

THE CHILD'S TREASURE OF MYTHS

XII. NIOBE



It is a very sad tale that is told of Niobe, who was a Queen of Thebes. Her husband, the king, was a son of Zeus, and Niobe was the mother of fourteen children—seven sons and seven daughters. Because of this she was exceedingly proud; for her seven daughters were all beautiful, and her seven sons were as brave and as gallant as a mother could hope for her sons to be. It seemed to Niobe that she had just cause for pride, and all might have been well had she not boasted so much of her children and compared them with those of a goddess.

As you know, many of the goddesses who lived on Mount Olympus were jealous of their sisters who lived on the earth. One of the proudest of them all was Latona, the mother of Apollo, god of the sun, and of Diana, goddess of the chase and of the moon.

Now, Niobe knew that Latona thought her son and daughter remarkable children. Therefore, she was unwise, to say the least, to attract the attention of the goddess to her own large and handsome family. This, however, was just what she did. She made it plain to everybody that she believed Latona poor in comparison with herself, because Latona had only one son and one daughter, while she, Niobe, had seven sons and seven daughters.

Latona paid no attention at first to Niobe's continual boasting. Then something happened that gave her cause for action.

Each year the people of Thebes held a great festival in honor of Latona and her children. Altars were set up and the crowd worshiped before them, bringing their gifts to the gods.

Niobe, with a crown of laurel leaves on her head, and wearing a gorgeous costume, came out to the festival. When she saw the people of her kingdom bowing to Latona, her thoughts became bitter. She permitted herself to speak thus to them: