

Jason, a victim of remorse and despair, now led a weary and sorrowful life, and every day he wandered down to the shore, where he sat under the shade of the Argo's hulk, which was slowly rotting away.

Death of Jason. One day, while he was sitting there musing over his youthful adventures and Medea's strange prophecy, a sudden gale detached a beam, which, falling on his head, fractured his skull and caused instantaneous death.

The Argonautic expedition is emblematic of the first long maritime voyage undertaken by the Greeks for commercial purposes; while the golden fleece which Jason brought back from Colchis is but a symbol of the untold riches they found in the East, and brought back to their own native land.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CALYDONIAN HUNT.

CENEUS and Althæa, King and Queen of Calydon, in Ætolia, were very happy in the possession of a little son, Meleager, only a few days old, until they heard that the Fates had decreed the child should live only as long as the brand Birth of Meleager. then smoking and crackling on the hearth. The parents were motionless with grief, until Althæa, with true mother's wit, snatched the brand from the fire, plunged it into an earthen jar filled with water, quenched the flames which were consuming it, and, carefully laying it aside, announced her intention to keep it forever.

Meleager, thus saved from an untimely death by his mother's presence of mind, grew up a brave and handsome youth, and joined the Argonautic expedition. While he was absent, his father omitted the yearly sacrifice to Diana, who, enraged at his neglect, sent a monstrous boar to devour his subjects and devastate his realm. Meleager, on his return, gathered together all the brave men of the country, and instituted a great hunt, whose main object was the capture or death of the obnoxious boar.

Jason, Nestor, Peleus, Admetus, Theseus, Pirithous, and many other noted heroes, came at his call; but the attention of all the spectators was specially attracted by Castor and The hunters. Pollux, and by the fair Atalanta, daughter of Iasius, King of Arcadia. This princess had led a very adventurous life; for when but a babe, her father, disappointed to see a daughter instead of the longed-for son, had exposed her on Mount Parthenium to the fury of the wild beasts. Some hunters,

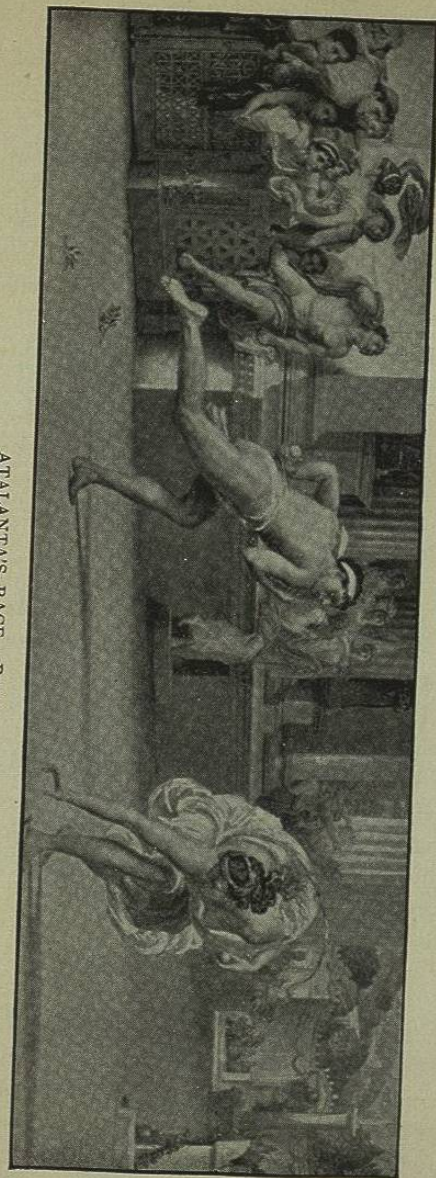
passing there shortly after this, found the babe fearlessly nursing from a she-bear, and in compassion carried her home, where they trained her to love the chase.

The grand Calydonian Hunt was headed by Meleager and Atalanta, who were very fond of each other, and who boldly led the rest in pursuit of the boar. From one end of the Calydonian forest to the other the boar fled, closely pursued by the hunt, and was at last brought to bay by Atalanta, who succeeded in dealing him a mortal wound. But even in his dying struggles the boar would have killed her, had not Meleager come to her rescue and given him his deathblow.

All the hunt now gathered around the boar's corpse, and watched Meleager take its spoil, which he gallantly bestowed upon Atalanta. Althæa's two brothers were present at the hunt; and, as they wished to possess the skin, they bitterly reproofed their nephew on their way home for giving it to a stranger. They added taunts to this reproof, which so angered Meleager, that, in a sudden fit of passion, he slew them both. When Althæa saw her brothers' corpses, and heard that they had been slain by her son, she vowed to avenge their death, drew the carefully cherished brand from its hiding place, and threw it upon the fire burning brightly on her hearth. When the last bit of the precious wood crumbled away into ashes, Meleager died. All Althæa's affection for her son returned when his lifeless corpse was brought to her, and in her despair she committed suicide.

In the mean while, Atalanta, proud of her skill and of her spoil, had returned to her father's court, where, no other heir having appeared, she was joyfully received, and

entreated to marry. Many suitors came to woo the fair princess, but most of them refrained from pressing their suit when they heard what conditions were imposed upon all who would obtain her hand; for Atalanta disapproved of marriage, and, anxious to keep her freedom, decreed that she should marry only on condition that her suitor would beat her in a foot race.



ATALANTA'S RACE.—Poyner.

If he were beaten, however, he must pay for his defeat by forfeiting his life.

In spite of these barbarous terms, a few youths had tried to outrun her; but they failed, and their lifeless heads were exposed on the racing ground to deter all other suitors. Undaunted by these ghastly trophies, Hippomenes, or Milanion, once came to Atalanta and expressed a desire to race with her. This youth had previously obtained Venus' protection, and concealed under his garment her gift of three golden apples. Atalanta prepared for her race as usual, and, as usual, passed her rival; but just as she did so, one of the golden apples rolled at her feet. For a moment she paused, then stooped and picked it up ere she resumed the race. Her adversary had passed her and won some advance; but she soon overtook him, when a second golden apple caused a second delay. She was about to reach the goal first, as usual, when a third golden treasure tempted her to pause, and enabled Hippomenes to win the race.

"Hippomenes turns her astray
By the golden illusions he flings on her way."

MOORE.

Atalanta could now no longer refuse to marry, and her nuptials were soon celebrated. In his happiness at having won such a peerless bride, Hippomenes forgot to pay the promised thanks to Venus, for which offense he and his wife were severely punished by being transformed into a pair of lions, and doomed to drag Cybele's car (p. 19).

The twin brothers Castor and Pollux, the Dioscuri, or Gemini, who had greatly distinguished themselves by their daring in the Calydonian Hunt, were made the deities of boxing, wrestling, and all equestrian exercises.

"Leda's sons I'll sound,
Illustrious twins, that are
For wrestling this, and for the race renown'd."

HORACE.

One of these twins, Castor, was a mortal, and in a combat with the sons of Aphareus was slain. Pollux, who was immortal, then implored Jupiter to allow him to die also, that he might not be parted from his brother,—a proof of brotherly affection which so touched the father of the gods, that he permitted Castor to return to life on condition that Pollux would spend half his time in Hades.

Later on, satisfied that even this sacrifice was none too great for their fraternal love, he translated them both to the skies, where they form a bright constellation, one of the signs of the zodiac. Castor and Pollux are generally represented as handsome youths, mounted on snowy chargers.

"So like they were, no mortal
Might one from other know:
White as snow their armor was:
Their steeds were white as snow."

MACAULAY.

Their appearance under certain circumstances foretold success in war, and the Romans believed that they fought at the head of their legions at the celebrated battle of Lake Regillus. Their name was also given to meteors, sometimes seen at sea, which attach themselves like balls of fire to the masts of ships,—a sure sign, according to the sailors, of fine weather and an auspicious journey.

"Safe comes the ship to haven,
Through billows and through gales,
If once the Great Twin Brethren
Sit shining on the sails."

MACAULAY.

Festivals celebrated in honor of these twin brethren, and called the Dioscuria, were held in many places, but specially in Sparta, their birthplace, where they had world-renowned wrestling matches.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ŒDIPUS.

LAIUS and Jocasta, King and Queen of Thebes, in Bœotia, were greatly delighted at the birth of a little son. In their joy they sent for the priests of Apollo, and bade them foretell the glorious deeds their heir would perform; but all their joy was turned to grief when told that the child was destined to kill his father, marry his mother, and bring great misfortunes upon his native city.

“Laius once,
Not from Apollo, but his priests, receiv'd
An oracle, which said, it was decreed
He should be slain by his own son.”

SOPHOCLES (Franklin's tr.).

To prevent the fulfillment of this dreadful prophecy, Laius bade a servant carry the new-born child out of the city, and end its feeble little life. The king's mandate was obeyed only in part; for the servant, instead of killing the child, hung it up by its ankles to a tree in a remote place, and left it there to perish from hunger and exposure if it were spared by the wild beasts.

When he returned, none questioned how he had performed the appointed task, but all sighed with relief to think that the prophecy could never be accomplished. The child, however, was not dead, as all supposed. A shepherd in quest of a stray lamb had heard his cries, delivered him from his painful position, and carried him to Polybus, King of Corinth, who, lacking an heir of his own, gladly adopted the little stranger. The Queen of Corinth and her handmaidens hastened with tender concern to

bathe the swollen ankles, and called the babe Œdipus (swollen-footed).

Years passed by. The young prince grew up in total ignorance of the unfortunate circumstances under which he had made his first appearance at court, until one day at a banquet one of his companions, heated by drink, began to quarrel with him, and taunted him about his origin, declaring that those whom he had been accustomed to call parents were in no way related to him.

“A drunken rev'ler at a feast proclaim'd
That I was only the supposed son
Of Corinth's king.”

SOPHOCLES (Franklin's tr.).

These words, coupled with a few meaning glances hastily exchanged by the guests, excited Œdipus' suspicions, and made him question the queen, who, afraid lest he might do himself an injury in the first moment of his despair if the truth were revealed to him, had recourse to prevarication, and quieted him by the assurance that he was her beloved son.

Œdipus
consults the
oracle.

Something in her manner, however, left a lingering doubt in Œdipus' mind, and made him resolve to consult the oracle of Delphi, whose words he knew would reveal the exact truth. He therefore went to this shrine; but, as usual, the oracle answered somewhat ambiguously, and merely warned him that fate had decreed he should kill his father, marry his mother, and cause great woes to his native city.

“I felt
A secret anguish, and unknown to them
Sought out the Pythian oracle; in vain;
Touching my parents, nothing could I learn;
But dreadful were the mis'ries it denounc'd
Against me; 'twas my fate, Apollo said,
To wed my mother, to produce a race
Accursed and abhor'd; and last, to slay
My father.”

SOPHOCLES (Franklin's tr.).

What! kill Polybus, who had ever been such an indulgent father, and marry the queen, whom he revered as his mother!

Never! Rather than perpetrate these awful crimes, and bring destruction upon the people of Corinth, whom he loved, he would wander away over the face of the earth, and never see city or parents again.

Ædipus leaves
Corinth.

“Lest I should e'er fulfill the dire prediction,
Instant I fled from Corinth, by the stars
Guiding my hapless journey.”

SOPHOCLES (Franklin's tr.).

But his heart was filled with intense bitterness, and as he journeyed he did not cease to curse the fate which drove him away from home. After some time, he came to three crossroads; and while he stood there, deliberating which direction to take, a chariot, wherein an aged man was seated, came rapidly toward him.

The herald who preceded it haughtily called to the youth to stand aside and make way for his master; but Ædipus, who, as Polybus' heir, was accustomed to be treated with deference, resented the commanding tone, and refused to obey. Incensed at what seemed unparalleled impudence, the herald struck the youth, who, retaliating, stretched his assailant lifeless at his feet.

Death of
Laius.

This affray attracted the attention of the master and other servants. They immediately attacked the murderer, who slew them all, thus unconsciously accomplishing the first part of the prophecy; for the aged man was Laius, his father, journeying *incognito* from Thebes to Delphi, where he wished to consult the oracle.

Ædipus then leisurely pursued his way until he came to the gates of Thebes, where he found the whole city in an uproar, “because the king had been found lifeless by the roadside, with all his attendants slain beside him, presumably the work of a band of highway robbers or assassins.”

“He fell

By strangers, murdered, for so fame reports,
By robbers in the place where three ways meet.”

SOPHOCLES (Franklin's tr.).

Of course, Ædipus did not connect the murder of such a great personage as the King of Thebes by an unknown band of robbers, with the death he had dealt to an arrogant old man, and he therefore composedly inquired what the second calamity alluded to might be.

With lowered voices, as if afraid of being overheard, the Thebans described the woman's head, bird's wings and claws, and lion's body, which were the outward presentment of a terrible monster called the Sphinx, which had taken up its station without the city gates beside the highway, and would allow none to pass in or out without propounding a difficult riddle. Then, if any hesitated to give the required answer, or failed to give it correctly, they were mercilessly devoured by the terrible Sphinx, which no one dared attack or could drive away.

The
Sphinx.

While listening to these tidings, Ædipus saw a herald pass along the street, proclaiming that the throne and the queen's hand would be the reward of any man who dared encounter the Sphinx, and was fortunate enough to free the country of its terrible presence.

As Ædipus attached no special value to the life made desolate by the oracle's predictions, he resolved to slay the dreaded monster, and, with that purpose in view, advanced slowly, sword in hand, along the road where lurked the Sphinx. He soon found the monster, which from afar propounded the following enigma, warning him, at the same time, that he forfeited his life if he failed to give the right answer:—

The
riddle.

“Tell me, what animal is that
Which has four feet at morning bright,
Has two at noon, and three at night?”

PRIOR.

Œdipus was not devoid of intelligence, by any manner of means, and soon concluded that the animal could only be man, who in infancy, when too weak to stand, creeps along on hands and knees, in manhood walks erect, and in old age supports his tottering steps with a staff.

This reply, evidently as correct as unexpected, was received by the Sphinx with a hoarse cry of disappointment and rage as it turned to fly; but ere it could effect its purpose, Œdipus marries his mother. ^{his mother.} It was stayed by Œdipus, who drove it at his sword's point over the edge of a neighboring precipice, where it was killed. On his return to the city, Œdipus was received with cries of joy, placed on a chariot, crowned King of Thebes, and married to his own mother, Jocasta, unwittingly fulfilling the second fearful clause of the prophecy.

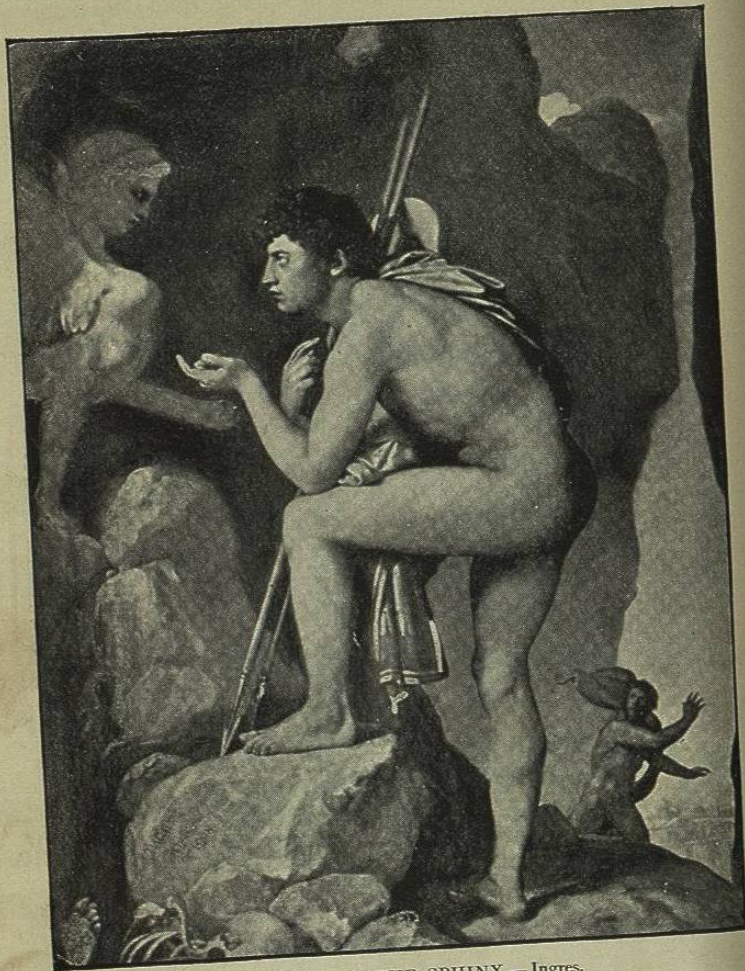
A number of happy and moderately uneventful years now passed by, and Œdipus became the father of two manly sons, Eteocles and Polynices, and two beautiful daughters, Ismene and Antigone; but prosperity was not doomed to favor him long.

Just when he fancied himself most happy, and looked forward to a peaceful old age, a terrible scourge visited Thebes, causing the death of many faithful subjects, and filling the hearts of all with great terror. ^{The} The people now ^{plague.} turned to him, beseeching him to aid them, as he had done once before when threatened by the Sphinx; and Œdipus sent messengers to consult the Delphic oracle, who declared the plague would cease only when the former king's murderers had been found and punished.

“The plague, he said, should cease,
When those who murder'd Laius were discover'd,
And paid the forfeit of their crime by death,
Or banishment.”

SOPHOCLES (Francklin's tr.).

Messengers were sent in every direction to collect all possible information about the murder committed so long ago, and after a short time they brought unmistakable proofs which convicted



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ŒDIPUS AND THE SPHINX.—Ingres.
(Louvre, Paris.)

Œdipus of the crime. At the same time the guilty servant confessed that he had not killed the child, but had exposed it on a mountain, whence it was carried to Corinth's king.

The chain of evidence was complete, and now Œdipus discovered that he had involuntarily been guilty of the three crimes to

avoid which he had fled from Corinth. The rumor of these dreadful discoveries soon reached Jocasta, who, in her despair at finding herself an accomplice, committed suicide.

Œdipus, apprised of her intention, rushed into her apartment too late to prevent its being carried out, and found her lifeless. This sight was more than the poor monarch could bear, and in his despair he blinded himself with one of her ornaments.

"He pluck'd from off the robe she wore
A golden buckle that adorn'd her side,
And buried in his eyes the sharpen'd point,
Crying, he ne'er again would look on her,
Never would see his crimes or mis'ries more,
Or those whom guiltless he could ne'er behold,
Or those to whom he now must sue for aid."

SOPHOCLES (Franklin's tr.).

Penniless, blind, and on foot, he then left the scene of his awful crimes, accompanied by his daughter Antigone, the only one who loved him still, and who was ready to guide his uncertain footsteps wherever he wished to go. After many days of weary wandering, father and daughter reached Colonus, where grew a mighty forest sacred to the avenging deities, the Furies, or Eumenides.

Here Œdipus expressed his desire to remain, and, after bidding his faithful daughter an affectionate farewell, he groped his way into the dark forest alone. The wind rose, the lightning flashed, the thunder pealed; but although, as soon as the storm was over, a search was made for Œdipus, no trace of him was ever found, and the ancients fancied that the Furies had dragged him down to Hades to receive the punishment of all his crimes.

Antigone, no longer needed by her unhappy father, slowly wended her way back to Thebes, where she found that the plague had ceased, but that her brothers had quarreled about the succession to the throne. A compromise was finally decided upon, whereby it was decreed that Eteocles, the elder son, should reign one year, and at the end of that period resign the throne to Polynices for an equal space of time, both brothers thus exercising the royal authority in turn. This arrangement seemed satisfactory to Eteocles; but when, at the end of the first year, Polynices returned from his travels in foreign lands to claim the scepter, Eteocles refused to relinquish it, and, making use of his power, drove the claimant away.

"Thou seest me banish'd from my native land,
Unjustly banish'd, for no other crime
But that I strove to keep the throne of Thebes,
By birthright mine, from him who drove me thence,
The young Eteocles: not his the claim
By justice, nor to me his fame in arms
Superior; but by soft, persuasive arts
He won the rebel city to his love."

SOPHOCLES (Franklin's tr.).

Polynices' nature was not one to endure such a slight patiently; and he hastened off to Argos, where he persuaded Adrastus, the king, to give him his daughter in marriage, and aid him to recover his inheritance. True to his promise, Adrastus soon equipped a large army, which was led by seven determined and renowned chiefs, ready to risk all in the attempt, and either win or perish.

"Seven valiant leaders march
To Thebes, resolved to conquer or to die."

SOPHOCLES (Franklin's tr.).

Their bravery was of no avail, however, for Thebes was well fortified and defended; and after a seven-years' siege they found themselves no nearer their goal than at the beginning of the war. Weary of the monotony of this quarrel, the conflicting armies

finally decreed that the difference should be settled by a duel between the inimical brothers, who no sooner found themselves face to face, than they rushed upon each other with such animosity that both fell.

By order of Jocasta's father, Creon, the corpse of Eteocles received all the honors of a Greek burial, while that of Polynices was left on the plain, a prey to the birds and wild beasts.

"Polynices' wretched carcass lies
Unburied, unlamented, left expos'd
A feast for hungry vultures on the plain."

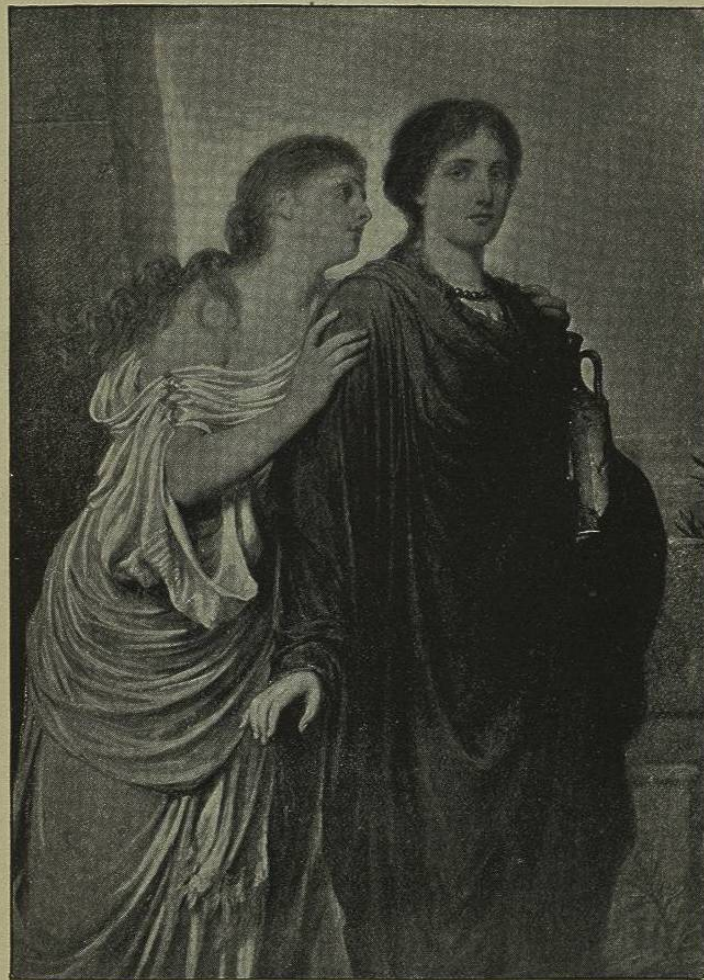
SOPHOCLES (Franklin's tr.).

Then a proclamation was issued, that, if any dared bury the body of the fallen prince, he would incur the penalty of being buried alive. Heedless of this injunction and
Antigone's devotion. Ismene's prayers to refrain from endangering her own life, Antigone dug a grave for her brother's remains, and, unaided, fulfilled the various customary funeral rites. Her task was almost completed, when the guards discovered her, and dragged her into the presence of Creon, who, although she was a relative and the promised wife of his son Hæmon, condemned her to death.

"Let her be carried instant to the cave,
And leave her there alone, to live, or die;
Her blood rests not on us: but she no longer
Shall breathe on earth."

SOPHOCLES (Franklin's tr.).

Hæmon pleaded passionately for her life; but, when he saw his prayers were vain, he ran to the place where Antigone was
Antigone and Hæmon. confined, sprang into her narrow cell, wound his arms closely around her, and refused to leave her. There they were walled in; Antigone's sufferings were cut mercifully short by asphyxiation; and, when Hæmon saw she was no more, he, in utter despair, thrust his dagger into his side, and perished too.



ANTIGONE AND ISMENE.—Teschendorf.

“On himself bent all his wrath,
Full in his side the weapon fix'd, but still,
Whilst life remain'd, on the soft bosom hung
Of the dear maid, and his last spirit breath'd
O'er her pale cheek, discolor'd with his blood.
Thus lay the wretched pair in death united,
And celebrate their nuptials in the tomb.”

SOPHOCLES (Franklin's tr.).

Ismene, the last of Œdipus' unfortunate race, died of grief, and thus the prophecy was fully accomplished. The Theban war was not, however, entirely ended, for, when both brothers fell, the two armies flew to attack each other; and such was their courage, that many fell, and only one of the seven chiefs returned to Argos. There he patiently waited until the children of these brave captains were old enough to bear arms, and then proposed to them to attack Thebes and avenge their fathers' death.

The Epigoni (or those who come after), as these youths are collectively designated, received this proposal with rapture; and Thebes, again besieged, fell into their hands, and was duly sacked, burned, and destroyed, as the Delphic oracle had foretold so many years before.

CHAPTER XXV.

BELLEROPHON.

BELLEROPHON, a brave young prince, the grandson of Sisyphus, King of Corinth, had the great misfortune to kill his own brother while hunting in the forest. His grief was, of course, intense; and the horror he felt for the place where the catastrophe had occurred, added to his fear lest he should incur judicial punishment for his involuntary crime, made him flee to the court of Argos, where he took refuge with Prœtus, the king, who was also his kinsman.

He had not sojourned there very long, before Anteia, the queen, fell in love with him; and although her husband, Prœtus, treated her with the utmost kindness, she made up her mind to desert him, and tried to induce ^{Anteia's} treachery. Bellerophon to elope with her. Too honest to betray a man who had treated him as a friend, the young prince refused to listen to the queen's proposals. His refusal was to cost him dear, however; for, when Anteia saw that the youth would never yield to her wishes, she became very angry indeed, sought her husband, and accused the young stranger of crimes he had never even dreamed of committing.

Prœtus, indignant at what he deemed deep treachery on the part of an honored guest, yet reluctant to punish him with his own hand as he deserved, sent Bellerophon to Iobates, King of Lycia, with a sealed message bidding him put the bearer to death.

Quite unconscious of the purport of this letter, Bellerophon traveled gayly onward, and presented himself before Iobates, who