

thee. Not without toil came she into my hands. I found as I went upon my way that certain men had ordered contests for wrestlers and runners, and the like. Now for them that had the preeminence in lesser things there were horses for prizes; and for the greater, as wrestling and boxing, a reward of oxen, to which was added this woman. And now I would have thee keep her, for which thing, haply, thou wilt one day thank me."

To this the King answered:

"I thought no slight when I hid this truth from thee. Only it would have been for me sorrow upon sorrow if thou hadst gone to the house of another. But as for this woman, I would have thee ask this thing of some prince of Thessaly that hath not suffered such grief as I. In Pherae here thou hast many friends; but I could not look upon her without tears. Add not then this new trouble. And also how could she, being young, abide in my house, for young I judge her to be? And of a truth, lady, thou art very like in shape and stature to my Alcestis that is dead. I pray you, take her from my sight, for she troubleth my heart, and my tears run over with beholding her."

Then said Hercules:

"Would I had such strength that I could bring back thy wife from the dwellings of the dead, and put her in thy hands."

"I know thy good will, but what profiteth it? No man may bring back the dead."

"Well, time will soften thy grief, which yet is new."

"Yea, if by time thou meanest death."

"But a new wife will comfort thee."

"Hold thy peace; such a thing cometh not into my thoughts."

"What? wilt thou always keep this widowed state?"

"Never shall woman more be wife of mine."

"What will this profit her that is dead?"

"I know not, yet had I sooner die than be false to her."

"Yet I would have thee take this woman into thy house."

"Ask it not of me, I entreat thee, by thy father Zeus."

"Thou wilt lose much if thou wilt not do it."

"And if I do it I shall break my heart."

"Haply some day thou wilt thank me; only be persuaded."

"Be it so; they shall take the woman into the house."

"I would not have thee entrust her to thy servants."

"If thou so thinkest, lead her in thyself."

"Nay, but I would give her into thy hands."

"I touch her not, but my house she may enter."

"'Tis only to thy hand I entrust her."

"O King, thou compellest me to this against my will."

"Stretch forth thy hand and touch her."

"I touch her as I would touch the Gorgon's head."

"Hast thou hold of her?"

"I have hold."

"Then keep her safe, and say that the son of Zeus is a noble friend. See if she be like thy wife; and change thy sorrow for joy."

And when the King looked, lo! the veiled woman was Alcestis his wife.

II

ANTIGONE

IT BEFELL in times past that the gods, being angry with the inhabitants of Thebes, sent into their land a very noisome beast which men called the Sphinx. Now this beast had the face and breast of a fair woman, but the feet and claws of a lion; and it was wont to ask a riddle of such as encountered it; and such as answered not aright it would tear and devour.

When it had laid waste the land many days, there chanced to come to Thebes one Oedipus, who had fled from the city of Corinth that he might escape the doom which the gods had spoken against him. And the men of the place told him of the Sphinx, how she cruelly devoured the people, and that he who should deliver them from her should have the kingdom. So Oedipus, being very bold, and also ready of wit, went forth to meet the monster. And when she saw him she spake, saying:

"Read me this riddle right, or die:
What liveth there beneath the sky,
Four-footed creature that doth choose
Now three feet and now twain to use,
And still more feebly o'er the plain
Walketh with three feet than with twain?"

And Oedipus made reply:

"'Tis man, who in life's early day
Four-footed crawleth on his way;

When time hath made his strength complete,
Upright his form and twain his feet;
When age hath bowed him to the ground
A third foot in his staff is found."

And when the Sphinx found that her riddle was answered,
she cast herself from a high rock and perished.

For a while Oedipus reigned in great power and glory;
but afterwards in madness he put out his own eyes.
Then his two sons cast him into prison, and took his
kingdom, making agreement between themselves that
each should reign for the space of one year. And the
elder of the two, whose name was Eteocles, first had
the kingdom; but when his year was come to an end,
he would not abide by his promise, but kept that
which he should have given up, and drove out his
younger brother from the city. Then the younger,
whose name was Polynices, fled to Argos, to King
Adrastus. And after a while he married the daughter
of the King, who made a covenant with him that he
would bring him back with a high hand to Thebes, and
set him on the throne of his father. Then the King sent
messengers to certain of the princes of Greece, entreating

that they would help in this matter. And of these
some would not, but others hearkened to his words, so
that a great army was gathered together and followed
the King and Polynices to make war against Thebes.
So they came and pitched their camp over against the
city. And after they had been there many days, the
battle grew fierce about the wall. But the chiefest
fight was between the two brothers, for the two came
together in an open space before the gates. And first
Polynices prayed to Here, for she was the goddess of
the great city of Argos, which had helped him in this