," said he, "my love has prevailed!"

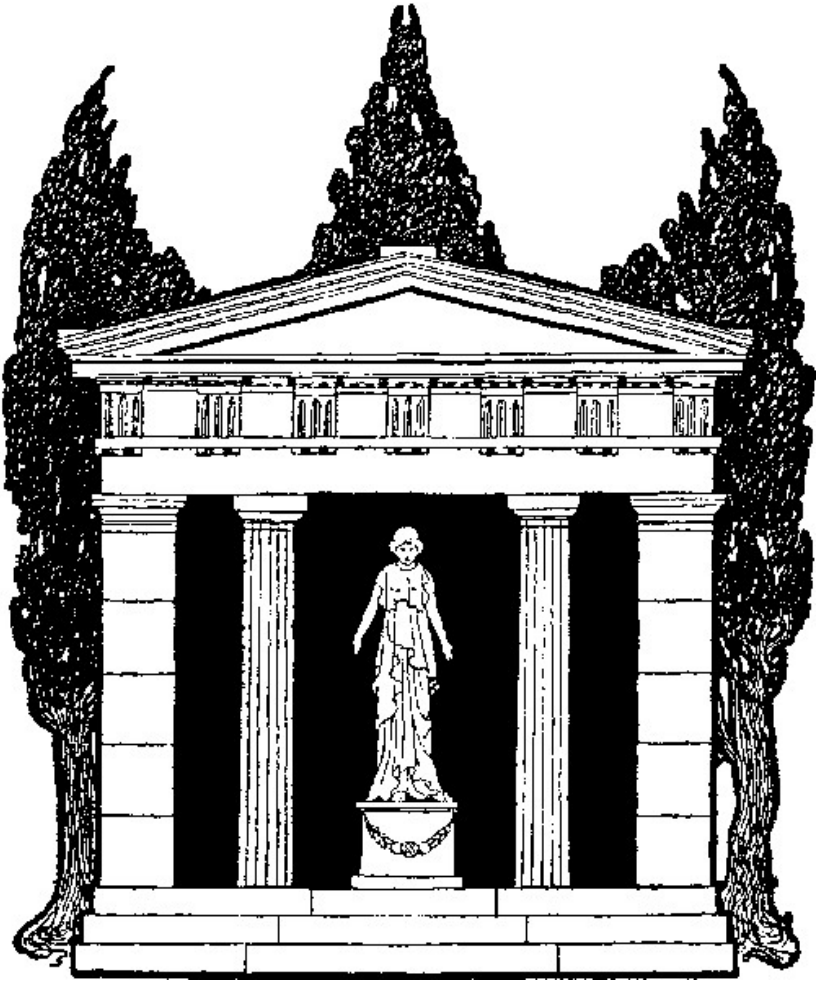
"Even in the heart of a stone, Pygmalion," she said, "love can kindle love. My form is the work of thy hand, and my soul is the child of thy love. As long as stone can last, so long shall my body last; and as long as thy love can live, so long shall my soul live also."

"My love," he said, "will live for ever."

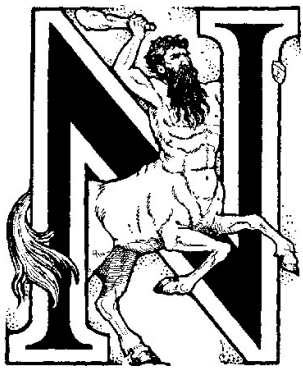
"Then for ever," said she, "my soul will live with thine."

"So as husband and wife they lived together for many a long year. The cunning came back to Pygmalion's hand, and many a fair statue did he make for the people of Cyprus. In time he died in a green old age. His spirit fled away to the dwelling-place of souls, and with him the spirit of Galatea, his wife; and her body returned to the form which Pygmalion had first made her—a fair white marble image. In the garden where he, in his childhood, had learned to model the clay, the Cyprians buried him, building a fair tomb over him, and in a niche they placed the statue of Galatea. So the words she had

spoken when she came to life were fulfilled. Her form lived as long as stone could live, and her soul lived as long as Pygmalion could love her. And which of us can say that this could not be for ever, or that they do not still live in the light of each other's love in the dwelling-place of souls?



THE DIVINE MUSICIAN



ORTH-WEST of the Ægean, where the cliffs of Pelion rise sheer out of the sea, dwelt long ago Cheiron, the centaur, the wisest of living things, half man, half horse. Many brothers had he, who in form were like himself, but their hearts within were hard and wild, and because of their untamed passions and their cruelty and lust they were hated alike by gods and men. But Cheiron was gentle and mild. He knew all manner of strange things; he could prophesy, and play upon the lyre, and cure men of their hurts by means of healing herbs. He was brave withal, and had been in many a bloody fight, and knew the arts of war full as well as the arts of peace. Wherefore the old Hellenes called him Cheiron, the Better One, and sent up their sons to live with him that they might be taught all the things which man should know. In a hollow cave on the mountain-side he had his home. Far up above him the snow-capped peaks of Pelion kept watch over the nestling townships of the plain, and far, far below the waves of the Ægean washed without ceasing on the rocks of that pitiless coast, now soft and soothing as the song a mother sings to her child, now loud and boisterous beneath the lash of the storm-wind, when the seabirds fly screaming to the shelter of the shore. All around were dark forests of chestnut, pine and oak, where many a fierce beast had his lair. In the branches of the trees the wild birds built their nests and filled the dark glades with song. About the mouth of the cave the ground was trampled hard beneath the tread of many feet, and paths led this way and that, some into the heart of the forests, others down the steep cliff to the shore.

Every morning at sunrise a troop of boys and youths would come forth from the cave, and, dividing into groups, would go their several ways to fish or to hunt, or to follow the course of some stream to its unknown source in the mountains. Sometimes Cheiron

himself would go with them, if he thought they had need of his help; but more often he left them to their own devices, to follow each one his own bent as Nature prompted him. In the evening they would come home and tell him of their doings in the day; and he would praise or blame them, according as they had done well or ill, and show them how they might do better another time. Then they would go to their couches of dried moss and leaves, and sleep the deep sleep of youth and health, while the cool night breeze blew in upon their faces from the mouth of the cave, and put fresh life and strength into their tired limbs. In the winter-time, when the night was longer than the day, and the snow lay deep upon the hills, they would light a great fire in front of the cave with logs they had stored in the summer months, and Cheiron would take his lyre and sing to them of all things in heaven and earth, while they lay round about and listened. The songs which he sang to them then they never forgot, because Cheiron was wise, and spoke to their souls in his singing. So they laid up his songs in their hearts; and many a long year after, when they were grown men far away, and some danger or difficulty stood in their path, the drift of his teaching would come back to them in the words of a song, and their hearts would grow brave and strong once more to act worthily of their boyhood's sunny days on Pelion. Many a hero whose name still lives among man had been trained by Cheiron in his youth—Peleus, who married a goddess, and Achilles his son, the swiftest and bravest of mortal men; and Jason, the leader of the Argonauts; and Asklepios, the mighty healer; and, not least among them, Orpheus, the greatest of Greek musicians and mystics, whose tale I will tell you now.

One day, as the shades of evening were beginning to fall, Cheiron stood before the mouth of the cave waiting for the lads to come home. Sooner than he expected he saw one of them far away coming down a path from the mountains, and he marvelled that he should return so soon and alone. As he came nearer Cheiron saw that he walked with his eyes upon the ground, deep in thought. Every now and again he stopped and looked round upon the peaceful hillsides stretching calm and smiling in the golden glow of the evening; and when he had gazed for a moment he sighed, as though he would breath into his soul the beauty he saw around him, and then went on

his way once more with his eyes on the ground. So he walked till he came close to the cave and saw Cheiron standing in the entrance. Then he ran up to him and put his hand upon his shoulder.

"My father," he cried, "look round upon the hills, hast thou ever seen them so fair as they have been this day?"

Cheiron smiled at his words.

"Orpheus," he said, "the fair face of the earth changes but little. In the soul of man it lies to look upon her and see her beauty or to be blind."

"Till this day I have been blind, Cheiron," he said.

"And who has lifted the veil from thine eyes, my son?" asked his master.

"I know not," he said. "But this morning, while yet it was dark, there came to me a strange unrest and a longing to be alone. So I crept forth from the cave whilst you were all sleeping, and climbed up the mountain-side—up, up, in the grey light before dawn, till I came to the place where the white snow lies like a cloak about the shaggy shoulders of Pelion. There I left the track of my footsteps where no feet but mine had trod, and climbed up upon a boulder and looked out across the sea. And I saw the great sun rise out of the east. As I looked it seemed that I beheld the face of God; and as snow and sea and the forests awoke to life in the light of His glory, my soul awoke within me. All the day long I wandered about the forests and hills; and I saw the beauty of the trees and the grass, and the grace of the wild deer as he bounded over the rocks, as I had never seen it before. The wonder of this day lies like a burden on my heart that I fain would ease, yet I have no words to tell of it."

Then Cheiron took up the lyre which was lying by his side and passed his fingers gently over the strings.

"Orpheus," he said, "many a long year ago, when thou wast a little lad, thy mother Calliope brought thee to me. And she put thy hand in my hand, and said: 'Cheiron, make a man of my son. Make him brave and fearless and strong, a worthy companion of the noble lads thou hast around thee. When the right time comes I will breathe my spirit upon him, and he shall be great, as few in this world are great.' This day she has kept her word, Orpheus. She has breathed her spirit upon thee, and has opened the eyes of thy soul and made them see."

"Who is my mother Calliope?" asked the lad.

"She is the Fair-voiced One who speaks through the lips of mortals by music and song, Orpheus. With her sisters, she dwells for ever by the sunlit streams of Helicon, where they follow in the footsteps of Apollo, their lord, across the green lawns and the flowery meadows. All knowledge, all music of sound and of words, comes to men by their gift—those nine great sisters, the Muses. Happy art thou to be her son. Take now this lyre from mine hand. Ease the burden of thy soul in song, and learn how great is the gift she has given thee."

So Orpheus took the lyre from his master, and struck the chords, as all the lads who dwelt with Cheiron knew full well how to do. But instead of the old songs that he had learnt from his childhood, a new song came to his lips, and he sang as he had never sung before. Far away upon the hillsides his companions heard his voice, and they stopped upon their homeward way to listen, as the evening breeze bore the sound to their ears. When they knew that the voice came from home, they hastened on and drew silently near, that no sound might disturb the singer, and throwing themselves upon the ground at his feet, forgot their weariness and hunger as they listened. On and on he sang, forgetful of all else but his song, till the red glow of the evening died away in the west and the stars shone pale in the twilight. There was a strange magic about his music which drew all living things to his feet, as a magnet draws the cold heart of steel. From the woods and forests they came, and from the bare hillsides—the lion, the leopard and the trembling fawn. The snake came forth from his hiding-place, the rabbit from his hole, and the wild birds wheeled about his head and settled on the brow of the cave. The

very trees seemed to hear him, as they swayed their heads to and fro to the rhythm of his song. As he looked round upon his comrades whilst he sang, his heart grew strong within him, for he felt that a strange new power had been born in his soul, which could bow the heads of men beneath his will as the wind bows the rushes by the stream. So he sang on as the twilight deepened into night, and all the stars of heaven came forth to listen, till at length his song died upon his lips, like a breeze lulled to rest at sunset. For a moment the creatures lay spellbound around him; then one by one they crept back to their homes, with their fears and their hatreds tamed for a while by the magic of his singing. And his companions crowded round him with words of praise and eager questions.

"Who taught thee thy magic song, Orpheus?" they cried.

"The sunrise and the snow," he answered, "and the teaching of Cheiron, and my happy days with you, and the spirit of my mother Calliope—all these have taught me my song."

But his answer was a dark saying to them, and not one of them understood it, save Cheiron. He knew that it is the commonest things in life that are the material of all that is beautiful and fair, just as a temple may be built of common stone; but that the children of the Muses are few, who can by music and art open the blind hearts of men to see.

Thus did the gift of song fall upon Orpheus, so that he became the greatest of all singers upon the earth. All day long he would wander about the woods and the hill, and tame the heart of every living thing with the magic of his voice.

One day it chanced that he came into the wood where he had never been before, and he followed a grass-grown track which led to the mouth of a cave. On one side of the cave stood a tall beech-tree, whose moss-covered roots offered a tempting seat, and close by a clear stream gushed forth from the rocks. He drank eagerly of the water, for he had wandered far and was thirsty; and when he had quenched his thirst, he sat down on the roots of the beech-tree and

began his song. As before, the wild things gathered about him, and crouched at his feet, tame and silent, as he sang; and from the shadow of the cave crept a wood-nymph, and lay upon the grass, with her chin between her hands, looking up into his face. For a time he did not see her, so silently had she come; but at last the power of her eyes drew his eyes upon her, and he turned his head and looked at her. When he saw her, his arm fell useless by his side and his voice died away in his throat, for he had never looked upon anyone so fair. Her hair was black as the storm-cloud, but her eyes were blue as the summer sky, and she lay like a white flower in the grass at his feet. For a long moment he gazed into her face without speaking, as she gazed back at him, and at last he spoke.

"Who art thou, maiden?" he asked.

"I am Eurydice," she answered.

"Thy hair is black as midnight, Eurydice," he said, "and thine eyes are bright as the noonday."

"Are not midnight and noonday fair to thine eyes?" she asked.

"They are fair indeed, but thou art fairer."

"Then I am well content," she said.

"I know not thy name nor thy face, Eurydice," said he, "but my heart beats with thy heart as though we were not strangers."

"When two hearts beat together, Orpheus, they are strangers no more, whether they have known each other all their days or have met as thou and I have met. Long ago the fame of thee, and of thy singing, reached mine ears, but I hardened my heart against thee, and said, 'It is an idle rumour, and he is no better than other men, before whose face I flee.' But now the gods have brought thy steps to the hollow cave where I dwell, and thou, by thy magic, has drawn me to thy feet, so that I, who doubted thy power, must follow thee whithersoever thou wilt."

FROM THE SHADOW OF THE CAVE CREPT A WOOD-NYMPH, AND LAY UPON THE GRASS.

"Shall I sing the a song, Eurydice—the song thou hast sown in my heart?"

"Yes, sing me that song," she answered.

So he struck the chords of his lyre and sang her the song that was born of her beauty. One by one the wild creatures stole back to the forest, for that song was not for them, and they two were left alone beneath the spreading boughs of the beech-tree. As he sang, Eurydice crept closer to him, till her head rested on his knee and her long black hair fell in a cloud about his feet. As she drew nearer his voice grew lower, till it became a whisper in her ear. Then he laid his lyre on the ground beside him and put his arms about her, and their hearts spoke to each other in the tongue that knows not sound nor words.

So it came to pass that Orpheus returned no more to dwell with Cheiron and his companions in the hollow cave below Pelion, but lived with Eurydice, his wife, in her cave in the heart of the forest. But he never forgot his boyhood's happy days, nor all that Cheiron had done for him. He would come often to see him and take counsel with him, and sing to the lads his magic song. For a few short years he lived a life the gods might envy, till the dark days came, when not even music could bring comfort to his heart. For one day, as he roamed with Eurydice through the dark forest, it chanced that she unwittingly trod upon a snake, and the creature turned upon her and pierced her white foot with its venomous fang. Like liquid fire the poison ran through her veins, and she lay faint and dying in his arms.

"O Eurydice," he cried, "Eurydice, open thine eyes and come back to me!"

For a moment the agony of his voice awoke her to life.

"Orpheus," she said, "beloved, this side of the river of death we can dwell together no more. But love, my dear one, is stronger than death, and some day our love shall prevail, never again to be conquered."

When she had spoken her head sank down upon his breast, and her spirit fled away, to return no more. So he bore the fair image of his wife in his arms, and laid her in the depths of the cave that had been

their home. Above her head he placed a great pine torch, and all the long night watches he sat with his arms about her and his cheek against her cheek; and his heart groaned within him with a grief too great for words. Ere the day dawned he kissed for the last time the lips that could speak to him never again, and laid back her head on a pillow of leaves and moss. Then he pulled down the earth and stones about the mouth of the cave, so that no one could find the opening, and left for evermore the home he had loved so well. Onward he walked in the grey light of dawn, little caring where he went, and struck the chords of his lyre to tell all the earth of his grief. The trees and the flowers bowed down their heads as they listened, the clouds of heaven dropped tears upon the ground, and the whole world mourned with him for the death of Eurydice his wife.

"Oh, sleep no more, ye woods and forests!" he sang, "sleep no more, but toss your arms in the sighing wind, and bow your heads beneath the sky that weeps with me. For Eurydice is dead. She is dead. No more shall her white feet glance through the grass, nor the field flowers shine in her hair. But, like last year's snow, she is melted away, and my heart is desolate without her. Oh! why may the dried grass grow green again, but my love must be dead for ever? O ye woods and forests, sleep no more, but awake and mourn with me. For Eurydice is dead; she is dead, dead, dead!"

So he wandered, making his moan and wringing the hearts of all who heard him, with the sorrow of his singing. And when he could find no more comfort upon earth he bethought him of the words of his wife:

"This side of the river of death we can dwell together no more. But love, my dear one, is stronger than death, and some day our love shall prevail, never again to be conquered."

He pondered the words in his heart, and wondered what she might mean.

"If love is stronger than death," he thought, "then my love can win her back. If I can charm the hearts of living things with the magic of

my song, I may charm, too, the souls of the dead and of their pitiless king, so that he shall give me back Eurydice, my wife. I will go down to the dark halls of Hades, and bring her up to the fair earth once more."

When hope was thus born anew in his heart he grew brave for any venture, and pressed forward on his way till he came to the place men called the mouth of Hades. Nothing daunted by the tales of horror they told him, he entered the fearsome cave, which led deep down into the bowels of the earth, where noisome vapours chocked the breath in his throat, and the dark forms crouched in his path and fled shrieking before him, till at last he stood by the shores of the ninefold Styx, that winds about the realms of the dead. Then he shouted aloud to Charon, the ferryman, to row him across in his boat. When the old man heard his voice, he stopped midway across the stream.

"Who is it that calls me in the voice of the living?" he asked.

"It is Orpheus," he answered. "I am come to fetch back Eurydice, my wife."

But the old man laughed, and his laugh cut the heart of Orpheus like a knife.

"O beardless innocent," he said, "who gave thee power over life and death? I tell thee that many have stood by the shores of this stream and entreated me to take them across, that they might bring their dear ones back with them. But no living soul shall sit in my boat, nor shall the dead, who have sat in it once, ever return to sit in it again. Go back to earth, young man, and when thy time has come, thou too shalt sit in my boat, never fear."

"That time has come, Charon," he said, "and I shall sit in thy boat this day."

Raising his lyre, he struck the chords, and his love taught him the tune and the words to sing. Steadfastly he gazed at Charon, and the

magic of his singing drew the old man towards him as surely as though the rope of the boat were in his hands. Without ceasing his song, he took his place in the stern, and in time to the music Charon dipped his oars in the stream, so that the boat swung over the river as it had never swung before. As it stranded in the shallow water, Orpheus leaped lightly to the shore.

"Farewell for the present, Charon," he cried; "we shall meet again ere long."

He hastened on his way, playing and singing his magic song. Resting on his pole, the old man looked after him with wonder in his heart, and shaded his eyes with his hand. For a ray of the sun seemed to shine for a moment in that cold grey land as Orpheus passed by. The pale flowers of hell tossed their heads to and fro, as though the west wind played through their leaves, and their colour and their scent came back to them once more. With a sigh, Charon breathed in the perfume from the air, and tossed back the grey locks from his brow and straightened his drooping shoulders.

"It is long since I smelt the fresh smell of the earth," he muttered. "Who is this young god, who can bring light to the darkness and life to the realms of the dead?"

So till Orpheus passed out of sight and the sound of his singing grew faint in the distance Charon stood looking after him, and then with a sigh he sat down in his boat and bent to his oars once more.

And Orpheus went on his way, with hope beating high in his heart, till he came to the portals of the palace of Death. On the threshold lay Cerberus, the three-headed hound of hell, who night and day kept watch beside the gate to see that no one passed in save those who had died upon earth, and that those who had passed him once should pass him never again. When he heard Orpheus coming, he sprang to his feet and snarled and growled and bared his sharp white fangs; but as the strains of music grew clearer he sank silent to the ground, and stretched his three great heads between his paws. Orpheus, as he passed by, bent down and stroked him, and the fierce

beast licked his hands. So did he enter into the gates of Death, and passed through the shadowy halls, till he stood before the throne of Pluto, the king. A dim and awful form did he sit, wrapped about in darkness and mist, and on his right hand sat Persephone, his wife, whom he stole from the meadows of Sicily. When he saw Orpheus his eyes gleamed like the gleam of cold steel, and he stretched forth his gaunt right arm towards him.

"What dost thou here, Orpheus?" he asked.

"I am come to ask thee a boon, O king," he answered.

"There be many that ask me a boon," said Pluto, "but none that receive it."

"Yet none have stood before thee in the flesh, as I do, O king, to ask their boon."

"Because thou hast trespassed unlawfully on my domain, dost thou think that I will grant thee thy boon?"

"Nay; but because my grief is so great that I have dared what none have dared before me, I pray thee to hear me."

Without waiting for an answer, he struck his lyre and sang to them the story of his life, and how he had loved and lost Eurydice. The eyes of the pale queen brightened when she heard him, and the colour came back to her cheeks, as the song brought back to her mind the days of her girlhood and the sunlit meadows of Sicily. Then a great pity filled her heart for Eurydice, who had left the green earth for ever, and might not return, as she herself did, in the spring-time, living only the dark winter months below. As Orpheus ceased his song she laid her hand upon her husband's.

"My lord," she said, "grant his boon, I pray thee. He is brave and true-hearted, and he sings as no man has ever sung before."

But the stern king sat with his head upon his hand and eyes cast down, deep in thought. At length he spoke, and his voice was soft and kind.

"Orpheus," he said, "thou hast touched my heart with thy singing. Yet it lies not with me to grant thee thy boon."

"But if the queen, thy wife, may return to the earth in the spring-time, may not Eurydice, too, come back at thy command?" asked Orpheus.

"The ways of the gods are not the ways of mortals, Orpheus; they walk by paths you may not tread. Yet, though I have no power to give thee back Eurydice, thou mayest win her thyself if thou hast the strength."

"How may that be?" cried Orpheus. "For the sake of Eurydice I have strength for any venture."

"No strength of the flesh can win her, Orpheus, but the strength of a faith unfaltering. I will send for her, and when thou seest her stand within the hall, holding out her hands towards thee, thou must harden thy heart, and turn and flee before her by the way thou camest. For the love of thee she will follow, and she will entreat thee to look at her and give her thy hand over the stony way. But thou must neither look at her nor speak to her. One look, one word, will be thine undoing, and she must vanish from thine eyes for ever. The spell of thy song still rests upon the guardians of my kingdom, and they will let thee and thy wife pass by. But think not by word nor deed to help her. Alone she passed from life to death, and alone she must pass back from death to life. Her love and thy faith can be the only bond between you. Hast thou the strength for this?"

"My lord," cried Orpheus, " 'tis but a small thing to ask for a love like mine."

"It will be harder than thou thinkest," the king replied. "Nevertheless, I will call Eurydice."

He signed to a messenger to fetch her. In a few moments he returned, and behind him came Eurydice from the garden of Death. The dank dew hung heavy about her, and she walked with her eyes upon the ground, while her long black hair hid the paleness of her face. Thus did she come into the centre of the hall, and, not speaking or moving, Orpheus gazed upon her till she raised her eyes and saw him. With a cry she sprang towards him.

"Orpheus!" she cried.

But, remembering the words of the king, he turned and fled before her through the misty halls and out by the great gate, where Cerberus lay tamed with his heads between his paws. And he tried to shut his ears to her pleading as they sped across the plain, but every word that she said cut his heart like a stab, and more than once he almost turned to answer her, so piteous was her cry.

"Oh, Orpheus, what have I done? Why dost thou flee from me? Oh, give me one word, one look, to say thou lov'st me still."

But he remained firm in his resolve, and sat himself in Charon's boat, and steeled his heart, whilst she sat beside him, but could not touch him. For he was a living soul, and she was a shade, and might not touch him if she would. But still she pleaded with him.

"O Orpheus, my heart is starving for one look, one word. I know thou lovest me, but oh! to see thine eyes tell me so and hear thy lips say it."

He longed to turn and clasp her in his arms, and tell her how he loved her better than life. But still he refrained, and hugged his lyre close to his breast in his agony; and as soon as the boat touched the shore he leapt out and hastened up the steep, dark path, whilst the sweat stood out in drops upon his brow, so hard was the way and so stifling the air. Behind him followed Eurydice, and if the way was hard for him, for her it was ten times harder. She had no strength for words, and only by her sobs did Orpheus know she was following still. So they went on, till at length the air grew pure and fresh, and

the daylight shone before them at the mouth of the cave. With eager steps Orpheus pressed forward, longing for the moment when he might clasp his wife in his arms and speak to her once more. But as the way grew easier for him, it grew harder for Eurydice; since no one may pass from death to life without sore travail and pain. So she struggled and stumbled after him, and her heart gave way within her as she felt she could follow no farther.

"Orpheus!" she cried in her despair, "thy hand."

Ere reason could restrain him, his heart had answered her sudden cry, and he turned and held out his arms to help her. All too late he knew his folly. For even as he was about to hold her she slipped away, and as smoke is borne away on the wings of the wind, so was she borne away, helpless and lifeless, to the realms of the dead, and her voice floated back like the echo of a dream.

"Farewell, Orpheus. Alas! Alas! farewell!"

So for the second time did he lose Eurydice; and if his grief was great before, it was ten times greater now. For as the cup of joy had touched his lips it had slipped from his hand and broken, and he knew that the chance the gods had given him once they would give him never again, but that all his life long he must dwell in loneliness without Eurydice his wife. Blindly he went forward with his lyre beneath his arm. The strings hung broken and lifeless, for the rocks and thorns had torn them as he passed on his way up from Hades. But he heeded not nor made any effort to mend them, for the strings of his heart hung broken too, and the music in his soul was dead. In black despair he wandered on, and the sunshine to his eyes was darkness, and the fair forms of earth were sadder than the phantoms of Hades had seemed to him while hope still beat in his breast. As a colt that has wandered far by unknown paths returns at last surely to his homestead, so did his feet carry him back to Pelion and the dear home of his boyhood. Not till he stood in the path which led up to the cave did he know where he had come; but when he saw the mouth of the cave before him his eyes were opened once more, and a faint joy stole into his heart as he went on and sat down on a stone

outside. All was silent and deserted, and he sat for a while alone with his own sad thoughts, till he felt a touch upon his shoulder, and looked up into the face of Cheiron standing beside him.

"ORPHEUS!" SHE CRIED IN HER DESPAIR, "THY HAND."

"Oh my master!" he cried.

"My son, thou hast suffered," said Cheiron.

"I have been down into Hades, Cheiron," he answered.

"My child," said Cheiron, "I know it all."

He gazed upon him, his great mild eyes full of pity, and Orpheus gazed back at him, and knew that he understood, though how he had learnt his tale he could not tell. His heart drew comfort from the sympathy that understood without words, and was softened as the parched earth is softened by rain, so that he took Cheiron's hands between his, and bowed his head upon them, and wept.

Thus it came to pass that he returned to his boyhood's home, and dwelt once more with Cheiron and his lads beneath the shade of snow-capped Pelion. In time the bitterness of his grief was purged away, and he remembered Eurydice as something bright and fair that had been woven into the web of his life while yet it was young, and which could never be taken away. As he listened again to the old songs which Cheiron had sung to him and his comrades when they were lads, the fire and the eagerness of his youth were born once more within him. When he saw the elder ones go forth into the world and little lads brought up to take their place with Cheiron, he felt how life stands ever beckoning and calling to those in whose veins the blood of gods and heroes runs, and they go forth to rule and to serve, to fight and to labour, in answer to the call which the foolish do not hear. So one morning he took his lyre, which for many a long day had lain silent, and putting fresh strings for the ones that were broken, he passed his fingers lovingly over them as of old. And the spirit of music sprang to life once more in his heart, as the flowers spring to life when the winter is past, so that once again he could charm every living thing by the magic of his song.

When Cheiron knew that his power had come back to him he was glad.

"Orpheus," he said, "thou hast conquered. A weaker man than thou art would have lain crushed beneath the foot of adversity. But those who bravely rise again are stronger than before."

"Master," he said, "when I saw the broken strings of my lyre and felt my voice choked within me, I said, 'With the breaking of this string the music dies and becomes a voiceless echo of the past, just as now Eurydice is a shade in the shadowy land while her body is dust upon earth,' and lo! ere the strings were mended or the voice grew strong again, the soul of song lived once more in my heart, as on the day when first my mother Calliope breathed her spirit upon me. If music may live without sound or words, may not the soul live without bones and flesh? This is a mystery, and I must seek the wide world for an answer."

And Cheiron smiled upon him.

"It is good to seek," said he, "though thou find no answer in the end."

"Yet will I find an answer," said Orpheus.

So when the call of Jason came soon after, for him to sail with the heroes in the good ship *Argo* for the finding of the Golden Fleece, and to be their minstrel on the stormy seas, he went down right gladly to Iolchos. At the sound of his song the gallant ship leapt over the stones and into the sea like a charger ready for battle, though before she had been too heavy to move. So he sailed with the heroes on their perilous venture, filling their hearts with courage and hope, and took them safely through many a danger by the magic of his song. But though many had set out, there were few that returned, and he saw the wreck of many a promising life on that terrible voyage, but found no answer for his quest. He bowed his head in reverence to the memory of those who, for the sake of adventure and honour and a noble name, had poured forth their lives like water on a thirsty soil, knowing full well when they set forth that the danger would be for all, but the prize and the dear home-coming for few.

So, as soon as might be, he set forth again to wander the wide world alone with his lyre. Some say he went to Egypt, others to Crete, but wherever he went he found the great god Dionysos, the god of many names—Bromios, Bacchos, Zagreus—who fills men's minds with inspiration and divine madness, so that they become one with him and with the life that lives for ever behind the forms of things that die. He ate of the flesh of the mystic bull, which is the god himself, and to the sound of his lyre the Mænads danced over the mountains and through untrodden woods, and held to their breasts young lions, and cubs of the untamed wolf. Far away from towns and cities, where custom and language raise barriers between man and man, on the breast of the untouched earth they danced their mystic dance, and became one with Bacchos and with all things that have life in the present, or have lived in the past. There Orpheus found Eurydice again in the communion of soul with soul, and learnt what she had meant when she said, "Some day our love shall prevail, never again to be conquered." So it came to pass that he became the priest of Bacchos, the mystic god, who is one with Life and Love. And he wrote upon tablets the rule of life, by which, through purity and initiation, men may become one with god, and when they have been purified by birth and re-birth in many diverse forms, they may win, because they are one with him, the immortal life that changeth not, like the life of the stars in heaven.

The tale goes of Orpheus that he at last came to Thrace and the wild mountain lands that lie to the north of Greece. There he tamed the fierce hill tribes with the magic of his song, and lived a life of abstinence and purity and ecstasy of the soul. But the followers of Dionysos who dwelt in those parts looked on him askance; for whereas they worshiped the god with sheding of blood and rending of goats, in the madness that is born of wine, the ecstasy of his worship was born of music and beauty, and he would have no part nor lot in their wild revels. And because there is no hate that is greater than the hate of those who worship one god in divers way, there came a day when the mad frenzy of the Mænads was turned against Orpheus himself. As he sat looking forth on the sunrise and singing as he touched his lyre, the raving band came up behind him, full of madness and of wine. And they tore him limb from limb in

their frenzy, as they had torn the wild goats before, and cast his head into the Hebrus, thinking to silence his singing for ever. But his head floated on the waves of the eddying stream, fair and fresh as in life, singing as it floated its magic enchanting song. Gently the river bore it along and down to the sea, and the blue sea waves kissed it and passed it from one to the other, till at last they cast it up, still singing, on the shore of the Lesbian Isle. There the Muses came and buried it, and made of its tomb a sacred shrine, where, for many a long year, men came from far and wide to worship and consult the oracle. About that shrine the nightingales sang more sweetly than in any other spot on earth, for they learnt their song from the lips of Orpheus himself. And men bound themselves in a holy brotherhood which they called by his name, and lived by the rules he had written on his tablets. Some of those who pretended to follow him were charlatans and rogues, and brought dishonour and ridicule upon his name, while others kept the letter without the spirit of his law; but among them were those of a pure and blameless life, who kept his doctrines, and handed them down from generation to generation, till in time they became the foundation-stones of the great philosophies of Pythagoras and Plato.

Thus did Orpheus live and die, and pointed out to men the path of immortality by purity and abstinence and ecstasy of the soul. There were many of old who hated his doctrine, and many who hate it now; and, indeed, it is not one by which every man can live. But there are those to whom it brings peace and joy, though they call it by other names than his; and these are the Bacchoi, the initiated, who have seen the inward light, and their souls are at peace.

THE FLIGHT OF ARETHUSA

ANY, many hundred years ago a small band of colonists set sail from Corinth to found for themselves a new home and a new city in the far-away west. With a song upon their lips, the sailors bent to their oars.

"Heave ho! Heave ho!" they sang, "for the three-cornered isle of the west! Heave ho! for the fountain that fails not, and the whispering willow-trees! Heave ho! for the waters that are wedded with the waters of our own native land!"

Then, as the breeze filled their sails, they pulled in their oars, and looked back for the last time at the home they were leaving for ever. Proudly between two seas did the rock of Corinth raise her head, encircled with a diadem of walls and towers. With tears in their eyes they watched her sink, and soon all around them was nothing but the waste of the grey sea waves. Thus did they leave the old land for the new with joy and sorrow, hope and fear in their hearts, and sailed away to the west, to the land of their dreams, the three-cornered isle of which the oracle had spoken. For when Archias, their leader, had consulted the priestess at Delphi, she had answered,

"To Trinacria the god bids thee go, the three-cornered isle of the west. There on Ortygia, the sacred islet, shalt thou build thee a home, by the side of the fountain that fails not, Arethusa, whose waters are wedded with the waters of thine own native land."

So, in obedience to her words, Archias set sail with his little band. And they found Ortygia and the spring Arethusa in the shade of the whispering willows. There they planted the seed of that city, which grew to be the greatest in all Sicily and the mistress of the Mediterranean—Syracuse, proud Corinth's prouder daughter. For her sake many a battle has been fought and many a weary war been

waged; for through long centuries men knew that whoever held the keys of Syracuse held the keys of power in their hands.

But what did the priestess mean when she bade Archias go to the isle whose waters were wedded with the waters of his own native land? And how came it that when he and his band reached Sicily they found there the flowers and the fruit of the home they had left, and streams that ran in and out of the limestone rocks like the streams of the Peloponnese? I will tell you.

Arethusa, around whose spring in Ortygia the whispering willows bent, was once a nymph, who dwelt in the Arcadian woodlands and followed Artemis the maiden huntress, over hill and over dale. Artemis loved her above all the other nymphs who were her handmaids, and as a sign of her favour she would let her carry her bow and her quiver full of darts. On many a hot summer's day did Arethusa and her companions bathe with their mistress in the cool deep mountain pools. Above their heads the great oaks of the forest spread their branches, and the grass beneath their feet was fresh and green. So long as they stayed by the side of their mistress the nymphs were safe from harm, for no god or goddess in all the land was so powerful as Artemis, and she knew how to protect her own.

So it came to pass that, because Arethusa had never known what fear was, she grew to think that there was no such thing, and one day she left her mistress and her comrades, and wandered forth alone through the woods. Her heart was gay and light, and she sang as she went. In the gloom of the forest she was like a ray of the sun, and on the bare hill-sides she was like a sparkling stream that leaves green grass and flowers wherever it passes. But she thought nothing of her beauty, nor feared any harm because of it. As soon would lily cease from growing, because it feared to be plucked for the sake of its fair sweet flower. So she wandered on happy and light-hearted on that bright summer's day.

ON AND ON SHE FLED, WITH THE SWIFTNESS AND STRENGTH OF DESPAIR.

At last she came to a broad river that barred her path. High up above her head the water fell leaping and roaring down the face of the

rocks, while below the swift current hurried along through swirling eddies and foam. When she saw that she could go no farther, she sat down on a rock by the edge of a stream, and let the cool water play over her feet; then she bent down to fill her hand and drink. As she did so her heart stopped beating, and her limbs grew stiff and numb, and for the first time in her life she knew what fear was. For out of the waters before her there rose up what seemed a great billow of foam and spray, which stretched out a long arm towards her, and from the tips of five great fingers the drops fell cold upon her shoulders. With a cry, she drew herself together, and turned and fled; but she had seen the form of the river-god grow clear in the billow, with the water flowing down from his damp hair and beard, and the flash of his eyes like the flash of lighting in the midst of foam. It was Alpheus, the king of all the rivers of Peloponnese. He had seen Arethusa alone on the bank, and for love of her beauty he had risen from the depths of the stream and stretched out his arms to gather her to himself, and draw her down beneath the waves, to live with him and be his for ever. But she had been too quick for him, and now she fled before him as a deer flees before the hounds, whilst the fear that had numbed her at first now lent wings to her feet. Over hill and over dale she fled, swift as the rushing wind. Her bright locks flew out behind her, and as she leapt from rock to rock her white robes gleamed like the gleam of sunlit waters. Close behind her came Alpheus. The deafening roar of his flood sounded like thunder in her ears, and his misty breath blew cold upon her cheek. On and on she fled, with the swiftness and strength of despair, till at last she could go no farther; for before her stretched the blue waste of the cruel Ionian, and the spray of the waves stung her face, while behind her the floods of Alpheus rushed thundering down. Then she stretched forth her hands, and cried out to the Maid of the Sea,

"O Dictynna, Dictynna, have mercy! In the name of great Artemis, whom thou lovest as I do, help me now."

The Maid of the Sea heard her cry, and wrapped her about in a mist, and her body and her limbs were unloosed and melted away, till she became a spring of fresh, pure water that bubbled and danced over the stones of the shore, and dived at last into the waves of the sea.

But behind her the flood of Alpheus still rushed leaping and foaming. He had followed her over mountain and valley, and he followed her now through the ocean. Down through the white waves they dived into the depths of the sea, and passed like silvery currents of light through the green sleeping waters, on and on, through forests of seaweed, and over shell-strewn rocks, till they were stopped at last in their flight by the roots of the three-cornered isle. There, through the fissures and clefts, they forced their way up once more to the sunlight, and side by side they leapt down from the rocks and the crags—down towards the sea once again. But Arethusa fled no longer in terror, and her fear of Alpheus was gone; for he pursued her no more in a thundering, boisterous flood. Now he held out his strong white arms, and called to her gently and low—as gently as the waves call in summer as they dance to the shore.

"Arethusa, Arethusa, I love thee. Come, join thy waters with mine."

But she leapt away from him with a happy, mischievous laugh, and tossed back the spray from her hair, so that it fell on his cheek like a shower of kisses. Thus she leapt laughing, down over the rocks and crags towards the sea, knowing full well that he played with her, and that any moment he could make her his own. At last, as she hovered for a moment on the brink of the cliff, he caught her in his strong white arms, and together they dived once more into the salt sea waves, so that their waters were mingled, and for evermore they were one. And Arethusa showed her bright head again in the spring beneath the willows of Ortygia, which is called by her name to this day. From the time of her flight that spring never failed or grew dry, for from the snows of the mountains Alpheus flowed always to meet her, bringing coolness and plenty to the waters he loved. Men said, moreover, that if a cup were put into the stream of Alpheus in the Peloponnese it would find its way at last to the spring in Ortygia—which showed that the waters of Arethusa and Alpheus were wedded and blended together, so that they lived apart no more.

And that was the reason why Archias found in Sicily the flowers and the fruit of the land he had left; for Alpheus had borne their seeds in his stream from Peloponnese, and scattered them right and left as he

sprang through the rocks, that the winds of heaven might sow them where they willed. To this day you will find in Sicily the olive and the vine, and the blushing flower of the almond, and the narcissus with its crown of gold, as you find them in Peloponnese; for is not the water that feeds their meadows one stream that joins two lands? And on the first coins of Syracuse you will find the head of the nymph Arethusa, with the fish swimming round about; for was it not by the side of her spring that the first stones of the city were laid, on the sacred isle of Ortygia, round which the sea-fish swam?

Thus did Arethusa flee in terror from Alpheus, to be wedded to him at last in a land across the sea.

THE WINNING OF ATALANTA

NCE upon a time there ruled in Arcadian Tegea a proud-hearted king named Schœnus. A tamer of horses was he, and a man mighty in the hunt and in battle. Above every other thing he loved danger and sport and all kinds of manly exercise. Indeed, these things were the passion of his life, and he despised all womenkind because they could take no part nor lot in them. And he wedded Clymene, a fair princess of a royal house, because he wished to raise up noble sons in his halls, who should ride and hunt with him, and carry on his name when he was dead. On his wedding day he swore a great oath, and called upon all the gods to witness it.

"Never," he swore in his pride, "shall a maid child live in my halls. If a maid is born to me, she shall die ere her eyes see the light, and the honour of my house shall rest upon my sons alone."

When a man swears an oath in his pride, he repents full oft in humility, and so it fell out now. For many a long year no child was born to him, and when at last he had hopes of an heir, the babe that was born was a maid. When he saw the child his heart was cut in two, and the pride of a father and the pride of his oath did battle within him for victory. The pride of his oath conquered, for he was afraid to break his word in the face of all his people. He hardened his heart, though he had held the babe in his arms, and its little hand with a birthmark above the wrist had closed about his finger trustfully, and gave orders that the child should be cast out upon the mountains to die of hunger and cold. So the babe was given to a servant, who bore it forth and left it on the slope of bleak Parthenius. But Fate made a mock of Schœnus, of his pride and of his oath, for no other child, either man or maid, was born to him in his halls. All too late he repented of his folly, when he saw his hearth desolate and no children round his board, and knew that not only his name, but

his race, was like to die with him, because of the rash oath which he had sworn.

Yet there was one who had pity on the babe, and whose heart was kinder than the heart of its own sire. When Artemis, the maiden goddess, saw the child cast forth to die, she was filled with anger against Schœnus, and swore that it should live. For it was a fair child, and a maid after her own heart, and no young life ever called to her in vain for mercy. Wherefore she sent a she-bear to the place where the child lay, and softened the heart of the beast, so that she lifted it gently in her mouth and bore it to the cave where her own cubs lay hid. There she suckled it with her own young ones, and tended it night and day, till it grew strong and could walk, and the cave rang with its laughter as it played and gambolled with the young bears. When Artemis knew that the child was old enough to live without its foster-mother, she sent her nymphs to fetch it away, and when they bore it to her she was well pleased to find it fair and strong.

"Her name shall be Atalanta," she said to them. "She shall dwell on the mountains and in the woods of Arcadia, and be one of my band with you. A mighty huntress shall she be, and the swiftest of all mortals upon earth; and in time she shall return to her own fold and bring joy and sorrow to their hearts."

Thus it came to pass that Atalanta lived with the nymphs in the woodlands of Arcadia. They taught her to run and to hunt, and to shoot with bow and arrows, till soon the day came when she could do these things as well as any of their band. For the blood of her father ran hot in her veins; and not more easily does a young bird learn to fly than Atalanta learnt to love all manner of sport. So she came to womanhood in the heart of the hills, and as her form grew in height and strength, it grew too in beauty and grace. The light of the sunbeam lay hid in her hair, and the blue of the sky in her eyes, and all the rivers of Arcadia bathed her limbs and made them fresh and white. But she thought little of her beauty, or the power it might have over the hearts of men, for all her delight was in the hunt, and to follow Artemis, her mistress, over hill and over dale. Artemis

loved her, and delighted to do her honour; and when the land of Calydon cried to her for mercy, because of the boar she had sent to ravage it in her wrath, she decreed that none but Atalanta should have the glory of that hunt. The tale of how she came to Calydon, and of how the boar was slain at last through her, I have told you before; and of how death came to Meleager, because he loved her, and would not let any man insult her while he stood idly by. By the fame of that hunt her name was carried far and wide through Hellas, so that when she came to the funeral games of Pelias there was no need to ask who she was. She ran in the foot race against the swiftest in the land, and won the prize so easily that when she reached the goal the first man had scarce passed the turning-point, though he was no sluggard to make a mock of. When the games were over, she went back to Arcadia without a tear or a sigh, but her face and her memory lived in the heart of many a man whose very name she had not known; and when presently the news went abroad that she would wed the man who could win her, they flocked from far and wide, because they loved her better than life; for they knew that the unsuccessful went forth to certain death.

The tale of how Atalanta went back to her own folk, and of how she was wooed and won, is as follows:

One day, when King Schœnus had a great hunt in the forest on the edge of his domain, it chanced that Atalanta had come to those parts; and when she heard the blare of the bugles and the barking of the hounds, her heart leapt with joy. As a dog, when he hears the voice of his master, pricks up his ears and runs swiftly to meet him, so did Atalanta run swiftly through the woods when she heard the sound of bugles. Full often she joined a hunt on the uplands of Arcadia, and run with the hounds; and when the hunt was over she had fled back into the forest, away from those who had been fain for her to stay. For she loved the hunt but not the hunters; but, because she was a mortal and born of a mortal race, she did not flee from their eyes, as the woodland nymphs fled, but hunted with them for joy of the hunt, and left them when it pleased her. So now she joined the chase as the stag broke loose from cover, and her white fleet flashed in the

sunlight as she followed the hounds across the open moorland. King Schœnus, when he saw her, was glad.

"It is Atalanta, the maiden huntress," he cried. "See that she be treated with due courtesy, for she is the only woman on earth who is fit to look a man in the face."

And he rode eagerly after her. But the best horse in all that company was no match for Atalanta. Far ahead of them all she shot, like an arrow from the bow, and when at least the stag turned at bay in a pool, she was the first to reach him. When the rest had come up, and the huntsman had slain the stag, the king turned to her.

"Atalanta," he said, "the trophy of this chase is thine, and my huntsman shall bear the head of the stag whithersoever thou shalt bid him. In token of our esteem, I beg thee accept this ring. When thou lookest upon it, think kindly of an old man whose heart is lonely, and who would fain have a daughter like thee.

As he spoke he drew off a gold ring from his finger and held it towards her; the tears stood in his eyes and his hand shook as he looked on her fair young form, and remembered the babe he had cast out on the the mountains to die. If she had lived she would have been of an age with Atalanta, and perchance as fair and as strong as she; and his heart was bitter against himself for the folly of his oath.

When Atalanta heard his words, she had a mind at first to refuse his gift. Many a man before had offered her gifts, and she had refused them every one; for she had no wish to be beholden to any man. But when she saw the eyes of the old king dim with tears, and how his hand shook as he held out the ring, her heart was softened, and yearned with a strange yearning towards him. Coming forward, she knelt at his feet and took the ring, and held his hand and kissed it.

"May the gods grant the prayer of thy heart, sire," she said, "and give thee a daughter like unto me, but fairer and more wise than I!"

As he looked down on the hand that held his own the old king trembled more violently than before, for above the wrist was a birthmark like the birthmark above the wrist of the babe he had cast forth to die. And he knew that he made no mistake, for that mark had lived in his mind as though it had been branded with red-hot steel.

"Atalanta," he said, "the gods have heard thy prayer. This is not the first time thy fingers have closed about mine."

"What meanest thou, sire?" she asked.

"As many years ago as the span of thy young life," he said, "I held in my arms a new-born babe, the child that the gods had given me, and its little hand with a birthmark above the wrist closed about my finger trust-fully. But because of my foolish pride I hardened my heart. I cast away the gift of the gods and sent the child to die upon the mountains. But the birthmark on its wrist was branded on my brain so that I could not forget it. Never till this day have I seen that mark again, and now I see it on thy wrist, my child."

He bowed his head as he spoke, and the tears from his eyes fell upon her hand, which lay in his as she knelt before him.

"Oh, my father!" she cried, and bent forward and kissed his hand.

When he found that she did not turn from him, though she knew what he had done, he was more deeply moved than before.

"Atalanta," he said, "when I cast thee forth to die, I gave back to the gods the life they had given me, and now I have no right to claim it again. Yet would thy presence be a sunshine in my halls if thou wert to come back to me, my child."

Thus did the call come to Atalanta to return to her own folk, and the choice lay before her. On the one side was her free life in the forest, with Artemis and her nymphs, the hunt, the fresh air, and all the things that she loved; on the other was life within the walls of a city,

and the need to bow her head to the customs and the ways of men. Her heart misgave her when she thought of it.

"OH, MY FATHER!" SHE CRIED.

"My lord," she said, "will a young lion step into the cage of his own free will, think you?"

The old king bowed his head at her words.

"Alas! what other answer could I look for?" he said. "I thank the gods that they have shown me thy fair face this day. Perchance, when we hunt again in these parts, thou wilt join us for love of the chase. Till then, my child, farewell."

With trembling hands he raised her from her knees, and kissed her on the forehead. Then he signed to his men to lead forward his horse, and mounted and rode sadly home through the forest with his company. And Atalanta shaded her eyes and stood watching them till they disappeared from sight. When they had gone, she sighed, and turned and went upon her way. But her eyes were blind and her ears were deaf to the sights and sounds she loved so well, and that night she tossed restlessly upon her couch of moss. For before her eyes was the figure of an old man bowed with sorrow, and in her ear his voice pleaded, trembling with longing and love.

"Thy presence would be as sunshine in my halls if thou wert to come back to me, my child."

In the dawn she rose up from her couch, and bathed in a stream close by, and gathered up her shining hair in a coil about her head. Then she put on her sandals and a fresh white tunic, slung her quiver about her shoulders, and bow in hand went forth through the forest. Looking neither to the right nor to the left, she went on her way till she came to the white road that led to the city. Then she turned and looked back at the forest.

"Dear trees and woods," she said, "farewell, and ye nymphs that dwell in the streams and dance on the green sward of the mountains. When I have trodden the white road and gone up to the city, I can live with you no more. As for thee, great Artemis, who saved me in the beginning, I will be thy servant for ever, and dwell a maiden all my days, and a lover of the hunt."

She leant her head against a tree close by, and the tears stood in her eyes. It seemed that the breeze bore her words on its wings, for she

heard a sigh from the forest, and the waters cried out to her, "Atalanta, come back, come back!"

But she closed her ears, and stepped out bravely on the white highway, and went up into the city. The people as they saw her pass marvelled greatly at her beauty, and whispered on to the other, "Surely it is Atalanta, the king's daughter. What doth she here?"

For the tale of how King Schœnus had found his child, and of how she had refused to come home with him, had spread like wildfire through the city; so that when they saw her, they knew full well who she must be. She took no heed of them at all, but went straight forward on her way till she came to the gate of the palace. The gate stood open, and without knocking or calling she passed in, and went across the echoing court and beneath the portico into the great hall, as one who comes by night. When she had entered the hall, she stopped and looked about her. At first all seemed silent and deserted, for the folk had gone their several ways for the work of the day; but at length she spied an old man sitting on a carved chair in one of the alcoves between the pillars. It was the king, her father. He sat with his head upon his hand and his eyes downcast upon the floor, and his face was sad and full of longing, as of one who dreams sweet dreams which he knows will not come true. Gently she drew near him, and thanked the gods who had timed her coming so that she should find him alone. And she went and knelt at his feet. The old man gazed for a moment in her face, as though he did not see her; then he started from his chair and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Atalanta!" he cried.

"My father," she said, "I have come back to thee."

Then he gathered her up in his arms.

"Oh, my child, my child!" he said. "The gods are kind beyond my desert."

"Thy voice cried out to me in the night-time," she said, "and I could not shut my heart to thy pleading. The call of the free earth was strong, but the call of my blood was stronger."

Thus did Atalanta come back to her own folk, and bring joy to the heart of her father and the mother who had never held her in her arms. A great feast was held in the palace in her honour, and through all the city the people rejoiced because of her. For she was a fair princess of whom any land might be proud, and her fame had spread through the length and breadth of Hellas. Indeed, as soon as it was known who she was, and how she had left the mountains to come and live with her own kin, suitors flocked from far and wide to seek her hand in marriage. But she treated them one and all with scorn, and vowed that she would never wed. At first her father smiled upon her, and looked on her refusal to wed as the sign of a noble nature, that was not to be won for the asking of the first chance-comers. So he gathered about him the noblest princes in the land in the hope that among them all there would be one who could win her heart. But the months passed by, and still she vowed that she would never wed. All her delight was in running and hunting, and to ride by her father's side. As for the young princes, she liked them full well for companions in sport, but as soon as they spoke of love and marriage she would turn her back upon them. At length the king grew anxious.

"Surely, my child," he said, "among all these princes there is one whom thou couldst love?"

"I shall never love any man but thee, my father," she replied.

"Yet all the hope of our race lies upon thee, Atalanta," he said. "If thou wilt not wed, our race will die."

"Our race died on the day on which thou didst cast me forth on the mountains," she answered. "If I have lived, it is no thanks to thee or to any of my people, but my life is hers who saved me on that day."

"What meanest thou?" said the king.

"When I left the forest and came back to thee I vowed a vow to Artemis, who saved me in the beginning. I said, 'I will be thy servant for ever, and dwell a maiden all my days and a lover of the hunt.' My life belongs to her, and not to my race, not to any son of man."

"We vow rash vows in ignorance, Atalanta," said the king, as he remembered the oath he had sworn on his wedding-day, "and Fate makes a mock of us, and turns our nay to yea."

But Atalanta laughed at his words.

"When Fate mocks at me," she said, "it will be time enough for me to wed and turn my nay to yea."

Nothing that he could say would persuade her to go back from her resolve. But still he reasoned with her night and day, till at length she grew so wearied of the matter that she bethought of a plan that would rid her of all her suitors.

"My father," she said, "I will wed any man who shall ask my hand, if he will also fulfil one condition."

"My child," cried the father, "I knew that in the end thou wouldst listen to reason. Tell me thy condition, that I may spread it abroad among those who are suing for thy hand."

"Tell them," she said, "that I will wed the first man among them who will run a race with me. If he win, I will be his bride, but if he lose, he must die."

The king's face fell when he heard her words.

"Surely thou speakest in mockery, Atalanta," he said. "No man in all the world can run as swiftly as thou canst, and they know it. Thou wilt drive thy suitors from thee; or if any be foolhardy enough to run with thee, they will run to a certain death."

"No man will run to a certain death, my father," she answered. "When they know that to sigh for me is to sigh for death, they will go back to their own folk, and I shall be troubled with suitors no more."

Herein she spoke in ignorance, and knew not the fatal power of her beauty upon the hearts of men. And her father sighed at her words. Yet he thought within himself,

"Perchance there is more in her words than meets the ear. The deep sea is easier to fathom than the mind of a woman. Either there is one among her suitors whom she favours above the rest, and she will see to it that he is the first to run with her, and will bridle her speed and let him win; or else, Heaven knows, some god has put this whim in her heart, and will send a champion we know not, who can run faster than the fastest, and he will outspeed her and make her his bride. She will never let men die because of her."

But herein he too thought in ignorance, and knew not how his own pride and stubbornness lived again in Atalanta, so that she would abide by her word, though it brought grief to herself and death to the others. So he published abroad among the suitors the condition she had made. When they heard it there was a great consternation among them, and they consulted together as to what they should do, and some sent a deputation to her to find out the meaning of her words.

"Lady," they asked, "when thou speakest of death thou speakest perchance of parables. Those who run in the race with thee and are outstripped must give up all hope of thee, and look upon thy face no more. And this would be death indeed to them that love thee."

But she laughed in their faces.

"If you would hear parables," she said, "go to the oracle at Delphi. I am no raving priestess to utter words that walk two ways at once. He who courts death may race with me at daybreak, and at sunset he

shall drink the poison-cup without fail, and look neither on my face again nor the face of any living thing. Have I spoken plainly now?"

The next day there was a great confusion in the halls of King Schœnus. There was shouting and bustling, and attendants ran this way and that. Chariots clattered through the gateway and drew up in the court, and baggage was piled high behind the horses. And Atalanta laughed aloud at the success of her scheme; for suitor after suitor came and kissed her hand and bade her farewell. They loved her much, but they loved life better, and were content to go home and find mates who, though less fair, were less ferocious, and were like to look upon their lords with eyes more lowly and obedient than Atalanta.

That night the gathering about the board was scantier than it had been for many a long day. Yet a few of the suitors remained, and seemed in no haste to be gone. Day after day passed by, and each night Atalanta said within herself,

"To-morrow they will surely go. They dwell in distant towns, and they are waiting for a favourable day for their journey."

But favourable days came and went, and still they stayed in the halls of King Schœnus. At last Atalanta could hide the dread in her heart no longer.

"How long will it be, my father," she asked, "ere we are troubled no more with strangers in our halls?"

"If thou wilt wed one of them, we shall be troubled with the rest no more," he replied.

"They know full well I can wed no man of them, because of the condition I have made," she said.

"They are waiting for thee to fulfil thy condition," said the king.

Then Atalanta herself went and pleaded with them.

"My friends," she said, "I pray you to be guided by me. The gods have not fashioned me after the manner of womenkind, and I cannot give myself nor my love to any man. Look upon me as one of yourselves, I pray you, and think not to win me in marriage."

But they replied, "Lady, thou hast given the condition of thy marriage, and we are waiting to fulfil it."

"But my condition means certain death," she cried.

"Nothing in this life is certain," they said, "save death in the end. If it come soon or late, what matter? For thy sake we are willing to face it now."

Thus was she forced to keep her word, and the lists were made ready for the race, and the lots were cast among the suitors as to which of them should be the first to run against her. In the early morning, before the sun was strong, the race was run, and all the city crowded to the course to watch it. The man ran well and bravely, but his speed was as a child's play to Atalanta. She put forth her strength like a greyhound that is content to run for a while before the horses, but when he scents a hare, can leave them behind. Even so did Atalanta run, and came in cool and fresh at the goal, whilst her rival ran in hot and panting behind her.

Thus did it come to pass that the first man drank the poison-cup because of his love for Atalanta. With a smiling face did he drink it, as a man drinks at a feast.

"Farewell, lady," he said; "grieve not for me. With open eyes I chose my fate. I ran for the sake of love and beauty, and I have won death. Such is ever the lot of the nameless many. They fight for the glory of the man whose name shall live. Good luck to my rival!"

And now a time of darkness and mourning fell upon the land, and many a day in the year the city was hung with black for the sake of some noble suitor who had chosen death rather than life without Atalanta. And Atalanta's heart was sore within her, because of the

rash condition she had made in her ignorance. When she would fain have recalled her words it was too late, for the suitors bound her to her promise.

"Either give thyself of thine own free will to one of us, or else let us take our chance of winning thee or death," they said.

And so she was forced to run with them. For in her heart she knew that even death was happier for a man than to win her without her love.

Thus were the words of Artemis fulfilled when she said, "In time she shall return to her own folk, and bring joy and sorrow to their hearts."

One day it chanced that a stranger came to the city on a morning that a race was to be run. The night before he had slept in a village near by, and the people had told him the tale of Atalanta, and how on the morrow another suitor was to run to his death. But he scoffed at their words.

"No man would run to certain death," he said, "were the maid as fair as Aphrodite."

"Go and see for thyself," they replied. "Soon we shall hear that thou too wilt run in the race."

"Never," he said; "no woman can cheat my life from me."

But they shook their heads unconvinced.

"Many before thee have spoken likewise," said they, "and yet they have run."

"If I run, I will run to win," he answered.

"Can a snail outstrip a deer?" they asked.

"It might so chance," said he.

"Thou art mad," they cried.

"Better to be mad on earth than sane in Hades," he replied.

But they shook their heads the more, and tapped wisely with their fingers on their foreheads, to show that he was mad and spoke at random.

"Well, well," he said, with a laugh, "we shall see what we shall see."

The next morning he set forth early for the city, and, mingling with the crowd, he made his way to the race-course, and found for himself a place where he could watch the whole sight with ease. The race was run and ended as it always ended; and once again the city was hung with black. But in the mind of the stranger an image remained which had not been there before—the image of a maid whose white feet flashed in the sunlight and her tunic swung to and from as a flag swings in the breeze.

"Great Heracles!" he thought within himself, "to run shoulder to shoulder with her for a moment, even in a race for death, might be worth the while after all. I will make myself known at the palace, and see what the gods will give me."

For some days he lay hid in the city, till he thought the time was ripe for him to go up to the palace of the king. Then he went for a walk along the highway, and when he was covered with dust and grime, he returned to the city and made his way at once to the palace. At the door of the gateway he knocked, and the old porter came out to ask his will.

"I am come from a distant land," he said, "and to-morrow I would journey yet further on my way. I pray thee to crave hospitality for one night for me from the steward of this house, whoe'er he be. I am a king's son, and worthy to sit at any man's table."

The porter cast a doubtful eye on the travel-worn clothes of the stranger. It seemed unlikely that a king's son would go on a distant journey with no body-servant and no horse or baggage. The he looked in his clear blue eyes, which gazed back at him as innocent as a child's, and he saw that for all his sorry raiment he was by no means ill-favoured, but held himself well and proudly. So he opened the door and led him across the court.

"Well, well," he muttered in his beard, "great folk have strange whims in these days. Our king must needs slay his daughter, because she is a maid, and she needs slay her suitors, because they are men. After that this fellow may well be, as he says, a king's son, who, because he has a palace and plenty, must needs tramp over the face of the earth and beg his bread. Praise be to the gods who put lowly blood in my veins and sense in my head, else had it been better for the gate to keep itself than to have me for a guardian."

Then he cast another look over his shoulder at the young man behind.

"At any rate, for one night he can do no harm," he muttered.

"What didst thou say, father?" asked the stranger.

"I said that for one night thou couldst do no harm," replied the old man.

"On the contrary," said the stranger with a laugh, "in one night I hope to do more good to this house than thou hast done in all thy life."

"The young have ever a good conceit of themselves," said the porter. "Thou art not like to keep this gate, winter and summer, day and night, for close on three-score years, as I have done, young man."

"On the other hand," said the stranger, "thou art not like to marry the king's daughter within the year, and have the city hung with red instead of black in thine honour, as I am like to do."

"Sir," said the old man, "I know my place too well—"

"—and love thy life too much to aspire to the hand of the princess. Is that not so?"

"Mayhap," said the old man, and shut his mouth with a snap. To all further remarks which the stranger made he answered with a grunt. He took him into the palace and delivered him into the hands of the steward. As he turned to go back to his post, the young man clapped his hand upon his shoulder.

"Good luck to thee and thy gate," he said. "When I come through with the hand of the princess in mine, perchance thou wilt look upon me with greater favour than now."

"Be warned in time, young man," said the porter, "and tarry not over long in this palace, but go forth on thy journey in the morning, as thou hadst a mind to do in the beginning. Those who tarry too long are apt to go through the gate with nought but a cake in their hand."

This he said, meaning the cake which was put in the hands of the dead for them to give to Cerberus, the watch-dog of Hades.

"Fear not for that," said the stranger; "I had as lief go empty-handed."

Thereupon he turned to the steward, who welcomed him sadly to the halls of King Schœnus. All strangers were looked upon askance in those days, lest they came as suitors for the hand of Atalanta, and wished to add to those who had run in the fatal race. When he heard that the young man would depart on the morrow on his journey he was glad, and gave him water to wash with and a change of raiment, and showed him his place at the board, without so much as asking his name. When Atalanta saw a stranger at the board her heart sank within her, and she kept her eyes turned away, as though she had not seen him, for she made sure that he too had come to run in the race with her. It chanced that night that the company was scanty,

and no man talked in private to this neighbour, but the conversation leapt from one end of the board to the other, as each one took his share in it and said his say. The stranger, too, took his part with the rest of them, nowise abashed; and so shrewd were his words, and so full of wit, that soon he had a smile upon the face of each one at the table. For many a long day the talk had not been so merry nor the laughter so loud at the table of King Schœnus. Atalanta, too, forgot her constraint, and talked and laughed freely with the stranger; and he answered her back, as though it had been man to man, and showed no more deference to her than to the others of the company.

When the meal was over, the king approached the stranger, and Atalanta stood beside him.

"Sir," said the king, "thy name and country are still hid from us, but we are grateful for thy coming, and would be fain for thee to stay as long as it shall please thee."

"I thank thee, sire," said the stranger, "but I am bound by a strange vow. I may not reveal my name, nor accept hospitality for more than one night from any man, till I come to a house where none other than the king's daughter shall promise me her hand in marriage. From the tales I have heard in the neighbouring country, I have learnt that I may not hope to end my vow beneath this roof—though indeed," he said, turning to Atalanta, "I would fain press my suit if there were any chance of success."

But Atalanta threw back her head at his words.

"Thou has doubtless heard the condition," she said, "by the fulfilment of which alone a man may win my hand."

"Alas, sir!" said the king, "I would press no man to try his luck in that venture."

"Since that is so," said the stranger, "I will go forth once more upon my journey at break of day, and see what luck the gods will give me. I thank thee for thy kindly hospitality this night, and beg thee to

excuse me. I have travelled far, and would fain rest now, as I must go a long distance ere I can rest again."

Thereupon he took his leave of King Schœnus and his daughter. But she, for all her pride, could not forget the man who seemed to bid her farewell with so light a heart. He was well favoured, but it was not because he was well favoured, or because he had a ready tongue, that she thought on him. Indeed, when she asked herself why she should remember one who by now had doubtless lost all memory of her, she could find no answer. As she tossed on her couch with a troubled mind, she determined that before he left the palace on the morrow she would have some speech with him.

"He thinks no more of me than of a stone upon wayside," she said within herself, "wherefore I can do him no wrong by letting him speak with me again before he goes."

It was her custom to rise early in the morning, before the rest of the household was stirring, and to go forth alone into the woods; and it was the lot of one of the slaves to rouse himself betimes to give her food ere she went, so that when she appeared, as was her wont, he thought nothing of it. The stranger had risen even earlier than she, and the slave was waiting upon him. When Atalanta saw him, her heart gave a sudden thrill, for she had not looked to see him so soon.

"Good-morrow, sir," she said. "It is not often I have a companion when I break my fast."

Then she turned to the slave.

"Thou mayest get thee back to thy bed," she said, "and sleep out thy sleep in peace. I will see to the wants of our guest and speed him on his way."

The slave, nothing loth, departed. He was well used to strange commands from his mistress; and, moreover, there was no need to invite him twice to return to his couch.

Thereupon Atalanta sat down at the board beside the stranger, and they fell to with all the appetite of youth and health; and as they ate they laughed and joked, and talked of strange lands they both had seen and adventures that had befallen them. In the space of one half-hour they were as good friends as though they had known each other all their lives, and suitors who had sat at her father's board day after day were much more strangers to Atalanta than this man, who had craved but one night's hospitality.

When they had finished their meal the stranger rose.

"I must bid thee farewell, lady," he said.

"Nay, not yet," she replied; I will set thee on thy way, and show thee a road through the forest that will bring thee to the city thou seekest. I know every track and path as well as the wild deer know them."

He tried to dissuade her, but she would not listen, and led him out from the palace by a side-gate, which she unbarred with her own hands. Down through the sleeping streets they went, where the shadows of the houses lay long upon the ground, and out across the open downs into the shade of the forest. The dew gleamed like jewels on the leaves, as here and there the slanting rays of the sun shone through the trees, and above their heads the lark sang gaily in the bright summer sky. Yet they walked silently side by side, as though, in spite of the brightness of the day, sorrow and not joy were sitting in their hearts; and all their gay talk and laughter of the early morning was dead. At length they came to a broad track that crossed the path they were in, and Atalanta stopped short and pointed to the right.

"From here," she said, "thou canst not miss thy way. Follow the track till it lead thee to the high-road, and when thou strikest the high-road, turn to the left, and thou wilt come to the city thou seekest."

Then she held out her hand to him.

"I must bid thee farewell," she said, "and good luck to the ending of thy vow."

"Lady," he said, and took her hand in his," if thou wilt, thou canst release me now from my vow."

But she drew her hand away sharply and tossed back her head.

"Many kings have daughters besides King Schœnus," she said, "and any one of them could release thee from thy vow as well as I."

"Atalanta," he said, "no king's daughter save thee shall ever release me from my vow. That which laughter and our converse last night and this morning strove to hide, our silence, as we walked side by side, has revealed far better than I can tell thee. Thou knowest that I love thee. From the first moment that I saw thee I have loved thee."

His words made her heart thrill with a strange joy. But she showed no sign of it, and answered him coldly. She was proud and wished to test him.

"Doubtless the flood-gates of love are easily thrown open where a man would be released from a vow. Thou knowest how thou mayest win me. Art thou willing to run in the race?"

At this all his mirth returned to him, and his eyes shone with merriment as he answered:

"Much good would my love do me if I had to drink the poison cup perforce. Nay, nay," he said; "I love thee too well to put death at thy door. When I have some chance of winning the race, I will come back and claim thee. In the meantime, lady, farewell."

And, bowing to her, he turned and went his way, without so much as looking back at her, as she stood trembling with astonishment and anger. It was not thus her other lovers had spoken. When he had gone from sight, she turned suddenly and went back by the path they had come. Her hands were clenched, and the tears sprang

unbidden to her eyes, as she strode forward with long, angry strides that took no heed of where they went.

"He has made a mock of me!" she cried to herself—"he has made a mock of me!" He is a base adventurer who seeks release from his vow. He has no heart and no honour. Fool that I was to treat him as a friend!"

Thus did she stride along in her wrath, till it had cooled somewhat, and she was able to think more calmly of the stranger. Then his form came back to her mind, as he had looked when they stood face to face at the parting of the ways, when the sun had glinted down upon them through the trees, and he had looked her straight in the face with his clear blue eyes, and said: "Thou knowest that I love thee. From the moment I saw thee I have loved thee."

A great sob rose in her throat as she remembered.

"Ah, he spoke the truth!" she said; "I know that he spoke the truth."

Moreover, her heart told her that long before he had spoken the words she had known that he loved her. Yet strange is the bond of love. Its strands are certainty and doubt interwoven. Wherefore Atalanta, though she had heard the words which were but the echo of the silent speech of their hearts, had put him yet further to the test, and had driven him from her side by asking of him a sacrifice she had no wish for him to make.

"If he would come back and run with me," she sighed, "my feet would be as heavy as lead against him."

But she sighed in vain. Day after day passed by, and he came not.

"He is a man of his word," she thought at last. "Till he has some chance of winning he will not come back. And he is no fool. He knows he can never run as fast as I can run. He will never come back."

Yet, for all this she watched for him night and day. When she went forth into the road, or into the forest, she looked for his form at every turn of the way. When she entered the great hall of the palace, she looked to see his face at the board. But always she looked in vain, and sometimes her heart grew bitter against him.

"If he were come now," she would say to herself, "I would show him no mercy. He who takes so much thought before he will risk his life for my sake is not worthy to win me."

Then again she would grow tender, and stand looking down the path by which he had gone, and sigh for him.

"Oh, my love, come back, come back! My pride is melted away like the snow, and without any race I will give myself to thee."

Thus would she long for him, and grow near to hating him, because she knew that she loved him. The weeks and months passed by, and still he returned not; winter came and went, and once again the dewdrops shone in the summer sunlight as Atalanta walked in the forest at break of day. She walked with her eyes upon the ground, thinking of the summer morning a long year ago when he had walked by her side in silence along the very path. When by chance she raised her eyes, there, at the parting of the ways, he stood, as though in answer to her thoughts. With a cry she stopped short and gazed at him, and he came forward and bowed to her.

"I have come back, lady," he said.

"Oh!" she cried from her heart, "I am glad thou hast come back."

Then he bent and kissed her hand. So once more they walked in silence side by side along the path they had walked before; and once again the bond of love was knit strong between them, with its strands of certainty and doubt. As they drew near to the edge of the forest, Atalanta was the first to speak.

"And thy vow," she asked—"hast thou found release from it?"

"Not yet," he answered. "I am come back to run the race, that I may win release."

Once again the spirit of perversity came upon her.

"Where hast thou learnt to run like the wind?" she asked.

"I have not learnt to run like the wind," he replied. "I have learnt something better than that."

"Few things are better in a race than swiftness," she said.

"True," he answered; "yet I have found the one thing better."

"What is this strange thing?" she asked.

"When we have run the race, thou wilt know," he said.

"I have grown no sluggard," she said, with a toss of her head, as though to warn him that her speed was not a thing to be despised.

"That I can see," he said, as he cast a glance at her straight white limbs and the easy grace of her bearing as she walked beside him. Then they talked of different matters, and each one knew that that what they had nearest their hearts they were hiding from each other.

So they came to the palace, and from the lowest to the highest the inmates greeted the stranger with joy. For he had won the hearts of them all by his wit and his genial smile. But they sighed when they heard that he too had come to run in the fatal race.

"Alas!" said the old king, shaking his head, "I had rather no have looked upon thy face again than see thee back on such an errand."

The young man laughed. "He who runs with a fair hope of winning runs swiftly," he said. "The others were dragged down by the shackles of their own despair."

"Thou dost not know my daughter," said the king.

"Mayhap I know her better than thou thinkest, and better than thou knowest her thyself," said the stranger.

No arguments or entreaties would turn him from his purpose.

"I must win release from my vow," he said. "I cannot live all my life a nameless wanderer. Yet will I not wed any woman I love not, for the sake of my release. Atalanta alone can save me, for I love none other."

So the lists once again were prepared, and the course made smooth for the race. With trembling fingers Atalanta tied her girdle about her, and bound her sandals to her feet. Though her heart was crying out for the stranger to win, and praying that her feet might fail her at the last, yet her pride, too, lifted up its head.

"He makes so sure of winning," she thought, "he despises my swiftness. He shall see that nothing he has learnt can teach him to run as I can run. And yet—oh, cursed be the condition I thought so cunning in mine ignorance! Oh, would that he could win me without first outspeeding me!"

Thus did her pride and her desire pull two ways at once.

And now the folk were gathered together round the course, and Atalanta and the stranger stood ready and waiting for the word to be given. She had made it a condition of the race that her rivals should have a good start of her, and she stood with her eyes upon the stranger's back, as he waited many paces before her. All too soon the word was given, and he sprang forward from his place, like a dog which has been straining at his leash springs forward when the hook is unloosed. And Atalanta, too, sprang forward; but whereas the man ran like a hunted thing that strains every muscle to save its life, she ran with the swinging grace of the wild deer that, far away from the hunters and hounds, crosses the springing turf of the lonely moor, fearless and proud, as he throws back his antlers in the breeze.

Thus did Atalanta run, as though she had no thought of the race, or of the man who ran for his life. Yet, though she seemed to make no effort, she gained upon her rival at every step, and now she was running close behind him, and now she was almost shoulder to shoulder, and out of the corner of his eye he could see the gleam of her tunic. Then for a moment he slackened his pace, and it seemed that she would pass him, and on every side the people shouted out to him, "Run, run! Faster, faster! She will pass thee."

But he put his hand into the opening of his tunic, and drew forth something from his breast. Then his hand swung up above his head, and from it there flashed a dazzling fiery apple. Up and down through the air it flashed like a meteor, and rolled along the grass, till it stopped far away in the centre of the course, and lay shining like a jewel in the rays of the sun. Every eye was turned from the race to watch its gleaming flight, and Atalanta stopped short and watched it too. When she saw it stop still in the middle of the course, flashing and sparkling in the grass, a great desire sprang up in her heart to have it—a mad, unreasoning desire that she could not resist. And she darted aside out of the path of the race, and went and picked up the shining golden apple and put it in the bosom of her tunic. Meanwhile the stranger had lost no time, and when Atalanta came back to the spot she had left, he was far ahead upon the course, and she had to run with a will if she wished to overtake him. But once again she gained upon him, and the space between them grew less and less, till they were running wellnigh shoulder to shoulder. And once again, he saw the gleam of her tunic beside him; and again he slackened his speed for a moment, and sent a second gleaming apple into the air. Once more the mad, unreasoning desire sprang up in Atalanta's heart, and, leaving the course, she picked up the second apple and put in the bosom of her tunic beside the first. By the time she had returned to the path the stranger had rounded the turning-point, and was well on his way towards the goal, and she put forth all her strength to overtake him. But the ease of her running was gone. She ran as one who runs bearing a burden, yet she would not cast away the golden apples in her bosom; for though they hampered her, she gained upon her rival, and for the third time they were running almost shoulder to shoulder. And again, the third

time, the same thing happened, and Atalanta left the course to pick up the shining fruit. This time when she returned to her place the stranger was close upon the goal, and all around the people were shouting and waving their hands. Blindly she pulled herself together, and with all the strength that was left in her she made a great spurt to overtake him. If she would cast away the golden apples, she might yet win the race; but the same mad desire which had spurred her to pick them up forbad her now to let them go. As she ran they seemed to grow heavier and heavier in her bosom; yet she struggled and panted on, and step by step did she gain upon him, though her eyes were darkened to all but his form and the goal ahead. On every side the people shouted louder than before, for they knew not now which of them would win. As they drew near to the goal they were again almost shoulder to shoulder, and the stranger saw once more the flash of Atalanta's tunic beside him, while there were yet some paces to run. Then he gave a great spurt forward, and leapt away from her side. She tried to do likewise, but her strength was gone. She had made her last effort before. Thus did it come to pass that the stranger ran in first to the goal, and, running close upon his heels, Atalanta fell breathless into his arms as he turned to catch her. She had run twice as far as he, but what matter if he had not outsped her? He had won the race, and held the woman he loved in his arms. The tears shone in her eyes, but he knew they were no tears of grief; and in the face of all the people he kissed her.

Thus was Atalanta, the swiftest of all mortals, beaten in the race by the stranger, and learnt from his lips what it was that he had found on his travels that made speed of no avail in the race.

For after they had come back to the city, surrounded by the joyous folk, and had passed hand in had beneath the gateway, and the stranger had nodded with a smile at the old porter, who stood bowing before them; after he had revealed to them all that he was Meilanion, the son of Amphidamas, and the old king had fallen on his neck and given him his blessing, because he proved to be the son of his own boyhood's friend, and the man of all others he would have chosen for his son-in-law—after all this, when the speeches and the merrymaking were over, they two walked alone in the moonlit

court of the palace. At last Atalanta had decked herself in the long saffron robes of a bride, and in her hands she bore the three shining apples. Meilanion's arm was about her, as they walked for a while in silence, but at length she spoke and held out the fruit in her hands.

OUT OF THE CORNER OF HIS EYE HE COULD SEE THE GLEAM OF HER TUNIC.

"Tell me their secret," she said.

"Their secret lies in thy heart, Atalanta," he answered.

"What meanest thou?" she asked.

"I mean that if thou hadst not loved me, they would never have filled thy soul with longing to have them, and thou wouldst never have turned aside from the race."

"And, knowing this, thou didst stake thy life on my love?" she said.

"Knowing that, I staked my life on thy love," he answered.

"Then that was the one thing better than speed in the race?"

"Yes," he answered, "I learnt to trust in thy love."

There was silence for a moment between them, and then again Atalanta spoke.

"And whence came the apples?" she asked him.

"When I left thee at the parting of the ways," he said, "I travelled many a weary league by land, and on the road I passed many a shrine of Aphrodite. But I never passed them by without lifting up my hands in prayer to the goddess, for I knew that she could help me if she would, and I knew that to them that love truly she is ever kind in the end. But I wandered till I was footsore and weary, and yet I had no sign. At length I came to the seashore, and took ship for the pleasant isle of Cyprus, which is her own dear home. There at last she came to me, walking on the waves of the sea. As I lay on the shore in the night-time, I saw her as a great light afar, and she drew near to me with the foam playing white about her feet. In her hand she bore three shining golden apples. And she came and stood beside me, and I hid my eyes at the sight of her beauty. But she spoke to me in a voice that was soft and kind, and the melody of it touched my heart like the melody of music.

" 'Fear not, Meilanion,' she said; 'I have heard the cry of thy heart. Here are three apples from mine own apple-tree. If she whom thou lovest loves thee in return, she cannot resist the spell of their golden brightness. When thou runnest against her, cast them one by one into the middle of the course. If she love thee she will turn aside to pick them up. For her they will be heavy as the gold they seem made of. For thee they will be light as the fruit whose form they wear. Farewell, and good luck to thy race.'

"Thereupon darkness came over my eyes, and I could find no words to thank her. When I awoke I thought it had been a dream, but lo! by my side upon the sand lay the apples, shining in the sunlight."

"And thy vow?" asked Atalanta. "How camest thou to make such a vow?"

He laughed at her words.

"When a hare is hunted," he said, "thou knowest how he will double and turn, and take a line he has no mind to pursue to the end. So was it with me. Long ago in my father's house I heard of thee and of thy beauty, and how thou couldst cast such a spell upon the hearts of men that for thy sake they would fling away their lives. And a great desire came upon me to see this thing for myself, for I could scarce believe it. So I set forth alone to find thee, and hid my name from all men as I journeyed, for thus could I be more free to act as seemed best in mine own eyes. And I saw thee run in a race, and that glimpse was enough to tell me that I too one day must run with thee. Yet was I more wary than my rivals. I knew that to come as a suitor was the way to turn thy heart to stone. Wherefore I pretended to be bound by a vow, which would bring me as a passing stranger before thee. Canst thou forgive the lie?"

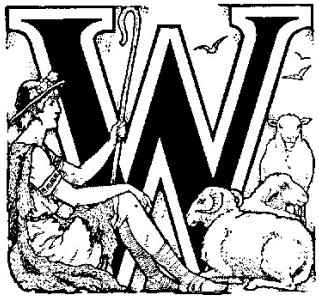
She smiled into his face.

"It was a daring venture," she said.

"I knew I was as one who treads unknown paths on a moonless night," he answered. "Yet deep in my heart I felt that when a man desires one thing on earth above every other—when he loves that thing better than life itself, he is like to win it in the end, if he walk patiently step by step in faith. He will win that thing, or death in his struggle for it; and he is content that so it should be."

Such was the winning of Atalanta. As for the golden apples, she placed them in a precious casket, and guarded them jealously all her day, for a memorial of the race that she had failed to win.

PARIS AND ŒNONE



HEN Peleus the mortal married silver-footed Thetis, the fair nymph of the sea, great was the rejoicing among the gods and men; for Peleus was a brave warrior and a mighty man, and well deserved to have for a wife a child of the Immortals. To his marriage-feast he bade all the gods and goddesses, and they left their seats on calm Olympus, and came down to Pelion where he dwelt, a band of shining ones, to do honour to the mortal whom they loved. One alone of them all he had not asked—Eris, the black-browed Goddess of Strife, for at his wedding-feast he wished to have happiness and joy, and no dark looks to mar the gladness of his board. But he looked to find shame in the heart of one who knew not shame. As it was, she came unasked, and great was the sorrow that her coming brought, both to him and to his wife and all the fair land of Hellas. For she sowed the seed of discord which blossomed to the blood-red flower of war, in which the mightiest and the best of two great nations fell through ten long years of strife, and among them was Achilles, the swiftest and bravest of mortal men, the son whom Thetis bore to Peleus to be a comfort to him in his old age, and to succeed him when he died. But as it was, Achilles died in battle far from his native land in the prime and flower of his manhood.

Now the manner in which Eris wreaked her vengeance was in this wise.

When the marriage-feast was drawing to its close and the gladdening wine had unlocked the lips and opened the hearts of the revellers, above all the din and clatter there rang through the hall a harsh, discordant laugh like the rattle of thunder before the storm. A dead silence fell upon them all, and every eye was turned towards the place from whence that fearful laugh had come. In the shade of the doorway stood a tall gaunt figure wrapped all about in black.

Above her head she held a blood-red torch that flickered madly in the breeze, and cast upon her face the shadow of her wild elf-locks. Her cheeks were pale as ashes and her lips were thin and blue, but her eyes shone bright as red-hot coals. When she saw the hall silent and trembling before her, she laughed aloud once more and waved the torch above her.

"Ha! ha!" she cried. "you give me a cold welcome, my masters. But I am kinder than you. I give, and take nothing in return. See here, I bring seasoning to your feast, and much joy may you have of it."

Thereupon she drew from her bosom an apple all of gold, and hurled it in their faces on the board. It rolled along the tale like a ball of light, and stopped in the centre before Peleus, the king of the feast. The eyes of all the guests followed it full of amazement and delight, for it was wondrous fair to look upon.

"I see you like my gift," cried Eris. "Let her keep it who deserves it best. Farewell. I stay not where I came unbidden."

Then she turned upon her heel, and strode away into the blackness of the night.

When she had gone, Peleus put forth his hand and took the apple. It was of pure gold, the outermost parts of white gold pale as straw, and the cheeks of red gold bright as poppies, and across it was written in shining letters, "For the Fairest."

As Peleus read the words aloud he looked slowly round the board.

"O lady goddesses," he asked, "to which of you shall I give it?"

Thereupon arose a strife of tongues, and all the harmony and good-fellowship of the feast was gone, for one said one thing and one another, and each one in her heart wished to have it for her own. But the claim of three stood out above that of all the rest.

"I am the Queen of Heaven," said Hera, "and the mother of gods and man. The apple is mine by right."

"I am the giver of knowledge and wisdom," said Pallas Athene, "and through me all things are perfected, and the wrong is put to right. The apple should be mine."

"I am the Goddess of Love," said Aphrodite, "I am life itself. My claim is the best of all."

As Peleus looked on them he knew not to which of them he should give it, for each in turn seemed fairest. And he was wily withal, and knew he could not give it to one without angering the other two against him. So he said,

"O lady goddesses, who am I that I should judge between you? Choose you your own judge from among the sons of men, and he shall give the apple to her he deems the fairest."

Then they consulted together, and chose Paris, the son of Priam, King of Troy; for he was the fairest of all mortal men, and would know how to judge between them. And they left the halls of Peleus with a smile upon their lips, but in their hearts was envy and hatred where there had once been sympathy and love; for the apple of discord had fulfilled the purpose of her who gave it.

Now Paris was the second son of Priam and Hecuba, and brother of Hector, the pride of Troy. The night before he was born his mother dreamed a dreadful dream—that she had given birth to a firebrand which set all Troy aflame. In terror she sent for her child Cassandra, the priestess of Apollo, whose word came always true. And she told her dream, and asked what it could mean. Then Apollo raised from Cassandra's eyes the veil that hides the future, and she told her mother the meaning of that dream.

"In mine ears," she cried, "there sounds the din of battle and the clash of arms. I see round Troy the foemen's tents, and their ships drawn up upon the shore. I see Scamander's stream run red with

blood. Through the desolate streets slinks one whose manhood has departed, and who shuns the eyes of his fellow-men, for he prized a woman's arms above his country's honour. That man is the son that thou shalt bear, and he shall be the curse of Troy."

When Priam the king heard these words his heart was filled with anger.

"No son of mine," he cried, "shall bring shame and destruction on my city. When the child is born he shall be cast out upon the mountains to die ere his eyes can see the light."

So, notwithstanding his mother's entreaties, as soon as the child was born he was given to Agelaus the herdsman to cast out upon the hills. And he took him up to Gargarus, the topmost peak of Ida, and there he left him to die of cold and hunger, or to be torn in pieces by the beasts of prey.

But when the Fates have spoken, their word shall surely come to pass, whatever man may do. And so it fell out now. A she-bear, whose cubs the hunters had killed, found the child, and for five days and five nights she suckled him, and kept him safe and warm. On the sixth day Agelaus passed that way once more, looking to find the child dead, if any trace of him remained. But lo! nestled in the moss and fallen leaves, the babe lay sweetly sleeping. Then he marvelled greatly in his heart.

"Surely," he thought, "this can be no common babe, and it is the will of Heaven that he should live."

So he picked him up in his arms, and carried him home to his wife, for long had they prayed the gods in vain for children. And they brought him up as their own son, and called his name Paris. As soon as he could walk, he would go out with his foster-father on the mountains, and keep watch over the flocks and the herds, and he grew to be a tall and comely lad. For he breathed the pure sweet air of heaven, and bathed in Ida's rippling streams. Nor did he lack courage and strength withal. If ever a mountain lion, made bold by

hunger, came down upon the flocks and carried off a sheep or a goat, whilst the herdsmen fled in terror for their lives, he would come up and fight him single-handed with his knife and his shepherd's staff, and it was not the lion that came off best in that fight. So famous did he become for his strength and prowess that all about the countryside men called him Alexander, defender of men.

Now it came to pass one summer's day that he had walked for many a long mile across the treeless downs, and at length he turned, hot and thirsty, into the shade of the forest. Soon he came upon a mountain stream that danced foaming over the stones, and he drank of its waters gladly, and bathed in a clear brown pool; then, tired out, he cast himself upon the bank and fell asleep.

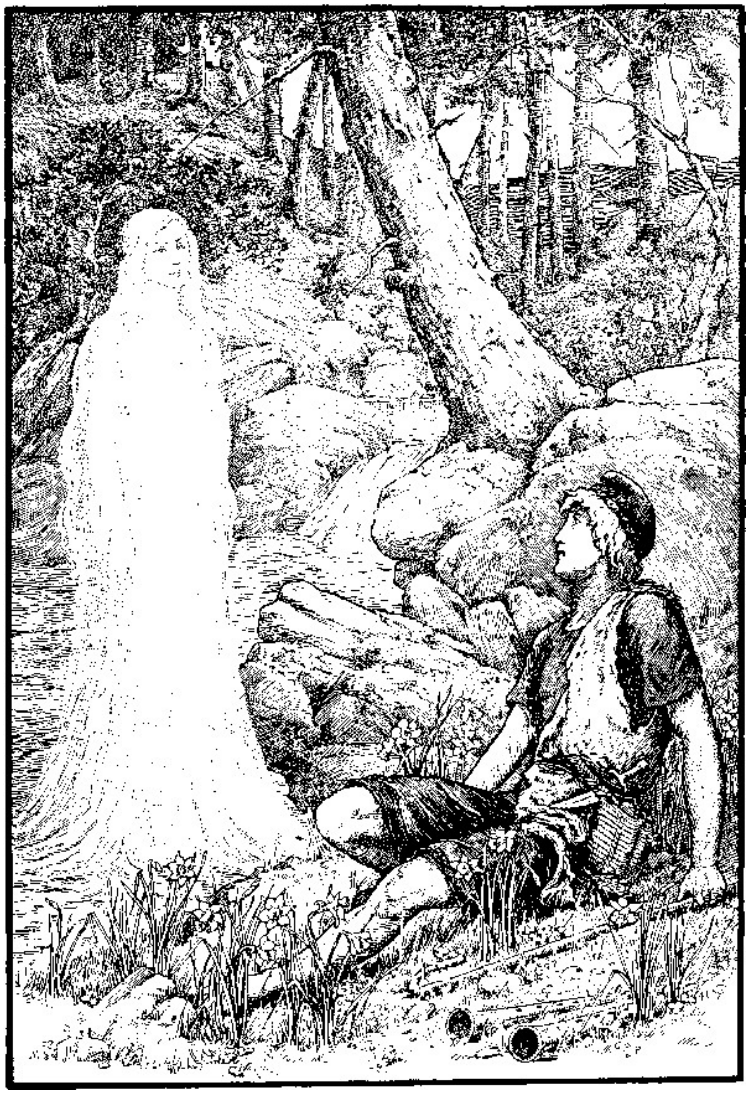
When he awoke, the trunks of the pine-trees stood out purple against the sunset, and the evening light cast over all things a glamour of mystery. He rubbed his eyes, thinking he must still be dreaming; for out of the stream beside him there rose a wondrous form of a maiden clad all in misty white. Her hair was like fallen beech-leaves when the sun shines on them through the trees, and her eyes were like the changing river that reflects the light of heaven. She stood before him motionless, and gazed down upon him where he lay.

"O most wonderful," he whispered, "who art thou?"

"I am Œnone," she answered, and her voice was like the music of the brook—"Œnone, the daughter of Cebren, the river god, whose stream runs dancing at your feet from the side of wooded Ida. O fairest of mortals, I am lonely in these mountain glades; let me watch thy flocks with thee."

Then she came towards him with both her hands out- outstreched stretched. And Paris took her cool white hands in his. Fair as the crescent moon, she bent over him and raised him from his knees, and they looked deep into each other's eyes and loved, as the young and pure alone can love. From that day forth they watched his flocks

together on the wooded slopes, and wandered hand in hand through the forests and across the smooth green lawns of Ida.



OUT OF THE STREAM BESIDE HIM THERE ROSE A WONDROUS FORM OF A MAIDEN CLAD ALL IN MISTY WHITE.

Meanwhile, since the day when Priam had given his child to be exposed upon the mountains, many a circling year had passed, and the day drew on which, if his son had lived, he would have held great games and feasted in honour of his reaching years of manhood. And Priam's heart within him smote him when he thought of the innocent babe, and he cast about in his mind how he yet might do him honour.

"Perchance I acted hastily," he thought, "and by care and good example my son might after all have been a blessing to his city and to me. But the dead are dead, and I cannot call him back to life. Yet will I honour him as best I may, that in the world below they may know he is a king's son and not utterly forgotten."

So he ordered great funeral games to be held in honour of his son, who had died without a name upon the mountains. Far and wide throughout the land the tidings went, and the lists were made ready, and rich prizes brought together for the victors. Among them was to be a bull, the strongest and finest from all the herds of Priam. The herdsman drove down their finest cattle to the city for the king himself to chose, and he chose a mighty beast which Agelaus had bred and reared. Now it chanced that this bull was the favourite of Paris out of all the cattle under his charge, and he loved him as some men love a dog. When he heard that Agelaus had given him to be a prize in the games, he waxed exceeding wrath.

"If he is to be any man's prize," he cried, "I shall be that man."

But Agelaus laughed at him.

"Who art thou," he said, "a foundling and a shepherd's foster-son, to enter in the lists against the sons of kings?"

"Sons of kings or sons of crows, I care not," he answered. "My arms are as strong and my feet are as swift as theirs any day. I shall enter for the lists."

The old man chuckled at his words, for he loved the lad, and was proud of his strength and beauty.

"The gods be praised! he muttered. "The mountain air has not dulled his spirit, nor dried up the royal blood in his veins."

But Œnone was sad when she heard of his resolve.

"Ah, Paris," she begged, "as thou lovest me, leave me not to enter these games."

"But I will come back to thee, beloved. What difference can it make?" he asked.

"In my heart pale fear is sitting," she replied. "I know that if thou goest, it will be the beginning of woes for thee, and for me, and for all thy native land."

"Nay, thou art over fearful. Thou shalt see, I will come back with my bull, and thou and I will be happy together, as we have always been."

"Paris," she said, "that I know will never be, if once thou joinest in the games. I can see but dimly into the future, but this much at least I know: that if thou goest, war shall beat about the walls of Troy like a wave of the sea, and from the midst of the battle I see thee carried forth wounded unto death. Ah, Paris, leave the bull for a weaker man, and go not down!"

"Nay, I cannot hearken to such foolishness. What war can come if I go to Troy for the sake of a bull?"

"The cause of the war I know not, but come it surely will. O Paris, in that day come back to me, and I will heal thee of thy hurt! I know the use of herbs, for many a strange charm has my father taught me, and if any life is left in thee, I will call it back. But best of all, stay with me now, and go not down to the games."

And, weeping, she threw her arms about his neck; but nothing she could say would stop him.

So when the day came he went down into the city, and entered for the lists with the flower of the land, and all the folk marvelled who he might be. For he was tall and exceeding fair, and they had never seen his face before. When the turn came for his match, he set his teeth and wrestled like a young lion, for the bull that was the pride of his flock; and the strength of his adversaries was turned to weakness. With joy in his heart, he came forward to take his prize; and a loud cheer rose to heaven, for the people were glad that he had won. And the king's heart went out of him as he gave the prize, for he was the age his son would have been had he lived.

"Young man," he said, "who art thou, and who is thy father?"

"I am Paris, the foster-son of Agelaus the herdsman," he answered.

"Is thine own sire dead, then?" asked Priam.

"O king, thou askest me riddles I cannot answer," said Paris, "seeing I know not even who mine own sire may be."

"This is a strange matter," said the king, and in spite of himself his heart beat fast within him.

Now Cassandra the prophetess, his daughter, was standing by his side, and the time had come for her to speak.

"O king," she said, "thou hast not far to seek for the father of this lad."

"What meanest thou?" asked Priam.

"Put thy hands upon the lad's shoulders, and look into his eyes, and thou shalt see the image of his father," she answered.

Trembling between hope and fear, the old king bent forward from his seat and put his hands upon the young man's shoulders.

"Can it be—can it really be my own son?" he asked.

"Thy son he is," replied Cassandra, "and no other man's. The Fates decreed that he should live, and he has lived."

"My son, my son!" cried the king, and fell upon his neck. "How I have longed for thee, and my soul has been weighed down with the burden of thy death! Now in mine old age the gods have given thee back to me, and my heart is glad. For thou art brave and fair, my son, and any father would be proud of thee, nor fear that ever thou shouldst bring dishonour on the land."

Once again the old man fell upon the neck and kissed him; and Hecuba, his mother, held him in her arms, and wept tears of joy over the child she had given up for the dead. His brothers and his sisters crowded round, and all the people; and some raised him on their shoulders, and with songs and shouts of joy they took him to the palace of Priam. There they clothed him in rich raiment, as befitted a king's son, and held a great feast in his honour; for every man was glad that one so fair and noble had been spared to bring honour to the land of Troy. Cassandra alone sat silent amidst the revelry, for her heart was cut in two. When she looked upon her brother's fair young face, she was glad that he had lived; yet ever before her eyes there floated the vision she had seen the night before he was born—a vision of war, unmanliness and death—and she knew that vision would come true. When she thought of it she shuddered and almost wished him dead, and in her heart she cursed that fatal gift of prophesy which brought her nought but grief. Verily in her case knowledge was not a thing of joy.

When the guests had departed, the old king took his son aside.

"I have set a place apart for thee, my son," he said, "and from this day forth thou must live with thy kinsfolk in the palace."

"I will live with thee right gladly, my father," he answered, "but my days I will spend upon the mountains as of yore, and keep watch over thy flocks and herds. For I love the beasts and the mountain air, and methinks in a city I should pine for want of my old free life."

The form of Œnone rose up before his eyes; but that he hid from his father.

"Thou mayest live as best pleases thee, my son," said Priam, "and I will give thee many goodly flocks and herds of cattle for thine own."

So it came to pass that, though Paris was a prince and son of the King of Troy, there was small change in his manner of life, save that now he lived in his father's palace instead of the herdsman's hut. For in those days it was thought no shame even for a prince to be a shepherd, and keep watch over his own flocks and herds.

It was soon after this that the strife arose among the goddesses about the apple that Eris had cast in their midst at the marriage-feast of Peleus. And Zeus sent down Iris, the swift-footed messenger of Heaven, to tell Paris of the charge that was laid on him, and to bear him the golden apple. Down the path of the rainbow she sped, the road whereby she always went to and fro betwixt gods and men. Her shining robes flew out behind her, and the wings upon her feet and shoulders glanced like lightning in the sky. At early down, while the dew lay bright upon the ground, she came and stood in the path as Paris was driving his flocks to pasture. In one hand she held the staff that Zeus had given her, to show she was the messenger of Heaven, and in the other she held the golden apple.

"O fairest of mortals," she said, "I have been sent to thee by Zeus, who rules on high. In heaven there is a war between the three great goddesses as to which of them shall have the prize of beauty, this apple thou seest in my hand. And they have appointed thee to be the judge between them. Hold thyself ready, then, for this day at noon they will come to thee here on the lonely heights of Ida."

She spoke, and threw the apple at him, and he caught it deftly, as a player catches a ball. And wind-footed Iris sped back by the rainbow path as swift as she had come.

"This is passing strange," thought Paris, as he gazed at the apple in his hand, and read the words inscribed upon it—"For the Fairest." There it lay, smooth and shining, a sure token that he had not been dreaming. So he took it and showed it to Œnone, and told her what Iris, the messenger of the gods, had said to him. When Œnone heard it she was filled with fear.

"Cast it at their feet, Paris, when they come to thee," she begged, "and say thou canst not set thyself up to be a judge of the Immortals."

"Nay, that would anger them against me," he said; for in his heart he was proud to have been chosen out of all the sons of men.

"I tell thee it will bring thee trouble if thou doest it, and to me sorrow unspeakable," said she.

"Did the winning of the bull bring sorrow either to thee or to me?" he asked scornfully.

Œnone was silent under his rebuke, though she knew her foreboding would come true. When the sun was almost high in the heavens, she came to him softly where he lay on the grass and kissed his hand.

"Zeus grant thee wisdom in thy judgment, Paris," she said, and glided away swiftly through the trees, that he might not see the tears in her eyes.

Then his heart smote him for his scornful words, and he rose up hastily from the ground and called to her,

"Œnone, Œnone!"

But she answered him not, and when he looked for her among the trees, he could find no trace of her. Now it was close upon noon, and he hastened back to the glade, where Iris had bidden him stay, and waited for the coming of the goddesses. In the clear bright light of noontide they came and stood before him in the shade of the forest trees; and he fell on his knees before them, filled with wonder and awe, and cast his eyes upon the ground, for he was afraid to look upon such majesty and beauty. Thereupon they drew near to him and bade him not be afraid, but rise and give his judgment. So he rose from his knees and looked upon them; and minute after minute passed, while still he gazed, for he could not make up his mind, so passing fair was each.

"Ah, lady goddesses," he said at last, "take the apple and divide it into three, for I cannot say who is the fairest among you."

"Nay, that may not be," they said; "thou must give it to one, and one alone."

As he still hesitated, Hera spoke.

"Look well upon me, Paris," she said. "I am the Queen of Heaven, and wife of Zeus almighty, and all power and might is in my hands. I can give thee kingship and sovereignty, and dominion over many peoples. See to it that my might is for thee, and not against."

As she spoke his heart turned cold with fear, and from terror he would have given her the apple. But as he was about to stretch forth his hand, Pallas Athene spoke.

"O Paris, what is power without wisdom? Purple and gold, and to sit where others kneel—all these things make not a king. But to walk by the light of knowledge where others grope in darkness—this can make a slave a ruler of kings. This can I give thee."

Then the voice of reason within him prompted him to give the apple to her; but once again he was withheld, as Aphrodite spoke.

"Power and wisdom, Paris? What are these but empty words at which men vainly grasp? I can give thee that which all men covet—the fairest of women for thine own."

The music of her voice made the blood rush like fire through his veins, and his heart was melted within him.

"O Aphrodite," he cried, and fell at her feet, "thou art fairest. Beside love, what is power, what is wisdom? I give thee the apple, O thou fairest among the fair!"

As she stretched forth her hand towards him to take the apple, a mist fell over his eyes, and he knew no more. When he awoke the apple and the goddesses had vanished away, and Œnone was bending over him weeping.

"Alas," she said, "my father, whose stream runs at thy feet, has told me thy choice, Paris, and I am come to bid thee farewell."

"Farewell, Œnone? Why farewell?" he cried, and stretched out his arms to her. The flame of Aphrodite still burned in his heart, and to his eyes Œnone had never looked more fair than now.

"Because of Aphrodite's promise," she answered.

"Ah, Œnone!" he cried, and took her in his arms, "now I know what that promise meant. Thou art the fairest of women, and thou art mine, beloved, and Aphrodite's promise was fulfilled ere she made it."

"Nay, nay, that is not what she meant. I may be fair, Paris, yet I am no woman, but a child of the mountain waters. One day thou wilt forget me, and thy heart will turn to thine own kind. In that day Aphrodite has promised that the fairest of women shall be thine, and she shall surely keep her word."

"Thou art woman enough for me," he said, "and I shall never want any other than thee." He kissed her, and comforted her as best he

could. The hours fled like minutes, the moon rose high in heaven, and one by one the stars came out, yet still they sat and talked of love, and of how they would be faithful to each other always. In like manner day after day passed by, and no two lovers in all the land were happier than Paris and Œnone.

Now it chanced that about this time Menelaus, King of Sparta, came to Troy, at the command of the oracle at Delphi. For a year past his land had been laid waste by a grievous famine, and when he inquired the cause of it, the oracle bade him to go to Troy and offer sacrifices at the tomb of Lycus and Chimæreus, the sons of Prometheus, for until their spirits were appeased the land of Sparta would be barren, and her sons would die of hunger in her streets. So Menelaus set sail for Troy, and Priam and all his house received him with joy. They held great feasts in his honour, and treated him hospitably, as befitted the king of a mighty people. When he had performed his task, and the time had come for him to return, he said to Priam,

"My friend, thou hast treated me right royally, and I in my turn would fain to do thee some service. Say, wilt thou not sail with me to Sparta, and see my palace, which shineth as the sun for splendour, and Helen, my wife, who is the fairest in a land where women are fairer than all other women?"

But Priam shook his head.

"I am an old man, Menelaus, and my travelling days are done. But if thou wouldst truly do me a service, thou wilt take with thee my son Paris as thy guest. He is of an age now to travel and see strange lands, and I could not entrust him to better hands than thine. Say, wilt thou take him or no?"

"I will take him right gladly," answered Menelaus, "seeing that since I cannot have thyself, no other man would please me so well as thy son. Bid the young man be ready, and he shall sail with me and my folk."

When Paris heard the news, he was glad; for never in his life had he set foot outside the land of Troy, and he longed to see the riches of Menelaus and all the wonders of his palace in Sparta. Ere the sun had risen he was in the woods of Ida telling Œnone of the voyage he must take.

"Nay, grieve not, beloved," he said, as she turned her face sadly away; "for a few short months I must leave thee, but I will come back to thee with many a long tale of the wonders I have seen. There is nought like travel to make a man hold up his head among his fellows, and the seeing of strange things that others have not seen."

"There is nought like travel," she said, "to make a man forget his home, and love the new things better than the old."

"Dost thou think me so faithless, Œnone?"

"Many men are faithful till they meet temptation," she replied.

"Had I listened to thee, I should still have been a shepherd on the mountains, knowing neither kith nor kin."

"It would have been happier so," said she.

"Œnone, I must not heed thy fears. Remember, I am a king's son, and I must live my life as befits a man, and not be ever held back by a woman's arms."

"The gods grant thou mayest always think so, Paris. Fare thee well, then; I will stay thee no longer, but I will watch for thy coming as never woman watched before. If evil fortune befall thee, Paris, come back to me, and I will save thee."

So, with many a promise not to forget her, but to come back to her as soon as might be, he left her and set sail with Menelaus.

And they crossed the blue Ægæan and came to glorious Sparta, lying low among the circling hills. And Menelaus made his guest

welcome, and showed him all the splendours of his palace, with its inlaid columns and its frieze of gold and blue. His stable and horses did he show him, and the stadium where the races were run and his treasure-house beneath the ground. Last of all he took him to Helen, his wife.

Now Helen, fairer than the sun in heaven, was sitting among her maidens, and when her lord and Paris entered, she rose from her chair and came forward with a smile to greet them. In the curve of her neck, in the gleam of her hair, there was magic, and a witchery about her face and form that no man could withstand; for she was the fairest of all women under the sun, that ever had been or ever should be in time to come. Many a man in his day loved Helen of Sparta, and many a man did she love in return; for so the gods had made her, exceeding fair and exceeding fickle, a joy and a curse among men.

As Paris looked upon her, her beauty reached his heart like the fumes of wine, and he forgot himself and his native land and Œnone; he forgot all pride and manliness, and the ties of honour that bound him to his host—all but his passion for Helen. Day and night he thought of her and of her alone, and of how he might make her his own; and day and night he plotted and planned, and at last he gained his end. For Aphrodite, true to her word, helped him, as she alone could do, and kindled in the heart of Helen an answering flame, making her for the time being love Paris more than Menelaus, her lord, or any other man. And she cast dust in the eyes of Menelaus, so that he saw not how the two lived only for each other, nor suspected his guest of any treachery. So one dark night they fled away together to Gythium, and from thence they sailed to Cranaë, and were wedded, and had joy of their love, forgetful of all else.

Œnone, meanwhile, wandered lonely about the woods and groves of Ida. With a heavy heart she had watched the ships of Menelaus sail away, and now, day by day, she would go down to the shore and look out across the sea towards Hellas. High up on a rock she would sit and sigh for him.

"Ah, Paris, between thee and me lies many a weary league of barren waters and many a misty mountain chain. But my heart is with thee in that strange new land. Oh, Paris, forget me not, but come back to me soon, beloved."

Thus would she sigh day by day; but he came not. Month after month passed by, but still he came not, nor any news of him, and his father and all the city were troubled to know what might have befallen him. So they manned a ship, and sent it out to Sparta to get news, and in time it returned home to tell how Paris and Helen had fled from Menelaus, and how Menelaus had set out in pursuit, and had followed them to the land of Egypt. After that no man knew where they had gone, or whether, perchance, Paris and Menelaus had met in deadly battle and fallen each by the other's hand, or what might have chanced. All the land was plunged in woe to think that Paris had so forgotten his honour as to steal away the wife of his host. But still they kept watch by day and by night, in case he should come back and be persuaded to give her up and make what amends he could.

Paris, meanwhile, with Helen, had fled before Menelaus from Egypt, and had taken refuge in Phœnicia; and when he traced them there, they fled once more and took ship to return to Troy; for they could not live for ever as wanderers on the face of the earth. With the silence of shame the folk received them at the harbour, and amid silence, that spoke more than words, they made their way through the city and came and stood before Priam in his halls, with eyes downcast upon the ground. Now Priam had heard of their coming, and had prepared in his mind a wrathful speech wherewith to greet his son and the woman who had led him astray. But when he looked upon Helen his wrath melted away like frost before the sun; for she looked like a fair lily that some careless hand has half plucked from its stem, so that its head hangs drooping towards the dust. Even so did she stand, with the tear-drops falling from her eyes. And all the wrathful words faded from his mind, so that he spoke quite otherwise than he had planned.

"My children," he said gently, "come hither to me."

"They came and knelt before him, and he laid his hands upon their young shoulders, as they bowed their heads and wept upon his knees.

"Ye have grievously sinned, my children," he said, "and ye are learning, all too late, how bitter is the fruit of sin. There is but one course before you. Paris, give back the woman thou hast stolen, and make what honourable amends thou canst. And thou, Helen, go home with thy lord when he comes for thee, and be a faithful wife to him always, and make him forget that ever thou didst play him false."

"O King," she said, "thou knowest not what thou askest. If thou givest me up to Menelaus he will slay me, or else my life will be a dog's life in his halls; for his heart is no softer than a flint, though his tongue be smooth. O my father, cast me not out from thy halls. If I have sinned in leaving Menelaus, shall I not sin again in leaving Paris? Or shall my sin be less if I flee from the man I love, to go with him I love not? Who maketh two hearts to cleave together? Who put Aphrodite all-powerful? Must we set at nought the will of Heaven for the sake of laws that man has made? O Priam, my father, forsake me not, but keep me in thy halls."

And she clasped her hands about his knees and looked up into his face. Beneath her gaze all his resolve gave way, and he took her face between his hands and kissed her.

"My Daughter," he said, "thou shalt stay with me as long as it shall please thee."

Thus did it come to pass that she made her home in Troy, and Priam, the king, became an accomplice in her sin; for the gods had so made her that the hearts of men were as wax between the fingers of Helen of Sparta.

In time came Menelaus, and stood in the halls of Priam, and demanded back his wife. And they offered him a ransom—gold and precious stones—but he flung it back in their faces.

"Think you that gold can pay for a living soul?" he cried? "Only a life can pay for a life, and many a life shall you pay for the sake of Helen. Look to your battlements and towers, O Priam; they must be strong indeed to stand against the host that I shall bring behind me from Hellas. Farewell, till we meet again in battle."

And he strode from the hall in anger, and sailed away to Sparta, to rouse up all the heroes of Hellas to take part in his quarrel with Troy.

Meanwhile in Troyland the forge fires burnt night and day, and the hammer rang loud upon the anvil. The red-hot iron was drawn from the furnace and bound hissing about the chariot-wheel; shields were stretched and swords were fashioned, and the ash-tree was felled upon the mountain for the handle of the tapering spear. Among the men many a heart beat high with hope; for what is there like war, if a man is brave and strong, to bring him renown, and make his name live among his fellows? But in the women's hall many a silent tear was shed; for what is there like war to bring sorrow to a woman's heart, when she sees her dear ones going forth to battle and knows not whether she shall ever look on their faces again, or, perchance, see them carried home with a gaping spear-wound in the side? And when the battle is raging she can do nought but pray. So they cursed Helen and her beauty in their hearts, and wished that even now King Priam would send her back and stave off the war from Troy.

But Paris and Helen cared for none of these things; while others worked and wept, they dallied in each other's arms and forgot all else, or hoped that when Menelaus reached home his anger would cool, and that he would find the kings of Hellas none too willing to leave their lands for the sake of another's wife. But in this they hoped in vain, and reckoned not how dear a man may hold his country's honour. For one dark night the hosts of Hellas pulled in to shore, and drew up their boats upon the beach and pitched their camp, and when the morning dawned their men were thick as flies about the walls of Troy.

So did it come to pass that Cassandra's words came true, and for many a weary year the tide of war surged about the city like a wave

of the sea, and Paris slunk through the streets like a beaten cur, not daring to look his fellows in the face. For they hated him because he had brought war upon his country, and yet, though the quarrel was of his own making, he was ever the last to take the field and ever the first to retreat. So low had his manhood sunk that he thought far more of reaching Helen with an unbroken skin than of winning fame upon the field of battle.

But one day matters reached a pass when Menelaus met him face to face upon the field, and challenged him to single combat beneath the walls of Troy. He who should kill his man should have Helen for wife, and the war should end, and no more lives be spent in vain for the sake of a quarrel that concerned but two. But Paris thought of Helen waiting in her chamber, and looked upon Menelaus, standing sword in hand before him, strong as a lion in his wrath. Then his heart gave way within him, and he turned and fled from the face of his foe back into the ranks of the Trojans. He would have fled from the fight altogether, but that in the path of his retreat stood Hector; the nodding plumes waved terrible upon his helmet and he leant on his two-handed sword and frowned upon his brother, for he had seen how he fled from Menelaus. When Paris saw him he fell back ashamed, but Hector stood aside to let him pass.

"Thou chicken-hearted mannikin," he cried, "get thee gone, and let others fight thy battle, that the courage of the Trojans be not a by-word among the nations."

And Paris slunk past him with his eyes upon the ground and went home to Helen in her chamber.

But when the fight was over Hector came and dragged him from his hiding-place as a dog drags out a rat into the light.

"Thou smooth-faced deceiver," he said, "is this the way a man should fight when he has sailed across the high seas, and stolen away the fairest of women from a man mighty in battle? Are we to make the name of Troy a laughing-stock among our foes, and hang our heads in shame when men shall say, 'In strength and might they

are like the immortal gods, these Trojans, but their courage is the courage of deer, that flees swiftly through the forest when he hears the bark of the hounds?' Thou coward, would thou hadst never been born, or hadst died upon the mountains ere there was time to bring dishonour on thy country."

And Paris trembled before his brother's wrath, but some of his old manhood returned to him.

"Thou speakest as all men speak who know not Aphrodite's power," he said. "Nevertheless, if thou wilt have it so, send forth a herald to Menelaus, and tell him I accept his challenge, and will fight him for the sake of Helen, his wife. And let the hosts of the Achæans and the hosts of Troy lay down their arms, and we two will stand up alone between them, and whichsoever of us shall fall in death, his side shall give up Helen to the victor; and the war shall cease, and peace be made between the nations."

So Hector sent forth a herald to Menelaus, and the two hosts drew close together on the plain till there was but a narrow space between them, and they lay aside their arms, and some lay upon the ground or sat, and others stood behind to watch the fight in the midst. And Paris put on his shining armour and his helmet with the nodding plumes, and went and stood face to face with Menelaus. In the sight of all the people Hector prayed,

"O Zeus, who rulest from on high, grant that he who is the offender may fall in the fight, and his spirit flee away to Hades, that the land may have peace and the people rest from war."

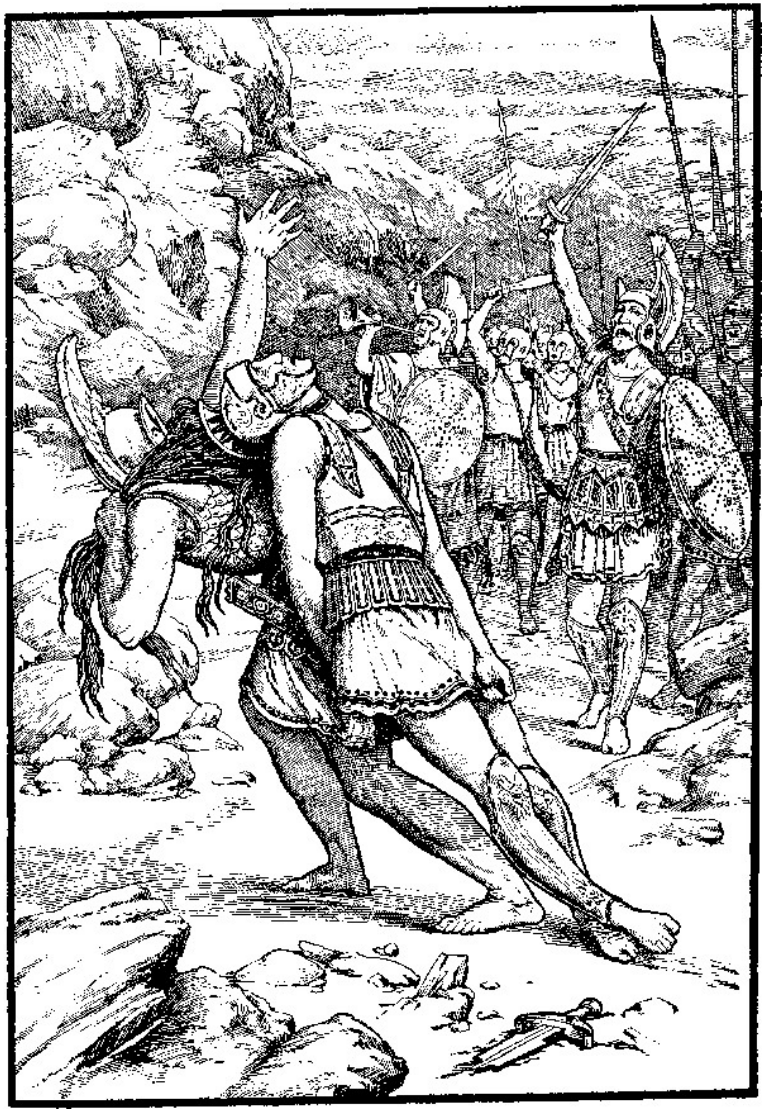
And every man in his heart prayed likewise, for all were sickened at the long years of fruitless strife.

Then Hector shook the lots in his helmet, to see who should be the first to hurl his brazen spear, and the lot of Paris fell forth upon the ground. And he brandished his spear above his head, and hurled it with all his might, and it crashed against the shield of Menelaus; but the stout shield turned it aside, and it fell powerless upon the

ground. Thereupon Menelaus in his turn hurled his spear, and it pierced through the shield of his foe, and would have brought black death to his heart had he not swerved aside, so that the point but grazed his corselet. But Menelaus, seeing his advantage, drew forth his sword and rushed upon him, and felled him a mighty blow upon his helmet, hoping to cleave it in two. But the sword shivered to pieces in his hand as he struck. Then, with an oath, he cast aside the hilt and leapt upon Paris, and seized him by the horsehair plume upon his helmet, and dragged him down. And the leathern thong that held the helmet was drawn tight about his throat, so that the breath was wellnigh squeezed out of him, and Menelaus was bearing him in triumph towards the Achæan host. But Aphrodite was mindful of her favourite, and, ere it was too late, she made the stout ox-hide give way beneath the weight of his body, and the helmet slipped off his head. Then she wrapped a mist about his body, so that no man should see him, and bore him away through the midst of the Trojan host, and laid him upon his bed. In the likeness of an aged dame she went and stood beside Helen on the battlements, where she leant with the other Trojan women looking down upon the plain, and she told her how she had borne forth Paris from the fight and saved him, and that now he lay upon his bed and longed for her. So straightway Helen left the others, and went and sat down by Paris. When she saw him lying there, without so much as a scratch upon his body, she was ashamed for him, and began to upbraid him.

"So thou hast come back from the battle, Paris, and couldst not endure to stand up to god-like Menelaus. Would that he had taken thee, for he is a better man than thou art! Go forth now, thou craven, and challenge him once more to battle, and stay thy ground like a man. Lo! thou art vanished away like smoke from the field, and both the hosts are making mock of thee."

Then her heart smote her for fear he should take her at her word and go back, and she fell upon her knees beside him, and took his hand in hers and wept.



MENELAUS WAS BEARING HIM IN TRIUMPH TOWARDS THE ACHæAN HOST.

"Ah, Paris," she cried, "go not forth, I pray thee, but stay with me. I, even I, do bid thee stay, lest thou fall by the hand of Menelaus, and I be left all desolate without thee."

"Ah, Helen," he said, "upbraid me not, for I love thee above all else. Some other day I will return and fight with Menelaus, but now I will stay with thee, and we will have joy of each other and forget all else."

So whilst Menelaus searched raging through all the host, like a lion seeking for his prey, Paris and Helen dallied in each other's arms, hidden from the eyes of men. An ill reckoning would it have been for Paris had the men of Troy known where to find him, for they hated him like black death, and would have given him up to the hands of Menelaus, to do by him as he would.

From that day forth Paris scarce dared to show his face among his fellows; but when Hector urged him, and he could stand out against his taunts no longer, he would go forth into battle, but disguised as a common soldier, with no mark upon him of his rank and birth. So did he hope to escape death and flee home as swift as might be to the arms of Helen. In this he succeeded full well for a time, but a day came when no disguise could save him and he could not flee away. For in the ranks against him stood mighty Philoctetes, with his bow and his poisoned arrows. And he drew his bow and prayed to Zeus in his heart,

"O Zeus almighty, that drivest the black thundercloud before thee, do thou guide mine arrow aright, that it may work havoc among our foes and bring glory to the host of the Achæans. In thy hands I leave it."

Then he drew back the string, so that the mighty bow was wellnigh bent in two, and the arrow sped with a whirr far over the foremost ranks of the Trojans to the rear part of the host. And it fell upon Paris, and pierced between the joints of his armour right through into his side. With a groan he fell, and black night came over his eyes, and he lay as one dead upon the field. When the fight was over, and either side was gathering up the dead and wounded from the plain, they came upon Paris among the rest; but till they had drawn off his helmet they knew him not, for he was dressed as a common soldier. When they saw who it was, they put him reverently on a bier

apart, for he was a king's son, and had been a brave man once, and death can wipe out many an old score of bitterness and hatred. So they bore him upon their shoulders silently to the palace of Priam his father, and laid him upon his couch. And they brought him wine and cordials, for his heart beat faintly still within his breast. For a moment he revived, and spoke in broken whispers.

"My friends, I am dying," he said, "and I would die in the pure free air of heaven, away from cities and from men and from shame. O my father, bid them carry me forth upon Ida, and there let them leave me, and return no more till they know the last breath must have gone from my body. Then let them burn me there, where once I was brave and free; and as the fire of my burning shall die out, let my name die out from among you—my name and my dishonour."

So did he speak, and fell back exhausted, with the vision before his eyes of the groves of Ida and of Œnone, and how she rose from the waters and loved him in the days of his innocent youth. And he remembered her words:

"O Paris, in that day come back to me, and I will heal thee of thy hurt."

And he wondered whether she would keep her word and forgive him and heal him, so that they could go back to their old life upon the mountains. But even if she would not, he felt that he would rather die there than in the airless city.

So they wrapped him about in warm coverings—for it was winter-time, and the snow lay white upon the ground—and carried him forth upon Ida. And they placed a blazing torch above his head and left him on the lonely heights, and the whispering pine-trees kept watch above him as they tossed their arms in the cold north wind.

From the shadow of a boulder Œnone watched the procession wind back down the mountain-track, and when they had passed out of sight she came forth from her hiding-place. The tale of Paris and Helen she knew full well, and the reason for the war, for she had

listened to the talk of the shepherds on the mountains. But still in her heart she loved Paris; and when she saw him carried forth to die, she remembered how she had promised to heal him of his hurt, for she knew many a magic charm, and she could heal him if she would. So now she drew near to him out of the forest, and bent over his couch, and her red-gold hair fell soft about his face. But the fire of fever burnt hot within him, and he knew her not; but the face that came before his wandering mind was the face of Helen.

"Helen!" he whispered, "Helen!"

At the sound of that hated name a great bitterness came into the heart of Œnone.

"Must I heal thee for the sake of Helen?" she cried, and turned and fled through the darkened pines, on, on, she knew not where, and threw herself at last upon the grass and wept.

And so the torch burned low above his head and cast a dim red glow upon the snow, and he died alone of his fever upon the mountains, and she healed him not of his hurt.

The next morning came the young men from the city, and the sons of Priam, and the old king himself, to the place where Paris lay; for they knew full well that he could not have lived out that night upon the mountains. And they gathered together the pine-trunks which the woodmen had left felled upon the ground, and heaped up a great pyre, high upon the hills, so that the burning of Paris might shine like a beacon fire in the sight of Troy and of the Achæan host. When the pyre was built they placed the body on it, and poured out wine and oil upon the wood, and the old king stood and lifted up his hands above his son.

"O father Zeus," he prayed, "who rulest upon Ida, before thee do I burn the body of my son, and before my friends and before my foes, that they both may see it. May the wine which I pour forth upon his body be a libation of peace, that by his death he may join together in

friendship those hands which by his sin he made draw the sword upon each other. O Zeus almighty, grant my prayer!"

The people bowed their heads as they heard, and the old man poured forth the last libation. The salt tears ran from his eyes and fell upon the body of his son, and washed away from his mind all memory of his sin and cowardice, and only the image of him remained as he had been when he came in his youth and beauty for the winning of the bull. So can the hand of death wipe out all ugliness and wrong.

When the last libation had been poured, they set the pyre alight, and in time it burned up bravely, for the oil and the wine, and the breath of the north wind blowing bleak across the mountain, made the flame burn bright and clear; and the pyre of Paris shone like a flaming star against the dull grey sky and over the hills and plain lying silent beneath their pall of snow. Far away across the valley Œnone saw the light, and knew that the body of him she loved, and might have saved, lay perishing within the flames. All too late, the bitterness in her heart died out, and only the love remained, and she would have given all she knew to have healed Paris of his hurt. With a wild cry she rushed, on the wings of the storm-wind, down the valley and up the hillside, and her white robes flew out behind her and the long locks of her red-gold hair. Through the ranks of the mourners she rushed and over the melting snow, through the flames of the pyre, and cast herself upon the body of Paris and put her arms around his neck. There, on his last resting-place, she lay with him, and the stifling smoke closed about her, and her spirit fled away there, where his had gone before. The people heard the cry, and saw her as she flew through their midst; but they thought it was the shriek of the north wind rushing over the hills, and to their eyes her white robes and her flowing hair seemed but the snowdrift, and last year's dead leaves whirled madly on the wings of the storm. And so they knew nought of the love of Paris and Œnone, or of how she watched his flocks with him when he was brave and free, or of how she forgave him, all too late, and died with him in the pyre which burned for a beacon of peace upon the snow-clad hills.

CAST HERSELF UPON THE BODY OF PARIS AND PUT HER ARMS AROUND HIS NECK.