English Literature for Secondary Schools

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CHILDREN OF THE DAWN

PART I

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Children of the Dawn

Old Tales of Greece

Written by

Elsie Finnimore Buckley

With Introduction by ARTHUR SIDGWICK; *Notes and Subjects for Essays by* J. H. FOWLER

PART I

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ILLUSTRATION

INTRODUCTION

[From the Introduction to the larger volume, comprising eleven stories, published by Messrs. Wells, Gardner, Darton & Co., Ltd, who have authorised the publication of the present selection.]

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, Athenæus, Apuleius and Ælian. 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 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 Œdipus." 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, Æschylus wrote a whole trilogy, and Sophocles three separate dramas, on this theme. Euripides dealt with it in his "Phœnissæ," which survives, and in his "Œdipus 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.

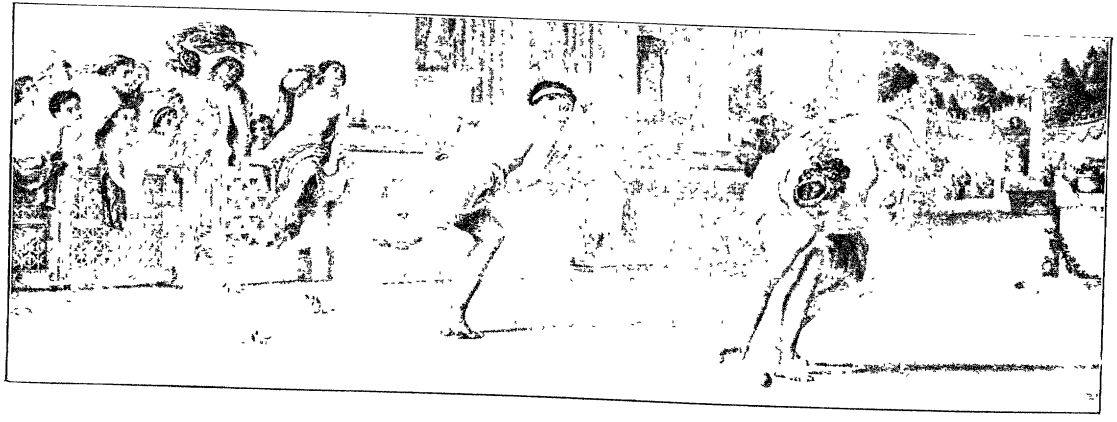
The other two stories (in both of which Atalanta appears) rest in their present shape on the authority of Apollodorus; but the incidents of the Calydonian boar-hunt, and the race for the hand of the princess, won by the suitor's clever trick

of the golden apples, are found as local traditions connected with two different parts of Greece, Arcadia and Bœotia, and may be in their earliest form of great antiquity.

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.

OXFORD,
September 9, 1908.



ATALANTA'S RACE.

After the Painting by E. J Poynter, R A.

CHILDREN OF THE DAWN

THE RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX

FAR away towards the east and the regions of the rising sun lies the fair land 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 call 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 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 burned 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 at 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 sweep 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 Anticyra 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 corn-fields 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—from 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 washed in the great stone basin, and put away all uncleanness 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 around 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, 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?"

"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 answers 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 women was now the foulest of beasts, and he saw that by 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."

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 the 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 mine own sire. Wherefore I went not back to my native land, but have 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 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, curse 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 art 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 they 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 Cithæron, 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 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 spring breezes played about them, and the clear waters of Cephisus flowed sparkling at their feet to the fertile plain below. In the dark coverts and green glades the nightingale 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 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 gentler 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.

"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 of the glory and wisdom of Œdipus, and of how he solved the riddle of the Sphinx.

THE HUNTING OF THE CALYDONIAN BOAR

In the city of Calydon long ago there were great rejoicings because the queen Althæa had given birth to a son, her first-born, who, if 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 baby to her breast, and held its soft little hand in hers, and whispered in its ear words which only a mother knows how to use 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 leash, 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—such 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, Althæa, 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; she rushed across the room, and, drawing forth the brazing 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 Althæa 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 alone 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-eyed 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 Achelöus 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 our 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 turned 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 shalt 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 vine-yard 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 flocks 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 came, 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 fondle her and play with her, and so long as they were 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 the curtain of the great doorway for the newcomer 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. Crosswise 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 Crisæan 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 mountains 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, 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 greenwood, but never a monster so fierce as this boar that Artemis has sent against us. I tell 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 deer, 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 on 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 women-kind 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 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, Althæa 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 the boar had struck in his 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."

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

the 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 brave 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 coverings, 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," cried 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.

"O 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 nor 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 for all, he opened his eyes and looked up at her, and when he saw her the fear and the 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 WINNING OF ATALANTA

ONCE 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 folk 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 held 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 the bugles. Full often had she joined in 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 wood-nymphs fled, but hunted with them for joy of the hunt, and left them when it pleased her. So now she joined in the chase as the stag broke loose from cover, and her white feet 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 last 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 to 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 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 trustfully. 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 as 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 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.

"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 early 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 one 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 right. 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 to 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 for my hand, if he will fulfil one condition."

"My child," cried her 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 others. So he published abroad among the suitors the condition she had made. When they heard it there was 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 in 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 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 marrying, 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 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 far 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 that 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 racecourse, 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 fro 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. Then 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 must 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 had come 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 his 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, in 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 hast 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 the wayside," she said within herself, "wherefore I can do him no wrong by letting him speak with me 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 all our 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:

"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 my 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 first 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 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 to 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 that 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 indifferent matters, and each one knew 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 not 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 shackels 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 l
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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 dashed 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 it 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 forbade 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 not 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 had 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 hand 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 merry-making 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.

"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.'

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"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 days, for a memorial of the race that she had failed to win.

NOTES

P. 2, l. 10. **Amphion.** See Tennyson's poem of that name.

> " 'Tis said he had a tuneful tongue,
> Such happy intonation,
> Wherever he sat down and sung
> He left a small plantation;
> Wherever in a lonely grove
> He set up his forlorn pipes,
> The gouty oak began to move,
> And flounder into hornpipes."

In another poem, *Tithonus*, Tennyson refers to the legend that Apollo built the walls of Troy (Ilion) by his music, as Amphion was said to have built the walls of Thebes.

> " Like that strange song I heard Apollo sing,
> While Ilion like a mist rose into towers."

P. 4, l. 10. **naiads,** nymphs (female spirits), supposed to live in rivers and springs.

P. 6, l. 28. **satyrs,** spirits of the woodland, in the train of the god Dionȳsus, with puck noses, bristling hair, goat-like ears and short tails. There is a famous statue of a satyr (or faun) in the Capitoline Museum at Rome. A charming description of it will be found near the beginning of Hawthorne's novel, *Transformation*.

P. 9, l. 12. **tumblers,** mountebanks.

P. 12, l. 2. **hellebore,** a plant which was said to cure insanity.

l. 21. **tripod,** three-footed stool.

P. 29, l. 7. **one of the noblest plays,** the "Antĭgŏnē" of Sophocles.

SUBJECTS FOR SHORT COMPOSITIONS

(The numbers in brackets refer to the pages)

I. THE RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX.

1. What do you know of the country of the Greeks?

2. Ancient Athens.

3. Describe the temple of Apollo at Delphi.

4. What do you think of the characters of Oedipus and Antigone?

5. Express the Riddle of the Sphinx in rhyme—not more than 8 lines.

6. Write a short poem on the death of the Sphinx and the rejoicings that followed. [Compare Spenser's account of the Slaying of the Dragon in *Faerie Queene*, Cantos xi. and xii.]

7. Explain the words: cascades (7), fissure (12), noxious (12), livelong (18), expiation (29), dissuade (28), libation (33), sanctuary (33).

II. THE HUNTING OF THE CALYDONIAN BOAR.

8. What do you know of the Furies and the Fates?

9. What gods and goddesses are mentioned in this story, and what were their special attributes?

10. "So on the morrow a great festival was held in honour of Artemis" (42). Write an imaginary description of it.

11. Write a short poem *either* on "Althaea's Curse" (58), *or* on "The burning of the brand" (59).

12. Explain the words: assuaged (42), barque (46), perforce (46), unflinching (46), trophy (54).

III. THE WINNING OF ATALANTA.

13. Do you know any other story of a child being suckled by an animal (63)?

14. King Schoenus writes to a neighbouring king to tell him of the return of his daughter. Give the letter.

15. Describe Atalanta's Race with the stranger in a letter from some one who saw it.

16. Put into verse Atalanta's farewell to the forest (70).

17. Explain by reference to their context:

(*a*) If it come soon or late, what matter?

(*b*) Can a snail outstrip a deer?

(*c*) Those who tarry too long ... go through the gate with nought but a cake in their hand.

(*d*) When I awoke I thought it had been a dream.

18. Explain the words: uplands (66), alcove (71), parable (75), tunic (80), askance (83), deference (83), saffron (97).

HELPS TO FURTHER STUDY.

1. For some account of the gods and goddesses and other personages named in this book, see any Dictionary of Classical Mythology, or Guerber's *Myths of Greece and Rome* (London: Harrap).

2. The story of Oedipus is told in two noble plays by Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. The verse translation of Sophocles by Lewis Campbell (*World's Classics*, Oxford), is recommended, or the fine translation of *Oedipus Rex* by Gilbert Murray (London: Allen). In *Oedipus at Colonus* the lovely ode on Colonus (cp. p. 30 of this book) should be read, and the wonderful account of the death of Oedipus (cp. p. 34).

3. Older readers will enjoy the splendid verse of Swinburne's drama, *Atalanta in Calydon*.

4. The story of Jason (p. 39) is told in Kingsley's *Heroes* and in William Morris's poem, *The Life and Death of Jason*.

INDEX OF NAMES AND PLACES

The number refers to the page

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