



Plutarch Selection

For our Plutarch selection, we have chosen the chapter "Golden Shoes and Two Crowns," a study of Demetrius from *The Children's Plutarch: Tales of the Greeks*, and included it on the following pages. The book may also be purchased on Amazon.

Plutarch

Golden Shoes and Two Crowns

by F.J. Gould

Kings dream, just as other people do. A King of Macedon (Mass-e-don) dreamed that he was a sower, and he went forth to sow gold-dust. After a while he went to the field, and found corn growing that had golden ears. After a while again he went, and, alas! he saw the corn cut. Some man had been and cut the shining crop, and left nothing but useless stalks. And he heard a voice say: "Prince Mithridates (*Mith-ri-day-teez*) has stolen the golden corn and gone away toward the Black Sea."

The king told his son Demetrius (Dee-mee-tri-us), who lived from about 338 B.C. to 283 B.C. "I shall kill Mithridates," he said; "we have let him stay at our palace all this time as a friend, and he has gone hunting with you and enjoyed himself. But now I feel sure, according to my dream, that he means harm to you and me."

Of course, you know the king was wrong. He had no right to hurt the prince because of the bad dream. Dreams cannot give us wise warnings, though I know some foolish books are printed which pretend to tell fortunes by dreams.

The heart of young Demetrius was sad at the thought of the danger that was coming upon his companion. He had, however, promised the king that he would not speak a word on the subject.

"Well," he whispered to himself, "it is true I promised not to speak, but I can tell my friend of the peril without speaking!"

Soon afterward, while they were out sporting with other youths, Demetrius drew the prince to one side, and wrote on the ground with the end of his spear these two words:

"Fly, Mithridates."

The prince understood at once. As soon as darkness came on he fled, and took passage in a galley across the Black Sea to his native land in Asia Minor.

You see that Demetrius was ready to help a friend in need; but I fear I cannot tell very much that is good of him, for, above all things, he was a man of war. While he was yet a very young man he went to and fro in Asia, waging war against the Arabs, from whom he once captured seven hundred camels; or against various Greek princes. For you must know that after the death of Alexander the Great large lands in Asia, Egypt, etc., were shared among his captains, so that there were Greek rulers over many foreign countries.

He resolved to go to the aid of Athens. The castle at Athens was held by a band of men who, though they were Greeks, were tyrants over the city. Demetrius sailed with a fleet of two hundred and fifty ships. The people did not know he was coming. They saw the fleet, but supposed that it belonged to their masters. No guard was set at the mouth of the harbor, and the galleys of Demetrius entered without a fight. A multitude of people ran to the landing-place, and saw the young prince on board his ship. He made signs to them to keep silence. Then a herald shouted from the prince's ship in a very loud voice:

"O ye people of Athens, be it known to you that the Prince Demetrius has come to give you your freedom, to drive out your foes, and to restore the good old laws and government that your city once possessed."

A great shout went up from the Athenian folk, and Demetrius landed with his men. He laid siege to the fortress, and soon mastered it.

Near Athens was a town which the prince also attacked. His soldiers burst in, and began to plunder the houses. But he remembered that in this town there lived a wise man—a philosopher—named Stilpo—a man who lived a quiet life and studied, and loved knowledge more than he loved money. So Demetrius sent to Stilpo's house, and bade his soldiers fetch the sage to his presence.

"Have my men robbed anything from you?" asked the prince.

"No," answered Stilpo; "none of your men want to steal knowledge, and that is all I have."

It may amuse you to hear how one of the prince's friends took the news of a victory to the old King of Macedon. Demetrius fought with one hundred and eighty ships against one hundred and fifty ships of the King of Egypt (this king was also a Greek). Seventy of the enemy's vessels were captured, many others were sunk, and the King of Egypt escaped with only eight. After the battle, Demetrius behaved nobly. He set all the prisoners free, and he gave decent burial to all the enemy's dead. A messenger was sent to Macedon with the tidings. This messenger ordered the ship that carried him to anchor off the coast, while he went ashore in a small boat. Alone he landed; alone he walked toward the palace of the king. Some one ran up to him from the king.

"What is the news?"

No answer.

Another, and another; but they received no reply. The aged king, in much alarm, came to the door, and the people crowded round. Then the messenger stretched out his hand, and cried:

"Hail to thee, O king! We have totally beaten the King of Egypt at sea; we are masters of the island of Cyprus."

"Hail to thee, also, my good friend," said the king; "but you have kept us waiting a long time, and I shall keep you waiting before I give you any reward for your news."

Demetrius had a great love for making ships. He built galleys that were worked by fifteen or sixteen banks of oars—that is, the men sat in fifteen or sixteen rows, making in all, perhaps, one hundred and twenty oarsmen, all pulling together. Demetrius would stand on the beach watching his galleys sweep by. Another thing he liked to build was a machine for besieging a fortress. It was like a huge cart in the shape of a tower, rolling on four large wheels or rollers, each wheel sixteen feet high. The tower was divided into stages or floors, one above the other. On each of these stages stood armed men, ready to throw stones, darts, etc., at the people on the walls of the besieged fortress. As the tower was pushed toward the fort the wheels creaked, the men shouted, and great was the terror of it!

Of course, after the old king's death Demetrius became King of Macedon. Ships and siege-towers were more interesting to him than giving justice to the people. He wore two crowns on his head, his robe was purple, and his feet were shod with cloth of gold.

One day he walked in the street, and some persons gave him petitions, or rolls of paper on which their requests were written. He put them in a fold of his cloak till he came to a bridge, and then he pitched all the rolls into the river! But an old woman fared better on another occasion. She begged him to listen to her story of trouble. "I have no time," he replied, shortly.

"Then," cried the dame, "you should not be a king!"

These words struck home to his soul. On arriving at his palace, he put aside all other business, and ordered that every person who wished to see him about wrongs they had suffered should be admitted. The old woman was brought to him first, and he listened to her tale, and punished the man who had evil-treated her. And to others also he did justice, sitting in his royal chair day after day for the purpose. But it was only now and then that he acted in this kingly way. Too often his mind was given to war, to sieges, attacks, and conquests.

His last war was waged among the rocky hills and passes of Syria. Nearly all his warriors deserted him, and went over to the side of his enemy. Demetrius and a few friends took refuge in a forest, and waited till night fell and the stars glittered above the mountains. They crept out of the forest and across the rocks, but saw the camp-fires of the foe on every hand. All hope was gone. Demetrius gave himself up as a prisoner of war. For three years he was confined in a Syrian castle, and was allowed to go hunting in a large park, to walk in the gardens, and to feast royally with his companions. After a time he lost his fiery spirit and cared naught for the pleasures of the chase. He drank deep from the wine-cup, and gambled with his money and worked harm to his health, and died at the age of fifty-four, in the year 283 B.C.

His body having been burned after the manner of the Greeks, the ashes that remained were put into an urn of gold. The urn was set on a raised part of the deck of a galley, and armed men sat in the ship. Slowly the vessel was rowed across the sea, while a skilful flute-player sounded a sweet and solemn air. The oars kept time to the notes of the flute. The son of Demetrius came to meet the funeral-galley with a fleet of many ships; and thus the urn of gold was taken to the port of Corinth, and thence it was carried to a tomb.