

CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

A BOOK OF  
GOLDEN DEEDS

Charlotte Yonge

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

# A Book of Golden Deeds

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CHARLOTTE M. YONGE



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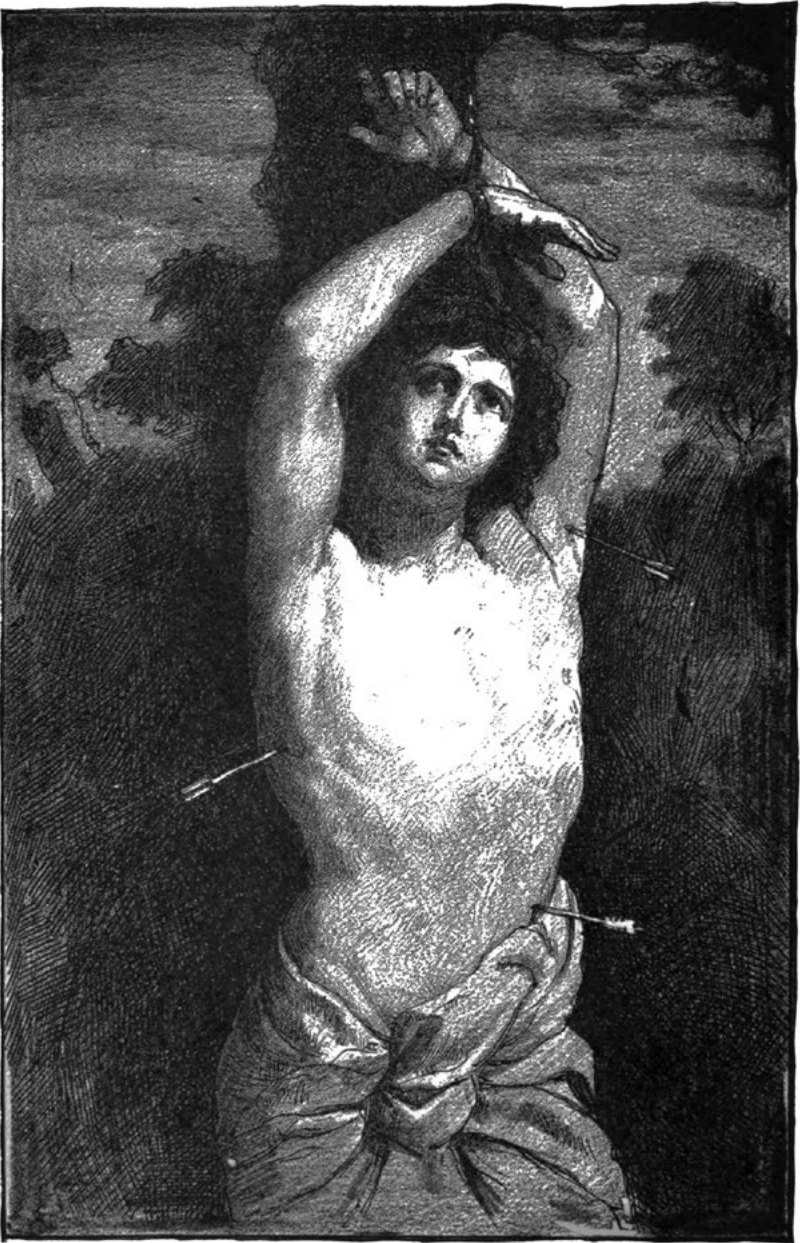
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“i have done tha t which w as my dut y to do ”



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## Preface

As the most striking lines of poetry are the most hackneyed, because they have grown to be the common inheritance of all the world, so many of the most noble deeds that earth can show have become the best known, and enjoyed their full meed of fame. Therefore it may be feared that many of the events here detailed, or alluded to, may seem trite to those in search of novelty; but it is not for such that the collection has been made. It is rather intended as a treasury for young people, where they may find minuter particulars than their abridged histories usually afford of the soul-stirring deeds that give life and glory to the record of events; and where also other like actions, out of their ordinary course of reading, may be placed before them, in the trust that example may inspire the spirit of heroism and self-devotion. For surely it must be a wholesome contemplation to look on actions, the very essence of which is such entire absorption in others that self is forgotten; the object of which is not to win promotion, wealth, or success, but simple duty, mercy, and lovingkindness. These are the actions wrought, "hoping for nothing again", but which most surely have their reward.

The authorities have not been given, as for the most part the narratives lie on the surface of history. For the description of the Colisæum, I have, however, been indebted to the Abbé Gerbet's *Rome Chrétienne*; for the Housewives of Löwenburg, and St. Stephen's Crown, to Freytag's *Sketches of German Life*; and for the story of George the Triller, to Mr. Mayhew's *Germany*. The Escape of Attalus is narrated (from Gregory of Tours) in Thierry's *Lettres sur l'Histoire de France*; the Russian officer's adventures, and those of Prascovia Lopouloff, the true Elisabeth of Siberia, are from M. le Maistre; the shipwrecks chiefly from Gilly's *Shipwrecks of the British Navy*; the Jersey Powder Magazine from the *Annual Register*, and that at Ciudad Rodrigo, from the traditions of the 52nd Regiment.

There is a cloud of doubt resting on a few of the tales, which it may be honest to mention, though they were far too beautiful not to tell. These are the details of the Gallic occupation of Rome, the Legend of St. Geneviève, the Letter of Gertrude von der Wart, the stories of the Keys of Calais, of the Dragon of Rhodes, and we fear we must add, both Nelson's plan of

the Battle of the Nile, and likewise the exact form of the heroism of young Casabianca, of which no two accounts agree. But it was not possible to give up such stories as these, and the thread of truth there must be in them has developed into such a beautiful tissue, that even if unsubstantial when tested, it is surely delightful to contemplate.

Some stories have been passed over as too devoid of foundation, in especial that of young Henri, Duke of Nemours, who, at ten years old, was said to have been hung up with his little brother of eight in one of Louis XI's cages at Loches, with orders that two of the children's teeth should daily be pulled out and brought to the king. The elder child was said to have insisted on giving the whole supply of teeth, so as to save his brother; but though they were certainly imprisoned after their father's execution, they were released after Louis's death in a condition which disproves this atrocity.

The Indian mutiny might likewise have supplied glorious instances of Christian self-devotion, but want of materials has compelled us to stop short of recording those noble deeds by which delicate women and light-hearted young soldiers showed, that in the hour of need there was not wanting to them the highest and deepest "spirit of self-sacrifice."

At some risk of prolixity, enough of the surrounding events has in general been given to make the situation comprehensible, even without knowledge of the general history. This has been done in the hope that these extracts may serve as a mother's storehouse for reading aloud to her boys, or that they may be found useful for short readings to the intelligent, though uneducated classes.

NOVEMBER 17, 1864.







## *What is a Golden Deed?*

WE all of us enjoy a story of battle and adventure. Some of us delight in the anxiety and excitement with which we watch the various strange predicaments, hair-breadth escapes, and ingenious contrivances that are presented to us; and the mere imaginary dread of the dangers thus depicted, stirs our feelings and makes us feel eager and full of suspense.

This taste, though it is the first step above the dulness that cannot be interested in anything beyond its own immediate world, nor care for what it neither sees, touches, tastes, nor puts to any present use, is still the lowest form that such a liking can take. It may be no better than a love of reading about murders in the newspaper, just for the sake of a sort of startled sensation; and it is a taste that becomes unwholesome when it absolutely delights in dwelling on horrors and cruelties for their own sake; or upon shifty, cunning, dishonest stratagems and devices. To learn to take interest in what is evil is always mischievous.

But there is an element in many of such scenes of woe and violence that may well account for our interest in them. It is that which makes the eye gleam and the heart throb, and bears us through the details of suffering, bloodshed, and even barbarity,—feeling our spirits moved and elevated by contemplating the courage and endurance that they have called forth. Nay, such is the charm of brilliant valour, that we often are tempted to forget the injustice of the cause that may have called forth the actions that delight us. And this enthusiasm is often united with the utmost tenderness of heart, the very appreciation of suffering only quickening the sense of the heroism that risked the utmost, till the young and ardent learn absolutely to look upon danger as an occasion for evincing the highest qualities.

“O Life, without thy chequer'd scene  
Of right and wrong, of weal and woe,  
Success and failure, could a ground  
For magnanimity be found?”

The true cause of such enjoyment is perhaps an inherent consciousness that there is nothing so noble as forgetfulness of self. Therefore it is that

we are struck by hearing of the exposure of life and limb to the utmost peril, in oblivion, or recklessness of personal safety, in comparison with a higher object.

That object is sometimes unworthy. In the lowest form of courage it is only avoidance of disgrace; but even fear of shame is better than mere love of bodily ease, and from that lowest motive the scale rises to the most noble and precious actions of which human nature is capable—the truly golden and priceless deeds that are the jewels of history, the salt of life.

And it is a chain of Golden Deeds that we seek to lay before our readers; but, ere entering upon them, perhaps we had better clearly understand what it is that to our mind constitutes a Golden Deed.

It is not mere hardihood. There was plenty of hardihood in Pizarro when he led his men through terrible hardships to attack the empire of Peru, but he was actuated by mere greediness for gain, and all the perils he so resolutely endured could not make his courage admirable. It was nothing but insensibility to danger, when set against the wealth and power that he coveted, and to which he sacrificed thousands of helpless Peruvians. Daring for the sake of plunder has been found in every robber, every pirate, and too often in all the lower grade of warriors, from the savage plunderer of a besieged town up to the reckless monarch making war to feed his own ambition.

There is a courage that breaks out in bravado, the exuberance of high spirits, delighting in defying peril for its own sake, not indeed producing deeds which deserve to be called golden, but which, from their heedless grace, their desperation, and absence of all base motives—except perhaps vanity—have an undeniable charm about them, even when we doubt the right of exposing a life in mere gaiety of heart.

Such was the gallantry of the Spanish knight who, while Fernando and Isabel lay before the Moorish city of Granada, galloped out of the camp, in full view of besiegers and besieged, and fastened to the gate of the city with his dagger a copy of the Ave Maria. It was a wildly brave action, and yet not without service in showing the dauntless spirit of the Christian army. But the same can hardly be said of the daring shown by the Emperor Maximilian when he displayed himself to the citizens of Ulm upon the topmost pinnacle of their cathedral spire; or of Alonso de Ojeda, who figured in like manner upon the tower of the Spanish cathedral. The same daring afterwards carried him in the track of Columbus, and there he stained his name with the usual blots of rapacity and cruelty. These deeds, if not tinsel, were little better than gold leaf.

A Golden Deed must be something more than mere display of fearlessness. Grave and resolute fulfilment of duty is required to give it the true weight. Such duty kept the sentinel at his post at the gate of Pompeii, even when the stifling dust of ashes came thicker and thicker from the volcano,

and the liquid mud streamed down, and the people fled and struggled on, and still the sentry stood at his post, unflinching, till death had stiffened his limbs; and his bones, in their helmet and breastplate, with the hand still raised to keep the suffocating dust from mouth and nose, have remained even till our own times to show how a Roman soldier did his duty. In like manner the last of the old Spanish infantry originally formed by the Great Captain, Gonzalo de Cordova, were all cut off, standing fast to a man, at the battle of Rocroy, in 1643, not one man breaking his rank. The whole regiment was found lying in regular order upon the field of battle, with their colonel, the old Count de Fuentes, at their head, expiring in a chair, in which he had been carried, because he was too infirm to walk, to this his twentieth battle. The conqueror, the high-spirited young Duke d'Enghien, afterwards Prince of Condé, exclaimed, "Were I not a victor, I should have wished thus to die!" and preserved the chair among the relics of the bravest of his own fellow countrymen.

Such obedience at all costs and all risks is, however, the very essence of a soldier's life. An army could not exist without it, a ship could not sail without it, and millions upon millions of those whose "bones are dust and good swords are rust" have shown such resolution. It is the solid material, but it has hardly the exceptional brightness, of a Golden Deed.

And yet perhaps it is one of the most remarkable characteristics of a Golden Deed that the doer of it is certain to feel it merely a duty; "I have done that which it was my duty to do" is the natural answer of those capable of such actions. They have been constrained to them by duty, or by pity; have never even deemed it possible to act otherwise, and did not once think of themselves in the matter at all.

For the true metal of a Golden Deed is self-devotion. Selfishness is the dross and alloy that gives the unsound ring to many an act that has been called glorious. And, on the other hand, it is not only the valour, which meets a thousand enemies upon the battlefield, or scales the walls in a forlorn hope, that is of true gold. It may be, but often it is a mere greed of fame, fear of shame, or lust of plunder. No, it is the spirit that gives itself for others—the temper that for the sake of religion, of country, of duty, of kindred, nay, of pity even to a stranger, will dare all things, risk all things, endure all things, meet death in one moment, or wear life away in slow, persevering tendance and suffering.

Such a spirit was shown by Leæna, the Athenian woman at whose house the overthrow of the tyranny of the Pisistratids was concerted, and who, when seized and put to the torture that she might disclose the secrets of the conspirators, fearing that the weakness of her frame might overpower her resolution, actually bit off her tongue, that she might be unable to betray the trust placed in her. The Athenians commemorated her truly golden silence by raising in her honour the statue of a lioness without a tongue,

in allusion to her name, which signifies a lioness.

Again, Rome had a tradition of a lady whose mother was in prison under sentence of death by hunger, but who, at the peril of her own life, visited her daily, and fed her from her own bosom, until even the stern senate were moved with pity, and granted a pardon. The same story is told of a Greek lady, called Euphrasia, who thus nourished her father; and in Scotland, in 1401, when the unhappy heir of the kingdom, David, Duke of Rothesay, had been thrown into the dungeon of Falkland Castle by his barbarous uncle, the Duke of Albany, there to be starved to death, his only helper was one poor peasant woman, who, undeterred by fear of the savage men that guarded the castle, crept, at every safe opportunity, to the grated window on a level with the ground, and dropped cakes through it to the prisoner, while she allayed his thirst from her own breast through a pipe. Alas! the visits were detected, and the Christian prince had less mercy than the heathen senate. Another woman, in 1450, when Sir Gilles of Brittany was savagely imprisoned and starved in much the same manner by his brother, Duke François, sustained him for several days by bringing wheat in her veil, and dropping it through the grated window, and when poison had been used to hasten his death, she brought a priest to the grating to enable him to make his peace with Heaven. Tender pity made these women venture all things; and surely their doings were full of the gold of love.

So again two Swiss lads, whose father was dangerously ill, found that they could by no means procure the needful medicine, except at a price far beyond their means, and heard that an English traveller had offered a large price for a pair of eaglets. The only eyrie was on a crag supposed to be so inaccessible, that no one ventured to attempt it, till these boys, in their intense anxiety for their father, dared the fearful danger, scaled the precipice, captured the birds, and safely conveyed them to the traveller. Truly this was a deed of gold.

Such was the action of the Russian servant whose master's carriage was pursued by wolves, and who sprang out among the beasts, sacrificing his own life willingly to slake their fury for a few minutes in order that the horses might be untouched, and convey his master to a place of safety. But his act of self-devotion has been so beautifully expanded in the story of "Eric's Grave", in "Tales of Christian Heroism", that we can only hint at it, as at that of the "Helmsman of Lake Erie", who, with the steamer on fire around him, held fast by the wheel in the very jaws of the flame, so as to guide the vessel into harbour, and save the many lives within her, at the cost of his own fearful agony, while slowly scorched by the flames.

Memorable, too, was the compassion that kept Dr. Thompson upon the battlefield of the Alma, all alone throughout the night, striving to alleviate the sufferings and attend to the wants, not of our own wounded,

but of the enemy, some of whom, if they were not sorely belied, had been known to requite a friendly act of assistance with a pistol shot. Thus to remain in the darkness, on a battlefield in an enemy's country, among the enemy themselves, all for pity and mercy's sake, was one of the noblest acts that history can show. Yet, it was paralleled in the time of the Indian Mutiny, when every English man and woman was flying from the rage of the Sepoys at Benares, and Dr. Hay alone remained because he would not desert the patients in the hospital, whose life depended on his care—many of them of those very native corps who were advancing to massacre him. This was the Roman sentry's firmness, more voluntary and more glorious. Nor may we pass by her to whom our title page points<sup>1</sup> as our living type of Golden Deeds—to her who first showed how woman's ministrations of mercy may be carried on, not only within the city, but on the borders of the camp itself—"the lady with the lamp", whose health and strength were freely devoted to the holy work of softening the after sufferings that render war so hideous; whose very step and shadow carried gladness and healing to the sick soldier, and who has opened a path of like shining light to many another woman who only needed to be shown the way. Fitly, indeed, may the figure of Florence Nightingale be shadowed forth at the opening of our roll of Golden Deeds.

Thanks be to God, there is enough of His own spirit of love abroad in the earth to make Golden Deeds of no such rare occurrence, but that they are of "all time". Even heathen days were not without them, and how much more should they not abound after the words have been spoken, "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend", and after the one Great Deed has been wrought that has consecrated all other deeds of self-sacrifice. Of martyrdoms we have scarcely spoken. They were truly deeds of the purest gold; but they are too numerous to be dwelt on here: and even as soldiers deem it each man's simple duty to face death unhesitatingly, so the "glorious army of martyrs" had, for the most part, joined the Church with the expectation that they should have to confess the faith, and confront the extremity of death and torture for it.

What have been here brought together are chiefly cases of self-devotion that stand out remarkably, either from their hopelessness, their courage, or their patience, varying with the character of their age; but with that one essential distinction in all, that the dross of self was cast away.

Among these we cannot forbear mentioning the poor American soldier, who, grievously wounded, had just been laid in the middle bed, by far the most comfortable of the three tiers of berths in the ship's cabin in which the wounded were to be conveyed to New York. Still thrilling with the suffering of being carried from the field, and lifted to his place, he saw a comrade in even worse plight brought in, and thinking of the pain it must

<sup>1</sup> See the title page for an engraving of Florence Nightingale.

cost his fellow soldier to be raised to the bed above him, he surprised his kind lady nurses (daily scatterers of Golden Deeds) by saying, "Put me up there, I reckon I'll bear hoisting better than he will".

And, even as we write, we hear of an American Railway collision that befell a train on the way to Elmira with prisoners. The engineer, whose name was William Ingram, might have leapt off and saved himself before the shock; but he remained in order to reverse the engine, though with certain death staring him in the face. He was buried in the wreck of the meeting train, and when found, his back was against the boiler—he was jammed in, unable to move, and actually being burnt to death; but even in that extremity of anguish he called out to those who came round to help him to keep away, as he expected the boiler would burst. They disregarded the generous cry, and used every effort to extricate him, but could not succeed until after his sufferings had ended in death.

While men and women still exist who will thus suffer and thus die, losing themselves in the thought of others, surely the many forms of woe and misery with which this earth is spread do but give occasions of working out some of the highest and best qualities of which mankind are capable. And oh, young readers, if your hearts burn within you as you read of these various forms of the truest and deepest glory, and you long for time and place to act in the like devoted way, bethink yourselves that the alloy of such actions is to be constantly worked away in daily life; and that if ever it be your lot to do a Golden Deed, it will probably be in unconsciousness that you are doing anything extraordinary, and that the whole impulse will consist in the having absolutely forgotten self.





## *The Stories of Alcestis and Antigone*

IT has been said, that even the heathens saw and knew the glory of self-devotion; and the Greeks had two early instances so very beautiful that, though they cannot in all particulars be true, they must not be passed over. There must have been some foundation for them, though we cannot now disentangle them from the fable that has adhered to them; and, at any rate, the ancient Greeks believed them, and gathered strength and nobleness from dwelling on such examples; since, as it has been truly said, "Every word, look or thought of sympathy with heroic action, helps to make heroism". Both tales were presented before them in their solemn religious tragedies, and the noble poetry in which they were recounted by the great Greek dramatists has been preserved to our time.

Alcestis was the wife of Admetus, King of Pheræ, who, according to the legend, was assured that his life might be prolonged, provided father, mother, or wife would die in his stead. It was Alcestis alone who was willing freely to give her life to save that of her husband; and her devotion is thus exquisitely described in the following translation, by Professor Anstice, from the choric song in the tragedy by Euripides:—

“Be patient, for thy tears are vain—  
They may not wake the dead again:  
E'en heroes, of immortal sire  
And mortal mother born, expire.  
    Oh, she was dear  
    While she linger'd here;  
She is dear now she rests below,  
    And thou mayst boast  
    That the bride thou hast lost  
Was the noblest earth can show.

“We will not look on her burial sod  
    As the cell of sepulchral sleep,  
It shall be as the shrine of a radiant god,  
And the pilgrim shall visit that blest abode

To worship, and not to weep;  
 And as he turns his steps aside,  
 Thus shall he breathe his vow:  
 'Here sleeps a self-devoted bride,  
 Of old to save her lord she died.  
 She is a spirit now.  
 Hail, bright and blest one! grant to me  
 The smiles of glad prosperity.'  
 Thus shall he own her name divine,  
 Thus bend him at Alcestis' shrine."

The story, however, bore that Hercules, descending in the course of one of his labours into the realms of the dead, rescued Alcestis, and brought her back; and Euripides gives a scene in which the rough, jovial Hercules insists on the sorrowful Admetus marrying again a lady of his own choice, and gives the veiled Alcestis back to him as the new bride. Later Greeks tried to explain the story by saying that Alcestis nursed her husband through an infectious fever, caught it herself, and had been supposed to be dead, when a skilful physician restored her; but this is probably only one of the many reasonable versions they tried to give of the old tales that were founded on the decay and revival of nature in winter and spring, and with a presage running through them of sacrifice, death, and resurrection. Our own poet Chaucer was a great admirer of Alcestis, and improved upon the legend by turning her into his favourite flower—

"The daisie or els the eye of the daie,  
 The emprise and the floure of flouris all".

Another Greek legend told of the maiden of Thebes, one of the most self-devoted beings that could be conceived by a fancy untrained in the knowledge of Divine Perfection. It cannot be known how much of her story is true, but it was one that went deep into the hearts of Grecian men and women, and encouraged them in some of their best feelings; and assuredly the deeds imputed to her were golden.

Antigone was the daughter of the old King Oedipus of Thebes. After a time heavy troubles, the consequence of the sins of his youth, came upon him, and he was driven away from his kingdom, and sent to wander forth a blind old man, scorned and pointed at by all. Then it was that his faithful daughter showed true affection for him. She might have remained at Thebes with her brother Eteocles, who had been made king in her father's room, but she chose instead to wander forth with the forlorn old man, fallen from his kingly state, and absolutely begging his bread. The great Athenian poet Sophocles began his tragedy of "Oedipus Coloneus" with showing the blind old king leaning on Antigone's arm, and asking—



“Tell me, thou daughter of a blind old man,  
 Antigone, to what land are we come,  
 Or to what city? Who the inhabitants  
 Who with a slender pittance will relieve  
 Even for a day the wandering Oedipus?”

POTTER.

The place to which they had come was in Attica, near the city of Colonus. It was a lovely grove—

“All the haunts of Attic ground,  
 Where the matchless coursers bound,  
 Boast not, through their realms of bliss,  
 Other spot so fair as this.  
 Frequent down this greenwood dale  
 Mourns the warbling nightingale,  
 Nestling ‘mid the thickest screen  
 Of the ivy’s darksome green,  
 Or where each empurpled shoot  
 Drooping with its myriad fruit,  
 Curl’d in many a mazy twine,  
 Droops the never-trodden vine.”

ANSTICE.

This beautiful grove was sacred to the Eumenides, or avenging goddesses, and it was therefore a sanctuary where no foot might tread; but near it the exiled king was allowed to take up his abode, and was protected by the great Athenian King, Theseus. There his other daughter, Ismene, joined him, and, after a time, his elder son Polynices, arrived.

Polynices had been expelled from Thebes by his brother Eteocles, and had been wandering through Greece seeking aid to recover his rights. He had collected an army, and was come to take leave of his father and sisters; and at the same time to entreat his sisters to take care that, if he should fall in the battle, they would prevent his corpse from being left unburied; for the Greeks believed that till the funeral rites were performed, the spirit went wandering restlessly up and down upon the banks of a dark stream, unable to enter the home of the dead. Antigone solemnly promised to him that he should not be left without these last rites. Before long, old Oedipus was killed by lightning, and the two sisters returned to Thebes.

The united armies of the seven chiefs against Thebes came on, led by Polynices. Eteocles sallied out to meet them, and there was a terrible battle, ending in all the seven chiefs being slain, and the two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, were killed by one another in single combat. Creon, the

uncle, who thus became king, had always been on the side of Eteocles, and therefore commanded that whilst this younger brother was entombed with all due solemnities, the body of the elder should be left upon the battlefield to be torn by dogs and vultures, and that whosoever durst bury it should be treated as a rebel and a traitor to the state.

This was the time for the sister to remember her oath to her dead brother. The more timid Ismene would have dissuaded her, but she answered,—

“To me no sufferings have that hideous form  
Which can affright me from a glorious death”.

And she crept forth by night, amid all the horrors of the deserted field of battles, and herself covered with loose earth the corpse of Polynices. The barbarous uncle caused it to be taken up and again exposed, and a watch was set at some little distance. Again Antigone

“Was seen, lamenting shrill with plaintive notes,  
Like the poor bird that sees her lonely nest  
Spoil'd of her young”.

Again she heaped dry dust with her own hands over the body, and poured forth the libations of wine that formed an essential part of the ceremony. She was seized by the guard, and led before Creon. She boldly avowed her deed, and, in spite of the supplications of Ismene, she was put to death, a sufferer for her noble and pious deeds; and with this only comfort:—

“Glowing at my heart  
I feel this hope, that to my father, dear  
And dear to thee, my mother, dear to thee,  
My brother, I shall go.”

POTTER.

Dim and beautiful indeed was the hope that upbore the grave and beautiful Theban maiden; and we shall see her resolution equalled, though hardly surpassed, by Christian Antigones of equal love and surer faith.

