

HELEN AND APHRODITE

And Menelaus called for goodly wine
To welcome Paris, and their mirth ran high
Till echo answered echo through the halls.
And long they tarried o'er the flowing cup
While flaming braziers lit the festive board.
Then as the shades of night crept on apace
The maidens strewed the beds with purple o'er
And Paris and the King fell in deep sleep.
But not so Helen; long the hours wore on
Nor sleep o'ertook her, till the rosy dawn
Was watching to unloose the gates of day.
Then a great wonder midst the orbs was seen,
And Hesper-Phosphor, sweetest star of heaven
Which lingers o'er the setting sun, and sees
His rise to glory with the dawn of day,
Turned pale; for midst a gorgeous burst of flame
The Queen of Love appeared, with myrtle crowned.
And lo! her swan-drawn chariot flashed and gleamed
Along the pathway of the starry sky
And paused, where Lacedæmon's palace rose.
And Helen, trembling at the glowing light
From off her couch arose, for well knew she
That radiance other than of mortal birth.
Then Aphrodite, lovely, but with soul
As cold as marble, save to touch of love
Stood on a fleecy cloud, poised in mid-air,
Bewildering soul and sense, even desire.
Well might a mortal dream to die were bliss
If dying he might her but once embrace!
Silently, smiling with that smile which sits
Upon her lovely lips, and lingers there,
She gazed on Helen, who with downcast eyes
Besought the queen, her life, her love, to spare.