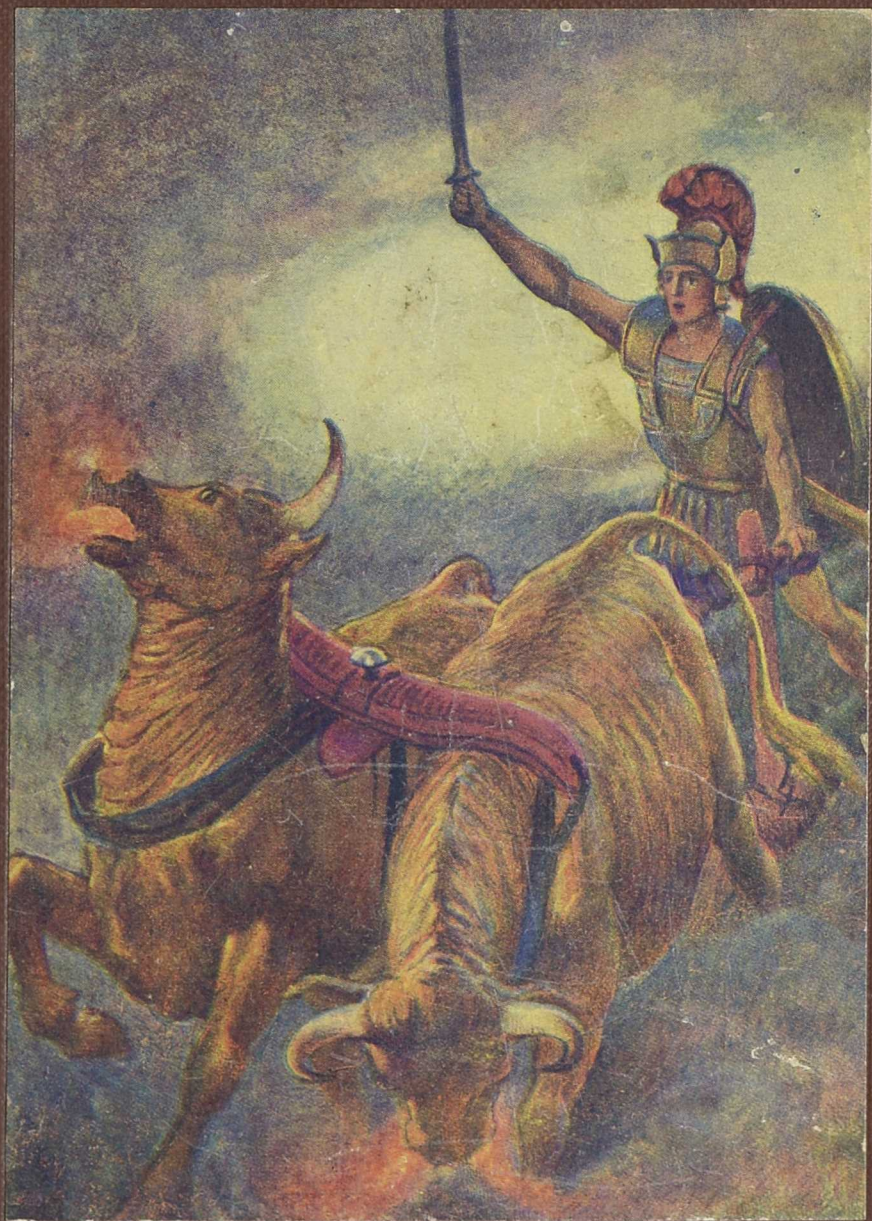


KINGSLEY'S "HEROES"



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Perseus finds his mother at the handmill.

THE HEROES

Abridged from the Tales by
Charles Kingsley

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS

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THE HEROES.

PERSEUS.

I. How Perseus and his Mother came to Seriphos.

ONCE upon a time there were two princes who were twins. Their names were Acrisius and Prætus, and they lived in the pleasant vale of Argos, far away in Hellas. They had fruitful meadows and vineyards, sheep and oxen, great herds of horses, and all that men could need to make them blest : and yet they were wretched, because they were jealous of each other. From the moment they were born they began to quarrel ; and when they grew up each tried to take away the other's share of the kingdom, and keep all for himself.

So first Acrisius drove out Prætus ; and he went across the seas, and brought home a foreign princess for his wife, and foreign warriors to help him, and drove out Acrisius in his turn ; and then they fought a long while till the quarrel was settled, and Acrisius took Argos and one half the land, and Prætus took Tiryns and the other half.

But there came a prophet to that hard-hearted Acrisius, and said, "Because you have risen up against your own blood, your own blood shall rise up against you. Your daughter Danaë shall bear a son, and by that son's hands you shall die."

And at that Acrisius was very much afraid ; but he did not mend his ways, for he shut up his fair daughter Danaë in a cavern underground, lined with brass, that no one might come near her.

Now it came to pass that in time Danaë bore a son ; so beautiful a babe that any but King Acrisius would have had pity on it. But he had no pity ; for he took Danaë and her babe down to the sea-shore, and put them into a great chest and thrust them out to sea.

The north-west wind blew freshly out of the blue mountains, and down the vale, and away and out to sea. And away and out to sea before it floated the mother and her babe.

They floated on and on, and the chest danced up and down upon the billows, and the baby slept upon its mother's breast : but the poor mother could not sleep, but watched and wept.

And now they are past the last blue headland, and in the open sea ; and there is nothing round them but the waves, and the sky, and the wind. But the waves are gentle, and the sky is clear, and the breeze is tender and low.

So a night passed, and a day, and a long day it was for Danaë ; and another night and day beside, till Danaë was faint with hunger and weeping, and yet no land appeared. And all the while the babe slept quietly ; and at last poor Danaë drooped her head and fell asleep likewise, with her cheek against the babe's.

After a while she was awakened suddenly ; for the chest was jarring and grinding, and

the air was full of sound. She looked up, and over her head were mighty cliffs, all red in the setting sun, and around her rocks and breakers, and flying flakes of foam. She clasped her hands together and shrieked aloud for help. And when she cried, help met her; for now there came over the rocks a tall and stately man, and looked down wondering upon poor Danaë tossing about in the chest among the waves.



He wore a rough cloak of frieze, and on his head a broad hat to shade his face. In his hand he carried a trident for spearing fish, and over his shoulder was a casting-net; but Danaë could see that he was no common man by his stature, and his walk, and his flowing golden hair and beard. But she had hardly time to look at him before he had laid aside his trident and leapt down the rocks, and thrown his casting-net so surely over Danaë and the chest that he drew it, and her, and the baby safe upon a ledge of rock.

Then the fisherman took Danaë by the hand, and lifted her out of the chest, and said,—

“O beautiful damsel, what strange chance has brought you to this island in so frail a ship? Who are you, and whence? Surely you are some king’s daughter; and this boy has somewhat more than mortal.”

But Danaë only held down her head, and sobbed out,—

“Tell me to what land I have come, and among what men I have fallen.”

And he said, “This isle is called Seriphos. I am the brother of Polydectes the king; and men call me Dictys the netter, because I catch the fish of the shore.”

Then Danaë fell down at his feet, and embraced his knees, and cried,—

“Oh, sir, have pity upon a stranger, and let me live in your house as a servant; but treat me honourably, for I was once a king’s daughter, and this my boy (as you have truly said) is of no common race. I will not be a charge to you, for I am more skilful in weaving and embroidery than all the maidens of my land.”

And she was going on ; but Dictys stopped her, and raised her up, and said,—

“ My daughter, I am old, and my hairs are growing gray, while I have no children to make my home cheerful. Come with me then, and you shall be a daughter to me and to my wife, and this babe shall be our grand-child.”

So Danaë was comforted, and went home with Dictys, the good fisherman, and was a daughter to him and to his wife, till fifteen years were past.

II. How Perseus vowed a Rash Vow.

FIFTEEN years were past and gone, and the babe was now grown to be a tall lad and a sailor, and went many voyages after merchandise to the islands round. His mother called him Perseus ; but all the people called him the son of Zeus, the king of the Immortals.

For though he was but fifteen, he was taller by a head than any man in the island ; and he

was the most skilful of all in running and wrestling and boxing, and in throwing the quoit and the javelin, and in rowing with the oar, and in playing on the harp, and in all which befits a man. And he was brave and truthful, gentle and courteous, for good old Dictys had trained him well ; and well it was for Perseus that he had done so.

I said that Dictys' brother was Polydectes, king of the island. He was greedy, and cunning, and cruel. And when he saw fair Danaë he wanted to marry her. But she would not ; for she cared for no one but her boy.

At last Polydectes became furious, and while Perseus was away at sea he took poor Danaë away from Dictys, saying, "If you will not be my wife, you shall be my slave." So Danaë was made a slave, and had to fetch water from the well, and grind in the mill, because she would not marry that cruel king.

Now one day at Samos, while the ship was lading, Perseus wandered into a pleasant wood to get out of the sun, and sat down on the turf and fell asleep. And as he slept a strange dream came to him.

There came a lady through the wood, taller than he or any mortal man, but beautiful exceedingly, with great gray eyes, clear and piercing, but strangely soft and mild. On her head was a helmet, and in her hand a spear. And over her shoulder, above her long blue robes, hung a goat-skin, which bore up a mighty shield of brass, polished like a mirror. She stood and looked at him as if she could see all the secrets of his soul. And Perseus drooped his eyes, trembling and blushing, as the wonderful lady spoke.



“Perseus, you must do an errand for me.”

“Who are you, lady? And how do you know my name?”

“I am Pallas Athené; and I know the thoughts of all men’s hearts, and discern their manhood or their baseness. And from the souls of clay I turn away, and they are blest, but not by me. They fatten at ease, like sheep in the pasture, and eat what they did not sow, like oxen in the stall.

“But to the souls of fire I give more fire,

and to those who are manful I give a might more than man's. These are the heroes, the sons of the Immortals, who are blest, but not like the souls of clay. For I drive them forth by strange paths, Perseus, that they may fight the Titans and the monsters, the enemies of gods and men. Tell me now, Perseus, which of these two sorts of men seem to you more blest."

Then Perseus answered boldly: "Better to die in the flower of youth, on the chance of winning a noble name, than to live at ease like the sheep, and die unloved and unrenowned."

Then that strange lady laughed, and held up her brazen shield, and cried: "See here, Perseus; dare you face such a monster as this, and slay it, that I may place its head upon this shield?"

And in the mirror of the shield there appeared a face, and as Perseus looked on it his blood ran cold. It was the face of a beautiful woman; but her cheeks were pale as death, and her brows were knit with everlasting pain, and her lips were thin and bitter like a snake's;

and instead of hair, vipers wreathed about her temples, and shot out their forked tongues, while round her head were folded wings like an eagle's, and upon her bosom claws of brass.

And Perseus looked awhile, and then said : "If there is anything so fierce and foul on earth, it were a noble deed to kill it. Where can I find the monster?"

Then the strange lady smiled again, and said : "Not yet ; you are too young, and too unskilled ; for this is Medusa the Gorgon, the mother of a monstrous brood. Return to your home, and do the work which waits there for you. You must play the man in that before I can think you worthy to go in search of the Gorgon."

Then Perseus would have spoken, but the strange lady vanished, and he awoke ; and, behold, it was a dream. So he returned home ; and when he came to Seriphos, the first thing which he heard was that his mother was a slave in the house of Polydectes.

Grinding his teeth with rage, he went out, and away to the king's palace, and found his mother sitting on the floor, turning the stone

hand-mill, and weeping as she turned it. And he lifted her up, and kissed her, and bade her follow him forth.

But before they could pass out of the room Polydectes came in, raging. And when Perseus saw him he flew upon him as the mastiff flies on the boar. "Villain and tyrant!" he cried; "you shall die!" And because he had no sword he caught up the stone hand-mill, and lifted it to dash out Polydectes' brains.

But his mother clung to him, shrieking, "Oh, my son, we are strangers and helpless in the land; and if you kill the king we shall both die."



Good Dictys, too, who had come in, entreated him. "Remember that he is my brother, and spare him for my sake."

Then Perseus lowered his hand; and Polydectes, who had been trembling all this while, let Perseus and his mother pass.

Perseus took his mother to the temple of Athené, and there the priestess made her one of the temple-sweepers; for there they knew

she would be safe, and not even Polydectes would dare to drag her away from the altar.

Now Polydectes was sure that he could never get back Danaë as long as Perseus was in the island; so he made a plot to rid himself of him. And first he pretended to have forgiven Perseus, and to have forgotten Danaë; so that, for a while, all went as smoothly as ever. Next he proclaimed a great feast, and invited to it all the chiefs, and the young men of the island, and among them Perseus, that they might all do him homage as their king.

On the appointed day they all came; and as the custom was then, each guest brought his present with him to the king: one a horse, another a shawl, or a ring, or a sword; but Perseus brought nothing, for he had nothing to bring, being but a poor sailor-lad. So he stood at the door sorrowfully, watching the rich men go in; and his face grew very red as they pointed at him and whispered, "What has that foundling to give?"

Now this was what Polydectes wanted; and as soon as he heard that Perseus stood without, he bade them bring him in, and asked

him scornfully before them all, "Am I not your king, Perseus, and have I not invited you to my feast? Where is your present, then?"

Perseus blushed and stammered, while all the proud men round laughed, and some of them began jeering him openly. "This fellow was thrown ashore here like a piece of weed or drift-wood, and yet he is too proud to bring a gift to the king."

And so forth, till poor Perseus grew mad with shame, and cried out, "A present! Who are you who talk of presents? See if I do not bring a nobler one than all of yours together!"

"Hear him! Hear the boaster! What is it to be?" cried they all, laughing louder than ever.

Then his dream at Samos came into his mind, and he cried aloud, "The head of the Gorgon."

He was half afraid after he had said the words; for all laughed louder than ever, and Polydectes loudest of all.

"You have promised to bring me the

Gorgon's head? Then never appear again in this island without it. Go!"

Perseus ground his teeth with rage, for he saw that he had fallen into a trap; but his promise lay upon him, and he went out without a word.

Down to the cliffs he went, and looked across the broad blue sea; and he prayed in the bitterness of his soul,—

"Pallas Athené, was my dream true? and shall I slay the Gorgon? If thou didst really show me her face, let me not come to shame as a liar and boastful."

But there was no answer nor sign. And three times Perseus called weeping, "Rashly and angrily I promised, but cunningly and patiently will I perform."

Then he saw afar off above the sea a small white cloud, as bright as silver. And it came on, nearer and nearer, till its brightness dazzled his eyes.

Perseus wondered at that strange cloud, and he trembled as it touched the cliff below. And as it touched it broke, and parted, and within it appeared Pallas Athené,

and beside her a young man more light-limbed than the stag, whose eyes were like sparks of fire. By his side was a scimitar of diamond, and on his feet were golden sandals, from the heels of which grew living wings.

They looked upon Perseus keenly, and yet they never moved their eyes; and they came up the cliffs towards him more swiftly than the seagull, and yet they never moved their feet. And Perseus fell down and worshipped, for he knew that they were more than man.

But Athené stood before him and spoke gently, and bid him have no fear. Then—

“Perseus,” she said, “you have braved Polydectes, and done manfully. Dare you brave Medusa the Gorgon?”

And Perseus said, “Show me, then, how I can do this!”

“Perseus,” said Athené, “this deed requires a seven years’ journey, in which you cannot repent or turn back, nor escape; but if your heart fails you, you must die in the Unshapen Land, where no man will ever find your bones.”

“Better so than live here, useless and

despised," said Perseus. "Tell me how I can do but this one thing, and then, if need be, die!"

Then Athené smiled, and said,—

"Be patient and listen; for if you forget my words, you will indeed die. You must go to the sources of the cold north wind, till you find the three Gray Sisters, who have but one eye and one tooth between them. You must ask them the way to the Nymphs, the daughters of the Evening Star, who dance about the golden tree, in the Atlantic island of the west. They will tell you the way to the Gorgon.

"Once she was a maiden as beautiful as morn, till in her pride she sinned a sin at which the sun hid his face: and from that day her hair was turned to vipers, and her hands to eagle's claws; and her heart was filled with shame and rage, and her lips with bitter venom; and her eyes became so terrible that whosoever looks on them is turned to stone. So she became the sister of the Gorgons, the daughters of the Queen of the Sea. Touch them not, for they are

immortal ; but bring me only Medusa's head."

"And I will bring it!" said Perseus ; "but how am I to escape her eyes? Will she not freeze me too into stone?"

"You shall take this polished shield," said Athené, "and when you come near her look not at her herself, but at her image in the brass, so you may strike her safely. And when you have struck off her head, wrap it, with your face turned away, in the folds of the goat-skin on which the shield hangs. So you will bring it safely back to me."

Then Perseus said, "I will go. But how shall I cross the seas without a ship? And who will show me my way? And when I find her, how shall I slay her, if her scales be of iron and brass?"

Then the young man spoke: "These sandals of mine will bear you across the seas, as they bear me all day long; for I am Hermes, the messenger of the Immortals who dwell on Olympus."

Then Perseus fell down and worshipped, while the young man spoke again:

“The sandals themselves will guide you on the road; and this sword itself will kill her, for it is divine, and needs no second stroke. Arise, and gird them on, and go forth.”

So Perseus arose, and girded on the sandals and the sword.

And Athené cried, “Now leap from the cliff and be gone.”

Then Perseus looked down the cliff and shuddered, but he was ashamed to show his dread. Then he thought of Medusa and the renown before him, and he leapt into the empty air.

And behold, instead of falling he floated, and stood, and ran along the sky. He looked back, but Athené had vanished and Hermes; and the sandals led him on northward ever, like a crane who follows the spring toward the fens.

III. How Perseus slew the Gorgon.

So Perseus started on his journey, going dryshod over land and sea; and his heart was

high and joyful, for the winged sandals bore him each day a seven days' journey.

And he went on, till the sunny hills of Greece were behind him, and before him were the wilds of the north. Then he passed the mountains, and many a barbarous tribe, till he came to the Ister stream. And he walked across the Ister dry-shod, and away through the moors and fens, day and night toward the bleak north-west, turning neither to the right hand nor the left, till he came to the Unshapen Land, and the place which has no name.

And seven days he walked through it on a path which few can tell, till he came to the edge of the everlasting night, where the air was full of feathers, and the soil was hard with ice; and there at last he found the three Gray Sisters, nodding upon a white log of drift-wood, beneath the cold, white winter moon; and they chaunted a low song together, "Why the old times were better than the new."

There was no living thing around them, not a fly, not a moss upon the rocks. The

surge broke up in foam, but it fell again in flakes of snow; and it frosted the hair of the three Gray Sisters, and the bones in the ice-cliff above their heads.

They passed the eye from one to the other, but for all that they could not see; and they passed the tooth from one to the other, but for all that they could not eat; and they sat in the full glare of the moon, but they were none the warmer for her beams. And Perseus pitied the three Gray Sisters, but they did not pity themselves.

So he said, "Oh, venerable mothers, tell me, if you can, the path to the Gorgon."

Then one cried, "Who is this?" And another, "This is the voice of one of the children of men."

And he, "I am one of the sons of men and of the heroes. The rulers of Olympus have sent me to you to ask the way to the Gorgon."

Then one cried, "Give me the eye that I may see him;" and another, "Give me the tooth that I may bite him." But Perseus stepped close to them, and watched till

they passed the eye from hand to hand. And as they groped about between themselves, he held out his own hand gently, till one of them put the eye into it, fancying that it was the hand of her sister. Then he sprang back, and laughed, and cried,—

“Cruel and proud old women, I have your eye; and I will throw it into the sea unless you tell me the path to the Gorgon, and swear to me that you tell me right.”

Then they wept, and chattered, and scolded, but in vain. They were forced to tell the truth, though when they told it Perseus could hardly make out the road.

“You must go,” they said, “foolish boy, to the southward, till you come to Atlas the Giant, who holds the heavens and the earth apart. And you must ask his daughters, the Hesperides, who are young and foolish like yourself. And now give us back our eye, for we have forgotten all the rest.”

So Perseus gave them back their eye; but instead of using it, they nodded and fell fast asleep, and were turned into blocks of ice, till the tide came up and washed them all away.

But Perseus leapt away to the southward, leaving the snow and the ice behind, while the sun rose higher day by day upon a bright blue summer sea. And the terns and the seagulls swept laughing round his head, and called to him to stop and play. And all night long the sea-nymphs sang sweetly, and the Tritons blew upon their conchs, as they played round Galatæa their queen, in her car of pearled shells.



Day by day the sun rose higher, and leapt more swiftly into the sea at night, and more swiftly out of the sea at dawn; while Perseus skimmed over the billows, and his limbs were never weary, till he saw far away a mighty mountain, all rose-red in the setting sun. Its feet were wrapped in forests, and its head in wreaths of cloud; and Perseus knew that it was Atlas, who holds the heavens and the earth apart.

He came to the mountain, and leapt on shore, and wandered upward among pleasant valleys and waterfalls, and tall trees and

strange ferns and flowers; but there was no sign of man.

At last he heard sweet voices singing, and he guessed that he was come to the garden of the Nymphs, the daughters of the Evening Star.

So he stepped forward and saw them dancing, hand in hand around the charmed tree, which bent under its golden fruit; and round the tree-foot was coiled the dragon, who lies there for ever, blinking and watching with dry bright eyes.

Then Perseus stopped, because he was bashful before those fair maids; but when they saw him, they too stopped, and called to him with trembling voices,—

“Who are you? Are you Heracles the mighty, who will come to rob our garden, and carry off our golden fruit?” And he answered,—

“I am not Heracles the mighty, and I want none of your golden fruit. Tell me, fair Nymphs, the way which leads to the



Gorgon, that I may go on my way and slay her."

"Not yet, not yet, fair boy. Come hither and play with us awhile; we have danced alone here for a thousand years, and our hearts are weary with longing for a play-fellow. So come, come, come!"

"I cannot dance with you, fair maidens, for I must do the errand of the Immortals. So tell me the way to the Gorgon, lest I wander and perish in the waves."

Then they sighed and wept, and answered,—

"The Gorgon! she will freeze you into stone."

"It is better to die like a hero than to live like an ox in a stall. The Immortals have lent me weapons, and they will give me wit to use them."

Then they sighed again, and answered, "Fair boy, if you are bent on your own ruin, be it so. We know not the way to the Gorgon; but we will ask the giant Atlas, above upon the mountain peak, the brother of our father, the silver Evening

Star. He sits aloft and sees across the ocean, and far away into the Unshapen Land."

So they went up the mountain to Atlas, and Perseus went up with them. And they found the giant kneeling, as he held the heavens and the earth apart.

They asked him, and he answered mildly, pointing to the sea-board with his mighty hand, "I can see the Gorgons lying on an island far away; but this youth can never come near them unless he has the hat of darkness, which whosoever wears cannot be seen."

Then cried Perseus, "Where is that hat, that I may find it?"

But the giant smiled. "No living mortal can find that hat, for it lies in the depths of Hades, in the regions of the dead. But my nieces are immortal, and they shall fetch it for you if you will promise me one thing and keep your faith."

Then Perseus promised; and the giant said, "When you come back with the head of Medusa, you shall show me the beautiful horror, that I may become a stone for ever;

for it is weary labour for me to hold the heavens and the earth apart."

Then Perseus promised; and the eldest of the Nymphs went down, and into a dark cavern among the cliffs, out of which came smoke and thunder.

And Perseus and the Nymphs sat down seven days, and waited trembling, till the Nymph came up again; and her face was pale, and her eyes dazzled with the light, for she had been long in the dreary darkness; but in her hand was the magic hat.

Then all the Nymphs kissed Perseus, and wept over him a long while; but he was only impatient to be gone. And at last they put the hat upon his head, and he vanished out of their sight.

But Perseus went on boldly, beyond the streams of Ocean, to the isles where no ship cruises, till he heard the rustle of the Gorgons' wings and saw the glitter of their brazen talons; and then he knew that it was time to halt.

He thought awhile within himself, and remembered Athené's words. Then he rose

aloft into the air, and held the mirror of the shield above his head, and looked up into it that he might see all that was below him.

And he saw the three Gorgons sleeping, as huge as elephants. He knew that they could not see him, because the hat of darkness hid him; and yet he trembled as he sank down near them, so terrible were those brazen claws.

Two of the Gorgons lay sleeping heavily, as swine sleep, with their mighty wings outspread; but Medusa tossed to and fro restlessly, and as she tossed Perseus pitied her, she looked so fair and sad. And her neck gleamed so white in the mirror that Perseus had not the heart to strike, and said, "Ah, that it had been either of her sisters!"

But as he looked, from among her tresses the vipers' heads awoke and showed their fangs, and hissed; and Medusa, as she tossed, threw back her wings and showed her brazen claws; and Perseus saw that, for all her beauty, she was as foul and venomous as the rest.



Then he came down and stepped to her boldly, and looked steadfastly on his mirror, and struck with the sword stoutly once; and he did not need to strike again.

Next he wrapped the head in the goat-skin, turning away his eyes, and sprang into the air aloft, faster than he ever sprung before.

For Medusa's wings and talons rattled as she sank dead upon the rocks; and her two foul sisters woke, and saw her lying dead.

Into the air they sprang yelling, and looked for him who had done the deed. Thrice they swung round and round, like hawks who beat for a partridge; and thrice they snuffed round and round, like hounds who draw upon a deer. At last they struck upon the scent of the blood, and they checked for a moment to make sure; and then on they rushed with a fearful howl, while the wind rattled hoarse in their wings.

On they rushed, sweeping and flapping like eagles after a hare; and Perseus' blood ran cold, for all his courage, as he saw them come howling on his track; and he cried,

“Bear me well now, brave sandals, for the hounds of Death are at my heels!”

And well the brave sandals bore him, aloft through cloud and sunshine, across the shoreless sea; and fast followed the hounds of Death, as the roar of their wings came down the wind. But the roar came down fainter and fainter, and the howl of their voices died away; for the sandals were too swift, even for Gorgons, and by nightfall they were far behind, two black specks in the southern sky, till the sun sank and he saw them no more.

Then he came again to Atlas, and the garden of the Nymphs; and when the giant heard him coming, he groaned, and said, “Fulfil thy promise to me.” Then Perseus held up to him the Gorgon’s head, and he had rest from all his toil; for he became a crag of stone, which sleeps for ever far above the clouds.

Then he thanked the Nymphs, and asked them, “By what road shall I go homeward again, for I wandered far round in coming hither?”

And they wept and cried, "Go home no more, but stay and play with us."

But he refused, and they told him his road, and said, "Take with you this magic fruit, which if you eat once, you will not hunger for seven days. For you must go eastward and eastward ever, over the doleful Libyan shore which lies waste and desert, with shingle and rock and sand."

Then they kissed Perseus and wept over him, and he leapt down the mountain and went on, lessening and lessening like a seagull, away and out to sea.

IV. How Perseus came to the Æthiops.

So Perseus flitted onward to the north-east, over many a league of sea, till he came to the rolling sandhills and the dreary Libyan shore.

And he flitted on across the desert; and as he went the blood-drops fell to the earth from the Gorgon's head, and became poisonous asps and adders, which breed in the desert to this day.

Over the sands he went, feeding on the fruit which the Nymphs had given him, till he saw the hills of the Psylli, and the Dwarfs who fought with cranes. Their spears were of reeds and rushes, and their houses of the egg-shells of the cranes; and Perseus laughed, and went his way to the north-east, hoping all day long to see the blue Mediterranean sparkling, that he might fly across it to his home.



But now came down a mighty wind, and swept him back southward toward the desert. All day long he strove against it; but even the winged sandals could not prevail. So he was forced to float down the wind all night. And when the morning dawned there was nothing to be seen save the same old hateful waste of sand.

And out of the north the sandstorms rushed upon him, blood-red pillars and wreaths, blotting out the noonday sun; and Perseus fled before them, lest he should be choked by the burning dust. Seven days he strove against the storms, and seven days he was

driven back, till he was spent with thirst and hunger, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. Here and there he fancied that he saw a fair lake, and the sunbeams shining on the water; but when he came to it it vanished at his feet, and there was nought but burning sand.

Then he cried to Athené, and said,—

“Oh, fair and pure, if thou hearest me, wilt thou leave me here to die of drought? Shall I never see my mother more, and the blue ripple round Seriphos, and the sunny hills of Hellas?”

So he prayed; and after he had prayed there was a great silence.

The heaven was still above his head, and the sand was still beneath his feet; and Perseus looked up, but there was nothing but the blinding sun in the blinding blue; and round him, but there was nothing but the blinding sand.

And Perseus stood still a while and waited. Then suddenly his ears were opened, and he heard the sound of running water.

And at that his heart was lifted up, though

he scarcely dared believe his ears ; and weary as he was, he hurried forward, though he could scarcely stand upright ; and within a bowshot of him was a glen in the sand, and marble rocks, and date-trees, and a lawn of gay green grass. And through the lawn a streamlet sparkled and wandered out beyond the trees, and vanished in the sand.

Perseus laughed for joy and leapt down the cliff, and drank of the cool water, and ate of the dates, and slept upon the turf, and leapt up and went forward again : but not toward the north this time ; for he said, " Surely Athené hath sent me hither, and will not have me go homeward yet. What if there be another noble deed to be done before I see the sunny hills of Hellas ? "

So he went east, till he saw before him a mighty mountain-wall, all rose-red in the setting sun.

Then he towered in the air like an eagle, for his limbs were strong again ; and he flew all night across the mountain till the day began to dawn. And then, behold, beneath

him was the long green garden of Egypt and the shining stream of Nile.

And he saw cities walled up to heaven, and temples, and obelisks, and pyramids, and giant gods of stone. And he came down amid fields of barley, and flax, and millet; and saw the people among the watercourses, parting the streams among the plants cunningly with their feet, according to the wisdom of the Egyptians. But when they saw him they all stopped their work, and gathered round him, and cried,—

“Who art thou, fair youth? and what bearest thou beneath thy goat-skin there? Surely thou art one of the Immortals; for thy skin is white like ivory, and ours is red like clay. Thy hair is like threads of gold, and ours is black and curled.” And they would have worshipped him then and there, but Perseus said,—

“I am not one of the Immortals; but I am a hero of the Hellens. And I have slain the Gorgon in the wilderness, and bear her head with me. Give me food, therefore, that I may go forward and finish my work.”

Then they gave him food, and fruit, and wine; but they would not let him go. And when the news came into the city that the Gorgon was slain, the priests came out to meet him, and the maidens, with songs and dances, and timbrels and harps; and they would have brought him to their temple and to their king, but Perseus put on the hat of darkness, and vanished away out of their sight.

Therefore the Egyptians looked long for his return, but in vain, and worshipped him as a hero, and made a statue of him which stood for many a hundred years; and they said that he appeared to them at times with sandals a cubit long, and that whenever he appeared the season was fruitful, and the Nile rose high that year.

Then Perseus went to the eastward, along the Red Sea shore; and then, because he was afraid to go into the Arabian deserts, he turned northward once more, and this time no storm hindered him.

He flew on past pleasant hills and valleys. But the lowlands were all drowned by floods,

and the highlands blasted by fire, and the hills heaved like a bubbling cauldron.

And Perseus feared to go inland, but flew along the shore above the sea; and he went on all the day, and the sky was black with smoke; and he went on all the night, and the sky was red with flame.



And at the dawn of day he looked toward the cliffs; and at the water's edge, under a black rock, he saw a white image stand.

"This," thought he, "must surely be the statue of some sea-god; I will go near and see."

So he came near; but when he came, it was no statue, but a maiden of flesh and blood, for he could see her tresses streaming in the breeze; and as he came closer still, he could see how she shrank and shivered when the waves sprinkled her with cold salt spray.

Her arms were spread above her head, and fastened to the rock with chains of brass; and her head drooped on her bosom, either with sleep, or weariness, or grief. But now

and then she looked up and wailed, and called her mother; yet she did not see Perseus, for the cap of darkness was on his head.

Full of pity and indignation, Perseus drew near and looked upon the maid. And he thought, "I have never seen so beautiful a maiden; no, not in all our isles. Surely she is a king's daughter. Do barbarians treat their kings' daughters thus? She is too fair, at least, to have done any wrong. I will speak to her."

And, lifting the hat from his head, he flashed into her sight. She shrieked with terror, and tried to hide her face with her hair, for she could not with her hands; but Perseus cried,—

"Do not fear me, fair one; I am a Hellen, and no barbarian. What cruel men have bound you? But first I will set you free."

And he tore at the fetters, but they were too strong for him; while the maiden cried,—

"Touch me not; I am accursed, devoted as a victim to the sea-gods. They will slay you if you dare to set me free."

“Let them try,” said Perseus, and, drawing the sword from his thigh, he cut through the brass as if it had been flax.

“Now,” he said, “you belong to me, and not to these sea-gods, whosoever they may be!” But she only called the more on her mother.

“Why call on your mother? She can be no mother to have left you here. I know now why Pallas Athené sent me hither. She sent me to gain a prize worth all my toil and more.”

And he clasped her in his arms, and cried, “Where are these sea-gods, cruel and unjust, who doom fair maids to death? I carry the weapons of Immortals. Let them measure their strength against mine! But tell me, maiden, who you are, and what dark fate brought you here.”

And she answered, weeping,—

“I am the daughter of King Cepheus, and my mother is Cassiopœia of the beautiful tresses, and they called me Andromeda, as long as life was mine. And I stand bound here, hapless that I am, for the sea-monster’s

food, to atone for my mother's sin. For she boasted of me once that I was fairer than the Queen of the Fishes; so she in her wrath sent the sea-floods, and her brother the Fire King sent the earthquakes, and wasted all the land, and after the floods a monster bred of the slime, who devours all living things. And now he must devour me, guiltless though I am; for the priests say that nothing but my blood can atone for a sin which I never committed."



But Perseus laughed, and said, "A sea-monster! I have fought with worse than him. I would have faced Immortals for your sake; how much more a beast of the sea?"

Then Andromeda looked up at him, and new hope was kindled in her breast, so proud and fair did he stand, with one hand round her, and in the other the glittering sword. But she only sighed, and wept the more, and cried,—

"Why will you die, young as you are? Is there not death and sorrow enough in the world already? It is noble for me to die,

that I may save the lives of a whole people ; but you, better than them all, why should I slay you too ? Go you your way ; I must go mine."

But Perseus cried, "Not so ; for the lords of Olympus, whom I serve, are the friends of the heroes, and help them on to noble deeds. Led by them, I slew the Gorgon, the beautiful horror ; and not without them do I come hither, to slay this monster with that same Gorgon's head. Yet hide your eyes when I leave you, lest the sight of it freeze you to stone."

But the maiden answered nothing, for she could not believe his words. And then, suddenly looking up, she pointed to the sea, and shrieked,—

"There he comes with the sunrise, as they promised. Oh, go ! Is it not dreadful enough to be torn piecemeal, without having you to look on ? " And she tried to thrust him away.

But he said, "I go ; yet promise me one thing ere I go : that if I slay this beast you will be my wife. Promise me, and seal it with a kiss."

Then she lifted up her face, and kissed him; and Perseus laughed for joy, and flew upward, while Andromeda crouched trembling on the rock.

On came the great sea-monster, lazily breasting the ripple, and stopping at times by creek or headland to watch for the laughter of girls at their bleaching, or cattle pawing on the sand-hills, or boys bathing on the beach.

At last he saw Andromeda, and shot forward to take his prey. Then down from the height of the air fell Perseus like a shooting-star, down to the crests of the waves, while Andromeda hid her face as he shouted; and then there was silence for a while.

At last she looked up trembling, and saw Perseus springing toward her; and instead of the monster a long black rock, with the sea rippling quietly round it.

Who then so proud as Perseus, as he leapt back to the rock, and lifted his fair Andromeda in his arms, and flew with her to the cliff-top, as a falcon carries a dove?

Who so proud as Perseus, and who so joyful as all the Æthiop people? For they had stood watching the monster from the cliffs, wailing for the maiden's fate. And already a messenger had gone to Cepheus and Cassiopœia, where they sat in the innermost palace chambers, awaiting their daughter's end.

And they came, and all the city with them, to see the wonder, and received their daughter back again, as one alive from the dead.

Then Cepheus said, "Hero of the Hellens, stay here with me and be my son-in-law, and I will give you the half of my kingdom."

"I will be your son-in-law," said Perseus, "but of your kingdom I will have none, for I long after the pleasant land of Greece, and my mother, who waits for me at home."

Then Cepheus said, "You must not take my daughter away at once, for she is to us like one alive from the dead. Stay with us here a year, and after that you shall return with honour." So they went up to the



palace; and when they came in, there stood in the hall Phineus, the brother of Cepheus, chafing like a bear robbed of her whelps, and with him his sons, and his servants, and many an armed man; and he cried to Cepheus,—

“You shall not marry your daughter to this stranger, of whom no one knows even the name. Was not Andromeda betrothed to my son? And now she is safe again, has he not a right to claim her?”

But Perseus laughed and answered, “If your son is in want of a bride, let him save a maiden for himself. He left this one to die, and dead she is to him. I saved her alive, and alive she is to me, but to no one else. Ungrateful man! have I not saved your land, and the lives of your sons and daughters, and will you requite me thus? Go, or it will be worse for you!” But all the men-at-arms drew their swords and rushed on him like wild beasts.

Then he unveiled the Gorgon’s head, and said, “This has delivered my bride from one wild beast: it shall deliver her from many.”

And as he spoke Phineus and all his men-at-arms stopped short, and stiffened each man as he stood ; and before Perseus had drawn the goat-skin over the face again, they were all turned into stone.

Then Perseus bade the people bring levers and roll them out ; and what was done with them after that I cannot tell.

So they made a great wedding-feast, which lasted seven whole days, and who so happy as Perseus and Andromeda ?

But on the eighth night Perseus dreamed a dream ; and he saw standing beside him Pallas Athené, as he had seen her in Seriphos, seven long years before ; and she said,—

“Perseus, you have played the man, and see, you have your reward. Know now that the gods are just, and help him who helps himself. Now give me here the sword, and the sandals, and the hat of darkness, that I may give them back to their owners ; but the Gorgon’s head you shall keep a while, for you will need it in your land of Greece. Then you shall lay it up in my temple at Seriphos, that I may wear it on my shield



(1,423)

The death of Acrisius.

for ever. And as for this land, I have appeased the sea and the fire, and there shall be no more floods nor earthquakes.”

And Perseus rose to give her the sword, and the cap, and the sandals; but he woke, and his dream vanished away. And yet it was not altogether a dream; for the goat-skin with the head was in its place, but the sword, and the cap, and the sandals were gone, and Perseus never saw them more.

V. How Perseus came Home again.

AND when a year was ended Perseus hired men and cut down cedars, and built himself a noble galley; and painted its cheeks with vermilion, and pitched its sides with pitch; and in it he put Andromeda, and all her dowry of jewels, and rich shawls, and spices from the East; and great was the weeping when they rowed away.

So Perseus and the Phœnicians rowed to the westward till they came to Seriphos, his ancient home. Then he left his galley on

the beach, and went up as of old; and he embraced his mother, and Dictys, his good foster-father, and they wept over each other a long while, for it was seven years and more since they had met.

Then Perseus went out, and up to the hall of Polydectes; and underneath the goat-skin he bore the Gorgon's head. The harpers harped, and the revellers shouted, and the wine-cups rang merrily as they passed from hand to hand.

Then Perseus stood upon the threshold, and called to the king by name. But none of the guests knew Perseus, for he was changed by his long journey. He had gone out a boy, and he was come home a hero; his eye shone like an eagle's, and his beard was like a lion's beard, and he stood up like a wild bull in his pride.

But Polydectes the wicked knew him, and hardened his heart still more; and scornfully he called,—

“Ah, foundling! have you found it more easy to promise than to fulfil?”

“Those whom the gods help fulfil their

promises; and those who despise them reap as they have sown. Behold the Gorgon's head!"

Then Perseus drew back the goat-skin, and held aloft the Gorgon's head.

Pale grew Polydectes and his guests as they looked upon that dreadful face. They tried to rise up from their seats; but from their seats they never rose, but stiffened, each man where he sat, into a ring of cold gray stones.

Then Perseus turned and left them, and went down to his galley in the bay; and he gave the kingdom to good Dictys, and sailed away with his mother and his bride.

But Perseus rowed westward toward Argos, and landed, and went up to the town. And when he came he found that Acrisius, his grandfather, had fled. For Prætus, his wicked brother, had made war against him afresh.

Then Perseus called the Argives together, and told them who he was, and all the noble deeds which he had done. And all the nobles and the yeomen made him king, for they saw that he had a royal heart; and they

fought with him against Argos, and took it, and killed Prætus; and there were great rejoicings, because they had got a king from Father Zeus.

But Perseus' heart yearned after his grandfather, and he said, "Surely he is my flesh and blood, and he will love me now that I am come home with honour. I will go and find him, and bring him home, and we will reign together in peace."

So Perseus sailed away till he came to the town of Larissa, where the wild Pelasgi dwelt. And when he came there, all the people were in the fields, and there was feasting, and all kinds of games; for Teutamenes, their king, wished to honour Acrisius, because he was the king of a mighty land.

So Perseus did not tell his name, but went up to the games unknown; for he said, "If I carry away the prize in the games, my grandfather's heart will be softened toward me."

So he threw off his helmet and his cuirass, and all his clothes, and stood among the youths of Larissa, while all wondered at him, and said, "Who is this young stranger, who

stands like a wild bull in his pride? Surely he is one of the sons of the Immortals."

And when the games began they wondered yet more; for Perseus was the best man of all at running, and leaping, and wrestling, and throwing the javelin; and he won four crowns, and took them, and then he said to himself, "There is a fifth crown yet to be won: I will win that, and lay them all upon the knees of my grandfather."

And as he spoke he saw where Acrisius sat, by the side of Teutamenes the king, with his white beard flowing down upon his knees, and his royal staff in his hand; and Perseus wept when he looked at him, for his heart yearned after his kin, and he said, "Surely he is a kingly old man, yet he need not be ashamed of his grandson."



Then he took the quoits, and hurled them, five fathoms beyond all the rest; and the people shouted, "Further yet, brave stranger! There has never been such a hurler in this land."

Then Perseus put out all his strength, and hurled. But a gust of wind came from the sea, and carried the quoit aside, and far beyond all the rest; and it fell on the foot of Acrisius, and he swooned away with the pain.

Perseus shrieked, and ran up to him; but when they lifted the old man up he was dead, for his life was slow and feeble.

Then Perseus cast dust upon his head, and wept a long while for his grandfather. At last he rose, and called to all the people aloud, and said,—

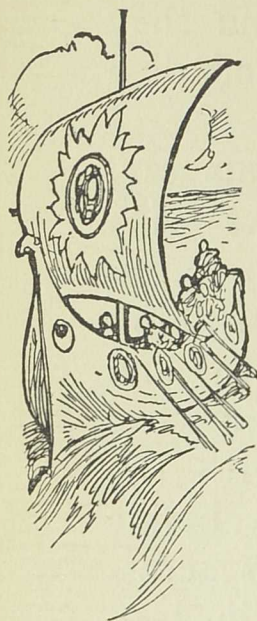
“The gods are true, and what they have ordained must be. I am Perseus, the grandson of this dead man, the far-famed slayer of the Gorgon.”

Then he told them how the prophecy had declared that he should kill his grandfather, and all the story of his life.

So they made a great mourning for Acrisius, and burnt him on a right rich pile; and Perseus went to the temple, and was purified from the guilt of the death, because he had done it unknowingly.

Then he went home to Argos, and reigned there well with fair Andromeda ; and they had four sons and three daughters, and died in a good old age.

And when they died, the ancients say, Athené took them up into the sky with Cepheus and Cassiopœia. And there on star-light nights you may see them shining still ; Cepheus with his kingly crown, and Cassiopœia in her ivory chair, plaiting her star-spangled tresses, and Perseus with the Gorgon's head, and fair Andromeda beside him, spreading her long white arms across the heaven, as she stood when chained to the stone for the monster. All night long they shine for a beacon to wandering sailors ; but all day they feast with the gods, on the still blue peaks of Olympus.



THE ARGONAUTS.

I. How the Centaur trained the Heroes on Pelion.

I HAVE told you of a hero who fought with wild beasts and with wild men ; but now I have a tale of heroes who sailed away into a distant land, to win themselves renown for ever, in the adventure of the Golden Fleece.

And what was that golden fleece? I do not know, nor care. The old Hellens said that it hung in Colchis, nailed to a beech-tree in the War-god's wood, and that it was the fleece of the wondrous ram who bore Phrixus and Helle across the Euxine Sea. For Phrixus and Helle were the children of Athamas, the Minuan king. And when a famine came upon the land, their cruel step-

mother, Ino, wished to kill them, that her own children might reign, and said that they must be sacrificed on an altar to turn away the anger of the gods.

So the poor children were brought to the altar, and the priest stood ready with his knife, when out of the clouds came the Golden Ram, and took them on his back and vanished.

The ram carried the two children far away over land and sea, till he came to a strait where Helle fell into the sea. So those narrow straits are called "Hellespont" after her; and they bear that name until this day.



Then the ram flew on with Phrixus to the north-east, across the sea which we call the Black Sea now. And at last he stopped at Colchis, and there Phrixus married the daughter of Aiëtes the king, and offered the ram in sacrifice; and Aiëtes nailed the ram's fleece to a beech, in the grove of the War-god.

And after a while Phrixus died, and was buried; but his spirit had no rest, for he was

buried far from his native land. So he came in dreams to the heroes of the Minuai, and called sadly by their beds, "Come and set my spirit free, that I may go home to my kinsfolk."

And they asked, "How shall we set your spirit free?"

"You must sail over the sea to Colchis, and bring home the golden fleece; and then my spirit will come back with it, and I shall sleep with my fathers and have rest."

He came thus, and called to them often; but when they woke they looked at each other, and said, "Who dare sail to Colchis, or bring home the golden fleece?" And in all the country none was brave enough to try it; for the man and the time were not come.

Phrixus had a cousin called Æson, who was king in Iolcos by the sea. And Æson had a step-brother named Pelias, who was fierce and lawless, and did many a fearful deed; and at last this step-brother drove out Æson, and took his kingdom to himself.

And Æson, when he was driven out, went sadly away out of the town, leading his little

son by the hand; and he said to himself, "I must hide the child in the mountains, or Pelias will surely kill him, because he is the heir."

So he went up from the sea across the valley, and across the torrent of Anauros, towards Pelion the ancient mountain, whose brows are white with snow.

He went up and up into the mountain, over marsh and crag and down, till the boy was tired and footsore, and Æson had to bear him in his arms, until he came to the mouth of a lonely cave, at the foot of a mighty cliff.

Around the cave's mouth grew all fair flowers and herbs, as if in a garden, ranged in order, each sort by itself; while from the cave came the sound of music, and a man's voice singing to the harp.

Then Æson put down the lad, and whispered,—

"Fear not, but go in, and whomsoever you shall find, lay your hands upon his knees and say, 'In the name of Zeus, the father of gods and men, I am your guest from this day forth.'"

Then the lad went in without trembling, for he too was a hero's son; but when he was within, he stopped in wonder to listen to that magic song.

And there he saw the singer lying upon bear-skins and fragrant boughs: Cheiron, the ancient centaur, the wisest of all things beneath the sky. Down to the waist he was a man, but below he was a noble horse; his white hair rolled down over his broad shoulders, and his white beard over his broad brown chest; and his eyes were wise and mild, and his forehead like a mountain-wall.



And in his hands he held a harp of gold, and struck it with a golden key; and as he struck he sang till his eyes glittered, and filled all the cave with light.

As he sang the boy listened wide-eyed, and forgot his errand in the song. And at the last old Cheiron was silent, and called the lad with a soft voice. And the lad ran trembling to him, and would have laid his hands upon his knees; but Cheiron smiled, and said, "Call hither your father Æson, for I know

you, and all that has befallen, and saw you both afar in the valley, even before you left the town."

Then Æson came in sadly, and Cheiron asked him, "Why came you not yourself to me?"

And Æson said,—

"I thought, Cheiron will pity the lad if he sees him come alone; and I wished to try whether he was fearless, and dare venture like a hero's son. But now I entreat you let the boy be your guest till better times, and train him among the sons of the heroes, that he may avenge his father's house."

Then Cheiron smiled, and drew the lad to him, and laid his hand upon his golden locks, and said, "Are you afraid of my horse's hoofs, fair boy, or will you be my pupil from this day?"

"I would gladly have horse's hoofs like you, if I could sing such songs as yours."

And Cheiron laughed, and said, "Sit here by me till sundown, when your playfellows will come home, and you shall learn like them to be a king, worthy to rule over gallant men."

Then he turned to Æson, and said, "Go back in peace, and bend before the storm like a prudent man. This boy shall not cross the Anauros again till he has become a glory to you and to your house."

Then Cheiron put the lyre into the boy's hands, and taught him how to play it, till the sun sank low behind the cliff, and a shout was heard outside. And then in came the sons of the heroes—Æneas, and Heracles, and many another mighty name.



And great Cheiron leapt up joyfully, and his hoofs made the cave resound, as they shouted, "Come out, Father Cheiron, come out and see our game." And one cried, "I have killed two deer;" and another, "I took a wild cat among the crags;" and Heracles dragged a wild goat after him by its horns, for he was as huge as a mountain crag.

And Cheiron praised them all, each according to his deserts.

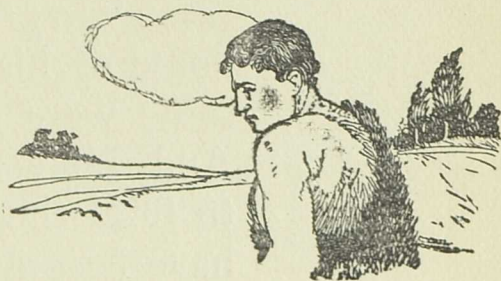
Then the lads brought in wood, and split it, and lighted a blazing fire; and others

skinned the deer and quartered them, and set them to roast before the fire ; and while the venison was cooking they bathed in the snow-torrent, and washed away the dust and sweat.

And then all ate till they could eat no more (for they had tasted nothing since the dawn), and drank of the clear spring water, for wine is not fit for growing lads. And when the remnants were put away, they all lay down upon the skins and leaves about the fire, and each took the lyre in turn, and sang and played with all his heart.

Then Cheiron took his lyre, and all the lads joined hands ; and as he played they danced to his measure, in and out, and round and round. There they danced hand in hand, till the night fell over land and sea, while the black glen shone with their broad white limbs and the gleam of their golden hair.

And the lad danced with them, delighted, and then slept a wholesome sleep, and rose at the dawn, and bathed in the torrent, and



became a schoolfellow to the heroes' sons, and forgot Iolcos, and his father, and all his former life.

But he grew strong, and brave, and cunning upon the pleasant downs of Pelion, in the keen, hungry mountain air. And he learnt to wrestle, and to box, and to hunt, and to play upon the harp; and next he learnt to ride, for old Cheiron used to mount him on his back; and he learnt the virtues of all herbs, and how to cure all wounds; and Cheiron called him Jason the healer, and that is his name until this day.



II. How Jason lost his Sandal in Anauros.

AND ten years came and went, and Jason was grown to be a mighty man. Some of his fellows were gone, and some were growing up by his side. And Heracles was gone to Thebes to fulfil those famous labours which have become a proverb among men.

And Æneas was gone home to Troy, and many a noble tale you will read of him, and of all the other gallant heroes, the scholars of Cheiron. And it happened on a day that Jason stood on the mountain, and looked north and south and east and west; and Cheiron stood by him and watched him, for he knew that the time was come.

And Jason looked south, and saw a pleasant land, with white-walled towns and farms, nestling along the shore of a land-locked bay, while the smoke rose blue among the trees; and he knew it for Iolcos by the sea.

Then he sighed, and asked, "Is it true what the heroes tell me—that I am heir of that fair land?"

"And what good would it be to you, Jason, if you were heir of that fair land?"

"I would take it and keep it."

"A strong man has taken it and kept it long. Are you stronger than Pelias the terrible?"

"I can try my strength with his," said Jason; but Cheiron sighed, and said,—

"You have many a danger to go through

before you rule in Iolcos by the sea—many a danger and many a woe, and strange troubles in strange lands, such as man never saw before.”

“The happier I,” said Jason, “to see what man never saw before.”

And Cheiron sighed again, and said, “Will you go to Iolcos by the sea? Then promise me two things before you go.”

Jason promised, and Cheiron answered, “Speak harshly to no soul whom you may meet, and stand by the word which you shall speak.”

Jason wondered why Cheiron asked this of him; but he knew that the Centaur was a prophet, and saw things long before they came. So he promised, and leapt down the mountain, to take his fortune like a man.

He went down through the arbutus thickets, and across the downs of thyme, till he came to the olives in the glen; and among the olives roared Anauros, all foaming with a summer flood.

And on the bank of Anauros sat a woman, all wrinkled, gray, and old; her head shook

palsied on her breast, and her hands shook palsied on her knees; and when she saw Jason, she spoke whining, "Who will carry me across the flood?"

Jason was bold and hasty, and was just going to leap into the flood; and yet he thought twice before he leapt, so loud roared the torrent down, all brown from the mountain rains, while underneath he could hear the boulders rumbling as they ground along the narrow channel, and shook the rocks on which he stood

But the old woman whined all the more. "I am weak and old, fair youth. For Hera's sake, carry me over the torrent."

And Jason was going to answer her scornfully, when Cheiron's words came to his mind.

So he said, "For Hera's sake, the Queen of the Immortals, I will carry you over the torrent, unless we both are drowned midway."

Then the old dame leapt upon his back as nimbly as a goat, and Jason staggered in, wondering, and the first step was up to his knees.



The second step was up to his waist, and his feet slipped about the stones; so he went on staggering and panting, while the old woman cried from off his back,—

“Fool, you have wet my mantle! Do you make game of poor old souls like me?”

Jason had half a mind to drop her, and let her get through the torrent by herself; but he said only, “Patience, mother; the best horse may stumble some day.”

At last he staggered to the shore, and set her down upon the bank. He lay panting awhile, and then leapt up to go upon his journey; but he cast one look at the old woman, for he thought, “She should thank me once at least.”

And as he looked, she grew fairer than all women, and taller than all men on earth; and her garments shone like the summer sea, and her jewels like the stars of heaven; and over her forehead was a veil, woven of the golden clouds of sunset; and through the veil she looked down on him with great soft heifer’s eyes, which filled all the glen with light.

And Jason fell upon his knees, and hid his face between his hands.

And she spoke, "I am Hera. As thou hast done to me, so will I do to you. Call on me in the hour of need, and try if the Immortals can forget."

And when Jason looked up, she rose from off the earth, like a pillar of tall white cloud, and floated away across the mountain peaks, toward Olympus, the holy hill.

Then a great fear fell on Jason, but after a while he grew light of heart; and he went down toward Iolcos, and as he walked he found that he had lost one of his sandals in the flood.

And as he went through the streets, the people came out to look at him, so tall and fair was he; but one old man called to him, "Fair lad, who are you, and what is your errand in the town?"

"My name, good father, is Jason, and my errand is to Pelias, your king; tell me, then, where his palace is."

But the old man started and grew pale, and said, "Do you not know the oracle, my

son, that you go so boldly through the town with but one sandal on?"

"I am a stranger here, and know of no oracle. But what of my one sandal? I lost the other in Anauros, while I was struggling with the flood."

Then the old man said, "I will tell you, lest you rush upon your ruin unawares. The oracle in Delphi has said that a man wearing one sandal should take the kingdom from Pelias. Therefore beware how you go up to his palace, for he is the fiercest and most cunning of all kings."

Then Jason laughed like a war-horse in his pride. "Good news, good father, both for you and me. For that very end I came into the town."

Then he strode on towards the palace of Pelias. And he stood in the doorway and cried, "Come out, come out, Pelias, and fight for your kingdom like a man."

Pelias came out wondering, and "Who are you, bold youth?" he cried.



“I am Jason, the son of Æson, the heir of all this land.”

Then Pelias blessed the heavens which had brought his nephew to him, never to leave him more. “For,” said he, “I have but three daughters, and no son to be my heir. You shall rule the kingdom after me, and marry whichsoever of my daughters you shall choose. But come in, come in, and feast.”

So he drew Jason in, and spoke to him so lovingly and feasted him so well that Jason’s anger passed; and after supper his three cousins came into the hall, and Jason thought that he should like well enough to have one of them for his wife.

But at last he said to Pelias, “Why do you look so sad, my uncle?”

Then Pelias sighed heavily, like a man who had to tell some dreadful story, and was afraid to begin; but at last he said,—

“For seven long years and more have I never known a quiet night; and no more will he who comes after me, till the golden fleece be brought home.”

Then he told Jason the story of the golden fleece. And his daughters came and told the same tale, and wept, and said, "Oh, who will bring home the golden fleece, that the spirit of Phrixus may rest, and that we may have rest also, whom he never lets sleep in peace?"

Jason sat awhile, sad and silent; for he had often heard of that golden fleece, but he looked on it as a thing hopeless, and impossible for any mortal man to win it.

But when Pelias saw him silent, he began to talk of other things, and courted Jason more and more, speaking to him as if he was certain to be his heir, and asking his advice about the kingdom; till Jason, who was young and simple, could not help saying to himself, "Surely he is not the dark man whom people call him. Yet why did he drive my father out?" And he asked Pelias boldly, "Men say that you are terrible, and a man of blood, but I find you a kind and hospitable man; and as you are to me, so will I be to you. Yet why did you drive my father out?"

Pelias smiled, and sighed, "Men have

slandered me in that, as in all things. Your father was growing old and weary, and he gave the kingdom up to me of his own will. You shall see him to-morrow and ask him, and he will tell you the same."

Jason's heart leapt in him when he heard that he was to see his father; and he believed all that Pelias said, forgetting that his father might not dare to tell the truth.

"One thing more there is," said Pelias, "on which I need your advice. There is one neighbour of mine whom I dread more than all men on earth. Can you give me a plan, Jason, by which I can rid myself of that man?"

After a while Jason answered, half laughing, "Were I you, I would send him to fetch that same golden fleece."

And at that a bitter smile came across Pelias' lips, and a flash of wicked joy into his eyes; and Jason saw it, and started, and he knew that he was taken in a trap.

But Pelias only answered gently, "My son, he shall be sent forthwith."

"You mean me?" cried Jason, starting up.

And he lifted his fist angrily, while Pelias stood up to him like a wolf at bay.

But after a moment Pelias spoke gently, "Why then so rash, my son? Had you bid me love the man of whom I spoke, and make him my son-in-law and heir, I would have obeyed you; and what if I obey you now, and send the man to win himself immortal fame?"

Jason saw that he was entrapped; but his second promise to Cheiron came into his mind, and he thought, "What if the centaur were a prophet in that also, and meant that I should win the fleece!" Then he cried aloud,—

"You have well spoken, cunning uncle of mine! I love glory, and I dare keep to my word. I will go and fetch this golden fleece. Promise me but this in return, and keep your word as I keep mine. Treat my father lovingly while I am gone, and give me up the kingdom for my own on the day that I bring back the golden fleece."

Then Pelias looked at him and almost loved him, in the midst of all his hate, and

said, "I promise, and I will perform. It will be no shame to give up my kingdom to the man who wins that fleece."

Then they swore a great oath between them, and afterwards both went in and lay down to sleep.

And on the morrow Jason went to Pelias, and said, "Give me a victim, that I may sacrifice to Hera." So he went up, and offered his sacrifice; and as he stood by the altar, Hera sent a thought into his mind; and he went back to Pelias, and said,—

"If you are indeed in earnest, give me two heralds, that they may go round to all the princes of the Minuai, who were pupils of the centaur with me, that we may fit out a ship together, and take what shall befall."

At that Pelias praised his wisdom, and hastened to send the heralds out, for he said in his heart, "Let all the princes go with him, and, like him, never return; for so I shall be lord of all the Minuai, and the greatest king in Hellas."



III. How they built the Ship "Argo."

So the heralds went out, and cried to all the heroes of the Minuai, "Who dare come to the adventure of the golden fleece?"

And Hera stirred the hearts of all the princes, and they came from all their valleys to the yellow sands of Pagasai. And first came Heracles the mighty, with his lion's skin and club, and behind him Hylas, his young squire, who bore his arrows and his bow; and Tiphys, the skilful steersman; and Butes, the fairest of all men; and Castor and Polydeuces, the twins, the sons of the magic swan; and Peleus, the father of Achilles, whose bride was silver-footed Thetis, the goddess of the sea; and Mopsus, the wise soothsayer, who knew the speech of birds; and Ancaios, who could read the stars, and knew all the circles of the heavens; and Argus, the famed shipbuilder, and many a hero more, in helmets of brass and gold with tall dyed horse-hair crests, and embroidered shirts of linen beneath their coats

of mail, and greaves of polished tin to guard their knees in fight; with each man his shield upon his shoulder, of many a fold of tough bull's hide, and his sword of tempered bronze in his silver-studded belt; and in his right hand a pair of lances, of the heavy white ash-staves.

So they came down to Iolcos, and all the city came out to meet them. And some said, "Never was such a gathering of the heroes since the Hellens conquered the land." But the women sighed over them, and whispered, "Alas! they are all going to their death!"

Then they felled the pines on Pelion, and Argus taught them to build a galley, the first long ship which ever sailed the seas. They pierced her for fifty oars—an oar for each hero of the crew—and pitched her with coal-black pitch, and painted her bows with vermilion; and they named her *Argo* after Argus, and worked at her all day long. And at night Pelias feasted them like a king, and they slept in his palace-porch.

But Jason went away to the northward till he found Orpheus, the prince of minstrels.

And he asked him, "Will you leave your mountains, Orpheus, my fellow-scholar in old times, and sail with the heroes of the Minuiai, and bring home the golden fleece, and charm for us all men and all monsters with your magic harp and song?"

Then Orpheus sighed, "Have I not had enough of toil and of weary wandering far and wide? In vain is the skill and the voice which my goddess mother gave me; in vain I went down to the dead, and charmed all the kings of Hades, to win back Eurydice, my bride. For I won her, my beloved, and lost her again the same day, and wandered far away in my madness, while I charmed in vain the hearts of men, and the savage forest beasts, and the trees and the lifeless stones, with my magic harp and song, giving rest, but finding none.

"But at last Calliope, my mother, delivered me, and brought me home in peace; and I dwell here in the cave alone, among the savage tribes, softening their wild hearts with music and the gentle laws of Zeus. And now I must



go out again, to the ends of all the earth, far away into the misty darkness, to the last wave of the Eastern Sea.”

Then Orpheus rose up sighing, and took his harp, and went over Strymon. And he led Jason to the south-west to Dodona, the town of Zeus, where it stood in the darkness of the ancient oak wood, beneath the mountain of the hundred springs. And he led him to the holy oak, bade him cut down a bough, and sacrifice to Hera and to Zeus ; and they took the bough and came to Iolcos, and nailed it to the beak-head of the ship.

And at last the ship was finished, and they tried to launch her down the beach ; but she was too heavy for them to move her, and her keel sank deep into the sand. Then all the heroes looked at each other blushing ; but Jason spoke, and said, “ Let us ask the magic bough ; perhaps it can help us in our need.”

Then a voice came from the bough, and Jason heard the words it said, and bade Orpheus play upon the harp, while the heroes waited round, holding the pine-trunk rollers to help her toward the sea.

Then Orpheus took his harp, and began his magic song—"How sweet it is to ride upon the surges, and to leap from wave to wave, while the wind sings cheerful in the cordage, and the oars flash fast among the foam ! How sweet it is to roam across the ocean, and see new towns and wondrous lands, and to come home laden with treasure, and to win undying fame !"

And the good ship *Argo* heard him, and longed to be away and out at sea ; till she stirred in every timber, and leapt up from the sand upon the rollers, and plunged onward like a gallant horse ; and the heroes fed her path with pine-trunks, till she rushed into the whispering sea.

Then they stored her well with food and water, and pulled the ladder up on board, and settled themselves each man to his oar, and kept time to Orpheus' harp ; and away across the bay they rowed southward, while the people lined the cliffs ; and the women wept, while the men shouted, at the starting of that gallant crew.

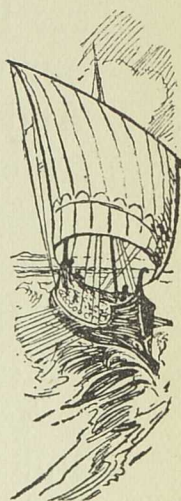


IV. How the Argonauts sailed to Colchis.

ERE long the heroes came to Ephetai, across the bay, and waited for the south-west wind, and chose themselves a captain from their crew : and all called for Heracles, because he was the strongest and most huge ; but Heracles refused, and called for Jason, because he was the wisest of them all.

So Jason was chosen captain ; and they all vowed before the sun, and the night, and the blue-haired sea who shakes the land, to stand by Jason faithfully in the adventure of the golden fleece.

Then they went to their ship and sailed eastward, like men who have a work to do. And they sailed to the northward toward Pelion, up the long Magnesian shore. And their hearts yearned for the dear old mountain, as they thought of pleasant days gone by, and of the sports of their boyhood, and their hunting, and their schooling in the cave beneath the cliff. And at last Peleus spoke,



“Let us land here, friends, and climb the dear old hill once more. We are going on a fearful journey ; who knows if we shall see Pelion again ? Let us go up to Cheiron, our master, and ask his blessing ere we start. And I have a boy, too, with him, whom he trains as he trained me once.”

So the helmsman steered them to the shore under the crags of Pelion ; and they went up through the dark pine-forests towards the centaur’s cave.

Then Cheiron leapt up and welcomed them, and kissed them every one, and set a feast before them ; and young Achilles served them, and carried the golden goblet round. And after supper all the heroes clapped their hands, and called on Orpheus to sing ; but he refused, and said, “How can I, who am the younger, sing before our ancient host ?” So they called on Cheiron to sing, and Achilles brought him his harp ; and he began a wondrous song.

Then Orpheus took the lyre, and sang of the making of the wondrous World, and how all things sprang from Love, who could not live alone in the Abyss. And as

he sang, his voice rose from the cave, above the crags, and through the tree-tops, and the glens of oak and pine. And the trees bowed their heads when they heard it, and the gray rocks cracked and rang, and the forest beasts crept near to listen, and the birds forsook their nests and hovered round. And old Cheiron clapt his hands together, and beat his hoofs upon the ground, for wonder at that magic song.

Then Peleus kissed his boy, and wept over him, and they went down to the ship ; and Cheiron came down with them, weeping, and kissed them one by one, and blest them, and promised to them great renown. And the heroes wept when they left him, till their great hearts could weep no more ; for he was kind and just and pious, and wiser than all beasts and men.

So they rowed on over the long swell of the sea till they met with Cyzicus, ruling in Asia over the Dolions, who welcomed the heroes, feasted them, and stored their ship with corn and wine, and cloaks and rugs, and shirts, of which no doubt they stood in need.

But at night, while they lay asleep, came down on them terrible men, who lived with the bears in the mountains, like giants in shape, who fought with young firs and pines. But Heracles killed them all with his deadly poisoned arrows; but among them, in the darkness, he slew Cyzicus, the kindly prince.



Then they got to their ship and to their oars, and Tiphys bade them cast off the hawsers and go to sea. But as he spoke a whirlwind came, and spun the *Argo* round, and twisted the hawsers together, so that no man could loose them. Then Jason went forward, and asked counsel of the magic bough.

Then the magic bough spoke, and answered, "This is because you have slain Cyzicus, your friend. You must appease his soul, or you will never leave this shore."

Jason went back sadly, and told the heroes what he had heard. And they leapt on shore and searched till they found the body among

the corpses of those monstrous beasts. And they wept over their kind host, and laid him on a fair bed, and heaped a huge mound over him, and Orpheus sang a magic song to him, that his spirit might have rest ; and so the soul of good Cyzicus was appeased, and the heroes went on their way in peace.

Then they rowed away along the shore till they found a pleasant bay. And there they ran the ship upon the yellow sand, and went ashore to sport and rest.

And there Heracles went away into the woods, bow in hand, to hunt wild deer ; and Hylas, the fair boy, slipped away after him, and followed him by stealth, until he lost himself among the glens, and sat down weary to rest himself by the side of a lake ; and there the water nymphs came up to look at him, and loved him, and carried him down under the lake to be their playfellow, for ever happy and young.

And Heracles sought for him in vain, shouting his name till all the



mountains rang ; but Hylas never heard him, far down under the sparkling lake. So while Heracles wandered searching for him, a fair breeze sprang up, and Heracles was nowhere to be found ; and the *Argo* sailed away, and Heracles was left behind.

And the Minuai went on up the Bosphorus, till they came to the city of Phineus, the fierce king.

And they went up from the shore toward the city, through forests white with snow ; and Phineus came out to meet them with a lean and woeful face, and said, “ Welcome, gallant heroes, to the land of cold and misery ; yet I will feast you as best I can.”

And he led them in, and set meat before them ; but before they could put their hands to their mouths, down came two fearful monsters, the like of whom men never saw ; for they had the faces and the hair of fair maidens, but the wings and claws of hawks ; and they snatched the meat from off the table, and flew shrieking out above the roofs.

Then Phineus beat his breast and cried, “ These are the Harpies, whose names are the

Whirlwind and the Swift, and they rob us night and day, sweep away our food from off our tables, so that we starve in spite of all our wealth."

Then up rose Zetes and Calais, the winged sons of the North-wind, and said, "Do you not know us, Phineus, and these wings which grow upon our backs?" And Phineus hid his face in terror; but he answered not a word.

"Because you have been a traitor, Phineus, the Harpies haunt you night and day. Where is Cleopatra our sister, your wife, whom you keep in prison? and where are her two children, whom you blinded in your rage, and cast out upon the rocks? Swear to us that you will right our sister, and then we will drive the whirlwind maidens to the south; but if not, we will put out your eyes, as you put out the eyes of your own sons."

Then Phineus swore an oath to do as they wished; and Jason took those two poor children, and cured their eyes with magic herbs.

But Zetes and Calais rose up sadly and said, "Farewell now, heroes all. Our day is come

at last, in which we must hunt the whirlwinds over land and sea for ever ; and if we catch them they die, and if not, we die ourselves."

At that all the heroes wept ; but the two young men sprang up, and aloft into the air after the Harpies, and the battle of the winds began.

The heroes trembled in silence as they heard the shrieking of the blasts ; while the palace rocked and all the city, and the Bosphorus boiled white with foam, and the clouds were dashed against the cliffs.

But at last the battle ended, and the Harpies fled screaming toward the south, and the sons of the North-wind rushed after them, and brought clear sunshine where they passed. For many a league they followed them away to the south-west across Hellas. But what became of Zetes and Calais I know not, for the heroes never saw them again.

But the Argonauts went eastward, and out into the open sea, which we now call the Black Sea, but it was called the Euxine then. All feared that dreadful sea, and its rocks, and shoals, and fogs, and bitter, freezing storms.

And first Orpheus spoke, and warned them, "We shall come now to the wandering blue rocks ; my mother warned me of them."

And soon they saw the blue rocks shining like spires and castles of glass, while an ice-cold wind blew from them. And as they neared they could see them heaving, crashing, and grinding together, till the roar went up to heaven.

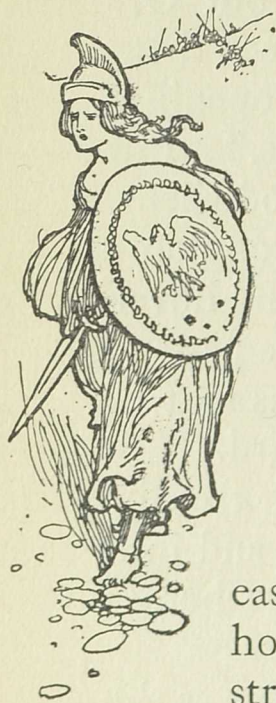
The heroes' hearts sank within them, and they lay upon their oars in fear ; but Orpheus called to the helmsman, "Between them we must pass ; so look ahead for an opening, and be brave, for Hera is with us." But Tiphys, the cunning helmsman, stood silent, clenching his teeth, till he saw a heron come flying mast-high towards the rocks, and hover awhile before them, as if looking for a passage through. Then he cried, "Hera has sent us a pilot ; let us follow the cunning bird."

Then the heron flapped to and fro for a moment, till he saw a hidden gap, and into it he rushed like an arrow, while the heroes watched what would befall.

And the blue rocks clashed together as the

bird fled swiftly through ; but they struck only a feather from his tail, and then rebounded apart at the shock.

Then Tiphys cheered the heroes, and they shouted ; and the oars bent beneath their strokes as they rushed between those toppling ice-craggs and the cold blue lips of death, and ere the rocks could meet again they had passed them, and were safe out in the open sea.



And they went on past many a mighty river's mouth, and past many a barbarous tribe, and the cities of the Amazons, the warlike women. And at day-dawn they looked eastward, and midway between the sea and the sky they saw white snow-peaks bright above the clouds. And they knew that they were come to Caucasus, at the end of all the earth.

And they rowed three days to the eastward while Caucasus rose higher hour by hour, till they saw the dark stream of Phasis rushing headlong to

the sea, and, shining above the tree-tops, the golden roofs of King Aiëtes, the child of the Sun.

Then out spoke the helmsman, "We are come to our goal at last, for there are the roofs of Aiëtes, and the woods where all poisons grow; but who can tell us where among them is hid the golden fleece? Many a toil must we bear ere we find it, and bring it home to Greece."

But Jason cheered the heroes, for his heart was high and bold; and he said, "I will go alone up to Aiëtes, though he be the child of the Sun, and win him with soft words." But the Minuai would not stay behind, so they rowed boldly up the stream.

And a dream came to Aiëtes, and filled his heart with fear. He thought he saw a shining star, which fell into his daughter's lap; and that Medeia, his daughter, took it gladly, and carried it to the river-side, and cast it in, and there the whirling river bore it down, and out into the Euxine Sea.

Then he leapt up in fear, and bade his servants bring his chariot, that he might go

down to the river-side and appease the nymphs, and the heroes whose spirits haunt the bank. So he went down in his golden chariot, and his daughters by his side, Medeia, the fair witch-maiden, and Chalciope, who had been Phrixus' wife, and behind him a crowd of servants and soldiers, for he was a rich and mighty prince.

And as he drove down by the reedy river he saw *Argo* sliding up beneath the bank, and many a hero in her, like Immortals for beauty and for strength. But Jason was the noblest of all.

And when they came near together and looked into each other's eyes the heroes were awed before Aiëtes as he shone in his chariot, for his robes were of rich gold tissue, and the rays of his diadem flashed fire ; and in his hand he bore a jewelled sceptre, which glittered like the stars ; and sternly he looked at them under his brows, and sternly he spoke and loud,—

“ Who are you, and what want you here ? Do you take no account of my rule, or of my people, who know well how to face an invader ? ”

And the heroes sat silent awhile before the face of that ancient king. But Jason shouted loudly in answer, "We come not to plunder and to ravage, or carry away slaves from your land ; but my uncle, Pelias the Minuan king, he it is who has sent me to bring home the golden fleece. And these too, my bold comrades, they are no nameless men ; for some are the sons of Immortals, and some of heroes far renowned. And we too know well how to give blows and to take ; yet we wish to be guests at your table : it will be better so for both."

Then Aiëtes' eyes flashed fire as he heard, but he crushed his anger down in his breast, and spoke mildly.

"If you will fight for the fleece with my Colchians, then many a man must die. But do you indeed expect to win from me the fleece in fight? You will find it better far to choose the best man among you, and let him fulfil the labours which I demand. Then I will give him the golden fleece for a prize and a glory to you all."

So saying, he turned his horses and drove

back in silence to the town. And the Minuai sat silent with sorrow, and longed for Heracles and his strength.

But Chalciope, Phrixus' widow, went weeping to the town; for she remembered her Minuan husband, and all the pleasures of her youth, while she watched the fair faces of his kinsmen, and their long locks of golden hair. And she whispered to Medeia, her sister, "Why should all these brave men die? Why does not my father give them up the fleece, that my husband's spirit may have rest?"

And Medeia's heart pitied the heroes, and Jason most of all; and she answered, "Our father is stern and terrible, and who can win the golden fleece?" But Chalciope said, "These men are not like our men; there is nothing which they cannot dare nor do."

And Medeia thought of Jason and his brave countenance, and said, "If there was one among them who knew no fear, I could show him how to win the fleece."

So in the dusk of evening they went



down to the river-side. And Argus the boy crept forward, among the beds of reeds, till he came where the heroes were sleeping, while Jason kept ward on shore. And the boy came to Jason and said,—

“I am the son of Phrixus, your cousin; and my mother waits for you, to talk about the golden fleece.”

Then Jason went boldly with the boy, and found the two princesses standing; and when Chalciopé saw him she wept, and took his hands, and cried,—

“O cousin of my beloved, go home before you die!”

“You know not,” said Medeia, “what he must do who would win the fleece. He must tame the two brazen-footed bulls, who breathe devouring flame; and with them he must plough ere nightfall four acres in the field of Ares; and he must sow them with serpents’ teeth, of which each tooth springs up into an armed man. Then he must fight with all those warriors; and little will it profit him to conquer them, for the fleece is guarded by a serpent, more huge than any mountain

pine ; and over his body you must step if you would reach the golden fleece."

Then Jason laughed bitterly. "Unjustly is that fleece kept here, and unjustly shall I die in my youth, for I will attempt it ere another sun be set."

Then Medeia trembled, and said, "No mortal man can reach that fleece unless I guide him through. For round it is a wall full nine ells high, with lofty towers and buttresses, and mighty gates of threefold brass. And over the gateway sits Brimo, the wild witch-huntress of the woods, brandishing a pine-torch in her hands, while her mad hounds howl around. No man dare meet her or look on her, but only I her priestess, and she watches far and wide lest any stranger should come near."

"No wall so high," said Jason, "but it may be climbed at last, and no wood so thick but it may be crawled through ; no serpent so wary but he may be charmed, or witch-queen so fierce but spells may soothe her ; and I may yet win the golden fleece, if a wise maiden help bold men."



(1,423)

Jason and the brazen bulls.

And he looked at Medeia cunningly, till she blushed and trembled, and said,—

“Who can face the fire of the bulls’ breath, and fight ten thousand armed men?”

“He whom you help,” said Jason, flattering her, “for your fame is spread over all the earth. Are you not the queen of all enchantresses?”

“If it must be so—for why should you die?” answered the maiden—“I have an ointment here; I made it from the magic ice-flower. Anoint yourself with that, and you shall have in you seven men’s strength; and anoint your shield with it, and neither fire nor sword can harm you.

“But what you begin you must end before sunset, for its virtue lasts only one day. And anoint your helmet with it before you sow the serpents’ teeth; and when the sons of earth spring up, cast your helmet among their ranks, and the deadly crop of the War-god’s field will mow itself, and perish.”

Then Jason fell on his knees before her and kissed her hands; and she gave him the vase of ointment, and fled trembling through

the reeds. And Jason told his comrades what had happened, and showed them the box of ointment.

And at sunrise Jason went and bathed, and anointed himself from head to foot, and his shield, and his helmet, and his weapons, and bade his comrades try the spell. So they tried to bend his lance, but it stood like an iron bar. Then they hurled their lances at his shield, but the spear-points turned like lead; and Caineus tried to throw him, but he never stirred a foot; and Polydeuces struck him with his fist a blow which would have killed an ox, but Jason only smiled.

So he sent up to tell Aiëtes that he was ready for the fight; and they went up and stood in Aiëtes' hall, while he grew pale with rage.

"Fulfil your promise to us," cried they. "Give us the serpents' teeth, and let loose the fiery bulls; for we have a champion who can win the golden fleece."

And Aiëtes bit his lips, for he fancied that they had fled away by night; but he gave them the serpents' teeth.

Then he called for his chariot and his horses, and sent heralds through all the town; and all the people went out with him to the dreadful War-god's field.

And there Aiëtes sat upon his throne, with his warriors on each hand. And the people and the women crowded to every window and bank and wall.

And Chalciope was there, and Argus, trembling, and Medeia, wrapped closely in her veil; but Aiëtes did not know that she was muttering cunning spells between her lips.

Then Jason cried, "Fulfil your promise, and let your fiery bulls come forth."

Then Aiëtes bade open the gates, and the magic bulls leapt out. Their brazen hoofs rang upon the ground, and their nostrils sent out sheets of flame, as they rushed with lowered heads upon Jason; but he never flinched a step.

Then Jason sprang upon the nearest and seized him by the horn; and up and down they wrestled, till the bull fell grovelling on his knees. So both the bulls were tamed



and yoked; and Jason ploughed the sacred field.

Then he took the serpents' teeth and sowed them, and waited what would befall. And every furrow heaved and bubbled, and out of every clod arose a man. Out of the earth they rose by thousands, each clad from head to foot in steel, and drew their swords and rushed on Jason, where he stood in the midst alone.

Then Jason snatched off his helmet, and hurled it into the thickest of the throng. And blind madness came upon them, suspicion, hate, and fear; and one cried to his fellow, "Thou didst strike me!" and another, "Thou art Jason; thou shalt die!"

So each turned his hand against the rest; and they fought till they all lay dead upon the ground. Then the magic furrows opened, and the kind earth took them home into her breast; and Jason's work was done.

Then the Minuai rose and shouted. And Jason cried, "Lead me to the fleece this moment, before the sun goes down."

But Aiëtes thought, "Who is this who is proof against all magic? He may kill the

serpent yet." So he delayed, and sat taking counsel till the sun went down. Then he bade a herald cry, "Every man to his home for to-night. To-morrow we will speak about the golden fleece."

Then he turned and looked at Medeia. "This is your doing, false witch-maid!"

Medeia shrank and trembled; and Aiëtes knew that she was guilty, and whispered, "If they win the fleece, you die!"

But the Minuai marched toward their ship, growling like lions cheated of their prey; for they saw that Aiëtes meant to mock them, and to cheat them out of all their toil.

And after awhile Medeia came to them, trembling, and wept a long while before she spoke. And at last she said,—

"My end is come, and I must die; for my father has found out that I have helped you. He will not harm you, because you have been his guests. Go then, go, and remember poor Medeia when you are far away across the sea." But all the heroes cried,—

"If you die, we die with you; for with-

out you we cannot win the fleece, and home we will not go without it."

"You need not die," said Jason. "Flee home with us across the sea. Show us first how to win the fleece—for you can do it—and you shall be my queen."

Medeia wept, and shuddered, and hid her face in her hands; for her heart yearned after her sisters and her playfellows, and the home where she was brought up as a child. But at last she looked up at Jason, and spoke between her sobs,—

"The lot is cast, and I must endure it. Bring up your ship to the wood-side, and moor her there against the bank; and let Jason come up at midnight, and one brave comrade with him, and meet me beneath the wall."

Then all the heroes cried together, "I will go!" "and I!" "and I!" But Medeia calmed them, and said, "Orpheus shall go with Jason, and bring his magic harp." And Orpheus laughed for joy, and clapped his hands, because the choice had fallen on him.

So at midnight they went up the bank,

and found Medeia; and beside came Absyrtus, her young brother, leading a yearling lamb.

Then Medeia brought them to a thicket beside the War-god's gate; and there she bade Jason dig a ditch, and kill the lamb, and leave it there, and strew on it magic herbs and honey from the honeycomb.

Then sprang up through the earth Brimo, the wild witch-huntress, while her mad hounds howled around. And she leapt into the ditch with her hounds, and they ate and drank their fill, while Jason and Orpheus trembled, and Medeia hid her eyes.

And at last the witch-queen vanished; and the bars of the gates fell down, and the brazen doors flew wide, and Medeia and the heroes ran forward and hurried through the poison wood, guided by the gleam of the golden fleece, until they saw it hanging on one vast tree in the midst. And Jason would have sprung to seize it; but Medeia held him back, and pointed, shuddering, to the tree-foot, where the mighty serpent lay, coiled in and out among the roots, with a body like a mountain pine.



And when he saw them coming he lifted up his head, and watched them with his small bright eyes, and flashed his forked tongue, and roared like the fire among the woodlands, till the forest tossed and groaned.

But Medeia called gently to him, and he stretched out his long spotted neck, and licked her hand, and looked up in her face, as if to ask for food. Then she made a sign to Orpheus, and he began his magic song.

And as he sung, the forest grew calm again, and the leaves on every tree hung still; and the serpent's head sank down, and his brazen coils grew limp, and his glittering eyes closed lazily, till he breathed as gently as a child.

Then Jason leapt forward warily, and stept across that mighty snake, and tore the fleece from off the tree-trunk; and the four rushed down the garden, to the bank where the *Argo* lay.

There was a silence for a moment, while Jason held the golden fleece on high. Then he cried, "Go now, good



Argo, swift and steady, if ever you would see Pelion more."

And she went, as the heroes drove her, grim and silent all, with muffled oars, till the pine-wood bent like willow in their hands, and stout *Argo* groaned beneath their strokes.

On and on, beneath the dewy darkness, they fled swiftly down the swirling stream, till they heard the merry music of the surge upon the bar, as it tumbled in the moonlight all alone.

Into the surge they rushed, and *Argo* leapt the breakers like a horse, till the heroes stopped all panting, each man upon his oar, as she slid into the still, broad sea.

Then Orpheus took his harp and sang a pæan, till the heroes' hearts rose high again; and they rowed on stoutly and steadfastly, away into the darkness of the West.

*V. How the Argonauts were driven into
the Unknown Sea.*

So they fled away in haste to the westward; but Aiëtes manned his fleet and followed

them. And Lynceus saw him coming, while he was still many a mile away, and cried, "I see a hundred ships, like a flock of white swans, far in the east." And at that they rowed hard, like heroes; but the ships came nearer every hour.

Then Medeia, the dark witch-maiden, laid a cruel and a cunning plot; for she killed Absyrtus, her young brother, and cast him into the sea, and said, "Ere my father can take up his corpse and bury it, he must wait long and be left far behind."

And when Aiëtes came to the place he saw the floating corpse; and he stopped a long while, and bewailed his son, and took him up, and went home. But he sent on his sailors toward the westward, and bound them by a mighty curse—"Bring back to me that dark witch-woman, that she may die a dreadful death."

So the Argonauts escaped for that time; but Father Zeus saw that foul crime, and out of the heavens he sent a storm, and swept the ship far from her course. And at last she struck on a shoal, and the waves

rolled over her and through her, and the heroes lost all hope of life.

Then Jason cried to Hera, "Fair queen, who hast befriended us till now, why hast thou left us in our misery, to die here among unknown seas?"

Then spoke the magic bough which stood upon the *Argo's* beak, "Because Father Zeus is angry, all this has fallen on you; for a cruel crime has been done on board, and the sacred ship is foul with blood."



At that some of the heroes cried, "Medeia is the murderess. Let the witch-woman bear her sin, and die!" And they seized Medeia, to hurl her into the sea; but the magic bough spoke again, "Let her live, for you need her still. She must show you the way to her sister Circe, who lives among the islands of the West. To her you must sail, a weary way, and she shall cleanse you from your guilt."

Then all the heroes wept aloud when they heard the sentence of the oak; for they knew that a dark journey lay before them,

and years of bitter toil. And some upbraided the dark witch-woman, and some said, "Nay, we are her debtors still ; without her we should never have won the fleece."

And now the sea grew calmer, and the sun shone out once more, and the heroes thrust the ship off the sandbank, and rowed forward into the wastes of the unknown sea.

Whither they went I cannot tell, nor how they came to Circe's isle, the fairy island of the West. But when they came there Jason bid them land, and seek about for any sign of living man. And as they went inland Circe met them, coming down toward the ship ; and they trembled when they saw her, for her hair, and face, and robes shone like flame.

And she came and looked at Medeia ; and Medeia hid her face beneath her veil.

And Circe cried, "Ah, wretched girl, where is your aged father, and the brother whom you killed ? Little do I expect you to return in safety with these strangers whom you love. I will send you food and wine ; but your ship must not stay here, for it is foul with sin."

And the heroes prayed her, but in vain, and cried, "Cleans us from our guilt!" But she sent them away, and said, "Go on to Malea, and there you may be cleansed, and return home."

Then a fair wind rose, and they sailed eastward till they came to the Pillars of Hercules and the Mediterranean Sea. And thence they sailed on till they came to a flowery island, upon a still, bright summer's eve. And as they neared it, they heard sweet songs upon the shore. But when Medeia heard it, she started, and cried, "Beware, all heroes, for these are the rocks of the Sirens. Those who listen to that song are lost."

Then Orpheus spoke, "Let them match their song against mine!" So he caught up his lyre, and stood upon the poop, and began his magic song.

And now they could see the Sirens on the flowery isle: three fair maidens sitting on the beach, among beds of crimson poppies and golden asphodel. Slowly they sung, and sleepily, with silver voices, mild and clear,

which stole over the golden waters, and into the hearts of all the heroes, in spite of Orpheus' song.

And all things stayed around and listened : the gulls sat in white lines along the rocks ;



on the beach great seals lay basking, and kept time with lazy heads ; while silver shoals of fish came up to hearken, and whispered as they broke the shining calm.

And as the heroes listened, the oars fell from their hands, and their heads drooped on their breasts, and they closed their heavy eyes ; and they dreamed of bright, still gardens, and of slumbers under murmuring pines, till all their toil seemed foolishness, and they thought of their renown no more.

Then one lifted his head suddenly, and

cried, "What use in wandering for ever? Let us stay here and rest awhile." And another, "Let us row to the shore, and hear the words they sing."

And Butes, the fairest of all mortal men, leapt out and swam toward the shore, crying, "I come, I come, fair maidens, to live and die here, listening to your song."

Then Medeia clapped her hands together, and cried, "Sing louder, Orpheus, sing a bolder strain; wake up these hapless sluggards, or none of them will see the land of Hellas more."

Then Orpheus lifted his harp, and crashed his cunning hand across the strings. And he sung the song of Perseus, how the gods led him over land and sea, and how he slew the loathly Gorgon, and won himself a peerless bride.

So Orpheus sang, and the Sirens, answering each other across the golden sea, till Orpheus' voice drowned the Sirens', and the heroes caught their oars again.

And they cried, "We will be men like Perseus, and we will dare and suffer to the last."

But Butes swam to the shore, and knelt down before the Sirens, and cried, "Sing on! sing on!" But he could say no more, for a charmed sleep came over him, and a pleasant humming in his ears; and he sank all along upon the pebbles.

Then slowly rose up those three fair sisters, with a cruel smile upon their lips; and slowly they crept down towards him, like leopards who creep upon their prey; and their hands were like the talons of eagles as they stept across the bones of their victims to enjoy their cruel feast.

But fairest Aphrodite saw him from the highest Idalian peak, and she pitied his youth and his beauty, and leapt up from her golden throne; and like a falling star she cleft the sky, and left a trail of glittering light, till she stooped to the Isle of the Sirens, and snatched their prey from their claws.

But when the Sirens saw that they were conquered, they shrieked for envy and rage, and leapt from the beach into the sea, and were changed into rocks until this day.

After that they rowed on steadily, till they saw a long high island, and a great city on the shore. And on either side they saw a harbour, with a narrow mouth, but wide within.

So they rowed into the harbour. And the quays were full of people, going to and fro with merchandise among the crowd of ships. And the heroes' hearts were humbled, and they looked at each other and said, "We thought ourselves a gallant crew when we sailed from Iolcos by the sea; but how small we look before this city, like an ant before a hive of bees."

Then the sailors hailed them roughly from the quay, "What men are you?—we want no strangers here, nor pirates. We keep our business to ourselves."

But Jason answered gently, "Surely you are the masters of the sea; and we are but poor wandering mariners, worn out with thirst and toil. Give us food and water, and we will go on our voyage in peace."

Then the sailors laughed, and answered, "Stranger, you are no fool; you talk like an

honest man, and you shall find us honest too. We are the masters of the sea; but come ashore to us, and you shall have the best that we can give."

So they limped ashore, all stiff and weary, with long ragged beards and sunburnt cheeks, and garments torn and weather-stained, while the sailors laughed at them. And one said, "These fellows are but raw sailors; they look as if they had been sea-sick all the day."

At that Idas the rash would have struck them; but Jason held him back, till one of the merchant kings spoke to them, a tall and stately man.

"Do not be angry, strangers; the sailor boys must have their jest. But we will treat you justly and kindly, for strangers and poor men come from God. Come up with me to the palace of the king, and we will feast you well and heartily; and after that you shall tell us your name."

But Medeia hung back, and trembled, and whispered in Jason's ear, "We are betrayed, and are going to our ruin, for I see my countrymen among the crowd."

“It is too late to turn,” said Jason. And he spoke to the merchant king. “What country is this, good sir; and what is this new-built town?”

“This is the land of the Phæaces, beloved by all the Immortals; for they come hither and feast like friends with us, and sit by our side in the hall; and Alcinous rules us, and Arete, the wisest of queens.”

And the Minuai went on in silence through clean white marble streets, till they came to the hall of Alcinous. The lofty palace shone aloft in the sun, with walls of plated brass, from the threshold to the innermost chamber, and the doors were of silver and gold. And on each side of the doorway sat living dogs of gold, who never grew old or died. And within, against the walls, stood thrones on either side, down the whole length of the hall, strewn with rich glossy shawls; and on them the merchant kings of those crafty sea-roving Phæaces sat eating and drinking in pride, and feasting there all the year round.

And boys of molten gold stood each on a polished altar, and held torches in their

hands, to give light all night to the guests. And round the house sat fifty maid-servants, some grinding the meal in the mill, some turning the spindle, some weaving at the loom, while their hands twinkled as they passed the shuttle, like quivering aspen leaves.

And outside before the palace a great garden was walled round, filled full of stately fruit-trees—gray olives and sweet figs, and pomegranates, pears, and apples, which bore the whole year round. And at the farther end gay flower-beds bloomed through all seasons of the year; and two fair fountains rose, and ran, one through the garden grounds, and one beneath the palace gate, to water all the town. Such noble gifts the heavens had given to Alcinous the wise.



So they went in, and saw him sitting on his throne, with his golden sceptre by him, in garments stiff with gold; and beside him stood Arete, his wise and lovely queen, and leaned against a pillar as she spun her golden threads.

Then Alcinous rose, and welcomed them, and bade them sit and eat; and the servants brought them tables, and bread, and meat, and wine.

But Medeia went on trembling toward Arete, the fair queen, and fell at her knees, and clasped them, and cried, weeping as she knelt,—

“I am your guest, fair queen, and I entreat you by Zeus, from whom prayers come. Do not send me back to my father to die some dreadful death.”

“Who are you, strange maiden? and what is the meaning of your prayer?”

“I am Medeia, daughter of Aiëtes, and I saw my countrymen here to-day; and I know that they are come to find me, and take me home to die some dreadful death.”

Then Arete frowned, and said, “Lead this girl in, my maidens; and let the kings decide, not I.”

And Alcinous leapt up from his throne, and cried, “Speak, strangers, who are you? And who is this maiden?”

“We are the heroes of the Minuai,” said

Jason ; “and this maiden has spoken truth. We are the men who took the golden fleece. We came hither out of the ocean, after sorrows such as man never saw before. We went out many, and come back few, for many a noble comrade have we lost. So let us go, as you should let your guests go, in peace ; that the world may say, ‘Alcinous is a just king.’”

But Alcinous frowned, and stood deep in thought ; and at last he spoke,—

“Had not the deed been done which is done, I should have said this day to myself, ‘It is an honour to Alcinous, and to his children after him, that the far-famed Argonauts are his guests.’ But these Colchi are my guests, as you are ; and for this month they have waited here with all their fleet, for they have hunted all the seas of Hellas, and could not find you, and dared neither go further nor go home.”

“Let them choose out their champions, and we will fight them man for man.”

“No guests of ours shall fight upon our island, and if you go outside they will

outnumber you. I will do justice between you, for I know and do what is right."

Then he turned to his kings, and said, "This may stand over till to-morrow. To-night we will feast our guests, and hear the story of all their wanderings, and how they came hither out of the ocean."

So Alcinous bade the servants take the heroes in, and bathe them, and give them clothes. Then they came back again into the hall, while the merchant kings rose up to do them honour. And each man said to his neighbour, "No wonder that these men won fame. How they stand now like Immortals come down from Olympus, though many a winter has worn them, and many a fearful storm."

Then they ate and drank, and comforted their weary souls till Alcinous called a herald, and bade him go and fetch the harper.

The herald went out and fetched the harper, and led him in by the hand; and Alcinous said, "Sing to us, noble harper, and rejoice the heroes' hearts."

So the harper played and sang, while the

dancers danced strange figures ; and after that the tumblers showed their tricks, till the heroes laughed again.

Then, "Tell me, heroes," asked Alcinous, "you who have sailed the ocean round, and seen the manners of all nations, have you seen such dancers as ours here, or heard such music and such singing ? We hold ours to be the best on earth."

"Such dancing we have never seen," said Orpheus ; "and your singer is a happy man. I also have sung once or twice, though not so well as he."

"Sing to us, then, noble stranger," said Alcinous, "and we will give you precious gifts."

So Orpheus took his magic harp, and sang to them a stirring song of their voyage, and how they won the golden fleece ; and of Medeia's love, and how she helped them, and went with them over land and sea ; and of all their fearful dangers, from monsters, and rocks, and storms, till the heart of Arete was softened, and all the women wept.

And the merchant kings rose up, each man

from off his golden throne, and clapped their hands, and shouted, "Hail to the noble Argonauts, who sailed the unknown sea!"

And at last, when Orpheus had ended, they all went thoughtful out, and the heroes lay down to sleep, beneath the porch outside, where Arete had strewn them rugs and carpets, in the sweet summer night.

But Arete pleaded hard with her husband for Medeia, for her heart was softened. And she said, "The gods will punish her, not we."

And Alcinous smiled. "The minstrel's song has charmed you: but I must remember what is right, for songs cannot alter justice." But for all that Arete besought him, until she won him round.

So next morning he sent a herald, and called the kings into the square, and said, "This is a puzzling matter: remember but one thing. These Minuai live close by us, but Aiëtes lives afar off, and we have only heard his name. Which, then, of the two



is it safer to offend—the men near us, or the men far off?”

The princes laughed, and praised his wisdom; and Alcinous called the heroes to the square, and the Colchi also. Then Alcinous spoke, “Heroes of the Colchi, what is your errand about this lady?”

“To carry her home with us, that she may die a shameful death; but if we return without her, we must die the death she should have died.”

“What do you say to this, Jason?” said Alcinous.

“I say,” said the cunning Jason, “that they are come here on a bootless errand. Do you think that you can make her follow you, heroes of the Colchi—the princess who knows all spells and charms? And why return home at all, brave heroes, and face the long seas again, and double all your toil? There is many a fair land round these coasts which waits for gallant men like you. Better to settle there and build a city, and let Aiëtes and Colchis help themselves.”

Then a murmur rose among the Colchi,

and some cried, "He has spoken well ;" and some, "We have had enough of roving ; we will sail the seas no more !" And the chief said at last, "Be it so, then ; a plague she has been to us, and a plague she will be to you. Take her, since you are no wiser ; and we will sail away towards the north."

Then Alcinous gave them food, and water, and garments, and rich presents of all sorts ; and he gave the same to the Minuai, and sent them all away in peace.

At last, after many more adventures, they came to the Cape of Malea, at the south-west point of the Peloponnese. And there they offered sacrifices, and Orpheus purged them from their guilt. Then they rode away again to the northward, and came all worn and tired up the long Eubœan Strait, until they saw once more Pelion, and Iolcos by the sea.

And they ran the ship ashore ; but they had no strength left to haul her up the beach ; and they crawled out on to the pebbles, and sat down, and wept till they could weep no more. For the houses and the trees were

all altered ; and all the faces which they saw were strange ; and their joy was swallowed up in sorrow, while they thought of their youth, and all their labour, and the gallant comrades they had lost.

And the people crowded round, and asked them, “ Who are you, that you sit weeping here ? ”

“ We are the sons of your princes, who sailed out many a year ago. We went to fetch the golden fleece, and we have brought it, and grief therewith. Give us news of our fathers and our mothers, if any of them be left alive on earth.”

Then there was shouting, and laughing, and weeping ; and all the kings came to the shore, and they led away the heroes to their homes, and bewailed the valiant dead.

Then Jason went up with Medeia to the palace of his uncle Pelias. And when he came in Pelias sat by the hearth, crippled and blind with age ; while opposite him sat Æson, Jason’s father, crippled and blind likewise ; and the two old men’s heads shook together as they tried to warm themselves before the fire.

And Jason fell down at his father's knees, and wept, and called him by his name. And the old man stretched out his hands and felt him, and said, "Do not mock me, young hero. My son Jason is dead long ago at sea."

"I am your own son Jason, whom you trusted to the centaur upon Pelion ; and I have brought home the golden fleece, and a princess for my bride. So now give me up the kingdom, Pelias my uncle, and fulfil your promise as I have fulfilled mine."

Then his father clung to him like a child, and wept, and would not let him go ; and cried, "Now I shall not go down lonely to my grave. Promise me never to leave me till I die."

And now I wish that I could end my story pleasantly ; but it is no fault of mine that I cannot ; for Jason had taken a wicked wife, and he had to bear his burden to the last.

And first she laid a cunning plot to punish that poor old Pelias, instead of letting him die in peace.

For she told his daughters, "I can make old things young again ; I will show you how

easy it is to do." So she took an old ram and killed him, and put him in a cauldron with magic herbs ; and whispered her spells over him, and he leapt out again a young lamb.

Then she said to Pelias' daughters, " Do to your father as I did to this ram, and he will grow young and strong again." But she only told them half the spell ; so they failed, while Medeia mocked them ; and poor old Pelias died, and his daughters came to misery. But the song says she cured Æson, Jason's father, and he became young and strong again.

But Jason could not love her, after all her cruel deeds ; and she revenged herself on him. And a terrible revenge she took—too terrible to speak of here.

THESEUS.

I. How Theseus lifted the Stone.

ONCE upon a time there was a princess named Aithra, who had one fair son, named Theseus, the bravest lad in all the land; and Aithra never smiled but when she looked at him, for her husband had forgotten her, and lived far away.

And when Theseus was fifteen years old she took him up with her to a certain temple, and into the thickets of the grove which grew in the temple-yard. And she led him to a tall plane-tree, and said, "Theseus, my son, go into that thicket, and you will find at the plane-tree foot a great flat stone; lift it, and bring me what lies underneath."



Then Theseus pushed his way in through the thick bushes, and, searching among their roots, he found a great flat stone, all overgrown with ivy and moss. He tried to lift it, but he could not. And at last he came back to his mother, and said, "I have found the stone, but I cannot lift it; nor do I think that any man could in all the land."

Then she sighed and said, "Let it be for another year. The day may come when you will be a stronger man than lives in all the land."

Then she took him by the hand, and went into the temple and prayed, and came down again with Theseus to her home.

And when a full year was passed she led Theseus up again to the temple, and bade him lift the stone; but he could not.

Then she sighed, and said the same words again, and went down, and came again the next year; but Theseus could not lift the stone then, nor the year after. And he longed to ask his mother the meaning of that stone, and what might lie underneath it; but her face was so sad that he had not the heart to ask.

So he said to himself, "The day shall surely come when I will lift that stone." And in order to grow strong he spent all his days in wrestling, and boxing, and hurling, and taming horses, and hunting the boar and the bull, and coursing goats and deer among the rocks.

And when his eighteenth year was past, Aithra led him up again to the temple, and said, "Theseus, lift the stone this day, or never know who you are." And Theseus went into the thicket, and stood over the stone, and tugged at it; and it moved.

Then his spirit swelled within him, and he said, "If I break my heart in my body, it shall up." And he tugged at it once more, and lifted it, and rolled it over with a shout.

And when he looked beneath it, on the ground lay a sword of bronze, with a hilt of glittering gold, and by it a pair of golden sandals; and he caught them up, and leapt to his mother, holding them high above his head.

But when she saw them she wept



long in silence, hiding her fair face in her shawl; and Theseus stood by her wondering, and wept also, he knew not why. And when she was tired of weeping, she said, "Hide them in your bosom, Theseus my son, and come with me where we can look down upon the sea."

Then they went outside the sacred wall and looked down over the bright blue sea; and Aithra said,—

"Do you see this land at our feet?"

And he said, "Yes; this is where I was born and bred."

And she said, "It is but a little land, barren and rocky, and looks towards the bleak north-east. Do you see that land beyond?"

"Yes; that is Attica, where the Athenian people dwell."

"That is a fair land and large, Theseus my son; a land of olive-oil and honey. For the gods have girdled it with mountains, whose veins are of pure silver, and their bones of marble white as snow; and there the nightingales sing all day in the thickets, by the side of ever-flowing streams. There are

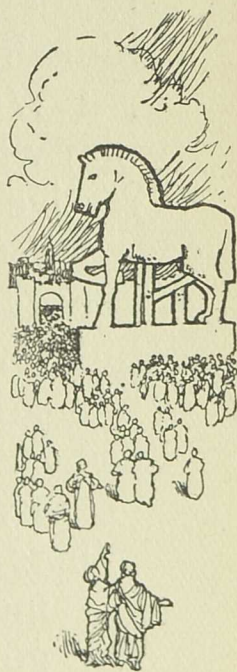
twelve towns well peopled, the homes of an ancient race. What would you do, son Theseus, if you were king of such a land?"

Then Theseus said, "If I were king of such a land I would rule it wisely and well in wisdom and in might."

And Aithra smiled, and said, "Take, then, the sword and the sandals, and go to Ægeus, King of Athens, and say to him, 'The stone is lifted, but whose is the pledge beneath it?' Then show him the sword and the sandals, and take what the gods shall send."

But Theseus wept, "Shall I leave you, O my mother?"

But she answered, "Weep not for me. Full of sorrow was my youth, and full of sorrow my womanhood, and full of sorrow my old age will be. Yet shall I be avenged, when the golden-haired heroes sail against Troy, and sack the palaces of Ilium; then I shall hear the tale of Theseus' fame."



Then she kissed Theseus, and wept over him ; and went into the temple, and Theseus saw her no more.

II. How Theseus slew the Devourers of Men.

So Theseus stood there alone, with his mind full of many hopes. And he longed for wings to fly across the sea, and find his father. But after a while his heart began to fail him ; and he sighed, and said within himself,—

“ What if my father have other sons about him whom he loves ? What if he will not receive me ? ”

Then he thought a long while sadly ; and at the last he cried aloud, “ Yes ; I will make him love me ; for I will prove myself worthy of his love. I will win honour and renown and do such deeds that Ægeus shall be proud of me, though he had fifty other sons ! Where can I find strange adventures, robbers, and monsters, and the enemies of men ? I will go by land, and into the mountains, and

round by the way of the Isthmus. Perhaps there I may hear of brave adventures, and do something which shall win my father's love."

So he went by land, and away into the mountains, with his father's sword upon his thigh, till he came to the Spider mountains, where the glens run downward from one peak in the midst, as the rays spread in the spider's web.

And he went up through the spider's web of glens, till he could see the narrow gulfs spread below him, north and south, and east and west; black cracks half-choked with mists, and above all a dreary down. But he toiled on through bog and brake, till he came to a pile of stones.

And on the stones a man was sitting, wrapt in a bear-skin cloak. The head of the bear served him for a cap, and its teeth grinned white around his brows; and the feet were tied about his throat, and their claws shone white upon his chest. And when he saw Theseus he rose and laughed.



"And who art thou, fair fly, who hast walked

into the spider's web?" But Theseus walked on steadily, and made no answer; but he thought, "Is this some robber? and has an adventure come already to me?" But the strange man laughed louder than ever, and said,—

"Bold fly, know you not that these glens are the web from which no fly ever finds his way out again? Come hither, and let me feast upon you."

But Theseus came on steadily, and asked,—

"And what is your name among men, bold spider?"

Then the strange man laughed again.

"My name is Periphetes; but men call me the club-bearer."

And he lifted from off the stones at his side a mighty club of bronze.

"This my father gave me, and forged it himself in the roots of the mountain; and with it I pound all proud flies till they give out their fatness and their sweetness. So give me up that gay sword of yours, and your mantle, and your golden sandals, lest I pound you, and by ill-luck you die."

But Theseus wrapt his mantle round his left arm quickly, and drew his sword, and rushed upon the club-bearer, and the club-bearer rushed on him.

Thrice he struck at Theseus, and made him bend under the blows like a sapling ; but Theseus guarded his head with his left arm, and the mantle which was wrapt around it.

And thrice Theseus sprang upright after the blow, like a sapling when the storm is past ; and he stabbed at the club-bearer with his sword, but the loose folds of the bear-skin saved him.

Then Theseus grew mad, and closed with him, and caught him by the throat, and they fell and rolled over together ; but when Theseus rose up from the ground the club-bearer lay still at his feet.

Then Theseus took his club and his bear-skin, and left him to the kites and crows, and went upon his journey down the glens on the farther slope, till he came to a broad green valley, and saw flocks and herds sleeping beneath the trees.

And by the side of a pleasant fountain,

under the shade of rocks and trees, were nymphs and shepherds dancing, but no one piped to them while they danced.

And when they saw Theseus they shrieked ; and the shepherds ran off, and drove away their flocks, while the nymphs dived into the fountain and vanished.

Theseus wondered and laughed. “ What strange fancies have folks here, who run away from strangers, and have no music when they dance ! ” But he was tired, and dusty, and thirsty, so he thought no more of them, but drank and bathed in the clear pool, and then lay down in the shade under a palm-tree, while the water sang him to sleep.

And when he woke he heard a whispering, and saw the nymphs peeping at him across the fountain from the dark mouth of a cave. And one said, “ Surely he is not Periphetes ; ” and another, “ He looks like no robber, but a fair and gentle youth.”

Then Theseus smiled, and called them. “ Fair nymphs, I am not Periphetes. He sleeps among the kites and crows ; but I have brought away his bear-skin and his club.”

Then they leapt across the pool, and came to him, and called the shepherds back. And he told them how he had slain the club-bearer; and the shepherds kissed his feet.

Then the nymphs and shepherds begged him to stay, but he would not. "I have a great work to do," he said; "I must go to Athens."

But the shepherds said, "Will you go alone toward Athens? None travel that way now, except in armed troops."

"You must go inland," said one, "and not dare to pass over the cliffs of Sciron; for on the left hand are the mountains, and on the right the sea, so that you have no escape, but must needs meet Sciron the robber, who will make you wash his feet; and while you are washing them he will kick you over the cliff, to the tortoise who lives below, and feeds upon the bodies of the dead."

Then Theseus frowned, and said, "This seems indeed an ill-ruled land, and adventures enough in it to be tried. But if I am the



heir of it, I will rule it and right it, and here is my royal sceptre." And he shook his club of bronze, while the nymphs and shepherds clung around him, and entreated him not to go.

But he went over the hills till he came to the cliffs of Sciron, and the narrow path between the mountain and the sea.

And there he saw Sciron sitting by a fountain, at the edge of the cliff. On his knees was a mighty club; and he had barred the path with stones, so that every one must stop who came up.

Then Theseus shouted to him, and said, "Holla, thou tortoise-feeder, do thy feet need washing to-day?"

And Sciron leapt to his feet, and answered,—

"My tortoise is empty and hungry, and my feet need washing to-day." And he stood before his barrier, and lifted up his club in both hands.

Then Theseus rushed upon him, and sore was the battle upon the cliff. But Theseus was a wary wrestler, and dropt his club, and

caught him by the throat and by the knee, and forced him back against the wall of stones, and crushed him up against them till his breath was almost gone. And Sciron cried, panting, "Loose me, and I will let thee pass."

But Theseus answered, "I must not pass till I have made the rough way smooth," and he forced him back against the wall till it fell, and Sciron rolled head over heels.

Then Theseus lifted him up all bruised, and said, "Come hither and wash my feet." And he drew his sword, and sat down by the well, and said, "Wash my feet, or I will cut you piecemeal."

And Sciron washed his feet trembling; and when it was done, Theseus rose, and cried, "As thou hast done to others, so shall it be done to thee. Go feed thy tortoise thyself," and he kicked him over the cliff into the sea.

And as he was skirting the Vale of Cephissus a very tall and strong man came down to meet him, dressed in rich garments. On his arms were golden bracelets, and round his neck a collar



of jewels ; and he came forward, bowing courteously, and held out both his hands, and spoke,—

“ Welcome, fair youth, to these mountains ; happy am I to have met you ! Come up to my castle and rest yourself awhile.”

“ I give you thanks,” said Theseus ; “ but I am in haste to go up the valley, and to reach Aphidnai.”

“ Alas ! you have wandered far from the right way, and you cannot reach Aphidnai to-night. It is well for you that I met you, for my whole joy is to find strangers, and to feast them at my castle, and hear tales from them of foreign lands. Come up with me, and eat the best of venison, and drink the rich red wine, and sleep upon my famous bed, of which all travellers say that they never saw the like. For whatsoever the stature of my guest, however tall or short, that bed fits him to a hair, and he sleeps on it as he never slept before.” And he laid hold on Theseus’ hands, and would not let him go.

Theseus wished to go forwards, but he was ashamed to seem churlish, and he was curious

to see that wondrous bed ; and beside, he was hungry and weary. Yet he shrank from the man, he knew not why ; for though his voice was gentle and fawning, it was dry and husky like a toad's ; and though his eyes were gentle, they were dull and cold like stones. But he consented, and went with the man up a glen which led from the road, under the dark shadow of the cliffs.

And as they went up, the glen grew narrower, and the cliffs higher and darker, and beneath them a torrent roared, half seen between bare limestone crags. And a horror fell on Theseus as he looked round at that doleful place. And he asked at last, "Your castle stands, it seems, in a dreary region."

"Yes ; but once within it, hospitality makes all things cheerful. But who are these ?" and he looked back, and Theseus also ; and far below, along the road which they had left, came a string of laden asses, and merchants walking by them, watching their ware.

"Ah, poor souls !" said the stranger. "Well for them that I looked back and saw

them ! And well for me too, for I shall have the more guests at my feast. Wait awhile till I go down and call them, and we will eat and drink together the livelong night."

And he ran back down the hill, waving his hand and shouting to the merchants, while Theseus went slowly up the steep pass.

But as he went up he met an aged man, who had been gathering driftwood in the torrent-bed. And when he saw Theseus, he called to him, and said,—

"O fair youth, help me up with my burden, for my limbs are stiff and weak with years."

Then Theseus lifted the burden on his back. And the old man blest him, and then looked earnestly upon him, and said,—

"Who are you, fair youth, and wherefore travel you this doleful road ?"

"Who I am my parents know ; but I travel this doleful road because I have been invited by a hospitable man, who promises to feast me, and to make me sleep upon I know not what wondrous bed."

Then the old man clapped his hands together and cried,—

“ Know, fair youth, that you are going to torment and to death, for he who met you is a robber and a murderer of men. And as for this bed of which he speaks, truly it fits all comers, yet none ever rose alive off it save me.”

“ Why ? ” asked Theseus, astonished.

“ Because, if a man be too tall for it, he lops his limbs till they be short enough, and if he be too short, he stretches his limbs till they be long enough ; but me only he spared, seven weary years ago ; for I alone of all fitted his bed exactly, so he spared me, and made me his slave. And once I was a wealthy merchant ; but now I hew wood and draw water for him, the torment of all mortal men.”

Then Theseus said nothing ; but he ground his teeth together.

“ Escape, then,” said the old man, “ for he will have no pity on thy youth. But yesterday he brought up hither a young man and a maiden, and fitted them upon his bed ; and the young man’s hands and feet he cut off, but the maiden’s limbs he stretched until she

died, and so both perished miserably—but I am tired of weeping over the slain. And therefore he is called Procrustes the stretcher. Flee from him ; yet whither will you flee ? The cliffs are steep, and who can climb them ? and there is no other road.”

But Theseus laid his hand upon the old man's mouth, and said, “ There is no need to flee,” and he turned to go down the pass.

“ Do not tell him that I have warned you, or he will kill me by some evil death,” and the old man screamed after him down the glen, but Theseus strode on in his wrath.

And he said to himself, “ This is an ill-ruled land ; when shall I have done ridding it of monsters ? ” And as he spoke, Procrustes came up the hill, and all the merchants with him, smiling and talking gaily. And when he saw Theseus he cried, “ Ah, fair young guest, have I kept you too long waiting ? ”

But Theseus answered, “ The man who stretches his guests upon a bed and hews off their hands and feet, what shall be done to him when right is done throughout the land ? ”

Then Procrustes' countenance changed, and he felt for his sword in haste ; but Theseus leapt on him, and cried,—

“Is this true, my host, or is it false?” and he clasped Procrustes round waist and elbow so that he could not draw his sword.

“Is this true, my host, or is it false?” But Procrustes answered never a word.

Then Theseus flung him from him, and lifted up his dreadful club, and before Procrustes could strike him he had struck, and felled him to the ground.

And once again he struck him ; and his evil soul fled forth, and went down to Hades squeaking, like a bat into the darkness of a cave.

Then Theseus stript him of his gold ornaments, and went up to his house, and found there great wealth and treasure, which he had stolen from the passers-by. And he called the people of the country, whom Procrustes had spoiled a long time, and parted the spoil among them, and went down the mountains, and away.

And he went down the valley by Acharnai,

and by the silver-swirling stream, while all the people blessed him, for the fame of his prowess had spread wide, till he saw the plain of Athens.

So Theseus went up through Athens, and all the people ran out to see him ; for his fame had gone before him, and every one knew of his mighty deeds. And all cried, " Here comes the hero who slew Procrustes the pitiless." But Theseus went on sadly and steadfastly, for his heart yearned after his father ; and he said, " How shall I deliver him from these leeches who suck his blood ? "

So he went up the holy stairs, and into Ægeus' hall, and stood upon the threshold, and looked round.

And there he saw his cousins sitting about the table at the wine, but no Ægeus among them. Loud laughed they, and fast went the wine-cup round ; but Theseus frowned, and said under his breath, " No wonder that the land is full of robbers, while such as these bear rule."

Then he called to the servants, and said, " Go tell King Ægeus, your master, that Theseus is here, and asks to be his guest awhile."

A servant ran and told Ægeus, where he sat in his chamber within, by Medeia, the dark witch-woman, watching her eye and hand. And when Ægeus heard he turned pale and red again, and rose from his seat trembling, while Medeia watched him like a snake.

“What is this news to you?” she asked. But he said hastily, “Do you not know who this Theseus is? The hero who has cleared the country from all monsters. I must go out and welcome him.”

So Ægeus came out into the hall, and when Theseus saw him, his heart leapt into his mouth, and he longed to fall on his neck and welcome him; but he controlled himself, and said, “My father may not wish for me, after all. I will try him before I discover myself;” and he bowed low before Ægeus, and said, “I have delivered the king’s realm from many monsters, therefore I am come to ask a reward of the king.”

And old Ægeus looked on him, and loved him, as what fond heart would not have done? But he only sighed, and said,—

“It is little that I can give you, noble lad, and nothing that is worthy of you.”

“All I ask,” said Theseus, “is to eat and drink at your table.”

“That I can give you,” said Ægeus, “if at least I am master in my own hall.”

Then he bade them put a seat for Theseus, and set before him the best of the feast ; and Theseus sat and ate so much that all the company wondered at him ; but always he kept his club by his side.

But Medeia, the dark witch-woman, had been watching him all the while. And she said to herself, “This youth will be master here.”

Then she went back into her chamber modestly, while Theseus ate and drank. But presently she came forth, decked in all her jewels, and her rich Eastern robes, and looking more beautiful than the day. And in her right hand she held a golden cup, and in her left a flask of gold ; and she came up to Theseus, and spoke in a sweet, soft, winning voice,—



“Hail to the hero, the conqueror! Drink, hero, of my charmed cup, which gives rest after every toil, which heals all wounds, and pours new life into the veins. Drink of my cup, for in it sparkles the wine of the East, and Nepenthe, the comfort of the Immortals.”

And Theseus looked up in her fair face and into her deep, dark eyes. And as he looked, he shrank and shuddered; for they were dry like the eyes of a snake. And he rose, and said, “The wine is rich and fragrant, and the wine-bearer as fair as the Immortals; but let her pledge me first herself in the cup, that the wine may be the sweeter from her lips.”

Then Medeia turned pale, and stammered, “Forgive me, fair hero; but I am ill, and dare drink no wine.”

And Theseus looked again into her eyes, and cried, “Thou shalt pledge me in that cup, or die.” And he lifted up his brazen club, while all the guests looked on aghast.

Medeia shrieked a fearful shriek, and dashed the cup to the ground, and fled; and where the wine flowed over the marble pave-

ment, the stone bubbled, and crumbled, and hissed, under the fierce venom of the draught.

But Medeia called her dragon chariot, and sprang into it and fled aloft, away over land and sea, and no man saw her more.

And Ægeus cried, "What hast thou done?" But Theseus pointed to the stone, "I have rid the land of an enchantment; now I will rid it of one more."

And he came close to Ægeus, and drew from his bosom the sword and the sandals, and said the words which his mother bade him.

And Ægeus stepped back a pace, and looked at the lad till his eyes grew dim; and then he cast himself on his neck and wept, and Theseus wept on his neck, till they had no strength left to weep more.

Then Ægeus turned to all the people, and cried, "Behold my son."

And the princes shouted, some one thing, and some another; for they were hot and wild with wine; but all caught swords and lances off the wall, where the weapons hung around, and sprang forward to Theseus, and Theseus sprang forward to them.

Twenty against one they fought, and yet Theseus beat them all ; and those who were left fled down into the town, where the people set on them, and drove them out, till Theseus was left alone in the palace, with Ægeus, his new-found father.

So Theseus stayed with his father all the winter ; and when the spring equinox drew near, all the Athenians grew sad and silent, and Theseus saw it, and asked the reason ; but no one would answer him a word.

Then he went to his father, and asked him ; but Ægeus turned away his face and wept.

“Do not ask, my son, beforehand about evils which must happen : it is enough to have to face them when they come.”

And when the spring equinox came, a herald came to Athens, and stood in the market, and cried, “O people and King of Athens, where is your yearly tribute ?” Then a great lamentation arose throughout the city. But Theseus stood up to the herald, and cried,—

“And who are you who dare demand tribute here ?”

And the herald answered proudly, for he was a grave and ancient man,—

“Fair youth, I do my master’s bidding, Minos, the King of Crete, who conquered all this land, and Megara which lies to the east, when he came hither with a great fleet of ships, enraged about the murder of his son. For his son Androgeos came hither to the games, and overcame all the Greeks in the sports, so that the people honoured him as a hero.

“But when Ægeus saw his valour, he envied him, and feared lest he should take away the sceptre from him. So he plotted against his life, and slew him basely, no man knows how or where. Then Minos came hither and avenged him, and would not depart till this land had promised him tribute—seven youths and seven maidens every year, who go with me in a black-sailed ship, till they come to Crete.”

And Theseus ground his teeth together, and said, “Wert thou not a herald I would kill thee for saying such things of my father; but I will go to him, and know the truth.”

So he went to his father, and asked him ; but he turned away his head and wept, and said, “ Blood was shed in the land unjustly, and by blood it is avenged. Break not my heart by question ; it is enough to endure in silence.”

Then Theseus groaned inwardly, and said, “ I will go myself with these youths and maidens, and kill Minos upon his royal throne.”

And Ægeus shrieked and cried, “ You shall not go, my son, for Minos thrusts them into a labyrinth, made for him among the rocks. From that labyrinth no one can escape, entangled in its winding ways, before they meet the Minotaur, the monster who feeds upon the flesh of men. There he devours them horribly, and they never see this land again.”

Then Theseus grew red, and his ears tingled, and his heart beat loud in his bosom. And he stood awhile like a tall stone pillar on the cliffs above some hero's grave ; and at last he spoke,—

“ Therefore all the more I will go with



them, and slay the accursed beast and Minos himself if he dare stay me."

Then Ægeus clung to his knees; but he would not hear, and at last he let him go, weeping bitterly, and said only this one word,—

"Promise me but this, if you return in peace, though that may hardly be: take down the black sail of the ship, and hoist instead a white sail, that I may know afar off that you are safe."

And Theseus promised and went out, and to the market-place where the herald stood, while they drew lots for the youths and maidens who were to sail in that doleful crew. And Theseus strode into the midst, and cried,—

"Here is a youth who needs no lot. I myself will be one of the seven."

So they went down to the black-sailed ship, seven maidens, and seven youths, and Theseus before them all, and the people following them lamenting. But Theseus whispered to his companions, "Have hope, for the monster is not



immortal." Then their hearts were comforted a little; but they wept as they went on board, and the cliffs of Sunium rang, and all the isles of the Ægean Sea, with the voice of their lamentation, as they sailed on towards their deaths in Crete.

III. How Theseus slew the Minotaur.

AND at last they came to Crete, and to the palace of Minos, the great king. And Theseus stood before him, and they looked each other in the face. And Minos bade take them to prison, and cast them to the monster one by one, that the death of Androgeos might be avenged. Then Theseus cried,—

"A boon, O Minos! Let me be thrown first to the beast. For I came hither for that very purpose, of my own will, and not by lot."

"Who art thou, then, brave youth?"

"I am the son of him whom of all men thou hatest most, Ægeus, the King of Athens, and I come here to end this matter."

And Minos pondered awhile, looking steadfastly at him, and he thought, "The lad means to atone by his own death for his father's sin," and he answered at last, mildly,—

"Go back in peace, my son. It is a pity that one so brave should die."

But Theseus said, "I have sworn that I will not go back till I have seen the monster face to face."

And at that Minos frowned, and said, "Then thou shalt see him; take the madman away."

And they led Theseus away into the prison, with the other youths and maids.

But Ariadne, Minos' daughter, saw him, as she came out of her white stone hall; and she loved him for his courage and his majesty, and said, "Shame that such a youth should die!" And by night she went down to the prison, and told him all her heart, and said,—

"Flee down to your ship at once, for I have bribed the guards before the door. Flee, you and all your friends, and go back in peace to Greece; and take me, take me with you!

for I dare not stay after you are gone ; for my father will kill me miserably, if he knows what I have done.”

And Theseus stood silent awhile, for he was astonished and confounded by her beauty ; but at last he said, “ I cannot go home in peace till I have seen and slain this Minotaur, and avenged the deaths of the youths and maidens, and put an end to the terrors of my land.”

“ And will you kill the Minotaur ? How, then ? ”

“ I know not, nor do I care ; but he must be strong if he be too strong for me.”

Then she loved him all the more, and said, “ But when you have killed him, how will you find your way out of the labyrinth ? ”

“ I know not, neither do I care ; but it must be a strange road if I do not find it out.”

Then she loved him all the more, and said,—

“ Fair youth, you are too bold ; but I can help you, weak as I am. I will give you a sword, and with that perhaps you may slay the beast ; and a clue of thread, and by that,

perhaps, you may find your way out again. Only promise me that if you escape safe you will take me home with you to Greece."

Then Theseus laughed and said, "Am I not safe enough now?" And he hid the sword in his bosom, and rolled up the clue in his hand; and then he swore to Ariadne, and fell down before her and kissed her hands and her feet. And she wept over him a long while, and then went away; and Theseus lay down and slept sweetly.

And when the evening came, the guards came in and led him away to the labyrinth.

And he went down into that doleful gulf, through winding paths among the rocks, under caverns, and arches, and galleries, and over heaps of fallen stone.

And he turned on the left hand, and on the right hand, and went up and down, till his head was dizzy; but all the while he held his clue. For when he went in he had fastened it to a stone, and left it to unroll out of his hand as he went on; and it lasted him till he



met the Minotaur, in a narrow chasm between black cliffs.

And when he saw him he stopped awhile, for he had never seen so strange a beast. His body was a man's; but his head was the head of a bull, and his teeth were the teeth of a lion, and with them he tore his prey. And when he saw Theseus he roared, and put his head down, and rushed right at him.

But Theseus stept aside nimbly, and as he passed by, cut him in the knee; and ere he could turn in the narrow path, he followed him, and stabbed him again and again from behind, till the monster fled bellowing wildly. And Theseus followed him at full speed, holding the clue of thread in his left hand.

At last Theseus came up with him, where he lay panting among the snow, and caught him by the horns, and forced his head back, and drove the keen sword through his throat.

Then he turned, and went back limping and weary, till he came to the mouth of that doleful place; and saw waiting for him, whom but Ariadne!

And he whispered, "It is done!" and

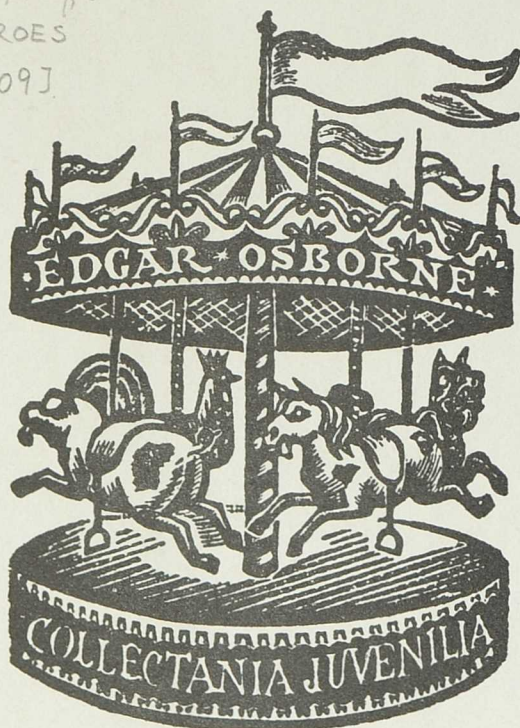
showed her the sword; and she laid her finger on her lips and led him to the prison, and opened the doors, and set the prisoners free.

Then they fled to their ship together, and leapt on board, and hoisted up the sail; and the night lay dark around them, so that they passed through Minos' ships, and escaped all safe to Naxos; and there Ariadne became Theseus' wife.

But that fair Ariadne never came to Athens with her husband. Some say that Dionusos, the wine-king, found her, and took her up into the sky; but however that may be, in his haste or in his grief, Theseus forgot to put up the white sail. Now Ægeus, his father, sat and watched day after day, to see the ship afar. And when he saw the black sail, and not the white one, he gave up Theseus for dead, and in his grief he fell into the sea, and died; so it is called the Ægean to this day.

And now Theseus was King of Athens, and he guarded it and ruled it well.

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