

“ 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

received him very hospitably, and, without inquiring his name or errand, entertained him royally for many days. After some time, Bellerophon suddenly remembered the sealed message intrusted to his care, and hastened to deliver it to Iobates, with many apologies for his forgetfulness.

With blanched cheeks and every outward sign of horror, the king read the missive, and then fell into a deep reverie. He did

The Chimæra. not like to take a stranger's life, and still could not refuse to comply with Prætus' urgent request: so, after much thought, he decided to send Bellerophon to attack the Chimæra, a terrible monster with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a dragon's tail.

“Dire Chimæra's conquest was enjoin'd;
A mingled monster, of no mortal kind;
Behind, a dragon's fiery tail was spread;
A goat's rough body bore a lion's head;
Her pitchy nostrils flaky flames expire;
Her gaping throat emits infernal fire.”

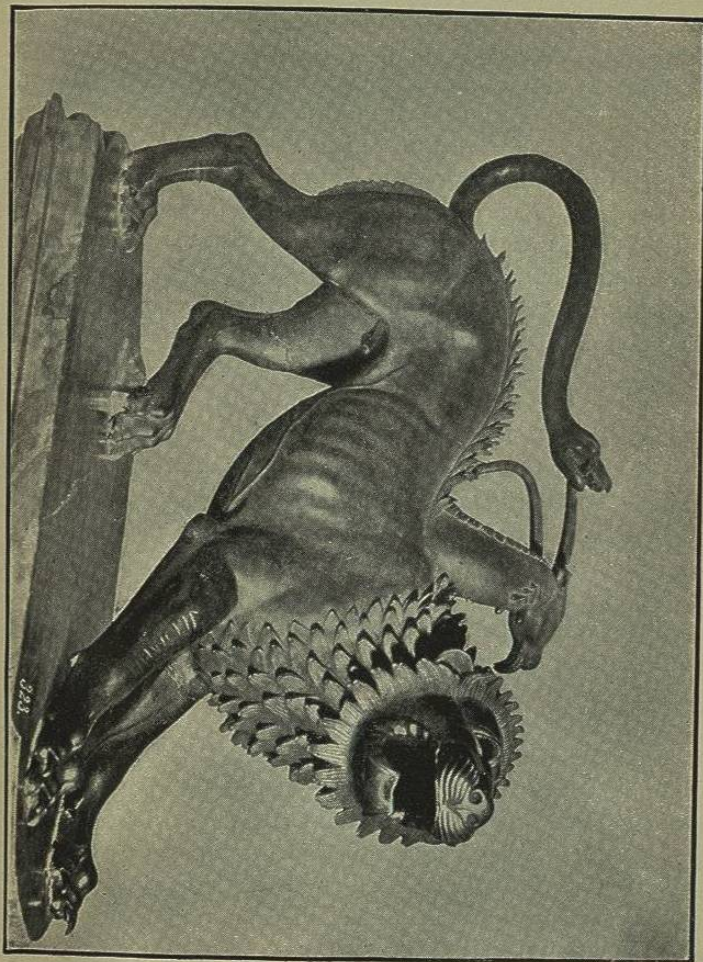
HOMER (Pope's tr.).

His principal motive in choosing this difficult task was, that, although many brave men had set forth to slay the monster, none had ever returned, for one and all had perished in the attempt.

Although very courageous, Bellerophon's heart beat fast with fear when told what great deed he must accomplish; and he left Iobates' palace very sorrowfully, for he dearly loved the king's fair daughter, Philonoe, and was afraid he would never see her again.

While thus inwardly bewailing the ill luck which had so persistently dogged his footsteps, Bellerophon suddenly saw Mi-

Minerva's advice. nerva appear before him in all her splendor, and heard her inquire in gentle tones the cause of his too evident dejection. He had no sooner apprised her of the difficult task appointed him, than she promised him her aid, and before she vanished gave him a beautiful golden bridle, which she bade him use to control Pegasus.



CHIMÆRA. (Egyptian Museum, Florence.)

Bridle in hand, Bellerophon stood pondering her words, and gradually remembered that Pegasus was a wonderful winged steed, born from the blood which fell into the foam of the sea from Medusa's severed head (p. 244). This horse, as white as snow, and gifted with immortal life as well as incredible speed, was the favorite mount of Apollo and the Muses, who delighted in taking aerial flights on his broad back; and Bellerophon knew that from time to time he came down to earth to drink of the cool waters of the Hippocrene (a fountain which had bubbled forth where his hoofs first touched the earth), or to visit the equally limpid spring of Pirene, near Corinth.

Bellerophon now proceeded to the latter fountain, where, after lingering many days in the vain hope of catching even a glimpse

Pegasus
bridled.

of the winged steed, he finally beheld him sailing downward in wide curves, like a bird of prey. From his place of concealment in a neighboring thicket, Bellerophon watched his opportunity, and, while the winged steed was grazing, he boldly vaulted upon his back.

Pegasus, who had never before been ridden by a mortal, reared and pranced, and flew up to dizzy heights; but all his efforts failed to unseat the brave rider, who, biding his time, finally thrust Minerva's golden bit between his teeth, and immediately he became gentle and tractable. Mounted upon this incomparable steed, Bellerophon now went in search of the winged monster Chimæra, who had given birth to the Nemean lion and to the riddle-loving Sphinx.

From an unclouded sky Bellerophon and Pegasus swooped suddenly and unexpectedly down upon the terrible Chimæra,

Chimæra
slain.

whose fiery breath and great strength were of no avail; for after a protracted struggle Bellerophon and Pegasus were victorious, and the monster lay lifeless upon the blood-soaked ground.

This mighty deed of valor accomplished, Bellerophon returned to Iobates, to report the success of his undertaking; and, although the king was heartily glad to know the Chimæra was no more,

he was very sorry to see Bellerophon safe and sound, and tried to devise some other plan to get rid of him.

He therefore sent him to fight the Amazons; but the hero, aided by the gods, defeated these warlike women also, and returned to Lycia, where, after escaping from an ambush posted by the king for his destruction, he again appeared victorious at court.

These repeated and narrow escapes from certain death convinced Iobates that the youth was under the special protection of the gods; and this induced the king not only to forego further attempts to slay him, but also to bestow upon the young hero his daughter's hand in marriage.

Bellerophon, having now attained his dearest wishes, might have settled down in peace; but his head had been utterly turned by the many lofty flights he had taken upon Pegasus' back, and, encouraged by the fulsome flattery of his courtiers, he finally fancied himself the equal of the immortal gods, and wished to join them in their celestial abode.

Bellerophon's
fall.

Summoning his faithful Pegasus once more, he rose higher and higher, and would probably have reached Olympus' heights, had not Jupiter sent a gadfly, which stung poor Pegasus so cruelly, that he shied viciously, and flung his too confident rider far down to the earth below.

“Bold Bellerophon (so Jove decreed
In wrath) fell headlong from the fields of air.”

WORDSWORTH.

This fall, which would doubtless have killed any one but a mythological hero, merely deprived Bellerophon of his eyesight; and ever after he groped his way disconsolately, thinking of the happy days when he rode along the paths of air, and gazed upon the beautiful earth at his feet.

Bellerophon, mounted upon Pegasus, winging his flight through the air or fighting the Chimæra, is a favorite subject in sculpture and painting, which has frequently been treated by ancient artists,

a few of whose most noted works are still extant in various museums.

This story, like many others, is merely a sun myth, in which Bellerophon, the orb of day, rides across the sky on Pegasus, the fleecy white clouds, and slays Chimæra, the dread monster of darkness, which he alone can overcome. Driven from home early in life, Bellerophon wanders throughout the world like his brilliant prototype, and, like it, ends his career in total darkness.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MINOR DIVINITIES.

ACCORDING to the ancients' belief, every mountain, valley, plain, lake, river, grove, and sea was provided with some lesser deity, whose special duty was assigned by the powerful gods of Olympus. These were, for instance, Naiades and
Oreades. the Naiades, beautiful water nymphs, who dwelt in the limpid depths of the fountains, and were considered local patrons of poetry and song.

The Oreades, or mountain nymphs, were supposed to linger in the mountain solitudes, and guide weary travelers safely through their rocky mazes.

"Mark how the climbing Oreads
Beckon thee to their Arcades!"

EMERSON.

As for the Napææ, they preferred to linger in the valleys, which were kept green and fruitful by their watchful Napææ and
Dryades. care, in which task they were ably seconded by the Dryades, the nymphs of vegetation.

The very trees in the forest and along the roadside were supposed to be each under the protection of a special divinity called Hamadryad, said to live and die with the tree intrusted to her care.

"When the Fate of Death is drawing near,
First wither on the earth the beauteous trees,
The bark around them wastes, the branches fall,
And the nymph's soul, at the same moment, leaves
The sun's fair light."

HOMER.