Bulfinch's Mythology: The Age of Fable
by Thomas Bulfinch

Chapter 27 - The Trojan War

Minerva was the goddess of wisdom, but on one occasion she did a very foolish thing; she entered into competition with Juno and Venus for the prize of beauty. It happened thus: At the nuptials of Peleus and Thetis all the gods were invited with the exception of Eris, or Discord. Enraged at her exclusion, the goddess threw a golden apple among the guests, with the inscription, "For the fairest." Thereupon Juno, Venus, and Minerva each claimed the apple. Jupiter, not willing to decide in so delicate a matter, sent the goddesses to Mount Ida, where the beautiful shepherd Paris was tending his flocks, and to him was committed the decision. The goddesses accordingly appeared before him. Juno promised him power and riches, Minerva glory and renown in war, and Venus the fairest of women for his wife, each attempting to bias his decision in her own favor. Paris decided in favor of Venus and gave her the golden apple, thus making the two other goddesses his enemies. Under the protection of Venus, Paris sailed to Greece, and was hospitably received by Menelaus, king of Sparta. Now Helen, the wife of Menelaus, was the very woman whom Venus had destined for Paris, the fairest of her sex. She had been sought as a bride by numerous suitors, and before her decision was made known, they all, at the suggestion of Ulysses, one of their number, took an oath that they would defend her from all injury and avenge her cause if necessary. She chose Menelaus, and was living with him happily when Paris became their guest. Paris, aided by Venus, persuaded her to elope with him, and carried her to Troy, whence arose the famous Trojan war, the theme of the greatest poems of antiquity, those of Homer and Virgil.

Menelaus called upon his brother chieftains of Greece to fulfil their pledge, and join him in his efforts to recover his wife. They generally came forward, but Ulysses, who had married Penelope, and was very happy in his wife and child, had no disposition to embark in such a troublesome affair. He therefore hung back and Palamedes was sent to urge him. When Palamedes arrived at Ithaca Ulysses pretended to be mad. He yoked an ass and an ox together to the plough and began to sow salt. Palamedes, to try him, placed the infant Telemachus before the plough, whereupon the father turned the plough aside, showing plainly that he was no madman, and after that could no longer refuse to fulfil his promise. Being now himself gained for the undertaking, he lent his aid to bring in other reluctant chiefs, especially Achilles. This hero was the son of that Thetis at whose marriage the apple of Discord had been thrown among the goddesses. Thetis was herself one of the immortals, a sea-nymph, and knowing that her son was fated to perish before Troy if he went on the expedition, she endeavored to prevent his going. She sent him away to the court of King Lycomedes, and induced him to conceal himself in the disguise of a maiden among the daughters of the king. Ulysses, hearing he was there, went disguised as a merchant to the palace and offered for sale female ornaments, among which he had placed some arms. While the king's daughters were engrossed with the other contents of the merchant's pack, Achilles handled the weapons and thereby betrayed himself to the keen eye of Ulysses, who found no great difficulty in persuading him to disregard his mother's prudent counsels and join his countrymen in the war.

Priam was king of Troy, and Paris, the shepherd and seducer of Helen, was his son. Paris had been brought up in obscurity, because there were certain ominous forebodings connected with him from his infancy that he would be the ruin of the state. These forebodings seemed at length likely to be realized, for the Grecian armament now in preparation was the greatest that had ever been fitted out. Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, and brother of the injured Menelaus, was chosen commander-in-chief. Achilles was their most illustrious warrior. After him ranked Ajax, gigantic in size and of great courage, but dull of intellect; Diomede, second only to Achilles in all the qualities of a hero; Ulysses, famous for his sagacity; and Nestor, the oldest of the Grecian chiefs, and one to whom they all looked up for counsel. But Troy was no feeble enemy. Priam, the king, was now old, but he had been a wise prince and had strengthened his state by good government at home and numerous alliances with his neighbors. But the principal stay and support of his throne was his son Hector, one of the noblest characters painted by heathen antiquity. He felt, from the first, a presentiment of the fall of his country, but still persevered in his heroic resistance, yet by no means justified the wrong which brought this danger upon her. He was united in marriage with Andromache, and as a husband and father his character was not less admirable than as a warrior. The principal leaders on the side of the Trojans, besides Hector, were Aeneas and Deiphobus, Glaucus and Sarpedon.

After two years of preparation the Greek fleet and army assembled in the port of Aulis in Boeotia. Here Agamemnon in hunting killed a stag which was sacred to Diana, and the goddess in return visited the army with pestilence, and produced a calm which prevented the ships from leaving the port. Calchas, the soothsayer, thereupon announced that the wrath of the virgin goddess could only be appeased by the sacrifice of a virgin on her altar, and that none other but the daughter of the offender would be acceptable. Agamemnon, however reluctant, yielded his consent, and the maiden Iphigenia was sent for under the pretence that she was to be married to Achilles. When she was about to be sacrificed the goddess relented and snatched her away, leaving a hind in her place, and Iphigenia, enveloped in a cloud, was carried to Tauris, where Diana made her priestess of her temple.

Tennyson, in his "Dream of Fair Women," makes Iphigenia thus describe her feelings at the moment of sacrifice:

"I was cut off from hope in that sad place,
Which yet to name my spirit loathes and fears;
My father held his hand upon his face;
I, blinded by my tears,

"Still strove to speak; my voice was thick with sighs,
As in a dream. Dimly I could descry
The stern black-bearded kings, with wolfish eyes,
Waiting to see me die.

"The tall masts quivered as they lay afloat,
The temples and the people and the shore;

One drew a sharp knife through my tender throat
Slowly,—and—nothing more."

The wind now proving fair the fleet made sail and brought the forces to the coast of Troy. The Trojans came to oppose their landing, and at the first onset Protesilaus fell by the hand of Hector. Protesilaus had left at home his wife, Laodamia, who was most tenderly attached to him. When the news of his death reached her she implored the gods to be allowed to converse with him only three hours. The request was granted. Mercury led Protesilaus back to the upper world, and when he died a second time Laodamia died with him. There was a story that the nymphs planted elm trees round his grave which grew very well till they were high enough to command a view of Troy, and then withered away, while fresh branches sprang from the roots.

Wordsworth has taken the story of Protesilaus and Laodamia for the subject of a poem. It seems the oracle had declared that victory should be the lot of that party from which should fall the first victim to the war. The poet represents Protesilaus, on his brief return to earth, as relating to Laodamia the story of his fate:

"'The wished-for wind was given; I then revolved
The oracle, upon the silent sea;
And if no worthier led the way, resolved
That of a thousand vessels mine should be
The foremost prow impressing to the strand,—
Mine the first blood that tinged the Trojan sand.

"'Yet bitter, ofttimes bitter was the pang
When of thy loss I thought, beloved wife!
On thee too fondly did my memory hang,
And on the joys we shared in mortal life,
The paths which we had trod,—these fountains, flowers;
My new planned cities and unfinished towers.

"'But should suspense permit the foe to cry,
"Behold they tremble! haughty their array,
Yet of their number no one dares to die?"
In soul I swept the indignity away:
Old frailties then recurred: but lofty thought
In act embodied my deliverance wrought.'

"... upon the side
Of Hellespont (such faith was entertained)
A knot of spiry trees for ages grew
From out the tomb of him for whom she died;
And ever when such stature they had gained
That Ilium's walls were subject to their view,
The trees' tall summits withered at the sight,
A constant interchange of growth and blight!"

The Illiad

The war continued without decisive results for nine years. Then an event occurred which seemed likely to be fatal to the cause of the Greeks, and that was a quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon. It is at this point that the great poem of Homer, "The Iliad," begins. The Greeks, though unsuccessful against Troy, had taken the neighboring and allied cities, and in the division of the spoil a female captive, by name Chryseis, daughter of Chryses, priest of Apollo, had fallen to the share of Agamemnon. Chryses came bearing the sacred emblems of his office, and begged the release of his daughter. Agamemnon refused. Thereupon Chryses implored Apollo to afflict the Greeks till they should be forced to yield their prey. Apollo granted the prayer of his priest, and sent pestilence into the Grecian camp. Then a council was called to deliberate how to allay the wrath of the gods and avert the plague. Achilles boldly charged their misfortunes upon Agamemnon as caused by his withholding Chryseis. Agamemnon, enraged, consented to relinquish his captive, but demanded that Achilles should yield to him in her stead Briseis, a maiden who had fallen to Achilles' share in the division of the spoil. Achilles submitted, but forthwith declared that he would take no further part in the war. He withdrew his forces from the general camp and openly avowed his intention of returning home to Greece.

The gods and goddesses interested themselves as much in this famous war as the parties themselves. It was well known to them that fate had decreed that Troy should fall, at last, if her enemies should persevere and not voluntarily abandon the enterprise. Yet there was room enough left for chance to excite by turns the hopes and fears of the powers above who took part with either side. Juno and Minerva, in consequence of the slight put upon their charms by Paris, were hostile to the Trojans; Venus for the opposite cause favored them. Venus enlisted her admirer Mars on the same side, but Neptune favored the Greeks. Apollo was neutral, sometimes taking one side, sometimes the other, and Jove himself, though he loved the good King Priam, yet exercised a degree of impartiality; not, however, without exceptions.

Thetis, the mother of Achilles, warmly resented the injury done to her son. She repaired immediately to Jove's palace and besought him to make the Greeks repent of their injustice to Achilles by granting success to the Trojan arms. Jupiter consented, and in the battle which ensued the Trojans were completely successful. The Greeks were driven from the field and took refuge in their ships.

Then Agamemnon called a council of his wisest and bravest chiefs. Nestor advised that an embassy should be sent to Achilles to persuade him to return to the field; that Agamemnon should yield the maiden, the cause of the dispute, with ample gifts to atone for the wrong he had done. Agamemnon consented, and Ulysses, Ajax, and Phoenix were sent to carry to Achilles the penitent message. They performed that duty, but Achilles was deaf to their entreaties. He positively refused to return to the field, and persisted in his resolution to embark for Greece without delay.

The Greeks had constructed a rampart around their ships, and now instead of besieging Troy they were in a manner besieged themselves, within their rampart. The next day after the unsuccessful embassy to Achilles, a battle was fought, and the Trojans, favored by Jove, were successful, and succeeded in forcing a passage through the Grecian rampart, and were about to set fire to the ships. Neptune, seeing the Greeks so pressed, came to their rescue. He appeared in the form of Calchas the prophet, encouraged the warriors with his shouts, and appealed to each individually till he raised their ardor to such a pitch that they forced the Trojans to give way. Ajax performed prodigies of valor, and at length encountered Hector. Ajax shouted defiance, to which Hector replied, and hurled his lance at the huge warrior. It was well aimed and struck Ajax, where the belts that bore his sword and shield crossed each other on the breast. The double guard prevented its penetrating and it fell harmless. Then Ajax, seizing a huge stone, one of those that served to prop the ships, hurled it at Hector. It struck him in the neck and stretched him on the plain. His followers instantly seized him and bore him off, stunned and wounded.

While Neptune was thus aiding the Greeks and driving back the Trojans, Jupiter saw nothing of what was going on, for his attention had been drawn from the field by the wiles of Juno. That goddess had arrayed herself in all her charms, and to crown all had borrowed of Venus her girdle, called "Cestus," which had the effect to heighten the wearer's charms to such a degree that they were quite irresistible. So prepared, Juno went to join her husband, who sat on Olympus watching the battle. When he beheld her she looked so charming that the fondness of his early love revived, and, forgetting the contending armies and all other affairs of state, he thought only of her and let the battle go as it would.

But this absorption did not continue long, and when, upon turning his eyes downward, he beheld Hector stretched on the plain almost lifeless from pain and bruises, he dismissed Juno in a rage, commanding her to send Iris and Apollo to him. When Iris came he sent her with a stern message to Neptune, ordering him instantly to quit the field. Apollo was despatched to heal Hector's bruises and to inspirit his heart. These orders were obeyed with such speed that, while the battle still raged, Hector returned to the field and Neptune betook himself to his own dominions.

An arrow from Paris's bow wounded Machaon, son of Aesculapius, who inherited his father's art of healing, and was therefore of great value to the Greeks as their surgeon, besides being one of their bravest warriors. Nestor took Machaon in his chariot and conveyed him from the field. As they passed the ships of Achilles, that hero, looking out over the field, saw the chariot of Nestor and recognized the old chief, but could not discern who the wounded chief was. So calling Patroclus, his companion and dearest friend, he sent him to Nestor's tent to inquire.

Patroclus, arriving at Nestor's tent, saw Machaon wounded, and having told the cause of his coming would have hastened away, but Nestor detained him, to tell him the extent of the Grecian calamities. He reminded him also how, at the time of departing for Troy, Achilles and himself had been charged by their respective fathers with different advice: Achilles to aspire to the highest pitch of glory, Patroclus, as the elder, to keep watch over his friend, and to guide his inexperience. "Now," said Nestor, "is the time for such influence. If the gods so please, thou mayest win him back to the common cause; but if not let him at least send his soldiers to the field, and come thou, Patroclus, clad in his armor, and perhaps the very sight of it may drive back the Trojans."

Patroclus was strongly moved with this address, and hastened back to Achilles, revolving in his mind all he had seen and heard. He told the prince the sad condition of affairs at the camp of their late associates: Diomede, Ulysses, Agamemnon, Machaon, all wounded, the rampart broken down, the enemy among the ships preparing to burn them, and thus to cut off all means of return to Greece. While they spoke the flames burst forth from one of the ships. Achilles, at the sight, relented so far as to grant Patroclus his request to lead the Myrmidons (for so were Achilles' soldiers called) to the field, and to lend him his armor, that he might thereby strike more terror into the minds of the Trojans. Without delay the soldiers were marshalled, Patroclus put on the radiant armor and mounted the chariot of Achilles, and led forth the men ardent for battle. But before he went, Achilles strictly charged him that he should be content with repelling the foe "Seek not," said he, "to press the Trojans without me, lest thou add still more to the disgrace already mine." Then exhorting the troops to do their best he dismissed them full of ardor to the fight.

Patroclus and his Myrmidons at once plunged into the contest where it raged hottest; at the sight of which the joyful Grecians shouted and the ships reechoed the acclaim. The Trojans, at the sight of the well-known armor, struck with terror, looked everywhere for refuge. First those who had got possession of the ship and set it on fire left and allowed the Grecians to retake it and extinguish the flames. Then the rest of the Trojans fled in dismay. Ajax, Menelaus, and the two sons of Nestor performed prodigies of valor. Hector was forced to turn his horses' heads and retire from the enclosure, leaving his men entangled in the fosse to escape as they could. Patroclus drove them before him, slaying many, none daring to make a stand against him.

At last Sarpedon, son of Jove, ventured to oppose himself in fight to Patroclus. Jupiter looked down upon him and would have snatched him from the fate which awaited him, but Juno hinted that if he did so it would induce all others of the inhabitants of heaven to interpose in like manner whenever any of their offspring were endangered; to which reason Jove yielded. Sarpedon threw his spear, but missed Patroclus, but Patroclus threw his with better success. It pierced Sarpedon's breast and he fell, and, calling to his friends to save his body from the foe, expired. Then a furious contest arose for the possession of the corpse. The Greeks succeeded and stripped Sarpedon of his armor; but Jove would not allow the remains of his son to be dishonored, and by his command Apollo snatched from the midst of the combatants the body of Sarpedon and committed it to the care of the twin brothers Death and Sleep, by whom it was transported to Lycia, the native land of Sarpedon, where it received due funeral rites.

Thus far Patroclus had succeeded to his utmost wish in repelling the Trojans and relieving his countrymen, but now came a change of fortune. Hector, borne in his chariot, confronted him. Patroclus threw a vast stone at Hector, which missed its aim, but smote Cebriones, the charioteer, and knocked him from the car. Hector leaped from the chariot to rescue his friend, and Patroclus also descended to complete his victory. Thus the two heroes met face to face. At this decisive moment the poet, as if reluctant to give Hector the glory, records that Phoebus took part against Patroclus. He struck the helmet from his head and the lance from his hand. At the same moment an obscure Trojan wounded him in the back, and Hector, pressing forward, pierced him with his spear. He fell mortally wounded.

Then arose a tremendous conflict for the body of Patroclus, but his armor was at once taken possession of by Hector, who retiring a short distance divested himself of his own armor and put on that of Achilles, then returned to the fight. Ajax and Menelaus defended the body, and Hector and his bravest warriors struggled to capture it. The battle raged with equal fortunes, when Jove enveloped the whole face of heaven with a dark cloud. The lightning flashed, the thunder roared, and Ajax, looking round for some one whom he might despatch to Achilles to tell him of the death of his friend, and of the imminent danger that his remains would fall into the hands of the enemy, could see no suitable messenger. It was then that he exclaimed in those famous lines so often quoted,

"Father of heaven and earth! deliver thou
Achaia's host from darkness; clear the skies;
Give day; and, since thy sovereign will is such,
Destruction with it; but, O, give us day."
—Cowper.

Or, as rendered by Pope,
"... Lord of earth and air!
O king! O father! hear my humble prayer!
Dispel this cloud, the light of heaven restore;
Give me to see and Ajax asks no more;
If Greece must perish we thy will obey,
But let us perish in the face of day."

Jupiter heard the prayer and dispersed the clouds. Then Ajax sent Antilochus to Achilles with the intelligence of Patroclus's death, and of the conflict raging for his remains. The Greeks at last succeeded in bearing off the body to the ships, closely pursued by Hector and Aeneas and the rest of the Trojans.

Achilles heard the fate of his friend with such distress that Antilochus feared for a while that he would destroy himself. His groans reached the ears of his mother, Thetis, far down in the deeps of ocean where she abode, and she hastened to him to inquire the cause. She found him overwhelmed with self-reproach that he had indulged his resentment so far, and suffered his friend to fall a victim to it. But his only consolation was the hope of revenge. He would fly instantly in search of Hector. But his mother reminded him that he was now without armor, and promised him, if he would but wait till the morrow, she would procure for him a suit of armor from Vulcan more than equal to that he had lost. He consented, and Thetis immediately repaired to Vulcan's palace. She found him busy at his forge making tripods for his own use, so artfully constructed that they moved forward of their own accord when wanted, and retired again when dismissed. On hearing the request of Thetis, Vulcan immediately laid aside his work and hastened to comply with her wishes. He fabricated a splendid suit of armor for Achilles, first a shield adorned with elaborate devices, then a helmet crested with gold, then a corselet and greaves of impenetrable temper, all perfectly adapted to his form, and of consummate workmanship. It was all done in one night, and Thetis, receiving it, descended with it to earth, and laid it down at Achilles' feet at the dawn of day.

The first glow of pleasure that Achilles had felt since the death of Patroclus was at the sight of this splendid armor. And now, arrayed in it, he went forth into the camp, calling all the chiefs to council. When they were all assembled he addressed them. Renouncing his displeasure against Agamemnon and bitterly lamenting the miseries that had resulted from it, he called on them to proceed at once to the field. Agamemnon made a suitable reply, laying all the blame on Ate, the goddess of discord; and thereupon complete reconcilement took place between the heroes.

Then Achilles went forth to battle inspired with a rage and thirst for vengeance that made him irresistible. The bravest warriors fled before him or fell by his lance. Hector, cautioned by Apollo, kept aloof; but the god, assuming the form of one of Priam's sons, Lycaon, urged Aeneas to encounter the terrible warrior. Aeneas, though he felt himself unequal, did not decline the combat. He hurled his spear with all his force against the shield the work of Vulcan. It was formed of five metal plates; two were of brass, two of tin, and one of gold. The spear pierced two thicknesses, but was stopped in the third. Achilles threw his with better success. It pierced through the shield of Aeneas, but glanced near his shoulder and made no wound. Then Aeneas seized a stone, such as two men of modern times could hardly lift, and was about to throw it, and Achilles, with sword drawn, was about to rush upon him, when Neptune, who looked out upon the contest, moved with pity for Aeneas, who he saw would surely fall a victim if not speedily rescued, spread a cloud between the combatants, and lifting Aeneas from the ground, bore him over the heads of warriors and steeds to the rear of the battle. Achilles, when the mist cleared away, looked round in vain for his adversary, and acknowledging the prodigy, turned his arms against other champions. But none dared stand before him, and Priam looking down from the city walls beheld his whole army in full flight towards the city. He gave command to open wide the gates to receive the fugitives, and to shut them as soon as the Trojans should have passed, lest the enemy should enter likewise. But Achilles was so close in pursuit that that would have been impossible if Apollo had not, in the form of Agenor, Priam's son, encountered Achilles for a while, then turned to fly, and taken the way apart from the city. Achilles pursued and had chased his supposed victim far from the walls, when Apollo disclosed himself, and Achilles, perceiving how he had been deluded, gave up the chase.

But when the rest had escaped into the town Hector stood without determined to await the combat. His old father called to him from the walls and begged him to retire nor tempt the encounter. His mother, Hecuba, also besought him to the same effect, but all in vain. "How can I," said he to himself, "by whose command the people went to this day's contest, where so many have fallen, seek safety for myself against a single foe? But what if I offer him to yield up Helen and all her treasures and ample of our own beside? Ah, no! it is too late. He would not even hear me through, but slay me while I spoke." While he thus ruminated. Achilles approached, terrible as Mars, his armor flashing lightning as he moved. At that sight Hector's heart failed him and he fled. Achilles swiftly pursued. They ran, still keeping near the walls, till they had thrice encircled the city. As often as Hector approached the walls Achilles intercepted him and forced him to keep out in a wider circle. But Apollo sustained Hector's strength and would not let him sink in weariness. Then Pallas, assuming the form of Deiphobus, Hector's bravest brother, appeared suddenly at his side. Hector saw him with delight, and thus strengthened stopped his flight and turned to meet Achilles.

Hector threw his spear, which struck the shield of Achilles and bounded back. He turned to receive another from the hand of Deiphobus, but Deiphobus was gone. Then Hector understood his doom and said, "Alas! it is plain this is my hour to die! I thought Deiphobus at hand, but Pallas deceived me, and he is still in Troy. But I will not fall inglorious," So saying he drew his falchion from his side and rushed at once to combat. Achilles, secured behind his shield, waited the approach of Hector. When he came within reach of his spear, Achilles choosing with his eye a vulnerable part where the armor leaves the neck uncovered, aimed his spear at that part and Hector fell, death-wounded, and feebly said, "Spare my body! Let my parents ransom it, and let me receive funeral rites from the sons and daughters of Troy." To which Achilles replied, "Dog, name not ransom nor pity to me, on whom you have brought such dire distress. No! trust me, naught shall save thy carcass from the dogs. Though twenty ransoms and thy weight in gold were offered, I would refuse it all."

So saying he stripped the body of its armor, and fastening cords to the feet tied them behind his chariot, leaving the body to trail along the ground. Then mounting the chariot he lashed the steeds and so dragged the body to and fro before the city. What words can tell the grief of King Priam and Queen Hecuba at this sight! His people could scarce restrain the old king from rushing forth. He threw himself in the dust and besought them each by name to give him way. Hecuba's distress was not less violent. The citizens stood round them weeping. The sound of the mourning reached the ears of Andromache, the wife of Hector, as she sat among her maidens at work, and anticipating evil she went forth to the wall. When she saw the sight there presented, she would have thrown herself headlong from the wall, but fainted and fell into the arms of her maidens. Recovering, she bewailed her fate, picturing to herself her country ruined, herself a captive, and her son dependent for his bread on the charity of strangers.

When Achilles and the Greeks had taken their revenge on the killer of Patroclus they busied themselves in paying due funeral rites to their friend. A pile was erected, and the body burned with due solemnity; and then ensued games of strength and skill, chariot races, wrestling, boxing, and archery. Then the chiefs sat down to the funeral banquet and after that retired to rest. But Achilles neither partook of the feast nor of sleep. The recollection of his lost friend kept him awake, remembering their companionship in toil and dangers, in battle or on the perilous deep. Before the earliest dawn he left his tent, and joining to his chariot his swift steeds, he fastened Hector's body to be dragged behind. Twice he dragged him around the tomb of Patroclus, leaving him at length stretched in the dust. But Apollo would not permit the body to be torn or disfigured with all this abuse, but preserved it free from all taint or defilement.

While Achilles indulged his wrath in thus disgracing brave Hector, Jupiter in pity summoned Thetis to his presence. He told her to go to her son and prevail on him to restore the body of Hector to his friends. Then Jupiter sent Iris to King Priam to encourage him to go to Achilles and beg the body of his son. Iris delivered her message, and Priam immediately prepared to obey. He opened his treasuries and took out rich garments and cloths, with ten talents in gold and two splendid tripods and a golden cup of matchless workmanship. Then he called to his sons and bade them draw forth his litter and place in it the various articles designed for a ransom to Achilles. When all was ready, the old king with a single companion as aged as himself, the herald Idaeus, drove forth from the gates, parting there with Hecuba, his queen, and all his friends, who lamented him as going to certain death.

But Jupiter, beholding with compassion the venerable king, sent Mercury to be his guide and protector. Mercury, assuming the form of a young warrior, presented himself to the aged couple, and while at the sight of him they hesitated whether to fly or yield, the god approached, and grasping Priam's hand offered to be their guide to Achilles' tent. Priam gladly accepted his offered service, and he, mounting the carriage, assumed the reins and soon conveyed them to the tent of Achilles. Mercury's wand put to sleep all the guards, and without hinderance he introduced Priam into the tent where Achilles sat, attended by two of his warriors. The old king threw himself at the feet of Achilles, and kissed those terrible hands which had destroyed so many of his sons. "Think, O Achilles," he said, "of thy own father, full of days like me, and trembling on the gloomy verge of life. Perhaps even now some neighbor chief oppresses him and there is none at hand to succor him in his distress. Yet doubtless knowing that Achilles lives he still rejoices, hoping that one day he shall see thy face again. But no comfort cheers me, whose bravest sons, so late the flower of Ilium, all have fallen. Yet one I had, one more than all the rest the strength of my age, whom, fighting for his country, thou hast slain. I come to redeem his body, bringing inestimable ransom with me. Achilles! reverence the gods! recollect thy father! for his sake show compassion to me!" These words moved Achilles, and he wept; remembering by turns his absent father and his lost friend. Moved with pity of Priam's silver locks and beard, he raised him from the earth, and thus spake: "Priam, I know that thou hast reached this place conducted by some god, for without aid divine no mortal even in his prime of youth had dared the attempt. I grant thy request, moved thereto by the evident will of Jove." So saying he arose, and went forth with his two friends, and unloaded of its charge the litter, leaving two mantles and a robe for the covering of the body, which they placed on the litter, and spread the garments over it, that not unveiled it should be borne back to Troy. Then Achilles dismissed the old king with his attendants, having first pledged himself to allow a truce of twelve days for the funeral solemnities.

As the litter approached the city and was descried from the walls, the people poured forth to gaze once more on the face of their hero. Foremost of all, the mother and the wife of Hector came, and at the sight of the lifeless body renewed their lamentations. The people all wept with them, and to the going down of the sun there was no pause or abatement of their grief.

The next day preparations were made for the funeral solemnities. For nine days the people brought wood and built the pile, and on the tenth they placed the body on the summit and applied the torch; while all Troy thronging forth encompassed the pile. When it had completely burned, they quenched the cinders with wine, collected the bones and placed them in a golden urn, which they buried in the earth, and reared a pile of stones over the spot.

"Such honors Ilium to her hero paid,
And peaceful slept the mighty Hector's shade."
—Pope.

The Golden Fleece

Tanglewood Tales, by Nathaniel Hawthorne

When Jason, the son of the dethroned King of Iolchos, was a little boy, he was sent away from his parents, and placed under the queerest schoolmaster that ever you heard of. This learned person was one of the people, or quadrupeds, called Centaurs. He lived in a cavern, and had the body and legs of a white horse, with the head and shoulders of a man. His name was Chiron; and, in spite of his odd appearance, he was a very excellent teacher, and had several scholars, who afterwards did him credit by making a great figure in the world. The famous Hercules was one, and so was Achilles, and Philoctetes likewise, and Aesculapius, who acquired immense repute as a doctor. The good Chiron taught his pupils how to play upon the harp, and how to cure diseases, and how to use the sword and shield, together with various other branches of education, in which the lads of those days used to be instructed, instead of writing and arithmetic.

I have sometimes suspected that Master Chiron was not really very different from other people, but that, being a kind-hearted and merry old fellow, he was in the habit of making believe that he was a horse, and scrambling about the schoolroom on all fours, and letting the little boys ride upon his back. And so, when his scholars had grown up, and grown old, and were trotting their grandchildren on their knees, they told them about the sports of their school days; and these young folks took the idea that their grandfathers had been taught their letters by a Centaur, half man and half horse. Little children, not quite understanding what is said to them, often get such absurd notions into their heads, you know.

Be that as it may, it has always been told for a fact (and always will be told, as long as the world lasts), that Chiron, with the head of a schoolmaster, had the body and legs of a horse. Just imagine the grave old gentleman clattering and stamping into the schoolroom on his four hoofs, perhaps treading on some little fellow's toes, flourishing his switch tail instead of a rod, and, now and then, trotting out of doors to eat a mouthful of grass! I wonder what the blacksmith charged him for a set of iron shoes?

So Jason dwelt in the cave, with this four-footed Chiron, from the time that he was an infant, only a few months old, until he had grown to the full height of a man. He became a very good harper, I suppose, and skilful in the use of weapons, and tolerably acquainted with herbs and other doctor's stuff, and, above all, an admirable horseman; for, in teaching young people to ride, the good Chiron must have been without a rival among schoolmasters. At length, being now a tall and athletic youth, Jason resolved to seek his fortune in the world, without asking Chiron's advice, or telling him anything about the matter. This was very unwise, to be sure; and I hope none of you, my little hearers, will ever follow Jason's example.

But, you are to understand, he had heard how that he himself was a prince royal, and how his father, King Jason, had been deprived of the kingdom of Iolchos by a certain Pelias, who would also have killed Jason, had he not been hidden in the Centaur's cave. And, being come to the strength of a man, Jason determined to set all this business to rights, and to punish the wicked Pelias for wronging his dear father, and to cast him down from the throne, and seat himself there instead.

With this intention, he took a spear in each hand, and threw a leopard's skin over his shoulders, to keep off the rain, and set forth on his travels, with his long yellow ringlets waving in the wind. The part of his dress on which he most prided himself was a pair of sandals, that had been his father's. They were handsomely embroidered, and were tied upon his feet with strings of gold. But his whole attire was such as people did not very often see; and as he passed along, the women and children ran to the doors and windows, wondering whither this beautiful youth was journeying, with his leopard's skin and his golden-tied sandals, and what heroic deeds he meant to perform, with a spear in his right hand and another in his left.

I know not how far Jason had traveled, when he came to a turbulent river, which rushed right across his pathway, with specks of white foam among its black eddies, hurrying tumultuously onward, and roaring angrily as it went. Though not a very broad river in the dry seasons of the year, it was now swollen by heavy rains and by the melting of the snow on the sides of Mount Olympus; and it thundered so loudly, and looked so wild and dangerous, that Jason, bold as he was, thought it prudent to pause upon the brink. The bed of the stream seemed to be strewn with sharp and rugged rocks, some of which thrust themselves above the water. By and by, an uprooted tree, with shattered branches, came drifting along the current, and got entangled among the rocks. Now and then, a drowned sheep, and once the carcass of a cow, floated past.

In short, the swollen river had already done a great deal of mischief. It was evidently too deep for Jason to wade, and too boisterous for him to swim; he could see no bridge; and as for a boat, had there been any, the rocks would have broken it to pieces in an instant.

"See the poor lad," said a cracked voice close to his side. "He must have had but a poor education, since he does not know how to cross a little stream like this. Or is he afraid of wetting his fine golden-stringed sandals? It is a pity his four-footed schoolmaster is not here to carry him safely across on his back!"

Jason looked round greatly surprised, for he did not know that anybody was near. But beside him stood an old woman, with a ragged mantle over her head, leaning on a staff, the top of which was carved into the shape of a cuckoo. She looked very aged, and wrinkled, and infirm; and yet her eyes, which were as brown as those of an ox, were so extremely large and beautiful, that, when they were fixed on Jason's eyes, he could see nothing else but them. The old woman had a pomegranate in her hand, although the fruit was then quite out of season.

"Whither are you going, Jason?" she now asked.

She seemed to know his name, you will observe; and, indeed, those great brown eyes looked as if they had a knowledge of everything, whether past or to come.

While Jason was gazing at her, a peacock strutted forward, and took his stand at the old woman's side.

"I am going to Iolchos," answered the young man, "to bid the wicked King Pelias come down from my father's throne, and let me reign in his stead."

"Ah, well, then," said the old woman, still with the same cracked voice, "if that is all your business, you need not be in a very great hurry. Just take me on your back, there's a good youth, and carry me across the river. I and my peacock have something to do on the other side, as well as yourself."

"Good mother," replied Jason, "your business can hardly be so important as the pulling down a king from his throne. Besides, as you may see for yourself, the river is very boisterous; and if I should chance to stumble, it would sweep both of us away more easily than it has carried off yonder uprooted tree. I would gladly help you if I could; but I doubt whether I am strong enough to carry you across."

"Then," said she, very scornfully, "neither are you strong enough to pull King Pelias off his throne. And, Jason, unless you will help an old woman at her need, you ought not to be a king. What are kings made for, save to succor the feeble and distressed? But do as you please. Either take me on your back, or with my poor old limbs I shall try my best to struggle across the stream."

Saying this, the old woman poked with her staff in the river, as if to find the safest place in its rocky bed where she might make the first step. But Jason, by this time, had grown ashamed of his reluctance to help her. He felt that he could never forgive himself, if this poor feeble creature should come to any harm in attempting to wrestle against the headlong current. The good Chiron, whether half horse or no, had taught him that the noblest use of his strength was to assist the weak; and also that he must treat every young woman as if she were his sister, and every old one like a mother. Remembering these maxims, the vigorous and beautiful young man knelt down, and requested the good dame to mount upon his back.

"The passage seems to me not very safe," he remarked. "But as your business is so urgent, I will try to carry you across. If the river sweeps you away, it shall take me too."

"That, no doubt, will be a great comfort to both of us," quoth the old woman. "But never fear. We shall get safely across."

So she threw her arms around Jason's neck; and lifting her from the ground, he stepped boldly into the raging and foaming current, and began to stagger away from the shore. As for the peacock, it alighted on the old dame's shoulder. Jason's two spears, one in each hand, kept him from stumbling, and enabled him to feel his way among the hidden rocks; although every instant, he expected that his companion and himself would go down the stream, together with the driftwood of shattered trees, and the carcasses of the sheep and cow. Down came the cold, snowy torrent from the steep side of Olympus, raging and thundering as if it had a real spite against Jason, or, at all events, were determined to snatch off his living burden from his shoulders.

When he was half way across, the uprooted tree (which I have already told you about) broke loose from among the rocks, and bore down upon him, with all its splintered branches sticking out like the hundred arms of the giant Briareus. It rushed past, however, without touching him. But the next moment his foot was caught in a crevice between two rocks, and stuck there so fast, that, in the effort to get free, he lost one of his golden-stringed sandals.

At this accident Jason could not help uttering a cry of vexation.

"What is the matter, Jason?" asked the old woman.

"Matter enough," said the young man. "I have lost a sandal here among the rocks. And what sort of a figure shall I cut, at the court of King Pelias, with a golden-stringed sandal on one foot, and the other foot bare!"

"Do not take it to heart," answered his companion cheerily. "You never met with better fortune than in losing that sandal. It satisfies me that you are the very person whom the Speaking Oak has been talking about."

There was no time, just then, to inquire what the Speaking Oak had said. But the briskness of her tone encouraged the young man; and, besides, he had never in his life felt so vigorous and mighty as since taking this old woman on his back. Instead of being exhausted, he gathered strength as he went on; and, struggling up against the torrent, he at last gained the opposite shore, clambered up the bank, and set down the old dame and her peacock safely on the grass. As soon as this was done, however, he could not help looking rather despondently at his bare foot, with only a remnant of the golden string of the sandal clinging round his ankle.
"You will get a handsomer pair of sandals by and by," said the old woman, with a kindly look out of her beautiful brown eyes. "Only let King Pelias get a glimpse of that bare foot, and you shall see him turn as pale as ashes, I promise you. There is your path. Go along, my good Jason, and my blessing go with you. And when you sit on your throne remember the old woman whom you helped over the river."

With these words, she hobbled away, giving him a smile over her shoulder as she departed.
Whether the light of her beautiful brown eyes threw a glory round about her, or whatever the cause might be, Jason fancied that there was something very noble and majestic in her figure, after all, and that, though her gait seemed to be a rheumatic hobble, yet she moved with as much grace and dignity as any queen on earth. Her peacock, which had now fluttered down from her shoulder, strutted behind her in a prodigious pomp, and spread out its magnificent tail on purpose for Jason to admire it.

When the old dame and her peacock were out of sight, Jason set forward on his journey. After traveling a pretty long distance, he came to a town situated at the foot of a mountain, and not a great way from the shore of the sea. On the outside of the town there was an immense crowd of people, not only men and women, but children too, all in their best clothes, and evidently enjoying a holiday. The crowd was thickest towards the sea-shore; and in that direction, over the people's heads, Jason saw a wreath of smoke curling upward to the blue sky.

He inquired of one of the multitude what town it was near by, and why so many persons were here assembled together.

"This is the kingdom of Iolchos," answered the man, "and we are the subjects of King Pelias. Our monarch has summoned us together, that we may see him sacrifice a black bull to Neptune, who, they say, is his majesty's father. Yonder is the king, where you see the smoke going up from the altar."

While the man spoke he eyed Jason with great curiosity; for his garb was quite unlike that of the Iolchians, and it looked very odd to see a youth with a leopard's skin over his shoulders, and each hand grasping a spear. Jason perceived, too, that the man stared particularly at his feet, one of which, you remember, was bare, while the other was decorated with his father's golden-stringed sandal.

"Look at him! only look at him!" said the man to his next neighbor. "Do you see? He wears but one sandal!"

Upon this, first one person, and then another, began to stare at Jason, and everybody seemed to be greatly struck with something in his aspect; though they turned their eyes much oftener towards his feet than to any other part of his figure. Besides, he could hear them whispering to one another.

"One sandal! One sandal!" they kept saying. "The man with one sandal! Here he is at last! Whence has he come? What does he mean to do? What will the king say to the one-sandaled man?"

Poor Jason was greatly abashed, and made up his mind that the people of Iolchos were exceedingly ill-bred, to take such public notice of an accidental deficiency in his dress. Meanwhile, whether it were that they hustled him forward, or that Jason, of his own accord, thrust a passage through the crowd, it so happened that he soon found himself close to the smoking altar, where King Pelias was sacrificing the black bull. The murmur and hum of the multitude, in their surprise at the spectacle of Jason with his one bare foot, grew so loud that it disturbed the ceremonies; and the king, holding the great knife with which he was just going to cut the bull's throat, turned angrily about, and fixed his eyes on Jason. The people had now withdrawn from around him, so that the youth stood in an open space, near the smoking altar, front to front with the angry King Pelias.

"Who are you?" cried the king, with a terrible frown. "And how dare you make this disturbance, while I am sacrificing a black bull to my father Neptune?"

"It is no fault of mine," answered Jason. "Your majesty must blame the rudeness of your subjects, who have raised all this tumult because one of my feet happens to be bare."

When Jason said this, the king gave a quick startled glance down at his feet.

“Ha!" muttered he, "here is the one-sandaled fellow, sure enough! What can I do with him?"

And he clutched more closely the great knife in his hand, as if he were half a mind to slay Jason, instead of the black bull. The people round about caught up the king's words, indistinctly as they were uttered; and first there was a murmur amongst them, and then a loud shout.

"The one-sandaled man has come! The prophecy must be fulfilled!"

For you are to know, that, many years before, King Pelias had been told by the Speaking Oak of Dodona, that a man with one sandal should cast him down from his throne. On this account, he had given strict orders that nobody should ever come into his presence, unless both sandals were securely tied upon his feet; and he kept an officer in his palace, whose sole business it was to examine people's sandals, and to supply them with a new pair, at the expense of the royal treasury, as soon as the old ones began to wear out. In the whole course of the king's reign, he had never been thrown into such a fright and agitation as by the spectacle of poor Jason's bare foot. But, as he was naturally a bold and hard-hearted man, he soon took courage, and began to consider in what way he might rid himself of this terrible one-sandaled stranger.

"My good young man," said King Pelias, taking the softest tone imaginable, in order to throw Jason off his guard, "you are excessively welcome to my kingdom. Judging by your dress, you must have traveled a long distance, for it is not the fashion to wear leopard skins in this part of the world. Pray what may I call your name? and where did you receive your education?"

"My name is Jason," answered the young stranger. "Ever since my infancy, I have dwelt in the cave of Chiron the Centaur. He was my instructor, and taught me music, and horsemanship, and how to cure wounds, and likewise how to inflict wounds with my weapons!"

"I have heard of Chiron the schoolmaster," replied King Pelias, "and how that there is an immense deal of learning and wisdom in his head, although it happens to be set on a horse's body. It gives me great delight to see one of his scholars at my court. But to test how much you have profited under so excellent a teacher, will you allow me to ask you a single question?"

"I do not pretend to be very wise," said Jason. "But ask me what you please, and I will answer to the best of my ability."

Now King Pelias meant cunningly to entrap the young man, and to make him say something that should be the cause of mischief and distraction to himself. So, with a crafty and evil smile upon his face, he spoke as follows:

"What would you do, brave Jason," asked he, "if there were a man in the world, by whom, as you had reason to believe, you were doomed to be ruined and slain—what would you do, I say, if that man stood before you, and in your power?"

When Jason saw the malice and wickedness which King Pelias could not prevent from gleaming out of his eyes, he probably guessed that the king had discovered what he came for, and that he intended to turn his own words against himself. Still he scorned to tell a falsehood. Like an upright and honorable prince as he was, he determined to speak out the real truth.

Since the king had chosen to ask him the question, and since Jason had promised him an answer, there was no right way save to tell him precisely what would be the most prudent thing to do, if he had his worst enemy in his power.

Therefore, after a moment's consideration, he spoke up, with a firm and manly voice.

"I would send such a man," said he, "in quest of the Golden Fleece!"

This enterprise, you will understand, was, of all others, the most difficult and dangerous in the world. In the first place it would be necessary to make a long voyage through unknown seas. There was hardly a hope, or a possibility, that any young man who should undertake this voyage would either succeed in obtaining the Golden Fleece, or would survive to return home, and tell of the perils he had run. The eyes of King Pelias sparkled with joy, therefore, when he heard Jason's reply.

"Well said, wise man with the one sandal!" cried he. "Go, then, and at the peril of your life, bring me back the Golden Fleece."

"I go," answered Jason, composedly. "If I fail, you need not fear that I will ever come back to trouble you again. But if I return to Iolchos with the prize, then, King Pelias, you must hasten down from your lofty throne, and give me your crown and sceptre."

"That I will," said the king, with a sneer. "Meantime, I will keep them very safely for you."

The first thing that Jason thought of doing, after he left the king's presence, was to go to Dodona, and inquire of the Talking Oak what course it was best to pursue. This wonderful tree stood in the center of an ancient wood. Its stately trunk rose up a hundred feet into the air, and threw a broad and dense shadow over more than an acre of ground. Standing beneath it, Jason looked up among the knotted branches and green leaves, and into the mysterious heart of the old tree, and spoke aloud, as if he were addressing some person who was hidden in the depths of the foliage.

"What shall I do," said he, "in order to win the Golden Fleece?"

At first there was a deep silence, not only within the shadow of the Talking Oak, but all through the solitary wood. In a moment or two, however, the leaves of the oak began to stir and rustle, as if a gentle breeze were wandering amongst them, although the other trees of the wood were perfectly still. The sound grew louder, and became like the roar of a high wind. By and by, Jason imagined that he could distinguish words, but very confusedly, because each separate leaf of the tree seemed to be a tongue, and the whole myriad of tongues were babbling at once. But the noise waxed broader and deeper, until it resembled a tornado sweeping through the oak, and making one great utterance out of the thousand and thousand of little murmurs which each leafy tongue had caused by its rustling. And now, though it still had the tone of a mighty wind roaring among the branches, it was also like a deep bass voice, speaking as distinctly as a tree could be expected to speak, the following words:

"Go to Argus, the shipbuilder, and bid him build a galley with fifty oars."

Then the voice melted again into the indistinct murmur of the rustling leaves, and died gradually away. When it was quite gone, Jason felt inclined to doubt whether he had actually heard the words, or whether his fancy had not shaped them out of the ordinary sound made by a breeze, while passing through the thick foliage of the tree.

But on inquiry among the people of Iolchos, he found that there was really a man in the city, by the name of Argus, who was a very skilful builder of vessels. This showed some intelligence in the oak; else how should it have known that any such person existed? At Jason's request, Argus readily consented to build him a galley so big that it should require fifty strong men to row it; although no vessel of such a size and burden had heretofore been seen in the world. So the head carpenter and all his journeymen and apprentices began their work; and for a good while afterwards, there they were, busily employed, hewing out the timbers, and making a great clatter with their hammers; until the new ship, which was called the Argo, seemed to be quite ready for sea. And, as the Talking Oak had already given him such good advice, Jason thought that it would not be amiss to ask for a little more. He visited it again, therefore, and standing beside its huge, rough trunk, inquired what he should do next.

This time, there was no such universal quivering of the leaves, throughout the whole tree, as there had been before. But after a while, Jason observed that the foliage of a great branch which stretched above his head had begun to rustle, as if the wind were stirring that one bough, while all the other boughs of the oak were at rest.

"Cut me off!" said the branch, as soon as it could speak distinctly; "cut me off! cut me off! and carve me into a figure-head for your galley."

Accordingly, Jason took the branch at its word, and lopped it off the tree. A carver in the neighborhood engaged to make the figurehead. He was a tolerably good workman, and had already carved several figure-heads, in what he intended for feminine shapes, and looking pretty much like those which we see nowadays stuck up under a vessel's bowsprit, with great staring eyes, that never wink at the dash of the spray. But (what was very strange) the carver found that his hand was guided by some unseen power, and by a skill beyond his own, and that his tools shaped out an image which he had never dreamed of. When the work was finished, it turned out to be the figure of a beautiful woman, with a helmet on her head, from beneath which the long ringlets fell down upon her shoulders. On the left arm was a shield, and in its center appeared a lifelike representation of the head of Medusa with the snaky locks. The right arm was extended, as if pointing onward. The face of this wonderful statue, though not angry or forbidding, was so grave and majestic, that perhaps you might call it severe; and as for the mouth, it seemed just ready to unclose its lips, and utter words of the deepest wisdom.

Jason was delighted with the oaken image, and gave the carver no rest until it was completed, and set up where a figure-head has always stood, from that time to this, in the vessel's prow.

"And now," cried he, as he stood gazing at the calm, majestic face of the statue, "I must go to the Talking Oak and inquire what next to do."

"There is no need of that, Jason," said a voice which, though it was far lower, reminded him of the mighty tones of the great oak. "When you desire good advice, you can seek it of me."

Jason had been looking straight into the face of the image when these words were spoken. But he could hardly believe either his ears or his eyes. The truth was, however, that the oaken lips had moved, and, to all appearance, the voice had proceeded from the statue's mouth. Recovering a little from his surprise, Jason bethought himself that the image had been carved out of the wood of the Talking Oak, and that, therefore, it was really no great wonder, but on the contrary, the most natural thing in the world, that it should possess the faculty of speech. It would have been very odd, indeed, if it had not. But certainly it was a great piece of good fortune that he should be able to carry so wise a block of wood along with him in his perilous voyage.

"Tell me, wondrous image," exclaimed Jason,—"since you inherit the wisdom of the Speaking Oak of Dodona, whose daughter you are,—tell me, where shall I find fifty bold youths, who will take each of them an oar of my galley? They must have sturdy arms to row, and brave hearts to encounter perils, or we shall never win the Golden Fleece."

"Go," replied the oaken image, "go, summon all the heroes of Greece."

And, in fact, considering what a great deed was to be done, could any advice be wiser than this which Jason received from the figure-head of his vessel? He lost no time in sending messengers to all the cities, and making known to the whole people of Greece, that Prince Jason, the son of King Jason, was going in quest of the Fleece of Gold, and that he desired the help of forty-nine of the bravest and strongest young men alive, to row his vessel and share his dangers. And Jason himself would be the fiftieth.

At this news, the adventurous youths, all over the country, began to bestir themselves. Some of them had already fought with giants, and slain dragons; and the younger ones, who had not yet met with such good fortune, thought it a shame to have lived so long without getting astride of a flying serpent, or sticking their spears into a Chimaera, or, at least, thrusting their right arms down a monstrous lion's throat. There was a fair prospect that they would meet with plenty of such adventures before finding the Golden Fleece. As soon as they could furbish up their helmets and shields, therefore, and gird on their trusty swords, they came thronging to Iolchos, and clambered on board the new galley. Shaking hands with Jason, they assured him that they did not care a pin for their lives, but would help row the vessel to the remotest edge of the world, and as much farther as he might think it best to go.

Many of these brave fellows had been educated by Chiron, the four-footed pedagogue, and were therefore old schoolmates of Jason, and knew him to be a lad of spirit. The mighty Hercules, whose shoulders afterwards upheld the sky, was one of them.

And there were Castor and Pollux, the twin brothers, who were never accused of being chicken-hearted, although they had been hatched out of an egg; and Theseus, who was so renowned for killing the Minotaur, and Lynceus, with his wonderfully sharp eyes, which could see through a millstone, or look right down into the depths of the earth, and discover the treasures that were there; and Orpheus, the very best of harpers, who sang and played upon his lyre so sweetly, that the brute beasts stood upon their hind legs, and capered merrily to the music. Yes, and at some of his more moving tunes, the rocks bestirred their moss-grown bulk out of the ground, and a grove of forest trees uprooted themselves, and, nodding their tops to one another, performed a country dance.

One of the rowers was a beautiful young woman, named Atalanta, who had been nursed among the mountains by a bear. So light of foot was this fair damsel, that she could step from one foamy crest of a wave to the foamy crest of another, without wetting more than the sole of her sandal. She had grown up in a very wild way, and talked much about the rights of women, and loved hunting and war far better than her needle. But in my opinion, the most remarkable of this famous company were two sons of the North Wind (airy youngsters, and of rather a blustering disposition) who had wings on their shoulders, and, in case of a calm, could puff out their cheeks, and blow almost as fresh a breeze as their father. I ought not to forget the prophets and conjurors, of whom there were several in the crew, and who could foretell what would happen to-morrow or the next day, or a hundred years hence, but were generally quite unconscious of what was passing at the moment. Jason appointed Tiphys to be helmsman because he was a star-gazer, and knew the points of the compass. Lynceus, on account of his sharp sight, was stationed as a look-out in the prow, where he saw a whole day's sail ahead, but was rather apt to overlook things that lay directly under his nose. If the sea only happened to be deep enough, however, Lynceus could tell you exactly what kind of rocks or sands were at the bottom of it; and he often cried out to his companions, that they were sailing over heaps of sunken treasure, which yet he was none the richer for beholding. To confess the truth, few people believed him when he said it.

Well! But when the Argonauts, as these fifty brave adventurers were called, had prepared everything for the voyage, an unforeseen difficulty threatened to end it before it was begun. The vessel, you must understand, was so long, and broad, and ponderous, that the united force of all the fifty was insufficient to shove her into the water. Hercules, I suppose, had not grown to his full strength, else he might have set her afloat as easily as a little boy launches his boat upon a puddle. But here were these fifty heroes, pushing, and straining, and growing red in the face, without making the Argo start an inch. At last, quite wearied out, they sat themselves down on the shore exceedingly disconsolate, and thinking that the vessel must be left to rot and fall in pieces, and that they must either swim across the sea or lose the Golden Fleece.

All at once, Jason bethought himself of the galley's miraculous figure-head.

"O, daughter of the Talking Oak," cried he, "how shall we set to work to get our vessel into the water?"

"Seat yourselves," answered the image (for it had known what had ought to be done from the very first, and was only waiting for the question to be put),—"seat yourselves, and handle your oars, and let Orpheus play upon his harp."

Immediately the fifty heroes got on board, and seizing their oars, held them perpendicularly in the air, while Orpheus (who liked such a task far better than rowing) swept his fingers across the harp. At the first ringing note of the music, they felt the vessel stir. Orpheus thrummed away briskly, and the galley slid at once into the sea, dipping her prow so deeply that the figure-head drank the wave with its marvelous lips, and rising again as buoyant as a swan. The rowers plied their fifty oars; the white foam boiled up before the prow; the water gurgled and bubbled in their wake; while Orpheus continued to play so lively a strain of music, that the vessel seemed to dance over the billows by way of keeping time to it. Thus triumphantly did the Argo sail out of the harbor, amidst the huzzas and good wishes of everybody except the wicked old Pelias, who stood on a promontory, scowling at her, and wishing that he could blow out of his lungs the tempest of wrath that was in his heart, and so sink the galley with all on board. When they had sailed above fifty miles over the sea, Lynceus happened to cast his sharp eyes behind, and said that there was this bad-hearted king, still perched upon the promontory, and scowling so gloomily that it looked like a black thunder-cloud in that quarter of the horizon.

In order to make the time pass away more pleasantly during the voyage, the heroes talked about the Golden Fleece. It originally belonged, it appears, to a Boeotian ram, who had taken on his back two children, when in danger of their lives, and fled with them over land and sea as far as Colchis. One of the children, whose name was Helle, fell into the sea and was drowned. But the other (a little boy, named Phrixus) was brought safe ashore by the faithful ram, who, however, was so exhausted that he immediately lay down and died. In memory of this good deed, and as a token of his true heart, the fleece of the poor dead ram was miraculously changed to gold, and became one of the most beautiful objects ever seen on earth. It was hung upon a tree in a sacred grove, where it had now been kept I know not how many years, and was the envy of mighty kings, who had nothing so magnificent in any of their palaces.

If I were to tell you all the adventures of the Argonauts, it would take me till nightfall, and perhaps a great deal longer. There was no lack of wonderful events, as you may judge from what you have already heard. At a certain island, they were hospitably received by King Cyzicus, its sovereign, who made a feast for them, and treated them like brothers. But the Argonauts saw that this good king looked downcast and very much troubled, and they therefore inquired of him what was the matter. King Cyzicus hereupon informed them that he and his subjects were greatly abused and incommoded by the inhabitants of a neighboring mountain, who made war upon them, and killed many people, and ravaged the country. And while they were talking about it, Cyzicus pointed to the mountain, and asked Jason and his companions what they saw there.

"I see some very tall objects," answered Jason; "but they are at such a distance that I cannot distinctly make out what they are. To tell your majesty the truth, they look so very strangely that I am inclined to think them clouds, which have chanced to take something like human shapes."

"I see them very plainly," remarked Lynceus, whose eyes, you know, were as far-sighted as a telescope. "They are a band of enormous giants, all of whom have six arms apiece, and a club, a sword, or some other weapon in each of their hands."

"You have excellent eyes," said King Cyzicus. "Yes; they are six-armed giants, as you say, and these are the enemies whom I and my subjects have to contend with."

The next day, when the Argonauts were about setting sail, down came these terrible giants, stepping a hundred yards at a stride, brandishing their six arms apiece, and looking formidable, so far aloft in the air. Each of these monsters was able to carry on a whole war by himself, for with one arm he could fling immense stones, and wield a club with another, and a sword with a third, while the fourth was poking a long spear at the enemy, and the fifth and sixth were shooting him with a bow and arrow. But, luckily, though the giants were so huge, and had so many arms, they had each but one heart, and that no bigger nor braver than the heart of an ordinary man. Besides, if they had been like the hundred-armed Briareus, the brave Argonauts would have given them their hands full of fight. Jason and his friends went boldly to meet them, slew a great many, and made the rest take to their heels, so that if the giants had had six legs apiece instead of six arms, it would have served them better to run away with.

Another strange adventure happened when the voyagers came to Thrace, where they found a poor blind king, named Phineus, deserted by his subjects, and living in a very sorrowful way, all by himself. On Jason's inquiring whether they could do him any service, the king answered that he was terribly tormented by three great winged creatures, called Harpies, which had the faces of women, and the wings, bodies, and claws of vultures. These ugly wretches were in the habit of snatching away his dinner, and allowed him no peace of his life. Upon hearing this, the Argonauts spread a plentiful feast on the sea-shore, well knowing, from what the blind king said of their greediness, that the Harpies would snuff up the scent of the victuals, and quickly come to steal them away. And so it turned out; for, hardly was the table set, before the three hideous vulture women came flapping their wings, seized the food in their talons, and flew off as fast as they could. But the two sons of the North Wind drew their swords, spread their pinions, and set off through the air in pursuit of the thieves, whom they at last overtook among some islands, after a chase of hundreds of miles. The two winged youths blustered terribly at the Harpies (for they had the rough temper of their father), and so frightened them with their drawn swords, that they solemnly promised never to trouble King Phineus again.

Then the Argonauts sailed onward and met with many other marvelous incidents, any one of which would make a story by itself. At one time they landed on an island, and were reposing on the grass, when they suddenly found themselves assailed by what seemed a shower of steel-headed arrows. Some of them stuck in the ground, while others hit against their shields, and several penetrated their flesh. The fifty heroes started up, and looked about them for the hidden enemy, but could find none, nor see any spot, on the whole island, where even a single archer could lie concealed. Still, however, the steel-headed arrows came whizzing among them; and, at last, happening to look upward, they beheld a large flock of birds, hovering and wheeling aloft, and shooting their feathers down upon the Argonauts.

These feathers were the steel-headed arrows that had so tormented them. There was no possibility of making any resistance; and the fifty heroic Argonauts might all have been killed or wounded by a flock of troublesome birds, without ever setting eyes on the Golden Fleece, if Jason had not thought of asking the advice of the oaken image.

So he ran to the galley as fast as his legs would carry him.

"O, daughter of the Speaking Oak," cried he, all out of breath, "we need your wisdom more than ever before! We are in great peril from a flock of birds, who are shooting us with their steel-pointed feathers. What can we do to drive them away?"

"Make a clatter on your shields," said the image.

On receiving this excellent counsel, Jason hurried back to his companions (who were far more dismayed than when they fought with the six-armed giants), and bade them strike with their swords upon their brazen shields. Forthwith the fifty heroes set heartily to work, banging with might and main, and raised such a terrible clatter, that the birds made what haste they could to get away; and though they had shot half the feathers out of their wings, they were soon seen skimming among the clouds, a long distance off, and looking like a flock of wild geese. Orpheus celebrated this victory by playing a triumphant anthem on his harp, and sang so melodiously that Jason begged him to desist, lest, as the steel-feathered birds had been driven away by an ugly sound, they might be enticed back again by a sweet one.

While the Argonauts remained on this island, they saw a small vessel approaching the shore, in which were two young men of princely demeanor, and exceedingly handsome, as young princes generally were, in those days. Now, who do you imagine these two voyagers turned out to be? Why, if you will believe me, they were the sons of that very Phrixus, who, in his childhood, had been carried to Colchis on the back of the golden-fleeced ram. Since that time, Phrixus had married the king's daughter; and the two young princes had been born and brought up at Colchis, and had spent their play-days in the outskirts of the grove, in the center of which the Golden Fleece was hanging upon a tree. They were now on their way to Greece, in hopes of getting back a kingdom that had been wrongfully taken from their father.

When the princes understood whither the Argonauts were going, they offered to turn back, and guide them to Colchis. At the same time, however, they spoke as if it were very doubtful whether Jason would succeed in getting the Golden Fleece. According to their account, the tree on which it hung was guarded by a terrible dragon, who never failed to devour, at one mouthful, every person who might venture within his reach.

"There are other difficulties in the way," continued the young princes. "But is not this enough? Ah, brave Jason, turn back before it is too late. It would grieve us to the heart, if you and your nine and forty brave companions should be eaten up, at fifty mouthfuls, by this execrable dragon."

"My young friends," quietly replied Jason, "I do not wonder that you think the dragon very terrible. You have grown up from infancy in the fear of this monster, and therefore still regard him with the awe that children feel for the bugbears and hobgoblins which their nurses have talked to them about. But, in my view of the matter, the dragon is merely a pretty large serpent, who is not half so likely to snap me up at one mouthful as I am to cut off his ugly head, and strip the skin from his body. At all events, turn back who may, I will never see Greece again, unless I carry with me the Golden Fleece."

"We will none of us turn back!" cried his nine and forty brave comrades. "Let us get on board the galley this instant; and if the dragon is to make a breakfast of us, much good may it do him."

And Orpheus (whose custom it was to set everything to music) began to harp and sing most gloriously, and made every mother's son of them feel as if nothing in this world were so delectable as to fight dragons, and nothing so truly honorable as to be eaten up at one mouthful, in case of the worst.

After this (being now under the guidance of the two princes, who were well acquainted with the way), they quickly sailed to Colchis. When the king of the country, whose name was Aetes, heard of their arrival, he instantly summoned Jason to court. The king was a stern and cruel looking potentate; and though he put on as polite and hospitable an expression as he could, Jason did not like his face a whit better than that of the wicked King Pelias, who dethroned his father.

"You are welcome, brave Jason," said King Aetes. "Pray, are you on a pleasure voyage?—Or do you meditate the discovery of unknown islands?—or what other cause has procured me the happiness of seeing you at my court?"

"Great sir," replied Jason, with an obeisance—for Chiron had taught him how to behave with propriety, whether to kings or beggars—"I have come hither with a purpose which I now beg your majesty's permission to execute. King Pelias, who sits on my father's throne (to which he has no more right than to the one on which your excellent majesty is now seated), has engaged to come down from it, and to give me his crown and sceptre, provided I bring him the Golden Fleece. This, as your majesty is aware, is now hanging on a tree here at Colchis; and I humbly solicit your gracious leave to take it away."

In spite of himself, the king's face twisted itself into an angry frown; for, above all things else in the world, he prized the Golden Fleece, and was even suspected of having done a very wicked act, in order to get it into his own possession. It put him into the worst possible humor, therefore, to hear that the gallant Prince Jason, and forty-nine of the bravest young warriors of Greece, had come to Colchis with the sole purpose of taking away his chief treasure.

"Do you know," asked King Aetes, eyeing Jason very sternly, "what are the conditions which you must fulfill before getting possession of the Golden Fleece?"

"I have heard," rejoined the youth, "that a dragon lies beneath the tree on which the prize hangs, and that whoever approaches him runs the risk of being devoured at a mouthful."

"True," said the king, with a smile that did not look particularly good-natured. "Very true, young man. But there are other things as hard, or perhaps a little harder, to be done before you can even have the privilege of being devoured by the dragon. For example, you must first tame my two brazen-footed and brazen-lunged bulls, which Vulcan, the wonderful blacksmith, made for me. There is a furnace in each of their stomachs; and they breathe such hot fire out of their mouths and nostrils, that nobody has hitherto gone nigh them without being instantly burned to a small, black cinder. What do you think of this, my brave Jason?"

"I must encounter the peril," answered Jason, composedly, "since it stands in the way of my purpose."

"After taming the fiery bulls," continued King Aetes, who was determined to scare Jason if possible, "you must yoke them to a plow, and must plow the sacred earth in the Grove of Mars, and sow some of the same dragon's teeth from which Cadmus raised a crop of armed men. They are an unruly set of reprobates, those sons of the dragon's teeth; and unless you treat them suitably, they will fall upon you sword in hand. You and your nine and forty Argonauts, my bold Jason, are hardly numerous or strong enough to fight with such a host as will spring up."

"My master Chiron," replied Jason, "taught me, long ago, the story of Cadmus. Perhaps I can manage the quarrelsome sons of the dragon's teeth as well as Cadmus did."

"I wish the dragon had him," muttered King Aetes to himself, "and the four-footed pedant, his schoolmaster, into the bargain. Why, what a foolhardy, self-conceited coxcomb he is! We'll see what my fire-breathing bulls will do for him. Well, Prince Jason," he continued, aloud, and as complaisantly as he could, "make yourself comfortable for to-day, and to-morrow morning, since you insist upon it, you shall try your skill at the plow."

While the king talked with Jason, a beautiful young woman was standing behind the throne. She fixed her eyes earnestly upon the youthful stranger, and listened attentively to every word that was spoken; and when Jason withdrew from the king's presence, this young woman followed him out of the room.

"I am the king's daughter," she said to him, "and my name is Medea. I know a great deal of which other young princesses are ignorant, and can do many things which they would be afraid so much as to dream of. If you will trust to me, I can instruct you how to tame the fiery bulls, and sow the dragon's teeth, and get the Golden Fleece."

"Indeed, beautiful princess," answered Jason, "if you will do me this service, I promise to be grateful to you my whole life long."

Gazing at Medea, he beheld a wonderful intelligence in her face. She was one of those persons whose eyes are full of mystery; so that, while looking into them, you seem to see a very great way, as into a deep well, yet can never be certain whether you see into the farthest depths, or whether there be not something else hidden at the bottom. If Jason had been capable of fearing anything, he would have been afraid of making this young princess his enemy; for, beautiful as she now looked, she might, the very next instant, become as terrible as the dragon that kept watch over the Golden Fleece.

"Princess," he exclaimed, "you seem indeed very wise and very powerful. But how can you help me to do the things of which you speak? Are you an enchantress?"

"Yes, Prince Jason," answered Medea, with a smile, "you have hit upon the truth. I am an enchantress. Circe, my father's sister, taught me to be one, and I could tell you, if I pleased, who was the old woman with the peacock, the pomegranate, and the cuckoo staff, whom you carried over the river; and, likewise, who it is that speaks through the lips of the oaken image, that stands in the prow of your galley. I am acquainted with some of your secrets, you perceive. It is well for you that I am favorably inclined; for, otherwise, you would hardly escape being snapped up by the dragon."

"I should not so much care for the dragon," replied Jason, "if I only knew how to manage the brazen-footed and fiery-lunged bulls."

"If you are as brave as I think you, and as you have need to be," said Medea, "your own bold heart will teach you that there is but one way of dealing with a mad bull. What it is I leave you to find out in the moment of peril. As for the fiery breath of these animals, I have a charmed ointment here, which will prevent you from being burned up, and cure you if you chance to be a little scorched."

So she put a golden box into his hand, and directed him how to apply the perfumed unguent which it contained, and where to meet her at midnight.

"Only be brave," added she, "and before daybreak the brazen bulls shall be tamed."

The young man assured her that his heart would not fail him. He then rejoined his comrades, and told them what had passed between the princess and himself, and warned them to be in readiness in case there might be need of their help. At the appointed hour he met the beautiful Medea on the marble steps of the king's palace. She gave him a basket, in which were the dragon's teeth, just as they had been pulled out of the monster's jaws by Cadmus, long ago. Medea then led Jason down the palace steps, and through the silent streets of the city, and into the royal pasture ground, where the two brazen-footed bulls were kept. It was a starry night, with a bright gleam along the eastern edge of the sky, where the moon was soon going to show herself. After entering the pasture, the princess paused and looked around.

"There they are," said she, "reposing themselves and chewing their fiery cuds in that farthest corner of the field. It will be excellent sport, I assure you, when they catch a glimpse of your figure. My father and all his court delight in nothing so much as to see a stranger trying to yoke them, in order to come at the Golden Fleece. It makes a holiday in Colchis whenever such a thing happens.

For my part, I enjoy it immensely. You cannot imagine in what a mere twinkling of an eye their hot breath shrivels a young man into a black cinder."

"Are you sure, beautiful Medea," asked Jason, "quite sure, that the unguent in the gold box will prove a remedy against those terrible burns?"

"If you doubt, if you are in the least afraid," said the princess, looking him in the face by the dim starlight, "you had better never have been born than to go a step nigher to the bulls."

But Jason had set his heart steadfastly on getting the Golden Fleece; and I positively doubt whether he would have gone back without it, even had he been certain of finding himself turned into a red-hot cinder, or a handful of white ashes, the instant he made a step farther. He therefore let go Medea's hand, and walked boldly forward in the direction whither she had pointed. At some distance before him he perceived four streams of fiery vapor, regularly appearing and again vanishing, after dimly lighting up the surrounding obscurity. These, you will understand, were caused by the breath of the brazen bulls, which was quietly stealing out of their four nostrils, as they lay chewing their cuds.

At the first two or three steps which Jason made, the four fiery streams appeared to gush out somewhat more plentifully; for the two brazen bulls had heard his foot tramp, and were lifting up their hot noses to snuff the air. He went a little farther, and by the way in which the red vapor now spouted forth, he judged that the creatures had got upon their feet. Now he could see glowing sparks, and vivid jets of flame. At the next step, each of the bulls made the pasture echo with a terrible roar, while the burning breath, which they thus belched forth, lit up the whole field with a momentary flash. One other stride did bold Jason make; and, suddenly as a streak of lightning, on came these fiery animals, roaring like thunder, and sending out sheets of white flame, which so kindled up the scene that the young man could discern every object more distinctly than by daylight. Most distinctly of all he saw the two horrible creatures galloping right down upon him, their brazen hoofs rattling and ringing over the ground, and their tails sticking up stiffly into the air, as has always been the fashion with angry bulls. Their breath scorched the herbage before them. So intensely hot it was, indeed, that it caught a dry tree under which Jason was now standing, and set it all in a light blaze. But as for Jason himself (thanks to Medea's enchanted ointment), the white flame curled around his body, without injuring him a jot more than if he had been made of asbestos.

Greatly encouraged at finding himself not yet turned into a cinder, the young man awaited the attack of the bulls. Just as the brazen brutes fancied themselves sure of tossing him into the air, he caught one of them by the horn, and the other by his screwed-up tail, and held them in a gripe like that of an iron vice, one with his right hand, the other with his left. Well, he must have been wonderfully strong in his arms, to be sure. But the secret of the matter was, that the brazen bulls were enchanted creatures, and that Jason had broken the spell of their fiery fierceness by his bold way of handling them. And, ever since that time, it has been the favorite method of brave men, when danger assails them, to do what they call "taking the bull by the horns"; and to gripe him by the tail is pretty much the same thing—that is, to throw aside fear, and overcome the peril by despising it.

It was now easy to yoke the bulls, and to harness them to the plow, which had lain rusting on the ground for a great many years gone by; so long was it before anybody could be found capable of plowing that piece of land. Jason, I suppose, had been taught how to draw a furrow by the good old Chiron, who, perhaps, used to allow himself to be harnessed to the plow. At any rate, our hero succeeded perfectly well in breaking up the greensward; and, by the time that the moon was a quarter of her journey up the sky, the plowed field lay before him, a large tract of black earth, ready to be sown with the dragon's teeth. So Jason scattered them broadcast, and harrowed them into the soil with a brush-harrow, and took his stand on the edge of the field, anxious to see what would happen next.

"Must we wait long for harvest time?" he inquired of Medea, who was now standing by his side.

"Whether sooner or later, it will be sure to come," answered the princess. "A crop of armed men never fails to spring up, when the dragon's teeth have been sown."

The moon was now high aloft in the heavens, and threw its bright beams over the plowed field, where as yet there was nothing to be seen. Any farmer, on viewing it, would have said that Jason must wait weeks before the green blades would peep from among the clods, and whole months before the yellow grain would be ripened for the sickle. But by and by, all over the field, there was something that glistened in the moonbeams, like sparkling drops of dew. These bright objects sprouted higher, and proved to be the steel heads of spears. Then there was a dazzling gleam from a vast number of polished brass helmets, beneath which, as they grew farther out of the soil, appeared the dark and bearded visages of warriors, struggling to free themselves from the imprisoning earth. The first look that they gave at the upper world was a glare of wrath and defiance. Next were seen their bright breastplates; in every right hand there was a sword or a spear, and on each left arm a shield; and when this strange crop of warriors had but half grown out of the earth, they struggled—such was their impatience of restraint—and, as it were, tore themselves up by the roots. Wherever a dragon's tooth had fallen, there stood a man armed for battle. They made a clangor with their swords against their shields, and eyed one another fiercely; for they had come into this beautiful world, and into the peaceful moonlight, full of rage and stormy passions, and ready to take the life of every human brother, in recompense of the boon of their own existence.

There have been many other armies in the world that seemed to possess the same fierce nature with the one which had now sprouted from the dragon's teeth; but these, in the moonlit field, were the more excusable, because they never had women for their mothers. And how it would have rejoiced any great captain, who was bent on conquering the world, like Alexander or Napoleon, to raise a crop of armed soldiers as easily as Jason did! For a while, the warriors stood flourishing their weapons, clashing their swords against their shields, and boiling over with the red-hot thirst for battle.

Then they began to shout—"Show us the enemy! Lead us to the charge! Death or victory!" "Come on, brave comrades! Conquer or die!" and a hundred other outcries, such as men always bellow forth on a battle field, and which these dragon people seemed to have at their tongues' ends.

At last, the front rank caught sight of Jason, who, beholding the flash of so many weapons in the moonlight, had thought it best to draw his sword. In a moment all the sons of the dragon's teeth appeared to take Jason for an enemy; and crying with one voice, "Guard the Golden Fleece!" they ran at him with uplifted swords and protruded spears. Jason knew that it would be impossible to withstand this blood-thirsty battalion with his single arm, but determined, since there was nothing better to be done, to die as valiantly as if he himself had sprung from a dragon's tooth.

Medea, however, bade him snatch up a stone from the ground.

"Throw it among them quickly!" cried she. "It is the only way to save yourself."

The armed men were now so nigh that Jason could discern the fire flashing out of their enraged eyes, when he let fly the stone, and saw it strike the helmet of a tall warrior, who was rushing upon him with his blade aloft. The stone glanced from this man's helmet to the shield of his nearest comrade, and thence flew right into the angry face of another, hitting him smartly between the eyes. Each of the three who had been struck by the stone took it for granted that his next neighbor had given him a blow; and instead of running any farther towards Jason, they began to fight among themselves. The confusion spread through the host, so that it seemed scarcely a moment before they were all hacking, hewing, and stabbing at one another, lopping off arms, heads, and legs and doing such memorable deeds that Jason was filled with immense admiration; although, at the same time, he could not help laughing to behold these mighty men punishing each other for an offense which he himself had committed. In an incredibly short space of time (almost as short, indeed, as it had taken them to grow up), all but one of the heroes of the dragon's teeth were stretched lifeless on the field. The last survivor, the bravest and strongest of the whole, had just force enough to wave his crimson sword over his head and give a shout of exultation, crying, "Victory! Victory! Immortal fame!" when he himself fell down, and lay quietly among his slain brethren.

And there was the end of the army that had sprouted from the dragon's teeth. That fierce and feverish fight was the only enjoyment which they had tasted on this beautiful earth.

"Let them sleep in the bed of honor," said the Princess Medea, with a sly smile at Jason. "The world will always have simpletons enough, just like them, fighting and dying for they know not what, and fancying that posterity will take the trouble to put laurel wreaths on their rusty and battered helmets. Could you help smiling, Prince Jason, to see the self-conceit of that last fellow, just as he tumbled down?"

"It made me very sad," answered Jason, gravely. "And, to tell you the truth, princess, the Golden Fleece does not appear so well worth the winning, after what I have here beheld!"

"You will think differently in the morning," said Medea. "True, the Golden Fleece may not be so valuable as you have thought it; but then there is nothing better in the world; and one must needs have an object, you know. Come! Your night's work has been well performed; and to-morrow you can inform King Aetes that the first part of your allotted task is fulfilled."

Agreeably to Medea's advice, Jason went betimes in the morning to the palace of King Aetes. Entering the presence chamber, he stood at the foot of the throne, and made a low obeisance.

"Your eyes look heavy, Prince Jason," observed the king; "you appear to have spent a sleepless night. I hope you have been considering the matter a little more wisely, and have concluded not to get yourself scorched to a cinder, in attempting to tame my brazen-lunged bulls."

"That is already accomplished, may it please your majesty," replied Jason. "The bulls have been tamed and yoked; the field has been plowed; the dragon's teeth have been sown broadcast, and harrowed into the soil; the crop of armed warriors have sprung up, and they have slain one another, to the last man. And now I solicit your majesty's permission to encounter the dragon, that I may take down the Golden Fleece from the tree, and depart, with my nine and forty comrades."

King Aetes scowled, and looked very angry and excessively disturbed; for he knew that, in accordance with his kingly promise, he ought now to permit Jason to win the Fleece, if his courage and skill should enable him to do so. But, since the young man had met with such good luck in the matter of the brazen bulls and the dragon's teeth, the king feared that he would be equally successful in slaying the dragon. And therefore, though he would gladly have seen Jason snapped up at a mouthful, he was resolved (and it was a very wrong thing of this wicked potentate) not to run any further risk of losing his beloved Fleece.

"You never would have succeeded in this business, young man," said he, "if my undutiful daughter Medea had not helped you with her enchantments. Had you acted fairly, you would have been, at this instant, a black cinder, or a handful of white ashes. I forbid you, on pain of death, to make any more attempts to get the Golden Fleece. To speak my mind plainly, you shall never set eyes on so much as one of its glistening locks."

Jason left the king's presence in great sorrow and anger. He could think of nothing better to be done than to summon together his forty-nine brave Argonauts, march at once to the Grove of Mars, slay the dragon, take possession of the Golden Fleece, get on board the Argo, and spread all sail for Iolchos. The success of this scheme depended, it is true, on the doubtful point whether all the fifty heroes might not be snapped up, at so many mouthfuls, by the dragon. But, as Jason was hastening down the palace steps, the Princess Medea called after him, and beckoned him to return. Her black eyes shone upon him with such a keen intelligence, that he felt as if there were a serpent peeping out of them; and, although she had done him so much service only the night before, he was by no means very certain that she would not do him an equally great mischief before sunset. These enchantresses, you must know, are never to be depended upon.

"What says King Aetes, my royal and upright father?" inquired Medea, slightly smiling. "Will he give you the Golden Fleece, without any further risk or trouble?"

"On the contrary," answered Jason, "he is very angry with me for taming the brazen bulls and sowing the dragon's teeth. And he forbids me to make any more attempts, and positively refuses to give up the Golden Fleece, whether I slay the dragon or no."

"Yes, Jason," said the princess, "and I can tell you more. Unless you set sail from Colchis before to-morrow's sunrise, the king means to burn your fifty-oared galley, and put yourself and your forty-nine brave comrades to the sword. But be of good courage. The Golden Fleece you shall have, if it lies within the power of my enchantments to get it for you. Wait for me here an hour before midnight."

At the appointed hour you might again have seen Prince Jason and the Princess Medea, side by side, stealing through the streets of Colchis, on their way to the sacred grove, in the center of which the Golden Fleece was suspended to a tree. While they were crossing the pasture ground, the brazen bulls came towards Jason, lowing, nodding their heads, and thrusting forth their snouts, which, as other cattle do, they loved to have rubbed and caressed by a friendly hand. Their fierce nature was thoroughly tamed; and, with their fierceness, the two furnaces in their stomachs had likewise been extinguished, insomuch that they probably enjoyed far more comfort in grazing and chewing their cuds than ever before. Indeed, it had heretofore been a great inconvenience to these poor animals, that, whenever they wished to eat a mouthful of grass, the fire out of their nostrils had shriveled it up, before they could manage to crop it. How they contrived to keep themselves alive is more than I can imagine. But now, instead of emitting jets of flame and streams of sulphurous vapor, they breathed the very sweetest of cow breath.

After kindly patting the bulls, Jason followed Medea's guidance into the Grove of Mars, where the great oak trees, that had been growing for centuries, threw so thick a shade that the moonbeams struggled vainly to find their way through it. Only here and there a glimmer fell upon the leaf-strewn earth, or now and then a breeze stirred the boughs aside, and gave Jason a glimpse of the sky, lest, in that deep obscurity, he might forget that there was one, overhead. At length, when they had gone farther and farther into the heart of the duskiness, Medea squeezed Jason's hand.

"Look yonder," she whispered. "Do you see it?"

Gleaming among the venerable oaks, there was a radiance, not like the moonbeams, but rather resembling the golden glory of the setting sun. It proceeded from an object, which appeared to be suspended at about a man's height from the ground, a little farther within the wood.

"What is it?" asked Jason.

"Have you come so far to seek it," exclaimed Medea, "and do you not recognize the meed of all your toils and perils, when it glitters before your eyes? It is the Golden Fleece."

Jason went onward a few steps farther, and then stopped to gaze. O, how beautiful it looked, shining with a marvelous light of its own, that inestimable prize which so many heroes had longed to behold, but had perished in the quest of it, either by the perils of their voyage, or by the fiery breath of the brazen-lunged bulls.

"How gloriously it shines!" cried Jason, in a rapture. "It has surely been dipped in the richest gold of sunset. Let me hasten onward, and take it to my bosom."

"Stay," said Medea, holding him back. "Have you forgotten what guards it?"

To say the truth, in the joy of beholding the object of his desires, the terrible dragon had quite slipped out of Jason's memory. Soon, however, something came to pass, that reminded him what perils were still to be encountered. An antelope, that probably mistook the yellow radiance for sunrise, came bounding fleetly through the grove. He was rushing straight towards the Golden Fleece, when suddenly there was a frightful hiss, and the immense head and half the scaly body of the dragon was thrust forth (for he was twisted round the trunk of the tree on which the Fleece hung), and seizing the poor antelope, swallowed him with one snap of his jaws.

After this feat, the dragon seemed sensible that some other living creature was within reach, on which he felt inclined to finish his meal. In various directions he kept poking his ugly snout among the trees, stretching out his neck a terrible long way, now here, now there, and now close to the spot where Jason and the princess were hiding behind an oak. Upon my word, as the head came waving and undulating through the air, and reaching almost within arm's length of Prince Jason, it was a very hideous and uncomfortable sight. The gape of his enormous jaws was nearly as wide as the gateway of the king's palace.

"Well, Jason," whispered Medea (for she was ill natured, as all enchantresses are, and wanted to make the bold youth tremble), "what do you think now of your prospect of winning the Golden Fleece?"

Jason answered only by drawing his sword, and making a step forward.

"Stay, foolish youth," said Medea, grasping his arm. "Do not you see you are lost, without me as your good angel? In this gold box I have a magic potion, which will do the dragon's business far more effectually than your sword."

The dragon had probably heard the voices; for swift as lightning, his black head and forked tongue came hissing among the trees again, darting full forty feet at a stretch. As it approached, Medea tossed the contents of the gold box right down the monster's wide-open throat. Immediately, with an outrageous hiss and a tremendous wriggle—flinging his tail up to the tip-top of the tallest tree, and shattering all its branches as it crashed heavily down again—the dragon fell at full length upon the ground, and lay quite motionless.

"It is only a sleeping potion," said the enchantress to Prince Jason. "One always finds a use for these mischievous creatures, sooner or later; so I did not wish to kill him outright. Quick! Snatch the prize, and let us begone. You have won the Golden Fleece."

Jason caught the fleece from the tree, and hurried through the grove, the deep shadows of which were illuminated as he passed by the golden glory of the precious object that he bore along. A little way before him, he beheld the old woman whom he had helped over the stream, with her peacock beside her. She clapped her hands for joy, and beckoning him to make haste, disappeared among the duskiness of the trees.

Espying the two winged sons of the North Wind (who were disporting themselves in the moonlight, a few hundred feet aloft), Jason bade them tell the rest of the Argonauts to embark as speedily as possible. But Lynceus, with his sharp eyes, had already caught a glimpse of him, bringing the Golden Fleece, although several stone walls, a hill, and the black shadows of the Grove of Mars, intervened between. By his advice, the heroes had seated themselves on the benches of the galley, with their oars held perpendicularly, ready to let fall into the water.

As Jason drew near, he heard the Talking Image calling to him with more than ordinary eagerness, in its grave, sweet voice:

"Make haste, Prince Jason! For your life, make haste!"

With one bound, he leaped aboard. At sight of the glorious radiance of the Golden Fleece, the nine and forty heroes gave a mighty shout, and Orpheus, striking his harp, sang a song of triumph, to the cadence of which the galley flew over the water, homeward bound, as if careering along with wings!

How Rome Was Founded
By James Baldwin

I. The Two Kings

A very great while ago there was a city in Italy which its people called Alba Longa, or the Long White. It stood on the slope of a hill, a mile or more from the river Tiber. Its houses stretched in a straggling line down to the shore of a little lake.

The men of Alba Longa were mostly shepherds and hunters. In times of peace they tended their flocks or ranged the woods for game. In times of war—which happened often enough—every man was ready with club and pike to fight for his home.

The people were rude and barbarous in their manners, as was common in those days. They ate mutton and coarse vegetables. They drank the milk of goats. They clothed themselves in sheepskins. They slept on the floor, and never allowed their fires to go out. They seldom went far from home, and they fancied that the whole world was seen from the top of their hill.

Now, there was a king of Alba Longa whose name was Numitor. He was an elderly man, gentle and kind. He cared little for power; indeed, there was nothing he liked so well as his farm and his garden and his flocks of white-fleeced sheep. Two children were his—a promising boy of twelve and a lovely daughter whose name was Rhea Silvia. He had also a younger brother called Amulius, a low-browed, dark-faced fellow, ready to do any sort of wickedness that came into his mind.

This brother was always stirring up the young men of Alba Longa.

"If I were king, things would be different," he would say. "You should all live at your ease, and want for nothing."

At length, one day when Numitor was at his farm, Amulius proclaimed himself king of Alba Longa. He stationed soldiers at the city gates, and declared that every man who did not acknowledge his right to the kingship should be put to death. Then he sent word to Numitor:—

"You had better stay with your sheep and goats, for I am the king!"

What else could poor, weak Numitor do? Indeed, I think he was quite glad to be rid of his kingly burdens and have nought to think about but his flocks. He would have been happy if his children had been permitted to live with him on the farm. But news soon came which filled his heart with grief and clouded all the rest of his days.

His boy was dead, slain by the hand of the false Amulius. Fair Rhea Silvia had been shut up in a temple of Vesta, there to serve as a priestess all her days, and nevermore to see her dear father or the pleasant home of her childhood.

II. The Two Babes

After this, Amulius settled himself down to enjoy his kingship. The shepherds of Alba Longa tended their flocks, and were sad or joyous much as they had been before. They hated Amulius; but they feared him much more, and so said nothing. And poor, sorrowing Numitor stayed on his farm and busied himself with his sheep and his goats.

Five, six, seven years passed by, and then strange news was told in Alba Longa. Rhea Silvia, it was said, had escaped from her temple prison. She had gone away with an unknown warrior who was never seen except when dressed in a coat of mail and fully armed. Some said that this warrior was Silvanus, the protector of all cattle; but most believed that he was Mars, the mighty lord of war and battles. As for me, I think he was some hero of a neighboring tribe who had known and loved Silvia in happier days, and who now wished to rescue her from her prison and make her his wife.

Great was the excitement in Alba Longa, and great was the alarm of the false king Amulius. All through the land close search was made for Rhea; but no sign or trace of her could be found.

"I shall never be safe while she lives," said Amulius; and he doubled the guards around the city. But Numitor stayed with his flocks and seemed to know nothing of what had occurred.

Another year passed by. It was the time of the spring floods, and the Tiber had overflowed its banks. The lowlands were under water. The shepherds had driven all their flocks to the hills.

One morning King Amulius was standing alone in his palace looking out at the drenched earth and the pouring rain. Suddenly there was a great uproar at the door, and two shepherds entered bearing a covered basket in their arms.

"What have you there?" cried the king.

They removed the cover. He looked in and saw two tiny babies, wrapped in an embroidered cloak. Their eyes blinked, and they began to cry as the light fell upon their faces.

"Yesterday," said the shepherds, "the Tiber suddenly flooded all our pasture lands. As we were hurrying toward the hills with our sheep we beheld a woman standing on a rock in the midst of the flood. We drew nearer, and saw that she was none other than Rhea Silvia, the daughter of old Numitor. When we would have seized her she leaped into the river, and the swirling waters carried her beyond our reach. But on the rock she left her cloak; and wrapped in the cloak, as you see them now, were these twin baby boys."

"I doubt you not," said Amulius, "for the cloak is the same that Rhea Silvia wore when a girl. Why did you not fling the brats into the river and let them die with their mother?"

"We dared not do so without your command," was the answer.

"Well, then," said the king, furious with rage, "I command it now. Carry them back to the place where you found them, and make sure that they are drowned. Out of my sight, and be quick about it!"

The shepherds again drew the cloak over the faces of the crying infants, and hurried away to do the king's bidding.

III. The Two Shepherds

"I cannot bear to see the pretty babes drown before my eyes," said one of the shepherds.

"Neither can I," said the other. "They make me think of my own twin boys at home."

"I could not see a lamb struggling in the waves without trying to save it," said the first.

"Only yesterday," said the second, "I saved two young wolves from drowning. And now what am I about to do?"

Thus the men talked to each other while they went on their undesired errand. Just as they reached the river they saw, floating in an eddying pool, a small trough, such as shepherds used when feeding their lambs in winter.

"I have it now," said the second shepherd. "Let us put the babes in the trough and send it floating into the current. They will be drowned, but not by us nor while we are looking on."

"You are right! You are right!" answered his companion. "Seize the thing as it comes near the shore, and let us end this ugly business."

They dipped the water out of the trough and wiped it dry and clean. Then they wrapped the babes in their mother's cloak and laid them down, side by side, in the bottom of the rude vessel.

"Fare you well, sweet babes," said the second shepherd. "I could never look my own twin boys in the face were I to see you drown."

"Fare you well, and a long, safe voyage," said the other, as he pushed the trough far out from the shore.

Then, without once looking behind them, the two men silently turned away and returned to Alba Longa to tell Amulius that they had done his bidding.

"Now at last I can breathe freely," he said to himself.

IV. The She-Wolf

Far down the stream floated the little trough boat with its tiny passengers. In the strong current it was rocked like a cradle, yet not a drop of water found its way into the frail craft. Lulled by the gentle motion and soothed by the rippling music of the waves, the babes soon fell asleep.

Then the boat drifted into smoother water. It was caught in a broad eddy and carried toward the shore. Slowly now it floated among logs and brushwood and over the flooded land. At nightfall it grounded in shallow water at the foot of a wooded hill; and the voyage was ended.

That night an old she-wolf was roaming through the underwoods by the shore, looking for her whelps which had been carried away by the flood. Suddenly she heard a feeble, wailing sound, as of some young creature in distress.

She paused and listened. Could it be her own little ones?

The sound seemed to come from some driftwood close at hand. She ran out into the shallow water, leaped upon a floating log, and looked down upon the strangest sight that wolf ever saw—two babies lying in a sheep trough and wailing, oh, so pitifully!

As the beast scrambled to the top of the log the children were attracted by the sound; they looked up and smiled and held out their tiny arms.

The wolf wondered, as only wolves can wonder. Could it be possible that these were her own lost whelps, strangely changed in form since she last saw them? At any rate they were young and helpless and hungry; and she would be a mother to them.

Her den was not far away. It was high and dry on the hillside. She would carry them thither.

With her strong jaws and huge, sharp teeth she seized the cloak to tear it away. But the infants were wrapped in it so tightly that she lifted them at the same time. What a fine way to carry them! It was much better than grasping them by the nape of the neck as she had always done with her own babies.

The babes were small and light; the wolf was big and strong, and it was easy for her to carry them. She ran joyfully up the hill, holding her head high so that they would not drag on the rocks. Into her dry, warm den she hastened, as glad as any mother returning home with her lost loved ones.

In a few minutes the wailing of the infants ceased; they fancied themselves in the arms of their own dear mother. The night was dark. Around the foot of the hill the waves lapped against the shores. In the wolf's den all was silent.

V. Faustulus

Summer came. The rains had ceased. The river Tiber was no longer a foaming torrent overflowing the plains, but only a narrow, yellow stream creeping along toward the distant sea. The mountain torrents were dried up; the earth was dusty and hot; the grass was withering on the hillsides.

Early one morning a wolf broke into the fold where the king's sheep were kept, and carried away a lamb. The head shepherd, whose name was Faustulus, gave chase to the robber. He followed her to the very cave in which she had her den. It was on the slope of the hill called the Palatine.

At the door of the cave the wolf turned and showed fight. Faustulus was ready for her. As she rushed fiercely toward him, a well-aimed blow from his ax felled her to the ground; another blow put an end to her life.

Faustulus bethought him then that he would look in the den—perhaps there were young wolves there. The door of the cave was low and narrow; but with his ax in his hand he crept forward and peered inside. At first he could make out nothing plainly; but in a little while his eyes became accustomed to the darkness and he could see quite well. What a strange sight was that which met his gaze! In the farthest corner of the cave was the wolf's lair—a rough pile of sticks and leaves and dry grass, with a torn cloak lying beside it. On the top of this rude bed sat two baby boys. They were cooing and goo-gooing as happily as though they were in their mother's lap. They were fat and hearty and appeared to be seven or eight months old; and when they saw Faustulus coming toward them they shrank back and began to scream with fear.

Faustulus picked them up in his arms. He wrapped the remains of the old cloak around them. He crawled out through the low door and, without stopping to take another look at the place, hurried home.

His wife, Acca Larentia, was astonished to see the two babes in his arms.

"Where did you find them, and what shall we do with them?" she asked.

He told her about finding them in the cave, and showed her the torn cloak.

"This is the cloak of Rhea Silvia," he said; "and no doubt these are her babes whom the king ordered to be drowned. Shall we be less kind to them than was the savage wolf?"

"Ah, no!" she answered. "Although we have twelve children of our own to care for, there is still plenty of room in our poor hut. We will keep the twins and care for them as our own."

"And nobody must know that they are not our own," said Faustulus; "for should this be told to King Amulius it would mean death to us all."

The two babies were therefore taken into the shepherd's family and given the same food and the same care and love as the other children. They were named Romulus and Remus, and they looked as much alike as two grains of wheat on the same stalk.

VI. The Rival Shepherds

Many years passed, and Romulus and Remus grew up to be tall young men, graceful and strong and fearless. With their foster brothers they tended the flocks on the Palatine Hill, and they were known among the shepherds as the sons of Faustulus. They hunted wild beasts in the forest by the Tiber; they fought with robbers; they became noted throughout the land for their fearless valor. In every enterprise they were the leaders.

Just across the valley from the king's pastures there was another hill called the Aventine. It was there that poor old Numitor had his farm, and there he pastured his sheep and his goats.

"The grass is greener and taller on the Aventine," said Romulus one day. "Let us drive our flocks over there to fatten in the fields of old Numitor."

"Agreed!" said his companions; and soon the thing was done.

It was not long, however, before the shepherds of Numitor discovered the intruders. There was a great outcry. Numitor's men rushed down the hill-side with clubs and stones and pikes, and there was a sharp fight. The king's shepherds were out-numbered four to one. They fought fiercely, but in the end were glad enough to hurry their flocks back to their own pasture.

A day or two after this, when Romulus was absent on a hunting excursion, it was discovered that the finest lamb in the king's flock was missing.

"Wolves!" said the shepherds.

"Yes," said the sharp-sighted Remus, "the two-legged wolves that keep old Numitor's sheep! If you had as good eyes as I have, you could see the lamb now, tethered to a stake just this side of the great rock over there. Stay you here, and I will go and fetch it back."

And all alone, with nothing but his staff in his hands, he strode off toward the Aventine.

"Let us go with you, Remus," cried the shepherds. "You may need help."

"Attend to your sheep, and do my bidding," Remus roughly answered.

VII. The Discovery

An hour later there was a great ado on the Aventine Hill. Remus had made his way up the slope without seeing a single enemy. He had reached the lamb and cut the cord with which it was tethered. He was about lifting it in his arms, when a dozen dark-faced fellows rushed suddenly upon him from their hiding place behind the great rock.

Remus dropped the lamb and fought manfully with his staff. But what could he do against so many? He was thrown to the ground; his hands were bound behind him; and then he was led over the hill to the farmhouse of old Numitor.

"Here is the ringleader of the gang that trespassed on your grounds," said his captors.

"Then away with him!" cried Numitor, without looking up or rising from his couch. "Take him away and make an end of him."

But before the men could turn round with their prisoner, there was a great hubbub at the door, and the king's shepherd, Faustulus, pushed his way into the room.

"My lord Numitor, my lord Numitor," he cried, "would you put your own grandson to death?" And then he hurriedly told the story of the twin babies and the wolf, and of the manner in which the boys had been brought up in his own house.

"And where is the other young man?" asked old Numitor, his memory going back slowly to his dear lost daughter Rhea Silvia.

"Here I am, grandfather," said Romulus, coming suddenly in, and going boldly forward to the old man's couch. He had returned from hunting just at the moment that the news of his brother's capture was told on the Palatine Hill. Calling to the shepherds to follow him, he was hurrying toward the Aventine to rescue the prisoner by force, when Faustulus had met him and told him about his parentage and urged him to another course.

"Here I am, too, grandfather," said Remus, as Numitor raised himself slowly and gazed at the two brothers with his weak old eyes.

"Whom do I see?" cried Numitor. "They have the face, the eyes, the look of Rhea Silvia; but what manly forms, what grace and strength! Yes, I must believe your story, Faustulus. They are my grandsons—their looks prove it."

"And if further proof were wanting," said Faustulus, "look upon this embroidered robe that was found with the children in the wolf's den."

Numitor took the soiled, torn garment in his hands, and his eyes filled with tears. "Alas, my dear lost daughter!" he moaned. "And cruel Amulius will slay your sons, too, when he learns they are still alive."

"Not so, not so, King Numitor!" cried a voice at the door. "Down with Amulius!"

"Romulus and Remus! Let Romulus and Remus lead us!" shouted all the shepherds and serving men. "Down with Amulius the tyrant! Hail to our King Numitor!"

Within an hour a strong force of men, armed with axes and pikes and clubs, was marching against Alba Longa; and Romulus and Remus were the leaders.

Amulius was feasting in his palace, little thinking of danger, when the brothers rushed in at the head of their shepherd army. The fight was sharp but quickly over. The people of Alba Longa were so tired of Amulius that few cared to aid him. When he found that all was lost he tried to escape; but a shepherd from the Palatine pastures felled him with a club, and an end was soon put to his wicked life.

"Our grandfather, Numitor, is again the king of Alba Longa!" cried Romulus.

"Long life to King Numitor!" shouted the rabble of shepherds. Some of them hastened to fetch the old man from his farm; and amid great rejoicings he was again seated on the throne from which he had been driven so long before.

VIII. The New City

Romulus and Remus might have remained in Alba Longa and lived at ease in their grandfather's palace; and, indeed, the poor man needed their help badly enough. But they longed for the pleasant hills where they had spent their childhood—for the Palatine and the Aventine, with their pasture lands and their green woods.

"Grandfather," they said, "you are the king of Alba Longa and we wish you long life and prosperity. But Alba Longa is no place for us. Give us leave to go out in the wild region by the Tiber and build a new town of our own."

What could Numitor do but tell them to go wherever they pleased? And so, at the head of a company of reckless men,—some shepherds and some robbers,—they went back to the hills by the Tiber.

"We will build our town on the Palatine," said Romulus.

"No, indeed," said Remus, "we will build it on the Aventine."

They could not agree; neither could the men who were with them. At last, when they were about to come to blows, old Faustulus stepped between them.

"For your own sakes, my boys," he said, "don't be wolves, but men. Settle this question in a peaceful way. Let the augurs decide."

"You are right," said the brothers; "the augurs shall decide. To-night we will watch for such signs as the powers above may send us."

All night long Romulus sat alone on the summit of the Palatine; all night long Remus sat alone on the summit of the Aventine. Thick clouds concealed the sky; the world was wrapped in pitchy darkness; nothing could be seen; nothing was heard. At last the dawn appeared, feeble and gray on the hilltops. Then Remus, watching from his lonely post, saw some large birds winging their way toward the woods beyond the Tiber.

"The augurs are for me," he cried to the shepherds in the valley below him. "I see six vultures flying from the Aventine."

A few minutes later the clouds rolled away and the rising sun gilded the tree tops with its golden beams. Then the shepherds heard from the summit of the opposite hill the deep-toned voice of Romulus crying,—

"The victory belongs to me. I see twelve vultures flying over the Palatine."

"The augurs decide for Romulus," said the shepherds. "The town shall be built on the Palatine, and it shall be called Rome in honor of our captain."

Romulus began at once to lay off the bounds of his little town. A few huts of brush and bark were built for the men. A better one of stones and clay was put up for the brothers. But Remus sulked and complained and tried in every way to hinder the work. "And this is the city of Rome, is it?" he sneered. "What a grand city, indeed!"

"We must have a strong wall around our city," said Romulus.

At once, with sharpened stakes and wooden spades, the men began the work. The space to be inclosed was not large, and soon a wall of earth and loose stones arose around the new city of Rome. It was but waist high, crooked, and uneven; and it was little wonder that Remus laughed at it.

"What a fine, strong wall it is!" he scornfully cried; and, running forward, he leaped over it at a bound.

"What a fine strong wall it is!"

But his feet had scarcely touched the ground when an angry shepherd struck him fiercely with a spade. As he fell, speechless and dying, the men crowded to the spot with rough cries and savage exultation.

"Thus perish all who attempt to pass the walls of Rome!" they shouted.

Perseus the Hero
A Book of Myths, by Jean Lang

"We call such a man a hero in English to this day, and call it a 'heroic' thing to suffer pain and grief, that we may do good to our fellow-men."

Charles Kingsley.

In the pleasant land of Argos, now a place of unwholesome marshes, once upon a time there reigned a king called Acrisius, the father of one fair daughter. Danaë was her name, and she was very dear to the king until a day when he longed to know what lay hid for him in the lap of the gods, and consulted an oracle. With hanging head he returned from the temple, for the oracle had told him that when his daughter Danaë had borne a son, by the hand of that son death must surely come upon him. And because the fear of death was in him more strong than the love of his daughter, Acrisius resolved that by sacrificing her he would baffle the gods and frustrate Death itself. A great tower of brass was speedily built at his command, and in this prison Danaë was placed, to drag out her weary days.

But who can escape the designs of the gods? From Olympus great Zeus himself looked down and saw the air princess sighing away her youth. And, full of pity and of love, he himself entered the brazen tower in a golden shower, and Danaë became the bride of Zeus and happily passed with him the time of her imprisonment.

To her at length was born a son, a beautiful and kingly child, and great was the wrath of her father when he had tidings of the birth. Did the gods in the high heavens laugh at him? The laugh should yet be on his side. Down to the seashore he hurried Danaë and her newly-born babe, the little Perseus, put them in a great chest, and set them adrift to be a plaything for winds and waves and a prey for the cruel and hungry sea.

"When in the cunningly-wrought chest the raging blast and the stirred billow and terror fell upon her, with tearful cheeks she cast her arm around Perseus and spake, 'Alas, my child, what sorrow is mine! But thou slumberest, in baby-wise sleeping in this woeful ark; midst the darkness of the brazen rivet thou shinest and in the swart gloom sent forth; thou heedest not the deep foam of the passing wave above thy locks nor the voice of the blast as thou liest in thy purple covering, a sweet face. If terror had terrors for thee, and thou wert giving ear to my gentle words—I bid thee sleep, my babe, and may the sea sleep and our measureless woe; and may change of fortune come forth, Father Zeus, from thee. For that I make my prayer in boldness and beyond right, forgive me.'"

Simonides of Keos.

For days and nights the mother and child were tossed on the billows, but yet no harm came near them, and one morning the chest grounded on the rocky beach of Seriphos, an island in the Ægean Sea. Here a fisherman came on this strange flotsam and jetsam of the waves and took the mother and child to Polydectes, the king, and the years that followed were peaceful years for Danaë and for Perseus. But as Perseus grew up, growing each day more goodly to look upon, more fearless, more ready to gaze with serene courage into the eyes of gods and of men, an evil thing befell his mother. She was but a girl when he was born, and as the years passed she grew ever more fair. And the crafty eyes of old Polydectes, the king, ever watched her more eagerly, always more hotly desired her for his wife. But Danaë, the beloved of Zeus himself, had no wish to wed the old king of the Cyclades, and proudly she scorned his suit. Behind her, as she knew well, was the stout arm of her son Perseus, and while Perseus was there, the king could do her no harm. But Perseus, unwitting of the danger his mother daily had to face, sailed the seas unfearingly, and felt that peace and safety surrounded him on every side. At Samos one day, while his ship was lading, Perseus lay down under the shade of a great tree, and soon his eyelids grew heavy with sleep, and there came to him, like butterflies that flit over the flowers in a sunlit garden, pleasant, light-winged dreams. But yet another dream followed close on the merry heels of those that went before. And before Perseus there stood one whose grey eyes were as the fathomless sea on the dawn of a summer day. Her long robes were blue as the hyacinths in spring, and the spear that she held in her hand was of a polished brightness, as the dart with which the gods smite the heart of a man, with joy inexpressible, with sorrow that is scarcely to be borne. To Perseus she spoke winged words.

"I am Pallas Athené," she said, "and to me the souls of men are known. Those whose fat hearts are as those of the beasts that perish do I know. They live at ease. No bitter sorrow is theirs, nor any fierce joy that lifts their feet free from the cumbering clay. But dear to my heart are the souls of those whose tears are tears of blood, whose joy is as the joy of the Immortals. Pain is theirs, and sorrow. Disappointment is theirs, and grief. Yet their love is as the love of those who dwell on Olympus. Patient they are and long-suffering, and ever they hope, ever do they trust. Ever they fight, fearless and unashamed, and when the sum of their days on earth is accomplished, wings, of whose existence they have never had knowledge, bear them upwards, out of the mist and din and strife of life, to the life that has no ending."

Then she laid her hand on the hand of Perseus. "Perseus," she said, "art thou of those whose dull souls forever dwell in pleasant ease, or wouldst thou be as one of the Immortals?"

And in his dream Perseus answered without hesitation:

"Rather let me die, a youth, living my life to the full, fighting ever, suffering ever," he said, "than live at ease like a beast that feeds on flowery pastures and knows no fiery gladness, no heart-bleeding pain."

Then Pallas Athené, laughing for joy, because she loved so well a hero's soul, showed him a picture that made even his brave heart sick for dread, and told him a terrible story.

In the dim, cold, far west, she said, there lived three sisters. One of them, Medusa, had been one of her priestesses, golden-haired and most beautiful, but when Athené found that she was as wicked as she was lovely, swiftly had she meted out a punishment. Every lock of her golden hair had been changed into a venomous snake. Her eyes, that had once been the cradles of love, were turned into love's stony tombs. Her rosy cheeks were now of Death's own livid hue. Her smile, which drew the hearts of lovers from their bosoms, had become a hideous thing. A grinning mask looked on the world, and to the world her gaping mouth and protruding tongue meant a horror before which the world stood terrified, dumb. There are some sadnesses too terrible for human hearts to bear, so it came to pass that in the dark cavern in which she dwelt, and in the shadowy woods around it, all living things that had met the awful gaze of her hopeless eyes were turned into stone. Then Pallas Athené showed Perseus, mirrored in a brazen shield, the face of one of the tragic things of the world. And as Perseus looked, his soul grew chill within him. But when Athené, in low voice, asked him:

"Perseus, wilt even end the sorrow of this piteous sinful one?" he answered, "Even that will I do—the gods helping me."

And Pallas Athené, smiling again in glad content, left him to dream, and Perseus awoke, in sudden fear, and found that in truth he had but dreamed, yet held his dream as a holy thing in the secret treasure-house of his heart.

Back to Seriphos he sailed, and found that his mother walked in fear of Polydectes the king. She told her son—a strong man now, though young in years—the story of his cruel persecution. Perseus saw red blood, and gladly would he have driven his keen blade far home in the heart of Polydectes. But his vengeance was to be a great vengeance, and the vengeance was delayed.

The king gave a feast, and on that day every one in the land brought offerings of their best and most costly to do him honour. Perseus alone came empty-handed, and as he stood in the king's court as though he were a beggar, the other youths mocked at him of whom they had ever been jealous.

"Thou sayest that thy father is one of the gods!" they said. "Where is thy godlike gift, O Perseus!"

And Polydectes, glad to humble the lad who was keeper of his mother's honour, echoed their foolish taunt.

"Where is the gift of the gods that the noble son of the gods has brought me?" he asked, and his fat cheeks and loose mouth quivered with ugly merriment.

Then Perseus, his head thrown back, gazed in the bold eyes of Polydectes.

Son of Zeus he was indeed, as he looked with royal scorn at those whom he despised.

"A godlike gift thou shalt have, in truth, O king," he said, and his voice rang out as a trumpet-call before the battle. "The gift of the gods shall be thine. The gods helping me, thou shalt have the head of Medusa."

A laugh, half-born, died in the throats of Polydectes and of those who listened, and Perseus strode out of the palace, a glow in his heart, for he knew that Pallas Athené had lit the fire that burned in him now, and that though he should shed the last drop of his life's blood to win what he sought, right would triumph, and wrong must be worsted.

Still quivering with anger, Perseus went down to the blue sea that gently whispered its secrets to the shore on which he stood.

"If Pallas Athené would but come," he thought—"if only my dreams might come true."

For, like many a boy before and since, Perseus had dreamed of gallant, fearless deeds. Like many a boy before and since, he had been the hero of a great adventure.

So he prayed, "Come to me! I pray you, Pallas Athené, come! and let me dream true."

His prayer was answered.

Into the sky there came a little silver cloud that grew and grew, and ever it grew nearer, and then, as in his dream, Pallas Athené came to him and smiled on him as the sun smiles on the water in spring. Nor was she alone. Beside her stood Hermes of the winged shoes, and Perseus knelt before the two in worship. Then, very gently, Pallas Athené gave him counsel, and more than counsel she gave.

In his hand she placed a polished shield, than which no mirror shone more brightly.

"Do not look at Medusa herself; look only on her image here reflected—then strike home hard and swiftly. And when her head is severed, wrap it in the goatskin on which the shield hangs. So wilt thou return in safety and in honour."

"But how, then, shall I cross the wet grey fields of this watery way?" asked Perseus. "Would that I were a white-winged bird that skims across the waves."

And, with the smile of a loving comrade, Hermes laid his hand on the shoulder of Perseus.

"My winged shoes shall be thine," he said, "and the white-winged sea-birds shalt thou leave far, far behind."

"Yet another gift is thine," said Athené. "Gird on, as gift from the gods, this sword that is immortal."

For a moment Perseus lingered. "May I not bid farewell to my mother?" he asked. "May I not offer burnt-offerings to thee and to Hermes, and to my father Zeus himself?"

But Athené said Nay, at his mother's weeping his heart might relent, and the offering that the Olympians desired was the head of Medusa.

Then, like a fearless young golden eagle, Perseus spread out his arms, and the winged shoes carried him across the seas to the cold northern lands whither Athené had directed him.

Each day his shoes took him a seven days' journey, and ever the air through which he passed grew more chill, till at length he reached the land of everlasting snow, where the black ice never knows the conquering warmth of spring, and where the white surf of the moaning waves freezes solid even as it touches the shore.

It was a dark grim place to which he came, and in a gloomy cavern by the sea lived the Graeæ, the three grey sisters that Athené had told him he must seek. Old and grey and horrible they were, with but one tooth amongst them, and but one eye. From hand to hand they passed the eye, and muttered and shivered in the blackness and the cold.

Boldly Perseus spoke to them and asked them to guide him to the place where Medusa and her sisters the Gorgons dwelt.

"No others know where they dwell," he said. "Tell me, I pray thee, the way that I may find them."

But the Grey Women were kin to the Gorgons, and hated all the children of men, and ugly was their evil mirth as they mocked at Perseus and refused to tell him where Medusa might be found.

But Perseus grew wily in his desire not to fail, and as the eye passed from one withered, clutching hand to another, he held out his own strong young palm, and in her blindness one of the three placed the eye within it.

Then the Grey Women gave a piteous cry, fierce and angry as the cry of old grey wolves that have been robbed of their prey, and gnashed upon him with their toothless jaws.

And Perseus said: "Wicked ye are and cruel at heart, and blind shall ye remain forever unless ye tell me where I may find the Gorgons. But tell me that, and I give back the eye."

Then they whimpered and begged of him, and when they found that all their beseeching was in vain, at length they told him.

"Go south," they said, "so far south that at length thou comest to the uttermost limits of the sea, to the place where the day and night meet. There is the Garden of the Hesperides, and of them must thou ask the way." And "Give us back our eye!" they wailed again most piteously, and Perseus gave back the eye into a greedy trembling old hand, and flew south like a swallow that is glad to leave the gloomy frozen lands behind.

To the garden of the Hesperides he came at last, and amongst the myrtles and roses and sunny fountains he came on the nymphs who there guard the golden fruit, and begged them to tell him whither he must wing his way in order to find the Gorgons. But the nymphs could not tell.

"We must ask Atlas," they said, "the giant who sits high up on the mountain and with his strong shoulders keeps the heavens and earth apart."

And with the nymphs Perseus went up the mountain and asked the patient giant to guide him to the place of his quest.

"Far away I can see them," said Atlas, "on an island in the great ocean. But unless thou wert to wear the helmet of Pluto himself, thy going must be in vain."

"What is this helmet?" asked Perseus, "and how can I gain it?"

"Didst thou wear the helmet of the ruler of Dark Places, thou wouldst be as invisible as a shadow in the blackness of night," answered Atlas; "but no mortal can obtain it, for only the Immortals can brave the terrors of the Shadowy Land and yet return; yet if thou wilt promise me one thing, the helmet shall be thine."

"What wouldst thou?" asked Perseus.

And Atlas said, "For many a long year have I borne this earth, and I grow aweary of my burden. When thou hast slain Medusa, let me gaze upon her face, that I may be turned into stone and suffer no more forever."

And Perseus promised, and at the bidding of Atlas one of the nymphs sped down to the land of the Shades, and for seven days Perseus and her sisters awaited her return. Her face was as the face of a white lily and her eyes were dark with sadness when she came, but with her she bore the helmet of Pluto, and when she and her sisters had kissed Perseus and bidden him a sorrowful farewell, he put on the helmet and vanished away.

Soon the gentle light of day had gone, and he found himself in a place where clammy fog blotted out all things, and where the sea was black as the water of that stream that runs through the Cocytus valley. And in that silent land where there is "neither night nor day, nor cloud nor breeze nor storm," he found the cave of horrors in which the Gorgons dwelt.

Two of them, like monstrous swine, lay asleep,

"But a third woman paced about the hall,
And ever turned her head from wall to wall,
And moaned aloud and shrieked in her despair,
Because the golden tresses of her hair
Were moved by writhing snakes from side to side,
That in their writhing oftentimes would glide
On to her breast or shuddering shoulders white;
Or, falling down, the hideous things would light

Upon her feet, and, crawling thence, would twine
Their slimy folds upon her ankles fine."

William Morris.

In the shield of Pallas Athené the picture was mirrored, and as Perseus gazed on it his soul grew heavy for the beauty and the horror of Medusa. And "Oh that it had been her foul sisters that I must slay!" he thought at first, but then—"To slay her will be kind indeed," he said. "Her beauty has become corruption, and all the joy of life for her has passed into the agony of remembrance, the torture of unending remorse."

And when he saw her brazen claws that still were greedy and lustful to strike and to slay, his face grew stern, and he paused no longer, but with his sword he smote her neck with all his might and main. And to the rocky floor the body of Medusa fell with brazen clang, but her head he wrapped in the goatskin, while he turned his eyes away. Aloft then he sprang, and flew swifter than an arrow from the bow of Diana.

With hideous outcry the two other Gorgons found the body of Medusa, and, like foul vultures that hunt a little song-bird, they flew in pursuit of Perseus. For many a league they kept up the chase, and their howling was grim to hear. Across the seas they flew, and over the yellow sand of the Libyan desert, and as Perseus flew before them, some blood-drops fell from the severed head of Medusa, and from them bred the vipers that are found in the desert to this day. But bravely did the winged shoes of Hermes bear Perseus on, and by nightfall the Gorgon sisters had passed from sight, and Perseus found himself once more in the garden of the Hesperides. Ere he sought the nymphs, he knelt by the sea to cleanse from his hands Medusa's blood, and still does the seaweed that we find on sea-beaches after a storm bear the crimson stains.

And when Perseus had received glad welcome from the fair dwellers in the garden of the Hesperides, he sought Atlas, that to him he might fulfil his promise; and eagerly Atlas beheld him, for he was aweary of his long toil.

So Perseus uncovered the face of Medusa and held it up for the Titan to gaze upon.

And when Atlas looked upon her whose beauty had once been pure and living as that of a flower in spring, and saw only anguish and cruelty, foul wickedness, and hideous despair, his heart grew like stone within him. To stone, too, turned his great, patient face, and into stone grew his vast limbs and strong, crouching back. So did Atlas the Titan become Atlas the Mountain, and still his head, white-crowned with snow, and his great shoulder far up in misty clouds, would seem to hold apart the earth and the sky.

Then Perseus again took flight, and in his flight he passed over many lands and suffered weariness and want, and sometimes felt his faith growing low. Yet ever he sped on, hoping ever, enduring ever. In Egypt he had rest and was fed and honoured by the people of the land, who were fain to keep him to be one of their gods. And in a place called Chemmis they built a statue of him when he had gone, and for many hundreds of years it stood there.

And the Egyptians said that ever and again Perseus returned, and that when he came the Nile rose high and the season was fruitful because he had blessed their land.

Far down below him as he flew one day he saw something white on a purple rock in the sea. It seemed too large to be a snowy-plumaged bird, and he darted swiftly downward that he might see more clearly. The spray lashed against the steep rocks of the desolate island, and showered itself upon a figure that at first he took to be a statue of white marble. The figure was but that of a girl, slight and very youthful, yet more fair even than any of the nymphs of the Hesperides. Invisible in his Helmet of Darkness, Perseus drew near, and saw that the fragile white figure was shaken by shivering sobs. The waves, every few moments, lapped up on her little cold white feet, and he saw that heavy chains held her imprisoned to that chilly rock in the sea. A great anger stirred the heart of Perseus, and swiftly he took the helmet from his head and stood beside her. The maid gave a cry of terror, but there was no evil thing in the face of Perseus. Naught but strength and kindness and purity shone out of his steady eyes.

Thus when, very gently, he asked her what was the meaning of her cruel imprisonment, she told him the piteous story, as a little child tells the story of its grief to the mother who comforts it. Her mother was queen of Ethiopia, she said, and very, very beautiful. But when the queen had boasted that no nymph who played amongst the snow-crested billows of the sea was as fair as she, a terrible punishment was sent to her. All along the coast of her father's kingdom a loathsome sea-monster came to hold its sway, and hideous were its ravages. Men and women, children and animals, all were equally desirable food for its insatiate maw, and the whole land of Ethiopia lay in mourning because of it. At last her father, the king, had consulted an oracle that he might find help to rid the land of the monster. And the oracle had told him that only when his fair daughter, Andromeda, had been sacrificed to the creature that scourged the sea-coast would the country go free. Thus had she been brought there by her parents that one life might be given for many, and that her mother's broken heart might expiate her sin of vanity. Even as Andromeda spoke, the sea was broken by the track of a creature that cleft the water as does the forerunning gale of a mighty storm. And Andromeda gave a piteous cry.

"Lo! he comes!" she cried. "Save me! ah, save me! I am so young to die."

Then Perseus darted high above her and for an instant hung poised like a hawk that is about to strike. Then, like the hawk that cannot miss its prey, swiftly did he swoop down and smote with his sword the devouring monster of the ocean. Not once, but again and again he smote, until all the water round the rock was churned into slime and blood-stained froth, and until his loathsome combatant floated on its back, mere carrion for the scavengers of the sea.

Then Perseus hewed off the chains that held Andromeda, and in his arms he held her tenderly as he flew with her to her father's land.

Who so grateful then as the king and queen of Ethiopia? and who so happy as Andromeda? for Perseus, her deliverer, dearest and greatest hero to her in all the world, not only had given her her freedom, but had given her his heart.

Willingly and joyfully her father agreed to give her to Perseus for his wife. No marriage feast so splendid had ever been held in Ethiopia in the memory of man, but as it went on, an angry man with a band of sullen-faced followers strode into the banqueting-hall. It was Phineus, he who had been betrothed to Andromeda, yet who had not dared to strike a blow for her rescue. Straight at Perseus they rushed, and fierce was the fight that then began. But of a sudden, from the goatskin where it lay hid, Perseus drew forth the head of Medusa, and Phineus and his warriors were turned into stone.

For seven days the marriage feast lasted, but on the eighth night Pallas Athené came to Perseus in a dream.

"Nobly and well hast thou played the hero, O son of Zeus!" she said; "but now that thy toil is near an end and thy sorrows have ended in joy, I come to claim the shoes of Hermes, the helmet of Pluto, the sword, and the shield that is mine own. Yet the head of the Gorgon must thou yet guard awhile, for I would have it laid in my temple at Seriphos that I may wear it on my shield for evermore."

As she ceased to speak, Perseus awoke, and lo, the shield and helmet and the sword and winged shoes were gone, so that he knew that his dream was no false vision.

Then did Perseus and Andromeda, in a red-prowed galley made by cunning craftsmen from Phœnicia, sail away westward, until at length they came to the blue water of the Ægean Sea, and saw rising out of the waves before them the rocks of Seriphos. And when the rowers rested on their long oars, and the red-prowed ship ground on the pebbles of the beach, Perseus and his bride sought Danaë, the fair mother of Perseus.

Black grew the brow of the son of Danaë when she told him what cruel things she had suffered in his absence from the hands of Polydectes the king. Straight to the palace Perseus strode, and there found the king and his friends at their revels. For seven years had Perseus been away, and now it was no longer a stripling who stood in the palace hall, but a man in stature and bearing like one of the gods. Polydectes alone knew him, and from his wine he looked up with mocking gaze.

"So thou hast returned? oh nameless son of a deathless god," he said. "Thou didst boast, but methinks thy boast was an empty one!"

But even as he spoke, the jeering smile froze on his face, and the faces of those who sat with him stiffened in horror.

"O king," Perseus said, "I swore that, the gods helping me, thou shouldst have the head of Medusa. The gods have helped me. Behold the Gorgon's head."

Wild horror in their eyes, Polydectes and his friends gazed on the unspeakable thing, and as they gazed they turned into stone—a ring of grey stones that still sit on a hillside of Seriphos.

With his wife and his mother, Perseus then sailed away, for he had a great longing to take Danaë back to the land of her birth and to see if her father, Acrisius, still lived and might not now repent of his cruelty to her and to his grandson.

But there he found that the sins of Acrisius had been punished and that he had been driven from his throne and his own land by a usurper. Not for long did the sword of Perseus dwell in its scabbard, and speedily was the usurper cast forth, and all the men of Argos acclaimed Perseus as their glorious king. But Perseus would not be their king.

"I go to seek Acrisius," he said. "My mother's father is your king."

Again his galley sailed away, and at last, up the long Eubœan Sea they came to the town of Larissa, where the old king now dwelt.

A feast and sports were going on when they got there, and beside the king of the land sat Acrisius, an aged man, yet a kingly one indeed.

And Perseus thought, "If I, a stranger, take part in the sports and carry away prizes from the men of Larissa, surely the heart of Acrisius must soften towards me."

Thus did he take off his helmet and cuirass, and stood unclothed beside the youths of Larissa, and so godlike was he that they all said, amazed, "Surely this stranger comes from Olympus and is one of the Immortals."

In his hand he took a discus, and full five fathoms beyond those of the others he cast it, and a great shout arose from those who watched, and Acrisius cried out as loudly as all the rest.

"Further still!" they cried. "Further still canst thou hurl! thou art a hero indeed!"

And Perseus, putting forth all his strength, hurled once again, and the discus flew from his hand like a bolt from the hand of Zeus. The watchers held their breath and made ready for a shout of delight as they saw it speed on, further than mortal man had ever hurled before. But joy died in their hearts when a gust of wind caught the discus as it sped and hurled it against Acrisius, the king. And with a sigh like the sigh that passes through the leaves of a tree as the woodman fells it and it crashes to the earth, so did Acrisius fall and lie prone. To his side rushed Perseus, and lifted him tenderly in his arms. But the spirit of Acrisius had fled. And with a great cry of sorrow Perseus called to the people:

"Behold me! I am Perseus, grandson of the man I have slain! Who can avoid the decree of the gods?"

For many a year thereafter Perseus reigned as king, and to him and to his fair wife were born four sons and three daughters. Wisely and well he reigned, and when, at a good old age, Death took him and the wife of his heart, the gods, who had always held him dear, took him up among the stars to live for ever and ever. And there still, on clear and starry nights, we may see him holding the Gorgon's head. Near him are the father and mother of Andromeda—Cepheus and Cassiopeia, and close beside him stands Andromeda with her white arms spread out across the blue sky as in the days when she stood chained to the rock. And those who sail the watery ways look up for guidance to one whose voyaging is done and whose warfare is accomplished, and take their bearings from the constellation of Cassiopeia.

The Peacock and Juno

Aesop's Fables, by Aesop

The Peacock was greatly discontented because he had not a beautiful voice like the nightingale, and he went and complained to Juno about it.

"The nightingale's song," said he, "is the envy of all the birds; but whenever I utter a sound I become a laughing-stock."

The goddess tried to console him by saying, "You have not, it is true, the power of song, but then you far excel all the rest in beauty: your neck flashes like the emerald and your splendid tail is a marvel of gorgeous colour."

But the Peacock was not appeased. "What is the use," said he, "of being beautiful, with a voice like mine?"

Then Juno replied, with a shade of sternness in her tones, "Fate has allotted to all their destined gifts: to yourself beauty, to the eagle strength, to the nightingale song, and so on to all the rest in their degree; but you alone are dissatisfied with your portion. Make, then, no more complaints. For, if your present wish were granted, you would quickly find cause for fresh discontent."