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THE LOST TALES OF MILETUS

BY THE RIGHT HON.

SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTTON, BART., M.P.

IN ONE VOLUME.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

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THE

LOST TALES OF MILETUS

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1866.

PREFACE.

TIME has spared no remains, in their original form, of those famous Tales of Miletus, which are generally considered to be the remote progenitors of the modern Novel. The strongest presumption in favour of their merit rests on the evidence of the popularity they enjoyed both among Greeks and Romans in times when the imaginative literature of either people was at its highest point of cultivation. As to the materials which they employed for interest or amusement, we are not without means of reasonable conjecture. Parthenius, a poet, probably of Nicæa (though his birthplace has been called in dispute), who enjoyed a considerable reputation in the Augustan Age, and had the honour to teach Virgil Greek, has bequeathed to us a collection of short love-stories compiled from older and more elaborate legends. In making this collection he

could scarcely fail to have had recourse to sources so popular as the fictions of Miletus. Whatever might have been the gifts of Parthenius as a poet, he wastes none of them on his task of compiler. He contents himself with giving the briefest possible outline of stories that were then in popular circulation, carefully divesting them of any ornament of fancy or elegance of style. His work, dedicated to the Latin poet, Gallus, seems designed to suggest, from the themes illustrated by old tale-tellers, hints to the imitation or invention of later poets. And, indeed, Parthenius himself states that it was for such uses to Gallus that his book was composed. But what stories, thus reduced to the mere ashes of their pristine form, might have been when they took life and glow from the art of the practised tale-teller, the yet extant and animated romance of "The Golden Ass," by Apuleius, may enable us to guess. For though that romance, as well as the story of the "Ass" by Lucian, is generally supposed to have been borrowed from the earlier work of Lucius of Patra, Apuleius implies that his manner of telling it is

agreeable to that of the fictions most in vogue in his time, which were certainly the Milesian Fables, or those which the Sybarites imitated from that original. And if in "The Golden Ass" we may really trace a distinguishable vestige of the manner in which the Milesian tale-tellers diversified and adorned their fables, they must have ranged through a variety of interest little less extensive than that in which the novelists of our day display the versatility of their genius,— embracing lively satire, prodigal fancy, and stirring adventure.

Out of such indications of the character and genius of the lost Milesian Fables, and from the remnants of myth and tale once in popular favour, which may be found, not only in such repertories of ancient legend as those of Apollodorus and Conon, but scattered throughout the Scholiasts or in the pages of Pausanias and Athenæus, I have endeavoured to weave together a few stories that may serve as feeble specimens of the various kinds of subject in which these ancestral tale-tellers may have exercised their faculties of inven-

tion. I have selected from Hellenic myths those in which the ground is not preoccupied, by the great poets of antiquity, in works yet extant; and which, therefore, may not be without the attraction of novelty to the general reader. In this selection I have avoided, of course, any of the more licentious themes, to which, it is to be feared, the Boccaccios of Miletus sometimes stooped their genius; while I have endeavoured to take subjects which depended for the popularity they once enjoyed on elements congenial to art in every land and age; subjects readily lending themselves to narrative construction or dramatic situation, and capable of that degree of human interest which is essential to the successful employment of all the more fanciful agencies of wonder.

I do not, however, assume the tales herein contained to be told in that primitive form of Milesian fiction of which we can only conjecturally trace the vestige. I have rather sought to place the myths upon which they are founded at that point of view from which they would have appeared to contemporaries of Apuleius in

whom the vestige of Milesian fable must be principally explored; — a period during which stories derived from heathen myths passed, in re-narrating, through minds in which what is called the modern sentiment, more or less perceptibly, infused itself. I have no doubt that the lovely story of Cupid and Psyche, which forms the most poetical portion of "The Golden Ass," is of much remoter antiquity than the time of Apuleius; but the modern sentiment which delights in under currents of thought, and does not satisfy itself with modes of art wholly sensuous, prevails in Apuleius's treatment of the story, and could not have been breathed into the fiction by any one who had not imbibed the spirit either of Christianity or of the later Platonists. In regarding, therefore, these fictions as if they were composed not by a contemporary of Sophocles nor even of Ovid, but by a contemporary of Apuleius, or of one of his less gifted successors in the revival or re-adaptation of Greek romance, the author gains this advantage: the main difficulty in the treatment of classic myths by a modern writer, is materially lessened, if

not wholly removed: for if the modern sentiment sometimes appears in the intimation of truths which underlie all fiction, it ceases to be an anachronism, and is critically appropriate to the period assumed for the composition of the story;—just as the mode in which Apuleius platonises the tale of Cupid and Psyche is proper to the time in which he lived, and the influences to which his imagination was subjected.

I must add a few words as to the form in which these narratives are cast. Although it is clear that the Milesian Tales were for the most part told in prose, yet it appears that Aristides, the most distinguished author of those tales whose name has come down to us, told at least some of his stories in verse. Dunlop, in the "History of Fiction," quotes verses from Ovid which seem to decide that question—

> Junxit Aristides Milesia carmina secum,
> Pulsus Aristides nec tamen urbe sua est.

And the myths I have selected are essentially poetic, and almost necessarily demand that license for fancy to which the employment of rhythm allures the sanc-

tion of the reader, while it obtains his more ductile assent to the machinery and illusions of a class of fiction associated in his mind not with novelists, but poets.

In have therefore adopted for the stories contained in this volume, forms of poetic rhythm; and the character of the subjects treated seemed to me favourable for an experiment which I have long cherished a desire to adventure; viz. that of new combinations of blank or rhymeless metre, composed not in lines of arbitrary length and modulation (of which we have a few illustrious examples), but in the regularity and compactness of uniform stanza, constructed upon principles of rhythm very simple in themselves, but which, so far as I am aware, have not been hitherto adopted, at least for narrative purposes. If the metres invented for the following poems were partially suggested by, they are not imitated from, metres in use among the ancients. They are modes of rhythm in conformity with our own associations of prosodiacal arrangement; humbly following in such attempt, if I may say so, with great reverence, the example set to us by Milton, who in his

rhymeless translation of Horace's Ode to Pyrrha aimed at no imitation of the "dactylic dance" of the Horatian stanza (especially in the first two lines), but rather at such rhythmical combinations as might transfer to a measure wholly English in construction, the elegant terseness of the Latin original. In fact, even if the strophic metres of the ancients could be faithfully rendered into the English language, and with a harmony agreeable to the English ear, we may reasonably doubt if they would be suitable to narrative purposes, since there is, I believe, no instance extant or recorded, in Greek or Roman literature, in which such metres were so employed — except episodically, as Horace treats the story of Europa in the Ode to Galatea. It may be asked why, in departing from the usual mechanism of our rhymeless metre, and acknowledging some obligation to classic rhythm, I did not resort to the forms of hexameter, or alternate hexameter and pentameter; for the adoption of which I might have sheltered myself behind the authority of writers so eminent, whether in the English language or the Ger-

man. Certainly I do not share in the objections which some critics of no mean rank have made to the adaptation of those measures to modern languages in which it is impossible to preserve the laws of quantity that associations derived from the originals are said, I think erroneously, to demand. For certain kinds of poetry, the hexameter especially seems to me admirably suited when in the hands of a master. The time has not, perhaps, yet come to decide the dispute whether "Evangeline" would have gained or lost in beauty had it been composed in a different measure, but most men of taste who have read the "Herman and Dorothea" of Goethe will allow, that in any other metre the poem could scarcely have had the same patriarchal charm, and no man of taste who has read the noble translation of that poem by Dr. Whewell will venture to assert that in any other metre the spirit of the original could have been as faithfully preserved. But neither the hexameter nor the alternate hexameter and pentameter would be appropriate to my mode of treating these stories, in which, for the most part, I have sought to

bring out dramatic rather than epic or elegiac elements of interest, not without aim at that lyrical brevity and compression of incident and description which is less easily attainable in the metres referred to than in composite measures of shorter compass and more varied cæsura. And for the rest, my object has been, not to attempt that which has been already done far better than I could hope to do it, but rather to suggest new combinations of sound in our native language without inviting any comparison with rhythms in the dead languages, from which hints for measures purely English have, indeed, been borrowed, but of which direct imitation has been carefully shunned.

If I have been somewhat prolix in these preliminary remarks, my excuse must be found in the desire I feel to bespeak candid attention to an experiment novel in conception and form, and therefore liable to many faults which those who would repeat it with more success may readily detect and avoid.

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THE SECRET WAY.

The very striking legend which suggests the following poem is found in Athenæus, book xiii. c. 35. It is there given as a quotation from the "History of Alexander, by Chares of Mitylene." The author adds, that "the story is often told by the barbarians who dwell in Asia, and is exceedingly admired; and they have painted representations of the story in their temples and palaces, and also in their private houses." In constructing the plot of the poem, I have made some variations in incident and *dénouement* from the meagre outlines of the old romance preserved in Athenæus, with a view of heightening the interest which springs from the groundwork of the legend. I should add that the name of the Scythian king's daughter is changed from Odatis, which, for narrative purpose, a little too nearly resembles that of her father, Omartes—to Argiope: a name more Hellenic it is true, but it may be reasonably doubted whether that of Odatis be more genuinely Scythian. For the sake of euphony, the name of the Persian Prince is softened from Zariadres to Zariades. This personage is said by the author whom Athenæus quotes, to have been the brother of Hystaspes, and to have held dominion over the country from above the Caspian Gates to the river Tanais (the modern Don). Assuming that he existed historically, and was the brother of Hystaspes and uncle to Darius I., he would have held the dominions assigned to him, as a satrap under Cambyses, not as an independent sovereign. But in a romance of this kind, it would be hypercritical, indeed, to demand strict historical accuracy. Although the hero of the legend would have been, as described, of purely Persian origin (a royal Achæmenian), and the people subjected to him would not have belonged to Media proper, in the poem he is sometimes called the Mede, and his people Medes, according to an usage sufficiently common among Greek writers when speaking generally of the rulers and people of the great Persian Empire. It may scarcely be worth while to observe that though in subsequent tales where the Hellenic deities are more or less prominently introduced or referred to, their Hellenic names are assigned to them, yet in the passing allusions made in this poem to the God of War or the Goddess of Morning, it was judged more agreeable to the general reader to designate those deities by the familiar names of Mars and Aurora, rather than by the Greek appellations of Ares and Eos.

OMARTES, King of the wide plains which, north
Of Tanais, pasture steeds for Scythian Mars,
  Forsook the simple ways
    And Nomad tents of his unconquered fathers;

And in the fashion of the neighbouring Medes,
Built a great city girt with moat and wall,
  And in the midst thereof
    A regal palace dwarfing piles in Susa,

With vast foundations rooted into earth,
And crested summits soaring into Heaven,
And gates of triple brass,
Siege-proof as portals welded by the Cyclops.

One day Omartes, in his pride of heart,
Led his High Priest, Teleutias, thro' his halls,
And chilled by frigid looks,
When counting on warm praise, asked—"What
is wanting?

"Where is beheld the palace of a king,
So stored with all that doth a king beseem;
The woofs of Phrygian looms,
The gold of Colchis, and the pearls of Ormus,

"Couches of ivory sent from farthest Ind,
Sidonial crystal, and Corinthian bronze,
Egypt's vast symbol gods,
And those imagined into men by Hellas;

"Stored not in tents that tremble to a gale,
But chambers firm-based as the Pyramids,
And breaking into spray
The surge of Time, as Gades breaks the ocean?"

"Nor thou nor I the worth of these things now
Can judge; we stand too near them," said the sage.
"None till they reach the tomb
Scan with just eye the treasures of the palace.

"But for thy building—as we speak, I feel
Thro' all the crannies pierce an icy wind
More bitter than the blasts
Which howled without the tents of thy rude fathers.

"Thou hast forgot to bid thy masons close
The chinks of stone against Calamity."
The sage inclined his brow,
Shivered, and, parting, round him wrapt his mantle.

The King turned, thoughtful, to a favourite chief,
The rudest champion of the polished change
That fixed the wain-borne homes
Of the wild Scythian, and encamped a city;

"Heard'st thou the Sage, brave Seuthes?" asked the King.
"Yea, the priest deemed thy treasures insecure,
And fain would see them safe
In his own temple:" The King smiled on Seuthes.

Unto this Scythian monarch's nuptial bed
But one fair girl, Argiope, was born:
For whom no earthly throne
Soared from the level of his fond ambition.

To her, indeed, had Aphroditè given
Beauty, that royalty which subjects kings,
Sweet with unconscious charm,
And modest as the youngest of the Graces.

Men blest her when she moved before their eyes
Shame-faced, as blushing to be born so fair,
Mild as that child of gods
Violet-crowned Athens hallowing named "Pity."*

Now, of a sudden, over that bright face
There fell the shadow of some troubled thought,
As cloud, from purest dews
Updrawn, makes sorrowful a star in heaven:

And as a nightingale that having heard
A perfect music from some master's lyre,
Steals into coverts lone,
With her own melodies no more contented,

* "In the market-place of the Athenians is an altar of Pity, which divinity, as she is, above all others, beneficent to human life and to the mutability of human affairs, is alone of all the Greeks reverenced by the Athenians."—Pausanias; Attics, c. XVII.

But haunted by the strain, till then unknown,
Seeks to re-sing it back, herself to charm,
  Seeks still and ever fails,
    Missing the key-note which unlocks the music,—

So, from her former pastimes in the choir
Of comrade virgins, stole Argiope,
  Lone amid summer leaves
    Brooding that thought which was her joy and
      trouble.

The King discerned the change in his fair child,
And questioned oft, yet could not learn the cause;
  The sunny bridge between
    The lip and heart which childhood builds was
      broken.

Not more Aurora, stealing into heaven,
Conceals the mystic treasures of the deep
Whence with chaste blush she comes,
Than virgin bosoms guard their earliest secret.

Omartes sought the priest, to whose wise heart
So dear the maiden, he was wont to say
That grains of crackling salt
From her pure hand, upon the altar sprinkled,

Sent up a flame to loftier heights in heaven
Than that which rolled from hecatombs in smoke.
"King," said the musing seer,
"Behold, the woodbine, opening infant blossoms,

"Perfumes the bank whose herbage hems it round,
From its own birthplace drinking in delight;
Later, its instinct stirs;
Fain would it climb—to climb forbidden, creepeth,

"Its lot obeys its yearning to entwine;
Around the oak it weaves a world of flowers;
Or, listless drooping, trails
Dejected tendrils lost mid weed and briar.

"There needs no construing to my parable:
As is the woodbine's, so the woman's life:
Look round the forest kings,
And to the stateliest wed thy royal blossom."

Sharp is a father's pang when comes the hour
In which his love contents his child no more,
And the sweet wonted smile
Fades from his hearthstone to rejoice a stranger's.

But soon from parent love dies thought of self;
Omartes, looking round the Lords of earth,
In young Zariades
Singled the worthiest of his peerless daughter;

Scion of that illustrious hero-stem,
Which in great Cyrus bore the loftiest flower
Purpled by Orient suns;
Stretched his vast satrapies, engulphing kingdoms,

From tranquil palmgroves fringing Caspian waves,
To the bleak marge of stormy Tanais;
On Scythia bordering thus,
No foe so dread, and no ally so potent.

Perilous boundary-rights by Media claimed
O'er that great stream which, laving Scythian plains,
Europe from Asia guards,
The Persian Prince, in wedding Scythia's daughter

Might well resign, in pledge of lasting peace.
But ill the project of Omartes pleased
His warlike free-born chiefs,
And ill the wilder tribes of his fierce people;

For Scyth and Mede had long been as those winds
Whose very meeting in itself is storm,
Yet the King's will prevailed,
Confirmed, when wavering, by his trusted Seuthes.

He, the fierce leader of the fiercest horde,
Won from the wild by greed of gain and power,
Stood on the bound between
Man social and man savage, dark and massive:

So rugged was he that men deemed him true,
So secret was he that men deemed him wise,
And he had grown so great,
The throne was lost behind the subject's shadow

In the advice he whispered to the king
He laid the key-stone of ambitious hope,
This marriage with the Mede
Would leave to heirs remote the Scythian king-
dom,

Sow in men's minds vague fears of foreign rule,
Which might, if cultured, spring to armed revolt.
In armed revolt how oft
Kings disappear, and none dare call it murder.

And when a crown falls bloodstained in the dust,
The strong man standing nearest to its fall
Takes it and crowns himself;
And heirs remote are swept from earth as rebels.

Of peace and marriage-rites thus dreamed the king;
Of graves and thrones the traitor; while the fume
From altars, loud with prayer
To speed the Scythian envoys, darkened heaven.

A hardy prince was young Zariades,
Scorning the luxuries of the loose-robed Mede,
Cast in the antique mould
Of men whose teaching thewed the soul of Cyrus.

"To ride, to draw the bow, to speak the truth,
Sufficed to Cyrus," said the prince, when child.
"Astyages knew more"
Answered the Magi — "Yes, and lost his kingdoms."

Yet there was in this prince the eager mind
Which needs must think, and therefore needs must
learn;
Natures, whose roots strike deep,
Clear their own way, and win to light in growing.

His that rare beauty which both charms and awes
The popular eye; his the life-gladdening smile;
His the death-dooming frown;
That which he would he could;—men loved and
feared him.

Now of a sudden over this grand brow
There fell the gloom of some unquiet thought,
As when the south wind sweeps
Sunshine from Hadria in a noon of summer:

And as a stag, supreme among the herd,
With lifted crest inhaling lusty air,
Smit by a shaft from far,
Deserts his lordly range amidst the pasture,

And thro' dim woodlands with drooped antlers creeps
To the cool marge of rush-grown watersprings;
So from all former sports,
Contest, or converse with once-loved companions,

Stole the young prince thro' unfrequented groves,
To gaze with listless eyes on lonely streams.
All, wondering, marked the change,
None dared to question; he had no fond father.

Now, in the thick of this his altered mood,
Arrived the envoys of the Scythian king,
Reluctant audience found,
And spoke to ears displeased their sovereign's message.

"Omartes greets Zariades the Mede:
Between the realms of both there rolls a river
Inviolate to the Scyth,
Free to no keels but those the Scythian charters:

"Yet have thy subjects outraged oft its waves,
And pirate foray on our northern banks
Ravaged the flocks and herds,
Till Scythian riders ask 'Why sleeps the Ruler?'

"Still, loth to fan the sparks which leap to flame
Reddening the nations, from the breath of kings;
We have not sought thy throne
With tales of injury or appeals to justice;

"But searching in our inmost heart to find
The gentlest bond wherewith to link our realms,
Make Scyth and Mede akin,
By household ties their royal chiefs uniting,

"We strip our crown of its most precious gem,
Proffering to thee our child Argiope:
So let the Median Queen
Be the mild guardian of the Scythian river."

Lifting his brow, replied Zariades:
"Great rivers are the highways of the world:
The Tanais laves my shores;
For those who dwell upon my shores I claim it.

"If pirates land on either side for prey,
My banks grow herdsmen who can guard their herds;
Take, in these words, reply
To all complaints that threaten Median subjects.

"But for the gentler phrase wherewith your king
Stoops to a proffer, yet implies command,
I pray you, in return,
To give such thanks as soften most refusal.

"Thanks are a language kings are born to hear,
But speak not glibly till they near their fall.
To guard his Scythian realm,
On the Mede's throne the Scyth would place his daughter;

"I should deceive him if I said 'Agreed.'
No throne, methinks, hath room for more than one;
Where a Queen's lips decide
Or peace or war, she slays the king her husband.

"Thus thinking, did I wed this Scythian maid,
It were no marriage between Mede and Scyth;
Nor wrong I unseen charms;
Love, we are told, comes like the wind from heaven

"Not at our bidding, but its own free will.
And so depart—and pardon my plain speech.
That which I think I say,
Offending oft-times, but deceiving never."

So he dismissed them, if with churlish words,
With royal presents, and to festal pomps.
But one, by Median law
Nearest his throne, the chief priest of the Magi,

Having heard all with not unprescient fears,
Followed the Prince and urged recall of words
Which, sent from king to king,
Are fraught with dragon seeds, whose growth is
armies.

Mute, as if musing in himself, the Prince
Heard the wise counsel to its warning close.
Then, with a gloomy look,
Gazed on the reader of the stars, and answered—

"Leave thou to me that which to me belongs;
My people need the Tanais for their rafts;
Or soon or late that need
Strings the Mede's bow, and mounts the Scythian rider.

"Mage, I would pluck my spirit from the hold
Of a strong phantasy, which, night and day,
Haunts it, unsinews life,
And makes my heart the foe of my own reason.

"Perchance in war the gods ordain my cure;
And courting war, I to myself give peace."
Startled by these wild words,
The Mage, in trust-alluring arts long-practised,

Led on the Prince to unfold their hidden sense;
And having bound the listener by the oath
Mage never broke, to hold
Sacred the trust, the King thus told his trouble.

"Know that each night (thro' three revolving moons)
An image comes before me in a dream;
Ever the same sweet face,
Lovely as that which blest the Carian's slumber.*

* The reader will have the kindness to remember in this and a subsequent allusion by Zariades to Greek legend, that the narrative is supposed to be borrowed from a Milesian tale-teller, who would certainly not have entertained the same scruple as a modern novelist in assigning familiarity with Hellenic myths to a Persian prince.

"Nought mid the dark-eyed daughters of the East,
Nought I have ever seen in waking hours,
Rivals in charm this shape
Which hath no life—unless a dream hath substance.

"But never yet so clearly visible,
Nor with such joy in its celestial smile
Hath come the visitant,
Making a temple of the soul it hallows,

"As in the last night's vision; there it stooped
Over my brow, with tresses that I touched,
With love in bashful eyes,
With breath whose fragrance lingered yet in waking,

"And balmed the morn, as when a dove, that brings
Ambrosia to Olympus, sheds on earth
Drops from a passing wing:
Surely the vision made itself thus living

"To test my boast, that truth so fills this soul
It could not lodge a falsehood ev'n in dream:
Wonderest thou, Magian, now,
Why I refuse to wed the Scythian's daughter?

"And if I thus confide to thee a tale
I would not whisper into ears profane,
'Tis that where reason ends,
Men have no choice between the Gods and Chaos.

"Ye Magi are the readers of the stars,
Versed in the language of the world of dreams:
Wherefore consult thy lore,
And tell me if Earth hold a mortal maiden

"In whom my nightly vision breathes and moves.
If not, make mine such talismans and spells,
As banish from the soul
Dreams that annul its longing for the daylight."

Up to his lofty fire-tower climbed the Mage,
Explored the stars and drew Chaldæan schemes;
Thrid the dark maze of books
Opening on voids beyond the bounds of Nature;

Placed crystal globes in hands of infants pure;
Invoked the demons haunting impious graves;
And all, alas, in vain;
The dream, adjured against itself to witness,

Refused to wander from the gate of horn,
To stars, scrolls, crystals, infants, demons, proof.
Foiled of diviner lore
The Mage resumed his wisdom as a mortal;

And since no Mage can own his science fails,
But where that solves not, still solution finds,
So he resought the King,
Grave-browed as one whose brain holds Truth
new-captured:

Saying, "O King, the shape thy dreams have glassed
Is of the Colchian Mother of the Medes;
When, on her dragon car,
From faithless Jason rose sublime Medea,

"Refuge at Athens she with Ægeus found;
To him espoused she bore one hero-son,
Medus, the Sire of Medes;
And if that form no earthly shape resembles

"What marvel? for her beauty witched the world,
Ev'n in an age when woman lured the gods;
Retaining yet dread powers
(For memories die not) of her ancient magic,

"Her spirit lingers in these Orient airs,
And guards the children of her latest love,
Thus, hovering over thee,
She warms thy heart to love in her—those children.

"As in her presence thou didst feel thy soul
Lodged in a temple, so the Queen commands
That thou restore the fanes
And deck the altars where her Medus worshipped:

"And in the spirit-breath which balmed the morn
Is symbolized the incense on our shrines,
Which, as thou renderest here,
Shall waft thee after death to the Immortals.

"Seek, then, no talisman against the dream,
Obey its mandates, and return its love;
So shall thy reign be blest,
And in Zariades revive a Medus."

"Friend," sighed the King, "albeit I needs must own
All dreams mean temples, where a Mage explains,
Yet when a young man dreams
Of decking altars, 'tis not for Medea."

He said and turned to lose himself in groves,
Shunning the sun. In wrath against the stars
The Mage resought his tower.
And that same day went back the Scythian envoys.

But from the night which closed upon that day,
The image of the dream began to fade,
Fainter and paler seen,
With saddened face and outlines veiled in vapour;

At last it vanished as a lingering star
Fades on Cithæron from a Mænad's eyes,
Mid cymbal, fife, and horn,
When sunrise flashes on the Car of Panthers.

As the dream fled, broke war upon the land:
The Scythian hosts had crossed the Tanais.
And, where the dreamer dreamed,
An angry King surveyed his Asian armies.

Who first in fault, the Scythian or the Mede,
Who first broke compact, or transgressed a bound,
Historic scrolls dispute
As Scyth or Mede interprets dreams in story.

Enough for war when two brave nations touch,
With rancour simmering in the hearts of kings;
War is the child of cloud
Oftentimes stillest just before the thunder.

The armies met in that vast plain whereon
The Chaldee, meting out the earth, became
The scholar of the stars,—
A tombless plain, yet has it buried empires.

At first the Scythian horsemen, right to left,
Broke wings by native Medes outstretched for flight,
But in the central host
Stood Persia's sons, the mountain race of Cyrus;

And in their midst, erect in golden car
With looks of scorn, Zariades the King;
And at his trumpet voice
Steed felt as man that now began the battle.

"Up, sons of Persia, Median women fly;
And leave the field to us whom gods made men:
The Scythian chases well
Yon timorous deer; now let him front the lions."

He spoke, and light-touched by his charioteer
Rushed his white steeds down the quick-parted lines;
The parted lines quick-closed,
Following that car as after lightning follow

The hail and whirlwind of collected storm:
The Scyths had scattered their own force in chase,
As torrents split in rills
The giant waves whose gathered might were deluge;

And, as the Scythian strength is in the charge
Of its fierce riders, so that charge, misspent,
Left weak the ignobler ranks,
Fighting on foot; alert in raid or skirmish,

And skilled in weapons striking foes from far,
But all untaught to front with levelled spears,
And rampart-line of shields,
The serried onslaught of converging battle:

Wavering, recoiling, turning oft, they fled;
Omartes was not with them to uphold;
Foremost himself had rode
Heading the charge by which the Medes were scattered;

And when, believing victory won, he turned
His bloody reins back to the central war,
Behold,—a cloud of dust,
And thro' the cloud the ruins of an army!

At sunset, sole king on that plain, reigned Death.
Far off, the dust-cloud rolled; far off, behind
A dust-cloud followed fast;
The hunted and the hunter, Flight and Havoc.

With the scant remnant of his mighty host
(Many who 'scaped the foe forsook their chief
For plains more safe than walls,)
The Scythian King repassed his brazen portals.

In haste he sent to gather fresh recruits
Among the fiercest tribes his fathers ruled,
They whom a woman led
When to her feet they tossed the head of Cyrus.

And the tribes answered—"Let the Scythian King
Return repentant to old Scythian ways,
And laugh with us at foes.
Wains know no sieges—Freedom moves her cities."

Soon came the Victor with his Persian guards,
And all the rallied vengeance of his Medes;
One night, sprang up dread camps
With lurid watch-lights circling doomèd ramparts,

As hunters round the wild beasts in their lair
Marked for the javelin, wind a belt of fire.
Omartes scanned his walls
And said, "Ten years Troy baffled Agamemnon."

Yet pile up walls, out-topping Babylon,
Manned foot by foot with sleepless sentinels,
And to and fro will pass,
Free as the air thro' keyholes, Love and Treason.

Be elsewhere told the horrors of that siege,
The desperate sally, slaughter, and repulse;
Repelled in turn the foe,
With Titan ladders scaling cloud-capt bulwarks,

Hurled back and buried under rocks heaved down
By wrathful hands from scatheless battlements.
With words of holy charm,
Soothing despair and leaving resignation,

Mild thro' the city moved Argiope,
Pale with a sorrow too divine for fear;
And when, at morn and eve,
She bowed her meek head to her father's blessing,

Omartes felt as if the righteous gods
Could doom no altars at whose foot she prayed.
Only, when all alone,
Stole from her lips a murmur like complaint,

Shaped in these words, "Wert thou, then, but a dream?
Or shall I see thee in the Happy Fields?"
Now came with stony eye
The livid vanquisher of cities, Famine;

And moved to pity now, the Persian sent
Heralds with proffered peace on terms that seem
Gentle to Asian kings,
And unendurable to Europe's Freemen;

"I from thy city will withdraw my hosts,
And leave thy people to their chiefs and laws,
Taking from all thy realm
Nought save the river, which I make my border,

"If but, in homage to my sovereign throne,
Thou pay this petty tribute once a year;
Six grains of Scythian soil,
One urn of water spared from Scythian fountains."

And the Scyth answered—"Let the Mede demand
That which is mine to give, or gold or life;
The water and the soil
Are, every grain and every drop, my country's:

"And no man hath a country where a King
Pays tribute to another for his crown."
And at this stern reply,
The Persian doomed to fire and sword the city.

Omartes stood within his palace hall,
And by his side Teleutias, the high priest.
"And rightly," said the King,
"Did thy prophetic mind rebuke vain-glory.

"Lend me thy mantle now; I feel the wind
Pierce through the crannies of the thick-ribbed stone."
"No wind lasts long," replied,
With soothing voice, the hierarch. "Calm and
tempest

"Follow each other in the outward world,
And joy and sorrow in the heart of man:
Wherefore take comfort now,
The earth and water of the Scyth are grateful,

"And as thou hast, inviolate to the Scyth,
His country saved, that country yet to thee
Stretches out chainless arms,
And for these walls gives plains that mock be-
siegers,

"Traversed by no invader save the storm,
Nor girt by watchfires nearer than the stars.
Beneath these regal halls
Know that there lies a road which leads to safety.

"For, not unprescient of the present ills,
When rose thy towers, the neighbours of the cloud,
I, like the mole, beneath,
Work'd path secure against cloud-riving thunder.

"Employing Æthiops skilled not in our tongue,
Held day and night in the dark pass they hewed;
And the work done, sent home:
So the dumb earthworm shares alone the secret.

"Lo, upon one side ends the unguessed road.
There,—its door panelled in yon far recess,
Where, on great days of state,
Oft has thy throne been set beneath the purple;

"The outward issue opes beyond the camp,
'Mid funeral earth-mounds,* skirting widths of plain,
Where graze the fleetest steeds,
And rove the bravest riders Scythia nurtures,

"They whom thou ne'er could'st lure to walls of stone,
Nor rouse to war, save for their own free soil.
These gained, defy the foe;
Let him pursue and space itself engulphs him."

* The numerous earth-mounds or tumuli found in the steppes now peopled by the Cossacks of the Don are generally supposed to be the memorials of an extinct race akin to, if not identical with, the ancient Scythian.

Omartes answered—"With the towers I built
Must I, O kind adviser, stand or fall.
Kings are not merely men—
Epochs their lives, their actions the world's story.

"I sought to wean my people from the wild,
To centre scattered valours, wasted thoughts,
Into one mind, a State;
Failing in this, my life as king has perished;

"And as mere man I should disdain to live.
Deemest thou now I could go back content
A Scyth among the Scyths?
I am no eaglet—I have borne the ægis.

"But life, as life, suffices youth for joy.
Young plants win sunbeams, shift them as we may.
So to the Nomad tribes
Lead thou their Queen.—O save, ye gods, my
daughter!"

The king's proud head bowed o'er the hierarch's breast.
"Not unto me confide that precious charge,"
Replied the sweet-voiced seer;
"Thou hast a choice of flight, I none. Thou
choosest

"To stand or fall, as stand or fall thy towers;
Priests may not choose; they stand or fall by shrines.
Thus stand we both, or fall,
Thou by the throne, and I beside the altar.

"But to thy child, ev'n in this funeral hour,
Give the sole lawful guardian failing thee;
Let her free will elect
From thy brave warriors him her heart most leans to;

"And pass with him along the secret way,
To lengthen yet the line of Scythian Kings.
Meanwhile, since needs must be
We trust to others this long-guarded secret,

"Choose one to whom I may impart the clue
Of the dark labyrinth; for a guide it needs;
Be he in war well tried,
And of high mark among the Nomad riders;

"Such as may say unto the antique tribes
With voice of one reared up among themselves,
'From walls of stone I bring
Your King's child to your tents; let Scythia guard
her.'"

"Well do thy counsels please me," said the King.
"I will convene to such penurious feast
As stint permits, the chiefs
Worthiest to be the sires of warlike monarchs:

"And, following ancient custom with the Scyths,
He unto whom my daughter, with free choice,
The wine-cup brimming gives,
Shall take my blessing and go hence her husband.

"But since, for guide and leader of the few
That for such service are most keen and apt,
The man in war most tried,
And with the Nomads most esteemed, is Seuthes,

"Him to thy skilled instructions and full trust
Will I send straight. Meanwhile go seek my child,
And, as to her all thought
Of her own safety in mine hour of peril

"Will in itself be hateful, use the force
That dwells on sacred lips with blandest art;
Say that her presence here
Palsies mine arm and dulls my brain with terror;

"That mine own safety I consult in hers,
And let her hopeful think, that, tho' we part,
The same road opes for both;
And if walls fail me, hers will be my refuge."

Omartes spoke, and of his stalwart chiefs
Selecting all the bravest yet unwived,
He bade them to his board
The following night, on matters of grave import;

To Seuthes then the secret he disclosed,
And Seuthes sought the hierarch, conned the clue,
And thrid the darksome maze
To either issue, sepulchre and palace;

And thus instructed, treasure, town, and king
Thus in his hands for bargain with the foe,
The treason schemed of yore,
Foiled when the Mede rejected Scythian nuptials,

Yet oft revolved—as some pale hope deferred,
Seen indistinct in rearward depths of time—
Flashed as, when looked for least,
Thro' the rent cloud of battle flashes triumph.

And, reasoning with himself, "the Mede," he said,
"Recks not who sits upon the Scythian throne,
So that the ruler pay
Grains of waste soil and drops of useless water:

"And if I render up an easy prey
The senseless king refusing terms so mild,
For such great service done
And for my rank among the Scythian riders,

"The Mede would deem no man so fit as I
To fill the throne, whose heir he scorned as wife,
And yield him dust and drops,
Holding the realms and treasures of Omartes."

So, when the next day's sun began to slope,
The traitor stood before Zariades,
Gaining the hostile camp
From the mute grave-mound of his Scythian fathers.

Plain as his simplest soldier's was the tent
Wherein the lord of half the Orient sate,
Alone in anxious thought,
Intent on new device to quicken conquest.

But for the single sapphire in his helm,
And near his hand the regal silver urn,
Filled with the sparkling lymph,
Which, whatsoe'er the distance, pure Choaspes

Sends to the lips of Achæmenian kings,*
The Asian ruler might to Spartan eyes
Have seemed the hardy type
Of Europe's manhood crowned in Lacedæmon.

* The license of romantic fable, which has already elevated Zariades from the rank of satrap to that of a sovereign prince, here assigns to him, as an Achæmenian, a share in the sacred waters of Choaspes, which were transmitted exclusively to the head of that family, viz. the Persian King.

The traitor, sure of welcome, told his tale,
Proffered the treason and implied the terms.
Then spoke Zariades;
"Know that all kings regard as foe in common

"The man who is a traitor to his king.
'Tis true that I thy treason must accept.
I owe it to my hosts
To scorn no means, destroying their destroyer —

"But I will place no traitor on a throne.
Yet, since thy treason saves me many lives,
I for their sake spare thine:
And since thy deed degrades thee from the freeman,

"I add to life what slaves most covet—gold:
Thy service done, seek lands where gold is king;
And, tho' thyself a slave,
Buy freemen vile eno' to call thee master.

"But if thy promise fail, thy word ensnare,
Thy guidance blunder, by thy side stalks death.
Death does not scare the man
Who, like thyself, has looked on it in battle;

"But death in battle has a warrior's grave;
A traitor dead—the vultures and the dogs."
Then to close guard the King
Consigned the Scyth, who for the first time trembled;

And called in haste, and armed his Sacred Band,
The Persian flower of all his Orient hosts;
And soon in that dark pass
Marched war, led under rampired walls by treason.

Safe thro' the fatal maze the Persians reached
Stairs winding upward into palace halls.
With stealthy hand the guide
Pressed on the spring of the concealèd portal,

And slowly opening, peered within: the space
Stood void; for so it had been planned, that none
Might, when the hour arrived,
Obstruct the spot at which escape should vanish:

But farther on, voices were heard confused,
And lights shone faintly thro' the chinks of doors,
Where one less spacious hall
Led, also void, to that of fated banquet.

Curious, and yielding to his own bold heart,
As line on line came, steel-clad, from the wall,
Flooding funereal floors,
The young King whispered, "Here await my signal,"

And stole along the intervening space,
At whose far end, curtains of Lydian woof,
Between vast columns drawn,
Fell in thick folds, at either end disparting:

He looked within, unseen; all eyes were turned
Towards a pale front, just risen o'er the guests,
In which the Persian knew
His brother King; it was not pale in battle.

And thus Omartes spoke:—"Captains and sons
Of the same mother, Scythia, to this feast,
Which in such straits of want
Needs strong excuse, not idly are ye summoned.

"Wishing the line of kings from which I spring
Yet to extend, perchance, to happier times,
And save mine only child
From death, or, worse than death, the Median
bondage,

"I would this night betroth her as a bride
To him amongst you whom herself shall choose;
And the benignant gods
Have, thro' the wisdom of their sacred augur,

"Shown me the means which may elude the foe,
And lead the two that in themselves unite
The valour and the sway
Of Scythia, where her plains defy besiegers.

"If the gods bless the escape they thus permit,
Braved first, as fitting, by a child of kings,
Then the same means will free
Flight for all those who give to siege its terror;

"Women and infants, wounded men and old,
If few by few, yet night by night, sent forth,
Will leave no pang in death
To those reserved to join the souls of heroes."

As, in the hush of eve, a sudden wind
Thrills thro' a grove and bows the crest of pines,
So crept a murmured hum
Thro' the grave banquet, and plumed heads bent
downward:

Till hushed each whisper, and upraised each eye,
As from a door behind the royal dais
Into the conclave came
The priest Teleutias leading the King's daughter.

"Lift up thy veil, my child, Argiope,"
Omartes said. "And look around the board,
And from yon beakers fill
The cup I kiss as in thy hand I place it.

"And whosoever from that hand receives
The cup, shall be thy husband and my son."
The virgin raised her veil;
Shone on the hall the starlight of her beauty.

But to no face amid the breathless guests
Turned downcast lids from which the tears dropped slow:
Passive she took the cup,
With passive step led by the whispering augur

Where, blazing lustre back upon the lamps,
Stood golden beakers under purple pall.
"Courage," said low the priest,
"So may the gods, for thy sake, save thy father!"

She shivered as he spoke, but, lips firm-prest
Imprisoning all the anguish at her heart,
She filled the fatal cup,
Raised her sad eyes, and vaguely gazed around her.

Sudden those eyes took light and joy and soul,
Sudden from neck to temples flushed the rose,
And with quick, gliding steps,
And the strange looks of one who walks in slumber,

She passed along the floors, and stooped above
A form, that, as she neared, with arms outstretched,
On bended knees sunk down
And took the wine-cup with a hand that trembled:

A form of youth—and nobly beautiful
As Dorian models for Ionian gods.
"Again!" it murmured low,
"O dream, at last! at last! how I have missed thee!"

And she replied, "The gods are merciful,
Keeping me true to thee when I despaired."
But now rose every guest,
Rose every voice in anger and in terror;

For lo, the kneeler lifted over all
The front of him their best had fled before —
"Zariades the Mede!"
Rang from each lip: from each sheath flashed the
sabre.

Thrice stamped the Persian's foot: to the first sound
Ten thousand bucklers echoed back a clang;
The next, and the huge walls
Shook with the war-shout of ten thousand voices;

The third, and as between divided cloud
Flames fierce with deathful pest an angry sun,
The folds, flung rudely back,
Disclosed behind one glare of serried armour.

On either side, the Persian or the Scyth,
The single lord of life and death to both,
Stayed, by a look, vain strife;
And passing onward amid swords uplifted,

A girl's slight form beside him his sole guard,
He paused before the footstool of the King,
And in such tones as soothe
The wrath of injured fathers, said submissive —

"I have been guilty to the gods and thee
Of man's most sinful sin,—ingratitude;
That which I pined for most
Seen as a dream, my waking life rejected;

"Now on my knees that blessing I implore.
Give me thy daughter; but a son receive,
And blend them both in one
As the mild guardian of the Scythian River."

DEATH AND SISYPHUS.

The final sentence of Sisyphus, to whom, whatever his misdeeds, even his worst enemies, the mythologists, conceded the merit of founding Ephyra, afterwards Corinth, and ranking high among the earliest encouragers of navigation and commerce, has been made by great poets more familiar to the general reader than the romantic adventures of his mythical life—among which not the least curious are those with Death and Pluto. The special offence which induced Zeus to send Death express to Sisyphus is variously stated by mythologists, though they generally agree that it was that of rashly intermeddling with Divine secrets. According to some authorities, Ares takes that part in the liberation of Death which is here assigned to Pluto. And for a more expeditious detection and punishment of the offence committed by Sisyphus in the capture of our common enemy (or friend, as the case may be), I may refer to the Scholiast on Pindar, Olymp. I. 97. But every antient Greek writer of fiction allowed himself a considerable latitude in his version of National Myths; and a Milesian tale-teller would not, in that respect, have been more scrupulous than an Athenian tragic poet. The effect on religious worship which is herein ascribed to the capture of Death, is partially imitated from the "Plutus" of Aristophanes. There, Zeus loses his votaries when the god of riches recovers his sight; here,—but it is not my business to tell my story beforehand.

One day upon his throne of judgment, Zeus
Sate to hear Man accuse his fellow-man;
And to the throne arose one choral cry,
"Zeus, help from Sisyphus!"

Thought the All-wise, "So many against one
Are ill advised to call on Zeus for help;
Brute force is many—Mind is always one:
And Zeus should side with Mind."

But, deigning to unravel thread by thread
The entangled skeins of self-concealing prayer,
At each complaint his lips ambrosial smiled,
For each was of the craft

Wherein this thief usurped the rights of thieves,
With brain of fox, defrauding maw of wolf,
So that the wolves howled "Help from Sisyphus:
Zeus, give us back our lambs!"

Curious to look upon this knave of knaves,
Zeus darted down one soul-detecting ray
Under the brow which, in repose, sustains,
In movement moves, the All.

Just at that moment the unlucky wretch
Was plotting schemes to cozen Zeus himself,
And, having herds of oxen on his hands
Stol'n from his next of kin,

Fain would he bribe the Thunderer's oracle
To threat a year of famine to the land,
Trebling to all who did not wish to starve
The market price of beeves.

"Softly," said Zeus, "Thy wit ensnares thyself,
Thou deal'st with Man when thou dost steal his ox;
But for an oracle to sell the beef,
Thy dealing is with Zeus."

The Thunderer summoned Hermes. "Go," he said,
"Bid Death deliver to thy hands for Styx,
And before sunset, or I may relent,
That rogue — with laughing eyes."

Now, having cheaply bought his oracle,
Home to his supper blithe went Sisyphus:
And as he sate, flower-crowned and quaffing wine,
Death stalked into the hall —

Saying, not "Save thee," as the vulgar say,
But in politer phrase, "I kiss thy hands."
"Art thou the Famine I have bought to-day?"
Cried Sisyphus, aghast;

"Thy bones, indeed, are much in need of beef."
"As lean as I the fattest man would be,
Worked he as hard, kept ever on the trot;
Drain thy last cup — I'm Death!"

"Art thou indeed that slandered friend of Man?
So great an honour was not in my hopes;
Sit down, I pray — one moment rest thy bones;
Here, take this chair, good Death!"

The grisly visitor felt inly pleased
At such unwonted invitation kind;
And saying, "Well, one moment," blandly sate
His os coccygis down.

Myths say that chair was by the Cyclops made;
But, seeking here historic sober truth,
All I know is, that when our crafty Thief
Sought to ensnare a foe,

Or force a creditor to cancel debt,
It was his wont to ask the wretch to sup,
And place him, with warm greeting and sweet smile,
On that nefarious chair;

Out from the back of which, as Death sate down,
Darted a hundred ligaments of steel,
Pierced thro' the hollows of his fleshless bones,
And bound him coil on coil!

"Ho! I am ready now," quoth Sisyphus,
"Up and away!" Death could not stir an inch;
He raged, he prayed, he threatened and he coaxed;
And the thief drank his health;

Saying, "Dear guest, compose thyself; reflect,
'Tis not so pleasant, thou thyself didst own,
To be for ever trotting up and down,
Dabbling thy feet in gore;

"Floundering in stormy seas; inhaling plague;
Kidnapping infancy; slow-poisoning age;
Greeted with tears and groans; abhorred by all;
Sole labourer without fee;

"Sole robber, without profit in the spoil;
Sole killer, without motive in the deed;
Surely 'tis better to be loved than loathed;
Wouldst thou be loved? Sit still.

"Sit and grow fat. What is it unto thee
If mortals cease to colonise the Styx?
Thou hast no grudge against them: Good or bad,
'Tis all the same to Death."

The Spectre soothed by these well-reasoned words,
And feeling really livelier in repose,
Little by little humanised himself,
And grinned upon his host,

Who, in his craft, deeming it best to make
Friends with a prisoner who might yet get free,
Did all he could to entertain the guest
With many a merry tale

And jocund song and flattering compliment,
Coaxed him to eat, and gave him the tit-bits,
And made him drink, nor grudged the choicest wine,
And crowned his skull with flowers.

Night after night a cheerful sight it was
To see these two at feast, each facing each,
Chatting till dawn under amazèd stars,
Boon comrades, Man and Death.

Meanwhile some private business of his own,
Whereof the Initiate in the Mysteries know
I am forbid to blab to vulgar ears,
Absorbed the cares of Zeus:

Veiled in opaque Olympus, this low earth
The Cloud-compeller from his thoughts dismissed,
Till, throned again upon his judgment-seat,
Downward he bent his ear,

And not a single voice from Man arose,
No prayer, no accusation, no complaint,
As if, between the mortals and the gods,
Fate's golden chain had snapt.

"Is it since Death rid earth of Sisyphus,
That men have grown contented with their lot,
And trouble me no more?" the Thunderer said;
"Hermes, go down and see."

The winged Caducean answered, "Sire of Gods,
Death has not rid the earth of Sisyphus,
But Sisyphus has rid the earth of Death,
And keeps him safely caged.

"Since then, these mortals, fearing Death no more,
Live like the brutes, who never say a prayer,
Nor dress an altar, nor invoke a god;
All temples are shut up;

"Thy priests would die of hunger, could they die;
As 'tis, they are thinner than Tithonus was
Before he faded into air—compelled
To feed on herbs, like slugs.

"But Death has now got flesh upon his bones,
And roses on his cheek, like Ganymede;
Contented with his rest, he eats and sleeps;
And Sisyphus cheats on.

"All men submit to him who captures Death,
And who, did they offend, might set him free."
In his vast mind's abyss the Thunderer mused;
Then, pitying, smiled, and said,

"Alas, for men, if Death has this repose,
I could not smite them with a direr curse
Than their own wishes—evil without end,
And sorrow without prayer.

'Think they, poor fools, in worshipping no more,
That 'tis the gods who stand in need of men;
To men the first necessity is gods;
And if the gods were not,

"Man would invent them, tho' they godded stones.
But in compassion for this race of clay,
Who else would make an Erebus of earth,
Death must be freed, and straight.

"Seek thou our brother Pluto: Death, of right,
Is in his service, and at his command;
And let the King of Shadows, with all speed,
Re-ope the way to Styx."

Down thro' the upper air into the realms
Of ancient Night dropped soundless, as a star,
Startling lost sailors, falls on Boreal seas,
The heavenly Messenger.

He found the King of Hades half asleep;
Beside him, yawned black-robed Persephonè;
A dreary dulness drowsed the ghastly court,
And hushed the hell-dog's bark.

"Ho up! Aidoneus," cried the lithesome god,
Touching the Dread One with his golden wand.
"Welcome," said Pluto, slowly roused. "What news?
Is earth sponged out of space?

"Or are men made immortals? Days and weeks
Here have I sat, and not a ghost has come
With tales of tidings from a livelier world.
What has become of Death?"

"Well may'st thou ask?" said Hermes, and in brief
He told his tale, and spoke the will of Zeus.
Then rose the Laughterless, with angry frown
Shadowing the realm of shade,

And donned the helm wherewith, on entering light,
From light he hides the horror of his shape.
Void stood hell's throne, from hell's gate rose a blast,
And upon earth came storm.

Ships rocked on whitening waves; the seamen laughed;
"Death is bound fast," they cried; "no wave can drown."
Red lightnings wrapt the felon plundering shrines,
And smote the cradled babe:

"Blaze on," the felon said; "ye cannot kill."
The mother left the cradle with a smile;
"A pretty toy," quoth she, "the Thunderer's bolt!
My urchin plays with it.

"Brats do not need a mother; there's no Death."
The adulteress starting cried, "Forgive me, Zeus!"
"Tut," quoth the gallant, "let the storm rave on.
Kiss me. No Death, no Zeus!"

"Laugh, kiss, sin on; ere night I have ye all,"
Growled the Unseen, whose flight awoke the storm;
And in the hall where Death sate crowned with flowers,
Burst thro' closed doors the blast.

Waiting his host's return to sup, Death sate,
A jolly, rubicund, tun-bellied Death;
Charmed with his chair, despite its springs of steel,
And lilting Bacchic songs.

Suddenly round about him and around
Circled the breath that kindled Phlegethon;
Melted like wax the ligaments of steel;
And Death instinctive rose:

He did not see the Hell-King's horrent shape,
But well he knew the voice at which the hall
Shook to the roots of earth in Tartarus.
"Find I the slave of Life

"In mine own viceroy, Life's supremest lord?
Haste—thy first charge, thine execrable host:—
Then long arrears pay up; career the storm,
And seize, and seize, and seize!

"Bring me the sailor chuckling in his ship,
The babe whose cradle knows no mother's knee,
The adulterer in the riot of his kiss,
And say, 'Zeus reigns and Death.'

"And seize, and seize, and seize, for Hell cries 'Give;'"
So the voice went receding down the storm;
And Sisyphus then entering in the hall,
Death clutched him by the throat.

"How cam'st thou free?" gasped out the thief of thieves:
"My chains were molten at the breath of Dis.
Quick; I have much to do." Said Sisyphus,
"I see mine hour is come;

"But as I've been a kindly host to thee,
So, by the memory of boon comradeship,
Let me at least unto my wife bequeath
My last requests on earth:

"Ho, sweetheart!" Death still had him in his gripe;
But, not unwilling that his host should save
His soul from torture by some pious wish,
Paused — and the wife came in.

"Hark ye, dear love," unto her ear the thief
Whisperingly stole his dying words from Death:
"As, whatsoe'er to others my misdeeds,
I have been true to thee,

"The sweetest, gentlest, loveliest of thy sex,
Obey me now, as I have thee obeyed;
I know, by warning message from the gods,
That for a time my soul

"Must quit my body; Zeus needs my advice.
But tho' to vulgar eyes I may seem dead,
Hold me as living; take me to my couch;
Wrap me up warmly, sweet:

"Death is set free; slay a fat capon, love,
Place with a bowl of Chian by my bed.
Stay, chuck, those armlets, pearls from Ormus—chuck,
When I come back, are thine."

As all wise knaves make sure of honest wives,
So the good woman, swearing to obey,
Sisyphus trusted to her love — of pearls,
And left the hall with Death.

Death straightway gave to Hermes at the door
His charge, and passed away upon the storm;
On sea rose yells, soon drowned beneath the waves,
On land rose shrieks, soon stilled;

And the next morning all the altars smoked,
And all the fanes were carpeted with knees:
Death had returned to earth; again to heaven
The gods returned for men.

Meanwhile adown the infinite descent
The god of thieves conducted the arch-thief,
Who prayed his patron deity to explain
Why in his noon of years

Thus hurried off to everlasting night.
"Hadst thou," said Hermes, "only cheated knaves
Worse than thyself in being also fools,
Thou might'st have lived as long

"As that yet blacker thief, the solemn crow;
But 'tis too much to cheat the Sire of Gods,
And forge his oracles to sell the beef
Thou hadst the wit to steal."

"True," sighed the ghost; "let me but live again,
And Zeus shall have no overseer on earth
So sternly holding venal priests in awe
Of a strict watch as I.

"Not for myself I speak; I think of Zeus.
'Tis for his interest that a knave like me
Should be converted to a holy man;
Marvels attest the gods."

"Sound truth," said Hermes; "but, like other truths,
Before it profits the discoverer dies.
'Tis now too late for such kind hints to Zeus."
"Not if thou plead my cause.

"Is not Zeus mild to sinners who repent?"
"Yes, on condition they are still alive."
"Were I then living, thou wouldst plead for me?"
"Ay; nor, methinks, in vain."

"That's all I ask. If I escape the Shades,
And in my body lodge myself again,
(There's honour among thieves,) I count on thee" —
"Escape the Shades and count."

"One doubt disturbs me still," resumed the ghost.
"The gods have their distractions, Death has none.
Before thou hear me, or canst plead with Zeus,
Death will be at my heels."

"Friend," said more gravely the good-humoured god,
"Dost thou, in truth, nurse crotchets of return
From the inexorable domain? Tut, tut,
Dead once is dead for good!"

"Now, then, I know thou really art my friend:
None but true friends choose such unpleasant words,"
Replied the ghost. "Crotchet or not, I mean
To sup at home to-night."

"If so," said Hermes, "having supped, and proved
Thou hast once more a stomach in the flesh,
Call Hermes thrice; ere Death can find thee out,
I'll plead thy cause with Zeus,

"And let thee know if thou'rt a ghost again!"
"Content!" cried Sisyphus, and grew so gay,
That Hermes, god of wits as well as thieves,
Sighed when they got to Styx;

And inly said, "A rogue like this would make
Souls in Elysium find their bliss less dull;"
Here the rogue whispered to the god, "To-night!"
Then cried to Charon, "Boat!"

"Thy fee!" said Charon. "Where's thine obolus?"
"Obolus, stupidest of ferrymen!
Let souls made unctuous by funereal nard
Grease thy Phlegræan palm.

"There is no house-tax where there is no house;
There is no grave-tax where there is no grave.
I am unburied and unburnt; I'm nought,—
Nought goes for nothing, churl."

Charon shoved off in growling "Hang thyself."
"Lend me thy throat," replied the ghost, "I will."
Thereat the ghosts, unburied like himself,
Laughed out a dreary laugh.

Dense was that crowd, the wrong side of the Styx
To and fro flitting; age-long to and fro;
The guileless man murdered in secret ways;
The murderer in his flight,

Back-looking, lest the Furies were behind,
Down sliddery scarp o'ergrown by brambles whirled;
Both burialless save in the vulture's craw,
And now from judgment kept

On the slow stream's bleak margin, side by side.
There, cast by shipwrek on untrodden sands,
Where never sailor came, o'er bleaching skulls
To sprinkle pious dust,

Lovers, whose kisses had been meeting fires,
Unsevered still, clasped hands without a throb,
Staring on waves whose oozing dulness gave
No shadow back to shades.

Eft-soons a sound strange to the realms of Dis,
Roll'd o'er the Ninefold River to the hall
Wherein, returned, sate Pluto; loathèd sound
Of laughter mocking woe.

"What daring ghosts by impious mirth profane
The sanctity of Hades?" asked the King.
Answered a Shape that just before the Three
Had brought a conqueror's soul,

"Upon the earthward margin of the Styx,
Merry as goat-song makes wine-tippling boors,
Shoulder on shoulder pressing, the pale mob
Drink into greedy ears

"The quips and cranks of an unburied droll
Fresh from Greek suns, named Sisyphus. Dread King,
Charon, provoked to mutiny by mirth,
Swears he will break his oars

"Unless thou free him from the ribald wit
Which stings him as the gadfly Io stung."
As Sisyphus, unburied, could not come
To Pluto—Pluto went,

Striding the Ninefold stream, to Sisyphus.
"Cease thy vile mime-tricks," said the Laughterless,
"Or dread the torments doom'd to laughter here."
"Pluto," replied the knave,

"There are no torments, by thy righteous law,
To any ghost until his case be judged;
But to be judged he must have crossed the Styx:
The unburied cannot cross.

"'Tis not my fault, but that of my base wife;
She grudges funeral to the corpse I left.
But if thou let my ghost return to earth,
As ghosts, when wronged, have done;

"To fright her soul its duty to discharge,
And by interment fit me for the Styx,
Most gladly I will face thy Judges three,
And prove my blameless life."

"Go then, nor tarry. Let me not again
Send Death to fetch thee. Frighten well thy wife."
Swift into upper air sped Sisyphus,
Slid thro' his household doors,

And his own body entered in a trice,
And having settled at his ease therein,
He fell to supper with exceeding gust.
That done, cried "Hermes," thrice.

Having thus cried, sleep fell upon his eyes,
And, in the vision of the night, behold,
Stood Hermes aureoled by a ring of light
Shed from the smile of Zeus,

Saying, "The Thunderer hath vouchsafed reprieve,
Nor shall Death take thee till thyself dost call;
And what in life men covet will be thine —
Honours, and feasts, and gear:

"Hold these as perfumes on an altar burned;
The altar stands, the incense fades in smoke;
The Three will ask thee, 'Was the altar pure?'
Not 'Were the perfumes sweet?'"

At morn woke Sisyphus; and of that dream
Recalled the first half, and forgot the last.
"Death shall not come till I myself shall call.
How I shall tire my heirs!

"What! call on Death, 'mid honours, feasts, and gear!
Hermes, indeed thou art the god of thieves;
A famous bargain we have made with Zeus:"
He rose, and hailed the sun.

And all things prospered well with Sisyphus:
Out of the profits of his stolen beeves
He built him ships and traded to far seas,
And every wind brought gold;

And with the gold he hired himself armed men,
And by their aid ruled far and wide as king;
Filled justice-halls with judges incorrupt,
Temples with priests austere:

And from a petty hamlet Corinth rose,
With heaven-kissed towers, above a twofold sea;
And where gaunt robbers prowled thro' forest glooms,
And herds grazed leagues of waste,

The boor in safety carolled at his plough,
And ample garners hived the golden grain:
Thus each man's interest led to all men's law;
And, born of iron rule,

Order arose to harmonise brute force;
And glimmered on the world the dawn of Greece.
For if the gods permit the bad to thrive,
'Tis for the ends of good,

As tyrants sow the harvest freemen reap.
But Sisyphus built temples and decked shrines,
Not for religious homage to the gods,
But as the forts of thrones.

There was no altar in his secret soul:
If he prized law, law legalises power;
And conquest, commerce, tax, and tribute were
The beeves he stole as king.

So he lived long 'mid honours, feasts, and gear;
But age came on, and anguish, and disease.
Man ever thinks, in bargaining with Zeus,
To cheat, and ever fails.

And weary, weary seemed the languid days,
Joyless the feast, and glitterless the gold,
Till racked with pain, one night on Death he called,
And passed with Death away.

He lacked not, this time, funeral obsequies;
Assyrian perfumes balmed his funeral pyre:
His ashes crumbled in a silver urn,
Stored in a porphyry tomb.

And for a while, because his children reigned,
Men praised his fortunes, nor condemned his sins;
Wise bards but called him "Craftiest of mankind,"
Proud rulers "The most blest."

But when his line was with the things no more,
And to revile the old race pleased the new,
All his misdeeds rose lifelike from his tomb,
And spoke from living tongues:

And awful legends of some sentence grim,
Passed on his guilty soul in Tartarus,
Floated, like vapours, from the nether deep,
And tinged the sunlit air.

But, by a priest in Saïs, I was told
A tale, not known in Greece, of this man's doom,
That when the Thracian Orpheus, in the Shades,
Sought his Eurydice,

He heard, tho' in the midst of Erebus,
Song sweet as his Muse-mother made his own;
It broke forth from a solitary ghost,
Who, up a vaporous hill,

Heaved a huge stone that came rebounding back,
And still the ghost upheaved it and still sang.
In the brief pause from toil while towards the height
Reluctant rolled the stone,

The Thracian asked in wonder, "Who art thou,
Voiced like Heaven's lark amist the night of Hell?"
"My name on earth was Sisyphus," replied
The phantom. "In the Shades

"I keep mine earthly wit; I have duped the Three.*
They gave me work for torture; work is joy.
Slaves work in chains, and to the clank they sing."
Said Orpheus, "Slaves still hope!"

"And could I strain to heave up the huge stone
Did I not hope that it would reach the height?
There penance ends, and dawn Elysian fields."
"But if it never reach?"

The Thracian sighed, as looming through the mist
The stone came whirling back. "Fool," said the ghost,
"Then mine, at worst, is everlasting hope."
Again uprose the stone.

* The three judges of Hell are not named in this tale. According to mythological chronology they could not have been those famous arbiters of final doom, Æacus, Rhadamanthus, and Minos, who did not flourish even on earth till after the time of Sisyphus.

CORINNA;

OR

THE GROTTO OF PAN AT EPHESUS.

In the neighbourhood of Ephesus there was a grotto, said to be arched over one of the entrances to Hades. In the grotto there was a statue of Artemis, to which was attached the reed dedicated to her by Pan as a peace-offering. This grotto afforded an ordeal to maidens willing to clear themselves of any charge against their honour. If when they entered the cave the reed gave forth a sound of music, they were considered to be acquitted of all charge—if not, they disappeared. The following story is founded on this legend.

Glaucon of Lesbos, the son of Euphorion,

Burned for Corinna, the blue-eyed Milesian.

Nor mother nor father had she;

Beauty and wealth had the orphan.

Short was the wooing, and fixed was the wedding-day,

Nuptial dues paid to the Fates and to Artemis:*

But envy not lovers their bliss;

Brief is the bliss of a mortal.

* Previous to any marriage (usually, but not always, on the day before the wedding), it was customary with the Greeks to make offerings to Hera, Artemis, and the Fates, as divinities presiding over marriage.

"Wealthy in truth is thy beauteous affianced one,"
Said to the lover his father Euphorion:
"To save thee the shame of her wealth,
Left I my vineyards in Lesbos.

"More than one Zeus has rained gold on thy Danaë:
Look at these proofs; weigh the names of the witnesses."
All marble stood Glaucon, as one
Smit by the eye of Medusa.

Lone in her chamber, the tender Milesian
Started from dreams of her lover to gaze on him.
And "Dazzling thy home, my betrothed;
Gold frets the beams of thy ceilings;

"Fair shine thy walls with the tissues of Persia;
Ind paves thy floors with its tributes of ivory;
Thy chests teem with Laurian ore;
Art thou not proud of thy riches?"

"All that thou namest," replied the Milesian,
"Passing to thee, are but prized as thou prizest them:
Of wealth that is mine I am proud —
Proud of the heart of my Glaucon!"

"Rightly thou sayest my heart, mocking sorceress,
That I have given to crush and to trample on;
My right hand of man is mine own,
This yet I save from dishonour."

Hurrying he gasped out the tale that had maddened him,
Witness and proof; and she heard and she answered not;
She sate looking drearily down,
As suppliants sit by an altar.

"Speechless?" he cried—"No defence? O thou guilty one."
Then from her white lips her voice sounded hollowly:
"Accusers are many—and I,
Now, losing thee, am so lonely."

Here the voice stopped; and a shudder came over her,
Looking too young, not for grief, but for guiltiness.
The wrath of the man fell abashed;
Inly he sighed, "Yet she loves me!"

"Born-blind are mortals," he said, after pausing long,
"Guessing the colours of truth, as lip-told to them;
But truth is beheld by the gods:
Dar'st thou ask gods for thy judges?

"Pan, the omniscient, a shrine has at Ephesus,
Built in the arch of the entrance to Acheron,
And there the god hung up his reed,
Vowed unto Artemis stainless.

"Let the pure maiden, appealing from calumny,
Enter with holy foot under the gloomy arch,
The reed which no mortal may touch
Sounds silver-sweet her acquittal.

"They who are guilty!" "Why pause? For the guilty, then,
Say, has the reed a voice sterner than memory?"
"The reed for the guilty is mute:
Lost to the guilty is daylight.

"If thou art pure the adventure is perilless,
Horror and night, if the witnesses slander not:
Restored to my arms, living bride,
Or in the ghost-land—a shadow!"

Sudden she rose, all the woman in majesty;
Fearlessly fronting him; solemnly beautiful;
And calm was her eye and her smile,
But the calm thrilled him with terror.

Calmly thus rises the moon over Rhodopè,
Calmly revealing the ice-fields of Thracia,
When everywhere quiet and light,
Everywhere midnight and winter.

"Welcome the shrine in the gateway of Acheron
So that thou art by my side as I enter it;
When rounds the next moon to her full,
Meet we at Ephesus, Glaucon.

"So the gods keep thee! — return to Euphorion."
Veiling her head, as a dream she passed noiselessly,
Passed noiselessly — as when a dream
Glides from the eyelids of sorrow.

Round is the orb of the moon in the summer sky;
Dark in the sacred grove, pine tree and platanus
Commingle the gloom of their boughs
Over the arch of Pan's grotto.

Came from the right with her maids, the Milesian;
Came from the left, the pale son of Euphorion;
Before the dread cavern, the two
Meet, and stand facing each other.

"Nuptial wreaths crown thee: Oh blessèd the omen be!
Shamed lying tongues when the reed vowed to Artemis
Shall lead on the flutes for my bride!"
"Then thou still lov'st me, O Glaucon!

"If I come back from the path into Acheron
Wilt thou yet think of the tales that have tortured thee?
And if I come not, wilt thou say,
'I asked her life, and she gave it?'"

Veiling his face with his hand, spoke the Lesbian,
"Come back to light, and the gods have acquitted thee;
But ah! if the gods could condemn,
There, where thou goest, I follow."

"Now," she said softly, "I fear thee not, Artemis.
Sun, soon to rise from thy sleep in dark ocean,
Whose steeds I have blamed for their sloth.
Waiting the sound of one footfall;

"Flowers in whose leaves I so late had my oracles,
Asking leaf after leaf 'Loves he? much? evermore?'
And deeming it promise from Heaven
When but a leaf answered kindly;

"Take my farewell, if so sentence the deities.
Life has worse terrors than those of the Shadow-land.
Now, Glaucon, thy right hand once more,
Ah, once again say, 'I love thee.'"

"Hold; if thy soul does not cry, 'I am innocent'
Stern will the gods be." "Are mortals more merciful?
If so, wilt thou make me thy bride?"
"Yes; but O be not my victim."

Gently she bent o'er the right hand that clung to her;
Softly a tear and a kiss fell together there;
Then startled he misses her touch,
Blackly the cave has closed o'er her:

Clanged the grim doors with a roar as she glided in;
Voiceless around stood the listening group, tremulous;
And hark, from the heart of the cave
Sound not of Pan's fluten music —

Sound of such wail as to haunted dreams wander from
Lands lost to light, where Cocytus winds drearily, —
O never till earth hide their urns,
They who have heard shall forget it.

Wide flew the doors of the fatal cave, noiselessly,
Into the dark rushed the moonbeams inquisitive:
The moonbeams rushed into the dark,
Rushed with the moonbeams the lover.

White at the verge of the gulf, black and fathomless,
Niched in her shrine, stood the statue of Artemis,
And lo, at her feet lay the reed
Vowed by the Haunter of Forests.

Close by the reed was the girl's wreath of myrtle-buds,
Every bud withered save one, freshly blossoming,
And close to the garland a leaf
Torn from an ivory tablet;

These the sole tokens that told of the vanished one.
Few were the words that were writ on the ivory:
"To Glaucon my wealth on the earth;
With me I take what he gave me."

Many, since then, say the maiden was innocent,
That her rash love roused the wrath of cold Artemis;
And they who would slanders revive
Only dare hint them in whispers.

Waned not that moon ere to torches funereal
By his son's bier walked the grey-haired Euphorion,
And near the dark cave, Glaucon's tomb
Arched his own path to the shadows.

Now thro' the stone of the tomb cleaves a myrtle tree,
Springing, 'tis said, from the lost maiden's bridal wreath;
Its stem parts in twain; ever green
One half, and one ever leafless.

Fondly the green with the leafless would intertwine,
Seeking to deck branches sere with fresh blossomings,
And never again wear a smile
They who sit under that myrtle.

THE FATE OF CALCHAS.

There are at least three traditions as to the fate of Calchas: one of which (Servius ad Virg. Ecl. VI. 72) serves as groundwork to the story herein told.

CALCHAS, the soothsayer, of mankind the wisest,
King over kings, subjecting Agamemnon,
Thus counselled to himself
Sitting outside his porch one summer noon;

"Enough, O Calchas, hast thou lived for glory;
Now live, as meaner mortals live, for pleasure;
Albeit thy locks are grey,
Long years yet stretch between the Styx and thee;

"For, by unerring oracle, hath Phœbus
Declared that Calchas shall from death be sacred,
Till he a soothsayer meet
With wisdom more heaven-gifted than his own.

"Now know I all the priests of all the temples;
There breathes not one who hails me not as master.
That sage has to be born,
Who, when as grey as I, may be as wise.

"Wherefore the joys which in life's noon escaped me,
Around life's lengthened evening I will gather,
And amid wine and flowers
Await the slow forewarner of the Shades."

So Calchas with his share of Ilion's treasure
Built a fair house 'mid fields of corn and olive;
But most he took delight
In vines transplanted from the Phrygian hills.

One day he stood, o'er-arched with purple clusters
Ripe for the vintage, when there spoke behind him
A sharp and taunting voice,
"Why counting grapes whose wine is not for thee?"

Sore angered at such rude rebuke irreverent,
The prophet turning, saw a wolf-eyed rover,
Most like some seaman wrecked,
And, gaunt with hunger, prowling alien shores.

"Stranger to me and truth," the wise man answered,
"The grapes are mine, and mine will be the vintage."
"Stranger thyself to truth,"
Replied the vagrant, "thou may'st press the grapes,

"But, as I said, the wine belongs to others."
"Know'st thou, O frontless man, that I am Calchas,
Apollo's awful priest?
Hence, nor with ribald jests profane mine ear."

"It suits not priests another's goods to covet,
And less to rail at him whose tongue speaks truly;
The wine those clusters store,
Shall never redden by a drop thy lips."

"Art thou a soothsayer also?" asked the Prophet.
"Regard my dress and thine: Are soothsayers ragged?"
"Thy garb, indeed, shows want,
And thy looks hunger; dost thou fail of work?"

"Nay, I find work enough in yonder city;
But if thou need'st a slave to tend thy vineyards,
I'll sell myself to thee
The day thou drink the vintage of those grapes."

"Agreed! Where find thee?" "Daily in the market,
At hest of any man who gives me taskwork."
"Go. When these grapes are wine
I'll summon thee, and thou shalt be my slave."

So the man went his way; and in due season
Red feet, in dancing measure, trod the clusters,
And Calchas set apart
The choicer juices in the bell-mouthed urns,

Stored to fermènt amid Arabian spices,
And languish into draughts for future winters.
But the new must, made clear
By sharpening acids for that autumn feast,

Being now cooled in moist sea-sands, and courting
With infant smiles the lips of the Bacchante,
Calchas sent forth his slaves
To summon round his board a host of friends;

And, mindful of the bond with that rude stranger,
Ordered the slaves to seek him in the market,
And bid him come to quaff
To his new master's health in this new wine.

The guests were met, and ranged on seats of citron,
With ivy crowned and Amathusian myrtle,
When strode into the hall
The ragged vagrant, lean, with hungry eyes.

Then Calchas rising, first made due libation,
And cup in hand, refilled by slaves from Ilion,
Told with a priestly mirth,
Grave, yet provoking gaiety, his tale,

The vagrant's sturdy and unshamed assurance,
And how he proffered slavery proving truthless;
"Yea, on the very day
Whereon," the prophet said, "I drink this wine.

"Therefore, my guests, I call you all to witness,
If this man now dare to renew that proffer,
So there be no dispute,
That by his proper choice he is my slave.

"Stranger, thou hearest. Own thyself repentant;
Learn shame, take pardon, and depart a freeman."
The stranger hitched his rags
Over his shoulder with a burly scoff;

"I said that wine thy lips shall never redden;
Say that it shall, and prove both fool and liar;
Drink, and I am thy slave:
If thou drink not, I claim thee, then, as mine."

At the buffoon effrontery of this outcast,
Bearding the priest whose looks had awed Achilles,
Mirth seized on every guest;
With one huge laughter all the banquet pealed:

The Trojan slaves caught the infectious humour,
And first, since Ilion fell, relaxed to laughter;
The carvers dropped the steel,
The players the flute, holding their shaken sides.

As Calchas, striving hard at self-composure,
Lifted the cup, he eyed the unmoved vagrant
Amid the general mirth
Grave as, by starlings mocked, Athenè's owl.

And quite unable longer to be solemn,
The seer burst forth in laughter yet more headstrong
For effort to restrain,
And as he laughed his face grew purple-flushed;

And his frame rocked; as one who feels an earthquake;
And from his right hand fell, unsipped, the wine-cup;
And, when all else were hushed,
Still he laughed on; striving to groan, he laughed:

And as the guests, smit with strange fear, came round
him,
Gasping and choked, he fell to earth; and touching
The vagrant's feet, laughed out
"The greater soothsayer's found!" So Calchas died.

THE OREAD'S SON:

A LEGEND OF SICILY.

The beautiful legends which furnish the subject of this story, once so famous that Ovid in his "Metamorphoses" (lib. IV.) considers it too well known to repeat, are told with some variations by different authorities: Diodorus, Ælian, Servius (ad Virg. Ecl.), &c. Parthenius, c. XXIX. tells the tale with his usual laconic dryness. It is said to have been the favourite theme of Stesichorus. To the hero of the romance, Daphnis, Sicilian traditions accord the fame due to the inventor of Bucolic poetry.

On lawns and riverbanks in Sicily
Shepherds first heard—I speak of times remote —
A sound of wondrous charm,
Voice nor of man nor bird; we call it Music.

Lured by the sound, the curious rustics tracked
The source it flowed from, thro' the liquid air,
To swards with hyacinths lush,
Where a boy sate alone beneath the ilex,

Breathing a soul into the hollow reed;
Around him grazed flocks white of fleece as those
Which heard Apollo's call
In fields Thessalian trodden by Alcestis.

As near to manhood's beauty was the boy's
As, in the hour when drowsy violets wake,
The pure star of the morn
Nears to the sun ere lost in ampler glory.

Much marvelling, spoke the shepherds to the youth,
Who, at their voice, his fluten music ceased,
And answered soft and low;
But theirs not his, and his was not their language.

So that, divining but by sign his will,
They left him, deeming, in their simple awe,
That, son of some strange prince,
His voice could call armed men if he were angered.

Oft-heard but seldom seen, the alien boy
There lingered, haunting dell, and glade, and rill;
And morn, and noon, and eve,
The breeze of his sweet pipings gladdened heaven.

And, as the presence of the music-breath
Fused its sweet soul into Sicilian air,
A gentler nature moved
Thro' the rude listeners; love, before brute instinct,

Became man's struggle to approach the gods;
And as a god itself, rebuking force,
Demanded dulcet prayers,
Attuned to imitate the alien's music.

Meanwhile, unconscious of his own soft charm,
The stranger piped but to his careless flocks,
And ofttimes sighed to think
That he with men had found no speech in common.

One summer noon, as thus he thought, thus sighed
By the cool fount of forest-shadowed waves,
In his own native tongue
The voice of one invisible made answer:

"Why dost thou pine to know the speech of men,
Uttering complaint in language of the gods?
And from what amaranth bowers
Strayest thou lone adown the gloom of forests?"

Startled, he gazed around, and guessed not whence,
From wood, or wave, or air, those accents came;
But as a man gives voice
To his own thought, and, hearing it, replieth,

So he addressed the unseen questioner:
"Who, and whate'er thou art, 'mid races pure,
Which, in this world of man,
Have world their own, whereof they hold the portals,

"Opening or closing as they list,—come forth,
Be my companion in these solitudes,
Enter my void of life,
As in this hollow reed there enters music."

Scarce had he said, when all the fountain stirred,
And from it rose a mist of starry spray,
Arched-o'er with iris hues
Veiling the sun, and with a luminous dimness

Snatching from sight the outward world beyond;
It cleared away; and, lo, beside him sate
An image woman-fair,
Fair less as substance than as dream of beauty.

Her paly locks white water-lilies starred,
Her dewy robes flowed undulous as waves,
And in her smile the light
Shone chill as shines the Hyad through the shower.

Yet in her looks was gentleness serene,
Waking no passion, or of love or fear,
But falling on his soul
Tender as falls the pure kiss of a sister.

And his heart opened to his new-found friend;
She in her new-found friend placed equal trust;
And all that summer noon,
Side by side seated, they exchanged confidings.

Brief told her tale: her race the Water-Nymph's,
Goddess of earth, yet privileged to commune
With powers that dwell in heaven,
Seeking with theirs to assimilate her being,

And be partaker of their tranquil bliss;
Glassing in dreams Selenè's silver calm,
Or with light's soul ensouled,
When flushed by Helios all her wavelets trembled.

"I," said the youth, "am riddle to myself,
And when I would remember, oft I guess.
Under the Hill of Fire,
In a green valley, bowered around with laurels

"That walled it from the world, my childhood passed
Where never winter robbed of leaves a rose.
Forms which no likeness have
To those beheld since I have left that valley,

"Sported around me with strange harmless mirth,
Goat-hoofed, and shaggy-haired, with human faces,
And one, of these the lord,
(We called him Pan,) taught me this reed, and
gave it.

"At times there came down from the burning hill
A woman-form, like thine, nymph-beautiful,
Yet more than thine distinct,
Fresh with warm life as the first morn of summer.

"For she was of the Oreads' buxom race,
That haunt the hill tops nearest to the sun,
Embrowned with hardy bloom;
Loose oak leaves rippling in her russet tresses.

"And she would fondle me in her strong arms,
And rock to sleep with gusty lullabies,
Like winds that sing to night
Thro' pines and rocky caves. I called her
'Mother.'

"So I grew up, and of this mortal race
Knew nought, save that my mother and the Fauns
Would, when they thought I slept,
Mourn that I was not of themselves, but mortal.

"A child no longer, on the verge of youth,
Six moons agone, I stood amid a glade
Watching the lurid sparks
Shot from the mount of fire beyond the laurels,

"When sudden dropped, as from a passing cloud,
On the green turf, with feet that made no sound,
Fronting me where I stood,
A shape of glory ringed with quivering halo.

"'Fear not,' he said, and from his smile a ray
Lit up the laurels. 'Me thou dost not know;
Thee I have known, ere yet
Thy lids were kissed from slumber by thy mother.

"'The time has come to quit these swards obscure,
And take high rank in the large world of man.
They who may not be gods,
May yet by aid of gods become immortals.

"'Know me as Hermes! messenger between
Zeus and all life wherein there breathes a soul;
And aught on earth by thee
Coveted most, my power can compass. Listen.'

"Therewith the god extolled the state of kings,
Whose words were laws, whose very looks were fates.
Of heroes, too, he spoke,
Breaking on rock-like breast the surge of battle:

"'Such are the men,' he said, 'who by wise rule
Or peerless deeds have baffled even Styx,
And after death still live
As names on earth, and some as stars in heaven.

"'Of these be one or both,—a Hero-king!'
I answered 'Nay,' and hung my head for shame.
Mildly resumed the god,
Touching my reed, 'Blest, too, life's music-givers!'

"And as he spoke, there flashed into his hand
A shell-like instrument, with golden strings:
'They in whose hands this lyre
Speaks to the nations, reign as kings for ever.'

"So saying, carelessly he swept the chords,
And the lyre spoke; spoke as if all the thoughts,
Passions, and powers, and dreams,
Coiled in the brain, or smouldering in the bosom,

"Had found long-pined-for egress. — As a bird
Caged from its birth content, abruptly hears
One on wings poised in heaven,
Blending with day's its own melodious gladness,

"And wakes at once to sense of light and song;
So, as from space remote, unto my soul
Came the god's music down;
Yet the joy made me weep—I felt my prison.

"When the god ceased, I flung away the reed.
'Give me the lyre,' I said. 'My choice is made.'
He smiled and gave it me;
And to my hand the strings denied all music.

"'Comfort!' said Hermes, with yet kindlier smile,
'And learn the art now that thou hast the lyre;
Its sound is as the tide
Swelled from a sea wherein have melted rivers.

"'To him who makes the lyre interpret life
Innumerous lives converging sum his own,
Joy, sorrow, hope, and fear,
Banquets and battles, love in calm and tempest,

"'Pæans of triumph, solemn hymns to Zeus,
Groans wailing up from gulfs in Tartarus,
Meet in the music-shell,
Fashioned by Heaven's wing'd herald for Apollo.

"'Go—love, and err, and suffer;—hear the sounds,
That clash in dissonance where throng mankind,
And then in grove or grot
Blend all the discords as creation blends them;

"'And so the lyre becomes creation's voice.'
'Mine not,' I cried in words half choked with tears,
'The gift so dearly bought!
Mine be the music leaflets take from Zephyr,

"'Or rills from fountains tinkling down their falls;
Born of the mountain Nymph, and reared by Fauns;
Mine be the reed of Pan,
Needing no discords to complete its music!'

"'Not so,' replied the god, with sterner voice,
'For thou art more than child of mountain nymph;
Thy father treads the heaven,
And thine no lot that levels thee with shepherds.

"'Meditate destinies of loftier height,
And when thy soul has stored within itself
Thoughts that would snap the reed,
There, where he leads, prepare to follow Hermes.'

"He said, and o'er the sward a silvery cloud
Wavered and rose; the god had passed away;
Then from the grass I snatched
The reed, and kissed and hid it in my bosom.

"And starting from the lyre with swerving spring
As from the baleful beauty of a snake,
I sought, precipitant,
The grot of Pan, deep amid fir-trees hidden.

"And telling him, with many a sob, my tale,
And all my terror, lest compelled to part
With my belovèd reed,
On his rough lap he seated me and fondled,

"And with a burly laugh, 'Ho, ho,' quoth he,
'Would Hermes rob me of my foster-son?
Spurns he the pipe that first
Unlocked the melody his skill but mimics?

"'Long ere the earth knew heroes, kings, and wars,
Winds sighed thro' reeds, and Pan and Music were.
Thou must know mortals; true,
But as my pupil; follow me, musician.'

"Then thro' the length of caves he led me on,
Till gained an archway opening on man's world,
And, clear in lusty day,
Meadow and dale and woodland stretched to ocean.

"'Go forth,' he said; 'rove freely at thy will,
Where bleat the flocks, where carol the wild birds.
Men, when they hear thy reed,
Shall whisper, ""Hark! a new-born sound from Nature!""'

"So lone I went out into sun-bathed lawns;
And flocks, there nestled, rose and followed me;
Fed on their milk, and fruits,
As, day by day, along my path they mellowed,

"And, couched on moss and wild-flowers under stars,
Have I thus lived and shunned the haunts of men,
Yet, lately, being man,
Pined for companion; — I have found thee, sister."

"So then," replied, in pausing long, the Nymph,
"Thou'rt not, as when I heard thee first, I deemed,
Free from the lot of those
Who flit beside my waters into Hades;

"But, born since man brought death into the world,
The Mother-Nymph transmits not to her son
Her portion in the life,
Which beautifies the universe for ever.

"Since it is so, fair youth, companions seek
In those who, conscious of their fleeting hours,
Snatch with impatient hand
At every bud with which an hour may blossom.

"There is no human blood in my pure veins;
There is no human throb in my still heart;
Thou wilt need human love,
The water-spirit loves but as a spirit.

"Nay, hear me farther, and at least be warned
Of what awaits the mortal having won
To his own side at will
One of the Naiad-sisterhood of fountains,

"Who then deserts the partner of his soul
For the warm light in mortal maiden's eye;—
For him, the Eumenides
Make this cold nymph stern as themselves in vengeance.

"Shun, then, my fountain; wake me not again
From the calm depths to which I now return."
And from his side she slid
Melting, as melts a snowflake, in the waters.

The youth went desolate and musing back
Where now from coverts they had sought at noon,
His flock came forth to graze
On pastures cool with shadow from the mountains.

Hesper arose, the shepherd's guardian star,
Bringing the hour when sweetest sounds the reed:
But the flocks wistful stood
Missing the wonted sound; the reed was silent.

And slumber fell not on his lids that night;
The Naiad's face gleamed on him from the stars.
And, at the burst of day,
Again the rash one stood beside the fountain,

Saying, "My soul needs honeyed food from thine,
Bees follow thyme, and all mine instincts thee:
Thy very threat is sweet,
For thou wouldst love me couldst thou stoop to vengeance."

Oft from that morn the awe-stricken herdsmen saw,
When following up steep crags some hardier goat
Strayed from their flocks — below
Seated on mossèd banks, or slowly gliding

Where, with dark pine commingling silvery leaves,
Quivered the poplar, side by side two forms;
And in the one they knew
The stranger youth, but who and what the other?

The seasons rolled, and still the Oread's son
Communed, contented, with the Fountain Nymph,
Learning from her kind lips
Mysteries occult, once simple truths in common

To the first race in the wise Golden Age;
Language of bird and beast, and tree and flower;
So passed into his reed
Strains heard by gods ere Zeus yet reigned on Ida.

But when his life waxed from the budding leaf
Into the crown of manhood's regal flower,
Again he felt alone,
And loneliest most when seated by the Naiad.

Now in those parts of Sicily there reigned
An aged king, to whom the fates had spared
But one fair woman-child,
To whose slight hand he half resigned his sceptre.

And she had many suitors; favouring none,
Yet, with a seeming favour, duping all;
Of thoughts and fancies light
As May-leaves wavering between sun and shadow,

And ever seeking after pleasures new,
Settling on phantasies, now gay, now grave,
And quitting each in turn,
Restless as flits the moth beneath the moonbeam.

To this fair princess, Glaucè was her name,
Floated strange stories of the Shepherd youth,
Dwelling apart from men,
With whom he had no language save his music.

And she sent forth her messengers and guards
To track his haunts and bring him to her court,
And, one ill-omened day,
They found and led him to her glittering presence.

And when she gazed upon his blooming face,
Flushed to becoming wrath at violence done,
The heart of Glaucè stirred;
He charmed her eyes, and her eyes sought to charm him.

Silvering her speech into its blandest tones,
She soothed him, not by language, yet by voice,
And guessing by her signs,
That wish to hear his reed had caused his capture,

Upon the reed he breathed, and music woke;
She, hearing, said, "This melody talks love."
And from her rose-crown took
Bud, newest-blown, and gave it as her answer.

And so, between the music and the flowers,
Language in common grew between the two,
And what was left obscure,
Little by little, eyes soon learned to utter.

And the Nymph's son taught not the mortal maid
The speech of gods; to him her own she taught;
And, with her mortal speech,
Delight in mortal joys which gods might envy.

Captive no more, too willing guest he stayed,
Linking bright moments varied as her whim;
Now, on the noontide sea,
By her sweet side, beneath Egyptian awnings;

Now, at the cool of dawn, on forest-slopes,
Startling the deer in coverts gemmed with dews;
Now, hailing starry night
With Lesbian cups in Lydian dances closing.

As a lark poised in orient heaven forgets
The ripples of the corn-field whence it rose,
Forgets its lowly nest,
And hath no sense of life save joy and glory,

So from the shepherd's soul evanishèd
His former life; the laurel vale of Pan;
Meek flocks and grassy dales;
And the pale beauty of the fount's calm Spirit.

He in his love-dream, as the lark in heaven,
Hung over time, hushed in the golden hour,
And his god-given reed
Merged all its notes in one voluptuous measure.

One morn, just as the leaflets change their hues,
When great Orion setting threatens ships;
When mists delay the dawn,
And the first snows fall feather-like on hill-peaks;

From that deep slumber following festive hours
Woke the Nymph's son. His chamber stretched between
The silenced banquet-hall
And roofless peristyle, where languid roses

Late lingering, circled a clear fountain-jet
Sent heavenward, breaking, for the flowers around,
All mirror in a wave
Which broke itself to soar above the roses.

At either hand stood open the tall doors,
But partly draped by woofs of Phrygian looms;
And from the morn-lit fount
His eyes turned towards the drearier hall of banquet.

There lay the wrecks of the last night's gone joys,
Goblets cast down; moist wine-stains on dull floors;
Limp blossoms with sick scent,
Kissed from flushed brows away by hardy lovers;

And here and there still struggled thro' the shade
The mournful flicker of a ghastly lamp;
All things of pleasure spoke
As of a life departed speaks a charnel.

And with a shuddering and foreboding chill
The Oread's son recoiled, and bent his looks
Where slumbered by his side,
One white arm round his neck, the Isle-king's daughter;

Her locks of dusky gold streamed wanderingly
From the green tangles of their myrtle crown,
Over the tranquil heave
Of breasts whereon Dione's doves might nestle.

Never, he thought, she looked so beautiful
As in the cold light of that autumn dawn;
And, kissing her closed lips,
He murmured, "Wake, and give my world its morrow!"

And still she slept; then from his neck he loosed
The coil of her soft arms; and her rose-palm
Pressing in his, he cried
In louder tone, "Awake, return these kisses."

And she slept still; then sudden on his soul
There came a sense of some strong Presence dread;
Some Power unseen, unheard,
Filling the space with unconjectured terror.

As when in forest-solitudes a bird
Halts trembling on the spray it lit upon,
Fettered by sudden fear,
Till the snake's eye grows out from the mute covert,

So with blanched cheek, and lifted hair, the youth
Felt an approaching Fate:—Pale from the spray
Of the flower-circled fount
Came gradual forth a slow reluctant image;

And towards him, noiseless, moved the Water Nymph.
Then breaking from his awe, he, with rude hand,
Shook the warm woman-shape
That slumbered at his side, and shrieked "Awake!

"O living partner of my living self,
With human arms shelter my human heart;
She comes—the immortal foe
Of mortal joy!—Love's death is in her aspect!"

Still slept the Princess, still moved on the Nymph,
Moving as moves the wave of a slow tide,
With face serenely sad
In that compassion wherein dwells not mercy;

From her pale lips came, not into his ear,
But to his innermost soul, a ghost-like voice,
Saying, "Accuse me not,
But the Eumenides. Alas my brother!"

And as when some bleak wind from Thracian skies
Suddenly takes into its cold embrace
A flower which Spring too soon
Lures into bloom upon unsheltered Hæmus,

Around his neck there coiled a freezing arm,
And on his eyelids fell a blighting kiss.
Still the fair sleeper slept,
But all the myrtles in her garland shivered.

Back to the fountain noiseless moved the nymph,
As moves the wave when the slow tide recedes;
So from the Oread's son
She and Heaven's sunlight passed; her kiss had blinded.

And Glaucè woke, and clasped him in her arms,
And he said, drearily, "I see thee not!
The beauty of thy bloom
Is lost to me for ever and for ever.

"And with thy beauty so has gone my love,
As a flame burns not when the light is quenched.
This doom is from the gods:
I blame thee not that thou hast brought it on me.

"But, by the memory of fond moments past,
Do what I pray thee; hither call thy slaves,
And let them lead my steps
Back to the place whence I was borne a captive."

Amazed and awed the Princess heard his speech,
Gazing upon the film of lightless eyes
Lately dart-filled with love,
Now blank as quivers vacant of their arrows.

And, sliding from the couch, she called her slaves,
And bade them summon the chief soothsaying priest,
By whose divining lore
Might yet return to those dark eyes her beauty.

The soothsayer came and by the blind man stood,
Closing the chamber from all ears profane,
Questioned, and heard, and mused,
Then left, and, seeking Glaucè, said grave-visaged:

"In breasts immortal direst angers dwell;
Thy charms have won her lover from a Nymph:
Not on thyself draw down
The wrath as yet restricted to the lover.

"Yield to the youth's request, and from these halls
Straightway send forth what kept would work thy woe."
Letting some few tears fall,
The Princess sighed, "Appease we the Immortals."

So the slaves led from out the regal gates,
Back to the lawns shadowed by fading wolds,
Where still his tranquil flocks
Grazed, the blind Shepherd; and there left him
friendless.

They left him with his reed in the still noon,
Alone amid the invisible wide world,
Alone, with his sweet reed,
And thro' the invisible wide world thrilled music.

Again the shepherds heard the strain long-missed,
And held their breath to hear; plaintive and low
As is the ringdove's coo
That lulls Pelasgic virgins in Dodona,

The gentle prelude stole to human hearts;
Anon the burden changed, the music swelled,
Joy, sorrow, hope, and fear,
Battles and banquets, love in calm and tempest,

Pæans of triumph, solemn hymns to Zeus,
Groans wailing up from gulfs in Tartarus,
Met in the reed, which Pan,
Ensouling Nature, gave the son of Hermes.

Abrupt the music ceased; with a sharp sigh,
In the unwonted strain the reed had burst,
And the poor blind man stood
Lone on an earth without a link to heaven.

As the swan knows that its completed song
Is its own death-dirge; and, with drooping crest,
Drifts to some shadowy creek,
Where, seen no more, around it close the sedges;

So in the music which had burst his reed,
The blind man felt that he had summed his life;
And, turning towards the West,
As by some hand diviner safely guided,

Adown the rock-path to the Naiad's well,
Sightless he passed, with still unerring tread,
And halted on a ledge;
Void air between his footing and the fountain;

Air, that buoys up the eagle to the sun,
Yet drops an ant that hath not gained its wings;
There standing, the blind man
Lifted his voice, and cried, "Again, lost Sister,

"Speak to me in the language of the gods!
I have lived, I have loved, I have suffered, I have placed
Faith in a broken reed;
There ends man's language as expressed by music.

"Thy kiss hath killed the beauty of all else,
To make thine own more life-like to my soul;
Sister, I see thy face,
See the cool lilies glisten round thy dwelling;

"Where, underneath the waves which know no storm,
Blooms shun the day, and open to the stars;
O take me to thy rest,
Kiss back these lids to light beneath thy waters."

Then all the fount from depth to margent stirred,
And floated up thro' air a silvery voice,
"Child of the Oread, come;
I'll cull my starriest lilies for thy garlands;

"And back to light unearthly kiss thy lids.
Come; on my banks there murmur sweeter reeds
Than breath could ever break,
Needing no discords to complete their music."

"I come," he said, and leapt; pale gleaming arms
Received, and drew him down to azure deeps,
Where, say Sicilian myths,
He and the Nymph form one pure soul for ever.

And later bards revered the Shepherd boy,
As the first sire of Nature-prompted Art;
And by his name is called,
The fount where Hermes joined him with the Naiad.

For many an age, with each returning spring,
To him were offered tributary flowers,
And songs which still retained,
In haunted ears, notes from the reed of DAPHNIS.

THE WIFE OF MILETUS.

This story is found in the "Erotics" of Parthenius.

In that dread time when Gaul her ravening swarms
Launched upon Greece, the Matrons of Miletus,
Honouring the yearly rites of Artemis,
With songs and offerings, gathered to the temple

That stands unwalled, six stadia from the town;
And, in the midst of their melodious hymnings,
A barbarous band down from the mountains swooped
Sudden as swoops on clustered doves the eagle.

When with their spoil the Gauls resought their land,
Freeing a Greek of rank whom they had captured,
They sent him to Miletus, with these words,
"The Gauls in war respect the nuptial altars,

"And accept ransom, paid within a year,
For the fair captives seized within your temple,
Their honour sacred till the year expire,
But if unransomed then—the slaves of conquest.

"Each Greek, who comes with ransom for his wife,
Safe as a herald when he cross our borders;
Hervor the Celt, in the Massalian port,
Will to all seekers give instruction needful."

Milesian husbands heard and answered "Good!"
Yet made no haste to profit by the message.
The way was long, of dire repute the Gaul,
Few foxes trust the honour of the lion;

And, as no sum was fixed, 'twere treasure lost
To take too much—pains lost to take too little.
Among these widowed spouses, one alone,
Xanthus, although his lost delight, Erippe,

Had with no dowry swelled his slender means,
Prized his wife more than misers prize their coffers;
And that the ransom might not fall too short,
He sold his house, his herds, his fields, and vineyards;

And having thus converted into coin
His all, and all compared with her seemed nothing,
He sailed for Gaul to buy the priceless back;
Reaching the seaport founded by Phocæa,

He learnt Erippe's whereabout, and, led
By a Celt guide across the Gaul's wild borders,
Paused at the cone-shaped palace of a chief
Lifted to rule upon the shields of battle.

There, at the door, the Greek beheld his wife
Carding the wool for her barbarian captor.
"Joy, joy!" he cried; "I see thee once again,
Freed — save from love, for I have brought the ransom."

And while, with kisses broken by his sobs,
He clasped her to his breast, out strode the Chieftain,
Roused by strange voices and his barking dogs.
Head taller than the rest; his long locks yellowing

The cold clear air, with undulating gleam;
His ample front serene with power unquestioned,
A wolf's-hide mantle for his robe of state;
In his right hand a boar-spear for a sceptre.

Already versed in the barbarian tongue,
Erippe, breaking from her lord's embraces,
Said—"Lo my husband! he hath crossed the seas,
And brought, if thou accept it still, my ransom."

The Gaul looked down a moment; the wolf's hide
Stirred with a fuller swell of his strong life-blood;
Then raising the clear light of his blue eyes,
He stretched his vast hand o'er the brows of Xanthus;

"Sacred," he said, "are marriage and man's hearth;
Pass through these doors, a guest; the guest is sacred."
The guide by Hervor lent, as one who knew
The Grecian tongue, explained these words to Xanthus;

For here, as if by joy or by surprise
Quite overcome, Erippe trembled voiceless,
And, when her lord's eye sought her, she was gone,
Lost in the inner labyrinths of that dwelling.

The Gaul placed meats and mead before his guest,
To whom, when thus refreshed, he spoke—"Milesian,
Thou com'st in time while yet the promised year
Lacks a brief moon of the completed circle;

"Had the year lapsed—the woman's face is fair,
And I am wifeless—haply I had loved her.
Enough—now tell me what thy worldly wealth,
And what proportion thou wouldst yield as ransom?"

Speaking thus thro' the interpreter, the Greek
Thro' the interpreter replied, "My father,
Tho' nobly born, left me but scanty lands;
These I have sold in haste at no slight losses.

"A thousand golden staters have I brought."
More had he said, the Gaul cut short the sentence.
"Hold there; I see thine is no niggard soul:
That which thou gainest, and I yield, has value

"To be assessed according as it seems
Singled from millions, as the world's one woman;
'Tis all or nought. Thou wouldst concede thine all;
I can take nought: the fourth part is my people's,

"The rest our law makes mine—I give it back.
Go, tell thy wife she is no more my captive,
The morrow's sun shall light ye homeward both."
Then by a stern-faced handmaid to the chamber,

Where his wife waited him, the Greek was led,
And left to tell Erippe his glad tidings.
"How the gods favour me! A kiss!" he cried.
"Had adverse winds delayed my Cyprian galley

"This wolf-skin wearer says he might have loved,
And made thee—horror!—wife of a barbarian.
But be we just! the savage hath a soul
Not found among the traffickers of Hellas;

"And of the thousand staters I proposed,
Takes but a fourth; small ransom for Erippe."
She, curious as her sex, then made her lord
Tell, word by word, all Greek and Gaul had uttered;

And having heard, cried, "Thou hast lost us both:
I know how void thy chest; a thousand staters!
Thou canst not have the tenth of such a sum,
And when the Gaul detects thee in this falsehood—"

"Hush," said the husband, "I have sold our all,
Our house, our herds, our cornfields, and our vineyards;
I named one thousand staters to the Gaul,
Meaning to add, but his impatience stopped me,

'That sum is half my all,—the other half
Is also here, sewed up in my slaves' garments;
If half suffice not, take the whole!' These Gauls
Guess not the price at which we Greeks rate beauty.

"What! coy as ever? Well, I love thee so!"
At early dawn, while yet her Xanthus slumbered,
She who had slept not, slipping from his side,
Donned her silk robe, and sleeked her amber tresses;

And stole, light-footed, to the outer door,
Where, as she knew his wont, with eyes fixed eastward,
To greet his shrineless Helios, stood the Gaul.
Starting he turned, quick-eared, to her fine footfall;

His eyes met hers — were hers, then, danger-fraught,
That in his strong right hand the spear-staff trembled?
"Seekest thou me?" he said. "Yea, thee!" "Alone!
Where is thy lord?" "Still slumbering in yon chamber."

"What wouldst thou?" "Hist! a secret. Bend thine ear,
Nor let thine aspect lose its wonted kindness.
Know my base husband has deceived thee, Gaul.
Sewn in the garments of his slaves is twofold

"The sum he proffered. Take that gold and me!
For him I loathe and thee I love. O master,
Thou wouldst have loved me had not this man come;
He for his falsehood merits death: so be it!

"Let one life cease to stand between us two!"
As she thus spoke, the Gaul his wolf-hide mantle
Plucked o'er his visage with a sudden hand,
And from that veil his voice with hollow murmur

Came to her ear. "Is it thy true thought speaks?
Mine the wife's love, and mine the husband's murder?"
"If it be murder to chastise a fraud,
Love, to reach love, is a divine destroyer."

He raised his looks, in wonder that the Gods,
While hating Evil, clothed it in such beauty;
And whispered, "Is thy husband not my guest?
Let me forget that thou hast said this horror,

"Wearing a face in which, were I thy lord,
Singled from millions, blooms the world's one woman.
Touch me not, speak not, for thy touch and word
Alike are fire. — Gods of the brave, forgive me

"For I do think that what I feel is fear."
So he shook off the hands that clasped his mantle,
And, striding thro' the doorway, left her lone.
But she, more bent on crime by his rejection,

And gladdening, 'mid her shame, to feel her power,
Smiled and said, "Ah! he loves me, and I conquer;
Hath he not owned my words and touch are fire?"
Back to the chamber where yet slept the husband

Snake-like she crept, and cut on yielding wax
Words deep enough for pathway into Hades.
Seeking, with Grecian sophistry of guile,
To dupe the rudeness of barbarian reason,

She wrote, "Thy guest be sacred in thy realm,
But at thy borders guest returns to debtor,
And if the debtor by a lie repay
The generous creditor's large-souled concession,

"What stings to wrath the generous like deceit?
Conduct us to the frontier; there give orders
To search the garments of the Grecian slaves;
The fraud exposed becomes thy clear acquittal

"With gods and men, for that which sets me free;
The vilest slavery is a hated wedlock.
We Grecian women do not choose our mates.
Blessèd our lot if loving him who chooses;

"If not, a life-long pining;—better death!
But death to whom—the prisoner or the gaoler?
We should be prophets could we but divine
If the strange breast whereon our simple childhood,

"Torn from its stem, is tortured into graft,
Hath life-sap healthful to our growth as woman.
A man was found to wed me without dower,
He sells his all to purchase back his bargain;

"Never asked that man 'Has this thing a heart?'
Content if deeming that the thing has beauty,
Saying 'I love,' but not 'Canst thou love me?'
Love is no deity except when twin-born,

"Sprung from two hearts, each yearning unto each,
Until they meet, though Hades yawned between them.
Thou art to me the world's one man, and I
For good or ill, to thee the world's one woman."

This writ, she took the tablets to a youth,
Who, as the Gallic chieftain's buckler-bearer,
Stood readiest to his hest at feast or fight,
And bade him seek and give them to his master.

The sun paused midway between morn and eve
When the shield-bearer brought his chieftain's answer,
Saying, "I wait to lead thee and thy lord
Along the wastes and woodland to our borders."

She, with a dreadful joy in this reply,
Cried to her husband, "Hasten our departure;
The Gaul is chafed that we so long delay."
A little while, and thro' the mountain gorges

Shadowing the sun, the slow procession moved.
Heading his chosen guard stalked first the Chieftain;
Followed the slaves; gay Xanthus, in their rear,
Carolling bird-like to his silent nest-mate.

The sun set reddening as they reached the stream
Which would belt Gaul, did her fierce heart brook girdle;
A grassy semicircle stretched between
The hurrying wave and the unmoving forest;

Grey, in the midst of that lone waste-land, stood
A block of stone rude as man's earliest altar.
Here paused the Gaul, and as the rest grouped round,
One of the guard brought to the chief, as victim,

A lamb all filleted with wilding flowers,
And the lamb meekly licked the hand that led it.
Then said the chief to Xanthus, who drew near
With a Greek's interest, curious, and yet scornful;

Slow-speaking, that the guide-interpreter
Might make each sentence clearer to the stranger,
"When, at the boundary of his land, the Gaul
Parts from the guest or settles with the debtor,

"His law enjoins a sacrifice to gods,
Who make him safe thro' strength and strong thro' honour,
Thus guest or debtor goes his homeward way
By holy rites secured from deadly ambush;

"Granting that guest or debtor forfeit not
By his own sin our father-land's protection.
For times have been when in the guest himself
The gods who guard our borders chose the victim:

"My grandsire here slew one—a smooth-tongued Greek,
False to his host—the accusing voice was woman's:
But this need scare not men revering truth.
Now while thy slaves complete thy share of barter,

"Which was of all thy worldly wealth the fourth;
Let thy fair wife—restored to gods of Hellas—
Pay her last homage to the gods of Gaul,
And hold the lamb, which is the spotless symbol

"Of hearts that pray to be as pure from guile."
Construing these words by her dark hopes, Erippe
Bent o'er the lamb, her white arm round its neck;
Whispered the Gaul, "Shall I not spare thy husband?

"Does thy heart fail? it is not yet too late."
Hissed her voice, "Nay, let him who parts us perish!
Could thy heart fail thee, mine, at least, is firm:
This weak hand strong enough to strike a sleeper;

"This slight foot swift enough to fly the dead;
Spare him to-day—dismiss me; with the morrow
I should regain thy side, and whisper 'Freed!'
Wouldst thou have courage to refuse me shelter?"

To the still heaven the Gaul upraised his sword,
And crying, "Gods, this offering to man's hearthstone,"
He smote: the lamb ran bleating from the stone;
To Acheron sighless passed a guiltier victim.

Flinging to Xanthus, rooted horror-spelled,
The fatal lines that wooed, and brought home, murder,
The Doomsman said—"When thy guide construes these,
Thank him who saved his guest from deadly ambush.

"Take all thy gold. I have paid my people; how,
Their bards will teach them at inviolate hearthstones.
Thou hast no cause to grieve; but I—but I,
O Greek, I loved her: I have slain Temptation."

And, as when, passing from the wrecks it doomed,
Desolate sets, in deeps of cloud, Orion,
The grand destroyer went his way forlorn
Thro' glimmering darkness down barbarian forests.

BRIDALS
IN
THE SPIRIT LAND.

The original of this Myth is to be found in Conon, Narrat. 18 (where Leonymus is named Autoleon), and in Pausanias, III. 19.

Many wonders on the ocean
By the moonlight may be seen.
Under moonlight, on the Euxine
Rose the blessed silver Isle,

As Leonymus of Croton,
At the Pythian god's behest,
Steered along the troubled waters
To the tranquil Spirit-land.

In the earthquake of the battle,
When the Locrians reeled before
Croton's shock of marching iron,
Strode a phantom to their van.

'Twas the shade of Locrian Ajax,
Guarding still the native soil;
And Leonymus, confronting,
Wounded, fell before the spear.

Leech and herb the wound could heal not.
Said the Pythian god, "Depart,
Voyage o'er the troubled Euxine
To the tranquil Spirit-land;

"There abides the Locrian Ajax;
He who gave the wound can heal:
God-like souls are in their mercy
Stronger yet than in their wrath."

White it rose on lullèd waters,
Rose the blessed silver Isle;
Purple vines in lengthened vistas
Knit the hill-top to the beach;

And the beach had sparry caverns,
And a floor of golden sands;
And wherever soared the cypress,
Underneath it bloomed the rose.

Glimmered there amid the vine-leaves,
Thoro' cavern, over beach,
Life-like shadows of a beauty
Which the living know no more;

Towery statures of great heroes,
They who fought at Thebes and Troy;
And, with looks that poets dream of,
Beamed the women heroes loved.

Stately out before their comrades,
As the vessel touched the shore,
Came the stateliest two, by Hymen
Ever hallowed into one.

As He strode, the forest trembled
To the awe that crown'd his brow;
As She stepped, the ocean dimpled
To the ray that left her smile.

"Fearless warrior, welcome hither!"
Said a voice in which there slept
Thunder-sounds to scatter armies
As a north-wind scatters leaves.

"Wounded sufferer, welcome hither!"
Said a voice of music, low
As the coo of doves that nestle
Under summer boughs at noon.

"Who are ye, O shapes of glory?"
He, the Hero-Ghost, replied,
"She is Helen, I Achilles,
In the Spirit-land espoused."

"Low I kneel to thee, Pelides;
But, O marvel, she thy bride,
She whose guilt unpeopled Hellas,
She whose marriage lights fired Troy!"

Frowned the large front of Achilles,
Casting shadow o'er the place,
As the sunlight fades from Tempè,
When on Ossa hangs a storm.

"Know, thou dullard," said Pelides,
"That on the funeral pyre
Earthly sins are purged from glory,
And the Soul is as the Name.

"If to her in life a Paris,
If to me in life a slave,
Helen's mate is here Achilles—
Mine the Sister of the Stars.

"Nought of her survives but beauty.
Nought of me survives but fame;
Fame and Beauty wed together
In the isle of happy souls."

O'er the foam of warring billows
Silver-chimed the choral song,
"Fame and Beauty wed for ever
In the isle of happy souls."

"Wounded sufferer, welcome hither,
Thou hast reached us, thou art cured;
Healed is every wound of mortal,
In the isle of happy souls."

O'er the gloom of moaning waters
Soft and softer chimed the song,
"Healed is every wound of mortal
In the isle of happy souls."

CYDIPPE;

OR,

THE APPLE.

THE very beautiful legend of "Cydippe and the Apple" was a favourite with both Greek and Latin writers. Callimachus wrote a poem (now lost) called "Cydippe," and we still retain the Epistles between Acontius and Cydippe in the Heroides of Ovid, though whether Ovid himself composed them is a matter of some dispute. Scaliger assigns their authorship to Sabinus, a contemporary and friend of Ovid's. In our own day, the main incident of the subject has been treated by Mr. Charles Kent, in hexameter verses rich with exquisite imagery and beauties of poetic expression. (See "The Golden Apple," in the charming volume of poems by Charles Kent, entitled "Aletheia: or The Doom of Mythology.") In the more matter of fact mode in which the legend is here told, the original plot has been somewhat amplified, and the vengeance of Artemis extended from Cydippe to her father, and one of her suitors.

Fairest and hardiest of the youths in Ceos
Flourished Acontius free from love's sweet trouble,
Pure as when first a child, in her child-chorus,
Chanting the goddess of the silver bow.

Him silent rocks and shadowy glens delighted,
Where the roe fled into the realm of eagles,
Or where the red eye of the lurking wild-boar
Gleamed thro' some crevice in dense forest leaves.

"Son," thus his father, widowed long, and aged,
Mournfully said, "The young are never lonely;
Solitude's self to them is a boon comrade;
Lone are the aged; lone amid the crowd,

"Loneliest when brooding o'er a silent hearthstone
Vacant of prattlers coaxing back to laughter:
Toys to the greybeard are his children's children;
They are to age, my son, as hopes to youth.

"Choose, then, a bride whom I may call a daughter,
And in her infants let me find companions.
Life hurries on to meet the point it sprung from;
Youth starts from infancy and age returns."

Moved much, Acontius heard, and said submissive:—
"Thy will my law shall ever be, O father.
But as my childhood served the solemn goddess,
Haunting lone souls estranged from human love,

"And she, since then, has made the smile of woman
Fall on my heart as falls on snow the moonbeam,
So the great Queen herself must lift the shadow
Cast by her marble image o'er my life.

"Go will I straight with offerings to her temple,
Praying her leave to make thy home less lonely."
Gently he kissed the old man's bended forehead,
Quitting the threshold with reluctant steps.

And the next day he stood before the father,
Saying, "The goddess, thro' her priest, our kinsman,
Gives me this riddle, baffling my dull reason;
Wisdom is thine, my father, read and solve."

"There," read the father, "where her shrine is chastest,
Artemis orders him who would forsake her.
This is no riddle," said the old man sadly,
"Artemis dooms thee to some Northern shrine,

"Where to her priesthoods marriage rites are sinful—
Patience! The gods are of all joy the givers;
And by the side of Sorrow, when they send her,
Place Resignation! Child, I will not grieve!"

Tears on his eyelids, from the old man's presence,
Went the son wandering listless toward the seashore;
Nearing the city-gates, quick crowds swept by him:
"Whither so fast?" he asked of one he knew.

"Whither, Acontius? yonder, to the haven,
Ere our State galley sail to wealthy Delos.
Why art not thou on board?" "I am no merchant,
What to me Delos? not a wildboar there!"

"Dullard, forget'st thou the blithe yearly feast-days,
Honouring the Delian Deities; Apollo,
And the great Artemis, who holds her eldest
Shrine, and her chastest, in her natal isle?"

Started Acontius, and his breath came quickly.
"Thanks; for thy words remind me of a duty;
Haste we, I hear the music giving signal
Of the raised anchor: Friend, when I am gone,

"Seek thou my father, say why I am absent;
Cheer him: stay,—bid him broach his oldest Chian,
And—thou and I were playmates in our childhood,
Drink to my health, the old man then will share!"

Promised the other; he loved well Acontius,
All men in Ceos loved the hunter's father.
Talking thus as they went, behold, the haven
And the sun glittering on the festive ship

Rainbowed from prow to stern with votive garlands.
In sprang the hunter; blithe began the boat-song;
Freighted with youth and garland-blooms, the galley
Slided from land adown the glassy sea.

Gaining the shores of consecrated Delos,
Port, mart, and street seem'd vocal with all Hellas,
And the whole city, as one mighty altar,
Breathed with Greek melodies and Syrian balms.

Wistful the hunter eyed the long procession,
Solemn with delegates from troubled cities,
Bearing those gifts by which a State in peril
Deems it wise piety to bribe the gods.

"Not now at midday," inly said Acontius,
"Merged in grand embassies of tribes and races
To the Queen-goddess, can I hope her favour
For the petition of one humble man.

"Therefore, since unprepared I came from Ceos,
Will I, this eve, buy white robes and feast-off'rings,
Spend night in prayer, unroofed beneath the moonlight,
And ere the city, from the leaden sleep

"Following long revel, opens drowsy lids,
Will I be first at dawn to seek the goddess,
Waiting not till the din of countless suitors
Tire ev'n the patience of celestial ears."

Quitting the crowd that poured into the temple,
All that bright feast-day, strayed the simple hunter,
Lone by the seashore, till in rosy twilight
Melted the outlines vague of wave and sky:

Pale from the altar rose the last thin vapour,
Evening's gay banquet closing day's grave worship;
Still the wide mart stood open for all stragglers;
Barber-shops loud with the last moment's news;

Wine-booths; stalls gay with wares for every stranger,
Gifts for his gods or playthings for his infants;
Singing girls skilled in songs for every lover;
Tale-tellers moving laughter, sometimes tears;

Vagrant diviners known not to Apollo,
Promising riches unrevealed to Plutus;
Swarthy barbarians—Æthiop, Mede, Egyptian,
Yellow-haired Celt from Hyperborean seas,

Attica's parasite and Thracia's robber
All seeking gain or pleasure—blessed the temple,
Which now in silence, seen above the roof-tops,
Rose, the calm well-head of the noisy mart.

Tall thro' the press broad-shouldered moved the hunter,
And, 'mid the stalls singling a face that pleased him,
Bought the things needful for his simple off'rings.
Quoth she who served him, from the Naxian isle

Laughing-eyed good-wife—"Comely-visaged stranger,
Take thou this fruit, the fairest in my orchard;
And may the cheek of her to whom it passes
Glow with a blush yet warmer than the fruit's."

Smiling the hunter sighed; and took the apple,
Gift which the Greek gives her he deems the fairest.
Then, where serene in starlight rose the temple,
Upward he went, and left the mart below.

In the hushed grove around the sacred columns,
All the night long he watched the silvery tree-tops
Opening still pathways to the moon;—till faintly
Through the leaves sighing crept the winds of dawn;

Reddened the hazy sea; a golden glimmer
Shot from day's car and woke the lark; Narcissus
Lifted his dew-gemmed coronal of clusters;
Shy peered the lizard from the crannied wall.

Now from within the fane rose choral voices,
Hymning the advent of the world's joy-bringer;
Now up the sacred stairs went slow the hunter;
Now with innumerous torches on his sight,

Column on column lengthening, blazed the temple,
Life-like, thus seen, stood out the marble goddess,
Beauteous in scorn as when she slew Orion.
First with due care besprinkling breast and hands

From the lustrating font within the entrance,
Murmuring low prayer Acontius neared the altar,
Rendering his bloodless sacrifice—pure flour-cakes,
Shapes wrought in wax of lion and of stag,

Poppy wreaths blushing round a stem of olive.
Homage thus paid, awhile he lingered, gazing
On the stern beauty of the solemn goddess;
Reverently then he turned him to depart.

Lo, midway in the aisle—her nurse before her
Mother-like walking—came a youthful virgin
Bearing white garlands, as when, led by winter,
Comes the fresh Spring-morn bringing earliest flowers.

Quiet and slow, with modest eyes cast downward,
Noting the hunter not, she glided by him;
Silent she took her place beside the altar,
Brightening its flame with balms from Araby

And the reflected light of her own beauty;
And at the first sight of that stranger maiden
Leapt the youth's heart, and from it the cold goddess
Lifted the shadow since his childhood cast.

As in closed chambers suddenly flung open
Rushes the light, rushes the golden splendour,
All his frame thrilled with a celestial glory,
And to himself he murmured "This is love."

Quickly, as by some inward voice instructed,
No other votaries sharing yet the temple,
While she, unheeding aught beyond the altar,
Over her offering bent her looks devout,

He, with his hunter's knife, carved on the apple
Letters clear-scored; and, screened behind a column,
Into the maiden's lap he cast that token
Which the Greek gives to her he deems most fair.

Startled, the girl looked round; nor saw the hunter,
And, wonder-stricken, asked the nurse in whisper,
"What can this mean? whence comes it?" Quoth the woman,
Puzzled and curious—"Nay, I cannot guess.

"Are there not letters? read thou what is written."
So the girl read these words, "I, at the altar
Artemis hallows, vow to wed Acontius."
With the sweet blush of angry innocence,

Scornful the maiden cast away the apple;
But, tho' in whisper she the words had spoken,
Heard by the Cean, heard by the great goddess.
"Joy!" said the lover, suddenly grown bold,

"Gold-thronèd Artemis, to thee unerring
Trust I the rest; the vow is in thy keeping."
When the girl, down-eyed as before, departed,
He, through the city, followed on her way,

Mute and unmarked and faithful as her shadow,
Till her light footfall on the parent-threshold
Left its last music. Learning from the neighbours
All that he asked, her parentage and name,

Longer the Cean tarried not in Delos;
Took a light boat, recrossed the sunny waters,
And, his home reaching, greeted thus his father:
"Make the house ready to receive a bride,

"For she is found: thy hearth shall not be lonely."
And so, tho', waking or in sleep, re-haunted
By that sweet face, he trusted to the goddess,
Strong in the patience which is born of hope.

This blooming maid of Delos, named Cydippe,
Was the sole child of Megacles, the Archon;
Courted by many, but to all yet heart-whole;
Now from the suitors making his own choice,

Megacles singled the great merchant, Chremes;
She, in whose mind the vow was as a circle
Traced in calm water by the halcyon dipping,
Child in submission to her father's will,

Neither inclined, nor yet averse, consented;
When, but three days before the appointed bridals,
Wondered the nurse that yet Cydippe slumbered
While not a dewdrop lingered on the rose;

Nearing the couch, she shrieked aloud in terror:
Colourless, calmly rigid, lay the maiden
As if not sleep, but sleep's more awful brother
With the quenched torch, reigned stern in that repose.

Locked in this trance, only by breath the faintest,
Showing a soul not vanished from the sunlight,
Lay she for weeks as if on life's last border
Touching the silent shadow-land beyond.

Said the cold merchant to the grieving father,
"Pardon me, friend, a wife is the house-mistress,
Ill fares the house if she indulge in trances.
Give back my love-gifts and annul the bond."

Proudly the Archon smiled and tore the contract.
Chremes soon found a bride with fits less quiet;
Then from her trance, fresh as from wonted slumber,
Bloomed out the maid, and stood amid the flowers.

Megacles now, sore-smarting at the insult
Put on his child by the coarse-thoughted merchant,
Out from her suitors chose a grand Eupatrid,
Grave as an Ephor schooling Spartan kings;

Scorning mankind as sprung from bone and sinew,
While from the stones with which Deucalion peopled
Thessaly's mud-banks, after the great deluge,
Vaunting his antique petrified descent.

Still from the rock itself will grow the blossom;
One day the stone-born chanced to see Cydippe,
And in some fissure of that flinty bosom,
Love found an opening for his thorny rose.

Just as before, averse not nor inclining,
Pleased with the love-gifts, heeding not the giver,
Pious Cydippe passively consented,
Child in submission to her father's will.

Lo now reversed the mystic visitation!
Her the trance spared and settled on the suitor;
Nine drowsy days the Eupatrid lay as stone-like
As his first father ere transformed to man.

When he returned to consciousness and reason,
Thus, to the Archon bending o'er his pillow
Gravely he whispered, "I have been in Hades,
Sojourning there with the majestic ghost

"Of my line's founder, the Thessalian pebble,
And he forbade me—but his words are sacred,—
Pity my fate; I dare not wed thy daughter.
Keep thou my love-gifts and annul the bond."

Homeward returning, Megacles self-communed,
Muttering, "Some god is mixed up in this matter.
Twice may my choice have angered Aphroditè.
Is not my daughter beautiful and young?

"Should not her proper mate be youth and beauty?
Squint-eyed the merchant; grey the stone-descended;
Like unto like! had Helen married Paris,
She had been chaste, and Troy be standing now."

So his choice settled soon upon Callistus,
Slender as Hermes, blooming as Apollo.
Never, since Paris, with a blander aspect
Guest at man's hearthstone left behind him woe.

"Surely this choice will please thee, Aphroditè,"
Megacles said, "And here will be no trances."
Neither inclining nor averse, Cydippe,
Child in submission to her father's will,

Glanced at her fair-faced suitor, and consented.
But, O the marvel! now it was the father
Whom the strange torpor wrapped from golden daylight:
Nine dreary weeks, where life's last border touched

On the dim shadow-land, he lay unmoving.
Goaded by debt, and pining for a dowry,
Thus to the maid said elegant Callistus,
"All men are mortal—thy good father's dead;

"Motionless, speechless, eating not nor drinking;
Weeping I say it, no man can be deader;
Sinful it is to keep him still unburied,
Staying from Fields of Asphodel his ghost.

"Let thy soft heart dismiss too pious scruples.
Mourn for thy father—place him on the death-pyre,
Hastening the moment when, extinct his ashes,
Love may to Hymen dedicate the torch."

Stern looked the girl, till then so meek; replying,
"Get thee gone, counsellor of household murder."
Thus for the third time Artemis preserved her
Faithfully true to the forgotten vow.

Now the strange story of these three strange trances
Lip to lip flew thro' wonder-loving Hellas,
And at the Archon's door, one noon in summer,
Knocking, a stranger slow admittance found.

Led by a house-slave to Cydippe's presence,
Thus, with grave aspect, he addressed the maiden:
"Daughter of Megacles, I, Greek, though stranger,
Come, a disciple of the healing god,

"Pledging my head to free thy father's spirit
From the dread sleep which drags it on to Lethé,
Grant me but leave to see him." Slowly lifting
Sorrowful lids, she gazed upon a brow

Seeming, she thought, the throne of modest candour.
Trustful she said, "The gods confirm thy promise!"
Leading him straight into her father's chamber.
O'er the death-sleep the stranger bent awhile;

Taking the hand, thrice breathing on the eyelids,
Softly he whispered, "Soul, that thro' the slumber
Still lives the same, as when, from sight evanished,
Moves not the less thro' sunlit space a star;

"What is the Power that weighs thee to the shadows
With the dire load of some diviner anger?
Speak, who the God, and what the expiation?"
Murmured the slumberer through unmoving lips,

"Artemis smites me; wherefore, ask Apollo."
Silence resettled on the lips unmoving;
Then to Cydippe, turning, asked the stranger,
"Is it thy will that I these words obey?"

"Blest be thy coming," she sobbed forth. "O hasten!
Hear I thy voice again, O father, father!"
Slow from her presence passed away the stranger,
Passed into sunlight, leaving her in prayer;

And, with her nurse and others of the household,
Went with peace-offerings to Apollo's temple,
And, when the sacred oracle had answered,
Led the procession back to that still couch.

"Comfort!" he said, and smiled, to the good daughter;
Over the sleeper then he lightly sprinkled
Drops from Apollo's font, imbibed by vervain,
And the lids opened, and the man sate up,

Wonderingly stared on kneeling forms around him,
Wonderingly heard a choir of household voices,
"Praise to the healing-god!—our master liveth:
"Praise to Apollo!" "To Apollo, praise!"

"Praise too his huntress-sister," said the stranger,
"Guardian with him of consecrated Delos:
Learn, noble Megacles, and thou, Cydippe,
Wherefore the anger of the Delian Powers.

"Thus saith the Oracle—those kneeling round thee
Heard it, O Archon—'Are not all vows holy?
Did not Cydippe vow to wed Acontius,
And at the solemn shrine of Artemis?'"

Suddenly then the fatal words, forgotten
As a dream's fragments, started up accusing
On the girl's mind; mute to her father's questions,
Cowering she stood, bowed down by grief and shame.

Pained for her darling, out the nurse spoke shrill-tongued,
Guiltless the girl, but criminal the apple,
"Peace!" cried the Archon—"who is this Acontius?"
Answered the stranger, "Well-born, young, a Cean;

"With but one merit—that he loves thy daughter,
Loved her at first sight—Artemis so willed it."
"Bow we to Artemis!" exclaimed the father,
"Quick, and to Ceos send the swiftest ship.

"Tarry here, stranger, welcome at this hearthstone.
Hast thou not saved its owner from the Shadows?
Tarry at least till comes the eager bridegroom,
Fathers are safe not till their daughters wed."

Tarried the stranger, golden days of summer:
Daily and hourly, darker yet and darker,
Standing between the girl and daylight, Sorrow.
She who till then had to her father's will,

Child in submission, bent without a murmur,
Inly rebelling, loathed these fated bridals,
Never so galled as when she heard the stranger
Palliate the guile which had ensnared her vow.

Stifling her wrath she marked his tranquil aspect
When the slaves decked the walls with nuptial garlands;
And while she marked, his eyes her own were seeking,
Seeking there light the sun could not bestow.

Late on the night before the dreaded morning
Fixed for the coming of the hated bridegroom,
Bold in despair she knelt before her father,
Weepingly knelt, and faltered forth these words:

"If my lost mother loved thee, if from childhood
I have obeyed and honoured thee, O father,
Hear me, nor slay with these detested bridals.
Rather O let me the cold goddess serve

"All my life long, as her pure virgin priestess,
So may she free me from a vow less sinful
Broken, than kept abhorring him who snared it.
Never can love dwell between me and fraud."

"Hold," cried the Archon; "nor incense a goddess
Who into Hades can entrance thy father;
Rail not at fraud—all maidens pray for lovers,
Warned tho' they be that love itself is fraud."

Back to her chamber crept the girl heart-broken,
Sate in the dark and moaned herself to slumber.
Gaily the ship, at morn, rode in the haven,
Flute and fife chiming to the dip of oars;

And the old, kind-faced father of the bridegroom,
Heading a train of friends and slaves gift-bearing,
Came to the house, where Megacles received him,
Standing at doorposts garlanded with rose.

Friendly the old men talked and laughed together;
Side by side marching came they to Cydippe:
Where was Acontius? where the guileful lover?
Where, too, the stranger, absent since the dawn?

Veiled was the girl; the bridal wreath of myrtle
Rent from her brow beneath her feet lay trampled;
Hidden her face, yet visible her anguish,
Bride with the myrtle trampled under foot.

Look, maiden, look! what image kneels before thee?
Hear, maiden, hear! what voice recalls thy blushes?
"I am Acontius, whom thou hast so hated—
I am the stranger; is he hated too?

"Snare for thy hand sufficed not to my treason;
And in thy heart I set the snare for pardon;
Here have I failed? if so, thou hast thy freedom;
I can release thee, maiden—I can die."

Bending she took up and replaced the myrtle,
Not with the right hand; that in his was resting;
And as, heard never save by gods and lovers,
Heart answers heart, she answered, yet was mute.

So with melodious hymnings to the temple
Went the procession; and in after ages
This story passed into a strain of music
Set for sweet singers, and to Lesbian lutes.

Youth, mayst thou ever at the chastest altar
Fix thy heart's choice on her thou deem'st the fairest,
And may the goddess ever keep unbroken
Vows on the apple read by virgins there.

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