

The Heroes

CLASSIC LIT FOR YOUNG READERS

MARY MACGREGOR

Charles Kingsley's
The Heroes

Mary MacGregor

Libraries of Hope

The Heroes
Classic Literature for Young Readers

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Contents

About This Book.....3

Perseus.....5

Perseus and His Mother 5

How Perseus Vowed a Rash Vow...12

How Perseus Slew the Gorgon 24

How Perseus Met Andromeda 31

How Perseus Came Home Again ...43

The Argonauts 49

How the Centaur Trained the Heroes 49

How Jason Lost His Sandal 60

How They Built the Ship Argo 74

How the Argonauts Won the Golden Fleece 78

The Argonauts Reached Home ...103

Theseus 116
How Theseus Lifted the Stone.....116
How Theseus Slew the Club-Bearer and the Pine-Bender 123
How Theseus Slew the Minotaur.143

Charles Kingsley's
The Heroes

Told to the Children by
MARY MACGREGOR

With Pictures by
ROSE LE QUESNE

About This Book

Charles Kingsley wrote *The Heroes* with a charm that has made the book a favourite with big boys and girls ever since it was written. But the little ones cannot follow the brave heroes through all their wonderful adventures, nor to all the strange countries through which they journey. For the adventures are sometimes with strange peoples or even with strange animals of which they have never heard, and the countries have names that they have not yet learned in their geography lessons. But in this little book Kingsley's story of *The Heroes* is told so simply that even small boys and girls will learn to love these brave men.

MARY MACGREGOR.

PERSEUS

CHAPTER 1
Perseus and His Mother

Once upon a time there were two princes who were twins. They lived in a pleasant vale 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.

And there came a prophet to one of

the hard-hearted princes and said, 'Because you have risen up against your own family, your own family shall rise up against you. Because you have sinned against your kindred, by your kindred shall you be punished. Your daughter Danæ shall bear a son, and by that son's hands you shall die. So the Gods have said, and it shall surely come to pass.'

At that the hard-hearted prince was very much afraid, but he did not mend his ways. For when he became king, he shut up his fair daughter Danæ in a cavern underground, lined with brass, that no one might come near her. So he fancied himself more cunning than the Gods.

Now it came to pass that in time Danæ bore a son, so beautiful a babe that any but the king would have had pity on it. But he had no pity, for he took Danæ and her babe down to the seashore, and

put them into a great chest and thrust them out to sea, that the winds and the waves might carry them whithersoever they would.

And away and out to sea before the northwest wind floated the mother and her babe, while all who watched them wept, save that cruel king.

So they floated on and on, and the chest danced up and down upon the billows, and the babe slept in its mother's arms. But the poor mother could not sleep, but watched and wept, and she sang to her babe as they floated.

Now they are past the last blue headland and in the open sea. 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 Danæ, and another

night and day beside, till Danæ was faint with hunger and weeping, and yet no land appeared.

And all the while the babe slept quietly, and at last poor Danæ 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, 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 Danæ, tossing about in the chest among the waves.

He wore a rough cloak, and on his head a broad hat to shade his face, and

in his hand he carried a trident, which is a three-pronged fork for spearing fish, and over his shoulder was a casting net.

But Danæ could see that he was no common man by his height and his walk, and his flowing golden hair and beard, and by the two servants who came behind him carrying baskets for his fish.

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 Danæ and the chest, that he drew it and her and the babe safe upon a ledge of rock.

Then the fisherman took Danæ 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 belongs to the Gods.' And as he spoke he pointed to the

babe, for its face shone like the morning star.

But Danæ 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, 'Polydectes is king of this Isle, and he is my brother. Men call me Dictys the Netter, because I catch the fish of the shore.'

Then Danæ fell down at his feet and embraced his knees and cried, 'O Sir, have pity upon a stranger, whom cruel doom has driven to your land, 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 is of no common race. I will not be a charge to you, or eat the bread of idleness, 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 grandchild.'

So Danæ 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.

CHAPTER 2
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.

His mother called him Perseus, but all the people in the Isle called him the King of the Immortals.

For though he was but fifteen, Perseus was taller by a head than any man in the island. And he was brave and truthful, and gentle and courteous, for good old Dictys had trained him well, and well it was for Perseus that he had done so. For now Danæ and her son fell into great danger, and Perseus had need of all his

strength to defend his mother and himself.

Polydectes, the king of the island, was not a good man like his brother Dictys, but he was greedy and cunning and cruel.

And when he saw fair Danæ, he wanted to marry her. But she would not, for she did not love him, and cared for no one but her boy.

At last Polydectes became furious, and while Perseus was away at sea, he took poor Danæ away from Dictys, saying, 'If you will not be my wife, you shall be my slave.'

So Danæ was made a slave, and had to fetch water from the well, and grind in the mill. But Perseus was far away over the seas, little thinking that his mother was in great grief and sorrow.

Now one day, 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, the strangest dream he had ever had in his life.

There came a lady to him 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 with her clear gray eyes. And Perseus dropped 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?'

Then the strange lady, whose name was Athene, 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, and her lips were thin. Instead of hair, vipers wreathed about her temples and shot out their forked tongues, and she had claws of brass.

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

Then the strange lady smiled again and said, 'You are too young, for this is Medusa the Gorgon. Return to your home, and when you have done the work

that awaits you there, you may be worthy to go in search of the monster.'

Perseus would have spoken, but the strange lady vanished, and he awoke, and behold it was a dream.

So he returned home, and the first thing 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 through the men's rooms and the women's rooms, and so through all the house, till he 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.

When Perseus saw the king, he flew upon him and cried, 'Tyrant! is this thy mercy to strangers and widows? Thou

shalt 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, and good Dictys too entreated him to remember that the cruel king was his brother.

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

So Perseus took his mother to the temple of Athene, and there the priestess made her one of the temple sweepers. And there they knew that she would be safe, for not even Polydectes would dare to drag her out of the temple. And there Perseus and the good Dictys and his wife came to visit her every day.

As for Polydectes, not being able to get Danæ by force, he cast about how he might get her by cunning. He was sure he

could never get back Danæ as long as Perseus was in the island, so he made a plot to get rid of him. First he pretended to have forgiven Perseus, and to have forgotten Danæ, so that for a while all went smoothly. 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, and eat of his banquet in his hall.

On the appointed day they all came, and as the custom was then, each guest brought with him a present for the king. One brought a horse, another a shawl, or a ring, or a sword, and some brought baskets of grapes, but Perseus brought nothing, for he had nothing to bring, being only a poor sailor lad.

He was ashamed, however, to go into the king's presence without a gift. 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 smiled and whispered, 'And what has Perseus to give?' Perseus blushed and stammered, while all the proud men round laughed and mocked, till the lad grew mad with shame, and hardly knowing what he said, cried out:

'A present! See if I do not bring a nobler one than all of yours together!'

'Hear the boaster! What is the present to be?' cried they all, laughing louder than ever.

Then Perseus remembered his strange dream, and he cried aloud, 'The head of Medusa the Gorgon!'

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

'You have promised to bring me the Gorgon's head. Then never appear again

in this island without it. Go!'

Perseus saw that he had fallen into a trap, but he went out without a word.

Down to the cliffs he went, and looked across the broad blue sea, and wondered if his dream were true.

'Athene, was my dream true? Shall I slay the Gorgon?' he prayed. 'Rashly and angrily I promised, but wisely and patiently will I perform!'

But there was no answer nor sign, not even a cloud in the sky.

Three times Perseus called, weeping, 'Rashly and angrily I promised, but wisely and patiently will I perform.'

Then he saw afar off a small white cloud, as bright as silver. And as it touched the cliffs, it broke and parted, and within it appeared Athene, and beside her a young man, whose eyes were like sparks of fire.

And they came swiftly towards

Perseus, and he fell down and worshipped, for he knew they were more than mortal.

But Athene spoke gently to him and bid him have no fear. 'Perseus,' she said, 'you have braved Polydectes, and done manfully. Dare you brave Medusa, the Gorgon?'

Perseus answered, 'Try me, for since you spoke to me, new courage has come into my soul.'

And Athene said, 'Perseus, this deed requires a seven years' journey, in which you cannot turn back nor escape. If your heart fails, you must die, and no man will ever find your bones.'

And Perseus said, 'Tell me, O fair and wise Athene, how I can do but this one thing, and then, if need be, die.'

Then Athene smiled and said, 'Be patient and listen. You must go northward till you find the Three Gray Sisters,

who have but one eye and one tooth amongst them. Ask them the way to the daughters of the Evening Star; for they will tell you the way to the Gorgon, that you may slay her. But beware! for her eyes are so terrible that whosoever looks on them is turned to stone.'

'How am I to escape her eyes?' said Perseus; 'will she not freeze me too?'

'You shall take this polished shield,' said Athene, 'and look, not at her herself, but at her image in the shield, 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 bring it safely back to me and win yourself renown and a place among heroes.'

Then said Perseus, 'I will go, though I die in going. But how shall I cross the seas without a ship? And who will show

me the way? And how shall I slay her, if her scales be iron and brass?'

But the young man who was with Athene spoke, 'These sandals of mine will bear you across the seas, and over hill and dale like a bird, as they bear me all day long. The sandals themselves will guide you on the road, for they are divine and cannot stray, 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 Athene 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, and he leaped into the empty air.

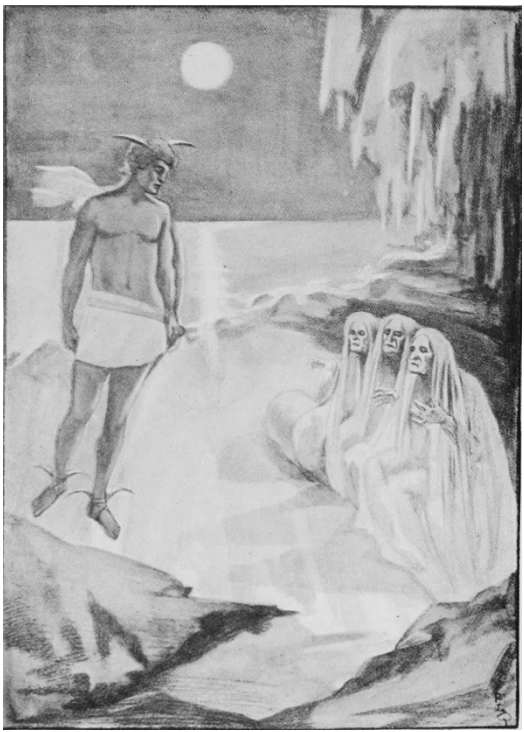
And behold! instead of falling, he floated, and stood, and ran along the sky.

CHAPTER 3
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 sandals bore him each day a seven days' journey.

And at last by the shore of a freezing sea, beneath the cold winter moon, he found the Three Gray Sisters. There was no living thing around them, not a fly, not a moss upon the rocks.

They passed their one eye each to the other, but for all that they could not see, and they passed the one 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.



Beneath the cold winter moon he found the Three Grey Sisters.

And Perseus said, 'Tell me, O Venerable Mothers, the path to the daughters of the Evening Star.'

They heard his voice, and then one cried, 'Give me the eye that I may see him,' and another, 'Give me the tooth that I may bite him,' but they had no answer for his question. Then Perseus stepped close to them, and watched as they passed the eye from hand to hand.

And as they groped about, 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.

At that Perseus sprang back and laughed and cried, 'Cruel old women, I have your eye, and I will throw it into the sea, unless you tell me the path to the daughters of the Evening Star and swear to me that you tell me right!'

Then they wept and chattered and scolded, but all in vain. They were forced

to tell the truth, though when they told it, Perseus could hardly make out the way. But he gave them back the eye and leaped away to the southward, leaving the snow and ice behind.

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

When they saw him they trembled and said, 'Are you come to rob our garden and carry off our golden fruit?'

But Perseus answered, 'I want none of your golden fruit. Tell me the way which leads to the Gorgon that I may go on my way and slay her.'

'Not yet, not yet, fair boy,' they answered, 'come dance with us around the trees in the garden.'

'I cannot dance with you, fair maidens, 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!'

But Perseus said, 'The Gods have lent me weapons, and will give me wisdom to use them.'

Then the fair maidens told him that the Gorgon lived on an island far away, but that whoever went near the island must wear the hat of darkness, so that he could not himself be seen. And one of the fair maidens held in her hand the magic hat.

While all the maidens kissed Perseus and wept over him, he was only impatient to be gone. So at last they put the magic hat upon his head, and he vanished out of their sight.

And Perseus went on boldly, past many an ugly sight, till he heard the rustle of the Gorgons' wings and saw the glitter of their brazen claws. Then he

knew that it was time to halt, lest Medusa should freeze him into stone.

He thought awhile with himself and remembered Athene's words. Then he rose into the air, and held the shield above his head and looked up into it, that he might see all that was below him.

And he saw 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.

Medusa tossed to and fro restlessly in her sleep. Her long neck gleamed so white in the mirror that Perseus had not the heart to strike. But as he looked, from among her tresses the vipers' heads awoke and peeped up, with their bright dry eyes, and showed their fangs and hissed. And Medusa as she tossed showed her brazen claws, and Perseus

saw that for all her beauty she was as ugly as the others.

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

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

And well his brave sandals bore him through cloud and sunshine across the shoreless sea, till he came again to the gardens of the fair maidens.

Then he asked them, 'By what road shall I go homeward again?'

And they wept and cried, 'Go home no more, but stay and play with us, the lonely maidens.'

But Perseus refused and leapt down the mountain, and went on like a sea-gull, away and out to sea.

CHAPTER 4
How Perseus Met Andromeda

So Perseus flitted onward to the northeast, over many a league of sea, till he came to the rolling sandhills of the desert.

Over the sands he went, he never knew how far nor how long, hoping all day to see the blue sparkling Mediterranean, 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 sandals could not prevail. And when morning came there was nothing to be seen, save the same old

hateful waste of sand.

At last the gale fell, and he tried to go northward again, but again down came the sandstorms and swept him back into the desert; and then all was calm and cloudless as before.

Then he cried to Athene, 'Shall I never see my mother more, and the blue ripple of the sea and the sunny hills of Hellas?'

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

And Perseus stood still awhile and waited, and said, 'Surely I am not here but by the will of the Gods, for Athene will not lie. Were not these sandals to lead me in the right road?'

Then suddenly his ears were opened and he heard the sound of running water. And Perseus laughed for joy, and leapt down the cliff and drank of the cool water, and ate of the dates, and slept on

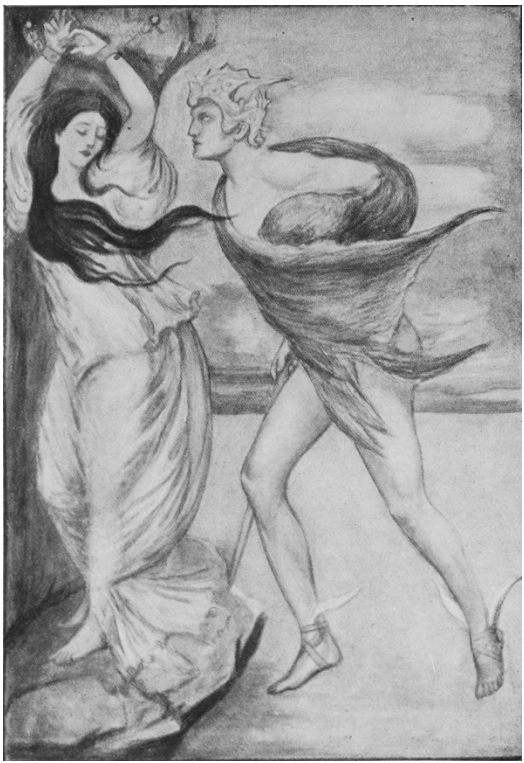
the turf, and leapt up and went forward again, but not toward the north this time.

For he said, 'Surely Athene 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 Perseus flew along the shore above the sea, and at the dawn of a day he looked towards the cliffs. 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.'

And he came near, but when he came it was no statue he found, 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



It was no statue he found, but a maiden of flesh and blood.

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 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.

In his heart pity and indignation, Perseus drew near and looked upon the maid. Her cheeks were darker than his, and her hair was blue-black like a hyacinth.

Perseus thought, 'I have never seen so beautiful a maiden, no, not in all our isles. Surely she is a king's daughter. She is too fair, at least, to have done any wrong. I will speak to her,' and, lifting the magic hat from his head, he flashed into her sight. She shrieked with terror, but Perseus cried, 'Do not fear me, fair one.

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 a victim for the sea-Gods. They will slay you if you dare to set me free.'

'Let them try,' said Perseus, and drawing his sword 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.

Then he clasped her in his arms, and cried, 'Where are these sea-Gods, cruel and unjust, who doom fair maids to death? 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 a king, and my mother is the Queen with the beautiful tresses, and they call me Andromeda. I stand here 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 wasted all the land. And now I must be devoured by a sea-monster to atone for a sin which I never committed.'

ButPerseus laughed and said, 'A sea-monster! I have fought with worse than he.' Andromeda looked up at him, and new hope was kindled in her heart, so proud and fair did he stand, with one hand round her, and in the other the glittering sword.

But still she sighed and said, 'Why will you die, young as you are? Go you your way, I must go mine.'

Perseus cried, 'Not so: I slew the

Gorgon by the help of the Gods, 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 too to stone.'

But the maiden answered nothing, for she could not believe his words.

Then suddenly looking up, she pointed to the sea and shrieked, 'There he comes with the sunrise as they said. I must die now. Oh go!' And she tried to thrust him away.

And Perseus said, 'I go, yet promise me one thing ere I go, that if I slay this beast you will be my wife and come back with me to my kingdom, for I am a king's son. 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. His great sides were fringed with clustering shells and seaweeds, and the water gurgled in and out of his wide jaws as he rolled along. 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.

When at last she looked up trembling, Andromeda saw Perseus springing towards 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 the people of the land!

And the king and the queen came, and all the people came with songs and dances to receive Andromeda back again, as one alive from the dead.

Then the king said to Perseus, '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 will I have none, for I long after the pleasant land of Greece! and my mother who waits for me at home.'

Then said the king, 'You must not take my daughter away at once, for she is to us as one alive from the dead. Stay with us here a year, and after that you shall return with honour.'

And Perseus consented, but before he went to the palace he bade the people

bring stones and wood and build an altar to Athene, and there he offered bullocks and rams.

Then they made a great wedding feast, which lasted seven whole days.

But on the eighth night Perseus dreamed a dream. He saw standing beside him Athene as he had seen her seven long years before, and she stood and called him by name, and said, 'Perseus, you have played the man, and see, you have your reward. Now give me the sword and the sandals, and the hat of darkness, that I may give them back to those to whom they belong. But the Gorgon's head you shall keep a while, for you will need it in your land of Hellas.'

And Perseus rose to give her the sword, and the cap, and the sandals, but he woke and his dream vanished away. 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.

CHAPTER 5
How Perseus Came Home Again

When a year was ended, Perseus rowed away in a noble galley, 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.

And when Perseus reached the land of Hellas he left his galley on the beach, and went up as of old. He embraced his mother and Dictys, and they wept over each other, for it was seven years and more since they had parted.

Then Perseus went out and up to the hall of Polydectes, and underneath the

goat-skin he bore the Gorgon's head.

When he came to the hall, Polydectes sat at the table, and all his nobles on either side, feasting on fish and goats' flesh, and drinking blood-red wine.

Perseus stood upon the threshold and called to the king by name. But none of the guests knew the stranger, for he was changed by his long journey. He had gone out a boy, and he was come home a hero.

But Polydectes the Wicked knew him, 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,' said Perseus, as he drew back the goat-skin and held aloft the Gorgon's head, saying, 'Behold!'

Pale grew Polydectes and his guests as they looked upon that dreadful face. They tried to rise from their seats, up

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.

He gave the kingdom to good Dictys, and sailed away with his mother and his bride.

And Perseus rowed westward till he came to his old home, and there he found that his grandfather had fled.

The heart of Perseus yearned after his grandfather, and he said, 'Surely he will love me now that I am come home with honour. I will go and find him and bring him back, and we will reign together in peace.'

So Perseus sailed away, and at last he came to the land where his grandfather dwelt, and all the people were in the fields, and there was feasting and all kinds of games.

Then 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 towards me.'

And when the games began, Perseus was the best of all at running and leaping, and wrestling and throwing. And he won four crowns and took them.

Then he said to himself, 'There is a fifth crown to be won. I will win that also, and lay them all upon the knees of my grandfather.'

So he took the stones and hurled them five fathoms beyond all the rest. And the people shouted, 'There has never been such a hurler in this land!'

Again Perseus put out all his strength and hurled. But a gust of wind came from the sea and carried the quoit aside, far beyond all the rest. And it fell on the foot of his grandfather, 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. Then Perseus rent his clothes and cast dust on 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: what they have ordained must be; I am Perseus, the grandson of this dead man.' Then he told them how a prophet had said that he should kill his grandfather.

So they made great mourning for the old king, and burnt him on a right rich pile.

And Perseus went to the temple and was purified from the guilt of his death, because he had done it unknowingly.

Then he went home and reigned well with Andromeda, and they had four sons and three daughters.

And when they died, the ancients say that Athene took them up to the sky. All night long Perseus and Andromeda shine as a beacon for wandering sailors, but all day long they feast with the Gods, on the still blue peaks in the home of the Immortals.

THE ARGONAUTS

CHAPTER I
How the Centaur Trained the Heroes

Now I have a tale to tell of heroes who sailed away into a distant land, to win themselves renown forever in the adventures of the Golden Fleece.

And what was the Golden Fleece?

It was the fleece of the wondrous ram who bore a boy called Phrixus and a girl called Helle across the sea; and the old Greeks said that it hung nailed to a beech tree in the War-god's wood.

For when a famine came upon the land, their cruel stepmother wished to

kill Phrixus and Helle, that her own children might reign.

She said Phrixus and Helle must be sacrificed on an altar, to turn away the anger of the Gods, who sent the famine.

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.

And the ram carried the two children far away, over land and sea, till at a narrow strait Helle fell off into the sea, and 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 northeast, across the sea which we call the Black Sea, and at last he stopped at Colchis, on the steep sea-coast.

And Phrixus married the king's daughter there, and offered the ram in

sacrifice, and then it was that the ram's fleece was nailed to a beech in the wood of the War-god.

After a while Phrixus died, but his spirit had no rest, for he was buried far from his native land and the pleasant hills of Hellas.

So he came in dreams to the heroes of his country, and called sadly by their beds, 'Come and set my spirit free, that I may go home to my fathers and 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. 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, for the man and the time were not come.

Now Phrixus had a cousin called Æson, who was king in Iolcos by the sea.

And a fierce and lawless stepbrother drove Æson out of Iolcos by the sea, and took the kingdom to himself and ruled over it.

When Æson was driven out, he 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 my stepbrother will surely kill him, because he is the heir.'

So he went up from the sea, across the valley, through the vineyards and the olive groves, and across the river, toward 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 till he came to the mouth of a lonely cave, at the foot of a mighty cliff.

Above the cliff the snow-wreaths hung, dripping and cracking in the sun. But at its foot, around the cave's mouth, grew all fair flowers and herbs, as if in a garden. There they grew gaily in the sunshine and in the spray of the torrent from above, 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."'

So 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 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. His eyes were wise and mild, and his forehead like a mountain-wall. In his hands he held a harp of gold, and he 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.

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 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,' said the lad.

And Cheiron laughed and said, 'Sit here 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, who had followed his son into the cave, and said, 'Go back in peace. This boy shall not cross the river again till he has become a glory to you and to your house.'

And Æson wept over his son and went away, but the boy did not weep, so

full was his fancy of that strange cave, and the Centaur and his song, and the playfellows whom he was to see.

Then Cheiron put the lyre into his 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, and great Cheiron leapt up joyfully, and his hoofs made the cave resound as the lads shouted, 'Come out, Father Cheiron, and see our game!'

One cried, 'I have killed two deer,' and another, 'I took a wild cat among the crags,' and another shouted,' I have dragged a wild goat by its horns,' and another carried under each arm a bear-cub.

And Cheiron praised them all, each as he deserved.

Then the lads brought in wood and split it, and lighted a blazing fire. Others

skinned the deer and quartered them, and set them to roast before the flames.

While the venison was cooking, they bathed in the snow-torrent and washed away the dust.

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.

When the remnants of the meal 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.

After a while they all went out to a plot of grass at the cave's mouth, and there they boxed and ran and wrestled and laughed till the stones fell from the cliffs.

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 the gleam of their golden hair.

And the lad danced with them, delighted, and then slept a wholesome sleep, upon fragrant leaves of bay and myrtle and flowers of thyme.

He rose at the dawn and bathed in the torrent, and became a schoolfellow to the heroes' sons, and forgot Iolcos by the sea, 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 learned to wrestle, to box and to hunt, and to play upon the harp. Next he learned to ride, for old Cheiron used to mount him on his back. He

learned too the virtue of all herbs, and how to cure all wounds, and Cheiron called him Jason the Healer, and that is his name until this day.

CHAPTER 2
How Jason Lost His Sandal

And ten years came and went, and Jason was grown to be a mighty man.

Now it happened one 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.

When Jason looked south, he 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 your uncle 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!'

Cheiron sighed and said, 'Will you go to Iolcos by the sea? Then promise me two things before you go! Speak harshly to no soul whom you may meet, and stand by the word which you shall speak.'

Jason promised. Then he leapt down the mountain, to take his fortune like a man.

He went down through the thickets and across the downs of thyme, till he came to the vineyard walls, and the olives in the glen. And among the olives roared the river, foaming with a summer flood.

And on the bank of the river sat a woman, all wrinkled, gray and old. Her head shook with old age, and her hands shook on her knees.

When she saw Jason, she spoke, whining, 'Who will carry me across the flood?'

But Jason, heeding her not, went towards the waters. Yet he thought twice before he leapt, so loud roared the torrent all brown from the mountain rains.

The old woman whined again, 'I am weak and old, fair youth. For Hera's sake,

the Queen of the Immortals, carry me over the torrent.'

Jason was going to answer her scornfully, when Cheiron's words, 'Speak harshly to no soul whom you may meet,' 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. Jason staggered in, wondering, and the first step was up to his knees.

The first step was up to his knees, and the second step was up to his waist. The stones rolled about his feet, and his feet slipped about the stones. So he went on, staggering and panting, while the old woman cried upon his back, 'Fool, you have wet my mantle! Do you mock at poor old souls like me?'

Jason had half a mind to drop her and

let her get through the torrent alone, but Cheiron's words were in his mind, and 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 himself panting awhile, and then leapt up to go upon his journey, but he first 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.

Her garments shone like the summer sea, and her jewels like the stars of heaven. And she looked down on him with great soft eyes, with great eyes, mild and awful, which filled all the glen with light.

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

And she spoke: 'I am Hera, the Queen of Olympus. As thou hast done to

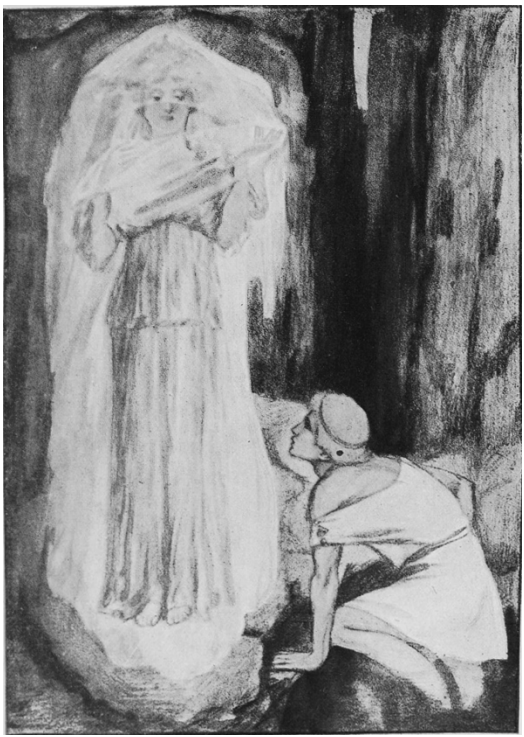
me, so will I do to thee. Call on me in the hour of need, and try if the Immortals can forget!'

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

Then a great fear fell on Jason, but after a while he grew light of heart. He blessed old Cheiron and said, 'Surely the Centaur is a prophet and knew what would come to pass when he bade me speak harshly to no soul whom I might meet.'

Then 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 he was. But some of the elders whispered together, and at last



"I am Hera, the
Queen of Olympus."

one of them stopped Jason and called to him, 'Fair lad, who are you and whence come you, and what is your errand in the town?'

'My name, good Father, is Jason, and I come from Pelion up above. My errand is to Pelias your king. Tell me, then, where his palace is.'

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

Jason laughed a great laugh in his pride. 'Good news, good father, both for you and me. For that very end, to take his kingdom, I came into the town.'

Then he strode on toward the palace of Pelias his uncle, while all the people

wondered at the stranger. And he stood in the doorway and cried, 'Come out, come out, Pelias the Valiant, and fight for your kingdom like a man.'

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

'I am Jason, the son of Æson, the heir of all the land.'

Then Pelias lifted up his hands and eyes and wept, or seemed to weep, and blessed the Gods who 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 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.

When supper was ended his three cousins came into the hall, and Jason thought he would like well to have one

of them for his wife.

But soon he looked at Pelias, and when he saw that he still wept, he said, 'Why do you look so sad, my uncle?'

Then Pelias sighed heavily again and again, like a man who had to tell some dreadful story, and was afraid to begin.

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 Phrixus and of the Golden Fleece, and told him what was a lie, that Phrixus' spirit tormented him day and night. 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 rest also, for he never lets us 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.

When Pelias saw him silent he began to talk of other things. 'One thing there is,' said Pelias, 'on which I need your advice, for, though you are young, I see in you a wisdom beyond your years. There is one neighbour of mine whom I dread more than all men on earth. I am stronger than he now and can command him, but I know that if he stay among us, he will work my ruin in the end. 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, for if he once set forth after it, you would never be troubled with him more.'

At that a little smile came across the

lips of Pelias, and a flash of wicked joy into his eyes. Jason saw it and started, and he remembered the warning of the old man, and his own one sandal and the oracle, and he saw 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, 'because I came here with one sandal,' and he lifted his fist angrily, while Pelias stood up to him like a wolf at bay. Whether of the two was the stronger and the fiercer it would be hard to tell.

But after a moment Pelias spoke gently, 'Why so rash, my son? I have not harmed you. You will go, and that gladly, for you have a hero's heart within you, and the love of glory.'

Jason knew that he was entrapped, but he cried aloud, 'You have well spoken, cunning uncle of mine, I love glory.

I will go and fetch the Golden Fleece. Promise me but this in return, and keep your word as I keep mine. Treat my father lovingly while I am gone, for the sake of the all-seeing Zeus, 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 he said, 'I promise, and I will perform. It will be no shame to give up my kingdom to the man who wins that fleece.'

So they both went and lay down to sleep. But Jason could not sleep for thinking how he was to win the Golden Fleece. Sometimes Phrixus seemed to call him in a thin voice, faint and low, as if it came from far across the sea. Sometimes he seemed to see the eyes of Hera, and to hear her words again, 'Call on me in the hour of need, and see if the

Immortals can forget.'

On the morrow Jason went to Pelias and said, 'Give me a lamb, that I may sacrifice to Hera.' 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, who were pupils of the Centaur with me. Then together we will fit out a ship, 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 Jason, and, like him, never return, so shall I be lord of the land and the greatest king in Hellas.'

CHAPTER 3
How They Built the Ship Argo

So the heralds went out and cried to all the heroes, 'Who dare come to the adventures of the Golden Fleece?'

And Hera stirred the hearts of all the princes, and they came from all their valleys to the yellow sand of Iolcos by the sea.

All the city came out to meet them, and the men were never tired with looking at their height and their beauty and the glitter of their arms.

But the women sighed over them and whispered, 'Alas, they are all going to their death!'

Then the heroes felled the mountain pines and shaped them with the axe, and Argus the famed shipbuilder taught them to build a galley, the first long ship which ever sailed the seas. They named her Argo, after Argus the shipbuilder, and worked at her all day long.

But Jason went away into a far-off land, till he found Orpheus, the prince of minstrels, where he dwelt in his cave.

And he asked him, 'Will you leave your mountains, Orpheus, my playfellow in old times, and sail with the heroes to bring home the Golden Fleece? And will you 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, since I lived in Cheiron's cave, above Iolcos by the sea? And now must I go out again, to the ends of all the earth, far away into the misty darkness?

But a friend's demand must be obeyed.'

So Orpheus rose up sighing, and took his harp. He led Jason to the holy oak, and he bade him cut down a bough and sacrifice to Hera. And they took the bough and came to Iolcos, and nailed it to the prow 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.'

And 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 the Argo toward the sea.

Then Orpheus took his harp and began his magic song. And the good ship Argo heard him and longed to be away and out at sea, till she stirred in every timber, and heaved from stem to stern, and leapt up from the sand upon the rollers, and plunged onward like a gallant horse till she rushed into the whispering sea.

And they stored her well with food and water, and settled themselves each man to his oar, keeping time to the harp of Orpheus. Then away across the bay they rowed southward, while the people lined the cliffs.

But the women wept while the men shouted at the starting of that gallant crew.

CHAPTER 4
How the Argonauts Won the Golden Fleece

The heroes rowed across the bay, and while they waited there for a southwest wind, they chose themselves a captain from their crew. And some called for the strongest and hugest to be their captain, but more called for Jason, because he was the wisest of them all.

So Jason was chosen captain, and each hero vowed to stand by him faithfully in the adventure of the Golden Fleece.

They sailed onward and northward to Pelion. And their hearts yearned for the dear old mountain, as they thought

of the days gone by, of the sports of their boyhood, and their hunting, and their lessons in the cave beneath the cliff. Then at last they said, 'Let us land here 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.'

So the helmsman steered them to the shore, under the crags of Pelion, and they went up through the dark pine-forests toward the Centaur's cave.

Then, as Cheiron saw them, he leapt up and welcomed them every one, and set a feast of venison before them. 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 he sang of heroes who fought with fists and teeth, and how they tore up the pine-trees in their fury, and hurled great crags of stone, while the mountains thundered with the battle, and the land was wasted far and wide.

And the heroes praised his song right heartily, for some of them had helped in that great fight.

Then Orpheus took the lyre and sang of the making of the wondrous world. And as he sang, his voice rose from the cave above the crags, and through the tree-tops. The trees bowed their heads when they heard it, and the forest beasts crept close to listen, and the birds forsook their nests and hovered near. And old Cheiron clapped his hands together and beat his hoofs upon the ground, for wonder at that magic song.

Now the heroes came down to the ship, and Cheiron came down with them,

weeping, and kissed them one by one, 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 wiser than all beasts and men.

Then Cheiron went up to a cliff and prayed for them, that they might come home safe and well, while the heroes rowed away and watched him standing on his cliff above the sea, with his great hands raised toward heaven and his white locks waving in the wind. They strained their eyes to watch him to the last, for they felt that they should look on him no more.

So they rowed on over the long swell of the sea eastward, and out into the open sea which we now call the Black Sea.

All feared that dreadful sea, and its rocks and fogs and bitter freezing storms,

and the heroes trembled for all their courage, as they came into that wild Black Sea, and saw it stretching out before them, without a shore, as far as eye could see.

Then Orpheus spoke and warned them that they must come now to the wandering blue rocks.

Soon they saw them, and their blue peaks shone like spires and castles of gray glass, while an ice-cold wind blew from them and chilled all the heroes' hearts.

As they neared them, they could see the rocks heaving, as they rolled upon the long sea-waves, 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 the blue rocks we must pass, so look for an opening, and be brave, for

Hera is with us.'

The cunning helmsman stood silent, clenching his teeth, till he saw a heron come flying mast-high toward 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 bird.'

The heron flapped to and fro 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 dashed together as the bird fled swiftly through, but they struck but one feather from his tail, and then rebounded at the shock.

Then the helmsman cheered the heroes, and they shouted, while the oars bent beneath their strokes as they rushed between those toppling ice-crags. But ere the rocks could meet again they had passed them, and were safe out in the

open sea.

After that they sailed on wearily along the coast, past many a mighty river's mouth, and past many a barbarous tribe. And at day dawn they looked eastward, till, shining above the tree-tops, they saw the golden roofs of King Aietes, the Child of the Sun.

Then out spoke the helmsman, 'We are come to our goal at last, for there are the roofs of Aietes, and the woods where all poisons grow. But who can tell us where among them is hid the Golden Fleece?'

But Jason cheered the heroes, for his heart was high and bold, and he said, 'I will go alone to Aietes, and win him with soft words. Better so than to go altogether and to come to blows at once.' But the heroes would not stay behind, so they rowed boldly up the stream.

And a dream came to Aietes and

filled his heart with fear. Then he leapt up and bade his servants bring his chariot, that he might go down to the riverside, 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 the Argo sliding up beneath the bank, and many a hero in her, like Immortals for beauty and strength. But Jason was the noblest of all, for Hera, who loved him, gave him beauty and height and terrible manhood.

When they came near together and looked into each other's eyes, the heroes were awed before Aietes as he shone in

his chariot like his father, the glorious Sun. 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.

Sternly Aietes looked at the heroes, and sternly he spoke and loud, 'Who are you, and what want you here that you come to our shore? Know this is my kingdom and these are my people who serve me. Never yet grew they tired in battle, and well they know how to face a foe.'

And the heroes sat silent awhile before the face of that ancient king. But Hera the awful Goddess put courage into Jason's heart, and he rose and shouted loudly in answer to the king.

'We are no lawless men. We come, not to plunder or carry away slaves from your land, but we have come on a quest 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. We too never tire in battle, and 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 Aietes' rage rushed up like a whirlwind, and his eyes flashed fire as he heard; but he crushed his anger down in his heart and spoke mildly.

'If you will fight, then many a man must die. But if you will be ruled by me 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 he said, and then turned his horses and drove back in silence to the town.

The heroes sat dumb with sorrow, for there was no facing the thousands of

King Aietes' men and the fearful chance of war.

But Chalciope, the widow of Phrixus, went weeping to the town, for she remembered her husband and all the pleasures of her youth while she watched the fair face 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 up the fleece, that my husband's spirit may have rest?'

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.'

Then 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 the evening they went down to the river-side, Chalciope and Medeia the witch-maiden, and with them a lad. And the lad crept forward, among the beds of reeds, till he came to where Jason kept ward on shore, leaning upon his lance, full of thought.

And the lad said, 'Chalciope waits for you, to talk about the Golden Fleece.'

Then Jason went boldly with the boy and found the two princesses. When Chalciope saw him, she wept and took his hands and cried, 'O cousin of my beloved Phrixus, go home before you die!'

'It would be base to go home now, fair princess, and to have sailed all these seas in vain.'

Then both the princesses besought him, but Jason said, 'It is too late to

return!'

'But you know not,' said Medeia, 'what he must do who would win the fleece. He must tame the two brazen-footed bulls, which breathe devouring flame, and with them he must plough ere nightfall four acres in a field. He must sow the acres with serpents' teeth, of which each tooth springs up into an armed man. Then he must fight with all these warriors. And little will it profit him to conquer them, for the fleece is guarded by a serpent more huge than any mountain pine. Over his body you must step if you would reach the Golden Fleece.'

Then Jason laughed bitterly: 'Unjustly is that fleece kept here, and by an unjust and lawless king, and unjustly shall I die in my youth, for I will attempt it ere another sun be set.'

Medeia trembled and said, 'No

mortal man can reach that fleece unless I guide him through.'

But Jason cried, 'No wall so high 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, and I may yet win the Golden Fleece, if a wise maiden help bold men.'

And he looked at Medeia with his glittering eye, 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.'

And Medeia said slowly, 'Why should you die? I have an ointment here. I made it from the magic ice-flower. Anoint yourself with that, and you shall have in you the strength of seven, and anoint your shield with it, and neither

fire nor sword shall harm you. Anoint your helmet with it, before you sow the serpents' teeth, and when the sons of earth spring up, cast your helmet among them, and every man of them shall perish.'

Then Jason fell on his knees before her and thanked 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.

So at sunrise Jason went and bathed and anointed himself from head to foot, and his shield and his helmet and his weapons. And when the sun had risen, Jason sent two of his heroes to tell Aietes that he was ready for the fight.

Up among the marble walls they went, and beneath the roofs of gold, and

stood in the hall of Aietes, while he grew pale with rage. 'Fulfil your promise to us, Child of the blazing Sun,' the heroes cried to King Aietes. 'Give us the serpents' teeth, and let loose the fiery bulls, for we have found a champion among us, who can win the Golden Fleece!'

Aietes grew more pale with rage, for he had fancied that they had fled away by night, but he could not break his promise, so he gave them the serpents' teeth. Then he called 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.

There Aietes sat upon his throne, with his warriors on each hand, thousands and tens of thousands clothed from head to foot in steel chain mail. And the people and women crowded to every window and bank and wall, while the heroes stood together, a mere handful in

the midst of that great host.

Chalciope was there, and Medeia, wrapped closely in her veil; but Aietes 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!'

Aietes bade open the gates, and the magic bulls leapt out. Their brazen hoofs rang upon the ground as they rushed with lowered heads upon Jason, but he never flinched a step. The flame of their breath swept round him, but it singed not a hair of his head. And the bulls stopped short and trembled when Medeia began her spell.

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. For the heart of the bull died within him, beneath the steadfast eye of that dark witch-maiden

and the magic whisper of her lips.

So both the bulls were tamed and yoked, and Jason bound them to the plough and goaded them onward with his lance, till he had ploughed the sacred field. And all the heroes shouted, but Aietes bit his lips with rage, for half of Jason's work was done.

Then Jason took the serpents' teeth and sowed them, and waited what would befall.

And Medeia looked at him and at his helmet, lest he should forget the lesson she had taught him.

Now every furrow heaved and bubbled, and out of every clod arose a man. Out of the earth they arose 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.

The heroes grew pale with fear for him, but Aietes laughed an angry laugh.

Then Jason snatched off his helmet and hurled it into the thickest of the throng.

And hate and fear and suspicion came upon them, and one cried to his fellows, 'Thou didst strike me,' and another, 'Thou art Jason, thou shalt die,' and each turned his hand against the rest, and they fought and were never weary, till they all lay dead upon the ground.

And the magic furrows opened, and the kind earth took them home again, and Jason's work was done.

Then the heroes rose and shouted, and Jason cried to the king, 'Lead me to the Golden Fleece this moment before the sun goes down.'

But Aietes thought, 'Who is this, who is proof against all magic? He may kill the serpent yet!' So he delayed, and sat taking counsel with his princes.

Afterwards he bade a herald cry, 'Tomorrow we will meet these heroes and speak about the Golden Fleece.'

Then he turned and looked at Medeia. 'This is your doing, false witch-maid,' he said; 'you have helped these yellow-haired strangers.'

Medeia shrank and trembled, and her face grew pale with fear, and Aietes knew that she was guilty, and he whispered, 'If they win the Fleece, you die.'

Now the heroes went marching toward their ship, growling, like lions cheated of their prey. 'Let us go together to the grove and take the Fleece by force,' they said. But Jason held them back, while he praised them for brave heroes, for he hoped for Medeia's help.

And after a time she came trembling, and wept a long while before she spoke. At last she said, 'I must die, for my father has found out that I have helped you.'

But all the heroes cried, 'If you die we die with you, for without you we cannot win the fleece, and home we will never go without it.'

'You need not die,' said Jason to the witch-maiden. 'Flee home with us across the sea. Show us but how to win the fleece, and come with us and you shall be my queen, and rule over the rich princes in Iolcos by the sea.'

And all the heroes pressed round and vowed to her that she should be their queen. Medeia wept and hid her face in her hands. 'Must I leave my home and my people?' she sobbed. 'But the lot is cast: I will show you how to win the Golden Fleece. 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 take 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 she brought them to a thicket beside the War-god's gate.

And the base of the gate 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.

Jason would have sprung to seize it, but Medeia held him back and pointed to the tree-foot, where a mighty serpent lay, coiled in and out among the roots.

When the serpent saw them coming, he lifted up his head and watched them with his small bright eyes, and flashed his forked tongue.

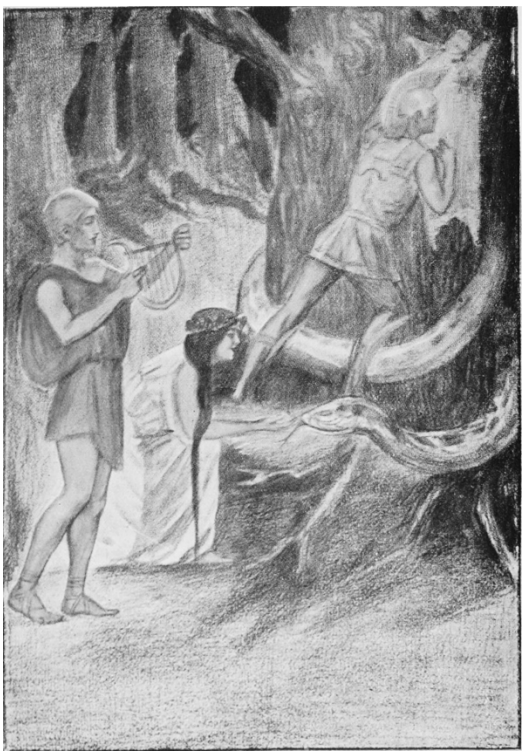
But Medeia called gently to him, and he stretched out his long, spotted neck, and licked her hand.

Then she made a sign to Orpheus, and he began his magic song.

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

Jason leapt forward warily and stept across that mighty snake, and tore the fleece from off the tree-trunk. Then the witch-maiden with Jason and Orpheus turned and rushed down to the bank where the Argo lay.

There was silence for a moment,



He stretched out his
long, spotted neck.

when 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. On and on, beneath the dewy darkness, they fled swiftly down the swirling stream, on and on till they heard the merry music of the surge.

Into the surge they rushed, and the 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 song of praise, till the heroes' hearts rose high again, and they rowed on, stoutly and steadfastly, away into the darkness of the West.

CHAPTER 5
How the Argonauts Reached Home

So the heroes fled away in haste, but Aietes manned his fleet and followed them.

Then Medeia, the dark witch-maiden, laid a cruel plot, for she killed her young brother who had come with her, and cast him into the sea, and said, 'Ere my father can take up his body and bury it, he must wait long and be left far behind.'

And all the heroes shuddered, and looked one at the other in shame.

When Aietes came to the place he stopped a long while and bewailed his

son, and took him up and went home.

So the heroes escaped for a time, but Zeus saw that evil deed, and out of the heavens he sent a storm and swept the Argo 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 out spoke the magic bough, which stood upon the Argo's prow, 'For your guilt, you must sail a weary way to where Circe, Medeia's sister, dwells among the islands of the West; she shall cleanse you of your guilt.' Whither they went I cannot tell, nor how they came to Circe's isle, but at last they reached the fairy island of the West.

And Jason bid them land, and as they went ashore they met Circe coming down toward the ship, and they trembled when they saw her, for her hair and face and robes shone flame.

Then Circe cried to Medeia, 'Ah, wretched girl, have you forgotten your sins that you come hither, where the flowers bloom all the year round? Where is your aged father, and the brother whom you killed? I will send you food and wine, but your ship must not stay here, for she is black with your wickedness.'

And the heroes prayed, but in vain, and cried, 'Cleanse us from our guilt!' but she sent them away and said, 'Go eastward, that you may be cleansed, and after that you may go home.'

Slowly and wearily they sailed on, till one summer's eve they came to a flowery island, and as they neared it they heard sweet songs.

Medeia started when she heard, and cried, 'Beware, O heroes, for here are the rocks of the Sirens. You must pass close by them, but those who listen to that

song are lost.'

Then Orpheus spoke, he, the king of all minstrels, 'Let them match their song against mine'; so he caught up his lyre and began his magic song.

Now they could see the Sirens. Three fair maidens, sitting on the beach, beneath a rock red in the setting sun.

Slowly they sung and sleepily, and as the heroes listened the oars fell from their hands, and their heads drooped, and they closed their heavy eyes, and all their toil seemed foolishness, and they thought of their renown no more.

Then Medeia clapped her hands together and cried, 'Sing louder, Orpheus, sing louder.'

And Orpheus sang till his voice drowned the song of the Sirens, and the heroes caught their oars again and cried, 'We will be men, and we will dare and suffer to the last.'

And as Orpheus sang, they dashed their oars into the sea and kept time to his music as they fled fast away, and the Sirens' voices died behind them, in the hissing of the foam. But when the Sirens saw that they were conquered, they shrieked for envy and rage and leapt into the sea, and were changed into rocks.

Then, as the Argonauts rowed on, they came to a fearful whirlpool, and they could go neither back nor forward, for the waves caught them and spun them round and round. While they struggled in the whirlpool, they saw near them on the other side of the strait a rock stand in the water—a rock smooth and slippery, and half way up a misty cave.

When Orpheus saw the rock he groaned. 'Little will it help us,' he cried, 'to escape the jaws of the whirlpool. For in that cave lives a sea-hag, and from her cave she fishes for all things that pass by,

and never ship's crew boasted that they came safe past her rock.'

Then out of the depths came Thetis, the silver-footed bride of one of the heroes. She came with all her nymphs around her, and they played like snow-white dolphins, diving in from wave to wave before the ship, and in her wake and beside her, as dolphins play. And they caught the ship and guided her, and passed her on from hand to hand, and tossed her through the billows, as maidens do the ball.

And when the sea-hag stooped to seize the ship, they struck her, and she shrank back into her cave affrighted, and the Argo leapt safe past her, while a fair breeze rose behind.

Then Thetis and her nymphs sank down to their coral caves beneath the sea, and their gardens of green and purple, where flowers bloom all the year

round, while the heroes went on rejoicing, yet dreading what might come next.

They rowed away for many a weary day till their water was spent and their food eaten, but at last they saw a long steep island.

'We will land here,' they cried, 'and fill our water casks upon the shore.'

But when they came nearer to the island they saw a wondrous sight. For on the cliffs stood a giant, taller than any mountain pine. When he saw the Argo and her crew he came toward them, more swiftly than the swiftest horse, and he shouted to them, 'You are pirates, you are robbers! If you land you shall die the death.'

Then the heroes lay on their oars in fear, but Medeia spoke: 'I know this giant. If strangers land, he leaps into his furnace, which flames there among the

hills, and when he is red-hot he rushes on them, and burns them in his brazen hands. But he has but one vein in all his body filled with liquid fire, and this vein is closed with a nail. I will find out where the nail is placed, and when I have got it into my hands you shall water your ship in peace.'

So they took the witch-maiden and left her alone on the shore. And she stood there all alone in her beauty till the giant strode back red-hot from head to heel.

When he saw the maiden he stopped. And she looked boldly up into his face and sang a magic song, and she held up a flash of crystal and said, 'I am Medeia, the witch-maiden. My sister Circe gave me this and said, "Go, reward Talus, the faithful giant, for his fame is gone out into all lands." So come and I will pour this into your veins, that you may live for

ever young.'

And he listened to her false words, that simple Talus, and came near.

But Medeia said, 'Dip yourself in the sea first and cool yourself, lest you burn my tender hands. Then show me the nail in your vein, and in that will I pour the liquid from the crystal flask.'

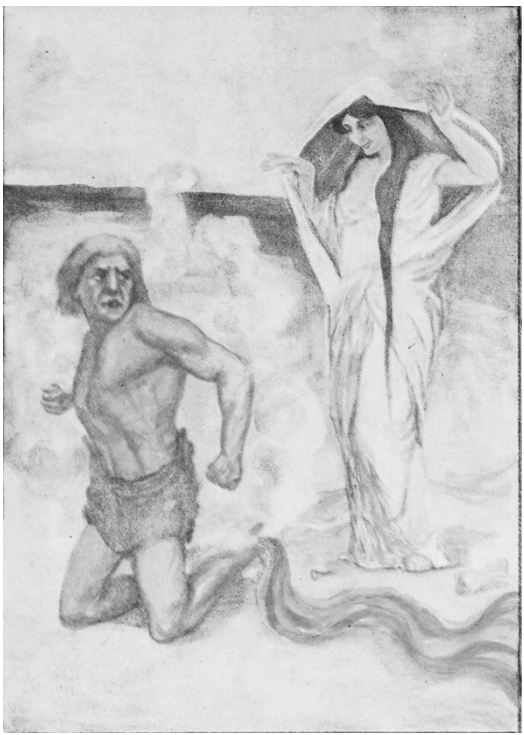
Then that simple Talus dipped himself in the sea, and came and knelt before Medeia and showed the secret nail.

And she drew the nail out gently, but she poured nothing in, and instead the liquid fire streamed forth.

Talus tried to leap up, crying, 'You have betrayed me, false witch-maiden.'

But she lifted up her hands before him and sang, till he sank beneath her spell.

And as he sank, the earth groaned beneath his weight and the liquid fire ran from his heel, like a stream of lava, to the



"You have betrayed me,
false witch-maiden."

sea.

Then Medeia laughed and called to the heroes, 'Come and water your ship in peace.'

So they came and found the giant lying dead, and they fell down and kissed Medeia's feet, and watered their ship, and took sheep and oxen, and so left that inhospitable shore. At the next island they went ashore and offered sacrifices, and Orpheus purged them from their guilt.

And at last, after many weary days and nights, all worn and tired, the heroes saw once more Pelion and Iolcos by the sea.

They ran the ship ashore, but they had no strength left to haul her up the beach, and they crawled out on the pebbles and wept, till they could weep no more.

For the houses and the trees were all

altered, and all the faces they saw were strange, so that their joy was swallowed up in sorrow.

The people crowded round and asked them, 'Who are you, that you sit weeping here?'

'We are the sons of your princes, who sailed in search of the Golden Fleece, and we have brought it home. Give us news of our fathers and 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.

And Jason went up with Medeia to the palace of his uncle Pelias. And when he came in, Pelias and Æson, Jason's father, sat by the fire, two old men, whose heads shook together as they tried to warm themselves before the fire.

Jason fell down at his father's knee and wept and said, 'I am your own son Jason, and I have brought home the Golden Fleece and a princess of the Sun's race for my bride.'

Then his father clung to him like a child, and wept, and would not let him go, and cried, 'Promise never to leave me till I die.'

And Jason turned to his uncle Pelias, 'Now give me up the kingdom and fulfil your promise, as I have fulfilled mine.' And his uncle gave him his kingdom.

So Jason stayed at Iolcos by the sea.

THESEUS

CHAPTER 1
How Theseus Lifted the Stone

Once upon a time there was a princess called Aithra. She 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.

Aithra used to go up to the temple of the Gods, and sit there all day, looking out across the bay, over the purple peaks of the mountains to the Attic shore beyond.

When Theseus was full fifteen years

old, she took him up with her to the temple, and into the thickets which grew in the temple yard. She led him to a tall plane-tree, and there she sighed 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 he tried till the sweat ran down his brow from the heat, and the tears from his eyes for shame, but all was of no avail. 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, 'The day may come when you will be a stronger

man than lives in all the land.' And 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 past, she led Theseus up again to the temple and bade him lift the stone, but he could not.

Then she sighed again and said the same words again, and went down and came again next year.

But Theseus could not lift the stone then, nor the year after.

He longed to ask his mother the meaning of that stone, and what might be 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 hunting the boar and the bull and the deer among the rocks, till upon all the

mountains there was no hunter so swift as Theseus, and all the people said, 'Surely the Gods are with the lad!'

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 he said, 'If I break my heart in my body it shall come up.' And he tugged at it once more, and lifted it, and rolled it over with a shout.

When he looked beneath it, on the ground lay a sword of bronze, with a hilt of glittering gold, and beside it a pair of golden sandals.

Theseus caught them up and burst through the bushes 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 and wept also, he knew not why.

When she was tired of weeping Aithra lifted up her head and laid her finger on her lips, and said, 'Hide them in your cloak, Theseus, my son, and come with me where we can look down upon the sea.'

They went outside the sacred wall and looked down over the bright blue sea, and Aithra said, 'Do you see the land at our feet?'

And Theseus said, 'Yes, this is where I was born and bred.'

And she asked, 'Do you see the land beyond?'

And the lad answered, 'Yes, that is Attica, where the Athenian people live!'

'That is a fair land and large, Theseus, my son, and it looks towards the

sunny south. There the hills are sweet with thyme, and the meadows with violet, and the nightingales sing all day in the thickets. There are twelve towns well peopled, the homes of an ancient race. What would you do, Theseus, if you were king of such a land?'

Theseus stood astonished, as he looked across the broad bright sea and saw the fair Attic shore. His heart grew great within him, and he 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 thy father Ægeus, king of Athens, and say to him, "The stone is lifted!" 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?'

She answered, 'Weep not for me.'

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

CHAPTER 2
How Theseus Slew the Club-Bearer and the Pine-Bender

So Theseus stood there alone, with his mind full of many hopes. And first he thought of going down to the harbour and hiring a swift ship and sailing across the bay to Athens. But even that seemed too slow for him, and he longed for wings to fly across the sea and find his father.

After a while his heart began to fail him, and he sighed and said within himself, 'What if my father have other sons around him, whom he loves? What if he will not receive me? He has forgotten me ever since I was born. Why should he

welcome me now?'

Then he thought a long while sadly, but at last he cried aloud, 'Yes, I will make him love me. I will win honour, and do such deeds that Ægeus shall be proud of me though he had fifty other sons.'

'I will go by land and into the mountains, and so round to Athens. Perhaps there I may hear of brave adventures, and do something which shall win my father's love.'

So Theseus went by land and away into the mountains, with his father's sword upon his thigh. And he went up into the gloomy glens, up and up, till the lowland grew blue beneath his feet, and the clouds drove damp about his head. But he went up and up, ever toiling on through bog and brake, till he came to a pile of stones.

On the stones a man was sitting wrapped in a cloak of bearskin.

When he saw Theseus, he rose, and laughed till the glens rattled.

'Who art thou, fair fly, who hast walked into the spider's web?'

Theseus walked on steadily, and made no answer, but he thought, 'Is this some robber? Has an adventure come to me already?'

But the strange man laughed louder than ever and said, 'Bold fly, know thou not these glens are the web from which no fly ever finds his way out again, and I am the spider who eats the flies? Come hither and let me feast upon you. It is of no use to run away, for these glens in the mountain make so cunning a web, that through it no man can find his way home.'

Still Theseus came steadily on, and he asked, 'And what is your name, bold spider, and where are your spider's fangs?'

The strange man laughed again. 'Men call me the Club-bearer, and here is my spider's fang,' and he lifted off from the stones at his side a mighty club of bronze. 'With this I pound all proud flies,' he said. '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 wrapped his mantle round his left arm quickly, in hard folds, 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. And thrice Theseus sprang upright after the blow, and he stabbed at the Club-bearer with his sword, but the loose folds of the bearskin saved him.

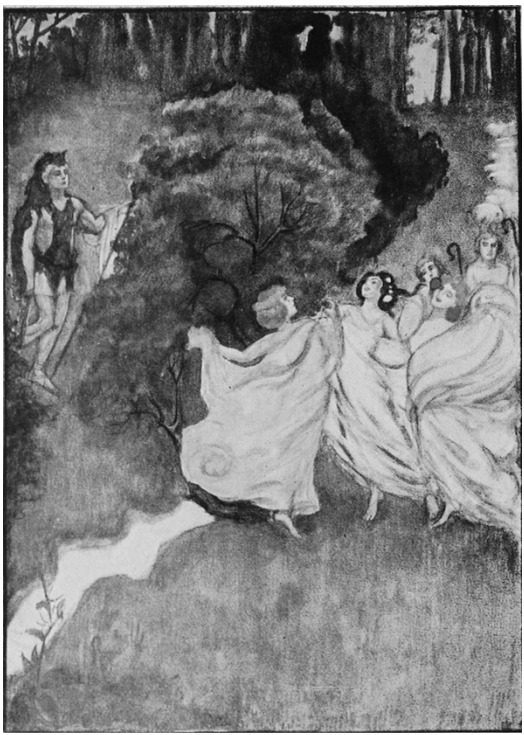
Then Theseus grew angry and closed with him, and caught him by the throat,

and they fell and rolled over together. But when Theseus rose up from the ground the Club-bearer lay still at his feet.

So Theseus took the strange man's club and his bearskin and went upon his journey down the glens, till he came to a broad green valley, and he saw flocks and herds sleeping beneath the trees. And by the side of a pleasant fountain were nymphs and shepherds dancing, but no one piped to them as they danced.

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 one piped to them
as they danced.

no more of them, but drank and bathed in the clear pool, and then lay down in the shade under a plane-tree, while the water sang him to sleep as it trickled down from stone to stone.

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, where they sat on green cushions of moss. One said, 'Surely he is not the Club-bearer,' and another, 'He looks no robber, but a fair and gentle youth.'

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

They leapt across the pool, and came to him, and called the shepherds back. And Theseus told them how he had slain the Club-bearer, and the shepherds

kissed his feet and sang, 'Now we shall feed our flocks in peace, and not be afraid to have music when we dance. For the cruel Club-bearer has met his match, and he will listen for our pipes no more.'

Then the shepherds brought him kids' flesh and wine, and the nymphs brought him honey from the rocks.

And Theseus ate and drank with them, and they begged him to stay, but he would not.

'I have a great work to do'; he said, 'I must go towards Athens.'

And the shepherds said, 'You must look warily about you, lest you meet the robber, called the Pine-bender. For he bends down two pine-trees and binds all travellers hand and foot between them, and when he lets the trees go again their bodies are torn in sunder.'

But Theseus went on swiftly, for his heart burned to meet that cruel robber.

And in a pine-wood at last he met him, where the road ran between high rocks.

There the robber sat upon a stone by the wayside, with a young fir-tree for a club across his knees, and a cord laid ready by his side, and over his head, upon the fir-top, hung the bones of murdered men.

Then Theseus shouted to him, 'Holla, thou valiant Pine-bender, hast thou two fir-trees left for me?'

The robber leapt to his feet and answered, pointing to the bones above his head, 'My larder has grown empty lately, so I have two fir-trees ready for thee!

He rushed on Theseus, lifting his club, and Theseus rushed upon him, and they fought together till the greenwoods rang.

Then Theseus heaved up a mighty stroke and smote the Pine-bender down upon his face, and knelt upon his back,

and bound him with his own cord, and said, 'As thou hast done to others, so shall it be done to thee. And he bent down two young fir-trees and bound the robber between them for all his struggling and his prayers, and as he let the trees go the robber perished, and Theseus went on, leaving him to the hawks and crows.

Clearing the land of monsters as he went, Theseus saw at last the plain of Athens before him.

And as he went up through Athens all the people ran out to see him, for his fame had gone before him, and every one knew of his mighty deeds, and they shouted, 'Here comes the hero!'

But Theseus went on sadly and steadfastly, for his heart yearned after his father. He went up the holy stairs to the spot where the palace of Ægeus stood. He went straight into the hall and stood

upon the threshold and looked round.

He saw his cousins sitting at the table, and loud they laughed and fast they passed the wine-cup round, but no Ægeus sat among them.

They saw Theseus and called to him, 'Holla, tall stranger at the door, what is your will to-day?'

'I come to ask for hospitality.'

'Then take it and welcome. You look like a hero and a bold warrior, and we like such to drink with us.'

'I ask no hospitality of you; I ask it of Ægeus the king, the master of this house.'

At that some growled, and some laughed and shouted, 'Heyday! we are all masters here.'

'Then I am master as much as the rest of you,' said Theseus, and he strode past the table up the hall, and looked around for Ægeus, but he was nowhere to be seen.

The revellers looked at him and then at each other, and each whispered to the man next him, 'This is a forward fellow; he ought to be thrust out at the door.'

But each man's neighbour whispered in return, 'His shoulders are broad: will you rise and put him out?' So they all sat still where they were.

Then Theseus 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 with Medeia, the dark witch-woman, watching her eye and hand.

And when Ægeus heard of Theseus he turned pale and again red, and rose from his seat trembling, while Medeia, the witch, watched him like a snake.

'What is Theseus 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 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 thought, '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.'

Old Ægeus looked on him and loved him, 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, was watching all the while, and she saw how the heart of Ægeus opened to Theseus, and she said to herself, 'This youth will be master here, unless I hinder it.'

Then she went back modestly to her chamber, while Theseus ate and drank, and all the servants whispered, 'This, then, is the man who killed the monsters! How noble are his looks, and how huge his size! Ah, would he were our master's son!'

Presently Medeia came forth, decked in all her jewels and her rich Eastern robes, and looking more beautiful than the day, so that all the guests could look

at nothing else. And in her right hand she held a golden cup, and in her left a flask of gold. She came up to Theseus, and spoke in a sweet and winning voice, 'Hail to the hero! drink of my charmed cup, which gives rest after every toil and heals all wounds'; and as she spoke she poured sparkling wine into the cup.

Theseus looked up into 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.

Then he rose and said, 'The wine is rich, and the wine-bearer fair. Let her pledge me first herself in the cup that the wine may be sweeter.'

Medeia turned pale and stammered, 'Forgive me, fair hero, but I am ill and dare drink no wine.'

Theseus looked again into her eyes and cried, 'Thou shalt pledge me in that cup or die!'

Then Medeia shrieked and dashed the cup to the ground and fled, for there was strong poison in that wine.

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

Ægeus cried, 'What have you done?'

But Theseus said, 'I have rid the land of one enchantment, now I will rid it of one more.'

And he came close to Ægeus and drew from his cloak the sword and the sandals, and said the words which his mother bade him, 'The Stone is lifted.'

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, till they had no strength left to weep more.

Then Ægeus turned to all the people and cried, 'Behold my son!'

But the cousins were angry and drew their swords against Theseus.

Twenty against one they fought, and yet Theseus beat them all, till at last he was left alone in the palace with his new-found father. But before nightfall all the town came up, with dances and songs, because the king had found an heir to his royal house.

So Theseus stayed with his father all the winter through, and when spring drew near, he saw all the people of Athens grow sad and silent. And he asked the reason of the silence and the sadness, 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.

But when spring had come, a herald stood in the market-place 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 before the herald and cried, 'I am a stranger here. Tell me, then, why you come?'

'To fetch the tribute which King Ægeus promised to King Minos. Blood was shed here unjustly, and King Minos came to avenge it, and would not leave Athens till the land had promised him tribute—seven youths and seven maidens every year, who go with me in a black-sailed ship.'

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

But Ægeus shrieked and cried, 'You shall not go, my son, you shall not go to die horribly, as those youths and maidens die. For Minos thrusts them into a

labyrinth, and no one can escape from 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.'

And Theseus said, 'Therefore all the more will I go with them, and slay the accursed Minotaur.'

Then Ægeus clung to his knees, but Theseus would not stay, and at last he let him go, weeping bitterly, and saying only this last word, 'Promise me but this, if you return in peace, though that may hardly be. Take down the black sail of the ship, for I shall watch for it all day upon the cliffs, 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 and drew lots for the youths and maidens who were to sail in that sad

ship.

The people stood wailing and weeping as the lot fell on this one and on that, but Theseus strode into the midst and cried, 'Here is one who needs no lot. I myself will be one of the seven.'

And the herald asked in wonder, 'Fair youth, do you know whither you are going?'

'I know,' answered Theseus boldly; 'let us go down to the black-sailed ship.'

So they went down to the black-sailed ship, seven maidens and seven youths, and Theseus before them all. And the people followed 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 rang with the voice of their weeping.

CHAPTER 3
How Theseus Slew the Minotaur

And the ship sailed slowly on, till at last it reached the land of Crete, and Theseus stood before King Minos, and they looked each other in the face.

Minos bade take the youths and the maidens to prison, and cast them to the Minotaur one by one.

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

'Who art thou, thou brave youth?' asked the king.

'I am the son of Ægeus, the king of Athens, and I am come here to end the yearly tribute.'

And Minos pondered a while, looking steadfastly at him, and he thought, 'The lad means to atone by his own death for his father's sin;' and he answered 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.'

At that Minos frowned and said, 'Then thou shalt see him.'

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

Now Ariadne, the daughter of Minos, saw Theseus as she came out of her white stone hall, and she loved him for his courage and his beauty, and she said, 'It is shameful 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, and take me with you. For I dare not stay after you are gone. 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 put an end to the terrors of my land.'

'And will you kill the Minotaur? How then will you do it?' asked Ariadne in wonder.

'I know not, nor do I care, but he must be strong if he be too strong for me,' said Theseus.

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 before I have eaten up the monster's carcass.'

Then Ariadne loved him yet 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 monster, 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.'

Then Theseus laughed and said, 'Am I not safe enough now?' And he hid his sword, and rolled up the clue in his hand, and then he fell down before Ariadne and kissed her hands and her feet, while

she wept over him a long while. Then the princess went away, and Theseus lay down and slept sweetly.

When evening came the guards led him away to the labyrinth. And he went down into that doleful gulf, 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 the clue. For when he went in he fastened it to a stone and left it to unroll out of his hand as he went on, and it lasted till he met the Minotaur in a narrow chasm between black cliffs.

And when he saw the Minotaur, he stopped a while, for he had never seen so strange a monster. His body was a man's, but his head was the head of a bull, and his teeth were the teeth of a lion.

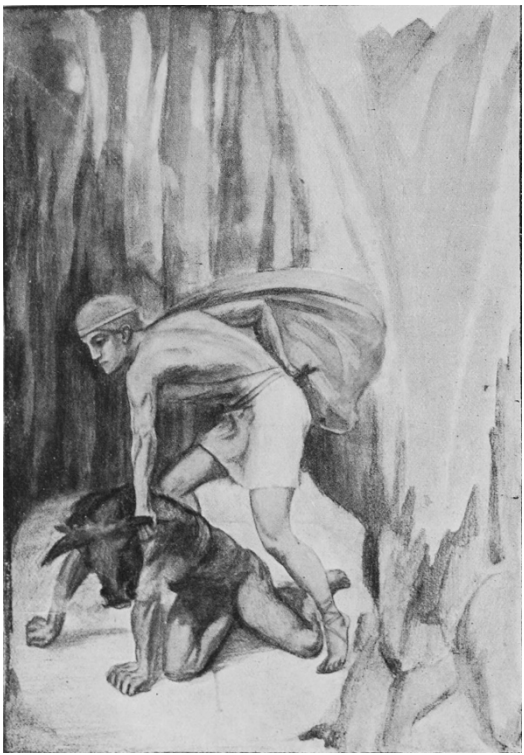
When he saw Theseus, he roared and put his head down and rushed right at him. But Theseus stepped aside nimbly,

and as the monster 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.

Theseus followed him, holding the clue of thread in his left hand, and at last he came up with him, where he lay panting, and caught him by the horns, and forced his head back, and drove the keen sword through his throat.

Then Theseus turned, and went back, limping and weary, feeling his way by the clue of thread, 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. Then she laid her finger on her lips, and led him to the prison and opened the doors, and set all the prisoners free, while the guards lay



He had never seen so
strange a monster.

sleeping heavily, for Ariadne had drugged them with wine.

So 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 escaped all safe, and Ariadne became the wife of Theseus.

But that fair Ariadne never came to Athens with her husband.

Some say that, as she lay sleeping on the shore, one of the Gods found her and took her up into the sky, and some say that the God drove away Theseus, and took Ariadne from him by force. 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 on the cliffs and watched day after day, and strained his old eyes across the waters to see the ship afar. And when he saw the black sail he gave up Theseus for dead,

and in his grief he fell into the sea and was drowned, and it is called the Ægean Sea to this day.

Then Theseus was king of Athens, and he guarded it and ruled it well, and many wise things he did, so that his people honoured him after he was dead, for many a hundred years, as the father of their freedom and of their laws.