

GROUP VI.

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*THE BLENDING OF HISTORY AND
MYTHOLOGY.*
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THE story of Ariadne, through whose cleverness Theseus, the semi-mythical founder of Athens, threaded the Labyrinth and slew the Minotaur, has been written in prose repeatedly; no one has told it more acceptably than Hawthorne in "Tanglewood Tales." But the end of this story is not satisfactory so far as the heroine is concerned, for the faithless Theseus, when he and the rest of his companions are ready to sail for home, basely deserts Ariadne, leaving her asleep on the island of Naxos.

The sequel to this tale is found in the writings of both Greek and Latin authors.

We select the following paraphrases on some of their poems.

HOW BACCHUS FINDS ARIADNE SLEEPING. [NONNUS.]

MRS. BROWNING.

When Bacchus first beheld the desolate
And sleeping Ariadne, wonder straight
Was mixed with love in his great golden eyes;

He turned to his Bacchantes in surprise,
 And said with guarded voice: "Hush! strike no more
 Your brazen cymbals; keep those voices still
 Of voice and pipe; and since ye stand before
 Queen Cypris, let her slumber as she will!
 And yet the cestus is not here in proof.
 A Grace, perhaps, whom sleep has stolen aloof:
 In which case, as the morning shines in view,
 Wake this Aglaia! yet in Naxos, who
 Would veil a Grace so? Hush! And if that she
 Were Hebe, which of all the gods can be
 The pourer-out of wine? or if we think
 She's like the shining moon by ocean's brink,
 The guide of herds, — why, could she sleep without
 Endymion's breath upon her cheek? or if I doubt
 Of silver-footed Thetis, used to tread
 These shores, — even *she* (in reverence be it said)
 Has no such rosy beauty to dress deep
 With the blue waves. The Loxian goddess might
 Repose so from her hunting-toil aright
 Beside the sea, since toil gives birth to sleep,
 But who would find her with her tunic loose
 Thus? Stand off, Thracian! stand off! Do not leap,
 Not this way! Leave that piping, since I choose,
 O dearest Pan, and let Athené rest!
 And yet if she be Pallas, — truly guessed, —
 Her lance is — where? her helm and ægis — where?"
 As Bacchus closed, the miserable Fair
 Awoke at last, sprang upward from the sands,
 And gazing wild on that wild throng that stands
 Around, around her and no Theseus there! —
 Her voice went moaning over shore and sea,
 Beside the halcyon's cry; she called her love;
 She named her hero, and raged maddeningly
 Against the brine of waters; and above,

Sought the ship's track, and cursed the hours she slept,
 And still the chiefest execration swept
 Against Queen Paphia, mother of the ocean;
 And cursed and prayed by times in her emotion
 The winds all round.

* * * * *

Her grief did make her glorious; her despair
 Adorned her with its weight. Poor wailing child!
 She looked like Venus when the goddess smiled
 At liberty of godship, debonair;
 Poor Ariadne! and her eyelids fair
 Hid looks beneath them lent her by Persuasion
 And every Grace, with tears of Love's own passion.
 She wept long; then she spoke: — "Sweet sleep did come
 While sweetest Theseus went. O, glad and dumb
 I wish he had left me still! for in my sleep
 I saw his Athens, and did gladly keep
 My new bride-state within my Theseus' hall;
 And heard the pomp of Hymen, and the call
 Of 'Ariadne, Ariadne,' sung
 In choral joy; and there, with joy, I hung
 Spring-blossoms round love's altar! ay, and wore
 A wreath myself; and felt *him* evermore,
 Oh, evermore beside me, with his mighty
 Grave head bowed down in prayer to Aphrodite!
 Why, what a sweet, sweet dream! *He* went with it
 And left me here unwedded where I sit!
 Persuasion help me! The dark night did make me
 A brideship the fair morning takes away;
 My Love had left me when the Hour did wake me;
 And while I dreamed of marriage, as I say,
 And blest it well, my blessed Theseus left me;
 And thus the sleep I loved so has bereft me.
 Speak to me, rocks, and tell my grief to-day,
 Who stole my love of Athens?" . . .

HOW BACCHUS COMFORTS ARIADNE.

MRS. BROWNING.

Then Bacchus' subtle speech her sorrow crossed :—
 "O maiden, dost thou mourn for having lost
 The false Athenian heart? and dost thou still
 Take thought of Theseus, when thou mayst at will
 Have Bacchus for a husband? Bacchus bright!
 A god in place of mortal! Yes, and though
 The mortal youth be charming in thy sight,
 That man of Athens cannot strive below,
 In beauty and valor, with my deity!
 Thou'lt tell me of the labyrinthine dweller,
 The fierce man-bull he slew: I pray thee, be,
 Fair Ariadne, the true deed's true teller,
 And mention thy clue's help! because, forsooth,
 Thine armed Athenian hero had not found
 A power to fight on that prodigious ground,
 Unless a lady in her rosy youth
 Had lingered near him; not to speak the truth
 Too definitely out till names be known—
 Like Paphia's—Love's—and Ariadne's own.
 Thou wilt not say that Athens can compare
 With Æther, nor that Minos rules like Zeus,
 Nor yet that Gnosus has such golden air
 As high Olympus. Ha! for noble use
 We came to Naxos! Love has well intended
 To change thy bridegroom! Happy thou, defended
 From entering Theseus' earthly hall,
 That thou mayst hear the laughters rise and fall
 Instead, where Bacchus rules! Or wilt thou choose
 A still-surpassing glory?—take it all,—
 A heavenly house, Kronion's self for kin,—
 A place where Cassiopea sits within

Inferior light, for all her daughter's sake
 Since Perseus, even amid the stars, must take
 Andromeda in chains ætherial!
 But *I* will wreath *thee*, sweet, an astral crown,
 And as my queen and spouse thou shalt be known—
 Mine, the crown-lover's!" Thus, at length, he proved
 His comfort on her; and the maid was moved;
 And casting Theseus' memory down the brine,
 She straight received the troth of her divine
 Fair Bacchus; Love stood by to close the rite:
 The marriage-chorus struck up clear and light,
 Flowers sprouted fast about the chamber green,
 And with spring-garlands on their heads, I ween,
 The Orchomenian dancers came along,
 And danced their rounds in Naxos to the song.
 A Hamadryad sang a nuptial dit
 Right shrilly; and a Naiad sate beside
 A fountain, with her bare foot shelving it,
 And hymned of Ariadne, beauteous bride,
 Whom thus the god of grapes had deified.
 Ortygia sang out, louder than her wont,
 An ode which Phœbus gave her to be tried,
 And leapt in chorus, with her steadfast front,
 While prophet Love, the stars have called a brother,
 Burnt in his crown, and twined in one another
 His love-flower with the purple roses, given
 In type of that new crown assigned in heaven.

NOTE.—For allusions to Ariadne's crown, see Longfellow's poem,
 "The Hanging of the Crane."

THE SLEEPING ARIADNE.

THIS statue is in the Museum of Sculpture in the
 Vatican and it has a world-wide fame. It is said to be

one of the finest pieces of sculpture in Italy. A copy is in the Athenæum gallery, Boston.

BACCHUS AND ARIADNE.

HESIOD, 850 B.C. [MRS. BROWNING'S TRANSLATION.]

The golden-haired Bacchus did espouse
That fairest Ariadne, Minos' daughter,
And made her wifehood blossom in the house ;
Where such protective gifts Kronion brought her,
Nor Death nor Age could find her when they sought her.

THE ORIGINAL SOURCES OF AN HISTORICAL POEM.

It has been stated that the possession of knowledge sufficient to understand Tennyson's "A Dream of Fair Women," in every detail, presupposes a liberal education. It may also be said that the pleasure of acquiring the necessary kind of knowledge to interpret this poem will be greatly enhanced by going to the original sources for it. The mystery surrounding the "fair women" whose names are not given in the poem, may be cleared by consulting a few authors to whose works we invite the attention of our readers.

The first lady who is unwilling to tell the poet her name gives the clue to her identity by mentioning her beauty and the effect of it. For a complete understanding of this stanza, the third book of the "Iliad" should be read. The second tells the poet her history briefly. In the fourth group of this book the student will find a translation of the original drama of which she is the heroine. The third tells her story more in detail and

the poet also adds his description of her, so that the famous queen of Egypt needs no further introduction. Shakspeare has taken her from history, and given her a higher niche in the Temple of Fame in one of his dramas. The fourth is "the daughter of the warrior Gileadite." Her story will be found in the Book of Judges, Chapter XI.

The history of "that Rosamond whom men call fair" is given in Agnes Strickland's "Lives of the Queens of England," in connection with the life of Eleanor, wife of Henry II. of England.

For the history of "her who clasp'd in her last trance her murder'd father's head," read the account of Sir Thomas More's execution and the disposal of his body, "Reign of Henry VIII."

The story of Joan of Arc, "a light of ancient France," has been told by so many historians and poets that the student scarcely needs a reference to any particular work; however, Southey's poem and Mrs. Charles's prose story, called "Joan, the Maid," are worthy of careful perusal.

The student should read the story of the fifth crusade under Prince Edward of England, afterwards Edward I. of the Norman line of kings, for the last incident related in the poem.

NOTE.—After the student has become familiar with the characters found in this poem, he should be able to appreciate somewhat, the rare power shown by the poet in adapting to his own use, the romance of history.

A comparison of each of these "fair women" as she appears here, with her original portrait will aid the student in determining whether Tennyson's delineations are apt or accurate.

A DREAM OF FAIR WOMEN.

TENNYSON.

I read, before my eyelids dropt their shade,
 "The Legend of Good Women," long ago
 Sung by the morning star of song, who made
 His music heard below ;

Dan Chaucer, the first warbler, whose sweet breath
 Preluded those melodious bursts that fill
 The spacious times of great Elizabeth
 With sounds that echo still.

And, for a while, the knowledge of his art
 Held me above the subject, as strong gales
 Hold swollen clouds from raining, tho' my heart,
 Brimful of those wild tales,

Charged both mine eyes with tears. In every land
 I saw, wherever light illumineth,
 Beauty and anguish walking hand in hand
 The downward slope to death.

Those far-renowned brides of ancient song
 Peopled the hollow dark, like burning stars,
 And I heard sounds of insult, shame, and wrong,
 And trumpets blown for wars ;

And clattering flints batter'd with clanging hoofs ;
 And I saw crowds in column'd sanctuaries
 And forms that pass'd at windows, and on roofs
 Of marble palaces ;

Corpses across the threshold ; heroes tall
 Dislodging pinnacle and parapet
 Upon the tortoise creeping to the wall ;
 Lances in ambush set ;

And high shrine-doors burst thro' with heated blasts
 That run before the fluttering tongues of fire ;
 White surf wind-scatter'd over sails and masts,
 And ever climbing higher ;

Squadrons and squares of men in brazen plates,
 Scaffolds, still sheets of water, divers woes,
 Ranges of glimmering vaults with iron grates,
 And hush'd seraglios.

So shape chased shape as swift as when to land
 Bluster the winds and tides the self-same way,
 Crisp foam-flakes scud along the level sand
 Torn from the fringe of spray.

I started once, or seem'd to start in pain,
 Resolved on noble things, and strove to speak,
 As when a great thought strikes along the brain,
 And flushes all the cheek.

And once my arm was lifted to hew down
 A cavalier from off his saddle-bow,
 That bore a lady from a leaguer'd town ;
 And then, I know not how,

All those sharp fancies, by down-lapsing thought
 Stream'd onward, lost their edges, and did creep
 Roll'd on each other, rounded, smooth'd, and brought
 Into the gulfs of sleep.

At last methought that I had wander'd far
 In an old wood : fresh-wash'd in coolest dew
 The maiden splendors of the morning star
 Shook in the steadfast blue.

Enormous elm-tree boles did stoop and lean
 Upon the dusky brushwood underneath

Their broad curved branches, fledged with clearest green,
New from its silken sheath.

The dim red morn had died, her journey done,
And with dead lips smiled at the twilight plain,
Half-fall'n across the threshold of the sun,
Never to rise again.

There was no motion in the dumb dead air,
Nor any song of bird or sound of rill ;
Gross darkness of the inner sepulchre
Is not so deadly still

As that wide forest. Growths of jasmine turn'd
Their humid arms festooning tree to tree,
And, at the root, thro' lush-green grasses, burn'd
The red anemone.

I knew the flowers, I knew the leaves, I knew
The tearful glimmer of the languid dawn
On those long, rank, dark wood-walks drench'd in dew,
Leading from lawn to lawn.

The smell of violets, hidden in the green,
Pour'd back into my empty soul and frame
The times when I remember to have been
Joyful and free from blame.

And from within me a clear under-tone
Thrill'd thro' mine ears in that unblissful clime,
"Pass freely thro' : the wood is all thine own,
Until the end of time."

At length I saw a lady within call,
Still than chisell'd marble, standing there ;
A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
And most divinely fair.

Her loveliness with shame and with surprise
Froze my swift speech ; she, turning on my face
The star-like sorrows of immortal eyes,
Spoke slowly in her place.

"I had great beauty : ask thou not my name :
No one can be more wise than destiny.
Many drew swords and died. Where'er I came
I brought calamity."

"No marvel, sovereign lady : in fair field
Myself for such a face had boldly died,"
I answer'd free ; and turning I appeal'd
To one that stood beside.

But she, with sick and scornful looks averse,
To her full height her stately stature draws ;
"My youth," she said, "was blasted with a curse :
This woman was the cause.

"I was cut off from hope in that sad place,
Which yet to name my spirit loathes and fears ;
My father held his hand upon his face ;
I blinded with my tears,

"Still strove to speak : my voice was thick with sighs
As in a dream. Dimly I could descry
The stern black-bearded kings with wolfish eyes,
Waiting to see me die.

"The high masts flicker'd as they lay afloat ;
The crowds, the temples, waver'd, and the shore ;
The bright death quiver'd at the victim's throat ;
Touch'd ; and I knew no more."

Whereto the other with a downward brow :
"I would the white cold heavy-plunging foam

Whirl'd by the wind, had roll'd me deep below,
Then when I left my home."

Her slow full words sank thro' the silence drear,
As thunder-drops fall on a sleeping sea ;
Sudden I heard a voice that cried, " Come here,
That I may look on thee."

I turning saw, throned on a flowery rise,
One sitting on a crimson scarf unroll'd ;
A queen with swarthy cheeks and bold black eyes,
Brow-bound with burning gold.

She, flashing forth a haughty smile, began :
" I govern'd men by change, and so I sway'd
All moods. 'Tis long since I have seen a man.
Once, like the moon, I made

"The ever-shifting currents of the blood
According to my humor ebb and flow.
I have no men to govern in this wood :
That makes my only woe.

"Nay — yet it chafes me that I could not bend
One will ; nor tame and tutor with mine eye
That dull cold-blooded Cæsar. Prythee, friend,
Where is Mark Antony?

"The man, my lover, with whom I rode sublime
On Fortune's neck : we sat as god by god :
The Nilus would have risen before his time
And flooded at our nod.

"We drank the Libyan Sun to sleep, and lit
Lamps which outburn'd Canopus. O my life
In Egypt! O the dalliance and the wit,
The flattery and the strife,

"And the wild kiss, when fresh from war's alarms,
My Hercules, my Roman Antony,
My mailéd Bacchus leapt into my arms,
Contented there to die !

"And there he died : and when I heard my name
Sigh'd forth with life I would not brook my fear
Of the other : with a worm I balk'd his fame.
What else was left? look here !"

(With that she tore her robe apart, and half
The polish'd argent of her breast to sight
Laid bare. Thereto she pointed with a laugh,
Showing the aspic's bite.)

"I died a Queen. The Roman soldier found
Me lying dead, my crown about my brows,
A name forever ! — lying robed and crown'd
Worthy a Roman spouse."

Her warbling voice, a lyre of widest range
Struck by all passion, did fall down and glance
From tone to tone, and glided thro' all change
Of liveliest utterance.

When she made pause I knew not for delight :
Because with sudden motion from the ground
She rais'd her piercing orbs, and fill'd with light
The interval of sound.

Still with their fires Love tipt his keenest darts ;
As once they drew into two burning rings
All beams of Love, melting the mighty hearts
Of captains and of kings.

Slowly my sense undazzled. Then I heard
A noise of some one coming thro' the lawn,

And singing clearer than the crested bird
That claps his wings at dawn.

"The torrent brooks of hallow'd Israel,
From craggy hollows pouring, late and soon,
Sound all night long, in falling thro' the dell,
Far-heard beneath the moon.

"The balmy moon of blessed Israel
Floods all the deep-blue gloom with beams divine :
All night the splinter'd crags that wall the dell
With spires of silver shine."

As one that museth where broad sunshine laves
The lawn by some cathedral, thro' the door
Hearing the holy organ rolling waves
Of sound on roof and floor

Within, and anthem sung, is charm'd and tied
To where he stands, — so stood I, when that flow
Of music left the lips of her that died
To save her father's vow ;

The daughter of the warrior Gileadite ;
A maiden pure, as when she went along
From Mizpeh's tower'd gate with welcome light,
With timbrel and with song.

My words leapt forth : " Heaven heads the count of crimes
With that wild oath." She render'd answer high :
" Not so, nor once alone ; a thousand times
I would be born and die.

" Single I grew, like some green plant, whose root
Creeps to the garden water-pipes beneath
Feeding the flower ; but ere my flower to fruit
Changed, I was ripe for death.

" My God, my land, my father — these did move
Me from my bliss of life, that Nature gave,
Lower'd softly with a threefold cord of love
Down to a silent grave.

" And I went mourning, ' No fair Hebrew boy
Shall smile away my maiden blame among
The Hebrew mothers ' — emptied of all joy,
Leaving the dance and song,

" Leaving the olive-gardens far below,
Leaving the promise of my bridal bower,
The valleys of grape-loaded vines that glow
Beneath the battled tower.

" The light white cloud swam over us. Anon
We heard the lion roaring from his den ;
We saw the large white stars rise one by one,
Or from the darken'd glen,

" Saw God divide the night with flying flame,
And thunder on the everlasting hills.
I heard Him, for He spake, and grief became
A solemn scorn of ills.

" When the next moon was roll'd into the sky,
Strength came to me that equall'd my desire.
How beautiful a thing it was to die
For God and for my sire !

" It comforts me in this one thought to dwell,
That I subdued me to my father's will ;
Because the kiss he gave me ere I fell
Sweetens the spirit still.

" Moreover it is written that my race
Hew'd Ammon, hip and thigh, from Aroer