

Introduction

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thus Asklepios was the raiser of the dead, until, like Semelê, he was smitten by the thunderbolts of Zeus. The wrath of Apollo on his death is but another form of the sorrow of Dêmêtêr, while the bondage to which he is doomed in the house of Admêtos is the subjection of Herakles to Eurystheus, of Achilleus to Agamemnon, the toil of the mighty sun for weak and mortal man.

Whatever be the origin of the name, Ixion (XV.) is the sun of noonday, whose four-spoked wheel, in the words of Pindar, is seen whirling in the highest heaven. His wife Dia (the pure air of morning) is the child of the darkness which will gaze on the treasures of the sun, although warned that he cannot do so and live. But the doom which requites his rashness brings on Ixion the guilt of his death, and Ixion ascends to the throne of Zeus in the highest æther to receive purification, as the sun leaves beneath him the vapours which soil his brightness. In this abode of unsullied purity he sees the face of Hêrê (the cloudless air), and seeks to win her love. But Zeus cheats him with a phantom and binds him to the blazing wheel which revolves eternally in the heaven.

The punishment of the Sun comes before us again in the story of the Phrygian Tantalos (XVI.), whose palace is like the house of Hêlios in its dazzling splendour. In Tantalos also we have the wisdom of Hêlios, of Phœbus, and of the wise man Sisypheos; the wisdom which Hêlios gives to Medeia, but which Phœbus cannot give to Hermes. At first his action is purely beneficent, like that of the sun in the genial spring; but the heat becomes more fierce, and as the phrase went, "The Sun slays the fruits which he wakened into life," so it was said that Tantalos had slain his son and spread his scorched limbs in the face of Zeus, the high heaven, and that he had met his doom. The more that the blazing Sun looks down on fruits and flowers or sparkling waters, the more do they droop and die, and the stream-beds are turned into slime, while over his head beetles the frowning mass of cloud like that which hangs over Tiebes while the Sphinx (the demon of the thunder) utters her dark sayings.