

THE
GOLDEN PORCH

A BOOK OF GREEK FAIRY
TALES

BY
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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

SECOND IMPRESSION

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PREFACE

The name of this book is borrowed from the Ode in which Pindar has enshrined the loveliest of fairy stories—the "leaf-fringed legend" of the Pansy Child. The poet was bidden to prepare that Ode in honour of a friend's victory in the Olympic Games, and he likens his task to the building of a palace. Golden pillars, he says, must bear up the porch of this House of Song, and the glories of the victor shall form those pillars, glittering afar in the sumptuous frontal of the fabric. Now, chief among the victor's glories, was his descent from the namesake of the Pansy, the holy Seer of Olympia, and so, through that Golden Porch, Pindar leads us into Fairyland.

In adding one more to the innumerable collections of stories from the Greek, I have hoped to break fresh ground by reproducing the myths of Pindar's Odes, as far as possible in a free translation, and with such additions only as were needed to form a framework. Some of these legends are already wholly or partly familiar, but several will be new, I think, to English readers.

It may be said that Greek myths, especially as handled by the poet who wove into them his deepest criticisms of life, are misleadingly, if not profanely, entitled fairy tales.

But I would plead that nothing in Greek literature, except the stories of Herodotus, is so steeped in the true fairy atmosphere as are the myths of Pindar. I need not speak of Aeschylus, the creatures of whose Titanic imagination belong to a universe of their own; but consider, for example, the poet of the *Odyssey*. His wonder-world, though real, lies far away; Odysseus, he makes us feel, has only to get back to Ithaca, and he has no more chance of encountering a Cyclops or a Laestrygon than you or I have. For Pindar, on the contrary, all Hellas is enchanted ground; it was in Arcadia, in Argos, in his own Thebes, that men of old fought uncanny monsters, entertained divinity unawares, and learnt Earth's secrets from

talking beasts and birds. What wonder, if for him, living in such a land, and turning from the upheaval of a new era to gaze fondly on an ideal past, that vanished world came alive again! At least, it is one charm of his story-telling that he seems to be describing things he saw happen with his own eyes, and another, that the marvels befall quite simply, and, so to speak, intelligibly, in the natural course of events.

To these essentials of the perfect fairy tale, Pindar adds the accepted *dramatis personae*—the brave young prince, the wicked king, his foil, and the incomparably beautiful princess. And always, as in fairy tales all the world over, the wicked king comes to a bad end, while the deserving hero lives happy ever after.

The legends of the Trojan War belong of course to a different category, for between the time of Heracles and the time of Achilles the sun of the fairy age has set.

It should perhaps be mentioned that some of the stories here presented are put together from the myths of several Odes, and most contain a good deal not to be found in Pindar. But where I have used other sources, or invented details, I have tried firstly to introduce no version of a myth not undoubtedly current in Pindar's day, and secondly, to remember his maxim, that "disparagement of the gods is a hateful art."

PROEM

He that erst these legends told
Sang in far-off days of gold,
Ere yet from Earth the bright gods went,
or toiling mortals, prison-pent
Where the frowning cities stand,
Forgot the way to Fairyland.
A blissful child, thro' greenwood bowers
He strayed, amid the April flowers,

And there, 'tis told, he once was found
On pansy pillow sleeping sound,
While the dusky mountain bees
Left for him the clover leas,
Left bluebell copse and crocus mead,
On his dreaming lips to feed.
But, for kisses that they stole,
The wingéd thieves paid wondrous toll,
Hallowing with chrisms pure
Those baby lips, their rose-red lure.
Strange the might, as I shall tell,
Hidden in that honey-spell!
For the child, a striping grown,
Still would haunt the forest lone,
Musing, ferny ways along,
The golden themes of antique song—
Wars and perilous wanderings,
Ancient marvels, hero-kings
Vanquishing in dauntless mood
Earth's primaeval dragon-brood,
All glittering quests, all glories won
Since Time's great wheel began to run.
So, like a bee, his aëry thought
Store of secret treasure wrought
From every bud and blossom bright
In Memory's garden of delight.
Many a Summer morn the boy
Ranged the dewy woods in joy;
Many an eve sat, half a-dream,
Where hazels hid a tinkling stream,
While softly to its drowsy chime
His lute's low harmonies kept time.
Then, in some divinest hour,
The magic of the wild-bee dower,
Swift as blaze of slumbering flame,
Sent a rapture thro' his frame.
To the runnel's brink he sprang,

Struck his Dorian lute and sang
 Such a song, the nightingale
 Hearing, hushed her plaintive tale;
 Such a song, the goat-foot Pan
 Envied once a child of man!
 Yes, the God whose music thrills
 Thro' silent places of the hills,
 The Watcher of the upland flocks
 Who pipes at noon upon the rocks,
 Tiptoed near, the boughs among,
 Fain to learn that mortal song,
 And oft, since then, his reed flung by
 To carol it in Arcady.
 Great Pan is dead; the woodlands hoar
 Ring to his wild notes no more;
 And the voice he loved that day
 Long from Earth has past away.
 Yet still in this her wintry age
 Its honey breathes from PINDAR'Spage,
 Whereon who looks shall seem to hear
 Its very accents warbling clear
 Of Thebes or Troy the tale sublime,
 Or some green idyll of the prime,
 In that sweetest human tongue
 Moulded when the world was young.

Ah, might these dissonant echoes vain
 Retrieve one cadence of the strain!

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CHAPTER I

THE FAVOURITE OF THE GODS

I

Long, long ago, in an Eastern land, there lived a King who was the richest man in the world. The rivers in his country ran over golden sands, and their banks sparkled with gems instead of pebbles. The King's fields were full of stones, but he did not mind that, for every stone was a lump of silver, and the hillsides were bursting with rich red copper, which was even better than gold or silver for making shields and helmets and suits of armour. All the wealth of the land was the King's very own, and he hardly knew what to do with it all, he had so much. Besides being so rich, Tantalus, for that was his name, was so lucky in everything he put his hand to, that people began to say he was the special favourite of the gods, who had given him everything the heart of man can desire. Now for a long while, Tantalus deserved all his good fortune; he was kind and just to his subjects, and famous far and near for his boundless hospitality to strangers. High and low, rich and poor, all travellers were welcome to his house, to stay as long as they would, faring sumptuously every day, and none departed without splendid presents. But his heart grew uplifted with the pride of his power and glory, till he would not be content, and longed to make himself still more renowned and envied among men. No king had a more stately dwelling than the palace in the city, which his forefathers had builded, but Tantalus began to despise it as unworthy of his majesty, and it came into his mind that his people would pay him yet greater honour and reverence if they were not permitted to see his splendour every day. He resolved to build himself a palace on a mountain-top, a golden house that should dazzle the eyes of all beholders, and dwell there aloof, like a god in his temple; then when he came down to the city, the

sight of him would be a nine days' wonder, and the folk would begin to think of him as greater and more glorious than a mortal man.

So the golden house was built, and shone like a star on the rocky crest of the mountain. Far below in the city, men looked up to that glittering speck among the clouds, and said that their great King was neighbour now to the gods above. When Tantalus saw the finished work, his heart swelled with triumph and delight; he walked through its marble courts, where fountains spouted from the jaws of golden dragons, through colonnades of silver pillars, shaped like palm trees, with broad fans of gold and clustering fruit of rubies, and came to the banqueting-hall, which was like a vast bower of roses, yellow, white, and pink, but the twining branches were golden, and all the roseleaves were pearls. The ceiling was enamel, the colour of the sky on a summer night, and at dusk it glowed like the sky with a thousand stars, which were lamps hollowed out of gems. Tantalus had ordered a splendid feast to be made ready, that he might sup for the first time in this hall of roses. He watched the troops of slaves spreading cushions of cloth of gold on ivory chairs and couches, and setting forth food and wine on tables of carved alabaster, in dishes of gold and flagons of crystal or amethyst, and a sad thought came to him in the height of his pleasure. One thing was lacking to this feast, though it was more magnificent than ever king had dreamed of. For what was a feast without guests? What, after all, was the good of having a golden palace, and a hall encrusted with pearls, when he had no one but his own courtiers to sit at his table and tell him how wonderful it all was? Some day, no doubt, he might entertain some neighbour king, who would go away quite humbled by the sight of these glories, but he felt [should be felt] that nothing would ever entirely console him for the want of guests, whose praise was really worth having, guests who were his equals, to share his feast that first night. As he thought thus, he heard one of his courtiers, who had all followed him through the palace with cries of delighted wonder, say to the rest, "Truly, our lord the King has built him a house that has not its like on earth, and there can

be nothing more marvellous even in heaven. See, my friends, how glorious is this chamber, where he will hold his royal feast! Would you not think that gods, rather than men, were the expected guests at such a banquet?"

These words seemed to Tantalus an answer to his unspoken wish. The gods! Yes, they and only they were guests worthy of him and his surpassing splendours. With a proud gesture, he threw up his hands heavenward, and cried aloud, "I, Tantalus the Kin, bid the gods, one and all, come taste of my good cheer."

No sooner had he spoken than a clap of thunder shook the palace, and the courtyard rang with the noise of horse-hoofs and of chariot-wheels. The doors of the banqueting hall flew open as if blown by a gust of wind, and a great golden-brown eagle stalked through them up the room, and perched upon the throne where Tantalus was to sit. Next moment, a light streamed from the doorway, brighter a thousand times than the radiance of the star-shaped lamps. So dazzling it was, that the King and his train covered their faces, and durst not look up. But then was heard a sound of trailing robes and gentle laughter, and a voice of unearthly sweetness said, "Fear not, Tantalus, but look upon your guests and make the welcome, for those you bade to your feast are come." With that, a soft hand drew away the King's hand from before his eyes, and he saw that she who spoke was Iris, the messenger of the gods. For she had wings such as you may see in pictures of the angels, only these were not white, but shimmered with all the colours of the rainbow, and Tantalus knew that the rainbow in the sky is the reflection of those bright wings which carry Iris over land and sea on the errands of the Immortals. She now led the King to a seat at the highest table, and, gathering courage to look about him, he saw that a great company were already sitting at the banquet, while his slaves and courtiers seemed to have lost their fear, and were waiting duteously upon them. On his own royal throne sat one who seemed another but a far more majestic king, crowned and sceptred, and the eagle perched beside him; and where the

Queen of Tantalus should have sat, was another Queen, with whom no mortal princess could compare for stately beauty, wearing, like a bride, a coronet of flowers and flowing veil inwrought with golden lilies. She, alone of the guests, seemed to look disdainfully at that glittering chamber, and, while the rest feasted and made merry, she leaned back in her ivory chair, stroking the sheeny neck of a peacock that stood stiffly beside her with gorgeous tail outspread. Tantalus knew that those two must be Zeus and Hera, the King and Queen of the gods, and pride mingled with awe in his heart, to see the greatest of the Immortals seated as guests under his roof. Zeus, that dread lord of the sky, whose mighty arm could hurl thunderbolts in his wrath, had laid aside the fulness of his glory, which was too bright for mortal eyes to bear, and appeared in mild and gracious majesty; he smiled gravely and kindly on his host, and Tantalus took courage to watch the rest of that heavenly company. Not far from Zeus sat a god who looked like his brother, which indeed he was, but he had a sterner face and a less kingly bearing, and wore no crown upon his long black locks. Instead of a sceptre, he held a trident of rock-crystal, and by this it was easy to know him for Poseidon, who had power over the sea, and all rivers and springs. Men feared the anger of Poseidon scarcely less than that of Zeus, because, though he had no thunderbolts, he could make the earth rend and quake, or the sea run mountains high, with one blow of this trident. But though he was fierce and terrible if offended, none of the Immortals was more kindly to the race of man, and none, it was said, was so faithful a friend to those who had once pleased him. And this, as you will hear presently, was a true saying.

Close to Poseidon, and leaning lovingly against his broad shoulder, Tantalus saw a bright-haired youth, at whose feet lay a bow and quiver, and a golden lyre. It was the archer Apollo, who is the sweet singer of heaven, and near him sat nine fair sisters crowned with violets, who are called the Muses. As the feats went on, another youth, whose smiling eyes sparkled with mischief, slipped from his place and stood behind Apollo, and stealthily picked up the golden lyre. But Apollo turned, and took

it from him laughing, and said, "Ah, thieving Hermes! Did you not give me this to make amends for the kine you stole from me in the Arcadian pastures, when you were yet a little roguish boy, and now would you steal it too? Nay, let me keep it, my brother, and you shall hear me sing with the Nine, in honour of our kind host.["] Then Tantalus looked eagerly at the merry face of Hermes, for there were many greater gods, but none more beloved than he, the god of homely shepherds and of wayfarers. He wore the cap and sandals of a traveller, but his cap was the cap of darkness, that made the wearer invisible when he pleased, and his sandals were the shoes of swiftness, that carried him dryshod over the surface of the sea. The King knew that all unlooked-for good luck, and all treasure trove, is the gift of Hermes, and he it is who charms asleep the eyes of whom he will, with the waving of the wand he carries.

And now Apollo sang to the golden lyre, and the Nine Muses sang with him. They sang in praise of Tantalus, the generous, the hospitable, the bounteous friend of the needy and the stranger, and how his name was glorious in many lands. They told how the gods looked down with favour on the good deeds that he had done, and how, in days to come, that favour should not cease from his house, but bring yet greater glory upon his children's children. That golden palace, they declared, should vanish from the earth, and be no more remembered, but generations yet unborn should marvel while mighty bards told in song the wondrous story of the race of Tantalus.

Now Apollo and those violet-crowned goddesses sang so enchantingly that not only the mortals but the heavenly guests who heard them sat as if spell-bound. Even the eagle, which had made Tantalus uneasy from time to time by fixing a fierce gaze upon him, and snapping its terrible hooked beak was lulled asleep by the gracious harmony, and sat with bluish eyelids closed, motionless but for the rise and fall of its feathers, like ripples on brown water, as its glossy back heaved in slumber.

When the song ceases, Tantalus started as though wakened from a dream, and looked round him, almost fearing

that he had only seen the forms of the Immortals in a vision. But it was all real, and no vision; there they were still sitting, those wondrous guests, with the same calm smile on their beautiful statue-like faces. At that moment Zeus, who had not yet spoken to the King, leaned forward and said in deep, grave tones, "Right, royally have you feasted us, O Tantalus, and we thank you for your good cheer. But since I know well that you are the most generous of hosts, I wonder that you should let one thing be wanting at your banquet."

"What thing is that, O King of gods and men?" asked Tantalus humbly (yet he was secretly angry that even Zeus should find fault with him); "I am a mere mortal," he added, "but the best a mortal can give I, surely, have set before you."

"Nay, my friend," Zeus answered, "the one thing you have *not* offered us is —your best. Your costly fair, your gold and gems and ivory, are these your greatest treasures? Think again, if you have not something still more precious."

Then turning to Hera, who was smiling very scornfully, he said, "Our generous host, my Queen, is not the man to deny his guests the choicest of his possessions; he has but forgotten for a moment what it is."

Just then, a curtain of Tyrian crimson that hung behind the throne was drawn quickly aside, and a little child ran laughing into the hall. It was the King's only son, the darling of his heart. Frightened slaves had told the Queen, his mother, that the gods were come down out of heaven to the King's feast, and she had not dared to behold them. but the child wanted so much to see what the gods were like, that he slipped away from her side, and now he stood gazing on them without the least fear, for indeed he was too young and too happy to be afraid of anything. His father saw the little lad look up into the face of Zeus with such innocent wonder that the god smiled, and laid his hand tenderly on the curly head.

"How say you now, Tantalus?" he said: "Will you not own that you have kept back one treasure, worth more than the wealth of your kingdom?"

But Tantalus bent his head and could not answer, for a sudden fear froze his heart. In those days, no host would let his guests depart without some gift, and a generous man would offer them the choice of the treasures in his house. Was it possible that the gods would choose the gift of his only son, and was that why Zeus had reproached him for not setting the best he had before the eyes of his guests? Alas, he saw plainly that the immortals took more delight in the child's beauty than in all the wonders of the golden palace. The haughty Hera stooped to kiss his forehead, and the other goddesses called him to them one by one and said, "Did you ever see such a lovely child?" just as if they were mortal ladies. One of them, who had great grey eyes, and was called Athena, lifted him to her shoulder, to look at the golden helmet she wore, and laughed because he said he wanted one like it, and a shield and spear like hers. Then the fairest of them all, whose name was Aphrodite, took the little boy upon her lap, and whispered coaxingly that she would give him better playthings than shields or spears if he would come and live with her, in her garden of roses that bloomed all the year round. But Poseidon, that stern-faced god, who sat beside her, shook back his dark hair and said, "O Queen of Love, have you not a boy of your own to play with? Come with me, little prince, for I will love you with a truer love than this fair goddess, and you shall have a gift that will please you better than her roses, when you come to be a man."

The child looked into Poseidon's eyes, which were deep blue like the sea, and felt that he liked this friendly god the best of all; he climbed upon his knee, and rested his little head on the sea-god's shoulder, and, being already drowsy, fell sound asleep. Meanwhile, Tantalus had made up his mind what to do, for dearly though he loved his son, his pride was stronger than his love. It should never be said that he, Tantalus the King, sent another king, the King of the Sky, who had done him so great an

honour, away from his feast empty-handed. Proudly he raised his head, at last, and met the searching glance of Zeus. "Great Lord of the Immortals," he said, "if indeed there is aught in this poor house of mine to please you, and these my other guests, I offer it with a willing heart. If indeed I failed to adorn this feast with my fairest jewel, it was with no grudging thought, for behold, ever-living gods, that jewel is yonder, and it is yours if you so choose." So saying, he pointed to the sleeping child. Now Zeus knew that pride and vainglory alone made Tantalus so ready to give up his son, but he would not judge him hardly, because he was a mortal man, and good and evil were mingled in his heart like flowers and weeds in a garden. Therefore the god thanked the King in gracious words, even as a man might thank his friend. "Royal Tantalus," he said, "this land of Lydia may boast henceforth that her king is the most generous, as well as the richest, in the world. Know, now, that when I said you had not offered us your best, I spoke to prove you, and to show my Queen, and these my children and kinsfolk, how nobly you can play the host. Now, my friend, we bid you farewell, but we will not take your son with us; it is enough that you have freely offered him to the gods, and in recompense for that, a year shall not pass before both he and you shall sit at our table, even as we have sat this night at yours."

Then once more came a great flash of light, and a peal of thunder, and when the dazzled mortals could see clearly again, the gods had vanished. The King looked hastily towards the couch where Poseidon had said, half-fearing that he might have carried off the child, after all. But there lay his little son, curled up among the embroidered cushions, and smiling in his sleep. One small hand held a rosebud Aphrodite had given him from her bosom, and in the other lay a strange blossom, white as the sea-foam. Poseidon also had a garden, and this was one of the flowers that grew there, under the waves.

II

A year had almost passed since the wonderful night when the gods feasted in the house of Tantalus. The story of that banquet was carried far and wide, and strangers came from many lands to see with their own eyes the king who had entertained Zeus himself, and hear from his own lips how the Immortals had looked, and what they had said to him. Tantalus was never tired of boasting about it all, and if he was proud before, you may fancy that now he was ten times prouder and more vainglorious. As he repeated the marvellous tale to guests at his feasts, surrounded by so much splendour, and seated on the throne where, as he told them, the King of the gods had sat in all his majesty, he began to feel that he himself was a sort of Zeus upon earth, and to imitate all he could remember of the god's appearance and behaviour. "Thus spoke Zeus," he would say, holding out his own sceptre, and doing his best to copy the voice of the heavenly King, when he told the story. And at last, as it seemed to him that he acted the part of a god exceedingly well, he did it not only when he described the visit of the Immortals, but every day and all day long. But he forgot how gracious and how gentle those Immortals had shown themselves, and only tried to copy their calm, grand looks and gestures. So, while he still gave splendid feasts to all who came, and sent them away with costly gifts, he now received his guests coldly and haughtily, as if they were hardly worthy to come into his presence. Travellers, when they got home again, talked even more about the King's pride and his boastful speeches, than about his golden house and his marvellous riches. As for his own subjects, they never saw him now, except driving through the city in a glittering chariot drawn by four white horses, while troops of slaves ran before him, scattering gold among the crowd, and crying, "Make way there for the Great King! Bow down before him, all ye people, and do him reverence, for he is the Friend of the Gods, and his glory is more than mortal." Tantalus no longer sat in the judgment-seat of the kings of Lydia, to do justice among his people, and if any man were bold enough to go up to his golden palace, either the guards would drive him away, saying that the King did not choose to be

troubled by common folk, or they would push him roughly into the presence-chamber, where Tantalus sat enthroned, stiff and silent, like an idol, in gorgeous array. And the stern, cold face of the King would so terrify the poor man that he would not dare to plead for the boon he came seeking.

So the year went by, but before it ended, rumours came to Tantalus that the tales of the travellers about his famous banquet were disbelieved by many who heard them. People were saying everywhere that he had not really feasted the gods at all; he had merely built a most wonderful palace, and then, because his guests were always telling him that his house and his banquets were fit for the gods, his head was turned with those flatteries, till he suffered a strange delusion, and thought he had given a feast to Zeus himself. Some of the travellers now asked him to show them some token of the Immortal's visit, which he was unable to do, and this made him very angry. How he wished that he had thought of asking Zeus to leave some sign of his presence which no one could doubt! It was no use, of course, to point to his courtiers and his slaves, and say, "All these saw the gods as plainly as I did," for every one knew what to expect of slaves and courtiers. If the King, their master, chose to say he had seen the gods, they would not dare to contradict him; nay, if he said he saw them with two heads apiece, or no heads at all, they would swear they saw the same. These thoughts were very unpleasant to Tantalus, and so occupied his mind that he forgot the time was at hand when he, in turn, was to feast with Zeus. Indeed, although at first he had boasted freely about going as a guest to the heavenly halls, he had never felt quite sure that he would ever get there, and as time went on, he came to think of his seeing the gods face to face as a wonderful thing that could never happen again. If only he could convince these impudent travellers that it ever *had* happened! Now it befell, on the very day twelvemonth from the coming of the gods, that ambassadors arrived, with gifts from the king of a far country, who desired to know the truth of the report he had heard, that the King of Lydia had given a feast to the Immortals. Tantalus received them hospitably, and when evening came, they sat with him at the

banquet, and he told them the whole story. Perhaps some doubts about that story had been whispered to them on their journey, for as the King told the tale, he noted with displeasure that the newcomers looked one at another, smiling slyly. "Strangers," he cried haughtily, "do you dare to mock me? Or do you doubt that my tale is true?"

"Great King," answered the eldest ambassador, "we are simple men, and we fear that you are pleased to make sport of us, asking us to take your royal dreams for truth. But if this be not so, we are sure that Zeus left with you some token of his presence at your feast, to be a witness to all men of the honour done you. We humbly desire to see that token, that we may carry word of it to our master, who will then believe the wondrous report he has heard."

Tantalus was nearly beside himself with rage at this request, which he felt quite certain had been suggested to the ambassadors by some of those evil-minded persons who had asked him the same thing before, and gone away scoffing. But it came into his mind that he would only make matters worse if he sent these grave ambassadors away with an angry answer. They would spread the story still farther, of his having no proof at all to show, and very soon, unless he could somehow put a stop to what people said about him, he, Tantalus, would become the laughing-stock of the world. Then quickly he resolved to gain a little time by hiding his rage and speaking pleasant words.

"I see," he said, "that the King, your master, has wise and prudent servants. You are very right to desire some proof of so great a marvel, and you shall have it. But it is already late, and you are wearied with your journey. Go now to rest, and tomorrow I will show you what you wish."

The ambassadors bowed deeply, and were led to the splendid chambers prepared for them. Tantalus remained sitting in the jewelled hall, thinking very hard what he was to do. Tomorrow he meant to put the ambassadors off again with some further excuse, and to persuade them to stay with him some days

longer; but how could he find them a proof, however long they stayed? "I would be alone," he said to the slaves who waited his commands, and they all withdrew. It was very quiet now in the great empty room. The king thought and thought, till nearly midnight, but could find no way out of his difficulty. Any one else would have called upon the gods to help him, but Tantalus was so used to thinking himself all-powerful that this never entered his head. At last, quite tired out with puzzling over the question, he leaned back on his throne and fell asleep. How long he slept he never knew; it seemed only a few minutes had passed when he was awaked by sounds of music, talking, and laughter. He sat up and rubbed his eyes in astonishment. There, all round him, sat the gods, just as he had seen them a year ago that very night! For one moment, he thought they had come back to show themselves to those unbelieving ambassadors and cover them with shame, but then he saw that he was no longer sitting in his own palace-hall. The place he had awoke in seemed like a vast temple, with walls and ceiling of some wonderful stone that shone like pure gold, and yet was transparent like glass. All round this hall were rows of tall pillars, and every pillar was a single block of ruby, sapphire, or emerald, glowing with its own coloured fire. There were no windows, and no lamps either in the room, which was flooded with what Tantalus would have thought was sunshine, only he supposed it was still night. Then he knew that this was no earthly palace, but the dwelling of Zeus, and suddenly he remembered the promise of the god. This was the night he was to feast with the Immortals—and here he was! He wondered if the little Pelops had been carried to the sky-palace too, and soon saw the child nodding and smiling at him from the couch where he sat, as he had done before, between Poseidon and the Queen of Love. All the Immortals now welcomed Tantalus with friendly looks and words of greeting, and one who seemed the youngest of the goddesses presented him with a shining cup, into which she poured wine the colour of dark mountain honey. "Fill all our cups to the brim, Hebe, my daughter," said Zeus to the beautiful cup-bearer, "and

drink, every one of you, to this friend of ours, who played the host to us so well."

"To our host, King Tantalus," cried the golden-haired Apollo, and the rest, as they drank, repeated, "To King Tantalus," and then all together cried, "Hail, mortal! Hail, guest of Zeus! Hail, friend of the gods!"

Now Tantalus no sooner tasted the drink of the gods, which men call nectar, than he was filled with such mirth and gladness as he had never known, nor any mortal can know, save those few who are permitted to share the banquet of Zeus. For nectar is brewed with honey from celestial flowers and with the juice of apples that grow in the Enchanted Isles of the Sunset, and they who drink it have perpetual youth and joy.

So the King forgot in a moment the troubles he had left behind on earth, and gave himself up to the delights of the heavenly feast. He thought he could look for ever at this glorious house of Zeus, compared to which his golden palace seemed but a mere hovel. Here topaz and emerald, and all stones known on earth as precious, because they are found only in small pieces, were to be seen in blocks as big as the masses of marble on his own hillsides. Therefore the gods wore no jewels, such as earthly kings are adorned with, and as for silver and gold, though their houses and furniture seemed to be made of those metals, they were not the same silver and gold that there is in this world of ours, but so much purer and finer that the light shone through them. So the hall where the Immortals were feasting looked like a temple build out of moonbeams and sunbeams, and rainbows, and its sapphire pavement like a piece of sky, which is just what it was.

The tables in this hall were covered with every sort of delicious fruit that grows in all the countries of the world, for in the garden of Zeus they are all ripe the whole year round. there were peaches and grapes, oranges and pomegranates and strawberries, and many more sorts that Tantalus had never seen before. The King noticed that none of the Immortals took any of

these fruits from the baskets of myrtle-twigs in which they were piled, and that clouds of butterflies were hovering over the tables, Now the plates of his neighbours seemed always full, but his remained empty, and as no one offered him anything he began to think the gods were strangely neglecting their guest.

"You do not understand our customs, friend Tantalus," said the merry voice of Hermes in his ear. "We offer you nothing, because you have only to wish, and your plate will be as full as mine." The King looked at a superb bunch of grapes which he saw in front of him, but just as he wished for it, it disappeared. At the same instant a very large purple butterfly settled on his plate; he put out his hand to touch it, and it was gone, but in its place there lay the bunch of grapes. Then he wished for an orange, and the same thing happened, only this time the butterfly's wings were golden-red.

"I do not understand those butterflies," he said to Hermes

"They are your wishes," said the young god, "and if you look, you will see the wishes of my companions bringing them whatever they may fancy in the same way."

"This is a strange magic," said the Kin, who now felt quite at ease with the friendly Hermes. "But now I see a number of golden bees flying about the tables, which I think must be wishes too, for wherever one alights, it vanishes and a round cake the colour of honey appears in its place. Tell me, Hermes, if these fruits and those small cakes are all your food, for though nothing can be more delicious than your fruit, I should not care, for my part, to live on figs and grapes and honey-break."

Hermes, at these words, could not answer for laughing, but Athena, that grey-eyed goddess who sat on the King's other side, turned her grave face to him, and said, "You know no what you say, O Tantalus! That honey-bread, as you call it, is the bread of immortality, which in the speech of men is called ambrosia, and those who eat of it live for ever. Rich and great you may be, King of Lydia, but wise you are not, or you would know better than to ask if we Immortals have such food as

pleases your gross mortal appetite. An ox roasted whole, perhaps, is what you hoped for at my father's table?"

Tantalus knew that Athena was the wisest of all the gods, except her father Zeus, and he was ashamed that she had overheard his thoughtless words.

"Lady and Queen," he answered, "forgive what I have spoken in my ignorance. How could I know that the bread was the divine ambrosia, of which men tell but know not what it is like?"

"Come, sister," then said Hermes, still laughing, "do not be offended with our guest. Remember we do not all despise the food of mortals, and Zeus himself has eaten porridge in a peasant's hut. Yes, Tantalus, once I travelled on earth with Zeus, in the disguise of wandering pedlars, that we might see who would show kindness to the poor and homeless. And when we had been turned away from many a rich man's door, we found shelter with two poor old cottagers, who gladly shared their humble supper with us out of charity. Those worthy souls, Philemon and his wife Baucis, were terrified when we showed ourselves in our true shape next morning, but they soon had their reward, for Zeus promised to grant whatever they should ask."

"Then I suppose they asked to be made King and Queen of that country," said Tantalus, "though I cannot say I ever heard of a King Philemon or a Queen Baucis."

"No," replied Hermes, "the only thing they wanted was never to be parted, or to leave the cottage where they had been so happy together. Zeus promised that they never should, and when they had ended their lives in peace at the same moment, they were changed into two oak trees, which are still flourishing where their cottage stood."

Tantalus thought to himself, "What a stupid old couple! If I had been in their place, I should have asked Zeus for something very different." But aloud he only said, "That is a

very pretty story," not wishing to risk another reproof from the severe Athena.

She, however, seemed ready to make him amend for speaking so sternly, and, breaking a cake of ambrosia in her snowy hands, she gave him half of it, with a gracious look. "You also, King," she said, "have earned a reward for your hospitality, and this is it. Unlike Philemon and Baucis, you already have everything that a man can wish for on earth, therefore Zeus wills to give you the one gift you have not, the gift of immortality."

Tantalus took the piece of ambrosia, and wondered to feel how light it was. He tasted it, and it was like nothing he had ever tasted before, and it melted in his mouth like snow. Never had food seemed to him so delicious, yet he could not tell if it was sweet, or sour, or salt, because these are the names of earthly flavours, and the flavour of ambrosia is different from any of them. Now he saw that Poseidon and Aphrodite gave the child Pelops fruit to eat and nectar to drink, but they did not give him ambrosia, and he wished that Pelops also should eat this bread of immortality.

"Will not the gods give ambrosia to my son," he asked Athena, rather timidly, "that he too may live for ever?"

But the wise goddess shook her head. "We may not give it to a child," she said, "and I will tell you the reason. When we have once given a gift, we have no power to take it back again. So it would be cruel to give the gift of immortality to any one who was not old enough to choose whether he will live for ever, or die, like other men, when his time comes."

"Surely," said the King, "there is no one who would not choose to live for ever."

"Ah, Tantalus," said Athena, and a strange look of pity came into her grey eyes, "you think so now, because you have never known pain or sorrow. But how would it be if your life were full of misery instead of happiness? Think what it would mean to you then, to know you could not die. Beware, moreover,

that *you* presume not to give our gift to others, for that were deadly sin."

These words, which he was to remember when too late, gave the King a vague feeling of dread, as if some unknown evil was about to befall him, and he was glad that Hebe at this moment filled his cup with nectar, and Apollo took his lyre and sang a joyous song.

When this was ended, Zeus called him to his side, and said: "Now, Tantalus, I, who was your guest, have given you feast for feast, and since you gave me your best, I have granted you the highest reward a mortal can have. Henceforth you need not fear death, and so long as you deserve to be the friend of the gods, you shall drink with us the sacred nectar which continually renews our youth and gladness."

"And yet, O King of us all," said Hera, with her scornful smile, "I think that this our guest desires a certain gift so much that he would prefer it to nectar and ambrosia."

"Let him name it, Lady of my heart," answered Zeus, "for we will not have him depart with any desire unsatisfied."

"I can name it," Hera said, tossing her queenly head. "It is Fame, and were I a mortal, I would seek it through the world, as all those heroes do who are my favourites among men."

"That I can well believe," replied Zeus gravely, "but now let our friend speak for himself. How say you, Tantalus? Have you not fame enough already, being known for the richest and most hospitable king in all the world?"

Now the words of Hera had reminded Tantalus that his fame among men was in danger from the evil-speaking of the people who would not believe he had feasted the gods.

"Great Zeus," he said, "I cannot thank you enough for the wonderful reward you have given me this night. But since you bid me, I will dare to confess that there is one thing wanting to make me entirely happy."

Then he told how the great honour the gods had done him by coming to his banquet was not believed by any one, and how that very night the ambassadors from a far country had asked for a proof of the story. And he prayed Zeus to grant him some token, which these men might see and believe. He heard the god answer, "When you awake, O Tantalus, you shall find such a token beside you," and then a rosy mist began to float before his eyes. He could just see that Hermes stood beside him, slowly waving his wand, then his eyes closed, and he knew no more.

III

When King Tantalus awoke, he found himself once more in his own banqueting-hall, which was now bright with the morning sunshine. His first thought was, "I have only dreamed a dream," and he felt bitterly disappointed, for what could he now say to the ambassadors, and where was the token he had hoped to show them? But he saw on the table beside him a golden cup and platter, which he thought the slaves must have set there while he slept, and being hungry and thirsty, he ate and drank the bread and the wine that were in them; and at the first taste, he knew that the bread was ambrosia, and the wine, nectar. "Then it was no dream, after all," he said to himself, "for this is the token Zeus promised. Yet, what am I to do with it, for Athena warned me that I must not give the god's gift to any one else, and if I tell those men that these are ambrosia and nectar, they will not believe unless they taste for themselves." So thinking, he lifted the cup to drink again of that delicious wine, and behold, the cup was full to the brim, as it was before! Then he looked at the platter, and saw that the cake, from which he had broken a piece, was whole again. Once more he drank, and broke another piece from the cake, and immediately the cup was full again, and the cake lay whole in the platter. Then he rejoiced greatly, for he knew that this wonder would assuredly overcome all the doubts of the ambassadors, and of all others who should see him eat and

drink before them out of a cup and platter that never grew empty.

But now he heard sounds of weeping and wailing from the inner chambers of the palace, where the Queen and her children lived, and he clapped his hands loudly to summon his slaves. "What is this weeping I hear?" he asked them, when they entered, and they told him, "It is the Queen and her women, O King, weeping because at dawn they saw that the little prince was gone from his bed-chamber, and we have searched the palace from end to end, but he is nowhere to be found." This they said trembling, for they feared the King would fall into a rage, and order them to be put to death if they did not instantly find the child, and they were astonished when he answered, without grief or anger, "It is well. Search no more, for I know what is become of my son." Then he went to the Queen's chamber, and she cried to him, with tears, "Alas, my lord, what can have befallen our child? I saw him sleeping safe and sound before I went to rest, and as I slept, I dreamed that a tall, kingly stranger, with long black locks, stood at my bedside, holding the boy in his arms, and they smiled on me, and were gone. At that I woke, fearing I knew not what, and ran to the next chamber, and woe is me, the child's bed was empty."

"Lady wife," said Tantalus, "I know where Pelops is, and, trust me, no evil can befall him there. The stranger you saw in your dream was the great Poseidon, who loves the boy, and has taken him to the heavenly halls. Did I not tell you how I offered our son to the gods when they feasted with me, and how they promised that he and I should be their guests? They have fulfilled that promise, and now I have seen the palace of Zeus, I as well content that Pelops should abide there for a time. Doubt not that he will be restored to us ere long, for I must tell you that the Immortals have made me their chosen friend and boon companion, and loaded me with such proofs of favour that I am certain they will refuse me nothing I desire."

Now the Queen was a meek and gentle lady, who held her lord for the most wonderful of men, and thought it not

strange that even the gods were glad to have him for a friend, but she loved her little son so dearly that she was only half comforted to hear where he was, since she was never happy when he was out of her sight.

But the King did not stay to cheer her, or to tell her more; he was in haste to prepare for his triumph, when the unbelieving ambassadors should see the token they had asked for. He ordered that all should be made ready for the mid-day banquet, and the tables spread as usual with the choicest faire, but that all the dishes and vessels set on his own table should be empty; then, when he took his seat upon the throne, he placed among them the cup of nectar and the platter of ambrosia, and bade the slaves call the ambassadors to the feast. And this was to Tantalus the proudest and happiest moment of his life, for his guests were even more astonished than he had hoped when he showed them the food and drink of the gods, and poured nectar from the celestial cup into the flagons and goblets on his table till all were filled, and heaped all the dishes with fragments of the cake of ambrosia, which grew no smaller, however often he broke it. They cried out that now indeed they could doubt no longer, and the King their master should hear, when they came home, that the gods had not only visited Tantalus of Lydia, but had bestowed on him the most marvellous gifts ever given to mortal man. On the morrow they departed for their own land, and spread the news upon their way, that Tantalus, after all, told a true tale, and could show the proof of it, for he had a never-failing portion of the bread and wine of the Immortals.

After this, King Tantalus for some time thought himself the happiest of men, being no longer troubled by the doubts or questions of travellers, who were now welcome to him again because he enjoyed displaying his wonderful cup and platter, to satisfy them. He did not forget Athena's warning, and was careful to keep the nectar and ambrosia for himself alone, telling all his guests that he was forbidden to share those gifts with any one. Meanwhile, the child Pelops was seen no more, and strange stories of his disappearance began to be whispered abroad, but

they did not come to the King's ears, for none dared repeat them to him. It was even said that Tantalus, who boasted how he had offered his son to the gods, and now declared the boy was dwelling with them above, had really slain him in secret for a sacrifice, to please the Immortals, and win from them that reward of nectar and ambrosia. But this story came from among the lowest of the folk, who knew not that such a deed, if Tantalus had ever so much as dreamed of doing it, would have made him utterly hateful in the sight of the gods.

Now while the King was happy, the Queen, his wife, pined day by day for the loss of Pelops; she had one other child, a daughter named Niobe, but Pelops was far dearer to her because of his loving ways, and now her only comfort was that she dreamed of him every night, and always saw him radiant with joy. The Princess Niobe, who was some years older than her brother, was a haughty damsel and cold-hearted, and the gentle Queen had long feared her daughter's pride would bring unhappiness upon her. But Tantalus thought the maiden could not be too proud, being the daughter of such a king as he, and loved her all the better for showing a spirit so like his own. The time now came for her to be wedded to the king of a neighbouring land, and the golden palace was thronged by countless multitudes from far and near, who were bidden to the marriage rejoicings. Guests of every degree were feasted by thousands for a whole month before the wedding, for the King had sent heralds and messengers a three months' journey—east, west, south, and north—proclaiming everywhere that all were welcome to this great festival. Then, on the marriage day, having poured forth in abundance the treasures of his kingdom on all who came, and filled their eyes with the sight of such royal splendour as the world never saw before or since, Tantalus held the crowning feast of all in his hall of roses; and in the fulness of his glory, his fate, the fate his proud heart brought upon him, was sealed at last. In that hour he felt it was no longer enough for him to be the greatest king in the world, and the acknowledged friend and favourite of the gods; no, he would be something greater still: he, though a man, would wield the power and

receive the honours of a god, for he would bestow on the men around him the greatest gifts that Zeus himself could give them. He would make them immortal, and he too would know what it was to be adored, to have temples and altars raised to his name by grateful worshippers, because he had delivered them from the fear of death. And so he would not merely live for ever, but through all eternity he would enjoy unheard of fame and glory as the giver of everlasting life to such as pleased him. These thoughts no sooner flashed through his brain, than he commanded jars and baskets of gold to be brought to his table, and began to fill them with the nectar and ambrosia which stood before him, saying with a loud voice: "Set this food and wine of the gods before the bridegroom and the bride, and before each of the guests, that they may eat and drink thereof, and live for ever, by the grace of Tantalus." At these words all the guests raised a great shout of joy, and bowed down before his throne, praising and blessing him for that boon. But even as the slaves poured out the nectar the light of the noonday was blotted out by so thick a darkness that no man in the hall could see his hand before his face. A sudden wind blew deathly cold through the blackness, and after the wind came a hollow groaning sound from deep within the earth. Stricken dumb with terror, all the banqueters sat motionless in the pitchy gloom for moments that seemed hours, till that sound came again, louder and deeper, and they felt the solid ground rock under their feet and heard a crash as of falling pillars. Then, with one cry of despair, all at once they started up, and rushed towards the doorway, groping blindly to find it, and struggling forward through the dense, invisible throng around them. None of that multitude could ever tell how he reached the courtyard, and fled still onward through the darkness, not knowing whither, till he found himself at last on the mountain slopes outside the palace; but there, when the darkened sun shone out again, stood one vast crowd of men, women, children, animals, trembling but unhurt. Every living thing the palace held escaped from the earthquake save only the King himself, who was nowhere to be seen. As the darkness lifted, all eyes were turned anxiously towards the Golden House. Great rents were

seen in its shining walls, and of its hundred towers there were but ten left standing; no fountains played now in the marble courts, and beyond the shattered pillars of its porch the banqueting hall seemed a mount of glittering ruins. The Princess Niobe entreated her newly-wedded lord to go back and seek for her father, and he would have done so, but at that moment the earth shook with a yet louder roar, the crags around tottered, and all that remained of the palace sank before their eyes into the mountain. At that sight the whole multitude fled down the hillsides to the city in the plain, not daring once to look behind. For many days clouds hung low on the sides of the mountain, while all the folk in the city wept and prayed and fasted, and many took flight into the country, fearing lest the hill itself should fall and overwhelm them. And when the clouds cleared away, the rocky peak where the Golden House had stood was seen to be cleft in twain; and some who were bold enough at last to climb thither brought back word that between those two jagged summits lay a deep ravine, covered with great splintered stones and overhung by towering precipices. No sign of life, nor trace of the palace could they see, and it was now plain to all that Tantalus had perished.

The king who had wedding Niobe then took her away to his own land, and would have taken her mother also, but the Queen would not leave the old palace in the city, where she had lived more happily than in the Golden House, before her husband gave way to that sinful pride which proved his bane. She bade farewell to her daughter with many tears, and that night, as she entered her chamber, she said: "I am indeed left desolate. Cruel are the gods, for they have destroyed Tantalus, my lord; and how do I know what evil they have wrought to my darling son, whom they have kept from me so long? All else I would bear if only I might see my child again."

But scarcely had she said this when she gave a cry of joy, for she saw Pelops lying asleep upon her bed. He awoke and sprang into her arms, and told her how glad he was to be with her again, although he had spent such a happy day with

Poseidon, and pelted him with roses in Aphrodite's garden, which was even lovelier than she had said. "Last night," he said, "after Poseidon carried me to the house of Zeus, I saw my father there at the feast; but to-day, when I was tired of play, I asked where he was, and Poseidon said he was gone back to earth, and I must go back too. Then he kissed me, and I fell asleep, so I think he must have brought me home without my knowing." Then his mother knew that the months which had gone by since the child was carried off by the god had passed in heaven as one day, and she kept silence, fearing to tell him the strange and terrible end of the King, his father. And for a while all knowledge of what had befallen was kept from the little prince in spite of his asking continually where the King was, and why they were not living in the Golden House. But at last Zeus showed himself to the Queen in a dream by night, and bade her tell Pelops all the story of his father's pride and how he had despised the warning not to give any one else the gift with which the gods had trusted him. "Had Tantalus obeyed us," said the heavenly vision, "we should have kept his son among us till he was old enough to receive that same gift himself; but now it is part of the King's punishment to know that the child has lost immortality through his father's sin."

IV

As Pelops grew up to manhood, all said of him that he was grave and thoughtful beyond his years, and in truth the story his mother had told him was ever in his mind, nor could he take pleasure in the pastimes of his comrades for thinking of his lost father. No one in the city would willingly set foot now upon the mountain, for the people believed that the place where the Golden House had stood was accursed ground, and neither hunter nor shepherd ever visited those hillsides, once so often climbed by the guests of Tantalus. But Pelops had often said to the Queen, "My father, who had eaten the bread of immortality, cannot be dead, and when I become a man, I will go up the

mountain and look for him in that valley among the cliffs, for something tells me he is there." And though his mother besought him not to venture to that fearful place in the vain hope of finding one whom the gods had assuredly hidden from them for ever, the young prince held steadfastly to that purpose. At last, on a day that he went hunting, the chase brought him and his companions to the foot of the mountain, and all the rest turned back, but he called to them that he would not lose the hart they followed for an idle fear, and went on alone. It was noon when he left them, but the sun was already low in the west when he stood among the rocks on the mountain top and gazed with a beating heart into the crag-walled hollow between the peaks. What was it he saw, or thought he saw yonder, at the far end of the ravine? A great fragment of rock, loosened from the face of the precipice, seemed toppling forward as though it must fall in another instant, and close under it sat a dim, kingly figure, with upturned face, holding both arms above his head to ward off the coming blow. Pelops ran forward, shouting to him to rise and fly, or the rock would crush him to death, and calling him "Father," for he knew it must be Tantalus, though he could not clearly see his face across the valley. But the figure did not stir, and suddenly the trembling mass above him was still. Then, hurrying nearer, Pelops could see that it was indeed Tantalus who sat there, robed and crowned as of old, and that a golden table stood beside him, with a shining cup and platter upon it. The King's form was so worn and wasted that he was more like a shadow than a living man, and his son's heart grew chill with fear as looked into his eyes, for they seemed not to see him, nor did Tantalus give the least sign that he heard his eager, pleading words. In sorrowful bewilderment, Pelops saw him snatch up the cup, which was brimful of honey-coloured wine, and put it to his lips; no sooner did it touch them than the cup was empty, and he set it down with a despairing sigh. Then he broke a morsel from the cake that was on the platter, and would have eaten it, but it vanished in his hand. The young prince could not bear the sight; he sprang towards his father that he might take him in his arms and bring him away from the dreadful spot, where he had so

long suffered these strange torments. But instantly a thick white mist from the heights above rolled down like a curtain between him and the King, and a voice came from behind the clouds, "Depart hence, O Pelops, for you cannot deliver this prisoner of the gods. As Tantalus has sown, so must he also reap, till the time is fulfilled."

Slowly and sadly Pelops went out of the glen; he turned at the entrance and looked back, and once more the King was sitting with upturned face, raising his arms towards the overhanging rock that trembled as before.

Pelops told no one what he had seen; but in after years, when people began to forget their fear of that mountain, it chanced more than once that herdsmen on the hill went into the glen of rocks and were affrighted by the same sight. So the spot was held in dread for many ages, and men told that it was haunted by the spectre of Tantalus, a king, whom the gods had doomed for his pride to a threefold punishment—endless thirst, endless hunger, and endless terror of a rock that seemed ever falling, but never fell. And because Tantalus was for ever tormented by the vanishing of nectar and ambrosia when they touched his lips, people say to this day that man is tantalised, when they mean that he sees something he longs for very near him, and cannot get it.

Now the land of Lydia became hateful to Pelops, after he learned the fate of his father, and he resolved to make his home in some other country, where the sight of that lonely mountain top, whence he could not deliver the prisoner of the gods, would grieve his eyes no more. At this time, travellers from beyond the sea brought tales of strange doings at a city called Pisa, which lay in the far land of Greece. The King of Pisa, they said, had an only child, a maiden of surpassing beauty, and many princes sought her in marriage, but all her suitors had perished miserably—for this reason. King Oenomaus, her father, had promised the maiden to whoever could outstrip him in chariot-race, but if he, the King, could overtake the other chariot, the suitor must die by his spear. Thirteen princes, one after another,

had already dared the perilous race, and always, although Oenomaus gave them a start of six furlongs, he overtook them with his peerless horses, and struck them dead with a well-aimed spear-throw. Pelops no sooner heard all this, than he said to himself, "That is the adventure for me," and he took farewell of the Queen his mother, saying that he desired to seek his fortune across the sea, where men would not know him for the son of the hapless Tantalus. The Queen was willing he should go, for she had seen that he was restless and unhappy; but she said, "Take companions with you, and slaves of our household, and let a ship be loaded with treasure, and good store of all things needful, that you may appear as befits a king's son, in the land whither you sail."

"Not so, my mother," answered Pelops; "I am bound on a certain quest I hear spoken of, and neither treasure nor following will serve me to win it. I go alone, but when I come to the seashore, I am in hopes to find a friend there, who will give me what help I need."

So Pelops journeyed alone for three days and three nights, and came to the sea one morning very early, before the sun was up. There, standing on the solitary shore, in the faint light of dawn, he called aloud the name of Poseidon. Immediately the calm deep was troubled, a long foam-crested billow came rolling shoreward, and broke at his feet in clouds of spray, and out of that wave the tall Poseidon rose up before him. "Earth-shaking God," said Pelops, "if you have not forgotten the joy we had once together in Aphrodite's garden, now grant to me a boon, for the sake of those pleasant hours."

"Ask what you will," answered Poseidon, "for I am no forgetful friend."

Then Pelops told his desire to race with the King of Pisa for the prize of his daughter's hand, and his fear that he would nowhere be able to find such fleet horses as the King's. "For I hear," he said, "that this King Oenomaus has a wonderful breed of horses from the far North, and some say he had them in a gift

from Ares, the Lord of War, whom he honours above all other gods. Now therefore, O Poseidon, send me quickly over the sea by your divine power, and give me two coursers swifter than any earthly steeds, to win me the victory."

Poseidon turned, and struck the water with his trident; then he said, "Look seaward, Pelops," and the youth beheld two white crests tossing far out at sea, like the crests of waves plunging toward the land. But as they neared the shore, he saw they were the flying manes of two white horses, which drew a golden chariot without a driver, and flew like the wind over the grey waters, till they halted at his side. At Poseidon's bidding, he mounted the chariot and took the reins, and forthwith those immortal horses bore him so swiftly out to sea, that the shore was already dim in the distance before he could look back to speak his thanks to the god. Soon the speed of his going and the rushing sound of the waves lulled him into drowsiness, nor did he fully awake till the golden car stood still, and he found himself on land once more. The first wayfarer he met told him that this was the country of King Oenomaus, and before sunset he came to Pisa, a little city built upon a hill.

King Oenomaus was glad at the coming of this handsome stranger, who proclaimed himself a suitor for the hand of the Princess, for he made sure of overtaking and slaying him as he had done the rest. "There is another wooer come to try his fortune," he told his daughter, "a king's son, by the look of him, with goodly white horses, and a chariot gay with gold. Tomorrow you shall ride in it, and see him fall at your side, like the others. That will be good sport, and those white horses will be the best of all my spoil from the fools who have raced with me." Next morning, the King brought his guest on foot to a broad and level valley near the city, and the slaves followed them, leading their chariots. Pelops saw that a tall maiden, wearing the veil of a bride, stood in his own car and held the reins. When they came to the place appointed, Oenomaus said, "It is my custom to set Hippodameia, my daughter, in the car of him who races here to win her, that he may carry off the prize, if he can. Drive forward

now, king's son, for I wait till you have gone six furlongs, but woe betide you if your horses are overtaken by those mares of mine, that came from the stalls of Ares, the War-god."

"Let me first see the face of this maiden," said Pelops, "since I have good hope to make her my bride this day."

"Throw back your veil, girl," said the King, and he laughed a cruel laugh; "let your suitor look on you while he may."

The Princess lifted her veil, and looked Pelops straight in the eyes; now her fierce father had reared her like a young warrior, till she could rein in the wildest horses, and see blood shed without flinching, nor had she ever known pity, but had taken delight in the deaths of those thirteen strangers who came seeking to carry her away as a bride. Yet as she looked at this beautiful youth, she wished, on a sudden, that she might not see him slain like those others, and at the strangeness of so wishing, she blushed and drew down her veil. Then Pelops looked well to the harness of the white horses, and took his stand beside her, and drove them onward along the valley. They had not passed far beyond the stone that marked six furlongs from the starting-place when they heard the King's chariot thundering behind them, but his wondrous mares were no match for the steeds of Poseidon, and soon Oenomaus saw that the race was lost. With a cry of rage, he leaned forward and hurled the spear at Pelops; so mightily he threw that the spear-point struck the side of the golden car, and would have pierced it, had it not been of heavenly metal. But in the doing of the treacherous deed, the King ended his life of wickedness; as he cast the spear with his full force, he over-balanced himself, and fell headlong from the chariot and broke his neck.

Thus, by Poseidon's help, Pelops gained a bride and a kingdom, for he reigned at Pisa in the stead of Oenomaus. He build the god an altar in the valley of the chariot-race, and held a yearly feast there in his honour, with sacrifices and rejoicings, on the day of the victory. Also he ordained a race of chariots to

be run at the festival, for prizes of golden vessels and costly armour, and in the after time the princes of all lands contended in that race, so glorious was the fame of it. But never came such horses thither as the white steed of Poseidon, which were seen no more from the day when Pelops died in a good old age, but vanished out of their stalls that same hour.

Now as for the Princess Hippodameia, she mourned but little for her father, whom she had rather feared than loved, and lived in all happiness with her wedded lord, forgetting the wild and warlike life of her youth. The sons who were born to her became mighty warriors, who won lands and cities by the sword, and their children fulfilled the promise of the gods to Tantalus concerning the glory that should come upon his house. For these were they who led a host out of all Greece to that siege of Troy town, which the poets of ancient ages made into the finest story in the world.

Here ends this tale; yet let it be told what befell when Pelops had sent for the Queen his mother to dwell with him at Pisa, who, because he would not return to the land of Lydia, had given to Niobe the kingdom of their father. There the daughter of Tantalus reigned and prospered many years, but, even as he had done, she provoked the wrath of the Immortals, through exceeding pride. For she had seven sons and seven daughters, incomparably beautiful, and she boasted that she had borne fairer children than any of the goddesses. This boast was heard in heaven by the divine mother of Apollo, who appeared to Niobe in the guise of an old woman, and bade her take back her words, lest the Archer-god and Artemis, his sister, should avenge the slight offered to their mother Leto. "Away, prating hag," answered the Queen, "or I will have you scourged from my doors for this insolence. Shall Leto, who has but the two children, be named equal to Niobe, the mother of twice seven?"

Forthwith the old woman vanished, and a cry was heard from the garden where the children were at play. "The arrows! The arrows! O mother, save us!" The Queen flew to the place, only to see her young sons and daughters fall one by one at her

feet, pierced to the heart by the arrows of invisible archers. None escaped those shafts save the youngest of all, a little maid, whom Niobe shielded in her arms, and she, who lived to be a woman, was ever after pale as marble from the terror of that hour.



NIOBE SHIELDING HER DAUGHTER.

Now there was a saying in those days that mortals whom the gods loved, died young, being delivered from all the toils of life, and the miseries of feeble age; moreover, it was counted a happy fate to die by the swift painless arrows that Apollo and Artemis shot from their silver bows. Let no one think, then, that Queen Niobe's innocent children were punished for their mother's pride; she, not they, suffered, and even to her the Immortals were not unmerciful. Day and night she wept by the children's tomb, refusing to be comforted, till at last the gods in pity turned her to a rock, in the semblance of a woman, and her tears to a spring of water that trickles for ever down its face, and there it is unto this day.

CHAPTER II

THE PRINCE WHO WAS A SEER

I

Hera, Queen of the gods, had stately shrines in many cities, but the one she loved best was her great and ancient temple near the rich city of Argos. For the folk of Argos honoured her above all the gods, with sacrifices and solemn feasts, as Lady of the land, and men called them the people of Hera. Now there was once a king in Argos who had three daughters, and they were the proudest princesses ever seen. Every year in the spring time all the maidens of the land, crowned with flowers and decked in their best array, went in procession to Hera's temple to offer her gifts and garlands and a veil brodered with lilies, in remembrance of her bridal with King Zeus. Then the priestess would cover the image of the goddess with the shining veil, and crown it with a wreath of scarlet pomegranate blossom, and it was borne in state to the city on a car drawn by white oxen, while all the people came forth to meet it with great rejoicing, and choirs of youths and maidens chanted wedding hymns in honour of Hera the Bride. The three daughters of the King went every year to the temple with the other maidens, but in their pride of heart they could not endure to see the splendid pomp of that procession, and hear the praises of the goddess, while they themselves walked unnoticed in the throng; and they said one to another, "Are not we as fair and as royal as this Bride of Zeus? Nay, who knows if Hera's beauty be so great, after all, who has seen her? But if that ancient image is her true likeness, the gods have an ugly queen indeed." So at last they would not go to the temple on the festival day, but sat at home, and when the image was borne past the palace they looked down from a window and mocked it aloud, saying, "What ancient dame have you there, good people? Since when

do grandmothers masquerade as brides?" The people trembled at these impious words, and the priestess cried aloud to the King to rebuke his daughters, but he laughed and answered heedlessly, "Let Hera rebuke them if their words displease her." Then said the priestess, "Both you and they, O King, shall learn that it is no light thing to insult our divine lady." With that she bade the drivers of the oxen turn them back to the temple, and the people went in silence to their homes.

That very night Hera sent a frenzy upon the three princesses, and they rushed in madness out of the city and roamed with strange cries among the fields. Their father went in search of them with the first light, but they knew him not, and fled away, shrieking, to the hills above the city. There they wandered for many days, and none could come near them, for when any approached, they bounded away like things possessed, and swifter than flying deer. Then the King in his despair sent messengers everywhere to offer great rewards to whoever would heal his daughters of their madness, and there came to him a seer out of the West country, whose name was Melampus. He was the son of a king, and he became a seer in this way. One day that he hunted in the woods he lay down to rest, being wearied, and fell asleep, and while he slept two young snakes crept out from their hole and licked his eyes and ears with their soft, forked tongues. Melampus awoke, and heard one snake say to the other, "This is the man who spared our lives when his servants found our nest last spring and slew our mother." With that they glided away, and then, lying still in deep amaze, he heard the birds also talking together, and understood all they said. Thus he became a seer, and a great physician as well, for his eyes were opened to see visions, and his ears to hear all that the wild creatures tell each other about the healing virtues of herbs and flowers and springs of water. Melampus told the King of Argos that he would heal his daughters for a price, but when the King asked what it was, he answered, "The half of your kingdom." This the King would not grant, and he sent him away. But soon the same madness came also upon the women of the land, so that they too fled out of their homes and wandered distracted about the hills.

Then the people, who had heard what the seer had demanded, earnestly besought the King to send after Melampus, and give him anything he asked to take away this plague from them. So Melampus was brought back, and the King offered him half the kingdom. But now the seer said that he would do nothing unless the King would give him two-thirds of the land. Even this the King was constrained to grant, lest the people should rise against him if he did not find means to rid them of the wrath of Hera, which his daughters had brought upon their wives and children. And the seer took men with him to the hills, and made them drive the herd of women gently before them towards a certain stream, and as they passed through its waters in flight from their pursuers they were healed of their madness, the three princesses with the rest. Thus Melampus became king over two-thirds of the land of Argos; one-third he kept himself, and gave one-third to Bias, his brother. But the three proud princesses, because they had despised Hera the Bride, never became brides themselves, and their father likewise came to no good end, because he had laughed instead of reproving them.

Melampus and Bias loved each other well, and reigned in peace for many years, but after their death their sons and grandsons began to be at feud about the kingdom, each desiring to make himself lord of all Argos. At last, when the Prince Adrastus, grandson of Bias, reigned in his father's stead, he took to himself the inheritance of the grandson of Melampus, who was yet a child, pretending that he would hold it in trust for his young kinsman. Also he took the child away from the servants who had the care of him (for his father and mother were dead), and brought him up in his own palace, and forbade his own servants on pain of death to let him learn that he was a king's son. So this little prince, who was called Amphiaraus, grew up in the house of Adrastus, and none dared tell him that he had a right to half the kingdom. He had for playmate a beautiful little girl, Eriphyle by name, who was the younger sister of Adrastus, and he came to love her very dearly, in spite of one great fault that she had—she was the most covetous little maiden that ever lived. She could not see her playfellow with a flower, or a fruit,

or a toy, without wanting to have it, and very often she got it, for she could coax very prettily, and if that did not do, the tears would come into her sweet dark eyes, and her rosebud of a mouth would quiver so piteously that he somehow felt himself a cruel little wretch, and begged her to take it. As she grew older her one delight was in jewels and golden trinkets, and though King Adrastus was for ever giving her such things, she could never have enough, but hoarded them away, and began to think of how she could get more. Sometimes she would pretend that she had lost a ring or a bracelet, and fret over it for days, till she was promised another like it, and then, when the new one was made, she would say that the gold was not so fine, or the gems not so large, as the old. Then the King, who doted on his young sister, would make her amends with some other costly gift besides, so that her hoard of treasures grew from day to day. But at last she did really lose one of her jewels; it was an earring curiously wrought, and hung with a pear-shaped pearl, and there were no such earrings in all the land of Greece as this and its fellow, which a trader from across the sea had brought to Argos out of the East. Therefore the Princess Eriphyle could not be comforted with any gift for the loss of it, and great search was made in all the house, and in the King's orchard and garden, but it could not be found. Amphiaraus searched with the rest, and could not bear to see the grief of the pretty princess. He sought to comfort her as best he could, and entreated her not to grieve, saying, "The earring will surely be found some day, and meanwhile have you not hundreds of other jewels? Do not vex yourself, Eriphyle, and spoil your dear eyes with weeping, or you will break my heart."

"Oh," she cried, "what a false boy this is! He would have me think he loves me, when he will not do the least little thing for my sake."

"I know not what you mean," he answered, bewildered. "What is there I would not do to please you?"

"If you loved me truly," she said, "you would never rest day or night till you brought me my earring, my lovely pearl earring that I prize so dearly, or else the match of it."

"One of those things I will do," said Amphiaraus, "and I will see your face no more till I have done it." And he went out of the chamber where she sat crying and scolding her women. But when he had once more searched high and low in vain, he said to himself that since he certainly could never find that earring, the thing he must do was to find another like it somewhere in the world. He waited till nightfall, lest one should see and hinder his going; then he took a cloak and a staff and put on sandals, and stole out of the King's house, and out of the city gate from which the road led to the nearest harbour-town. For he thought that there he might find some ship bound for the lands of the East, where only in the world craftsmen made earrings like the Princess Eriphyle's. It was a summer's night, and the clear heaven shone thick with stars, like bright kind eyes looking down upon his lonely way. About a league from the city, the road was bordered on one side by a wood of olives, and the young prince turned aside to rest there till morning light. He saw among the trees what seemed the pillared porch of a house, and went towards it, to seek a lodging for the night, but coming nearer, he saw that it was a roofless shrine, empty and half in ruins. Only a low stone altar, such as men built upon the graves of the dead, was to be seen within, lichen-stained, and mantled over by a wild vine. Amphiaraus rolled his cloak together for a pillow and propped it against the altar, and laid him down to sleep. Now as he slept, he dreamed a dream; he thought that a large, bright-eyed snake came out of the altar and coiled itself round him, and that it licked his eyes and his ears with its soft, forked tongue. This terrified him so, that he awoke, and then, as it seemed to him that voices were talking close at hand, he raised himself very quietly on one elbow, listening, and looking about him. It was still night, but the stars gave light enough in the roofless chamber to see two little brown owls perched side by side on the broken cornice. The low talking went on, till suddenly one of the voices—quite softly, but quite distinctly—

hooted. Then the prince looked at the owls again, and saw that they were the speakers, and he listened with all his might, pretending to be asleep.

"What youth is that," said one, "and why has he come to sleep on the grave of Melampus?"

"Little wife," answered the other, "he is called Amphiaraus, and he is the grandson of Melampus, and rightful king of half this land."

"How comes that?" said the lady owl. "Is not Adrastus rightful king of all Argos, seeing that he is descended from the elder brother of Melampus?"

"It is a long story," replied her mate, "but you shall hear it if you like." And he told her the tale of the three proud princesses, and how Melampus gained two-thirds of the kingdom and gave an equal share to Bias, his brother. "So you see," he said, "that King Adrastus is no better than a usurper, although he belongs to the elder branch of that family. He has brought up this youth in ignorance of his rights, and taught him to suppose that his grandfather Melampus held only the rank of a younger brother to the King from whom Adrastus himself inherits the whole land. Covetousness, my little wife, is the root of strange evils among men, and it is well seen in this greedy King and his greedier sister, Eriphyle. Like brother, like sister; because she has lost a gewgaw that you and I would not give a mouse for, she has sent this lad who loves her to the world's end to look for its like."

"How wise you are," said the lady owl. "It does a bird's heart good to listen to you. But tell me, will Amphiaraus find her jewel for the princess? It seems a pity such a handsome young prince should go wandering about the world like a beggar."

"He need not wander far if he knew where to look," said the other owl. "The princess dropped her earring when she was swinging in the orchard, and a magpie, who spied it in the grass, picked it up and flew off with it. That magpie happens to have

built a nest at the top of the sycamore which you see yonder, at the end of this olive grove, and she has put the earring into it, by way of ornament. For my part, I always think that magpies do not understand the true principles of house-building. The Beautiful is all very well, but when it comes to plastering one's walls with hard shiny things such as earrings, instead of with down, I, for one, consider it a mistake."

"My dear husband," said the lady owl, "how happy it makes me to hear you discourse. I believe you are the wisest owl that ever hooted."

Upon this, her mate gave a hoot which sounded something like a pleased laugh, and both the little owls flew away. Amphiaraus sat till sunrise beside the altar, pondering on what he had heard. He understood, now, that his dream was a true vision; he had heard how Melampus became a seer, and it was plain to him that the snake out of the grave was the spirit of the dead King, which had come forth in that shape to bestow his own strange powers upon his grandson. He had heard too that Melampus, when his end was near, desired that he might not be buried among the royal tombs of Argos, but rest under the open sky and among the woods which he had loved to haunt. Here, then, they had buried him, and build an altar and an unroofed shrine, but none had brought offerings to the tomb, nor repaired the crumbling walls, for many years, through fear of Adrastus, and of his father before him, who had threatened to punish any that showed honour to the memory of Melampus. Amphiaraus scarcely believed the owl had told a true tale about the King, his kinsman, who had always treated him with kindness, and he felt sure that he had spoken very unjustly against Eriphyle. "But I will soon see," he thought, "if the bird was right about the magpie and the earring." So he climbed the sycamore, and there indeed was the jewel in the magpie's nest.

The princess was overjoyed when he brought it to her, and her pleasure was pretty to see, but he noticed rather sadly that, while she eagerly fingered the precious earring again and again to see that it had received no injury, she only asked him

carelessly where he had found it, and quite forgot to thank him. For the first time Amphiaraus felt that he had a secret which she must not share; he told her he had found her jewel in a tree, where perhaps some thievish bird had carried it. "Very likely," she said, turning away, "but no matter where it was, since I have it again." And she went from him, smiling, to lay it up with her other treasures.

From that day the young prince was greatly changed; he grew silent and thoughtful, and wandered much alone among the woods and hills, with only his two hounds for company. King Adrastus supposed that he went hunting, and was wont to banter him pleasantly on his poor success, for it was seldom that he brought home any game. But Amphiaraus for the most part was not hunting; he was listening to the new language that his ears were opened to understand, and learning wisdom of beast and bird. Now, too, he could talk to his dogs, and the pleasure this was to them made amends for their disappointment when their master would not let them chase a doe or hare. So passed the summer, but when winter came, with its cold and rain, he went more seldom into the woodlands, and began to be seen more often in the market-place of the city, where, under long pillared porticoes of the temples around it, the folk of Argos gathered for buying and selling, and the old men would sit and talk. Amphiaraus went much among the people, who loved the young prince for his courteous speech and comely looks; he listened with respect to the talk of the old citizens, and they, who remembered his wise grandfather, and secretly hated King Adrastus, began to say among themselves that the wisdom of the good Melampus had come down to this noble youth, so shamefully kept from his inheritance.

And little by little they cautiously dropped hints in his hearing, which he, who knew so much more than they thought, was quick to understand. and to show that he understood, till at length they saw that he knew the whole story, though they could not guess by what means he learnt it. Now, Adrastus ruled the people hardly, for he was not less greedy of gain than the little

owl had said, and he oppressed the folk with more and more tolls and taxes, so that he became hateful to them. Also he took bribes and presents from those who came to plead their causes before him, and gave judgments for the rich against the poor, who had nothing to give him. These things bred much discontent in Argos, and whispers went abroad that some end should be made to this wrong-doing. There came a day at last when word went through the city of yet another tax to be laid upon the people, more grievous than any before, and at that a cry arose: "We will not longer endure this folk-devouring King! To arms, friends, and let us fall upon Adrastus and his guards in the palace. Better be slain with the sword than pay his dues of our corn and wine and oil till we perish with hunger." Then the elders of the city answered the people: "Well said, yet bethink you what you will do. Was it ever heard or known that any but a king could stand up against a kin? Who shall lead you against Adrastus, and who will rule you and fight your battles in his stead?"

Then, even as they hoped, the people cried, "The grandson of Melampus shall be our leader. Amphiaraus shall be king over us, and we will cast out the usurper who holds his land." So the whole city rose up in revolt, with shouting and clashing of arms, and marched upon the palace. Adrastus was a brave warrior, but he and his guards were taken by surprise, so suddenly the multitude broke in upon them, crying, "Amphiaraus shall be King! Away with the usurper!" Now while Adrastus and his men ran to the armoury to get their weapons, Amphiaraus stood still, amazed by the cry he heard, and the people thronged round him with loud shouts of, "Hail, King of Argos!" till the hall rang again. "Alas, friends," he cried to them, "what means this tumult? Can I take arms with you against Adrastus, my kinsman, my kind master since I was a child? I pray you, if you love me, put up your swords, and hear me, while I speak to the King." Then, as the inner doors were flung open and Adrastus was seen standing armed at the head of his men, the young prince turned to him and said, "I had no part in this, O King, nor knew what the folk purposed, but now, lest worse come of it, suffer me to speak their request and mine."

"Say on," said Adrastus. "The people would make me King," said Amphiaraus, "because the burden of tolls and taxes is more than they can bear, and because they know that I have the right to half the land you hold. Now it is best that there should be but one King in Argos, and you, my kinsman, must be that King, for I will never repay your kindness by disloyalty. I seek not to be King of half Argos, as were my father and my grandfather; I ask only to possess their share of the land, and to hold it under you as my liege lord. But for the people I ask that they may have equal justice done to rich and poor, as it was done by our fathers, and pay no greater taxes than our fathers required of them. Consider well, Adrastus, what you will do, for these men are many and desperate, and who knows what shall be the end if once swords are drawn?"

The King was silent for a space, for he doubted what were best to do; then he said: "I need time to answer such a request as this, and the day is far spent. Let the folk abide here, if they will, all night, to make sure I shall not bar the palace doors against them, and in the morning I will answer them and you." So the people remained in the King's hall and in the courtyard, and his servants brought them food and wine at nightfall, and they kept watch by companies all night. But Adrastus and his guards withdrew to the inner chambers of the palace, and there he gathered all his treasure together, and loaded his men therewith, and bade Eriphyle put all her jewels in bundles for her handmaids to carry, and led her, with all their train, through a secret passage from his underground treasure chamber to the fields beyond the palace garden. They could not take horses from the stables, for they were near the courtyard, and the noise of hoofs and wheels would have betrayed them, but stole away on foot through the darkness till they came to a farm of the King's, where some of his mules were kept, and these were harnessed to country carts for the princess and her women. Thence with all speed Adrastus and his company passed over the border of Argos and came as fugitives to the friendly city of Sicyon.

When it was found in the morning that the King had fled, some were for pursuing him, but the old man said: "Let him alone, he has done wisely. For he knew he had made such enemies of the people that he could never dwell safely in Argos, so long as they saw Amphiarus among them, whom all desire for their king. The gods have blessed yesterday's work with a good ending." And since Adrastus has chosen flight rather than do the justice asked of him, Amphiarus was willing to rule in his stead over the people, and he ruled them wisely and well. Yet his heart was full of sadness at the thought of Eriphyle, driven from the home where now he lived in lonely state, to dwell among strangers; and when he heard that her brother had made his abode in Sicyon he sent messengers again and again with letters, praying to be reconciled to his kinsman and offering to bring him back as King on the former conditions. Adrastus for a long while returned no answer; he had gathered a power in Sicyon with the help of his treasure, and was become master of the city, so that he meant ere long to come against Argos with an army and win back his throne by force. When two years were gone by, Amphiarus could no longer endure his longing to see Eriphyle again; he put on the disguise of a merchant, and went secretly to Sicyon with one faithful servant, and sought admission to the princess, saying that he had jewels to sell. Eriphyle received him in the chamber where she sat spinning with her maidens, and when she asked him the price of the jewels he showed her, "They are yours without a price, fair princess," he said, "if I may speak with you alone." At that, she sent the maidens out of the chamber, and forthwith he made himself known to her, and told her that he could have no joy of his kingdom because of his loneliness without her. Now the princess was weary of dwelling in a strange city, and she thought, "If I were wedded to Amphiarus, for love of me he would do my brother's will in all things. Why should not Adrastus promise all he asks, and leave the rest to me?" So she smiled sweetly upon him, and with subtle words made him believe that Adrastus was even then about to send a letter to him, consenting to return. And after private speech with her brother, she brought him to Amphiarus, and

they embraced as friends. Adrastus of his own accord declared that he would come back to Argos and do all that was required of him: "You," he said, "shall possess your own land, and dwell with me in all honour, as second in the kingdom. Only, that we may live together like brothers, I desire to give you my sister for wife, making this compact with you, that should we ever differ on any matter, she shall decide between us."

Now Amphiarus was wise with the wisdom of the beasts and birds, who know things hidden from men, and can read the signs of what shall be before it comes; but he had no skill in the crafty ways of man. He believed that Adrastus and his sister loved him as truly as he loved them, and he received the hand of the princess with the deepest joy. Yet after their wedding in Sicyon, as they all journeyed homewards together, he saw many sights that boded misfortune, and chilled his heart with fear of evil to come. They had not gone far when a hare ran across the road before them; presently they saw a single magpie by the wayside, and every bird that flew over their heads was flying widdershins. And as they came near the gates of Argos, a raven rose on flapping wings from a thunder-blasted tree, and uttered one harsh croak. Amphiarus alone could hear the word in that croak, and the word was "Death." So it was with a heavy heart that he came home again, although he brought with him the bride he had long desired, and the kinsman he had striven to restore to his throne. 70

II

Years came and went, and still all was well with the princes and the folk of Argos. Adrastus soon learnt that Amphiarus was a seer, and that whatever he foretold most surely came to pass, and he took his counsel in all things, so that the people marvelled because the King now ruled them mildly and justly. And the land had peace, for no enemy could plot anything against Adrastus that the birds did not bring warning of to Amphiarus. Meanwhile children were born to Eriphyle and

to the wife whom the King had taken in Sicyon. Now when the daughters of the King were maidens grown, he was troubled by a strange dream concerning them, and told it to Amphiaraus. "I dreamed," he said, "that a lion and a bear came to Argos, and were married to my daughters. What means this?"

"To-morrow, at this time," answered the seer, "go out of the north gate of the city, and you will see that lion and that bear. Bring them to your palace, and marry them to your daughters, for the gods will have it so."

Adrastus went out of the city gate on the morrow, and saw two young men coming towards him richly armed, after the fashion of king's sons and each had a painted shield. Now the shield of one was emblazoned with the figure of a lion, and that of the other with the figure of a bear. The King saluted them, and asked them who they were and whence they came. "I am called Tydeus," answered he with the lion-shield; "I have fled from the house of my father, who is king in the far north country, because I have slain a kinsman by mischance." Then he whose device was the bear, said: "Polyneices is my name, and I come from the city of Thebes. The curse of blood is come upon the king my father, and he is an outcast from the land. Now my brother and I agreed together to rule in Thebes by turns, each for a year; but when the first year was over, my brother would not give up the kingdom, and he has driven me forth, a banished man." So Adrastus knew that these princes were sent to him by the gods, to become his sons-in-law, according to his dream, and he bade them welcome and lodged them in the palace, and having persuaded them to abide in Argos, he gave them his daughters in marriage.

But the king's son of Thebes could not rest for the hatred he had to his brother, and he thought day and night upon revenge. Ere long he began to work upon Adrastus with promises and entreaties to gather a host together and make war on Thebes, telling him what great and goodly spoils should be his share when the city was taken. The King was easily moved by the hope of gain to undertake such a war; he called his

kinsmen and his captains together, and declared his mind to them. Now the rest were willing enough to follow him forth to battle, but they waited to hear what counsel Amphiaraus would give. Then slowly uprose the seer, and spoke a warning in solemn tones: "Fight not in this young man's quarrel, Adrastus, lest you bring on us and on our children the curse that rests upon his house. For three generations the wrath of the gods has not ceased from the royal race of Thebes, nor will it pass from them till Polyneices perish by the sword, ay, and his brother also. Hear now the tale of how it came. Laius the king, for a wickedness that he did in secret, was hated of the Heavenly Ones, and they laid this doom on him, that his own son should slay him, and pronounced it by the mouth of the priestess in the holy place of Delphi. Therefore, Laius, when his first child was born, had him cast out upon a wild and barren mountain, there to die or to be devoured by beasts of prey. But the herdsman of a neighbour king found the babe, and brought him to their lord's wife, who had no children, and she reared him as her son. It fell on a day, when he was grown a man, that he drove in a chariot over a saddle of the hills, and there met him another chariot and a troop of slaves running on foot. Now the two chariots could not pass in the narrow road, and the servants of the man in the chariot cried roughly to the son of Laius to make way, and seized his horses' bridles to turn them off the road on to the hillside, and he, in anger, urged his horses forward till he was close to the other charioteer, who leaned forward and struck him in the face with his whip. At that the son of Laius drew his sword, and stabbed that stranger to the heart, and he fell down dead in the chariot. The youth had but one servant with him, and the slaves were many; but they scattered in terror when they saw their lord was slain, and he dragged the dead man's chariot aside and went his way, not knowing the thing that he had done. For that man was Laius the king. After this the land of Thebes was ravaged by a strange and cruel monster, who preyed on youths and maidens, till the dead king's kinsmen let proclaim everywhere that whoever should slay the monster should take the kingdom for his reward. Many bards have sung, and often have we heard in

Argos, how a stranger youth made an end of that fell creature which men called the Sphinx, and became king in Thebes; that tale were too long to tell.

"But the blood he had shed in wrath was avenged at last upon that stranger youth, for he was the son of Laius, and after many years a chance revealed to him the name of his true father, and who it was he slew on the mountain road. Then it was that in agony of soul he made known the truth to his sons, to this Polyneices and his brother, and bade them take the kingdom that he might go on pilgrimage to holy places, seeking to wash away his guilt. Ah, hard-hearted prince, little pity did you or your brother show to your aged father in his evil hour. You it was, his own children, who drove him from the land, a feeble, blind old man, to beg his bread among strangers, and on you, when you thrust him forth, did he call down a father's curse. Beware, I say, Adrastus, how you draw the sword for Polyneices. Too surely, when he marches against Thebes, will he march to the doom prepared." When Amphiaraus had thus spoken, he went out from among them. Polyneices trembled at the words of the seer, for they brought to his mind the prayer his father uttered at his going forth from the gate of Thebes: *"O Sun, O Earth, behold the wrongs I suffer from these my children. Hear, Zeus on high, hear, gods of the under-world, the prayer of Oedipus the outcast, who once was Oedipus the King. As these sons of mine have thrust me out unpitied in mine age, so let them fall unpitied in their youth: as they have hated me for a crime that I did unwittingly, so may they hate each other, till their hate leads them to a crime that they shall do with open eyes."*

Yet his heart was so bent upon revenge, that no warning could turn him from his purpose; he was ready to brave destruction, if only he might destroy Eteocles his brother before it overwhelmed him. Therefore he pleaded earnestly with Adrastus, and his pleading prevailed against the warning of Amphiaraus, for the King said, "Be the rest as it may, Polyneices has had much wrong from his brother, and I am minded to help him to his right." Then Tydeus, his other son-in-law, who was a

mighty warrior, said, "I, too, am fain to do battle for him, and there are many princes and chiefs, our neighbours, who will gladly march with us to Thebes, to win themselves renown of valour. But some means must be found to make Amphiaraus one of us, for his name is great in all the land both as a warrior and a prophet, and neither princes nor people will fight with good hope, unless he go with our host."

"Leave that to me," said Adrastus, "for I know a way to turn him to what I will." And he broke up their council, and sent word to Eriphyle that he desired speech with her.

Now Eriphyle had lived so long with Amphiaraus that his tender goodness had brought love out of that selfish heart of hers, as the gentle rain brings flowers out a parched garden-soil. So when she came to her brother, and he told her that the time was come for her to decide a matter between him and her husband, according to the marriage-compact, she said to him: "You are very dear to me, my brother, but my lord and husband is dearer still. What seems good to him I also will uphold, though I am loth to gainsay you." And she went back to her house without more words spoken, and told Amphiaraus what had passed. The seer pressed her hand in silence, and she said, "Do you know, my lord, what this matter is, that Adrastus would have had me take his part in, and so have compelled your consent?"

Then he told the King's desire to war with Thebes, and said with a sigh, "I should have known that Adrastus would not heed my warning when there is the hope of golden spoils to be won, but I little thought he would seek this way to force me to fight in his host. That is what he meant you to do, my wife, to bid me march with him to Thebes, and by my marriage oath I am bound to yield to his will, whenever you shall so decide. Now I will tell you a thing that I told not to Adrastus, for little would it have hindered his going. I, if I go to Thebes, shall return no more, but meet my doom there."

Ill-pleased was King Adrastus that his sister would not so much as hear the thing he desired her help in against Amphiaraus, and he railed upon her to Polyneices, saying, "Who shall read a woman? This sister of mine that once loved nothing but gold and jewels, as well becomes a king's daughter, prates to me now of love for the man who she took for her lord only that she might come back to Argos and make him a tool in my hands. For Amphiaraus and I took an oath together to abide by her judgement when we came to variance, and now if she would say the word, he must come with us to Thebes, whether he will or no."

"Do you tell me that?" said Polyneices; "then let me deal with your sister." Now he said to himself that as he had won the brother with a bribe of wealth, so he would win the sister, now he knew that she loved jewels. For he had brought with him to Argos a rarer treasure than could be found in the caskets of all the queens on earth. It was a necklace of strange device and cunning workmanship; from a narrow band of beaten gold, two rows of pendants hung by chains of pearls, and in the upper row each pendant was a golden dove, with outspread wings and ruby eyes, but in the lower, each pendant was a golden hand, clasping an apple, and every apple was a topaz or an emerald. This, long ago, was a marriage gift of the goddess Aphrodite to her fair child Harmonia, whom the gods gave for bride to the first King of Thebes, and all the queens of his house had worn it, till the mother of Polyneices bestowed it on her favourite son. With this, he thought, he could tempt Eriphyle to betray her husband, however much she loved him. And he was right; the princess at first refused to listen, when his wife, her kinswoman, brought her his message and showed her the wondrous necklace, but he sent again and again, till at last desire of the precious thing so consumed Eriphyle, that she took it, with promise to give her voice for war with Thebes.

Then Polyneices hastened to the King, and once more the princes of the land were summoned to council. Adrastus said that he was resolved to march at once upon the city, and when

Amphiaraus told him sadly, "This once, I cannot go with you to battle," he answered, "That shall Eriphyle decide, even as you and I made compact long ago. Let her be called, and give judgement between us."

Pale as death, with downcast eyes, the traitress came into the hall; her brother, in few words, told her why she was sent for, and asked, "How say you, my sister? Shall Amphiaraus go with me to Thebes, or shall he forebear?" And with eyes still fixed upon the ground, she said in a low voice, "He shall go with you." Then she turned quickly, and went out of that assemblage with the handmaids who followed her.

"You have heard, Amphiaraus," said the King with a smile of triumph, "and you know now that to Thebes you must go."

"I have heard my doom," said the seer, "and not mine only. For I say to you, princes of Argos, that of seven champions who will lead our host against yonder city, not one shall return alive, save one, and he in flight from a lost battle." So saying, he went also to his house.

Before many days, a gallant army set forth at break of day from the gates of Argos, in seven companies, headed by as many princes in panoply of war. Each chief, but one, had some device blazoned on his shield which he had chosen to express his purpose and his hopes in going forth. First came the brave Tydeus, whose shield, the colour of the midnight sky, was thick sown with silver stars, with a full orbed moon in the midst, for he said, "As many stars as shine around this moon, so many souls will I send to throng the palace of Death's Queen, who is the moon of the Nether World." Next came Capaneus, of that former royal house of Argos, whose last king fell by the wrath of Hera; his emblem was a naked man with a blazing torch, and over him written, 'I WILL FIRE THE CITY.' The third and the fourth leaders were warlike princes, neighbours to Adrastus, who had for their devices, the one that earth-born giant Typhon, half-man, half-snake, with flames issuing from his mouth; the

other, in bitter mockery of Thebes, her ancient plague, the monstrous Sphinx, with the body of a youth in its claws. The shield of Polyneices bore the figure of a man in golden armour, led by a woman of noble and modest aspect, above whose head was written her name, 'Justice ' while from her mouth came the words, 'This man will I lead home.' Then came King Adrastus, having for emblem a warrior fully armed, mounting a ladder against a city-wall, with this inscription, 'SmallCaps("Not Ares, the war-god, shall turn me back"?>.' Last of all came Amphiaraus, and he only had nothing painted on his shield. He heeded not the farewells and blessings of the crowd about the city gate, but gazed before him as though in a trance, until, as he passed through the archway, he turned and looked back at the white porch of his home. There, between his two young sons, Eriphyle was standing, and their eyes met in one long, last look. Never a word had they spoken to one another since she had said the word that sent him forth to his fate, and she had shunned the sight of his calm, sad face. She could not read the meaning of the glance he now turned upon her, but it seemed to pierce her very hear; almost she rushed forward to call him back, but in a moment he had passed on at the head of his men. "It is too late," she said aloud, and went sobbing to her chamber. But before night she had clasped on the necklace; she need not hide it now, and that was something.

Adrastus and his host marched northwards through the land, and when they came to the border, they halted to offer sacrifice and prayer to Zeus, that he might send them a sign of good fortune ere they set foot on a foreign ground. Amphiaraus, whose part it was as seer to interpret the signs given by the sacrifice, watched in silence while they heaped dry wood upon a wayside altar, and laid the burnt offering of a ram thereon, and kindled the pile; well he knew that the sign given would be one plain enough for all to read without help of his. The thin flames, pale in the sunlight, had scarcely flickered up from the altar, when from the cloudless summer sky a shower of hail came hissing down upon the sacrifice, and quenched it in an instant. Thunder, in one sharp peal, followed the hail, which fell only on

the altar. While all stood dismayed, Adrastus boldly cried, "Courage, my comrades. What though this portent tells us Zeus will not accept our offering, it may be that he foretells a greater. We have offered a ram on this poor altar, but the god perhaps signifies that he waits the sacrifice of a hundred oxen which I have vowed him from the spoil of Thebes." Thus he cheered the spirits of his army, but the princes cried, "Let the seer interpret for us. Tell us, Amphiaraus, what bodes this sign—evil or good?"

"Nay," answered the seer, "hearken rather to Adrastus, for the time is gone by when word of mine could avail you. Yet, if he trusts in vows, let him know this, to obey is better than sacrifice."

That night, the host encamped among the hills, and next noontide they rested in a deep and grassy vale, shut in by hanging woods. The streams of the valley were now dwindled or dried up by the heat of summer, and it was needful to seek elsewhere for water. The Seven Champions went a little further through the solitary vale, and found a woman seated on a flowery knoll, with a child playing at her feet, and they asked her if there were any springs in that place where their host might drink, and water the horses.

"I will show you," she said, "where there is such a spring; it is in yonder wood, across the valley."

Then they called to them their slaves from the camp, who came bearing great jars slung on poles, and followed the woman, but the child was left at play among the flowers of the meadow. Now when they returned from the spring, he was not where she had left him, nor did he answer her calling, and she began to weep, saying, "He is the King's only son, whom I, his nurse, brought hither to play; if evil has befallen him, I am undone."

"He cannot be far away," said the Seven Champions, and they bade their men search the valley.

But Amphiarus saw the head and back of a serpent glancing through the meadow grass at a distance, and said, "He is yonder." They ran where he pointed, and the woman with a loud cry threw herself upon the body of the child, who lay there dead, slain by that serpent's bite. Fear and trembling came upon the Seven, for all knew that the sight of Death upon the road foretells utter disaster to the traveller, and of all evil signs this is the worst. Nevertheless, the hearts of the rest were hardened, by the will of the gods, that they might fulfil their doom, and the seer spoke no word to turn them from their onward march, knowing it was now too late. He bade the weeping nurse be comforted, for no harm should come to her, and asked her the name of that place. "It is called the vale of Nemea," she said, "and the folk say Heracles, that great hero, did his first mighty deed here, ridding these woods of a man-slaying lion. They say he strangled the monster with his bare hands, and I may well believe it; the men of to-day are but weaklings to him and his godlike generation, whom I saw in my youth."

Now this woman was old, and meanly clad, yet she bore herself nobly, and her speech was not the speech of a slave. Adrastus asked her name, and whether she were any kin to her master, the king of that country. "I am Hysipyle," she answered, "who once was queen of an island far away. An evil fate cast me from my throne, and my foes sold me into bondage. And now, when I take the tidings to my master that his child is dead, he will surely put me to death because I kept not guard over my nursling."

But the Seven Champions sent a herald with those tidings to the King, her master, and he came to them with his Queen, and all their household, making great lamentation. The Seven gave him sorrowful greeting, and when they had made themselves known to him, they laid all blame to themselves for the mischance that had befallen, and took his promise to hold the nurse guiltless. Then they buried the child in that same meadow, and raised a lofty mound over the grave, and set a pillar of stone upon the mound, whereon his name should be engraven, to keep

him in remembrance. All the host from Argos mourned for him with his own people, for three days and three nights, and the King, his father, made a great funeral feast in the vale of Nemea. On the third day, the Seven Champions departed, but first Amphiarus made solemn offerings at the grave, pouring milk mingled with honey upon it, as the custom was, and he spoke these words to the father: "I bid you engrave a new name upon this memorial stone, and not the name which your child bore in his life. Henceforth his name is Archemorus, that is, *Doom's Firstling*, for he was made the beginning of calamity to us in this our ill-starred journey. Grieve not, O King, for his early death, since without having known toil or pain, he has won glory such as many strive for through long and weary lives. For a thousand years to come, men shall hold solemn feasts beside this grave, and call his death to remembrance; the flower of youth from all the cities of Greece shall gather to those festivals, and contend in feats of strength, and in honour to his memory the victors shall be crowned with garlands of the wild parsley which grows on the spot where he died."

With this prophecy the seer went his way.

News of the coming of the Seven Champions flew before them, and there was tumult and fear in the city of Thebes. Eteocles, the King, made ready to defend the walls against them, and he alone felt no fear; he was of sterner mood than his brother Polyneices, and the thought of their father's curse troubled him not at all. He appointed six doughty chieftains to guard six gates of the city, for his scouts brought word that each leader of the enemy's host was encamped before one of the seven gates of Thebes, and having asked where Polyneices was posted, he said, "That gate I will defend myself. My traitor-brother, who dares to threaten his mother-city with fire and sword, must fall by no hand but mine." These dreadful words were spoken in the hearing of his household, and of the wives and mothers of the citizens, who had flocked for safety to the fortified rock whereon the palace stood, and all who heard them trembled. But none dared say their mind to the King, except one grey-haired dame,

who had known him from a child. "The gods forbid," she cried, wringing her withered hands, "that ever the sons of one mother should meet in deadly fray. Nay, my King, do not this wickedness: bring not the deep pollution of a brother's blood upon you. Command one of your captains to guard the seventh gate, and fight yourself against some other champion, not with Polyneices, lest the gods of our city withhold their aid from you in anger."

Then others of the women entreated him also not to fight at the seventh gate, falling at his feet with loud laments and clasping his knees in supplication. But Eteocles thrust them away in a rage, bidding them hold their peace for a pack of brawling fools.

"As for the gods," he said, "I care not how I may offend them, seeing that they have long hated all my race with a great hatred." And he went forth to look to the manning of the walls, and took his post at the seventh gate.

The host of the Seven Champions was now mustered for the onset; their trumpets rang out the signal, and above the clash of armour and clatter of chariot-wheels were heard the war-cries of the Seven as they rushed forward to the assault, and the answering shouts of the men of Thebes. As the bold Tydeus mounted his chariot, he saw Amphiaraus come forth from his tent and stand beside his own ready car, stroking the necks of the horses, and talking to them. "Ah, laggard!" he called to him, "so our seer is too wise to face the doom he foretold us. Now shame on you Amphiaraus, for even if your prophet's eyes see Death himself waiting at yonder gate, you play a coward's part in loitering here."

The seer lifted up his eyes and looked towards the gate on which his men were already advancing.

"I do indeed see what none else may see, yonder," he answered, "but it is not Death; it is a warrior-form in the likeness of myself, as I was in youth, and his shield bears the speckled snake, that I took for badge in memory of Melampus. Yet it is

not the wraith of myself, for I see him enter that gate a victor, from which I must be beaten back this very day. It is the vision of my son, the boy Alcmaeon, as he will one day be seen; the gods have granted me to know, in this last hour, that our children, Tydeus, shall conquer were their fathers fell. But now farewell, brave prince, for neither you nor I shall return to pleasant Argos; would with all my heart that I might die the death of a warrior with my noble comrades, but another doom is mine."

Then, with rapt gaze still bent upon the city gate, Amphiaraus stepped into his chariot and gathered up the reins, and at the bidding of his loved voice the horses dashed full gallop into the thick of the battle.

All day, like the thunder of surf against the cliffs, the din of that great fight swelled and sank round the walls of Thebes; all day a pall of coppery haze hung low over the city in the hot June air, laden with the sandy dust that rose in clouds from the trampled earth. So low it hung that the men upon the wall saw as through veils of fog the sudden glint of weapons, and white grim faces of the foes, come surging up from below when now and again some party of the invaders had planted their scaling-ladders against the ramparts in spite of the showers of darts and stones hurled down upon them. Now of scores who scaled the ladders, all were beaten back or cast down headlong before they could set foot upon the wall, except Capaneus, he of the Seven who had written on his shield the boast that he would fire the city. But he, carrying a blazing torch in his left hand, thrust it in the face of the nearest foes as he leaped among them, so that they fell back, and he sprang past them, and gained the roof of a temple that was built against the wall's inner side. "Zeus himself," he shouted, "shall not stop me now." The men of Thebes durst not leave the battlement to follow him, for his comrades came crowding up the ladder, and Capaneus in another instant would have fired the wooden gable of the temple, when, with one blinding flash of jagged flame, a thunderbolt out of heaven struck him and his torch to a heap of ashes. Such was the

end of a man who had even made a boast of defying the power of the gods.

Now, where all fought fearlessly and well, none did more valiantly than King Adrastus, and the foemen went down like corn before the reaper as he hewed his way among them to the gate. But as the day wore on, his own ranks were thinned ever faster by the missiles from the walls, and evil reports came by one messenger after another of the fighting at the other gates. Capaneus, they said, was charred to ashes by a thunderbolt, a manifest judgement of Zeus upon his impious vaunt, and Tydeus was breathing his last, wounded to death by the Theban chieftain he had slain in single combat. Then came word that others of the Seven were fallen, and when the light of sunset began to dye those reddened walls with a deeper crimson, a cry went through the host, from gate to gate: "O men of Argos, our cause is lost; the princes of Thebes have met, and Polyneices is hewn down by his brother's sword." At that cry, the besieged as one man burst out by all the gates with shouts of victory, and drove the now wavering mass of the invaders in rout before them. Adrastus knew that he only was left alive of the Seven, unless Amphiaraus, of whom no word had reached him, were among the flying; the day was lost indeed, and he turned rein and fled for his life. The pursuers pressed hard upon him, and one of his horses began to slacken speed at last for weariness and lack of provender; but the other, a bay stallion of Corinthian breed that Amphiaraus had given him, held on gallantly, straining at the yoke. "Save me now, Arion," Adrastus called to him; "save me for his sake who reared you and gave you to me," and quick as thought he lighted down from the chariot, cut Arion's trace, and sprang upon his back. The good horse neighed as if to show he understood, then went forward like the wind; over hill and dale he sped untiring, till he brought his rider safe to Argos.

The King was the first to bring those evil tidings to the city, and few there were who came behind him of all the great array that went forth to Thebes. Amphiaraus was not among the fugitives, nor could any of them give news as to his fate in the

battle. The city was filled with the lamentations of the old men, the women and children, mourning for sons, husbands and fathers, for every household was made desolate, from the least to the greatest. Then the elders of the folk, clad in white robes (for white was the hue of mourning at Argos), came to the King and besought him to send a herald to Thebes, praying leave to bring home the bones of the men who had fallen, that at least they might rest in the sepulchres of their fathers. This Adrastus did, and he himself, with the remnant of his fighting men, followed the herald to the border of the Theban land, there to wait till leave were granted. The herald returned with word that there was a new king in Thebes. "Eteocles," he said, "even as he clove the helm of his brother, was stabbed by him a hand's-deep in the breast, and they fell down dead together. Creon, their mother's brother, now rules the city, and he grants you the truce you desire, but bids you come unarmed." So Adrastus and his train came weaponless, in the white garb of mourning, beneath the walls, and they built a great pyre before each gate, and laid their dead thereon for the burning. For so was the custom of those days, to burn the bodies of those slain in war abroad, and gather their ashes into urns, which were laid in tombs in their own land. Now the body of Amphiaraus was not found among the slain, and as Adrastus stood watching the burning pyres, he lifted up his voice and wept, saying, "Would that even in death I might look on his face again, the jewel of all my host, the best of warriors and the best of seers."

Scarcely had he said this, when he saw a youth running towards him from a grove of poplars nigh at hand, and he knew him for the shield-bearer of Amphiaraus. "How comes it, young man," said Adrastus, "that you are here, neither slain nor captive, and where is your lord?"

"King," said the youth, making obeisance, "these three days I have hidden in the woods, fearing the Theban horsemen who have been hunting our people that escaped. I was in the chariot with my lord, the seer, while he fought, and he fought like a lion until that terror from the gods fell upon the host, when

they heard that Polyneices was killed. Then, when all were flying, the seer said, "The hour is come," and he turned his horses from the gate, yet he followed not the rest who fled toward Argos, but made for the woods eastward. The captain of that gate saw him, and came after us, driving furiously, and crying, "Turn, coward, and fight with me," but the seer answered never a word, nor looked back; I feared when I looked at him, for his face was set like a statue's, and his eyes seemed following some unseen thing along the road. Now we came to an open glade among the trees, and suddenly he pulled the horses backwards, and brought the chariot to a standstill, and said to me, "Light down quickly, my son, for here is my journey's end." And as I did so, wondering, he cried, "Stand back from the chariot; stand back from this place, I charge you, as you love your life. Commend me to Adrastus, and farewell." In that instant I felt the ground rock under my feet, and I leaped back, and ran to the edge of the wood. I saw the chariot that pursued us sway from side to side, and the horses stop in mid-career, trembling and plunging, and the brandished spear drop from the Theban captain's hand, and then —oh, what a sight was that for mortal eyes—the heaving earth yawned asunder beneath the chariot of Amphiaraus, and he and his horses went down alive into the pit. Before we that saw it could draw breath to cry out, the chasm closed over their heads. Woe is me for my kind lord, and woe will there be in Argos for the shepherd of the folk that is taken away by so dread a doom."

The King and all his company heard this tale in awestruck silence, but presently they fell to weeping afresh at the thought that they could not bring back to Argos even the poor relics of that wise and mighty prince, to rest in honour among his own people. The pyres of the dead burned all night, and at dawn they quenched the embers with wine, and gathered the ashes into the urns of painted clay, and made ready to depart. Then came to them out of the city a venerable old man, wearing a priest's chaplet of white wool, twined with leaves, on his long grey hair, and led by a young boy, for he was blind. He walked slowly to where the King was standing, and spoke thus, leaning

on his staff: "My name, O King Adrastus, is Teiresias, priest of Apollo's temple in this place, to whom the gods have given the power of a seer and a diviner of dreams, even as they gave it to Melampus and his house. I am come to bid you be comforted concerning Amphiaraus, for the doom that overtook him was sent of Zeus, who would not suffer so good a man to be dishonoured by falling in the rout of a vanquished host. He has perished, as the Fates ordained all save one of the Seven Champions should perish, but he was spared the stroke of a conqueror's spear. Moreover, his spirit rests in peace in the abode of just and holy men departed, where the beloved of the gods are granted a tearless life for evermore. There, among the lilies and asphodel of dewy meadows, he walks beside the still waters, in the light and fragrance of an eternal spring. And I am given to know that as in life he was the wise counsellor of his people, so from that other world he will yet bless them with his guidance, and not them only, but folk of many lands who seek it in their need. For in days to come men will raise a temple over that spot where the earth engulfed him, and to those who sleep within its walls the dead seer will show in dreams of the night the things that they pray to have revealed."

Then Teiresias returned into the city of Thebes, but Adrastus went home to Argos with the relics of the slain, pondering deeply the words that he had heard, and he lived to know that they were truly spoken.

CHAPTER III

PELEUS AND THE SEA-KING'S DAUGHTER

I

Once upon a time there was a king's son called Peleus, and he went out into the world to seek his fortune. Many adventures befell him on his travels, and wherever he came he made friends, for he was brave in war and gentle in peace, very strong, and fair to look upon, and as good as he was beautiful. Of all things, he took most delight in hunting, and in those days that sport was perilous, for the whole earth was full of savage beasts. The lion and the bear and the fierce wild boar roamed in the mountains and forests, and men feared them greatly for the harm they did to flocks and herds and crops, so that to slay such creatures was thought fit work for the bravest. Now it chance, as Peleus wandered in the land of Greece, that he came to the house of a king, and the king's son became his friend. But, by great misfortune, one day that the two lads went hunting together, Peleus cast his javelin at a boar, and it flew sideways from his hand and pierced the heart of his comrade. Peleus could not bear to go back to the king with tidings that he son was slain; he fled away in wild grief through the lonely woods, not knowing or caring whither. He was no murderer, yet he had shed blood, and he knew that every one would shrink from him as unclean, till he could find a protector who would aid him to wash away the stain of guilt. Only a king or a priest could do this for him; only these had power, when a man had caused another's death by accident, to purify him from the deed of blood by prayer and sacrifice to the gods. Peleus soon found such a helper. His wanderings brought him to the fair town of Iolcos by the sea, and he made himself known to the king, who received him kindly, and did him the service his besought. There he dwelt for a time, and served that king, whose name was Acastus, with a grateful heart.

But the queen, Hippolyta, was the wickedest of women, although fair as a lily, and sweet as honey in all her ways, and, by evil hap, she no sooner cast eyes on the beautiful stranger than she fell in love with him. From that day she thought of nothing but of how to get him into her power, but Peleus seemed to have no eyes for her soft glances, and no ears for her flattering speeches. At last she found him alone one day in a room of the palace, and, cunning woman that she was, began to tell him of a secret treasure that King Acastus had, which she would sell him for a kiss. Peleus, at first, could not understand her words, but when she spoke more plainly, he turned hot with anger, and broke away from her with horror, calling the God of Guestright to witness that never for any bribe would he rob the king, his kind host, of anything that was his. Now the God of Guestright is Zeus, who protects all strangers, and rewards all those who receive them hospitably, moreover, his vengeance falls upon all who return evil for good to their hosts. So he had been well pleased that Acastus befriended Peleus in his need, and that Peleus was grateful, and now from his throne in the sky he heard these words, and remembered them in due time.

Queen Hippolyta's love was of the kind that turns to bitterest hate if it is slighted; her pride was stung by the lad's look of scorn, and now her one thought was how to be revenged on him. She knew that her trusting lord would believe anything she told him, and she resolved in her wicked heart upon a plan by which Peleus should perish, and her own guilt never be known. With sighs and tears she told King Acastus that they were terribly deceived in the stranger who seemed so noble, for he had dared to ask her for the secret treasure, nay, had sought to take it from her by force. Never doubting that the Queen's story was true, Acastus was enraged beyond measure at such black-hearted ingratitude, and swore that Peleus should die for his treachery. Yet, because he was his guest, he would not kill him under his own roof, but took thought how he might destroy him in some other place. Now there was in that country a great mountain called Pelion, covered with forest, where there was good hunting. Many a tall deer had the King and Peleus chased

in those green woods and through the glens where the rushing mountain streams went singing down their rocky moss-fringed channels. Acastus thought that he would take Peleus hunting there once more, and after a long day's chase they would rest, as they sometimes did, in a cavern of the hills for the night. Then he would steal the sleeping youth's weapons from his side, and bid his servants put him to death when morning came. But he himself would slip away before it was light, for he would not slay with his own hand one who had eaten his bread and drunk of his cup.

And all would have come to pass as he had planned, but that Zeus did not forget Peleus. After the day's hunting the King and his train went to the cave, and cooked their supper, and lay down to sleep. But in the early dawn Peleus awoke, and looked about him, and saw that his weapons were gone. Acastus, too, was gone, and in the doorway of the cave stood the servants, with white faces and drawn swords, whispering together, for they feared to set upon Peleus, unarmed though he was. Then he sprang up with a cry, and at that they rushed upon him all together. In that instant another cry sounded behind them, and a thundering clatter of horse-hoofs, and as they turned in amaze, a huge four-footed thing came plunging past them and stood at Peleus' side. At that sound and sight the men broke and fled; well they knew what the strange creature was, and once those forests had been full of them, though now they were rarely seen. Peleus also knew by report that wondrous double-natured race, called Centaurs, but he gazed in wonder and some fear on what he now saw to be one of them. The Centaur's form was human down to the waist, but there it ended in the body of a powerful horse. Half man, half beast, he seemed at once terrible and mild; his eye flashed fire, and his brawny arms bent the bow he carried with a fierce gesture as he wheeled round to face the terrified servants, yet he had a wise and gentle face, and now bade the astonished youth fear nothing, in a deep and kindly voice.

"You came in a good hour for me," said Peleus, "for those men of the King's were about to kill me, and, as I heard

them muttering, they had his commands, What this may mean I cannot guess; I know that I have served him faithfully, and he ever seemed to love me well. But tell me what I must call you, my kind deliverer, and what chance brought you here, and then I in turn will tell you who I am, and all my unhappy story."

"Call me Chiron," said the Centaur, "but ask not, Peleus, what chance sent me hither, for it was no chance, but the providence of Zeus. In your hour of temptation did you not call upon his name? Yes, his all-seeing eye marked that you were true to his law, and those who honour him in secret, my son, he rewards openly. Believe me, he has great things in store for you which I may not speak of now. But as for Acastus, know that his wife brought a lying tale to him, feigning that you had sought to do him that very wrong which she would have bribed you to commit."

Greatly did Peleus marvel how the Centaur could know all this, for he had said no word to any one of the Queen's wickedness, not only because he knew that she would utterly deny it, and none would believe him, but because a brave man will tell no tales of a woman, however bad she may be. Chiron smiled, as though he guessed his thoughts, and took him gently by the hand. "Come, prince," he said, "you see that you need tell me nothing. You will not think that so strange when you know more about myself and about my people who live in the depths of this forest among the silent places of the hills. But now I must take you far up the mountain, where my own dwelling is. It is no palace, such as you have come from, but so keen a hunter as you are will find it a lodging after your own heart, and there must be your home for many a long day."

So they went out of the cave into the morning sunshine, and as they took their way up the steep woodland paths, Chiron began to speak of the Centaurs and the joys of their wild life among the mountains. He told of the far-off days when he himself was young, and first left his mother's side to roam far and wide in the forest. How glorious it had been to feel the strength of his young limbs as he galloped under the waving

boughs, or splashed through the clear waters of some shady pool at the foot of a tinkling waterfall! How wonderful, on summer nights, to climb the bare rocky summits of Pelion and look up into another forest, the forest of stars, where the great constellations wandered, the two Bears, and the Pleiades, like a flight of doves, and Orion the Huntsman, with his Dog! In those days, he said, the Centaur folk were many in number and lived at peace, knowing no enemies but the beasts of prey. These they made war upon with bows and arrows, for they had great skill in archery, but they hunted none other of the woodland creatures, and their food was only roots, and acorns and wild berries. Men, whom they seldom saw, they pitied and despised as a feeble and deformed race, and Chiron had heard a story that the poor two-legged things were once a tribe of Centaurs, who angered the gods, and were punished by being cut in half. But Chiron's people had learned at last to fear the puny race more than the fiercest and strongest wild beasts, "and, Peleus," he said, "is how it came to pass. There was a great feast made in this land for the wedding of a king's son, to which all were bidden from far and near, even the Centaurs from the hills. Now, none of them had ever tasted wine, nor knew what it was, and when they were given to drink of it at the banquet they thought the gods themselves had not a diviner liquor, and they drank till madness came upon them, so that they began to insult and quarrel with the other guests. Then one of them, starting up, laid hands on the fair bride, crying that he would carry her off for a prize, and the rest, with savage laughter and shouting, seized the maidens, her companions. In a moment that merry feast was turned to a bloody fray; the hall rang with the shrieks of the women and the shouts of the men as they sprang to defend them and struggled with the furious Centaurs, who reared and plunged to and fro, lashing out with their terrible hoofs. Many a man went down in that deadly fight and was trampled to death as he fell, yet, Peleus, my people, for all their mighty strength, were no match for the folk they had despised, for these men, these weaklings, fought with weapons unknown to the Centaurs, with the sword and the spear. And one by one, though the great creatures fought

long and stubbornly, they felt the fatal thrust of iron in breast of side, one by one they were struck down, till at last the whole troop lay dead or dying in the hall, and their red blood was mingled on its pavement with the red wine that ran from the overturned wine-jars. Ever since that day those who were left of my people have shunned the face of man, and hidden from him in the loneliest nooks of Pelion. For we have learnt that he is the destined lord of the earth, and where he comes all other creatures must give place, or else obey him. Therefore we, who cannot be tamed any more than our mountain torrents, must die out and disappear from our loved haunts. Soon there will be no more of us, and the time will come when men will even doubt if we ever existed."

"If I were you," Peleus replied, "I should hate the race that you say is ordained to subdue the earth and drive your people before it. How is it then, O Chiron, that you can show yourself so friendly to me, a man, and speak so patiently of the doom you foresee for your kindred?"

Once more his strange guide smiled, and it seemed to the youth that he looked at him with tenderness and with pity. "Dear lad," he said at last, "nothing that lives is so wonderful as man; but the immortal gods, when they gave him gifts above all Earth's other children, gave him also two things to keep him from growing too proud. These things are called Disease and Death. Now the first of these we Centaurs know nothing of, while as for the other, though we cannot live for ever, our natural life is many times longer than yours. You see me, Peleus, still in the prime of my strength, yet have I seen generations of men flourish and fall like the forest leaves. Alas! and I have seen their beauty and their strength decay untimely blighted by cruel sickness. When I saw this, compassion filled my heart, and because I knew that Mother Earth brings forth herbs of healing power for her children's sake, I set myself to learn them all, and to watch how every beast and bird would feed thereon, as its nature taught it, when it was ailing, that so I might become the physician and helper of suffering man. And that, indeed, is how I

got my name of Chiron, for it mean 'He with the hands,' and by favour of the gods my hands have laid healing on many an aching head and many a throbbing wound. Marvel not, then, that I have learnt also to love the race of men; do you not know that as soon as you help any one, you begin to love him even against your will?"

As they talked thus together, they came to Chiron's dwelling, which was a long and lofty cavern near the top of the mountain. Here the wise Centaur had been born, and here had lived through many generations of mortal men. Clematis, with its purple blossoms, and dark glossy ivy hung like a rich curtain round the doorway, and close to the threshold a spring of living water welled from out the rock and sent a tiny rivulet across the level greensward, where mountain bees were humming over tufts of wild thyme. The rays of the sun, already drawing westward, lit up the portals of the cave; but far within Peleus could see a dusky, vaulted chamber opening into the very heart of the hill. Out of those dim recesses two figures, in shape like Chiron, came towards him with words of kindly greeting; they were Philyra and Chariclo, the mother and wife of the good Centaur. It seemed that they had known of his coming, for they had dressed him a supper of venison and strewed him a soft bed of grass and leaves covered with deerskins. At sunset the cave was already in darkness, save where a fire of pine logs glowed redly in the centre of its rocky floor, and the tired youth soon slept as soundly in that strange abode as he had ever done in kings' houses.

Chiron's cave, as he had said, was a lodging such as any hunter might desire. Peleus had his fill of hunting every day, and the Centaur taught him all manner of things that belong to woodcraft—the ways of all the wild things great and small, and the note of every bird, and the uses of every plant, and all the signs of the weather. Also he trained him skilfully in all manly exercises, in running and leaping and wrestling and throwing the spear, till he grew swift-footed as a stag, and supple-sinewed as a wildcat, and strong as a mountain bull. But when the dark

winter came, and the north wind blew bitter cold through the snow-laden pines, Chiron had other lessons for his guest as they sat before a great fire of logs and fir-cones fashioning bows and arrows, or shaping and carving cups and platters of beechwood. Then he would tell of the brave deeds of famous heroes, some of whom he himself had known and taught in their youth; of Jason, whom he had brought up in that cavern from a child, and how he built the good ship *Argo* with wood from that same forest, and sailed her from Iolcos far into unknown seas to find the Golden Fleece. And of another child, Asclepios, whose mother died at his birth, and how he was brought to him, like a lost lamb, in the arms of Hermes, the kind and merry shepherd-god. Chiron thought that the god's touch must have gifted that child with his own love for young and weakly creatures, for Asclepios would never go hunting, but delighted to find and care for baby beasts and birds that had strayed or got hurt. Of all the Centaur could teach him he loved best to learn the art of healing, and at last his skill became greater than his master's, and he went among the cities of men working such wondrous cures that after his death he was honoured as a god, and temples were dedicated to him, which were the first of all hospitals for the sick.

So the mind of Peleus was stored with examples of noble living, and with the wisdom which long experience had taught the good Centaur. Soon he grew to love his gentle teacher as a father, and to wonder more and more what had made him so different from the other Centaurs, who sometimes visited the cave, and who knew nothing, but lived the life of animals. One day he reminded him that he had never said how he came to know what befell in the palace of Acastus, "Have you been her so long," said Chiron, "and never noticed that I, like all my kindred, understand the language of those other children of Earth whom you call dumb? The birds of the air, I must tell you, are great gossips, and the swallows who nest under the palace eaves in Iolcos hear many things worth repeating to their friends the rock-martins, who lodge in the crevices of our rocks. But if you are wondering, as I think you are, why I alone of the Centaurs was not content with lawless, savage ways, but desired to learn

wisdom and do the will of the gods, I will tell you a secret. I am not quite the same as the rest of my race, for I have a soul. Ah, Peleus, the life of the Centaurs is like the life of the forest trees, long and vigorous, but it ends at last, and then, like the trees when they fall, we sleep for ever in the lap of Earth. Only to me have the gods given an immortal soul such as they give to men. And having a soul has made me think of many things to which the other Centaurs pay no heed."

"That is very natural," said Peleus. After this, he grew even fonder of Chiron, because he had a soul, just like himself. And they lived happily till spring came to the forest.

II

In the dim green depths of the sea, where all is calm and silent, while winds are howling and white waves tossing far above, where winter never comes, and strange pale flowers bloom all the year round in forests of rainbow-coloured seaweeds, there are as many kingdoms and countries as are found upon dry land.

One of the largest of these countries was ruled by the old Sea-King Nereus, and it lay near the shores of Greece. Fathoms down below the blue southland waters stood the Sea-King's palace, built of coral and amber, and roofed with mother-of-pearl, and there he dwelt in peace with the fifty princesses, his daughters.

These maidens were of more than earthly beauty, but the youngest, whose name was Thetis, was the loveliest of them all, and in her childhood she was the darling of the rest, who called her their little queen. Now Nereus, like all the sea-people, was not only immortal, but had the power of foreseeing the future, and so, having already lived hundreds of years, and possessing this gift of prophecy, he had grown exceedingly wise, and the gods themselves often sought counsel of him, for he knew all that had happened in the past, and all that was to come. It befell

about the time that Peleus went to dwell with Chiron, that the god Poseidon came from his own sea-palace to the halls of Nereus, desiring some advice, and found him feasting in royal state, sitting on a crystal throne and waited on by the fifty princesses. The ancient King rose up to greet Poseidon, and placed him in the seat of honour at his right hand, and the beautiful Thetis hastened to serve him as cup-bearer. When they had feasted enough, the other sisters began a wonderful dance, and as they danced they sang; their dance looked like the twisting and untwisting of a rainbow, for they moved in seven bands of seven, and the robes of the first seven were violet, of the next rose-coloured, and so on. But Thetis, who was robed in white, sat meanwhile on a silver footstool at her father's feet; this was her birthday, and the dancers sang their love for her and wished her perpetual joy. Poseidon could not take his eyes from the lovely sea-princess, and he thought, "There is none like her, even among the goddesses." The dance ended, and Nereus placed a chaplet of fifty pearls on the head of Thetis, saying, "Each of my daughters, O Poseidon, receives such a coronal as this when she grows up to womanhood, and to-day I crown my youngest and fairest child. No mortal princess had ever so rich a dower, for ever pearl is worth a king's ransom."

"Most wise Nereus," answered Poseidon, "you and I know well that all the riches on earth are poor compared to the hidden treasures of the sea. We know, too, how men will toil and suffer and deal wickedly to gain the gold and gems which we immortals deem but toys and trinkets. Yet I will make bold to say that even the most covetous of men, if he might choose, would rather wed this maiden than possess her crown of pearls."

"Boldly spoken, indeed," said the Sea-King, with a smile. "But enough of this. Be pleased to tell me now what you desire of me, if, as I think, you came seeking counsel."

"To tell you what I desire," said Poseidon, "I must speak more boldly still."

"Do so, my guest," answered Nereus. "Plain speech and noble thoughts are what all look for from Poseidon."

"I would wed Thetis," said the god, looking upon her with his grave blue eyes. "I came hither, Nereus, to ask help of your wisdom, as I have often come before, but I have seen a sight that makes me forget all else. Now, therefore, I ask for this your daughter to be my queen."

"And will you not first ask," said the ancient King, "what my counsel is upon this marriage? How if it be destined to work you evil?"

But Poseidon tossed his dark head and answered, "Nay, I will hear no prophecy. Give me my desire, and let come what come may."

"Shall I give my child," then said Nereus, "to one so headstrong, who will no more heed a warning than the waves whose lord he is?"

At these words, Poseidon's eyes sparkled with anger, and he rose up, drawing his great stature to its full height. "Beware how you refuse me," he cried, "or you shall learn that I am lord not only of the waves but of all that lies below them. Yes, for when Zeus, my brother, took the throne of heaven from our father Chronos, he kept for himself the realms of sky and earth, but to me, his chief helper, he gave dominion over the world of waters. Mine are the seas and rivers, and all that is therein."

"It is even as you say," answered Nereus calmly, "and we, the ancient people of the sea, must own you for overlord, who are of the younger and stronger race of the sky-children. Yet think now, Poseidon, that you can make us afraid. You and your brethren, might though you are, are not the first world-rulers we have seen, nor the last we shall see. Trust me, the day will come when your power too shall be broken, when you shall plunge into these twilight deeps to rise no more and find your last refuge in this house of your friends. Grieve not the love we bear you, high-hearted son of Cronos, by violent words, but let

us part in peace. If, in a year and a day, your heart is still set on wedlock with my child, then come hither, and you shall have her."

The proud Poseidon's heart was touched by this gentle answer, and his angry mood passed away as suddenly as it came. "Farewell then, old King," he said, "and farewell maidens all, until I come again. Sweetly have you sung in praise of Thetis, but sweeter yet will sound your voices in the joyous bridal-song."

So saying, he went his way to his own palace under the waves.

Now because, as Nereus said, Poseidon was one of the sky-children, he came often to the councils and the feasts that Zeus held with the other Immortals in the heavenly halls. Not long after this, it chanced that, while the gods were gathered at their banquet, they began to debate, Who was the fairest among the goddesses? Some said, Hera, and some, Athena, and some, Aphrodite, but Poseidon kept silence. Then said Zeus, "Brother, you alone have not spoken. For whom will you give your voice?"

"For none here," answered Poseidon, "and therefore have I held my peace. But if Thetis, daughter of Nereus, were to rise from the sea and come among you, your debate were quickly ended. Neither in earth nor heaven is there beauty like hers."

The goddesses heard these words with great disdain, and the gods smiled to hear the unknown sea-maiden preferred to the Queen of Heaven and the Queen of Love. But Zeus was more ready to believe his brother, and he asked where this wonder might be seen. Poseidon told him that the Sea-King's daughters came up on moonlight nights to play and dance upon the shore. "If you would see them," he said, "take the form of some bird, or one of the seals that sleep among the rocks—for if they catch sight of man or god watching them, they dive at once beneath the waves." Poseidon said nothing of his love for Thetis, and in

his eagerness for Zeus to see her loveliness he forgot that it might win the heart of his might brother.

But the very next moonlight night Zeus took the form of a sea-eagle, and perched upon a rock as though asleep, and while he watched Thetis dancing with her sisters, her beauty cast a spell upon him, even as it had done upon Poseidon.

He, the King of gods and men, sat musing and silent when the Immortals were gathered again around his table, until the haughty, jealous Hera began to taunt him with scornful words, asking him if he had also seen the sea-witch (for so she called Thetis), and been made dumb by her enchantments.

"I *have* seen the daughter of Nereus," he answered, "and little need, proud Queen, has she of witchcraft, for she is yet fairer than Poseidon told us. Neither the Evening nor the Morning Star is so beautiful."

"Make her your Queen, then," cried the angry goddess. "No longer will I be called the wife of Zeus, who affronts me to my face. No, I will go down to Earth, I will journey to the land beyond the sunset and dwell with old Cronos, our banished father, and you, usurper as you are, may share the throne of heaven with what upstart you please. O, a glorious bride, truly, will you set in Hera's royal chair! Green eyes, has she not, and a fish's tail?"

Hera knew quite well that the sea-princesses had no tails (except the mermaids in the north, who belong to a different family), but she wished to say as many unpleasant things as she could. Now what was the grief and anger of Poseidon, when Zeus, instead of soothing Hera, as he often did, answered sternly, "Your will shall be done, wayward goddess! Bear witness, all who hear me, that Hera is my wife no more. Tomorrow shall see another Queen in heaven, fairer, ay, and more gentle than this troubler of our peace."

"Nay, O King," cried Poseidon, "this must not be. The daughter of Nereus is my promised bride."

But when he told how Nereus had promised to give him Thetis, if he asked for her in a year and a day, Zeus smiled and said, "My simple brother, the Ancient of the Sea, who know the future, knew that you would not come back in a year and a day, because ere then Thetis will wed another. Do you not see how easily he beguiled you?"

"Bitterly shall he rue it, then," said Poseidon, "yet why should he deceive me? Besides, he said something of evil threatening from the marriage, and it comes into my mind that he would have given me his daughter with good will, but for that very reason."

"What evil might that be?" asked Zeus.

"I cared not to learn it," answered Poseidon, recklessly, "for be it what it may, it shall not turn me from my purpose. Thetis is mine, I say, by her father's promise, and not even you, King of us all, shall take her from me."

Zeus made no answer, but his brow grew black as the storm-cloud, and the glance he darted upon his brother was more dreadful to behold than the red lightning. Poseidon, who flinched not under that awful gaze, which no one else ever dared to meet, flashed back a look of deadly rage, while even Hera sat overawed, and the rest watched affrightedly the faces of those two great brethren, in silence deep as the hush before it thunders. All at once in the tense stillness, the sound of trailing garments was heard without, and there glided into the hall a veiled figure, clad in white. Slowly she moved towards the throne of Zeus, and stood between the angry gods, and stretched out a hand to each. Then, with one mind, all the Immortals rose up in reverence; Zeus himself took the newcomer by the hand, and seated her beside him on the throne.

"Too seldom, holy goddess, do you visit us," he said, "welcome now and always, whatever be your errand. Have you seen some law broken, or some injustice done in the cities of men, that you come veiled among us, as if in sorrow?"

This he said, because that goddess, whose name was Themis, was the guardian of justice and of upright dealing, and was honoured in every city, but her pure eyes could not behold iniquity, and she veiled her face from the sight of wrong-doing. She was, moreover, a very ancient goddess, and had received from Earth, her mother, the gift of prophecy and the knowledge of hidden things.

She now threw back her veil, and turned her calm sad gaze from one to other of the still frowning brother-gods. "It is not by men," she said, "that the invisible altar of Justice has been spurned this very hour. The sky, O Zeus, has darkened at your frown; the sea, O Poseidon, has risen in tempest at your furious voice, and trembling mortals have wondered for what impiety the gods are wroth. But it is you, their judges and avengers, who are now transgressing the sacred laws of righteousness. Shall it be told among the kings of the earth, that the King of the gods put away his wife for a passionate word, and used his power to take the bride promised to his brother? Or shall it be sung among the noble deeds of Poseidon that he defied his King and brother, whom he had sworn to obey as supreme? Cease this unhallowed strife, O sons of Cronos, and turn away your minds from the daughter of Nereus, for were she ten times fairer than she is, you would not wed her, if you could read her fate."

With downcast eyes those high gods listened to the rebuke of Themis, and they answered her never a word. then she rose up to depart, but they both prayed her to tell them first what that fate was, of which she spoke, promising that they would strive no more, but draw lots who should wed the sea-maiden, if they still desired here when they knew all.

"It is ordained," said the wise goddess, "that the son of Thetis shall be mightier than his father. This is the peril of which Nereus would fain have warned Poseidon. For, if one of the greater gods marry her, the son born to them must be so powerful that he may make himself lord of heaven and earth; his strength will be irresistible, and he will wield some weapon more terrible than Poseidon's earth-splitting trident or the

thunderbolts of Zeus. Easily would that new god overthrow you all."

When the two gods heard this, they took an oath not to marry Thetis, although Poseidon declared at first that he would not give her up, come what might. But Themis bade him remember that the son born to him would be a danger not to himself along, but to all the sky-children, his kindred, so for their sakes he yielded. Then said Zeus, "What if some other Immortal, perchance one of the Earth-born Giants, our ancient foes, should wed the sea-maiden, and rear a son to overthrow us?"

"Lest that should come to pass," said Themis, "let her be given in marriage to a mortal, then will her child be mortal also. Let the Sea-King's daughter endure the lot of a woman, mingled of joy and sorrow, and look at last on a son fallen in battle."

"Lady of good counsels," said Zeus, "say further, on whom shall we bestow such a bride?"

"There is a king's son called Peleus," answered the wise goddess, "who dwelt of late in Iolcos, and won the praise of all for his upright life. You, O Zeus, know well that the praise was just, and already you have been his protector in peril. Now, if it seems good to you, you may reward him as he deserves."

"It pleases me well," said Zeus; "I have not forgotten that brave youth, nor how Acastus would have destroyed him by treachery. My purpose was to give him a sure refuge with Chiron until the time came for him to avenge the evil deed of the godless King, who dared to break the law of host and guest. Even now he would slay Peleus if he could find him, so bitter is the grudge he bears him. But for this while we will let him alone; soon enough will he pay one price for all."

"So let it be," said Themis; "and now, King of gods, send Hermes with all speed to Chiron's cave. The wise Centaur, when he hears the tidings, will teach Peleus how to win the sea-maiden, and make all things ready for her marriage-feast."

Straightway Hermes put on his shining sandals, which bear him dryshod over sea and land, and departed with his message. The song of birds was loud in the woods of Pelion as the god drew near to the Centaur's cave, and the ground he trod was carpeted with crocus and violets, and the scarlet wind-flower, for it was now the spring-tide. Peleus sat with Chiron in the cavern doorway, and saw one coming towards them through 123 a sunny glad. He thought it was some shepherd lad of the hills, for his eyes were holden, that he might not know the god, but the Centaur knew him, and said, "Hail, friend! What may be your errand here?"

"It is for your ear only," said Hermes.

Then Peleus said: "It is full time, O Chiron, that I went hunting again. I will go in chase of roebuck or wild kid to feast your guest withal;" and so took his weapons and hastened forth. At evening he returned, bringing venison, but the stranger was gone; nor did Chiron speak of him; wherefore Peleus asked no questions, having learned the best of manners from the good Centaur.

Next morning Chiron said to him, "I bethink me, Peleus, that I need the juice of a certain flower, for a salve that I am making. Do me a favour to bring me some of it."

"Willingly," said Peleus; "only tell me what is the flower and where it grows."

"It is the yellow sea-poppy," Chiron answered, "and you will find it blowing on the sea-shore, not many leagues from here. But, to be of any virtue, it must be gathered by moonlight."

"That is easily done," said Peleus. "The moon to-night will be almost full. At sunset I will go down to the sea and gather your poppies while she shines upon them."

So Peleus went down the mountain slopes at evening time, and came upon the cliffs above the sea, and saw the waves break glimmering in the dusk below. Then he sat down and waited till the moon should give him light to find a path down to

the beach, and, being wearied, he fell asleep. When he awoke the world was flooded with silver radiance, and, through the warm, still air of the May night, the sound of clear voices singing came mingled with the murmur of the sea. He sprang to his feet, and leapt down the rocks from ledge to ledge, drawn by the magic of that entrancing song. And then, as he reached the shore, he saw the singers, and stood spellbound with wonder and delight. The daughters of Nereus were dancing in maiden mirth on the level sands, not clad now in rainbow-coloured robes, but covered only by their floating hair. Faster and faster flew their little feet, twinkling in the moonlight as if slippered with tinsel, and all the while their shrill sweet song rose up like the singing of a thousand larks. Peleus could have looked and listened for ever, but all too soon one of the sea-maidens, who seemed to lead the dance, passing close beside him, turned her head and looked him in the face. Only for an instant he looked into her deep eyes, in colour like the violet shadows on a sunny sea, then, with a startled cry, she turned and fled into the waves. "Away! away!" cried all the sisters, and, like a flock of white sea-birds, the whole company scurried into the moonlit waters and dived out of sight.

Peleus forgot all about the yellow poppies; slowly and sadly he went back up the mountainside, and came to his cavern home in the grey dawn, and told the good Centaur what he had seen. "O Chiron," he said, "unless your wisdom can help me, I am a lost man from this hour. That song I heard is yet ringing in my ears, and the eyes of that sea-maiden who looked me in the face will give me no rest until I see them again. Tell me how I may approach her and not be seen, for the longing I have to behold her is like a sword in my heart."

"Such pain," said Chiron gently, "must all endure, who, being mortal, look on immortal beauty face to face. Know, Peleus, that she of whom you speak is the youngest and fairest of the daughters of Nereus, the aged Sea-King. Her father, named her Thetis, which means 'Spell-Maiden,' because he knew she would cast a spell of longing upon gods and men. Now, unless

you break that spell, you will pine away and die, like the luckless sailors who come to the Isle of the Sirens and listen to their singing. But I will tell you what you must do. Before moonrise to-night hide yourself behind some rock upon the shore, and, when the sea-maidens come, watch until Thetis is so near you that you can seize her in your arms. Then hold her fast until she speaks to you, for when she speaks the spell will break. Remember that the sea-people have many strange powers, but beware, whatever happens, that you do not let her go."

Peleus did as Chiron bade him, and, as Thetis went dancing by, he sprang out from his rock and threw his arms about her. Again, at her sudden cry, did all the other sisters flounce into the waves, never pausing in their flight till they reached their father's hall. But this time the youngest sister came not home with the rest. Peleus felt the sea-maiden tremble for a moment in his strong arms, and then she began to struggle with such violence that he marvelled at the force of her slender body. "Speak to me, Thetis," he cried, "speak but one word, and I will let you go." But Thetis only struggled the more wildly. Silently then they wrestled together in the moonlight, until Peleus began to feel his strength go from him, and his breath came thick and fast. The white limbs of the sea-maiden seemed to grow colder and colder to his touch, so that a shiver ran through him, and he closed his eyes, still clinging desperately to her writhing form. And then, with horror, he felt that form as it were melting in his grasp; he looked again at what he held, and it was no maiden, but a great sea-snake, ringed with green and purple, coiling this way and that to twist itself free. Only its eyes were the eyes of Thetis, and, seeing them, he gripped the creature still closer, though his heart stood still with terror. There came a cloud across the face of the moon, and in the dark those eyes seemed turning into balls of pale green fire. His hands no longer clutched the slippery coils of a serpent, but something furry and sleek; the moon breaking from the cloud showed him the form of a black panther.



PELEUS WRESTLES WITH THETIS.

Yet his heart did not wholly fail him, though the panther snarled fearsomely and drove its sharp claws into his side. As blood-drops from the wound fell on the panther's glossy fur, Peleus could feel it tremble; for one instant it lay still in his arms, and in that instant he cried once more, "Speak to me, Thetis!" but now it gave a spring that well-nigh made him lose his hold, and he tripped over a stone and fell headlong. Furiously struggled the panting beast as they rolled upon the sand, hither and thither it dragged him while still he held on grimly, setting his teeth and straining every muscle in a last despairing effort. Its form seemed to swell and change colour before his failing eyes; surely now it was a huge tawny thing he fought with, and his fingers were locked in a shaggy mane! All at once the hollow roar of a

lion rent the silence; he saw its gleaming fangs and felt them fasten on his arm. "This is the end of me," he thought, but he would not let go. Gathering all his strength he seized it by the throat with his other hand, to strangle it if he could. The lion, half-throttled, shook its mighty head, and bounded madly towards the water's edge, carrying Peleus along with it. He lost his footing again on a seaweed-covered rock, and, falling heavily, lay there stunned.

When he came to himself, his face was wet with seawater; the moon was down, and at first he could only see that shadowy form crouched near. Still dazed, he sat up, and lifted his arm to look at something, long and brown and lustrous, in his clenched hand. Was it a lock of the lion's mane, or a ribbon of sea-wee? "You are pulling my hair," said a soft voice close by, and at that sound Peleus burst into tears of joy.

The sun had risen out of the eastern sea, but the dew lay yet in myriads of diamond drops upon the upland lawns, when Peleus and Thetis, hand in hand, began to climb the mountain path that led across them into the green forest. They had sat till daybreak by the grey lapping waves, for when the spell was broken, it seemed that the Sea-King's daughter had many things to say to the mortal how had conquered her. She told him how her people have the power, if any take them captive, of changing their shape three times, but if they fail to break free in the third shape, they must return to their own; and how, when she quitted the form of a lion, she had thought to plunge into the sea, but could not because, in his swoon, his hand was still clenched upon her hair. And how, even as she wounded him in her struggle, a strange new anguish came upon her at the sight of his blood, so that she longed to speak, but the wild sea-nature in her locked her lips.

"Then, Peleus," she said, "as I watched you lying there so pale, with shut eyes, I thought, 'This is death, of which I have heard tell, but never saw till now,' and it seemed to me so cruel a thing to die, and look no more upon the sunlight, that I, who had never wept, shed bitter tears upon your face."

"Was it your tears I felt?" said Peleus, "and not the salt sea-spray? O Thetis, may they be the last, as they were the first, to fall from your eyes." But, alas! they were not the last, nor the most bitter.

Now, as they talked together, it was as if they had known each other always, and now were met again after long absence, such joy they had in the sight and speech of one another. And when Peleus said, "I can never leave you again, Thetis," she answered, "There is no need, for I am happier with you than I have ever been before." "Come then," said he, "I will bring you to the cave of the good Centaur, who is to me as a father." And he told how Chiron had saved his life from the men of King Acastus, and all else that he had done for him. "But now," he said, "I owe Chiron my life twice over, for had he not sent me to gather sea-poppies, I might never have seen you, and had he not counselled me to hold you fast whatever befell, surely I must have let you go, and then my heart would have gone with you under the sea, and I have perished in my despair."

Thetis smiled, and as they left the beach, she stooped and gathered a handful of the yellow poppies, saying, "Let me bring these flowers to Chiron, since it was through me that you went back to him empty-handed."

So they went on together into the heart of the forest, and ever as they went, the sea-maiden looked about her and cried out for pleasure like a child at the wonderful new things she saw, and the new music that she heard among the boughs. She thought, indeed, that it was the trees she heard singing; for though she could see the birds flit through the branches, she did not know they were not dumb, like the flocks of painted fishes that hovered among the coral groves of her own garden. She wondered, too, that the wild flowers would not uncurl their petals when she stroked them, like the sea-anemones, and because nothing has any scent under the sea, the wood-violets and little wild hyacinths puzzled her very much. "I think these flowers at least can sing," she said to Peleus, "although you say

the trees cannot, for something comes from them like strange soft music, only, instead of hearing it, I seem to breathe it."

The only thing that did not surprise her filled Peleus in his turn with great wonder; every bird and beast would come to her when she called it, ringdoves and woodpeckers came fluttering round her, the baby rabbits scuttled to her feet, and even the busy squirrels hurried down from the tree-tops to look at her with wise bright eyes. "Little brother" or "little sister" she called them all, for she knew none of their names, till Peleus told her. At noon they rested, and drank of a spring that flowed from under a mossy rock, and in an oak hard by, where bees were coming and going, Peleus found a great store of honey, and Thetis thought the honeycomb more delicious fare than the food of the gods.

Towards evening they came to the cave, and the Centaur met them upon the threshold. "This is the Sea-King's daughter, O Chiron," said Peleus, "and she had brought you the yellow poppies."

"That is well, my son," said the Centaur, with his grave, kind smile, "for I see that you have need of the salve which I was preparing for you." And at these words the sea-maiden looked at the wounded arm of Peleus, and hid her face in her hands. But Chiron laid his hand on her bent head and asked her, "Are you content, daughter of Nereus, to abide with this mortal, whom you have followed hither?" Then she looked up and said, "I am content. Where he dwells, I will dwell, and where he goes, I will go. Though he is a mortal man, and must bear the lot of men, will not the high gods be gracious to one who is fair and noble as themselves?"

"The gods," answered Chiron, "are well pleased, O Thetis, that you should wed this youth, for they desire to honour him to the utmost, because he has been found faithful and true of heart. Nay, more, it is their pleasure to come as guests to your marriage-feast, and ere long they will be here. It is the night of the full moon, and happiest are the bridals on which she looks

down in all her splendour. Come within, my children; the sun sinks apace, and Philyra and Chariclo wait to array the bride."

Then they went in, and saw that Chiron had made ready a great feast, and they marvelled at his foreseeing of what had befallen. As the sun set behind the hills, dim shapes began to move rustling through the silent woods, and the lights of pine-torches twinkled in the gloom of leaf-canopied aisles. Peleus, whose tired limbs Chiron had bathed and anointed with the healing balm, came to the doorway, and looked forth into the gathering dusk. He saw the lights, which drew slowly nearer, and heard a noise as of a herd of deer pattering over the fallen leaves, and above it the sound of wild, sweet music. Soon he was aware of a strange company coming towards him, with torches and with garlands, playing on pipes of reed, and dancing as they came. It was a troop of Fauns, he knew, for he had once or twice caught sight in the forest of one of those shy creatures, like a beautiful sunburnt boy, but goat-footed, and with curved horns peeping out from the curls on his brow. And now, from the grey stems of the great trees around came gliding the tree-fairies, the lovely Dryads, one of whom dwelt in every tree, and had her life bound up with its life, so that when it fell she was no more. There came also, following the piping of the Fauns, whatever beast or bird is awake by night; owls with solemn eyes, and prowling foxes, and a wolf with her cubs, and a lion, that rolled at Peleus' feet like a great dog. When all were gathered about the cavern-door, the first beams of the May moon lit up the open space before it as she rose above the tree-tops. Then suddenly the air was filled with melody so divine that the Fauns played no more, but threw down their pipes and listened with awe-struck faces. Louder grew the strain, as of harps and voices mingled, and now through the clear heaven above rolled a peal of thunder, and a trembling shook the ground, while a great voice cried aloud, "We are come, O Chiron, to the marriage of the Sea-King's daughter." At that voice the Fauns and Dryads bowed themselves to the ground, and Peleus also. He heard the Centaur answer from the threshold, "Hail, Lords of heaven and sea, enter this my dwelling, for all things are ready," and lifting up his

eyes, he saw before him a throng of bright-robed forms, and in the midst of them two kings, glorious to look upon. These cast gracious glances on him as they passed into the cave, while the celestial chant rang out again from the lips of their followers, mingled with the clear harmonies of the golden lyre that one among them played upon. Last of that company came that same shepherd lad whom Peleus had seen three days ago, but now transfigured by the bloom and radiance of a god, so that he knew him to be Hermes. The messenger of the Immortals now took him by the hand, bidding him hail, and they went in together after the rest. The great and lofty cavern-chamber was ablaze with torchlights, and the heavenly guests were seated in a half-circle on the rock-hewn bench that ran round its upper end, tables covered with all manner of woodland fare being set before them. In the highest place, between Zeus and Poseidon, sat the Sea-King's daughter, veiled with a veil of silvery sheen; it was woven out of gossamer and moonbeams by the forest spiders, who weave all the robes for the Dryads. Hermes led Peleus through the hall and placed him beside her, while all the Immortals gave him greeting in joyous tones. And now the feast went forward with mirth and laughter and rejoicing, and the gods praised Chiron's good cheer, the venison and oaten cakes and mountain-honey, and drank the wine he poured for them into the carved beechwood bowls. Peleus was glad to see that the good Centaur had made the forest guests welcome also; the Fauns were feasting merrily, couched on deerskins at the lower end of the cavern, and all the beasts and birds had their share of such food as they liked best. As for the Dryads, they ate only honey, and drank a wine that the Centaur had brewed from elder-blossom. When all had their fill of banqueting, Apollo took up his lyre and played, while the violet-crowned Muses rose up and sang together. First they sang the praise of Zeus their father, lord of all, and next of the lovely bride, the pearl of the sea, whom the gods had bestowed on Peleus for his exceeding great reward. The youth blushed deeply as he listened, for now they told of his coming to the house of Acastus, the false Queen's love for him, and how he was faithful to the King, his host. Then, as Apollo

struck a deeper chord from the pealing lyre, his own voice began to lead the choral song, chanting words of prophecy. For he, the minstrel of the gods, is also their seer, having received from Themis herself that gift of divining which Earth, her mother, gave her. So now, with wide eyes gazing before him, as though he saw a vision, the god sang thus of the days to come. *A wondrous child, the son of Peleus and Thetis, shall be reared in this cave by Chiron's fostering care. That child, even from six summers old, shall hurl his small javelin with true aim and godlike strength at bear and lion that prowl near the cavern's mouth, and drag their still panting carcasses to the Centaur's feet. And Artemis, goddess of the chase, and valiant Athena, will come many a time to watch unseen those feats of the little hunter. But when the boy, trained and taught by the wise Centaur in all noble ways, comes to the prime of his glorious youth, then, in the company of princely warriors, he shall cross the seas and do battle with mailed hosts beneath the walls of a far city, and win himself an everlasting name. For, ages after that city has fallen amid flames and slaughter, the lips of a mortal minstrel, poor and blind, will sing the deeds of the son of Thetis in such a deathless lay that his memory shall endure till the end of time.*

The song ceased, and all who heard it sat awhile in silence, musing on that prophecy. Then Zeus arose, and said, "The song of Apollo is his marriage-gift to Peleus and to Thetis; now will I declare what is mine. Peleus, in the strength I will give him, shall overthrow with his single spear Acastus and all his soldiery, and reign as king in his stead. Moreover, to him and his children's children I will give wide kingdoms in other lands of Greece."

Then said Poseidon, "And I will make Thetis queen of the coasts and headlands and all the bays around them, where this land borders on the seas of her ancient home, so shall she return as a great princess, when she visits her father Nereus."

The rest of the gods also made promise of gifts and each of the goddesses decked the Sea-King's daughter with a golden

necklace or girdle or bracelet of her own, wrought by the cunning hand of Hephaestus, the divine craftsman. It was now midnight, and the torches began to burn low in the vaulted chamber; once more Apollo's lyre was heard, but now he played a stately marching measure, and all the guests passed singing together out of the cavern. Peleus and Thetis rose up and followed them into the moonlight, for Chiron said, "Go now, my children, with those who will lead you to the home prepared for you." Now when they came forth upon the lawn, the heaven-dwelling gods were gone; only the Fauns, with relighted torches, and the Dryads, with hands full of flowers, thronged about them with laughter and with greetings. And so, led by the forest people, to the sound of their sweet wild pipings, they went together into the green heart of the woods. The owls hooted softly overhead as they went along, and the wolf cubs trotted beside them, till they came to the hunting-lodge which Peleus had built for himself of unbarked fir-logs, and thatched with reeds and moss. The door stood open, and they saw a wood-fire burning on the hearth within. Then, because he knew that a bride must not set foot upon the door-sill when she is brought home, Peleus lifted the Sea-King's daughter across the threshold in his arms, and they two were left alone.

III

It was summer once again in the green forest, when Chiron lay one evening in the doorway of his cave, thinking of the young, beloved guest who housed with him so long. He had seen Peleus no more since his marriage-night; but he had heard how King Acastus sought for him far and near to take his life, and how vengeance overtook that persecutor at last. For, according to the promise of Zeus, Peleus had gone down to Iolcos and taken it single-handed, putting to rout the King and all his host with no helper but his own good spear. Now he slew Acastus in the fight, and when the wicked Queen Hippolyta saw what was done, she hanged herself. So Peleus was lord of the city, but he loathed it when he thought on the end of those two.

Therefore, he sent for valiant princes, he friends, out of the north country, and gave them the city to dwell in, and himself went to that country and ruled it in their stead. And there, as Chiron heard, he built a fair palace by the sea for the daughter of Nereus.

While the old Centaur was thus musing in the twilight, Peleus himself came softly over the mossy turf and stood beside him. But Chiron, wrapped in thought, neither saw nor heard his coming. Then Peleus gently laid a bundle, rolled in a purple cloak, at his friend's feet, and a tiny cry came from the bundle. At that Chiron started up, and saw who was come to him, and he gave Peleus loving greeting. "My son," he said, "often have I longed to see your face again, and even now I was thinking of you. But what cry did I hear at hand, like the cry of a motherless lamb? Alas, why weep you at these words?"

"O Chiron," said Peleus, "it is indeed a motherless lamb I bring you," and he unrolled the cloak and put a yellow-haired babe into the Centaur's arms. "Take my little son," he said, "and be tender to him, with the tenderness you show to every helpless thing, for there is none to rear him in my desolate house." And for very grief he could say no more. But the babe, who was beautiful as the day, looked into Chiron's wise old face and smiled, and Chiron said, "See, already he is without fear, this child who is to be so great a warrior." Then he called Philyra and Chariclo, those gentle nurses of many a hero, and gave the babe into their keeping; but he himself made ready supper for Peleus without more words, for he saw that his sorrow was great. Nor did he ask him any more questions till he had cheered him with food and wine, and they were sitting together, as of old, beside the hearth. Then, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder, he said, "Will you not tell me now, my son, what this sorrow is, which I can but guess at, that if I cannot help you, at least I may strive to comfort you?" "Little I thought," said Peleus, "when I left this cave the happiest of mortals, that ever I should come back with such tidings as I must tell you now. The daughter of Nereus has forsaken me and our child, and gone back to the Sea-

King's halls. She told me at the beginning that she must leave me for ever the first time I crossed her in anything, for such, she said, is the way of all the sea-people. And when the babe was born, I woke one night and saw her steal out of our chamber carrying it in her arms, and I followed her, to see what she would do. She went into the hall, where the fire still burned on the hearth, and there, horror-stricken, I saw her thrust the child into the glowing embers. Who could see that and not do as I did? Yet the reproachful look Thetis gave me, as I snatched the babe from her, pierced me to the soul. 'Did I not warn you,' she said, 'never to cross me? Had you not hindered, I would have made the child weapon-proof from head to heel by the power of flame. But I must leave that word undone. Farewell, farewell!' With that, quick as a lightning-flash, she darted from the hall and from the palace, and flung herself into the sea."



THE CHILD ACHILLES BROUGHT TO CHIRON.

Chiron listened without wonder to this strange story, for he knew both the nature of the sea-people and the magic they can work. "Be comforted, Peleus," he said; "remember how Apollo prophesied in his song that your son should be reared in this cave of mine; it was fated, then, that his mother should thus

leave him. And though Thetis is lost to you now, yet if you wait patiently, sure I am that she will come to you again at last, never to leave you more. For happiness must come, in the end, of bridals which the high gods blest with their presence."

The kindly Centaur's words soothed the grief of Peleus, and brought him new hope. "I will be patient," he said; "and as for the child, I remembered the song of Apollo, and it lightened my heart a little to think of his growing up in your care, my wise and tender teacher. But tell me now, why Thetis said her work was not finished, and by what magic the babe passed unhurt through the flame?"

"Fire has no power on the bodies of the Immortals," said Chiron, "nor on any living thing, so long as an Immortal has hold of it. So the babe was safe while Thetis held it, and its flesh is weapon-proof wherever the flame touched it, for what fire does not burn, it makes unwoundable. But to finish her work, Thetis must have plunged the child into the fire a second time, because where her hand grasped it, there the flame could not reach."

"She held it by one heel," said Peleus.

"That heel, then," said the Centaur, "is the one spot where your son can be wounded."

Thus they talked together till far into the night, and on the morrow Peleus parted to his own home. At his going, Chiron asked him what he should call his son, and he said, "Achilles is the name his mother gave him."

The little Achilles was the fairest and the most bold-hearted of all the good Centaur's foster-children, and soon was dearer to him than even the beautiful Jason had been, or Asclepius the healer. In his very babyhood, he began to love the hunter's sport not less than Peleus his father did, and his first plaything was a little bow and arrow that he begged for as soon as he could speak. With these he would shoot from the doorway of the cave at prowling wolf or bear, but when he was six

summer old, he could not be content till Chiron gave him leave to go hunting in the forest. And that day another prophecy was fulfilled, for at sunset the Centaur, looking forth from the cavern, saw the little boy running towards him, dragging the still panting carcass of a huge wild boar, and he saw too, though Achilles could not, two stately forms moving beside him. One was clad in shining armour, with a golden helm upon her golden hair, and a great spear in her hand; the other, still taller, and slender as a young poplar, wore the short garb and leathern buskins of a hunter, and carried a silver bow. It was the great Athena, and Artemis, the Lady of the Wild Things, who walked, smiling, beside the marvellous child, and not then only, but through all his boyhood, they loved to watch his daring, and his strength like a young god's.

Now Chiron taught Achilles all his precepts of wisdom, and the perfect ways of honour and courtesy, but warrior-skill and hunting-craft he had no need to teach him, for they were his by nature. So swift of foot was he, that he could run down the hart and the roebuck; so strong, that he could take bison and boar alive, without help of hounds or hunting-nets. And though he had seen no weapon but bow and spear, of those he had such mastery from his infant days, that Chiron knew no warrior could stand against him.

So the years went by, until Chiron heard from the birds, his newsbringers, that a great war was toward, for a king in the South was gathering a mighty host to sail against a distant city. And Troy, the birds told him, was the city's name. When Chiron heard that, he called Achilles to him, and said, "My child, it was in this cave that your mother's marriage feast was held, and all the gods came to it, to bless the bridals, and bright Apollo uttered in song the destiny that was in store for you. I see now the beginning of those things which he foretold, and the time is come for you to return to your father's house, that you may go the way Fate has prepared for those swift feet of yours. Farewell, last and dearest of my fosterlings; I know that I must see your face no more, and yet I cannot grieve at your departing, when I

remember Apollo's prophecy and the glory that you are so soon to win." Thus he took leave of the youth, and sent him away that same hour to Phthia, the country of Peleus in the North. Achilles found his father dwelling in the palace by the sea, which he had called the House of Thetis, in honour of his bride. Peleus beheld him with joy, and said, "Welcome, my beloved son; I know you are come at the good Centaur's bidding, for he promised me long ago to send you home to me when the right time came."

Now Thetis had learnt from Nereus, who could foresee it all, what her child's doom must be, if ever he went to war, and when the old Sea-King told her that messengers were even then on their way to seek him in the house of Peleus, and summon him to the gathering of princes against Troy, she resolved to prevent them. She rose up through the sea that night, and glided silently to the bedside of Achilles, and carried him away in his sleep to an island called Scyros. So, when he awoke, behold he was lying on an unknown shore, and saw a strange and beautiful lady bending over him. Then Thetis made herself known to her son, and prayed him, if he had any love for his mother, to do what she would now bid him without questioning, for if he would not, she said with tears, a grievous thing must befall her. And Achilles promised to obey her, remembering the teaching of Chiron, how he said that next to the immortal gods, father and mother must be revered. Forthwith Thetis dressed the youth in a brodered robe, and when she had combed out his long fair hair with a comb of pearl, he seemed a tall blooming maiden. "I will bring you now," she said, "to the king of this isle, who is a friend to me and my people, and will say to him that you are a maid I have saved from shipwreck. At my request, he will lodge you for a while with the princess, his daughter, and do you, for my sake, take heed that no one discovers you are not what you seem."

So she brought him to the king's house, and he became the loved companion of the young princess and her maidens; and in their games, the new playmate was always winner, but in

weaving and spinning was so clumsy that they made great sport of her.

But the day after Thetis stole away Achilles, those messengers whom she feared came to Peleus saying, "King Agamemnon is marshalling a host to sail against Troy, and princes who love peril and renown are gathered to him from many lands. We are come from him to greet you, and to pray you to send your young son along with us, for a seer has revealed that Troy cannot be taken save by a warrior sprung from Peleus."

"He shall surely go with your host," answered Peleus, "and not alone, for I will send fifty ships, well manned, to Agamemnon's aid."

Then he sent to call Achilles before the messengers, but he could not be found. Now the messengers were King Agamemnon's herald, and a certain prince by name Odysseus. This Odysseus was the wiliest of men, and the most keen-witted, and it came into his thought that Peleus had heard of the war, and hidden his son betimes that he might not go into danger. "Swear to us, King," he said, "that you are not beguiling us, for how can your son have gone hence, and you know nothing of it?" Peleus had a mind to give him an angry answer, but he refrained himself, and called Zeus to witness that he knew not what was become of Achilles. "This, then, is the work of some god," said Odysseus, and he departed with the herald. Now this subtle prince was very greatly favoured by Athena, for that goddess loves valour much, but prudence more, and Odysseus, though no coward, was better in council than in fight. So he had not gone far on his road, when she met him in the likeness of an old seaman, and said, "The lad you seek, Odysseus, is in Scyros, for I saw him there." "I will take ship and go find him," said Odysseus. "That will not be easy," said the seeming old man; "he dwells in the king's house in the guise of a maiden, and none had guessed his secret but myself, who knew his face aforetime." "Nevertheless, I will go," said Odysseus, "for I think I know a

way to tell a youth from a girl—and disguise is a trick that others can play besides Achilles."

Not many days after, an old pedlar came to the king's house in Scyros, and the princess and her maidens flocked into the hall to see his wares. The pedlar spread out his great pack, and showed them all his rarities—snowy lawn of Cyprus, shawls of Tyrian purple, necklaces of amber, and golden girdles studded with Eastern turquoise. He eyed the girls keenly while they eagerly fingered the trinkets, and chattered with him over such as pleased their fancy, and he marked that one only looked carelessly on, and chose nothing. And to her the princess said, "Pyrrha, my sweet, do you care for none of these pretty things? Come, choose some jewel, what you will, and let me make you a gift of it." But Pyrrha answered, "Nay, dearest princess, I have no mind to any of these baubles." At that, the pedlar smiled, and the princess said to him, "Old man, have you shown us all your store? If you have kept some choice trinket to the last, as pedlars use, let Pyrrha see if it pleases her better than the rest."

"Gracious lady," said the pedlar, "I have on thing left, but it is no toy to please a maiden." So saying, he drew from its wrappings a sword of rare workmanship, ivory-hilted, with golden lions inwrought on its blade of dark-blue steel. Pyrrha's eyes sparkled at sight of it; she took it from his hand, poised it in her own, and cried, "This is the gift for me, if the pedlar asks not too great a price for such a goodly weapon."

"It is yours without a price," answered the pedlar, "if you dare use it—Achilles!" And suddenly he tore off beard and coarse mantle, and stood before them a bronze-corsleted warrior. For he was none other than Odysseus, and this was how he found the son of Peleus. "There is some treachery," cried the princess, and she fled out of the hall with the other maidens. Achilles was both ashamed and angry that he had betrayed himself to this cunning stranger, but Odysseus with artful words soon changed his mood, telling him of the glory to be won at Troy, and how Peleus himself desired to send him with twenty ships to that war. Then Achilles forgot all else in eagerness for that great

adventure, and would have sailed that very hour in the ship of Odysseus which waited him in a lonely bay, but he said, "If I go with you to the host in these maiden's robes, I shall be shamed for ever." "That have I cared for," said Odysseus, and he unrolled a bale of fine linen, and took out a suit of armour, and clad the youth in it, girding him with the sword. At that moment the King came in to them from the fields, for he had been watching the sowers, and his daughter had run to him there. "Ah, son of Thetis," he said, "you, then, were the maiden your mother bade me harbour. I guesses so much, when I heard my daughter's tale, for I knew Achilles was the name that gracious sea-queen gave her child. Now, as I hear, you are found by this stranger. Let me understand, I pray, what brings him here." Straightway Odysseus told his errand, and to win the King upon his side, he declared the prophecy that Troy could not be taken without help of one sprung from Peleus. This the King no sooner heard than he desired to have alliance with the youth who was destined to such greatness, and said, "How blessed is Peleus, who has a son so highly favoured of the gods. Would that I too might hear Achilles call me father." "King of Scyros," said the youth, with a rosy blush, "if your fair daughter can love Achilles as she loved Pyrrha, it would please me well to call you by that name. But this is no time for marrying or giving in marriage, and I must begone."

"Nay," said the King, "what needs such haste? Let Odysseus go to Phthia and take the fifty ships your father promised to where the hose is mustering, and stay you here meanwhile. We will have your wedding this very day, and in seven days you also shall sail to the trysting-place. So will no time be lost, for Odysseus will take seven days in going and returning."

And Odysseus consented to go, but before he left them he said, "I hear of you, Achilles, that you hate a lie worse than death. Pledge me your word, therefore, that in seven days you will come without fail to the harbour of Aulis, for that is the

trysting-place." So Achilles gave his word, and forthwith Odysseus departed.

Now the King had told his daughter whom he guessed Pyrrha to be, and she wept bitterly because her loved playmate was no maiden, as she thought, but a youth who perhaps had scorned her all this time in secret for her girlish ways. And she had offered him one of those glittering trifles (baubles, he called them, truly), whose rightful wear was the armour of a prince! It seemed to her that she could never look him in the face again for very shame, and she stole away by herself, and went down to the seashore, and sat there, weeping. Presently she began to reproach Thetis aloud for what she had done, calling seaward, and saying, "O Lady of the waves, why have you dealt so evilly with us? Do not we of this isle honour you and your sisters above all the goddesses, because of your kindly help to our fishermen? Many a boat have you brought safe to shore in tempest, many a great shoal of tunny have you driven into their nets, but have we ever forgotten to be grateful? If you had trusted my father with the truth about the guest you brought him, I had not been shamed this day."

Then Thetis, rising through the deep, came to her where she sat, and she too was weeping. "King's daughter," she said, "it was to save my child from doom that I hid him here, for he must fall in battle if he goes where the hateful Odysseus seeks to take him. Yes, it was Odysseus, that crafty fox, who played the pedlar, and now he has found Achilles, he will bend him to his purpose with cunning words. But you, if you have any pity for my son, may save him yet."

"I would give my life for his," said the princess, casting down her eyes; "only tell me what I must do." Thetis smiled through her tears, and answered, "I will tell you that on our way to the palace. Come, let us be going, for I am in haste to meet my son." So as they went together, Thetis told the princess that she was to be married to Achilles that same day, and prayed her to keep him from going forth to Troy. "How can I do that?" asked the princess. "Ask him what he will give you for a bride-

gift," said Thetis, "and he will bid you choose what you will. Then say you choose the granting of the first request you make to him, and let that request be, that he will not leave you for a year."

Now when they came to the palace, they found all things ready for the marriage, and the maidens were waiting to deck the bride in her finest jewels and array, and when they had attired her, Thetis set her own crown of pearls on her hair, saying, "These are the bride-price my son pays on his marriage, as the custom is." Then were Achilles and the princess wedded, with pomp and great rejoicings, and the King held a feast for all comers. And after the marriage, the princess sought a gift from Achilles, as Thetis had counselled, and he bade her choose what she would. "I desire nothing but this," she said, "that you will grant the first request I shall make."

"Deidamia," said Achilles (that was the name of the princess), "I love you too well to refuse anything you ask me, if it be not against my honour to do it. Prove me now, and let me hear your first request." But when she asked him to stay with her for a year, he told her that could not be, for he had given his word to Odysseus to set sail for Aulis in seven days. Nor could all her tears and entreaties move him to break his promise, although his soul was troubled at her distress. So, on the seventh day they parted, with many a tender, sad farewell; heavy were their young hearts that day, and dark forebodings came to them that they should see each other no more for ever. Yet Achilles comforted his bride as best he might, bidding her hope for his return with a victor's spoils from the war, and then, not to grieve him too sorely, she feigned better cheer, and looked her last on him with a smile. Thus the son of Peleus and the Sea-King's daughter went forth to Troy, as it was ordained; but what befell him there of sorrow and glory we leave untold, for such matters are too high and moving for a mere fairy-tale.

CHAPTER IV

THE LAD WITH ONE SANDAL

I

There was a king in the olden time, whose name was Pelias, and he dwelt in the fair harbour-town of Iolcos, ruling a folk that were famous seafarers from the beginning. A bold man was he, and a crafty, but he went ever in fear of his life, for he had an ill deed on his conscience, and his sleep of nights was broken by dreams which boded a bitter reckoning for the same. Many and many a time he awoke with a shriek, as a dagger seemed to touch his throat, but the dream-shape that brandished it was dim and wavering, and he could never descry the countenance of that phantom foe. At last he sent a trusty messenger to the holy place of Delphi, where Apollo reveals hidden things to mortals by the mouth of his priestess, to ask the interpretation of the vision. For he thought, "If I can but learn what man it is whose wraith appears to me, I shall make short work with him, and rid myself of this dread in which I live." The messenger returned, and brought this answer from the god: "Let Pelias know that the doom he dreams of will come from the hand of a near kinsman. I bid him beware, above all else, of the man who comes to him wearing one sandal, whether he be a stranger, or born and bred in Iolcos."

When King Pelias heard this message, his blood froze with fear; it was indeed death, then, that the dreams foreboded. Yet it was some comfort that now at least he had a sign whereby to know when the danger drew near, and he still hoped that he might forestall it if he kept good watch. So he set guards day and night about his palace, and watchment at all the city gates, and gave strict charge to them all to bring him instant warning, if ever they should see a man with one sandal. And as time went

on, his heart grew somewhat lightened of its dread, for there was no such comer seen, and the evil dreams ceased to visit him.

But he that was foretold came in his destined hour to Iolcos, out of the mountains to the northward, and stood in the market-place, while it was yet morning, and the throng of folk was greatest. The watchmen at the gate had seen him pass, but they paid no heed to one who seemed a mere lad, and by his dress a hunter from the hill-country.

This youth carried two hunting-spears, and instead of a cloak a leopard skin hung from his shoulders, above a close-fitting tunic; his head was uncovered, and his long curls flamed golden-red in the sunlight. It was easy to guess, from the shy and wondering glances he cast about him, that he was new to the sights of a city, yet he bore himself with the noble grace of a king's son, and as he stood there silent, many eyes were drawn to the beauty of his face, and his stature, lofty as a god's. Men began to whisper to one another, asking who the stranger was, and when none could answer, a murmur went to and fro among the crowd that one of the Immortals was come among them.

"So might Apollo look," they muttered, "or the mailed warrior Ares, fair and terrible. Surely this is some god, or the son of a god."

"Nay, friends," said some of the old men, "the gods come not thus in the sight of multitudes. Rather should we guess this mighty youth to be of that old race of the Earth-born Giants, but they all have perished long since, and only their huge graves are left for a witness to our days."

Now, while the folks talked thus under their breaths, and durst not, for reverence, question the godlike stranger, a man of the King's household gazed with the rest, and marked on a sudden that he wore but the one sandal. For it chanced, as the youth crossed the ford of a mountain stream on his way to the city, that its fellow slipped from his foot and was carried away by the torrent. Quickly did that henchman bring word to the palace, and at his tidings, King Pelias came in hot haste to the

market-place, urging the swift mules of his ivory car to their utmost speed. "Way there for the King," cried the slaves who ran beside him, and he drew rein in a cleared space, whence all the people had drawn back for his coming, save the stranger lad only. Pelias scanned him eagerly, and his soul sickened with affright as he saw the dreaded token of the single sandal on his right foot. But he cloaked the fear within him with haughty words, and said, eying the lad disdainfully, "Stranger, what country do you call home? What grey-haired carline of low degree mothered such a dainty pet? Come, speak out your parentage, and disgrace it not with detested lying."

Then the youth, undaunted, yet with gentlest courtesy, made reply—

"It is mine, rather, to render such answer as shall not disgrace the great Chiron, my teacher. For my home has been in his mountain-cave, and I had my rearing from the virtuous wife and mother of that wise Centaur. Twenty years have I numbered in the care of these foster-parents, and never yet done dishonour to their upbringing by deceitful act or word. But now I am come again to my own native land, to claim the ancient rights that were my father's, which Pelias, as I hear, holds in unlawful possession, even this kingdom of Iolcos."

"Do you call yourself, then, the son of Aeson," cried the King, "who ruled this land until a better than he took it from him? Who knows not that his only child died at its birth?"

"Not so, for I am that child," answered the stranger; "but when Pelias, moved by reckless desires, had overthrown his kinsman King Aeson with force and fraud, then for fear of that violent oppressor, my parents feigned that their newborn son was dead, and made great mourning, with all their household. Then, at dead of night, they sent me privily out of the city, a babe wrapped in swaddling-bands of royal crimson, and at their bidding faithful friends conveyed me to Chiron's cave, where I might be reared in safety. And Jason was the name by which that twy-natured Being was wont to call me. Such in brief is my

story, and now, good townsman, since you know me for countryman, come back to his own city, which of you will show me the ancient house of my fathers, that I know not, though I was born there?"

Before Jason made an end of speaking, King Pelias turned his mules and drove at a furious pace back to the palace; he knew that the folk held him in secret hate because he had dethroned Aeson, that gentle king, and he feared lest they should rise against him then and there, when they heard the lad with one sandal declare himself their rightful prince. But Jason also hurried from the market-place, eagerly following a band of willing guides. One thing he had not found courage to ask of a company of strangers, and would wait to learn within the doors of his home—was his father yet alive? Chiron had told him nothing of the old man's fate, only had bidden him go to Iolcos and claim his heritage from the usurper. Now when he was come to the house, and entered through its pillared porch, he crossed a wide courtyard, empty and silent, where grass was springing from the cracked pavement of marble, and in the hall beyond it he saw no one but an aged man, wrapped in a faded mantle, sitting in a low chair beside the embers of the hearth. The once lordly chamber was bare of furnishing; dust lay thick upon the floor, and cobwebs, where rich hangings should have been, drooped curtainwise from lintel and cornice. The home the youth had come to seemed a house of the dead, deserted save for that motionless figure cowering over the dying fire. But as he moved towards it, the snow-white head turned slowly, the dim eyes looked him in the face, and a trembling voice rang through the silence, "My son, my son!" Jason sprang to the old king, for he indeed it was, and clasped him to his breast, while tears of joy fell fast from those withered eyelids. It was long before Aeson could find words, in the rapture of beholding his son, come back to him the fairest and goodliest of men, but he told at last how Pelias had stripped him little by little of all he possessed, on this pretext or that, till neither broad lands, nor flocks and herds, nor the rich treasures of his house were left, and he himself, with a

few old slaves that tended him for love, lived on the secret doles of his well-wishers among the citizens.

"How comes it, my father," asked Jason, "that your two brethren have suffered you to be so evilly entreated of this tyrant, seeing that each of them is a king in his own country, if indeed they yet live?"

"They live and prosper," answered his father, "but it is far from hence to where they dwell, and they begrudge to waste blood and treasure in the cause of a feeble old man that cannot have long to live. But word will quickly reach them that you are home again, and when they hear what manner of young man their brother's son is become, I am much mistaken or they will think his cause worth battling for. Be you patient till we have news of them, for it comes in my mind that we shall shortly see either themselves, or the princes, your cousins."

The old king was a true prophet, and before many days, so swiftly spread the rumour of Jason's return, those two brethren and their sons came to greet him at Iolcos. The name of one was Pheres, and his son was called Admetus; these two were men of gracious and winning presence, speaking words of pleasantness, but their souls within them were little and mean. Amythaon, the other brother, was king in the far south-west; he had a name for wisdom, but the son he brought with him had yet a greater in the after time. For he was that Melampus of whom you may read in the tale of "The Prince who was a Seer."

Jason and his father made these kinsmen right welcome, although their hearts misgave them for the bareness of their ancient dwelling and for the wherewithal to feast the princes and their following. But at the first word that Aeson's kinsmen were come to visit him, the townsfolk rejoiced openly because at last strong helpers had appeared for the oppressed king, and they feared not to make their gladness and goodwill manifest by bringing him gifts in abundance of everything needful to entertain his guests. Such store of sheep and oxen, of corn and wine and oil, of tables, couches, vessels of every sort, and all

manner of household stuffs, as was gathered that day in Aeson's courtyard, had not been seen within its gates for many a long year. Moreover, the wealthier citizens sent their housethralls both men and maids, by the score, to grind the corn, to bake, and dress meat for the banquet, and to serve the king and his kinsfolk in the hall. So that night there was feasting and good cheer, torchlight and merry stir, in the house that had so long been silent and deserted.

Now Jason had the charge of all, and gave command as master, because of his father's great age and infirmity, and carried himself as a princely host should do, overlooking no point of courtesy, so that it was a marvel to his guests how he had come by these manners in the cave of a Centaur. For they knew not noble Chiron, who in the after time reared Prince Peleus in the like gracious ways, and compassed for him his marriage with the Sea-King's daughter, as I have told you already.

Then, to do his kinsmen all honour, Jason feasted them with the best for five days and five nights, saying no word of the matter he had at heart, but tasting in their company the delicious joy of life at its sweetest.

But on the sixth day he began to speak of graver things, and when he had opened all his mind to them, they gave full consent to that which he declared it his purpose now to do, and rising all together from the banquet, they followed him forthwith to the house of Pelias. At the sound of their voices in his hall, King Pelias came hastily from the inner chambers to meet them, and then, with fair-flowing speech of gentle tone, Jason spoke thus: "Son of a might sire, over quick are mortals to barter justice for the wages of iniquity, forgetting that the hour of reckoning must overtake them soon or late. But it well beseems both you and me to rule our hearts aright, and take thought what shall bring us good in days to come. Call to remembrance, I pray you, that your fathers and mine were of one blood, and that the divine Dispensers of weal and woe to men turn their faces from the sight of feuds between kindred. Let there be neither strife nor

drawing of swords between us two, to make division of the great inheritance of our forefathers; for if you will follow my counsel, it shall not need. See now, I freely yield the rich lands, and all the goodly flocks and herds, of which you have despoiled the old man, my father; little care I for the wealth these bring into your house, only do you on your part restore me the sceptre that was Aeson's, and the kingly seat where he gave judgement to his people. These, I say, yield up and grudge me not, lest a worse thing come of it."

Now Pelias was no ways minded to give up the kingship, even though he might keep all the fatness of the land for his own, and besides, he was utterly purposed to destroy the lad with the one sandal, because of the oracle he had heard concerning him. While Jason was yet speaking, his swift and cunning mind devised a plan for his undoing, and he answered with a show of mildness, in these words: "Behold, I will deal according to your pleasure in all things, but I am now stricken in years, and you are in the flower of your youth, therefore it is for you to undertake a certain task that else were mine. Hear now what it is, since you seek to be head over all our kindred, for the matter touches him most nearly who is chief of our house. There was a prince of our blood, Athamas by name, whose wife died and left him with two young children, and in no long time he wedding another. Now this second bride proved a cruel stepdame, and when sons were born to her, she plotted death for Phrixus, the eldest born of the first wife, that her own children might inherit the kingdom. She caused all the seed sown in the land to be secretly poisoned, and when many that ate the corn sickened and died, she brought her husband to believe that the gods had sent a pestilence on the people, which must be stayed by some great sacrifice. Then did she bribe a wicked seer to declare that the wrath of the gods could be turned away by no other victim than the King's first-born son. But when the boy Phrixus was laid on the altar-stone, and the knife upraised to slay him, the gods delivered him out of her hands in wondrous wise. For a ram with curly fleece of gold stood suddenly on the altar, and while all shrank back amazed, the boy threw himself upon its back, and it rose with him into

the air. Over land and sea it flew till it brought him to the country of the Colchians in the unknown regions far northward, and there, by divine bidding, he sacrificed it to Ares, god of the land, and hung its golden fleece on a tree of his sacred grove. But that fleece of gold was the bane of the hapless youth not long after, for the king of the Colchians put him to death only to possess the marvellous thing. And now, O Jason, I would have you go to yonder land, and take the Golden Fleece from the keeping of that savage king, since I am given to know that our murdered kinsman's spirit cannot rest till this be done. Yes, such is the message his unquiet ghost has sent me in a dream, and when I sought counsel of the god at Delphi, answer came from the place of prophecy, that I should straightway launch a ship to sail on the hallowed quest. This quest, then, do you pledge yourself to follow in my stead, and I will swear a solemn oath, making Zeus my witness, to yield you the kingdom."

Now all the tale Pelias told concerning Phrixus was true, but as for the dream and the message from Delphi, they were falsehoods cunningly devised to send Jason on a quest wherein he should surely perish. But the youth neither knew guile in his own heart, nor looked for it in another, so he made the covenant that Pelias asked, and took leave of him, filled with eagerness to achieve so strange an adventure. Then forthwith he sent out heralds to proclaim everywhere that he was bound on a perilous voyage, and would make all welcome to sail along with him who loved danger and renown better than to dwell at home in ignoble safety. At those tidings, high-hearted sons of kings gathered to Iolcos from far and near, for Queen Hera filled their hearts with keen desire to be Jason's shipmates, because she favoured him above all mortals from the day he came to the city to his life's end. And this was the reason: when he came to the ford where he lost his sandal, he saw an old beggar-woman sitting on the bank, crying and bewailing herself because she could not cross the rain-swollen stream. Jason spoke kindly to her, and, though she was both ragged and dirty, he took her up in his arms and carried her over. No sooner had he set her down again than her bent and shrunken form was changed into that of a fair woman in her

prime, and her rags into shining raiment, and she said to him, "For this good deed, count me your friend for ever." Thereupon she vanished from his sight, and he went on his way with gladness, knowing that one of the Immortals had appeared to him in this shape. Now the beggar-woman was Hera, who was wandering that day on earth, to see what kindness mortals would show to one so feeble and wretched.

So the flower of all the heroes who then lived came to the house of Aeson, making offer to sail with Jason on the quest. The first who came were two noble youths in armour of gleaming silver; so like they were that none might know one from the other, and their silver chariot was drawn by horses white as snow. These were the twin brothers, Castor and Polydeuces, who for the great love they bore each other were never parted their lives long, nor did even death sunder them at the last. The next comer had neither chariot nor shining armour, but trudged on foot, bearing a great bow and quiver, with a tawny lion-skin girt about his sinewy, sun-browned limbs. He was a man in the prime of life, of gallant bearing, though without height or comeliness of person, and he passed unremarked through the crowd that were drawn to Jason's door to gaze on those glorious Twins.

But they, when they saw him stand within the hall, rose up in deepest reverence as at the coming of a god, and Jason also, for he knew by the lion-skin and bow that this was Heracles himself. Much had he heard from Chiron of that great helper of men, and he gazed with awe and wonder on him who had done such mighty deeds by land and sea. But now came into the hall a young minstrel clad in flowing robe of white, with a chaplet of ivy on his fair hair. "I also, Jason," he said, "would fain be of your crew, though I have no weapon but this harp of mine. I am Orpheus of Thrace, come hither at Apollo's bidding, that your brave company may not lack for the minstrelsy warriors love so well." Right gladly did the princes there assembled welcome that sweet singer, whose fame was gone out into all lands; of him it was told that beasts and birds, nay, the trees and rocks of the

Thracian mountains, would follow the sound of his enchanting lyre.

It were long to tell what other heroes of ancient story mustered in Jason's hall that day, but none were so wondrous to behold as the last comers, Zetes and Cala?s, sons of the North Wind, who had bright feathered wings waving from their shoulders.



BUILDING THE ARGO.

Meanwhile, the best-skilled craftsmen of Iolcos had wrought busily under Jason's watchful eye at the building of his ship; the tallest pines on Mount Pelion, whose woody top overhung the cave of Chiron, had been felled for her masts and

timbers, and her fifty stout oars were hewn from giant ash-trees. When all was finished, and the good ship lay ready for launching, her young captain summoned his new comrades to the harbour, and said to them, "Here, noble friends, is the bark that shall carry us to the far Colchian land, well found with all we need for the long voyage." Then all the heroes clapped their hands at sight of the ship, and they called her Argo, that is to say, the Swift. And now Jason called upon Mopsos the seer, that dwelt in Iolcos, to offer sacrifice to Zeus, and entreat him for favourable signs at their setting forth, which the god granted both by the omens of the altar and by the lucky fall of lots that the seer cast to tell their fortunes. So that wise soothsayer bade them embark with all speed, for the hour was propitious to their sailing. But a greater sign followed, for when all were come aboard, and the anchors were raised on either side the prow, Jason stood up beside the helm, holding a golden cup in his hands, and poured wine therefrom into the sea, calling aloud on Zeus, lord of the lightning, on winds and waves, and nights of sea-faring, to be gracious to their outgoing and their homecoming. Immediately a peal of thunder gave answer from the clouds above, and lightning-flashes were seen to the right of the ship, cheering the hearts of all with happiest augury. At that, the seer bade the princely comrades betake them to their oars, and their mighty strokes bore the Argo swiftly out to sea. All that day, and many a day after, they rowed on untiringly, sped along by the strong south breeze that filled their sails. Fifty all told were those sailors, sons of gods and of kings, but none of Jason's kindred was among them, except only the brave Acastus, son of Pelias, who, for all his father could say, would not be turned from the quest of the Golden Fleece. So they fared ever northward, keeping in view the bays and promontories of the western mainland, till they had need of fresh water, and put in to a wooded cove, where a stream ran sparkling to the sea. And here misfortune befell them, for they lost Heracles, the best of their crew. There had followed him to Iolcos a fair lad called Hylas, who served him as cup-bearer. This boy, for his dauntless spirit, and the love Heracles had to him, was made one of Argo's

crew, and he disembarked in this place with the rest. But while they drew water from the stream, he wandered along its banks into the woods, till he came to its source in a deep, clear pool. As he bent over its cool depths, the Water Fairies who abode therein fell in love with his beauty, and before he was aware they threw their white arms about him and drew him under. Hylas gave one cry for help as the water closed over him, and Heracles, who heard and knew the well-loved voice, rushed to find him, but in vain; nor, though the hero and his comrades searched the woods the livelong day, could they see or hear aught of the vanished lad. Then when morning dawned again, Heracles bade the others delay no longer from their journey. "But I," said he, "must tarry, for I will never leave this place till I know what has become of Hylas." Sadly Jason and the rest took farewell of their great companion; their hearts were sore for his grief, but they might not linger, and so once more they stood out to sea with our and sail.

Now, after that, they came to a long straight of the sea, and on the shore of it there was an old blind man sitting at a table, who seemed to be weeping. "Let us draw in to land," said Jason, "and ask that old man what he does in this solitary place, and what may be his sorrow." So they brought Argo close in to the shelving shore, and called to him, asking who he was. The old man turned his sightless eyes upon them, and answered, "I am Phineus, the seer, of all men most miserable. Apollo, in my youth, bestowed on me the power of prophecy, whereby I came to great honour, and my house was filled with rich gifts from the folk who sought to me for soothsay. But I offended the holy gods by greed of gain, therefore in mine age they sent blindness upon me, and a strange evil, the like of which came never on mortal man. For whenever I sat at meat, two monstrous birds, with heads of women, darted screeching upon my food, and snatched it away before I could taste one morsel, leaving but fragments dropped from their foul talons. They were in sight like vultures that prey on carcasses, and the deadly carrion smell of them polluted all they touched, and all the air of the house, so that none could endure to abide therein. And at last the men of

my city thrust me forth, because of those noisome guests, but that they might still resort to me for prophecies, they builded me a hut on this lonely shore, and daily bring me offerings of choice dainties, such as I love. But woe's me! those fell winged creatures cease not to haunt me, as you will shortly see."

"Old man," said Jason, "our hearts are moved with pity for your wretched lot. Tell us now, by your divine foresight, shall none rid you of this strange pest?"

"Concerning that," said Phineus, "only this much is revealed to me; my deliverers are even now aboard this your ship, O son of Aeson, and bound for the far Colchian land. I know you, prince, and your errand, and who your comrades are, but which of them shall rescue me, and in what hour, is hidden from my ken."

While they talked thus, certain men came thither from the city, bearing baskets of rich viands which they spread on the old man's table, and he put forth his hands to take of them. Instantly, with hideous screams, two vulture-shapes, woman-headed, swooped down from upper air, seized upon the food and soared away swifter than an arrow's flight. And the air was filled with a poisonous savour of decay, so that Jason and his comrades were fain to push off their ship from that tainted shore. But Phineus cried to them with tears not to abandon him in his helpless plight, and they talked with him from Argo's deck, and Jason asked him how the dire monsters were called. "By mortals," he answered, "they are called the Harpies, that is the Snatchers, but the gods name them the Hounds of Zeus. You have seen their swiftness, how it is such that neither javelin nor arrow may overtake them; alas, what could Heracles himself avail me, where he yet with you!"

Then said Jason, "I know a way," and he filled a trencher with food, and bade the two Sons of the North Wind carry it ashore and set it before Phineus. They no sooner did so than the Harpies were seen darting upon the table; but swifter still, Zetes and Cala's rushed between and drove them back with the

flapping of their bright wings. The Harpies fled shrieking, pursued by those winged brethren over hill and dale, and the North Wind blew a fierce gale to speed his sons along, till on a desolate mountain they overtook the monsters, and drew their swords to slay them. But Zeus sent Iris, his messenger who rides upon the rainbow, to forbid them, because the Harpies were ministers of his vengeance upon sinners, and she commanded Zetes and Cala?s to put up their swords, and take an oath from them never more to come near Phineus. So the women-headed creatures swore it with human voice, by the great oath that binds the Immortal gods, even by the Water of Styx, that icy stream which flows from Earth into the Nether World. And the sons of the North Wind flew back to the Argo.

Now when they had bidden Phineus farewell, the heroes sailed along the strait to its opening into another sea, stormy and cold, where never ship had sailed before. For at the mouth of the strait two steep cliffs made a gateway, and they were alive, and whatever passed between them they crushed to pieces, clashing suddenly together upon it. But the comrades were forewarned by Phineus of this dreadful place, and having cast anchor before it, they went ashore and built an altar of stones and sacrificed a bull to Poseidon, god of mariners, with prayers for aid. And Hera, in her love to Jason, prevailed with Poseidon to grant them safe passage through those gates that he had set up to keep mortals from the Northern Sea, and she came herself to the ship in the likeness of a damsel, carrying a white dove. "Hail, Jason!" she said: "A friend sends you this bird, even she whom you met by the ford of the stream, and bids you let it loose from Argo's prow. Then, when you see it pass between the Clashing Cliffs, let your comrades row forward at their utmost speed." With that, she vanished, and Jason, glad at heart, bade his comrades bend to their oars, and let go the dove. Straight through the pass she flew, and the cliffs closed upon her with a roar like thunder, but by Hera's grace she sped between so swiftly that only her tail feathers were caught. Then, as the rocks rolled back with a grinding noise, Argo's crew rowed onward for their lives, and brought the good ship through by a hair's-breadth. The Clashing

Cliffs met again that same instant, but too late, and that was the end of them, for their doom was, if ever they missed their prey, to dash each other to powder.

Poseidon, at Hera's entreaty, calmed the northern deep for those first voyagers, and with a fair wind ever behind them they came at last in sight of the low misty shores of an unknown land. It was towards evening when they drew near and saw at hand the mouth of a broad river that flowed between dark woods of beech and pine, and there in a creek of the spreading stream they moored their ship for the night.

II

With the first light of day Jason and two of his comrades set forth inland, that they might find some inhabited place, and learn if this was the country to which they were bound. Presently they spied smoke curling up through the trees of the forest, and they went towards it, and came to a great house of timber, standing in an open glade, with byres and barns around it. As they drew near, a lad met them, driving cows to pasture, and they asked him the name of the land, and who dwelt in that house. "Strangers," said he, "this is the country of the Colchians, and yonder house is the palace of Aietes, their king." Then Jason, and the two comrades with him, who were Castor and Polydeuces, were glad, because they were at their journey's end; and they went into the palace and found the King sitting in the hall among his chieftans, dark-skinned men of fierce countenance, clad in golden armour of strange fashion. Aietes looked grimly upon the strangers, but he bade them sit down and feast with him, and his slaves set food before them in plenty, and dark, sweet drink, brewed of herbs and honey. When they had eaten and drunk, the King asked them whence they came, and where they had left the ship that brought them, for he knew that they must have come by sea to his country, since by land it was walled about with trackless forests. And Jason answered discreetly, not making known his errand, but saying they were

come from a land far south, and had moored their ship in the river not far away. "It is well," said the King. "Let your two comrades now go and bring the rest of your crew hither, that I may feast them all. To-day we will make merry, and you shall try your mettle in sword-play with my warriors, and to-morrow you shall tell me your errand."

So the Twin Brethren went forth to fetch their comrades, but the King, under show of courtesy, kept Jason from returning to the ship lest the strangers should put to sea, and escape out of his hands. For this Aietes was a cruel prince and a cunning, and he thought to make easy prey of these young men and their companions, and seize their fair-wrought arms, and any treasure they might have with them. But meantime he covered his evil purpose with friendly speech, bidding Jason refresh himself after his voyaging, and caused him to be led to a chamber where a bath was made ready. As the youth entered it he saw an ancient serving-woman pouring water into the bath out of a steaming cauldron, and she said to him, "Prince Jason, when you leave this chamber the King's daughter will meet you, and offer you a posset in a silver cup. Beware you taste it not, for it is deadly, but pour it on the ground, and say, 'For Those Below.' Then give this to the King's daughter." So saying, the old woman took a shining thing from her bosom, and gave it to Jason, and went quickly forth. But as she went out the fashion of her changed, and she shone with a beauty not earthly, so that he perceived some goddess had spoken to him. Now the shining thing was in the form of a four-spoked wheel, and it was golden, and the figure of speckled bird, moulded in clay, was bound upon the spokes by the outspread wings and by the feet. Jason viewed it with wonder, and he bathed himself quickly, eager to see what should next betide. Then, when he was arrayed again, and come out of that chamber, there greeted him a dark maiden, robed in scarlet, and she offered him drink in a silver cup. But he took it from her hand, smiling, and poured the drink upon the ground, and said, "For Those Below." The King's daughter looked at the youth in silence, and her olive cheeks turned pale. "Princess of the Colchians," said he, "let it not displease you that I deal thus

with your gift, but take a gift in return." And he laid the golden wheel in her hand, and left her standing mute. Now the daughter of Aietes was a great enchantress, one that could draw the moon out of the sky by her incantations, and knew all the spells that can be wrought with strange drugs and herbs of might. At her father's bidding she had mingled a potion for the stranger prince that would have destroyed him in three days, withering his veins with consuming fire. But, by his offering it to the Dead, she understood that he knew death was in the cup, and great fear of him took hold of her, for she deemed he had that knowledge by art magical, and that his gift was some potent charm. This in truth it was, as shall presently be told.

So soon as Argo's crew were come to the palace, King Aietes made them cheer with a feast of good things, and after the banquet he had them forth into a meadow, and desired them to show him what skill they had with their weapons. And he set ten chosen warriors to sword-play with Jason and nine of his comrades, while he sat to watch on a grassy knoll, and his daughter beside him. Then, under colour of sport, the Colchian warriors aimed deadly strokes at the strangers, for so had the King given secret command, trusting to see his champions slay those youthful guests right speedily. But the ten comrades fought like young lions with their fierce adversaries, and when they saw the battle was for life or death, they spared not to smite them till all were slain upon the place. Sore wearied, but unwounded in that deadly fray, the heroes sheathed their resistless swords at last, and Jason cried to the King, "We are guiltless, Aietes, of the deaths of these men. In an evil hour have we come to such a host as this, who would make it his pastime to see guests slaughtered before his face."

Aietes rose up with a laugh, and answered, "They that fare to strange lands must meet with strange customs. But since you like our Colchian manner of sport so little, I will henceforth deal with you in earnest." With that he took them back to the palace, but because it was now late, he sent them to the guest-chambers, saying he would hear their errand in the morning.

That night the witch-princess could not sleep for thinking on the bright-haired stranger, and the meaning of the gift he had given her. She was afraid to keep it, and afraid to leave it, and she had it hidden in the folds above her girdle while she watched him fighting for his life with her father's best swordsman; nor for all her skill in enchantments did she know that the spell of it was at work upon her even then. At last she slept, and dreamed that a queen crowned with roses stood at her bedside, and asked her what thoughts those were that troubled her; but, when she essayed to answer, she could find no words, and fell to weeping.

Then said the rose-crowned queen, "I am Aphrodite, known among gods and men for an enchantress of power, and to pleasure great Hera, I have put a charm upon you mightier than all your spells. For, as the bird is bound upon the wheel I bade Prince Jason give you, so your heart is bound with cords of desire to the giver, by the virtue of that charm. Rise now, and follow me to his chamber; the thoughts that you could not speak I know, and the struggle of your soul, but stronger than all is the thought that he must not die."

The King's daughter awoke, and behold, she was no longer in her own chamber, but stood beside the sleeping stranger. Moonlight fell upon her face, and hair of ruddy gold, and the drawn sword by his side, and she looked at him long before she aroused him with a touch of her hand, calling him by name.

"Who calls me?" said Jason, springing to his feet and grasping his sword.

"It is I, Medea," said the King's daughter; "I am come to bid you fly from this house while it is yet night, for to-morrow Aietes purposes to slay you and your comrades. Come, awaken the others, and I will unbar the gates meanwhile; the guards shall not hear us, for I have power to keep them slumbering soundly."

"Noble Medea," answered the prince, "I have seen strange things on my way hither, but here is the strangest of all, that you, who would have destroyed me with your potioin, are

now fain to save my life. I thank whatever god has changed your heart towards me, and praise your kindly thought, but as for flight, neither I nor my true comrades will quit this place without the prize we are come in quest of." And thereupon he took Medea by the hand, and seated her beside him on the couch, and told her all the tale from the beginning, of the task Pelias laid upon him, and the Argo's perilous voyage. Now, while he spoke of the dangers he had passed, and pleaded with her in sweet persuasive words for help to win the Golden Fleece, pity and love overflowed the heart of the witch-princess, and she forgot all the world but him only, and promised at last to aid him to the uttermost against her father. "For your sake, prince," she said, "I will brave the wrath of Aietes, though he kill me when he finds his treasure gone, and ask but this for reward, that you think sometimes of Medea when you dwell happily in that far southern home you tell me of."

Then Jason vowed a solemn vow that he would not leave her to suffer her father's vengeance, but take her home to be his wife, and queen of fair Iolcos, and they plighted troth together in that same hour. Medea then fetched from her own chamber an ivory box of ointment, and bade him anoint himself therewith in the morning, and told him all else that he must do to outwit the crafty King. Thus did Queen Hera, with help of Aphrodite, accomplish victory for Jason over the enchantress, who else would have proved a foe too strong for him and all his crew.

No sooner had the King and his guests broken fast on the morrow, than he said to them, "Let him that is captain among you now declare the cause of your coming hither"; and Jason made himself known to him, and in courteous words desired him to restore the Golden Fleece to the rightful heirs of Phrixus. Aietes heard him in silence to the end; then he arose and beckoned Argo's crew to follow him, and they went after him, wondering, to a fallow field hard by the palace. There they saw a huge plough of bronze lying, and two dun oxen stood near it, wondrous to behold; they had horns and hoofs of bronze, and breathed forth smoke and flame from their nostrils. The King

marked with his staff a furlong on the ground, took up the heavy brazen plough-yoke, and yoked those great beasts therewith, heedless of their scorching breath, that burnt black the grass around them, and the furious tossing of their terrible horns. Then, taking in hand a sharp-pointed goad of iron, he drove the oxen to the mark, and turned them, and so back again, cleaving the fallow soil with furrows deep and straight. And his guests watched with speechless amaze so great a marvel, till he unyoked his team beside them, and said, "If your chief can do as you have seen me do, the Golden Fleece shall be his. But I am sworn to give it to no man who cannot yoke my oxen and plough with my plough." Straightway Jason stripped off his saffron vesture and stepped boldly to the task, putting his trust in divine aid. Even as Aietes had done, so did he; he took up the yoke as it were a feather's weight, laid it on the necks of the oxen, despite their plungings hither and thither, and goaded them forward with the one hand, while with the other he bore hard upon the plough-stilts, driving a true furrow alongside the King's. Aietes looked to see him scorched to a cinder when he approached the fire-breathing bulls, but the flames had no power on his flesh by reason of Medea's enchanted ointment, and a wordless cry broke from the King, beholding him unscathed, and the god-like strength that was in him. But all Jason's comrades shouted with a great shout when the task was done, and crowded about him to clasp his hands with praises and glad greetings, and they crowned him with a garland of flowering grasses. In silent rage the King now led the way to the grove of Ares, where hung the Golden Fleece, yet he still had hopes that Jason, for all his prowess, would not be able to achieve the task that there awaited him. For the Fleece had a guardian stranger and more terrible than the oxen whose breath was flame. The grove of Ares was a gloomy wood of ancient oaks, that stooped their gnarled boughs low over dense undergrowths of brambles and juniper. A stone altar stood before it, stained with dark blood, and far within, the green gloom was broken by a spot of radiance like the clear shining of a lamp. No voice of bird sounded in that drear wood, for all winged creatures shunned it except the woodpeckers,

whose tapping was heard ever and anon in the deathly stillness. "Yonder light," said Aietes, "is the glitter of the Golden Fleece, and you, bold prince, will need no other guide to lead you thereto."

"King," said Jason, who was forewarned by Medea's counselling, "I fear to lay hands upon the sacred thing till I have offered sacrifice upon this altar, and besought mighty Ares not to be wroth at the taking away of the treasure which Phrixus dedicated here. Suffer us therefore to return to our ship for the night, and to-morrow we will bring offerings to the god of such things as we have." Aietes gave them leave willingly, for now he feared Jason exceedingly, and was well content that he should either depart at once from the land, if such were his secret purpose, or meet his doom on the morrow from the guardian of the Fleece. And one of these things he trusted would most surely befall, for that guardian was a dragon of baleful glaring eye, whose dappled coils were in length and thickness not less than Argo's hull that had fifty oars. So the King returned to his house, and Jason and his comrades went towards the river where their ship lay. But when they had gone a little way, Jason told the others what had chanced in the night, and how the King's daughter had wrought him deliverance from the bulls, and shown him means to overcome a yet greater peril. When they heard of the dragon in the grove, they were full eager to fight the monster, and prayed their captain by no means to encounter him alone, but Jason said, "That task must be mine only, and with Medea to aid, I shall not fail, if the gods so will. Do you, my comrades, hasten to our ship, and make all ready to sail whenever I shall come to you."

With that, he turned back and went alone to the dark grove, and at the setting of the sun, Medea came to him there.

But his comrades went on board the Argo, and looked well to all her gear, and set her sails, and when they had taken their supper, they sat each man at his oar, waiting in silence through the first watch of the night, while the autumn moon rose golden up the sky. And at midnight, they were aware of two

stately forms coming swiftly through the shadows of the wood, who seemed to carry between them a huge, glittering shield. Then the voice of Jason softly hailed them, and they saw that it was he and the witch-princess who drew near, bearing a spear athwart their shoulders, whereon hung the Fleece of Gold, shining like a sun. Without word spoken, those two laid their burden on Argo's deck, and Jason, with finger on lip, took his own place, and made sign to his crew to give way. Silently they bent to their oars, and the good ship stole out into the stream, and forth to the open sea. The helmsman turned her prow southward, but at that, Medea cried, "Princes, steer not homeward on the course by which you came, for that way will Aietes send to pursue you with a great host, and his ships sail fleetly than the wind through his enchantments. Long must be your voyage, even half the circuit of the world, but if you will trust to me for piloting, I will guide you safe home at last." The comrades hearkened gladly to those wise words, and turned Argo northward again at her command, and sailed for many days over a desolate sea where no man had come since the making of the world. At last, where that sea narrowed into a gulf between hills of ice and snow, they came forth upon the boundless Ocean stream, that girdles the round world, and now, by Medea's guidance they steered eastward and southward, till the cold of the frozen north was left behind, and the sun's heat gladdened them again. Three moons had risen and set, while Argo bore them along the Ocean stream, before they saw on their right hand the red cliffs of a coast, and wide channel of waters between.

"Through yonder strait lies our way," said Medea, and they steered northward once again along that firth of ruddy shores. Now at the head of it, they found no passage for their ship, for dunes of yellow sand stretched before them, far as the eye could see, and their hearts were discouraged. But Medea bade them draw Argo ashore, and said, "Beyond this sandy waste lies the Midland sea, whose waters wash the shores of your own dear land. Be not downcast, brave comrades, for in twelve days Argo shall ride on that sea once more, if with stout

hearts you endure the toil of bearing her thither." So when they had rested there that night, she who had been their pilot over a thousand leagues of ocean, guided the crew across the pathless desert, and they, by main strength hoisting the ship to their shoulders, marched onward thus laden under a burning sun. Never in their long seafaring had they known a labour like this, but the spirit of the heroes and the might of their young limbs did not fail nor falter in all that toilsome journey. On the twelfth day, the glittering of water was seen among the sandhills, and they pressed onward joyfully, till they came to the margin of a vast and shallow mere. Now when they would have drunk of its water, they could not, for it was brackish, but Medea cast a certain herb therein, and forthwith it was sweetened. Then she said to them, "This water is bitter with brine of the sea that neighbours it. Launch Argo now upon the mere, and let us seek a channel among the shallows that may bring us to the open main."

So they pushed off from the reedy bank, and rowed slowly, steering warily through the shallows of that great lagoon, till the helmsman saw blue water sparkling ahead, and cried, "The sea, the sea!" Then the glad heroes plied their oars with fresh vigour, and ere nightfall Argo was anchored in a bay of the Midland deep.

At early dawn, when they had hoisted sail and were drawing up the anchors, a voice hailed them from the shore, and they turned in wonder to see who might call them in that lonely place. There, at the waves' edge stood a man, stately and tall, and greeted them with kindly words, and desired them to tarry awhile, and be his guests that day. But Jason and the rest made courteous excuse, pleading their haste to be home. "Friends," said the stranger, "I will not seek to delay you, but at least take a guest-gift from my hands, for I would fain show you hospitality. I am the king of this desert land, and I know who you are, and the quest you sailed on. Be pleased to take this boon, the only one I have at hand." So saying, he stooped down and took up a clod of earth of the shore, and held it forth to them. Now Argo's

prow was nearest to the land, for thereby she had been moored, as the manner was, and it was not yet turned seaward, and he that stood nearest her curved beak was a young prince named Euphemos. He, springing to the bulwark, leapt lightly ashore, and clasped hands with the stranger, and took the clod, and knew not what gift that was, nor who gave it. But as he sprang on board again, and turned to speak thanks and farewell, the stranger vanished where he stood, and awe came on all the comrades, understanding that they had seen the god of that wilderness. Nevertheless, they set forth again rejoicing, because he had shown them favour and blessed them with a gift. Euphemos showed the clod to Medea and asked her what it might betoken, and she answered that the time was not yet come for him to know, but he must look well to the keeping of it, because there was a magic in it.

But when they had sailed three days, a gale blew from the south-west at twilight, and the waves rose high round the ship, and the enchanted clod was washed from the deck, where it was laid, by the driving spray. The Euphemos called aloud to Medea, "Alas, wise Lady, what shall I do? The precious thing is lost, carried overboard by a dashing wave, and it is sunk into the depths of the sea."

"Nay," said Medea, "it has not sunk, for there is a magic in it, but is drifting even now to the shore of yonder island on our lee. Listen, heroes all, and I will tell you what power is in the clod, and what will come of it. It is fated that where-ever it is laid upon the ground, the lord of that land shall be lord also of the soil whence it was taken. And if Euphemos had brought it to the fields of his own fair domain, and planted it there, then in the day when his children's children will seek new lordship over seas, they would have sailed to the land where we saw the solitary god, and made it their kingdom. But now, because the clod is flung by the salt waves on the strand of yonder isle, that is yet uninhabited, seventeen generations of men must pass away before the god's gift bears fruit. For the descendants of Euphemos will make their new home in that island, which then

shall be called Thera, and long after, they will voyage thence to the land of the clod, and reign there as kings of many cities." The comrades listened in silence to Medea's prophecy, and pondered it in their hearts, and Euphemos ever after kept it in memory, teaching it to his sons, and they to theirs. And in the seventeenth generation the words were fulfilled.

But now the gale freshened to a tempest, and Argo was driven before it out of her true course, and her crew were fain to run her for shelter under the white cliffs of another island, far to northward. There they found a fair haven where they anchored, and forthwith, and armed host came out to them from the city night at hand. Argo's men stared at these warriors with amaze, for they were women, and their leader, a tall, black-haired girl, clad in rich armour. She came to the harbour-side and greeted the strangers, asking who they were, and if they came peaceably.

"Peaceably, in truth, O Queen," answered Jason. "We are men of Iolcos, homeward bound from a long seafaring, and we do but seek shelter here till the storm is overpast. Tell me, I pray you, what land this is, and wherefore its warriors are women." "Stranger," said the armed maiden.

"This island is Lemnos, and my father was king of it. He and all our men-folk went forth to war against certain pirates of the mainland, and while they were abroad, Aphrodite took displeasure at us women, because we slighted her worship, and she caused us to become utterly hateful to our fathers and husbands when they returned. Therefore they thrust us away from bed and board, and would have taken them wives of the captives they brought home, but we, thus wronged, banded together for revenge, and slew them while they slept, with their own swords. Not one did we spare, except my father, but him, though I had sworn to show him no mercy, I hid in a great chest, and had it thrown into the sea, that, if the gods so willed, he might drift to some other shore. Since then, I, Hypsipyle, am Queen, and none but women dwell in Lemnos. Arms we have, as you see, and have learnt the skill of them, to defend ourselves

against all comers, but you, if you are what you say, we will welcome as guests."

Jason had little will to enter that city of dark deeds, and consort with those women of fierce nature, but Medea said, "Our ship was blown hither not without divine purpose. Let us go ashore, and lodge with the Queen, as she would have us." So they sojourned seven days in Lemnos, for all that time the wind blew rough 195 and contrary. Queen Hypsipyle entertained the comrades royally, and held games in their honour, setting forth prizes of golden goblets and broided mantles for running and wrestling and throwing the spear. For these the warrior-women contended with the heroes, and overcame not a few of them, for they were cunning wrestlers, and marvellous fleet-footed. But in feats of strength they could not match Jason and his men, nor in the race for which the Queen gave the richest prize of all, a silver shield, embossed with wild bulls, and hunters driving them into the toils. That race was run by seven heroes in full armour, carrying their heavy shields, and there was laughter among the women when the seventh, whose name was Erginos, stepped to the starting-place, because he, though yet young was grey-haired. Yet he outstripped the rest, and came foremost to the goal, and the mockers were ashamed when he took the silver shield, and the victor's garland from the Queen's hands. After this, the strangers found great favour with the island maidens, who would fain have had them for their wedding lords, and Hypsipyle made offer to Jason of her hand and kingdom, if he would abide in Lemnos. Now she was more beautiful than the Colchian enchantress, and Jason's heart was drawn to her, but false to his word he could not be, and that was given to Medea. But some of his comrades took them brides among the Lemnian damsels, and of these Euphemos; and Medea, at his wedding, prophesied good fortune to the marriage, moreover, the gods, she said, had willed him to find a wife in that island, for which very cause they had driven Argo to its coast. And the truth of her saying was quickly made manifest, for that very day the wind blew fair again for Iolcos, so that the heroes longed to set sail for home without delay. They listened not to any pleading, but made

Argo ready for sea, and put their island brides on board, and went their way. This was the last of their sea-faring; the kindly breeze never failed till they dripped anchor once again in the haven where their good ship first floated.



MEDEA'S MIRACLE.

Here ends the story of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece, for it needs not to tell the joy of his father and of all Iolcos at his homecoming, nor how the brave comrades took farewell, when they had seen him receive the kingdom from Pelias, who durst not draw back from his oath to yield it. Jason and Medea were wedded with splendour and rejoicings, and thereafter they had such happiness as seemed good to the gods. But as for Pelias, although Jason did him no violence, he did not escape the death that was to be dealt him by his own kindred. For his daughters heard that Medea had made old Aeson young again by her spells, and entreated her to do the like for their father. Then the enchantress killed an old ram before them, and cut it in pieces, and threw the pieces with magic herbs into a cauldron, and when she had said certain words over it, forthwith she drew out a lamb, alive and unhurt. And she gave a handful of

herbs to the daughters of Pelias, saying, "Do to your father as you have seen me to do this sheep, which has become a lamb again." The princesses did so, but Medea had given them common herbs, and they had not bethought them to ask what those words were which she said over the cauldron, therefore they could not bring their slain father to life again. Thus perished Pelias, even as the oracle had forewarned him, by a doom that had its beginning in the coming to Iolcos of the lad with one sandal.

CHAPTER V

THE PANSY BABY

I

King Aipytos of Arcadia was a lonely man when he grew old, for he had neither son nor daughter, and his queen was dead. There were no cities in his country, which was a land of wooded hills, and green dales dotted with countless sheep, and few strangers crossed the steep mountains that shut it in on every side. All the King's wealth was in his flocks and herds; his palace was built of oaken timbers, and no one ever wished to make war upon him, because he had little silver and less gold in his dwelling to tempt a spoiler. So there was nothing for him to do, after he was grown too old to go hunting, save to drive his sleek mules and well-burnished car about the uplands, visiting his sheepfolds, or the solitary huts of his woodcutters and goatherds. One day in summer time, while he watched the sheep-shearing on a hillside, two serfs came out of the oak woods where they herded his swine, driving a fat hog before them for the shearers' supper, and the elder was carrying a little child on his shoulder.

"Is that child yours, swineherd?" said King Aipytos. "How comes it then that she is arrayed so finely, and is white of skin as any princess?"

"She is none of mine, lord King," said the swineherd. "It was but yesterday I found her in the woods, sleeping alone under a pine tree. I have brought her hither to know if it may please you to have her reared in your house, for it is well seen she is no peasant brat, but one that will scarce thrive on my rough fare of roots and acorn bread."

The King looked upon the foundling, and his heart was touched by her flower-like face. "I will rear her as my own," he said. "Surely the gods have sent her, to bring joy into my childless house."

So the child was brought up in the palace, and King Aipytos loved her as a daughter, and gave her the name of Evadne. She could remember nothing, before her finding by the swineherd, except that she had fallen asleep under the pine tree in the lap of a lovely lady, with tresses black as night, who sang her a lullaby.

"Was that my mother?" she would ask the King, "and what was her name?"

Then he would answer, "Certainly it was your mother, and her name is Pitané."

For Pitané means "Lady of the Pine," and he guessed that Evadne's mother was the Wood Fairy who haunted that pine tree. But he never guessed that this Fairy herself had sent him her child to take care of, because she knew her tree was going to fall, and as soon as that happened, she would be no more. This is the fate of all the Wood Fairies, for they are the souls of the trees they inhabit, and they always know when their own tree is about to die. Therefore Evadne's Fairy mother had invisibly led the swineherd where her babe lay sleeping, and she whispered, "Take her to the King," so softly in his ear that he fancied the words were only a thought which came to him while he heard the pine tree rustle in the breeze.

Now Evadne, when she grew a maiden, seemed beyond all doubt the true daughter of that lovely Lady of the Pine; her slender body had the grace of a tall sapling, and her hair the blackness of fir woods when you see them against the sunset. That dusky hair is the chief glory of the Pine Fairies, though some say it is less beautiful than the auburn curls of their sisters who are Ladies of the Beeches, or the flaxen locks of those others whose haunt is the Silver Birch.

King Aipytos thought it not strange that the child of such a mother should love to wander in the woodlands, gathering flowers and berries, rather than to weave at the loom and broder robes like other maidens, nor did he ever hinder Evadne from roving early and late to her heart's content. But as time went on, it was told him once and again by his herdsman and shepherds that she wandered not alone; they had seen a golden-haired stranger walking beside her through forest glades, or sitting at her feet in some mountain meadow.

The King was grieved that his foster-child should meet a lover in secret, as though she feared he would forbid her the desire of her heart, and he said to her, "My child, you are of the age when maidens are wedded, and it may well be that you have seen some youth whom you think worthy of your hand. If it be so, fear not to tell me, for I would gladly see you made a bride before I die, though my house will lack its one jewel when you leave it."

Evadne answered, blushing rosy red, "More than a father have you been to me, and I will never leave you. I have seen no mortal whom I would choose for my lord."

Yet after this she kept away from the King's presence, and would often pass whole days and nights in the summer woods. At last he was sure that the maiden had some secret which she would not tell him, and he thought he would journey to the holy temple at Delphi and ask counsel of the priestess, for his mind was sorely troubled by this thing. Many leagues he journeyed in his mule-chariot over the Arcadian mountain passes and over the lands beyond, till he came to the rocky glen that is called Delphi, where the god Apollo gives oracles to men from his golden shrine, speaking by the mouth of his priestess. Now the inner chamber of that temple is built over a deep cleft in the rock, and a three-legged stool of gold is set over the cleft, whereon the priestess sits when she makes reply to those who inquire of the god. For a cloudy vapour rises out of the cleft at certain seasons, and while it floats round the priestess she falls

into a trance and chants divine words of prophecy or counsel, according as Apollo wills her to give his answer.



THE KING CONSULTS THE DELPHIC ORACLE.

King Aipyros offered sacrifice and burnt sweet incense on the temple altar, and the priestess bade him speak his request to Apollo, while she entered the inner shrine, where none else might set foot, and took her seat on the golden stool. Then he prayed to know why it was the Evadne passed all her days in the lonely woods, and kept here doings there a secret, even from him to whom she had ever been dutiful and loving. "Lord of Truth," he said, "show me what will come of this, be it good or evil; no longer may I endure to live in fear of some mischief to befall, dreading from day to day lest the maiden come home no more, and I lose the light of my old eyes for ever."

As the King made an end of speaking, the cloud filled the holy place and hid the form of the priestess from his sight. He knew that it was her voice which came to him out the cloud, yet now it rang so loud and silver-clear that it seemed the voice of the god himself. "King of Arcadia," it sang, "return in peace to your home, for great joy waits you there. Behold I, ever I myself, gave a gift to fair Evadne in the greenwood, and charged her to watch it well, keeping it hidden from all eyes. But now the time is at hand when my secret purpose shall be revealed, and you shall know the blessing that I have wrought you to recompense your love for your foster-child. Say therefore to the maiden, 'Apollo bids you show me his gift.' And in token that it is a true message, say also, 'The gift he gave you on the day when, laying aside your scarlet girdle, you rested by the spring where you had filled your silver pitcher.'"

Joyfully then the King sped him home again, but Evadne met him with never a smile, and her face was pale as death. And when she heard the message of the god, she broke into long weeping. "Alas, my father," she said at last, "these five days past I have sought in vain for Apollo's gift, till my heart was like to break. Awhile I kept it safe in a green bower that I built with hazel-twigs in a lonely dell, but now it is gone, I know not how, unless some wild beast has carried it away."

"What can the gift be, then," said Aipyros, "if wild beasts could make prey of it? Tell me at least what it is, since you cannot show it me as the god bade."

"I will tell you," she said, "both what it is and how it came to me. Many a time I had sight in the woods of beautiful shapes that I knew were not human creatures; some of them were like my Fairy mother, and there were others that rose out of the mountain streams or skipped on the sheer crags. I longed to speak with them, but always they vanished when I came near, till at last I saw one more glorious than them all, whose countenance shone like the sun. Golden-haired he was, and had a bow and quiver slung on his white shoulder. He did not fly me, like the rest, but gave me gentle greeting, and we had sweet speech

together then and many another day. That gracious friend told me not his name, but I learnt it ere long, for I heard the Wood Fairies whispering 'Apollo' as we walked together in the forest glades. Then I was afraid, for who was I to have companionship with so great a god? But Apollo bade me have no fear; only a little while could he stay in Arcadia, and then he must leave me for his heavenly dwelling, and I, he said, must content me with the lot of a mortal maiden in the house of my foster-father. And he left me at last, one noon-tide, beside a spring, where I had given him drink from my silvern pitcher, and loosed my scarlet girdle, and lain down to sleep. In my sleep, methought that he laid a purple pansy on my bosom, and said, 'I give you Heartsease, Evadne, for a farewell gift. Guard it well, and speak of it to none, until the hour that shall be told you.' At that I woke, and behold he was gone; but instead of the pansy, a dark-eyed babe was lying on my breast."

"This is a strange marvel," said Aipytos, "yet now I see plainly the purpose of the god. Doubtless he has given this child for a gladness and a blessing to my house. Take comfort, daughter, for he will surely be found, and Apollo will not have suffered harm to befall him."

Then the King and all his men made great search in the woods, and Evadne also went with them. At close of day they came upon a dingle filled breast-high with fern, and heard a cooing sound like baby laughter in the midst of the covert. Evadne sprang through the tangled bracken, Aipytos following with the best speed of his old limbs. A wondrous sight it was that met their eyes in the heart of the brake! There nestled in a bed of pansies, lay the lost child, his tender body aglow with the golden and purple gleams from the flowers, that burned like jewels in the broad rays of sunset. On either side of him was coiled a bright-eyed snake, holding in its mouth a piece of honeycomb, and with that they fed the Pansy Baby, while he stroked their emerald necks, laughing in delight. But Evadne trembled for the child, and at her cry of dread, those two strange guardians glided away. Then she caught him in her arms, and

gave him to the King, saying, "Father, Apollo's gift is to you also. Let this boy be a son to you in your old age." So they returned to the palace, glad at heart, and Evadne called the child Iamos, which in the speech of Arcadia means Heartsease.

II

King Aipytos died at last in a green old age, having lived to see the Pansy Child grow up a tall and comely youth, and he left him heir to all that was his. But the folk of Arcadia were ill-pleased that a stranger born should rule over them, and they murmured, saying, "Are there not kinsmen of our dead King in the land, to take his inheritance? Would that one of them were lord over us, for as for this Iamos, we know neither his father nor his kindred." And the old men said, "There is not under the sun so ancient a land as Arcadia, but now the glory is departed from it, for a kinless waif sits in the seat of a hundred kings."

These sayings came to the ears of Iamos, and he was troubled, not knowing what they meant.

"Mother," he said to Evadne, "what is this the people say, that I am no rightful heir of Aipytos? Are not you his daughter, and am not I your child? Yet they call me a stranger and an upstart." Then Evadne told him all the story of his birth, and how he had no mortal father, but was the gift of that bright-haired god who loved her long ago.

"I know," she said, "that Apollo will love you also for my sake, and he promised that his favour should always rest on me and mine. So now, if you are troubled at the murmuring of the folk, entreat him to befriend you, and show you a way to deal with them."

"Must I seek the god in his house at Delphi?" asked Iamos.

"Nay," said Evadne, "there is no need to journey so far. Go this night into the woods, and it may be he will speak to you there, if you call upon him."

Iamos went forth at midnight into the dark heart of the forest, and came by winding mossy ways to a leafy hollow, where a streamlet tinkled unseen in the gloom. A faint, sweet scent that he knew rose from the ground; he could not see what flowers were at his feet, but he felt sure they were pansies, and when he stooped and gathered one, it was indeed his namesake, the heartsease. "Here," he thought, "where Apollo's token blooms, I will call upon his name." He slid down the flowery bank, and stood barefoot in the running brook, for all streams were holy, and men were wont to enter their pure water when they would implore the presence of the stainless gods. Then, having bathed his hands and forehead, he stretched his arms skyward, saying, "God of the Silver Bow, glorious Apollo, draw near and hearken to my prayer. I knew not, till this day, that King Aipytos was not my grandsire, but now it were hateful to me to dwell in Arcadia, bearing the reproaches of the folk, who would fain have a king of the ancient royal blood. Leave me, I pray, to another land, and another people, and give me rule over them, that so I may found a kingdom, and make myself a name among men."

When he had thus spoken, a voice called far off in the darkness, "Iamos, my son."

"Who calls me?" said the lad, trembling, and the voice answered, near at hand, "One who will be to you a father and perform the promise he made to Evadne in the days of her youth. Follow me now in the way that I am going, till we come to the fair place that shall be your home."

Iamos felt that a presence stood close beside him in the dark hollow, but he could discern no form or feature through the gloom. "Gracious Apollo," he said, "lead me where you will, yet how shall I tread in the footsteps of a guide I cannot see?" But now the voice came from farther down the stream, calling "Hither to me," and he hastened after it, and ever, as he sped onward through the mirk of the woods, he heard it crying before him, "Follow, follow." No other sound broke the deep hush of night, save the rippling of the stream, now nearer and now more

distant, as they took their way along the narrow vales through which it flowed. It seemed to Iamos that his limbs were become strangely light, and his feet went swifter than ever before; tirelessly he raced on and on, and never tripped or stumbled, though he could not see a spear's length before him under the star-proof forest boughs. At last, in the first greyness of dawn, he found himself in an open valley, where the stream, now broadened to a river, ran between wide and level meads. The voice he had followed was silent, and he cried aloud, "Wither now, Apollo?"

"Look yonder," said the voice beside him, "where the valley widens into a plain under that low wooded hill. There, hard by the ford of the river, stands a temple of my brother Poseidon, and near it is a tomb of a king. That is the place where you must make your dwelling, and though it be solitary now, it shall be thronged in days to come by the great ones of the earth."

Now Iamos had hoped that Apollo would bring him to some fair city, and he marvelled in his heart what kingship could be his in that lonely valley. Also, he desired exceedingly to behold him face to face, and he said, "O heavenly guide, if this be my journey's end, deign to show yourself to your servant before you depart, for the darkness of the night is gone." But looking eagerly round he still saw no one, and the invisible god answered, "My son, of two things you shall now choose one, for to have them both is not granted to any mortal. Either you shall see me this once face to face, or you shall hear me speaking to you henceforth whenever you will, as you hear me now, and talk with me as a man talks with his friend."

Then Iamos, when he had thought a little while, said, "I choose to hear your voice; so shall I always find counsel for every need."

"You have chosen well," said Apollo, "henceforth great shall be your fame in this land, for by communing with me, who know all things in heaven and earth, and all that is to come, you will become the wisest of seers. Moreover, your wisdom shall

pass to your children, called after your name, and they shall have the gift of soothsay for all time, though it will not be granted to them to hear my voice, lest, being mortals, they boast of possessing the wisdom of gods. Go now and dwell yonder by the river until you see one coming to the ford, girt with a lion-skin and bearing a bow; that comer will build an altar to a mightier god than Poseidon, and a new gift will be given you in that day, whereby you and yours may reveal truth to men."

So Iamos went and lodged in Poseidon's temple, and took service there, hewing wood and drawing water for the sacrifices, and the folk of the country gave him food from the offerings they brought to the god. But he did not long hold that lowly office before Apollo's word began to be fulfilled, for it was soon noised abroad that the stranger youth who served so diligently in the temple had marvellous skill in the art of a seer, and his true answers to all who inquired of him about things to come were talked of far and near. At last the King of the land himself came to visit him, and bade him interpret a dream that he had dreamed. Iamos gave him no answer till he had spoken with Apollo; then he declared the meaning of the dream, and what he foretold from it came straightway to pass. After this, the King would have had him dwell in his palace in the city, but since Iamos would not leave the place appointed by the god, he build him a goodly house there. The young seer would take no rewards from poor folk when they came to him for prophecies, but from the great of the land he took such gifts as they pleased to bestow, so that his wealth increased with his fame.

Now this King, who name was Augeas, was very rich in flocks and herds, and he kept a thousand oxen stalled in a great byre near his house. The byre was never cleansed from year's end to year's end, and at length the oxen stood so deep in filth that it bred a murrain among them. Then Augeas set his herdsmen to cleanse the stalls, but none of them had strength to endure that noisome labour, and he took counsel of Iamos what were best to be done, who bade him send heralds abroad to offer a rich recompense to whoever would clear the byre of its

foulness. The King did so, and not many days after Iamos saw a man coming to the ford of the river, girt with a lion-skin, and bearing a great bow. "This is the comer," he thought, and he went to meet the stranger, and asked him his name.

"I am called Heracles," said he with the bow, "and I seek King Augeas, for I hear word of a service he needs. If he will pay the price I ask, I will cleanse his byre for him, and that in one day." "I will bring you to him," said Iamos, and they went together to the house of the King. Augeas believed it impossible for one man to do that work even in a year, so he readily promised the stranger the price he asked which was a hundred of the oxen. Then Heracles asked for a mattock and a spade, and they were given him amid laughter and gibing from the King and his men, who deemed him crazed in his wits. And when Heracles began to dig a wide trench at the door the byre, they laughed the more. But he, with more than mortal strength, dug that trench right across the fields that lay between the city and the river, and when he came to the ford he built a dam of earth and stones athwart the stream, so that it was turned from its course and flowed into the trench. And the waters, rushing through their new channel, flooded the byre, and washed away the dung-heaps that filled the stalls, and poured in a torrent down to a pool beneath the city walls. From morning to evening Heracles wrought at the task without rest, and before sunset the byre was cleansed. Then, lest the waters should swamp the city, he went in haste to break down the dam at the ford, and they returned again to the river-bed.

But when he claimed his reward of the hundred oxen, and evil thought came to Augeas, and he said, "What mean you, stranger? I take the gods to witness I made no such promise. Shall I give a hundred oxen for the hire of one day's labour? That wage you shall never have of me, unless you can prove that I promised it." This he said cunningly, for it had so chanced that Iamos did not go with Heracles into the King's presence, and none of his household was with Augeas when he gave the promise except Phyleus, his young son. So the false King, who

thought his son was even such as himself, now called for Iamos, and said, "Let the seer judge between us, for he is just and holy." And Iamos said, "Is there not a witness who can say which of the two speaks truly, King Augeas or the stranger?" "Her is Phyleus my son," answered the King, "who was present at our talk together, and can bear witness that I did not promise the hundred oxen." But the young prince blushed red with shame for his father's guile, and said, "Nay, my father, you did promise them, for I heard you." At that Augeas was very wroth, and for all Iamos could say against it, he banished his son out of the land on pain of death, and commanded his servants to drive both him and Heracles forth from the palace. Heracles could have overcome them all single-handed, yet for the sake of Phyleus, and lest harm should come to him, he departed without another word, taking the lad with him. But Iamos shook off the dust from his sandals on the King's threshold, and said, "Woe to this house, and woe to Augeas, because of the thing he has done this day! I say to you, O perjured King, that I will see your face no more, for the god whom I serve abhors lying and deceit." Augeas had a mind to slay him for these words, but he feared to lay hands on him because he was a prophet, and beloved by all the folk, and he let him go back to his own place.

Not long after this, word came to the King that an army was marching upon his borders, and the captain of the host was the man clad in the lion-skin who had cleansed his byre. For Heracles had mustered his friends and comrades out of many cities to make war on Augeas, and he had with him all the fighting men of Arcadia, the birthplace of Iamos, who were his sworn allies because of a service he had done them of old. There was a lake in Arcadia which was the home of a strange tribe of great water-fowl, and they preyed on human flesh, and were the terror fo the land until Heracles scared them away for ever with the twanging of his mighty bowstring and the hissing flight of his arrows. This good deed the men of Arcadia kept in remembrance, and now they repaid it, as they had vowed to do. But the son of Augeas was not with that host, for Heracles had helped the lad to win himself a kingdom in the north country,

where he lived prosperously all his days. Then King Augeas and his folk gave battle to the invaders before the gates of the city, and were put to utter rout, and the city was taken and set on fire. Now Heracles had given command to his host that they should give quarter to all, except the King only, therefore there was little slaughter that day, but Augeas himself me the doom he well deserved. All his wealth, and all the spoil of the city, Heracles divided with his comrades, and next day, they set forth with their booty heaped on ox-waggon, and with vast droves of cattle, to return to their homes. When they came to the ford of the river, Iamos met them, and Heracles asked him what temple that was, and why it was built there, apart from any dwellings of me. "It is Poseidon's temple," said Iamos, "which a prince who once ruled this land built in thanksgiving for a victory he won here by that god's help. Pelops was his name, and he came overseas from the East, where his father was a king of surpassing wealth and glory, whom men called the Favourite of the Gods." Then he told Heracles the story of the chariot-race, which has been told in this book already, and showed him the tomb of Pelops, who had bidden his sons bury him beside Poseidon's shrine.

"I also," then said Heracles, "will build a temple here to the god who has given me victory this day, even to most high Zeus, my guardian and deliverer in all perils. And as Pelops ordained chariot-races to be run here for a perpetual memorial, I too will now hold a contest of young men in feats of speed and strength, and leave it in your charge, holy seer, to hold the like once in four years, keeping solemn festival, to the honour of Zeus." Thereupon he chose out rich prizes for the games from his share of the spoil, and gave the remainder to Iamos, saying, "All this I dedicate to Zeus; take it to your keeping, for I make you treasurer of his temple."

So the hero and his comrades marked out a goodly space of the riverside meadow, and fenced it round with an earthen wall, and when they had built an altar of broad stones therein, they burnt sacrifices to Zeus. Then they held the contests, and

made Iamos the judge of them; first there was a foot-race, next wrestling, and boxing, and throwing the stone quoit, and last a chariot-race, in honour of Pelops. Heracles himself took no part in the games, because he was the giver of the prizes, and so it was best, for though he was small of stature, his strength was as the strength of fifty men. At evening time, great fires were lighted by the stream, and sheep and oxen were roasted whole for the banquet, and all the host sat down to feast and to make merry. The lovely moon looked down in full-orbed splendour on their festival, and threw her golden light over plain and river. All that midsummer night the warriors held revel, with wine and song and minstrelsy, till the wood fires burned low, and the twittering of birds began to tell that dawn was near. Next noon-tide, Heracles marshalled the host for their journey, and bade Iamos offer sacrifice on the new altar, praying Zeus to give some good omen at their setting forth. Then it was that the second gift of prophecy came to the young seer, as Apollo promised, for, looking on the fire of the altar, his mind was suddenly enlightened with strange knowledge, and he read plain signs of fate in the leaping flames. "Go in peace, Heracles," he cried; "safe and speedy shall be your home-faring, as Zeus grants me to discern from the clear burning of the sacrifice. Henceforth, I know by Apollo's word to me, that I shall thus foretell good or ill hap to all whom make offerings on this altar."

So Heracles went his way with all his company and Iamos saw him no more until another day. But the seer fulfilled all the charge he laid upon him, and dwelt happy and greatly honoured in that holy place, serving the gods faithfully all his days. The gift of divining by fire remained ever after with him and his, according to Apollo's promise, and in after ages, when the sacred Games that Heracles founded were become famous over the whole world, the prophets of the glorious sanctuary were the clan who had their name and lineage from the Pansy Child.

CHAPTER VI

THE HEAVENLY TWINS

I

Travellers in the ancient ages told that Laconia was the fairest land of all the kingdoms of the south. There you might journey all day through groves of citron and of orange, heavy with shining fruit, and sweet with blossom, and rest in the heat of noon-tide where the leafy sycamore and walnut trees made a pleasant shade on the river-banks. And there the nightingale sang all day long in the wayside copses, for the flowering myrtles grew so thickly that not a sunbeam could come through to tell her night had gone. But the travellers said that in all Laconia nothing could be seen more beautiful than the maidens of the land. Peasant-girl or king's daughter, they were all like queens to look upon, tall and stately and marvellous fair. Now there was once a maiden called Leda, and she was as far above the rest in beauty as the moon is brighter than the stars. It was said that the old chieftan, her father, came out of the north country to dwell in Laconia, and indeed her golden hair and milk-white skin showed plainly that she was of northern race. So there was much murmuring when the King chose her for his bride, instead of taking to wife a princess of his own kindred, and it was whispered among the old folks that bad luck would come of it.

It happened, however, that the harvest that year was very great, and the King was at peace with all his neighbours. Moreover, Queen Leda was gentle and gracious to her household, and bountiful to the needy, so that the people began to forgive her for being a foreigner. The next year, in the spring, word came to her husband of a great hunting to be held in the mountains beyond the borders of his kingdom, to which many

chiefs and princes were gathering, and he made ready to join them with a goodly company. Very busy were his men, sharpening and burnishing hunting-spears and knives, seeing to the horses, and to the great Laconian hounds of famous breed that could pull down wolf and wild-boar, and even the mountain-bull. Busy too was the Queen, looking well that her women prepared all needful food for the journey, and sorting out coverlets and bedding and garments for the King's use, for he would perhaps be many weeks among the hills. Then, when he was gone, the palace seemed to her silent and empty, and a strange sadness came into her heart. That night she lay long awake, and when at last she slept, her old nurse, who had crept in to watch her, saw the tears stealing down her cheeks. "Child of my heart," said the old crone, bending over her, "never may the dream come true that you weep to see."

"Nurse," said Leda, starting up, "have I been asleep? Who spoke to me just now? Who came and told me—" She could say no more, and hid her face in her hands.

The old crone made the sign that drives away evil magic. "No one has entered, my Queen," she said. "Have I not kept watch at your chamber-door? This was some dream; come, let me hear it, it may be I can read it for you, and if it bodes misfortune (which the gods avert) you shall take counsel of some seer."

"No, no," cried Leda, and wrung her hands. "To no one can I tell it. Let me alone, nurse."

Nor could the nurse coax her into saying another word, and her silence vexed the old woman, who had no small skill in signs and omens.

Next morning, the Queen, as was then the custom of queens, herself gave orders to her women for all the work of the day; and because the time had come round for a great washing of the household linen, she went down to the river to see that they did it properly. The younger handmaids were very merry over this work, which they liked much better than scrubbing and

scouring, and weaving and spinning indoors. They knelt on the low bank and plunged the clothes into the shallow running water, and some of them tucked up their robes and paddled in to tread the clothes clean on the pebbly river-bed, just as Highland lassies used to do, not so very long ago. The sun was but just risen when they began their work, and all was done before the heat of the day set in. Then they took their pleasant meal of bread and figs and wine in the grassy meadow, and some lay down to rest, but the young girls began a game at ball. Many a happy day had Leda spent in this way in her girlhood, and always, till to-day, she had loved to watch the sport and join in the laughter and singing, but now, because her heart was heavy, she went and sat a little way off from the others, thinking strange thoughts. "See," cried a girl presently, as she tossed up the ball, "see those two great birds flying overhead!"

"Birds, said you," croaked the old nurse, peering up. "Ay, ay wild geese, most like, of your feather, my girl. Well may they flock hither, if the old proverb hold true."

"Your tongue is sharper than your eyes, old woman," laughed another handmaid, "for one of those birds is an eagle. Look, sisters, look, how fiercely he chases the other! Round and round they fly—and lower and lower. See, the other is wearied out—ah, the beautiful creature, it is as white as snow."

"It is a swan," said Leda coming forward. All now stood still to watch this strange chase. The swan was wearied out indeed, and its great white wings flapped ever more feebly as it circled downward. Nearer and nearer it came to the spot where the women stood, till they shrieked and scattered in fear as the huge eagle swooped after it close to their heads. Only Leda did not move, and just as the beautiful bird sank at her feet, she threw her arms round it with a cry of pity, and shielded it with her mantle from those cruel claws. And, strange to tell, the eagle did not harm her. Up he soared into the sky, higher and higher he flew, till he was seen no more.

Now all the women had fled towards the palace, for they made certain that the eagle would kill the Queen with one blow of his beak, and even the old nurse had hobbled off as fast as she could for terror. Leda was left alone with the swan on the river-bank. She drew her mantle off the trembling bird, and stroked its head and smoothed its silvery wings, and told it it was safe, for the eagle was gone. It seem to understand her, and came closer to her side, looking into her face with its lustrous eyes.

"Beautiful swan," she said, "why have you lingered in our country when winter has gone? Always, when the summer is over, we see your brothers and sisters come flocking from over the mountains, and they live all winter in the reed-beds of our river. But they fly back in the spring to their own lands, the far North land that was once my father's home." "Lady," said the swan, "far is that land, but not so far as mine. Farther then ever swan has flown have I journeyed to look on one who is whiter than any swan."

Then Leda trembled very much, for she knew that this was not a real swan, and that the gods could take any shape that pleased them, when they came among men, and she bowed herself humbly before the great bird, "Oh, my lord," she said, "be gracious to your handmaid. If indeed I speak to one of the blessed gods, tell me, I pray, by what name I may call you." This she said, because the Immortals were most particular about being called by their right names. "Fear nothing, sweet Leda," said the swan. "As for my name, I am he whose servant is the eagle. And I bade him chase me in this shape to your feet, that I might learn if you are as kind as you are fair." Then Leda knew that King Zeus himself talked with her, and she was the more afraid. But the swan bent his arching neck, and laid his head gently on her arm. "Because you did not fear to save the hunted bird," he said, "ask what you will, and I will do it." Leda remembered her dream, and the tears sprang to her eyes. "Gracious Zeus," she said, "I know not what to ask. I have everything a queen can wish for, except children, and if you had come to me only yesterday, that is the gift I would have chosen.

But last night I had a cruel dream. I thought I stood before the holy temple at Delphi, waiting while my husband inquired of the oracle if children should be born to us. Then a veiled messenger came out and said to me, 'The priestess has spoken. Twin children shall be born to King Tyndareus, an only son and an only daughter, and they shall both be slain while he yet lives.' At these words I awoke, weeping, and my nurse asked me my dream. But I dare not tell it to any one, for if the people hear of it, they will say, 'This is what comes of the King marrying an outlander,' and if my husband hears of it, his heart will be turned from me because I bring this evil on his house. Alas, alas! that the King should go down to his grave childless, and leave no son to sit upon his throne. And I have heard, O mightiest of the gods, that even you cannot turn away their doom from hapless mortals."

"You have heard truly, lady," the swan answered, "for a law that cannot be broken governs all things in earth and heaven. Great is the power of the gods, but it is like the power of the sea, whose terrible waves cannot pass their appointed bounds. Yet, with our help, the thing that must come to pass may bring with it more good than evil. So now take comfort, and when your children come, the swan's gift shall come with them. But remember that you tell no one whence it came, nor who it was you saved from the eagle." So saying, he flapped his broad wings as if to fly; softly they brushed across Leda's eyes, and that instant she fell asleep.

Meanwhile, the women who had rushed home to the palace crying that the Queen was killed, came back with guards and serving-men to look for her, and were very much astonished because they could see no trace of her. Stranger still, they could not find the spot where they had left her. The flat and grassy bank where they had spread the linen to dry was just as they had left it, but a little way up stream, where the Queen had stood, they saw instead of level meadow a bed of tall reeds and rushes. "We are bewitched," they cried. "Yonder, just where the river makes a bend, is the very spot where the swan alighted." But the

men mocked them, and said, "Are you all crazed with fright, you silly wenches? What, did you play ball in a reed-bed? Come, show us where you left our mistress, or it will be the worse for you."

Now the old nurse had followed the others, crying and lamenting, and expecting every moment to see her lady lying dead. But when she saw the rushes waving where no rushes had been, it came into her mind that this might be the Water Fairies' doing. These Fairies, who were called Naiads in those days, are the gentlest and kindest of all (the Tree Fairies are kind-hearted too, but rather changeable, for their temper depends a good deal on the weather), and they delight in helping mortals in distress. One reason is, that many of them were once mortals themselves, who fell into the water, or jumped in to get away from some enemy, and so were drowned. The old nurse thought that one of them had most likely made the rushes spring up to hide Leda and the swan from the eagle. And she was very nearly right, only the Naiad had done it to make a bower for Leda while she rested. So the old crone went boldly forward, and pushed aside the screen of rushes. And there, with joy and wonder, they saw their Queen lying fast asleep, looking, as the old nurse said, just like a snow-white swan in its nest among the reeds.

Weeks went by and months went by, and still King Tyndareus did not come home from the hunting. Word came that he had sworn friendship with another prince who had saved his life from a savage boar, and was gone to help him win back his kingdom from a usurper. All this time Leda kept the swan's secret, as he had bidden her, and when the old nurse questioned her about what had happened, she only smiled and spoke of something else. So the old crone told the other women that the Naiad had hidden the Queen by enchantment in the nick of time, and they all believed her, and often threw flowers and cakes into the river to please that good fairy. At last news was brought to the palace that the King had helped his friend to win a great victory, and was coming home with much spoil. Already, said the messenger, he was near at hand, and in two days' time he

would enter the city. That same night the Queen had a little son and a little daughter, and they were put to sleep in two ivory cradles beside their mother's bed. Before sunrise next morning she was awakened by a sound like the flapping of wings. She looked round, and saw nothing—only on the ledge of the open window lay a white feather. Then she leaned down and peeped into the cradles, and there, beside each baby, was a swan's egg among the pillows. "That is the gift," she thought, "but what can be the use of it?" and she took one of the eggs in her hand to look at it. Instantly the shell cracked in two, and she saw inside it the loveliest baby, like a little doll. The tiny creature stretched out its arms to her and smiled; then, quickly as you can blow a bubble, it grew in her hand till it was as large as other babies. Full of wonder, she took the egg from the other cradle, and the same thing happened. The two swan-children were as like as two peas, only the one she had taken from her little son's cradles was a baby boy, and the other was a baby girl. Leda knew that directly, because all new babies suck their thumbs if they are boys, and their fingers if they are girls. Then Leda began to think hard how she might keep the wonderful present without telling who had sent it.

Now every one in the palace was so busy getting ready for the King's home-coming that only the old nurse could be spared to wait on the Queen, so no one else knew yet of her having twins. Leda resolved to show the old woman the swan-babies at once, and make her promise to give out that they also were the Queen's children. "I will bring them up as my own," she said to herself, "and so, even if my two poor little ones must die untimely, the King and I will not be left childless in our old age." And she gave thanks to Zeus for his gift.

Quickly came the old nurse at her lady's call, and loud were her cries of wonder when she saw the swan-babies. She willingly promised never to tell any one they were not the King's children, for she said, "One never knows what may happen, and a king with one son is like a ship with one anchor." But when she asked eagerly if Leda has seen nothing and heard nothing of

the babies' coming, the Queen only said, "They were here when I awoke." The old crone was very shrewd and terribly inquisitive, and she thought to herself, "The Queen knows more than she will tell me, or why is she not more astonished at this marvellous thing? She does not seem to think it the least surprising to wake up and find four babies instead of two. Something, for sure, has troubled her since that dream she had, and I shall have no rest till I find out what all this means." So thinking, she began prying round the room, and soon found two things that made her more curious than ever. On the window-sill was a white swan's feather, and under the cradle of the girl-babies was the broken shell of a swan's egg. Leda had hidden the other in her bed, but this one had fallen to the floor, and she forgot it. The cunning old crone said nothing, but the moment Leda's back was turned she picked up both eggshell and feather, and hid them in a coffer. "Some day," she thought, "these tokens may bring to light the truth."

A happy man was King Tyndareus when he saw those lovely children, and they pleased him more than all the treasures he brought home with him.

As time went on the two little princes grew up to be the handsomest and bravest lads that ever were seen in Laconia, and the two little princesses were the talk of the whole kingdom for their beauty. One of these maidens was dark-eyed and dark-haired, and her name was Clytaemnestra; the other, who was called Helen, was so enchanting in her loveliness that no one could refuse her anything, and everybody spoiled her. Strangely enough, although was one of the swan-children, she had the same violet eyes and golden hair as Leda. The two princesses were sought in marriage by so many king's sons, that their father feared to bestow them on any lest the others should take offence and make war upon him. Therefore he invited all the suitors to a wedding-feast, and said to them, "Princes, my daughters shall make their own choice from among you, but first you shall take an oath that whoever they choose, all the rest of you will fight for my sons-in-law if ever they are in need of help." All the

suitors agreed to this condition, and thus King Tyndareus made sure allies for himself and his family. The princesses were brought into the hall to see their suitors, and they chose the two sons of a king named Atreus, and were married that same day with great pomp and splendour. Now what befell them afterwards is the most famous of all stories, but here we bid them farewell, for this tale is about their brothers.

II

After The marriage of the two princesses, Queen Leda said to her sons: "It is time that you went on your travels, like other princes, in search of brides, and brought me home two new daughters to take the place of Helen and Clytaemnestra." But Castor and Polydeuces had no mind to be wedded, for they loved each other with a great love, and desired nothing else than to pass their whole lives together. So they said to their mother: "Why should we bring stranger women into our house, who like enough would stir up strife between us, and vex your heart also? Nay, mother, we will let such things alone till we are older. Nevertheless, we will go on our travels and seek adventures as king's sons are wont to do." And they set out to see the world. Now these Twin Brethren had grown up so like one to the other that none could tell them apart, and neither the old nurse nor Leda herself knew whether Castor or Polydeuces was the swan-child. They went forth clad alike in silver armour, and Castor drove the white horses of their silver chariot, for although both were marvellous tamers of horses, he was the better charioteer. In the first city where they sojourned they heard tidings of the ship that was to sail from Iolcos on the quest of the Golden Fleece, and how Prince Jason was gathering brave comrades to go with him. Forthwith they hastened to join themselves to that company, and as Iolcos they first saw Heracles, whose fame was already great in their own land, and they sailed with Jason in the ship Argo, and shared all those toils and perils set forth in the tale of "The Lad with One Sandal." Then, when Argo was come home again, and Jason had recovered the kingdom of his father,

the Twins harnessed their white horses that were left in Aeson's charge, and journeyed southward to their own country. Their road led them to a strong-walled city with seven gates, and they entered one of the gates and asked the first man they met the name of the city, who told them it was Thebes. "Then we are come to the city of a friend," cried Polydeuces, "for Thebes is the home of Heracles. Is he here, stranger, or have you tidings of him since he sailed with the ship Argo? We are his shipmates, but he went not far on that voyage before he parted from us."

"He has been seen in Thebes since then," answered the stranger, "but he is ever coming and going, for he never wearies of adventures, and he is not here now. It is said he is gone into the West with an army to war on a king there who did him a foul wrong."

"We will go after him, then," said the Twins, "and fight in his quarrel."

But the man of Thebes prayed them, if they were friends to Heracles, to lodge with him that night, and he brought them to his house, and feasted them with the best. "Kind hose," said Castor, presently, "may we know your name? We would fain tell Heracles when we see him which of his neighbours has received us so hospitably for his sake." "My name is Amphitryon," said their host, smiling, "and when you see Heracles, say that you lodges under his own roof-tree, for he is my son. In this house he was born after his mother and I fled hither out of Argos, our own city, from the power of a wicked king, and here, even in his cradle, Queen Hera sought to destroy him in her pitiless hate."

"It seems then that the tales are true," said Polydeuces, "which say that the Queen of the Gods bears a deep grudge against your noble son, and has wrought him toil and trouble without ceasing. But as to the cause of this, some say one thing and some another, and we would gladly hear from you, Amphitryon, the whole truth about the matter."

"I will tell you the tale from the beginning," said Amphitryon, and thus he told it. "My brother and I were the sons

of the King of Argos, that ancient city beloved of Hera, and when our father died, we should, by his command, have divided the kingdom, but my brother turned the folk against me with lying accusations, and I was forced to fly for my life, with my new-wedded bride. And we came to dwell at Thebes, where I was well received of the citizens because I had good repute as a warrior. At that time they made war upon certain islanders of the West, and I was chosen captain of their host because their prince was yet a child. By favour of the gods, we were conquerors in that war, and came home to Thebes laden with much spoil. Now it was late at night when we reached the city, and I would not sit down to feast and carouse with the rest, but hastened to my own house, that I might greet my wife. I found her asleep, and I awoke her, thinking to see her overcome with joy at my safe return, but she showed not the least surprise at the sight of me, and when I told her of the victory and the spoils, she said, 'All this, Amphitryon, you told me last night when you came home.' You may guess, princes, how these strange words troubled me; at first I thought my wife was crazed, but when I had questioned her closely, I perceived that some god had visited her in my likeness. For she knew everything that had passed in the war, and he who had been with her, gave her a golden girdle, saying it was from his share of the spoil. Now I myself had brought her a golden girdle, and when we laid the two side by side they were alike down to every petal of the lotus flowers embossed upon them. But Alcmena, my wife, believed that I had played a trick upon her, and it vexed her so that she showed my great coldness, and my heart was much disquieted. Then, one night I dreamed that the King of the Gods stood before me in all his majesty, and said: 'Be not cast down, Amphitryon; it was I who visited Alcmena, having a desire to behold and converse with her in mortal shape, because it was reported to me that she is the fairest of all women alive. Tell her this, and say Zeus bids her be reconciled to you. Also she shall have a sign from me that she may believe, for twin sons shall be born to her before a year goes by.' And as the god promised, so it came to pass.

"Now, when the two babes were five days old, as I was sitting in the market-place with elders of the city, my wife's handmaids ran shrieking towards us, and loudly called 'Help! help! Two monstrous serpents are in our lady's chambers devouring her children.' I cried to my neighbours to follow, and rushed with drawn sword into my house. What think you I saw, my guests, as I darted into the chamber of Alcmena? She, herself, half-clad as she had leapt from her couch, lay fainting by the cradle, her arms thrown round one child, and two huge snakes were writhing on the floor beside her. But they were writhing in death! The other babe sat upright in the cradle, and his tiny hands were gripping their scaly throats so fiercely that the breath came in hissing gasps from their red foaming jaws, and their glaring eyes seemed bursting from the sockets. For one instant that sight rooted me to the threshold—then, even as I sprang forward, the heads of the monsters fell back, and with a throttled cry they breathed their last. My little son looked up at me gravely, and, unclenching his hands, he let the lifeless bodies drop thudding to the ground. Then did I, and the men that followed me, give a mighty shout of joy, and it roused Alcmena from her swoon of terror, and she caught both children to her breast, sobbing for gladness. News of the marvel brought all the city flocking to our doors, and with the rest came blind Teiresias, that aged seer. Forthwith he prophesied to us concerning the child, and said this deed was but the beginning of wonders that he should do all his life long. For Hera, he said, had sent those serpents, because it angered her that Zeus praised the beauty of Alcmena in the presence of all the gods, saying he had seen none fairer in earth or heaven, and the jealous goddess would avenge that slight by contriving many another dire encounter for Alcmena's son. Yet all the perils she brought him into should but work him the more renown, and therefore he should be named Heracles, which is, being interpreted, 'Glory that cometh of Hera.'"

When Amphitryon had made an end of his story, both the Twins kept silence for a space, and then Castor, "Marvellous, in truth, are the ways of the Immortals. But I would fain hear one

thing more; is there no hope that the wrath of Hera may yet be turned from your son, our dear comrade, or will she be his enemy for ever?" "Teiresias foretold that she would make peace with him at last," answered Amphitryon; "nay, he spoke of strange bliss that she would grant him one day, when he should rest from toil and suffering in an eternal home. But, with your pardon, I will not repeat that prophecy, for it well-nigh passes belief that any man born of woman should be exalted to such a height of glory as it foreshadowed, nor do I desire it should be known." "You do wisely to conceal it," said Polydeuces, "for what men cannot credit, they are ever ready to mock at. But I also would hear one thing, if it be not displeasing to you. Since Alcmena has two sons, how is it that Hera's hatred pursues Heracles, and not his brother also?"

"I can but guess," said Amphitryon, "that her anger rests specially on the child who slew her ministers, the serpents. Darker to me is the cause of the measureless difference between my twin sons; the strength of Heracles you know, and can bear my witness that it is as the strength of a god, but Iphicles, his brother, is no stronger than other men. It is not so with you, noble sons of Tyndareus, whom I knew at first sight of you by report from Heracles, for he said also that you were alike in prowess as in form and face."

Long and late the Twin Brethren sat in Amphitryon's hall, and still their talk was of Heracles and his mighty deeds, of which his father had much to tell that they had never heard. For Heracles himself was very loth to speak of his own wondrous acts to his friends. Next morrow they took farewell of their host, and set forth again to seek Heracles and his army in the West, and made good speed upon the road, but for all that, he was already returning homeward when they met him, so when glad greetings had passed between the friends, the Twins told Heracles how they had come in hope to fight by his side, and asked what the feud was with King Augeas, and how it ended. And Heracles told them all the adventure, as it is set down in the tale of "The Pansy Baby." But whilst he told of the games held at

the temple and tomb by the ford, a new thing befell him for Zeus sent the spirit of prophecy upon him, so that he began to speak like a seer, with chanting utterance, and fixed, unseeing gaze. "Sons of Leda," he said, "I have dedicated a sanctuary yonder by the river for great Zeus, the protector both of me and you, and I purposed to return ere long to see the temple a-building. But it is revealed to me even now that my time on earth is short, and there is yet much work ordained for me to accomplish before I pass away by a fiery doom. Therefore I go not home till I have taken a far journey, and brought to the sanctuary of Zeus that which it sorely needs, for it lies in a treeless plain, and no pleasant shade defends men there from the scorching noonday sun; but I will plant it with shoots of those fairest trees which I saw once in the Land Beyond the North Wind, when I had chased through a thousand leagues of forest the Hind with the Golden Horns. And when I have done this, I must pass to those other labours that await me, and before the fourth year comes round, I shall be gone from earth. Now, I appointed the fourth year for the renewal of the Sacred Games, and since I may not hold that second festival, I charge you both, as you are true comrades to Heracles, fail not to hold it in my stead. And now, farewell."

Then, before the Twins could stay him, he turned and left them, going northward with great strides, and they, sad at his words, went to their own home. There was great joy in the house of Tyndareus at their home-coming, and after that, they wandered to far lands no more, though many a brave deed and strange adventure were theirs in neighbouring countries.

Now, when the fourth year was come, and the midsummer season drew on in which Heracles had held his festival, Castor and Polydeuces went to the sanctuary by the Western river, to fulfil their friend's last charge, and beheld the temple of Zeus that Iamos the Seer had builded, and a grove of young trees about it, the like of which they had never seen. For these were the first olive trees that ever grew in the land of Greece, and Heracles had brought them as he purposed from the

land beyond the North Wind. Then they asked Iamos if he had any tidings of Heracles, of whom they had long heard nothing, save confused rumours of his distant wanderings. "This very day," said the seer, "that great spirit had departed from among men. Yes, for it was shown me in a vision how he met the doom of fire, and entered by that flaming gate into everlasting bliss. Heracles had taken to wife the fair Princess Deianira, and he loved her truly, but in her folly she doubted of it, and caused him to wear a tunic which she had anointed with a certain magic philtre. That philtre was the blood of Nessus the Centaur, whom Heracles shot with a poisoned arrow because he offered insult to Deianira, and Nessus gave it to her, as he lay dying, telling her that it was a potent love-charm. Thus was the centaur avenged, for the poison of the arrow was in it, even the deadly venom of the hundred-headed snake that Heracles slew of old, and dipped his shafts in its black gore. So, when Heracles put on that tunic, it clung, like eating fire, to his mighty limbs, and in agony he strove to tear it off, but could not, for the poison glued it to his flesh. Then, when he saw he must die in that torment, he commanded a great funeral pyre to be raised and kindled on the hillside, and cast himself alive into the flames. Thus, in the sight of men he seemed to perish, but I say to you, sons of Leda, that in those flames the hero ascended bodily to the halls of Zeus. Weep not for the comrade you loved, for even now Queen Hera smiles upon him, and leads him to the heavenly marriage-feast, where he shall sit enthroned by her daughter Hebe, youngest of the goddesses, whom Zeus gives him for his bride."

Then said Castor, "Let us build here another altar, and offer sacrifice to Heracles as to a god, forasmuch as he, our man of men, is henceforth numbered with the Immortals." And Polydeuces said, "We will do so, yet, lest there be jealousy in heaven, let us build altars also to the Twelve Greatest Gods, save Zeus, whose altar Heracles himself has built already." This was done forthwith, and all the mightiest gods looked down with favour on that Second Festival of the Games that Heracles founded.

III

After these things, a feud began between King Tyndareus and another king, who was his kinsman and neighbour, ruling a country on the western border of Laconia. This king's name was Aphareus, and he had two sons, Idas and Lynceus, youths of the same age with Castor and Polydeuces. Idas had no little renown as a warrior, and he was very fair to look upon, but Lynceus was swart and small in stature, and all his delight was in woodcraft. It was hateful to Lynceus to dwell within the four walls of a house, and he passed his days and nights in the wide forest, and lived by hunting. And he was the best of hunters, though he had neither strength nor skill in archery; never man could track the game as he did, for he had lynx-eyes, that saw through rocks and through trees, and through the earth. Now, when the two kings fell to feud, their sons began to make forays over the border, and raided the cattle of their enemies; but at first King Tyndareus had the greater loss, because Lynceus could spy his herds from leagues away, and told his brother where he might surprise them. But Idas kept a herd of red cows that he set great store by, and one day Castor and Polydeuces came upon them feeding in a vale, and drove them off across the border, and the herdsmen fled to tell their lord. Then Idas rose up in great wrath, and swore that he would not rest till he had slain those Twin Brethren, and Marpessa his wife heard him. This Marpessa had great beauty, so that many princes had sought her in marriage, and even a god was among her suitors. For the golden-haired Apollo himself came to her father's house, and wooed her to be his bride, but she chose rather to wed Idas, and she said to the god, "When I am old and grey, shall I be still dear to you, who are young continually? Nay, let me wed a lover who will grow old along with me, to whose age-dimmed eyes I shall still seem fair." And Apollo bore Marpessa no malice for her choice, but was ever a friend to her, and gave her timely warning of a doom that threatened her husband. Therefore, when she heard the angry words of Idas, she besought him not to plan death for the Twin Brethren, for that, she said, would prove his bane, if Apollo had

told her truly. But Idas paid her no heed, and he bade Lynceus be on the watch for those two marauders continually, so that when next they came, he might lay some ambush for them.

Not many days after, Castor said to his brother, "Let us make another raid beyond the border, and see if there are not other cattle of Idas in the glens of Mount Taygetos." So they came by stealth to the wooded mountain, and it chanced, as they went along, that Castor caught his foot in the root of a beech, and fell, and his foot was sprained in the fall. Polydeuces tore a strip from his cloak, to bandage it, and looked for water, but there was none at hand. "I will go find a spring," he said, "and bring water in my helm to lave your foot, and ease the pain. Only, I fear lest the sons of Aphareus be abroad in these woods, and come upon you thus helpless." "Do you see yonder hollow oak?" said Castor; "that were a safe hiding-place, if I crept within it." "Well thought of," said Polydeuces, and kneeling down, he drew Castor's arms round his neck, and bore him on his back to the hollow tree. Then, placing him carefully within it, he heaped brushwood against the trunk to hide the opening, and went in search of water. But Lynceus was perched on a crag of the mountain, keeping his watch, and while Polydeuces was gone, he cast his eyes towards the glen where Castor sat in the oak, and saw him through the tree-trunk as through clear crystal. Down the rocks he bounded like a wild goat, and flew to tell Idas, and they both ran to the oak with the speed of the wind. Never a word said Castor when he saw their fierce faces, knowing full well that his hour was come, but as Idas dragged him forth and plunged a dagger into his side, he cried with a great voice on his brother's name. Polydeuces heard the cry, for he was that moment returning, and with a roar like a wounded lion's, he rushed upon the sons of Aphareus. Panic fear seized them at that sudden onslaught; they turned and fled before him into the depths of the forest, yet though they had the name of the swiftest runners alive, he overtook them in a dusky hollow, where a white headstone marked a solitary grave. Beside that tomb, the resting-place of a king, their forefather, Idas and Lynceus turned to bay, and as Polydeuces poised his spear for a

throw, they heaved aloft the headstone and hurled it upon him. Full on the breast it struck him, but he stood firm in his godlike strength, nor flinched from the blow, and the next instant, his spear pierced the heart of Idas, and Lynceus, in act to flee once more, fell dead on his dead brother, stricken by a thunderbolt from the blue.

For Zeus looked down with pity on the children of Leda in their hour of anguish, and sent swift vengeance on Castor's murderers. So perished those two brothers, and the green grave of their forefather was their funeral pyre; there, with none to pay them the last rites, their bodies smouldered to ashes in the sulphurous flames of the thunderbolt. But Polydeuces sped back to his brother, and found him not yet dead, though already the failing breath rattled in his throat. The hot tears broke from his eyes at that sight, and with a deep groan, he said, "Do you see this, O Zeus on high? Alas, what hope, what help is left to me, most wretched! Now, King of Gods, take away my life also, for what profits it a man to live, bereft of his heart's friend?" Then straightway Zeus himself, in his own shape of majesty, stood before him, with compassionate look.

"Polydeuces," said the god, "you know not what you ask. Death has claimed Castor, because he is the son of a mortal father, but on you death has no power, for you are not the son of Tyndareus, nor of any man. I myself gave you being, and brought you for a gift to Queen Leda, a tiny babe, shut in the shell of a swan's egg. But now, since you so love him whom you called brother, that you strive to share his lot whether for good or ill, I set a choice before you. It is yours, if you so choose, to abide henceforth for ever in my palace halls, where you shall find comrades meet for your warrior soul, even Athena, and Ares, Lord of War. Or, if that content you not, you may give half your birthright of immortality to Castor, and the two of you shall lead a double life, dwelling one day in the Nether World of the dead, and the next, in the golden houses of Heaven. Think well, Polydeuces, what your choice shall be."

But in the faithful heart of Polydeuces there was no thought of self. "Great Zeus," he cried, "save my Castor, and be the rest as it may." The god laid his hand on Castor's eyes, already closed in death, and they opened, bright with new life; he touched the blue gasping lips, and the rose-red flushed them once more. Castor drew a deep breath, and raising himself on one arm, he said, "Brother, I have surely slept, I thought, but it was dream, that Idas and Lynceus set upon me while you were gone."

With a cry of joy, Polydeuces flung himself into his arms, and when he looked up from that embrace, they were alone. Then he told Castor what had befallen, and how King Zeus himself had stood beside them; but Castor had seen no one save Polydeuces when his eyes opened, for they were holden from the sight of the god. Now the touch of Zeus had made him whole from head to foot, so that he rose up and walked lightly at his brother's side, and they came home at the setting of the sun. But as the Twins passed into the palace, the sun went down, and they fell lifeless on the threshold, for that day was Castor's day of doom, nor could Zeus himself give him one hour of earthly life, beyond his destined span. Then there was weeping and wailing in the house of Tyndareus, and Queen Leda tore her golden hair for sorrow, beholding those pale, silent forms of her beloved sons. From ancient times, the kings of Laconia were buried in rock-hewn sepulchres on the hillside without their city, and in such a vault Tyndareus laid the Twin Brethren. And all the land mourned them many days.

At this same time, Leda's nurse, now very aged, lay in her death-bed, and when she felt her hour was come, she sent for the King and told him all she knew, and showed him the swan's feather and the broken eggshell to prove her tale. Tyndareus was filled with rage that his wife had so deceived him, and reared as his lawful heir a child who was none of his, and he burst with drawn sword into her chamber, for he had a mind to kill her.

"Basely have you dealt with me, Leda," he cried to her, "and a bitter woe has your deceit brought on my house. Yes, I

well believe that the gods, to punish such falseness, have cut off my only son, together with that stranger whom you dared to call his brother. Now must I go childless to my grave, but you shall not live to see it."

Pale and trembling stood Leda before the furious King, but she answered never a word. Then suddenly a great light shone round about her, and Tyndareus saw the Twin Brethren hovering in that glory above her head. "My father," said Castor, in a voice of celestial sweetness, "be not wroth with our dear mother, for all she did was commanded her by most high Zeus." And he revealed the whole truth to Tyndareus, and bade him and Leda grieve no more, because both he and Polydeuces were happy for ever.

"To you also," he said to them, "Zeus grants happiness beyond the lot of other mortals, not that your children shall reign after you, but that you shall be called the father and mother of the Heavenly Twins, the Saviours of men." When Castor had thus spoken, the glory faded away, and the radiant Brethren vanished with it.

But, ever after, just such a light would often play over masts and sails of ships in peril at sea, and immediately the tempest would cease. Sometimes, in its sudden glare, the sailors caught sight of two princely youths standing on their deck who disappeared the next instant. Often, too, men hard pressed in battle saw two strange warriors fighting in their ranks, arrayed in silver armour, and riding on snow-white steeds, and they were liker each to the other than any twins that were ever seen. Before the charge of those riders, the bravest foes, although they were ten to one, broke and scattered in headlong rout, but always when the victory was won they vanished into air. At last a rumour spread (but none could say how it arose) that these workers of deliverance were the twin sons of Leda, whom the gods had taken to themselves in their youthful prime, and given them power to become saviours of men after their death, as Heracles, their comrade, was in his lifetime. And thereafter shrines were built in many cities to Castor and Polydeuces,

whither many a warrior and seaman whom they had succoured in dire peril came with grateful heart to pay his vows of thanksgiving.

"Back comes the chief in triumph
Who in the hour of fight
Hath seen the Great Twin Brethren
In Harness on his right:
Safe comes the ship to haven
Through billows and through gales,
If one the Great Twin Brethren
Sit shining on the sails."

CHAPTER VII

THE ISLE OF THE ROSE

I

In the days when the world began, there was an isle of the sea where the first roses bloomed wild on the first rose trees that ever grew. From its mountain peaks down to the very margin of the sparkling waves, the isle glowed with their crimson blossoms all the year, for in those days Earth had perpetual spring. But this rose-embowered land was like a fair garden haunted by deadly serpents, for the folk who dwelt in it were all wizards and warlocks. They were not as other men, but could change their shape to what they pleased, and they had the evil eye, which has power to blight every living thing it looks upon. The people of the neighbouring isles and coastlands lived in continual dread of that tribe of sorcerers, who were named the Telchines, because, in the malice of their black hearts they would sink ships by their enchantments, and come flying on the wings of the wind to blast crops of bewitch cattle by their baleful glance.

In that far-off time, Zeus and his brethren were yet unborn, and Kronos, the old sky-god, was king over all. Now Earth, the mother of gods and men, prophesied to Kronos that one of his own children would drive him from his heavenly throne, therefore he sought to destroy them at their birth. But Rhea, his wife, hid them all as soon as they were born, and put stones wrapped in swaddling-bands into their cradles, which Kronos cast into a pit of darkness, in mistake for his children. The youngest-born was Zeus, and him his goddess-mother carried secretly to a cave on a lonely mountain, where the Fairies of the Rocks nursed him, and the Wild Men of the Woods kept up a din of nights with drums and cymbals, lest Kronos should

hear his baby cries. And when the young god grew to his full strength, he brought Earth's prophecy to pass, for he drove his father from the sky to the Sunset Isles at the World's End, and sat upon his throne. That self-same day, certain ancient women, lame and limping, stood before the throne, and Zeus asked them who they were. "We are the Prayers of Men," they answered, "sent up from earth to call down vengeance on the evil Telchines, who, by foul magic, lay waste fields and vineyards, and strike dead the firstlings of the flocks. We are lame, like all our sisterhood, and hobble slowly on our errands, yet of all messengers we are the surest in the end." Then the wrath of Zeus was kindled against that wizard-folk, and he hurled down red-hot thunderbolts, and rained a great rain upon the sea, till its waters boiled like a cauldron, and broke in monstrous billows over the isle of the Telchines. The bed of the deep rocked and heaved where the thunderbolts crashed upon it through the seething waters, and in that shock the foundations of the isle crumbled beneath it, and it sank with all its roses fathoms down under the waves. So perished the Telchines, yet there were some of them who by their art had foreknowledge of the coming doom, and fled betimes to another land, where, for fear of Zeus, they wrought evil no more, but won a great name for skill in the working of iron, which they, of all mortals, first found a way to forge and temper.

Now Zeus kept for himself the kingdom of the sky, and gave his brother Poseidon dominion over the seas and rivers, but as for the Earth, he portioned it out by lot among the other gods. But it so chanced that Helios, the Sun-god, was not present with the rest at the drawing of the lots, and thus no land was allotted for him to call his own. Pure and holy was that light-giving god, and when next he came into the heavenly halls, it grieved the Immortals that they had forgotten him and left him portionless. Then Zeus would have cast lots again, but Helios said, "Nay, King of us all, of that there is no need. For, as I journey from East to West in my flaming car, I have looked down into the deeps of the sea, and have seen a fair isle growing up under the waves, as it were a rose upon its stem. Let that isle be my

portion when it rises into the upper air, and bid the Three Weird Sisters, whose word is law in Earth and Heaven, promise with a binding oath that it shall remain my heritage for ever."

So Zeus called the Three Weird Sisters, and they came and stood before him, grey-haired women, robed in grey. Now they were older than Time and the beginning of things, yet none who looked on their calm faces could tell if they were old or young. The First Sister was winding black thread and white threads on a spindle; the Second was spinning with a golden distaff; the Third had in her hand a pair of shears. And the threads were the lives of men, which, when the Second Sister had spun to the length ordained for them, the Third cut short with her glittering shears. Zeus bade the swear as Helios desired, and they said, "We will swear by the Loathly Water, for that great oath binds all the everlasting gods." Forthwith Zeus sent Iris his messenger to fetch some of that water, which rises in a fount called Styx, that is to say "Hateful," and falls down a cleft of the Earth into the Under World. Colder than ice is the Loathly Water, and deadly to drink, and the strongest vessel cannot contain it, for it shivers even iron in pieces. But the gods know that the only cup which can hold it is an ass's hoof, and in such a cup Iris brought it to the Three Sisters, Then the Second Sister held the cup on high, and swore by the Loathly Water that Helios should be lord of the isle, from the day it arose out of the waves to the end of time, and she poured out the water on the ground. For she it is who gives to all that live, both gods and men, their share of good and evil, but the other two have power in the hour of birth and of death.

It was the sunken land of the Telchines that Helios had marked springing upwards like a tree from its root in the ocean floor, and not many times did he journey round the sky before it shone, green as emerald, on the silver breast of the sea. The Sun-god poured down his keenest rays on the hills and vales until the salt ooze of the deep was dried up from their leafy thickets, once blossoming with a million roses. Those flowers had perished in the waves, but a fairer flower lay in the midst of the wild-briar

coverts—a sleeping maiden with cheeks like rose-leaves and hair golden as the rose's heart. Helios beheld her in joy and wonder, and hastened his fiery-footed horses westward, that he might visit this treasure of his isle when he had stabled them in his ocean palace. Then, in the purple twilight, he came to the bower where the maiden lay still sleeping, and awoke her with a kiss. And her eyes opened from a slumber of years to behold that radiant god, for she was the Fairy of the First Rose Trees, who had slept an enchanted sleep ever since the sea closed over the Telchines' isle. In all the Earth, Helios the all-seeing had seen nothing so lovely as her face, and he promised, if she would be his bride, to make her Queen of his sea-born land and call it by her name, and from that hour to this, it has been called the Isle of the Rose. But at first she wept, because all her flowers were drowned, and where her tears fell, they became white roses, and the white roses she kissed turned red.

Seven sons were born to Helios and the Rose Fairy, who, when they were grown to manhood, gathered a folk together from overseas, and builded a fair city on a hill of the isle. Then they said to their father, "We would have a temple in the high place of our city, according to the custom of men, wherein one of the Immortals may abide, and bless us as his own people. And we know that this land is yours for ever, therefore in your honour we will build the temple." But Helios forbade them, and said, "It is not for me, who day by day must guide the chariot of the sun, to dwell in any temple made with hands. I will teach you what you must do to win a divine guardian for your city. There is rumour in Heaven of a prophecy uttered by Mother Earth that a new goddess will be born ere long, whose mighty power will prosper with boundless wealth and glory the city she chooses for her abode. And it is foretold that she will choose the city of those who first honour with a burnt sacrifice. So now build a temple, even as you desire, and be ready, when you hear tidings of such a birth, to offer a sacrifice forthwith to the new Immortal." The seven princes did as they were bidden, and they laid wood on the altar of the temple, ready to be kindled when the time came. Now it befell, while all the gods sat in council

one day, and talked together, after their manner, about the affairs of mortals, that Zeus fell into deep thought, pondering how he might rule his kingdom for the best. Then, on a sudden, his brain throbbled with mighty pangs, and he cried aloud in his anguish to Hephaestus, the lame smith of the gods, "Take your axe, Hephaestus, and cleave open my head, lest it burst in pieces, for this pain is as it were a live thing, struggling to come forth." Straightway Hephaestus heaved up his axe, and cleft the head of Zeus, and behold, a thick cloud of fiery vapour rose up from the wound, like a pillar of smoke. But even as the astonished gods looked upon it, its form was changed to the likeness of a woman of tall stature and glorious aspect, wearing a crested helm, and brandishing a spear, and she sprang down in the midst of them, uttering a great war-whoop. At that cry, the heavens trembled, and the earth was shaken, and the gods themselves shuddered on their golden thrones. And the Four Winds carried the tidings East and West and South and North, that a new goddess was born into the world, the daughter of Zeus without a mother. The seven sons of Helios no sooner heard it, than they took offering of all the first-fruits of their land, and hastened to the temple they had built, which crowned the hill whereon their city stood. But in their haste, they forgot one thing; when they had laid the sacrifice on the altar, they found too late that none of them had brought fire to kindle the wood, and so they left the offering there unburnt, praying the daughter of Zeus to accept it with favour, and went their way. Meanwhile, the men of another city, though they knew not the prophecy concerning the goddess, were zealous to do her honour as soon as they heard the wondrous tale of her birth, being indeed the most pious folk in all the world, and, after the sons of Helios, they were the first of mankind to offer her sacrifice, nor did they neglect to burn it with fire. Therefore the daughter of Zeus came to abide in their city, and was its mighty defender ever after, and because she loved it exceedingly, she made it more glorious than any other city has been, or will be. And from its name, which was Athens, she took her own great name of Athena.

Nevertheless, the goddess was not unmindful of the prayer of the seven princes, whose sacrifice was the first, although it was imperfect, and she asked Zeus to reward them for honouring her, with some gift that would make their city flourish. So Zeus, for her sake, snowed golden snow upon the Isle of the Rose, which sprinkled all the hills with glittering flakes, and filled the valleys with dazzling drifts, till the Sun-god's children and their people were weary of gathering it, and their storehouses were full to overflowing with the wondrous treasure. After this, Athena herself appeared to the seven princes, fair and terrible, in her shining armour, and said to them: "My father has recompensed your good intent towards me with showers of gold, but I will give you a gift far above wealth, even the gift of wisdom. For I have wisdom beyond all the Immortals, except King Zeus, because I was born from his brain, and I can bestow it on whomsoever I will. Now, then, you shall become wiser than the wisest seers, and have such knowledge of all arts and handicrafts that you shall work greater wonders by pure skill than ever the Telchines did in this isle by unhallowed wizardry." And as the goddess promised, so it was; the children of Helios became master-workers in every craft then known among men, and of many more they were the first inventors. No such skilful shipwrights ever lived before, no such cunning artificers in metal, no such marvellous builders of masonry. But most of all their fame went abroad for works which all who beheld them deemed things done by witchcraft, for there was no shape of man, or beast, or bird, but they could make an image of it, molten or graven, so perfectly that it seemed alive. Report of these marvels, and their boundless wealth, drew strangers from all lands to the Isle of the Rose, until the seven princes were forced to build other cities also, because of the multitude of their folk. So, in the after time, the land of the First Roses, the Sun-gods's chosen heritage, became the home of a great people, and its name was famous in all the earth for their riches, and for those same arts which the seven sons of Helios learned by grace of Athena.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST HORSE

There was a king of the olden time who heard a prophecy that the child of his only daughter would destroy him. This daughter was the loveliest princess in the world, and her name was Danae. Her father loved her well, but when he heard that prophecy, he shut her up all alone in a brazen tower, and let no one come near her except himself, for he thought, "My daughter shall never marry, lest she have a child who brings me doom." The fair young princess was very lonely in her tower; all day she had nothing to do but comb her golden hair and spin with her silver distaff, and gaze through barred casements at the hills and woods, where she longed to wander free. The stern King forbade her even to show herself on the roof of the tower by day, but at night she would often go there to weep and bewail her lot under the stars. Now it chanced one midsummer night, that the King of all the Fairies saw her weeping, and heard her saying that she would not be so unhappy if only she had one living thing to love and to play with in her prison. He took pity on the captive princess, and when she lay down to sleep, he came and whispered in her ear, "Danae, the Fairies have sent you a playfellow." Danae awoke, and behold, a shower of gold was falling round her and drifting into a heap upon her bed. But when she put out her hands to touch the Fairy gold, the heap turned into a beautiful little child, whose yellow hair was bright as sunshine. Overjoyed, she took him into her arms, and hushed him to sleep, but she herself could sleep no more that night for thinking of this wonderful gift the Fairies had sent her.

Next morning, the King came as usual to the tower to see how his daughter fared, and found her playing with the child. "Daughter," said he, "whose child is this, and how came he here?"

"He is mine," said the princess; "the Fairies have sent him to me, in pity for my loneliness."

At these words, fear and wrath possessed the King, for it seemed to him that this must be the child spoken of in the prophecy. Moreover, he did not believe the Fairies had sent him, but thought that Danae had by some means contrived to have him brought into the tower so that she might rear up a child to slay her father and release her. So that cruel King shut up the princess and the babe in a great chest, and had it thrown into the sea. But the gods did not suffer them to perish; the chest drifted to an island, where certain fishermen drew it ashore in their nets, and, having opened it, ran to tell the King that a lovely lady and her child were cast in wondrous wise upon his shores. The island King received Danae with all kindness, but when he asked her who she was, she would only tell him that she was a princess from a far country, who had escaped from a shipwreck in that chest with her little son. For she feared the Fairy child would be taken from her, if she told all the truth.

Now, because of Danae's beauty, the island King would fain have wedded her, but she would have none of him, saying that all her love was given to her son, and when the King saw that his suit was vain, he began to hate Perseus, for so the child was called. Yet he bided his time until Perseus was grown a lad, and then, with a show of friendliness, he said to him, "Such a noble youth as you are should not be content to live in sloth at his mother's side, when there are great deeds to be done. I know of an adventure that will bring you everlasting fame, if you can brave the peril of it."

"Tell me what it is," said Perseus, "for I long to win renown."

"Far in the West," said the King, "there dwell three wondrous sisters, called the Gorgons, who have the faces and forms of beautiful women, but they are winged, and instead of tresses black snakes grow on their heads. Two are immortal, but

the third, whose name is Medusa, is mortal, and to slay that dire creature were a feat worthy of the mightiest hero."

Forthwith Perseus was fired with longing to achieve that enterprise, and he set out on the quest, in which he would have perished, as the King hoped, had not a goddess befriended him. Athena, who loves the brave, came to meet the youth as he drew near the lonely western mountain where the Gorgons dwelt, and he greeted her without fear, for in those days the Immortals walked freely among men.

"Prince," she said, "how is it you are come without a shield to slay Medusa?"

"I have my sword," said Perseus, "and why should I need a shield?"

Then the goddess told him a thing that the King purposely kept hidden from him, namely, that Medusa's eyes turned all who looked on them to stone. "Take my burnished shield," she said, "and look thereon as on a mirror, while I lead you backwards to the Gorgons. She whom you will see in the shield, sitting between her sisters, is Medusa, and by help of that mirror you must make shift to smite off her head."

Perseus did just as he was bidden, and with eyes still fixed on the bright shield, he cut off Medusa's head at one blow. Then the other two Gorgons rose on their great wings into the air, and hovered above their dead sister, shrilling out a weird lament. There was strange beauty in that mournful strain; tears filled the eyes of Perseus as he listened to it, nor did Athena herself hear it unmoved. And in after times she devised the first flute, that she might imitate the Gorgons' wailing tones, and taught mortals to play thereon the tune which is still called "Medusa's Dirge."

But now, as the Gorgons sang, Perseus saw a wondrous sight. Forth from the ground where Medusa's blood lay in a dark pool, sprang a four-legged creature, the like of which neither he nor any man had ever seen. For it was the First Horse. Perseus

ran to the beautiful, prancing beast to seize him by the mane, but the First Horse had wings, and straightway he soared aloft and passed from sight. Then Athena took Medusa's head and fixed it in the centre of her shield, and she covered it with her veil. "Take this home with you," she said to Perseus, "and use it as you shall see need, but remember that to look on it is death."



PEGASUS AND HIS RIDER.

Now when Perseus came home, he found that the island King had bound Danae in chains and cast her into a dungeon because she would not wed him. So he uncovered the shield, and brandished it before the eyes of the King and his servants, and they were turned to stone. After that, he achieved many adventures by help of the Gorgon shield, before Athena took it to herself again, because the power of it was too great to be left in mortal keeping, and in the end he slew Danae's father, yet he did that by mischance.

Thus the prophecy was fulfilled, and thereafter Danae and her Fairy child lived happy to their lives' end. But now hear the story of the First Horse.

That day he was born from the Gorgon's blood, he flew over land and sea to a high mountain, nigh to a city called Corinth. There was no water on the mountain for him to drink, but he stamped with his shining hoof upon the ground, and a clear spring gushed forth. This was seen by certain woodcutters, who went hastily to the city and told the King that a marvellous beast had appeared on the mountain. Then the King's son, whose name was Bellerophon, went to hunt the beast, but when he saw the First Horse, he wished to take him alive, for he seemed as gentle as he was beautiful, and showed no fear of man. But the Horse, though he let Bellerophon come near, and stroke his neck, broke away whenever he tried to hold him, or to jump on his back, till at last the King's son went home discouraged. And the people of Corinth called the strange new creature Pegasus, which means "Wellspring" in their language, because he made the water flow. Now Bellerophon thought for many days how he might catch the Horse and tame him, and at length he asked the seer of the city what to do, saying, "If I could but master this Pegasus, he would carry me swifter than the wind." "My counsel is," said the seer, "that you go this night to the temple of Athena and pray the goddess to help you. Then lie down to sleep on the altar, and it may be she will show you some device in a dream." Bellerophon followed his counsel and scarcely had he fallen asleep when Athena appeared to him in a dream, and said, "Awake, King's son of Corinth. Behold, I bring you a golden charm which will tame Pegasus as soon as you bind it about his jaws. And when you are lord of him, offer a white bull to Poseidon, the Earth-shaking god, and hang up the charm over my altar, for we two, in love to this city, sent the First Horse hither to be the servant of man." Bellerophon awoke, and he was alone, but he knew he had had a true vision, for behold a golden thing lay beside him, the like of which was never seen on earth before. He showed it to the seer, and told the vision, and then joyfully he hastened to the mountain with the charm. Pegasus stood still as though enchanted while he slipped it over his head and between his teeth, and from that moment the King's son could guide him at will. Thus, ever after, Corinth had renown as

the place where the First Horse was tamed by help of the First Bit and Bridle. And two memorials of the wonder remained there to later ages, even the Fountain Pirene, which Pegasus made to flow from the hillside, and that golden gift of Athena, which Bellerophon, as she bade him, dedicated in her temple.

Now Bellerophon rode his winged steed far and wide over land and sea, wherever he heard of monsters to be slain, or wicked kings to be overthrown, and he rided the earth of many such, shooting his arrows upon them from the bosom of the air.

But at last, in the pride of his heart, he boasted that he would mount up to Heaven and enter the abode of the gods, and so he came to no good end. For Zeus caused a gadfly to sting Pegasus as he soared upward, and his sudden plunge threw Bellerophon from his back. No mortal eye saw rider or horse again, and of the rash prince's fate those who were wisest spoke the least, but of Pegasus it was told that he rested thenceforth in those shining stalls where the horses of the gods feed from golden mangers

CHAPTER IX

THE BUILDERS OF TROY

I

Poseidon and Apollo, who were ever fast friends, once took such displeasure at King Zeus that they plotted to drive him from his throne. But he was aware of it, and armed himself with his flaming thunderbolts, wherewith to dash the rebels down from the battlements of the sky into the Lake of Darkness under the earth. And this he would have done, had not the gentle Leto, Apollo's mother, stayed his uplifted arm, and entreated him to spare her child. Then Zeus, for love of that fair, gracious goddess, said he would not cast Poseidon and Apollo into the gloomy Under World, but they must atone for their fault by a year of penance on earth, and dwell as hired servants in the house of some mortal.

So the two gods wandered through many lands in the guise of labouring men till they came to the city of a king called Laomedon, and offered to serve him for a year. The King was content, and agreed with them for a certain wage, which he said he would pay them at the year's end. Now Apollo seemed a mere lad, and him the King sent to keep his sheep among the hills, but Poseidon appeared a strong, full-grown man, fit for the hardest toil, therefore he was set to the work of a mason. Laomedon soon saw that his new servant was a marvellous builder; no one had ever been seen in that land who could hew stones into shape so deftly, and lay them so truly in their courses. One day he called Poseidon to him, and said, "I see, churl, that you do no lack for skill, and I have a task for you that will put it to proof. This city of mine has no defences but earthen ramparts, and palisades of timber; build me a wall of hewn stones round it, and look that the work be done by the year's end."

"What men shall I have to help me, King?" said Poseidon.

"You shall have none, churl," said the King, "unless you choose to call the lad, your comrade, from the sheepfolds." And he went away laughing in his beard.

This Laomedon was a hard man, and very greedy of gain, and he had spoken thus to Poseidon with intent to defraud him of his wages, for he never dreamed that one pair of hands could build a wall round the city within a year, and he meant to send away the stranger without payment when the time came, on the pretext that his task was not performed. But Poseidon sent word to Apollo to come and help him, and day by day the wall rose higher and higher under their tireless hands, until a thick ring of massive stone encircled the city, pierced with gateways that were flanked by lofty towers. Only, at one point, there remained an opening wide enough for a man to pass through, where the wall was still unfinished. All this was done by the last day of the full year that the two gods were bound to serve Laomedon, and on the morning of that day, he himself came to view the wall. Then said Poseidon, "Be pleased, O King, to pay the wages promised to me and my fellow, for the year is over, and the wall is builded." But Laomedon spied the gap in the wall, and with feigned anger he said, "Base churls that you are, you have left your task undone, and do you presume to claim wages? Begone, or I will make you rue this insolence." "Take heed to your words, Laomedon," said Apollo, "we have served you faithfully, and claim but our just due. As for yonder gap, an hour's work will suffice to close it, and that we will see to before departing." "Do you bandy speech with me, malapert boy?" cried the King. "I tell you, since the sun is risen already, the work is *not* completed by the day appointed. Now, by all the gods, if you loiter here but till to-morrow, I will spoil that dainty face of yours, and crop the ears from your head." So saying, he turned and strode haughtily away. "Apollo," said Poseidon, "I have a mind to swallow up this King in an earthquake, and his city along with him, for the year of our servitude is ended, and I am

free to use my power once more." "Nay," said the golden-haired god, "that must not be. I can foresee the doom that waits him, but the cup of his iniquity is not yet full. I will tell you what we may do to prepare the way of the comer who shall destroy him. If this wall were wholly built by immortal hands, the city could never be taken by an enemy, but if we cause a mortal man to fill up the gap we have left, then other mortals will be able to make a breach through his handiwork. Let us go hence, and seek some skilful builder among men, whom we may bring hither to finish the wall; so, when Laomedon sees it to-morrow, he will believe that we ourselves closed the gap." "I know of such a builder," said Poseidon. "Wait for me the while, and I will bring him to you." With that, he went quickly to the sea-beach near the city, and called up his white horses from the deep, and straightway they came to him, harnessed to his golden car. Poseidon mounted the chariot, and urged his horses onward over the sea-waves till he came to a certain island that was called Aegina. Here dwelt a wise and holy king named Aeacus, so famed for his justice that the gods themselves resorted to him for judgment when disputes arose between any of them. Aeacus was born in that island, and grew up there all alone, for in those days it was desert, but at last he prayed to Zeus that he might have folk to rule over, and Zeus turned all the ants of the island into men. And these men did not know how to plough and sow, nor the use of fire, nor how to build houses, until Aeacus taught them all these and other arts, which he had found out for himself. This King it was who first made sailing-ships, and coined silver into money, but in nothing was he more skilful than in building with stone.

When he now saw Poseidon, he greeted him as a friend, for the gods were no strangers to his house, and having heard what service was required of him, he entered the golden chariot, and they came swiftly over the sea to the city of Laomedon. Then Aeacus built up the gap in the wall, and before sunset he put the coping-stone on his masonry, which was fitted so smoothly to the rest that no eye could see where the gap had been. But, as he laid the last stone in place, the watching gods

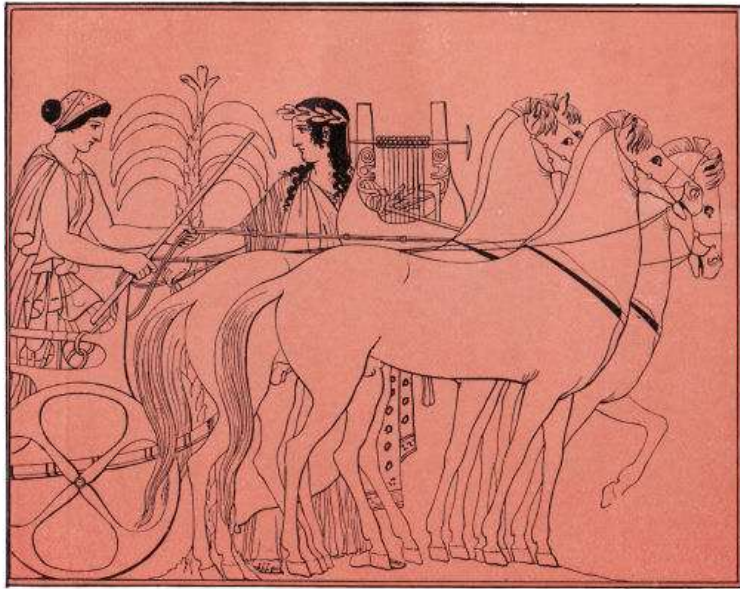
cried to him to draw back, and he stood aside to mark a strange marvel. Two huge serpents came gliding along, proudly arching their emerald necks, straight to the new-finished wall, and hurled themselves upon the battlement. It seemed their mighty spring would carry them clear over it, but their bodies struck the stonework with a dull thud, and the monsters fell back, writhing in throes of death. Instantly a third serpent, whose head was crested with golden plumes, darted to the spot, reared its great coils aloft, and sprang over the wall, uttering no serpent's hiss, but, strange to tell, a ringing battle-cry. Straightway Apollo bounded to the wall, and laying his hand upon it, thus he spoke: "To you, Aeacus, this sign is sent by Zeus, who has you ever in his keeping. Hear now what it betokens. The three serpents are three princes of your blood who will fight against this city; two must perish beneath its wall, but the third shall break in at this very place where your own hands have raised the bulwark, and shall burn the city with fire."

"Prophet of Zeus," said Aeacus, "when shall these things come to pass?"

"In the fourth generation," answered Apollo, "for those princes are your children's children yet to be. But hear this also, although the city will not be destroyed in your lifetime, you will live to hear that it is taken in war by your own son, and in that day the wicked Laomedon shall be slain, who had dealt so treacherously with us."

While Apollo spoke, the sun went down, and twilight fell upon land and sea. Aeacus saw two chariots draw near, glimmering in the dusk, and on one of them Apollo mounted, and went northward swifter than the wind. Then said Poseidon, "Apollo goes to the land beyond the North Wind, to visit the folk who honour him above all gods, and hold high festival with now his year of servitude is past. And I too will visit the temple I love best of all that mortals have built for me, which stands between two seas, not far removed from your island of Aegina. Come, let us be going, for I will bring you home on my way thither." So the three builders departed from the wall, and in the morning

Laomedon came again, and was well pleased it was finished, and the labourers he hired were gone without payment. But as for the bodies of the two serpent, they were vanished from the place before he came.



ARTEMIS BRINGS APOLLO HIS CAR.

After this, Laomedon gathered all the people of the land into his city, bidding them dwell no more in villages, as aforetime, because he had built a stronghold where they might be safe from every enemy, and being exceedingly proud of his fair town, girdled with that many-towered wall, he commanded them henceforth to name themselves Trojans, after the name of it. For the city was called Troy.

Now Poseidon could not endure to see the evil King in such prosperity, and ere long he caused the sea to overflow his land, even to the walls of Troy, so that crops and cattle were swallowed up. Then Laomedon called the soothsayers to advise some remedy against the flood, and they all declared that the

waters would not roll back from the land until a certain sea-monster was appeased with prey, which they said swam every night to the city walls. The King had sheep and goats and oxen thrown into the waters, but to no purpose, and at last the soothsayers told him nothing would satisfy the monster but the flesh of a young maiden. Thereupon the King made all the Trojan maidens draw lots, which should be thrown to the beast, and behold, the lot fell on his own daughter, Hesione. But it chanced that Heracles, on his travels about the world, came that very day to the house of Laomedon, while all were loudly bewailing the doom of the princess, and having heard the matter, he said to the King, "What reward will you give me, if I slay this monster?"

"Whatever you will," said the King, "to the half of my kingdom."

"I shall be content," said Heracles, "if you will give me two horses of that wondrous breed which men say the gods gave to your father."

"Gladly will I give them," said the King, and immediately Heracles waded out into the flooded meadows where the monster lay wallowing, and shot him dead with arrows from his mighty bow. Then the sea-waters drew back like an ebbing tide, so that the Trojans saw the carcass of the fearful creature, with huge jaws opened wide, lying stranded on their fields, as it were the black hull of a great ship. Nevertheless, Laomedon hardened his heart to yet another deed of wickedness, and drove Heracles away with threats and revilings, when he claimed his reward. "This is your hour," said Heracles, as he went away, "but mine will come." For he was bound on an errand of the king whom he served at that time, and might not delay to fight in his own quarrel.

II

When Aeacus came back to his island, heavy tidings were brought to him, for it had chanced that while his three sons were playing at quoits, the eldest threw his quoit slantwise, and it struck the youngest on the head, and killed him. Now the two elder were the sons of their father's first wife, but the youngest, whose name was Phocus, was the child of their stepmother. So when the two elder princes saw that their half-brother was dead, they fled out of the island, for their father loved him the best, and they feared lest he should believe they had murdered the lad out of jealousy. These princes were called Telamon and Peleus, and the adventures that befall Peleus are known to you already. But Telamon, the eldest, was betrothed to the daughter of a kin who ruled the island called Salamis, and to that island he fled, while Peleus went to seek his fortune in distant lands. There Telamon took a solemn oath that he had slain Phocus by mischance, and the King of Salamis purified him of the blood-guilt by prayer and sacrifice, as the manner was, and promised to give him his daughter in marriage when he had mourned for his brother a year and a day. Before that time, however, the King fell sick and died, and because he had no son the folk of Salamis chose Telamon to rule over them in his stead. Thus he became King, and at the year's end he married the princess.

On his marriage day, Telamon held a great feast in his house, to which all the men of the island were bidden, both rich and poor, and while they sat at table, one of his servants told him that a stranger stood at the gate, desiring to speak with him.

"What manner of man is he," said Telamon, "and why do you not bring him into the hall?" "He seems in haste to depart, O King," said the servant, "and as for who or what he is, we know not, but he is strangely arrayed. He has no garment but a lion's-skin girt about him, and carries the hugest bow that ever man saw."

"It is the noble Heracles," cried Telamon, "my father's friend and min," and he ran to the gate to welcome him. Heracles, for he it was indeed, at first excused himself from coming in to the banquet, saying that he had come on other business than merrymaking, as might be seen from his rough garb. "You shall tell me of that when you have eaten and drunk," said Telamon, "for it is ill talking between a full man and a fasting. Come, you shall not deny me; this, you must know, is my marriage-feast, and it is lucky chance that brings me such a guest to grace it." With that, he brought Heracles into the hall, and set him in the seat of honour, and the feat went merrily on. Then, when all had their fill of good cheer, Telamon bade his cup-bearer fill a great golden cup with wine, and, taking the goblet, he gave it into the hand of Heracles, saying, "My noble guest, pour out now the accustomed libation, for you are worthier than I." And thereby he paid Heracles the highest mark of honour, since it was his own right, as lord of the feast, to pour out the first drink-offering to the gods. Now the custom of the drink-offering was that when men began carousing after a feast, their cups were filled thrice with wine, and at each filling one cup was poured out to some god with a prayer for blessing, but always the first cup of those three was offered to Zeus. Heracles took the golden goblet, and rose up, and thus he prayed as he poured the wine on the ground: "Hear me now, King of Gods, if ever prayer of mine could win your grace. Grant that a son may be born to Telamon, my friend, as brave in soul and as strong in body as the lion whose hide I wear, even that might beast I slew at Nemea, in the first of my fights with savage monsters." Even as he spoke, an eagle flew into the hall through the open doors, perched a moment on the oaken rafters, and flew forth again. "Rejoice, Telamon," cried Heracles, "for Zeus has sent his own bird in sign that he will grant my prayer. You will have the son your heart secretly longs for, and when he is born, call him, I charge you, after the eagle." Heracles said this with a rapt look, and chanting voice, like a seer when the spirit of prophecy comes over him, and forthwith he sat down. Presently Telamon asked him what that errand was that brought him to Salamis, but

Heracles said, "I came to call you to a fray, and little thought to light on a wedding-feast. Let us speak of the matter to-morrow, for I will not mar these revels with talk of blood-shedding."

So, on the morrow, he told Telamon that he needed a warrior comrade to sail with him to Troy and fight against Laomedon, who had used him very evilly; and Telamon was so eager to share the adventure that he commanded a ship to be made ready, took leave of his bride, and set sail with Heracles that very day. Laomedon heard news of their landing, and went out to give them battle with all his men.

That day those two valiant comrades did wondrous feats of arms, and, with the crew of one ship, they fought the whole army of Troy, until they drove them in flight to their walls. Many were slain as they fled, but Laomedon and the greater part of his host escaped into the city, and barred the gates behind them. Then, shouting his war-cry in a voice like thunder, Telamon sprang to the wall, and, in the very spot where the serpent crossed it, he battered it down with the butt-end of his spear, and rushed through the breach, calling Heracles to follow. And Heracles came after, bending his terrible bow, and shot Laomedon through the heart in the midst of the city. When the people saw their King fall there was no more spirit in them. "Troy is taken," they cried, and implored mercy of the conquerors. Thus did vengeance overtake that treacherous King. Heracles took all the treasures of his house, and all the wealth of the city, and divided the spoil, giving a due portion to all his followers. Now three sons of Laomedon were slain in the fight, but his youngest, who was yet a child, was found hiding in the palace with his sister, the Princess Hesione, and they were brought as captives to Heracles. The princess wept and wrung her hands, crying, "Alas, great champion, will you slay this child for his father's sin?"

"Nay, princess," said Heracles, "that would be far from me. I would set him free, for my own part, but my comrades have a right to divide the captives among them by lot. Nevertheless, you shall ransom him at a price from the man to

whom the lot gives him. As for yourself, I may claim you for my own prize, because I am leader." Then they drew lots for all the captives, and the little prince fell to the lot of Telamon.

"Chieftain," said Hesione, "what ransom will you take for my brother?"

"I will take the gold-embroidered veil you wear," said Telamon.

So Hesione ransomed her brother for that price, and gave him in charge to the elders of the city to be brought up. From that day the child was called Priam, which means "Bought with a price," and when he grew up he reigned as king in Troy.

But Hesione was glad when she heard she was the prize of Heracles, for she had loved him since he delivered her from being cast to the sea-monster, and she said to him, "It were hateful to me to abide here now my father is dead. Let me follow you whithersoever you are going, my lord."

"Fairest Hesione," said Heracles, "I am a wanderer on the earth, and my road lies in perilous places, where I cannot take a maiden. I will send you with Telamon to Salamis, and for my sake he will treat you well, but as for me, I am going even now on another adventure."

"I go not home without you, my comrade," cried Telamon. "Never shall it be said that I returned with spoils and captives, leaving you to face new dangers alone. Take me on your quest, whatever it may be, and let me have the glory of fighting twice at the side of Heracles." Then Heracles consented, and when Telamon had sent his ship home with Hesione and the other captives, and the booty, the two friends went eastward to the country of the Amazons. For the king whom Heracles served had bidden him fetch for his daughter the golden girdle of the Amazon Queen. Now the Amazons were a nation of women, who suffered no men to come into their country, and they were warriors all, armed with brazen bows, and riding fierce swift horses. But how Heracles, with help of Telamon, overcame them

in a great battle, and took the girdle of their Queen, who fell fighting, and what else the comrades did before they came back to Salamis, belongs to another tale. Here we tell only of the building of Troy and what came of it.

A whole year was Telamon away, and when he came again to his house he found it full of mirth and gladness, because the son was born for whom Heracles prayed. Telamon remembered his friend's bidding, and called the child Ajax, which means "The Eagle" in the old speech of that land. And Ajax grew up a mighty youth, according to the prayer of Heracles, with a fearless soul that matched his stalwart body. Meanwhile King Aeacus heard of all these things in Aegina, and sent for his son Telamon, desiring to be reconciled to him before he died. When the ship he had sent returned, Aeacus went down to the harbour to meet it, and saw his son standing on the deck, holding the young Ajax in his arms, and they greeted again with tears. But Telamon would not set foot on shore till he had solemnly called the gods to witness that he was guiltless of murdering Phocus his brother.

Now while Telamon sojourned in Aegina, the time came for good King Aeacus to die, and in his last hour, he bade his son bring the child Ajax to him. And then he told the marvel he had seen at the building of Troy's wall, and how Apollo foretold from the sign of the Three Serpents that the city should twice be taken by warriors of his house, and the second time be utterly laid low. "The gods grant," he said, laying his hand on the head of Ajax, "that this my grandchild, may prove to be that Third Serpent, the conqueror." But that prayer was vain, for the fate of Ajax was otherwise ordained. He went indeed with the great host that beleaguered Troy in days to come, and of all the champions who fought in that long war, none did more valiant deeds than he, except Achilles, the son of Peleus. But those two were the two warriors sprung from Aeacus, whose doom was foreshadowed by the death of the first Two Serpents. Who, then, was the Third, the golden-crested, who sprang with a cry of victory over the new-built wall? In the tale of Peleus and Thetis,

it was told how Achilles wedded the king's daughter of the isle where his mother hid him, and left her, a mourning bride, to follow the way of glory. And he, the flower of all heroes, found death and deathless fame on the battlefield of Troy, and never saw the child whom the king's daughter bore to him in Scyros. Then came a prophecy to the Greek host that the city should never be taken without help of the son of Achilles, and they sent and fetched the young prince to their camp. The comrades of his father beheld the lad with mingled joy and pain, so like he was to their lost chief, and when he led them to the fight in shining arms, and flew lion-like upon the foes, the cry went up that Achilles was come back to life. And in no long time all Apollo's word to Aeacus was fulfilled, for that golden-haired youth was the golden-crested conquering Serpent who appeared to the Builders of Troy.