



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 graybeard 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 sea-shore ;
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 wild-boar 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 sea-shore, 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 innumerable 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 ;
Courtied 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; gray 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 a while ;

Taking the hand, thrice breathing on the eyelids,
Softly he whispered, ' Soul, that thro' the slumber
Still lives the same, as when, from sight vanished,
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 bridal,
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, may'st 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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THE END.