

Chapter II

CADMUS AND THE DRAGON'S TEETH

In a land of Asia, named Phoe-ni'ci-a, lived King Ag'e-nor with his queen. They had four children — three sons and a beautiful daughter named Eu-ro'pa.

One morning, as the young people were playing in a meadow near the seashore, a snow white bull came toward them. Europa and her brothers thought it would be a fine frolic to take a ride on the back of the bull. The brothers agreed that Europa should have the first ride. In a moment she was on the bull's back, and the bull was capering over the meadow. Then, suddenly, he ran down to the shore and plunged into the sea. For a little while he could be seen swimming through the water with Europa clinging to his horns. Then both disappeared, and Europa never saw her brothers or her father or mother again. Still, her fate was not a sad one. At the end of a long ride on the back of the bull, she reached that part of the world which to this day is called Europe in her honor. There she married a king, and was a queen for the rest of her life.

But in her old home there was great distress. Agenor sent his sons to look for her and told them not to return until they had found their sister. Their mother went with them. After a long time the two elder sons gave up the search and settled in a strange land. The mother and the youngest son, Cad'mus, wandered on until her death. With her last breath she made him promise to go to Mount Parnassus and ask the oracle where he might find Europa. As soon as she was dead, Cadmus made haste to Parnassus. When he arrived at the mountain, he found the cleft in the rocks from which the oracle had once come to Deucalion. Cadmus stood before the stream of gas which poured from it and asked for advice.

Famous Men of Greece



Europa on the bull's back

From the cleft came a deep roaring sound. Then he heard the puzzling words, "Follow the cow; and build a city where she lies down."

Cadmus saw a cow nibbling tufts of grass by the roadside, not far from where he was standing. He decided to follow her and, with some companions, set out on his unknown journey.

For a long time it seemed as though the cow would not lie down at all. Finally, she began to double her knees under her, as cows do, and in a second more she was at rest on the ground. Cadmus and his men decided to camp on the spot for the night. They looked about for some water and found a spring bubbling out from under a rock.

Now this was really an enchanted spring. It was guarded by a dragon that had the claws of a lion, the wings of an eagle, and the jaws of a serpent. When Cadmus and his men came near, the dragon sprang from behind the rock and killed all but Cadmus.

Luckily, Cadmus had his sword with him. When the dragon, with wide-open jaws, flew at him, he thrust his sword down the fiery throat and into the creature's heart. The monster fell dead. Through the air rang the words, "Sow the teeth of the dragon, O Cadmus!"

Though he saw that it would be hard work to break the great teeth out of the dragon's jaws, Cadmus at once set about the task. When it was finished, he dug the soil with the point of his sword as best he could and planted half of the monster's teeth.

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Never had grown such a wonderful crop. For every tooth that was planted, a warrior, armed and eager to fight, sprang up. Cadmus gazed in amazement, until a voice in the air commanded, "Throw a stone among the warriors."

Cadmus obeyed, and immediately every warrior drew his sword and attacked one of his companions. The woods rang with the din of the battle. One by one the warriors fell, until only five were left. Cadmus now shouted loudly to them, "Be at peace!" When they stopped fighting, he added, "Building is better than killing."

"Then let us build a city here!" cried Cadmus; for they were standing where the cow had lain down.

The warriors agreed, and all set to work to build a city. They called the city Thebes, and in later days it became very famous.

The land around Thebes was rich and covered with grass. So Cadmus and his friends raised cattle. But there were many robbers in Greece who often made raids upon the cattle and stole some of the finest animals.

For protection against the robbers, a wall was built. It was not a wall laid by masons, but a magic wall built by a strange musician called Am'phi-on. He struck such sweet music from his lyre that the stones danced about and took their proper places in the wall.

When Cadmus was a boy at his father's palace in Phoenicia, he and his brothers and the lost Europa had been taught to read and write. Now that peace and plenty filled his land, he determined to teach his people the arts of reading and writing. So the men of Thebes learned their a-b-c's, and Cadmus' school was the first in Europe where people were taught to read.

But Cadmus was not happy. He was condemned to eight years of punishment for killing the dragon. After the punishment was over, Jupiter gave him Harmony, the daughter of Venus, for a wife, and all the gods came to the wedding feast. One of the wedding presents was a necklace that brought bad luck to anyone who wore it. Harmony had great misfortunes. Bowed with grief, she and Cadmus left Thebes and settled in the western part of Greece. Finally, Jupiter pitied them in their trouble, turned them into serpents, and carried them to the realm of the blessed.

Greenleaf Guide to Famous Men of Greece

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Supplemental Texts:

The Greeks, page 4, "The legend of Minos"

Vocabulary:

| | |
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| capering | din |
| masons | realm |
| tufts | |

People and Places:

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|--------------|---------------|
| Phoe-nic'i-a | King A-ge'nor |
| Eu-ro'pa | Cad'mus |
| Thebes | Am'phi-on |
| Harmony | |

For Discussion:

1. How could you say that good came out of the disappearance of Europa? What part of the world bears her name today?
2. Tell the story of the founding of Thebes. Who founded it? How did it happen?
3. Cadmus was the founder of a very rich and prosperous city, yet he was not altogether happy. Tell why not. What was Cadmus' final end?