Adonis being too ardent in the pursuit of a wild boar, the beast kills him, on which Venus changes his
blood into a flower of crimson colour.

“She, indeed, thus warned him; and, harnessing her swans, winged her way through the air; but his
courage stood in opposition to her advice. By chance, his dogs having followed its sure track, roused a
boar, and the son of Cinyras pierced him, endeavouring to escape from the wood, with a wound from
the side. Immediately the fierce boar, with his crooked snout, struck out the hunting-spear, stained with
his blood, and then pursued him, trembling and seeking a safe retreat, and lodged his entire tusks in his
groin, and stretched him expiring on the yellow sand.

“Cytherea, borne in her light chariot through the middle of the air, had not yet arrived at Cyprus upon
the wings of her swans. She recognized afar his groans, as he was dying, and turned her white birds in
that direction. And when, from the lofty sky, she beheld him half dead, and bathing his body in his own
blood, she rapidly descended, and rent both her garments and her hair, and she smote her breast with
her distracted hands. And complaining of the Fates, she says, ‘But, however, all things shall not be in
your power; the memorials of my sorrow, Adonis, shall ever remain; and the representation of thy
death, repeated yearly, shall exhibit an imitation of my mourning. But thy blood shall be changed into a
flower. Was it formerly allowed thee, Persephone, to change the limbs of a female into fragrant mint;
and shall the hero, the son of Cinyras, if changed, be a cause of displeasure against me?’ Having thus
said, she sprinkles his blood with odoriferous nectar, which, touched by it, effervesces, just as the
transparent bubbles are wont to rise in rainy weather. Nor was there a pause longer than a full hour,
when a flower sprang up from the blood, of the same colour with it, such as the pomegranates are wont
to bear, which conceal their seeds beneath their tough rind. Yet the enjoyment of it is but short-lived;
for the same winds which give it a name, beat it down, as it has but a slender hold, and is apt to fall by
reason of its extreme slenderness.”

EXPLANATION.
Theocritus, Bion, Hyginus, and Antoninus Liberalis, beside several other authors, relate the history of the
loves of Venus and Adonis. They inform us of many particulars which Ovid has here neglected to remark.
They say that Mars, jealous of the passion which Venus had for Adonis, implored the aid of Diana, who,
to gratify his revenge, sent the boar that destroyed the youth. According to some writers, it was Apollo
himself that took the form of that animal; and they say that Adonis descending to the Infernal Regions,
Proserpine fell in love with him, and refused to allow him to return, notwithstanding the orders of
Jupiter. On this, the king of heaven fearing to displease both the Goddesses, referred the dispute to the
Muse Calliope, who directed that Adonis should pass one half of his time with Venus on earth, and the
other half in the Infernal Regions. They also tell us that it took up a year before the dispute could be
determined, and that the Hours brought Adonis at last to the upper world, on which, Venus being dissatisfied with the decision of Calliope, instigated the women of Thrace to kill her son Orpheus.

The mythologists have considered this story to be based on grounds either historical or physical. Cicero, in his Discourse on the Nature of the Gods, says, that there were several persons who had the name of Venus, and that the fourth, surnamed Astarte, was a Syrian, who married Adonis, the son of Cinyras, king of Cyprus. Hunting in the forests of Mount Libanus, or Lebanon, he was wounded in the groin by a wild boar, which accident ultimately caused his death. Astarte caused the city of Byblos and all Syria to mourn for his loss; and, to keep his name and his sad fate in remembrance, established feasts in his honour, to be celebrated each year. Going still further, if we suppose the story to have originated in historical facts, it seems not improbable that Adonis did not die of his wound, and that, contrary to all expectation, he was cured; as the Syrians, after having mourned for several days during his festival, rejoiced as though he had been raised from the dead, at a second festival called ‘The Return.’ The worship both of Venus and Adonis probably originated in Syria, and was spread through Asia Minor into Greece; while the Carthaginians, a Phœnician colony introduced it into Sicily. The festival of Adonis is most amusingly described by Theocritus the Sicilian poet, in his ‘Adoniazusæ.’ Some authors have suggested that Adonis was the same with the Egyptian God Osiris, and that the affliction of Venus represented that of Isis at the death of her husband. According to Hesiod, Adonis was the son of Phœnix and Alphesibœa, while Panyasis says that he was son of Theias, the king of the Assyrians.

In support of the view which some commentators take of the story of Adonis having been founded on physical circumstance, we cannot do better than quote the able remarks of Mr. Keightley on the subject. He says (Mythology of Ancient Greece and Italy, p. 109)— “The tale of Adonis is apparently an Eastern mythus. His very name is Semitic (Hebrew ‘Adon,’ ‘Lord’), and those of his parents also refer to that part of the world. He appears to be the same with the Thammuz, mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel, and to be a Phœnician personification of the sun who, during part of the year is absent, or, as the legend expresses it, with the Goddess of the under world: during the remainder with Astarte, the regent of heaven. It is uncertain when the Adonia were first celebrated in Greece; but we find Plato alluding to the gardens of Adonis, as boxes of flowers used in them were called; and the ill fortune of the Athenian expedition to Sicily was in part ascribed to the circumstance of the fleet having sailed during that festival.”

This notion of the mourning for Adonis being a testimony of grief for the absence of the Sun during the winter, is not, however, to be too readily acquiesced in. Lobeck (Aglaophamus, p. 691), for example, asks, with some appearance of reason, why those nations whose heaven was mildest, and their winter shortest, should so bitterly bewail the regular changes of the seasons, as to feign that the Gods themselves were carried off or slain; and he shrewdly observes, that, in that case, the mournful and the joyful parts of the festival should have been held at different times of the year, and not joined together, as they were. He further inquires, whether the ancient writers, who esteemed these Gods to be so little superior to men, may not have believed them to have been really and not metaphorically put to death? And, in truth, it is not easy to give a satisfactory answer to these questions.

Notes:

64. In her light chariot.]—Ver. 717. ‘Vecta levi curru Cytherea,’ Clarke quaintly renders, ‘The Cytherean Goddess riding in her light chair.'
65. To change the limbs.]—Ver. 729. Proserpine was said to have changed the Nymph, ‘Mentha,’ into a plant of that name, which we call ‘mint.’ Some writers say that she found her intriguing with Pluto while, according to other writers, she was the mistress of Pollux.

66. The same winds.]—Ver. 739. The flower which sprang from the blood of Adonis was the anemone, or wind-flower, of which Pliny the Elder says—‘This flower never opens but when the wind is blowing, from which too, it receives its name, as ἄνεμος means the wind.’—(Book i. c. 23).