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**HERAKLES, THE
HERO OF THEBES,
AND OTHER
HEROES OF THE
MYTH**

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**Herakles, the Hero of Thebes,
and Other Heroes of the Myth**

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Herakles, the Hero of Thebes, and Other Heroes of the Myth Adapted from the Second Book of the Primary Schools of Athens, Greece

PREFACE

The child's heart goes out to the man of action, the man who makes short work of things and gets directly at a result. He responds to life, to energy, quick wit, the blow that hits the nail on the head at the first stroke.

The rapidity of action in the stories of Herakles, Jason, and other Heroes of the Myth, the prowess and courage and untiring endurance of the men, render the characters worthy subjects of thought to young minds, and have secured the stories a permanent place in educational literature. It is not elegant literature alone that boys need, but inspiring ideals which will impel them to stand fearlessly to their guns, to do the hard thing with untiring perseverance, to reach the result with unerring insight.

It is exactly this unbending courage in Herakles and his comrade heroes, that has made them the backbone of literature for ages, holding their own in spite of the sapless literary fungus crowding our book-shelves.

While travelling in Greece I found the children of the primary schools reading these stories in the lower grades, the book being the one used next above the primer. The interest was enthusiastic, and I brought home a copy of the book, which, with Madame Ragozin's collaboration, I have arranged as a first or second book of reading for our own schools.

Mary E. Burt.

The John A. Browning School,
New York, March 15, 1900.

INTRODUCTION

THE LAND OF THE HEROES

One look at the map of Greece will show us that it is the smallest of European countries. For many hundreds of years it was inhabited by the handsomest, bravest, and most intelligent people in the world. But these people, the Greeks, or Hellenes, as they called themselves, had not always lived in the country.

Thousands of years before the Hellenes came to Greece it was a perfect wilderness of mountains, narrow valleys, torrents, and tangled forests. It was a land of wild beasts, and they were so numerous and fierce that there was almost no room for men.

Yet men did live there, but we know nothing about them or what they were like, except that they hid in caves and had hardly got beyond the art of making fire, trapping and killing the less dangerous animals with sticks or little arrows pointed with stones, and using their meat for food and hides for clothing.

Then the new people, the Greeks, began to come into the country. They came in boats from across the sea and on foot from the north, through numberless mountain-passes. They did not come all at once, but in small detachments, in single tribes, so that it took them many years to spread over the country.

The new race was nobler than the old, more advanced in knowledge and in the arts of civilized life. It was not a race to be content with caves and forest-dens, but each tribe, after it had chosen a district and taken possession of it, selected some high hill, built rude dwellings upon it and temples to its patron gods, a public treasure-house also, and enclosed the hill with strong walls. It had become a fortress, and was called Acropolis, in their language.

Each tribe, of course, had its leaders, usually belonging to some family which had earned the gratitude and loyalty of the people by brave and affectionate service, and the leadership descended from father to son. These were the kings and they resided within the Acropolis.

Around it and under the protection of its walls the people built their own huts and began to clear the land. They sowed various crops, planted the vine and the olive, and raised herds of sheep and goats. There was room enough within the walls for all the families, with their herds, to find shelter in the Acropolis in times of danger, from the attacks of the wild natives or of the still wilder beasts of the forests and fields.

Now these latter were by far the most dangerous enemies of the new settlers, who soon found that they could venture but a few miles from their small home-farms without encountering huge and ferocious animals which the increased herds attracted and which their miserable weapons were utterly insufficient to slay or even put to flight.

Each small district had its particular terror, just as many districts of India now have a man-eating tiger, which makes miles and miles of country around unsafe for man or beast.

It became a question which of the two, the men or the wild animals, would remain in possession. Then young and courageous men, sons of the ruling families, athletes in strength, practised in the arts of war, commanding through their greater wealth the use of better weapons, felt it their duty to their people to do for them what the poor herdsmen and laborers had neither the strength nor the skill to do for themselves.

From all the central royal cities they started singly or in small troops, a bevy of young heroes, as eager for the delights of adventure as for the public good. Year after year they wandered across country seeking the most impassable wildernesses, directed by the stories they heard on their way to the dens of the cruel monsters, which they usually overcame by force or cunning.

Then they would return to their homes triumphant, bearing the proof of their incredible prowess, the hides, or horns, or heads of the monsters they had slain. Thus they put new heart into their people. Their trophies seemed to say: "You see these creatures were not so terrible as they might have been; what we have done others can do." So they did a double good – one immediate by the destruction of the dreaded foes and by the opening of the land to the planters and the tillers; the other even more far-reaching and more beneficent in its results by raising men's spirits, inspiring them with confidence and with the ambition to show that they were not mere helpless boors, cowed and dependent on their betters.

The Greek nation in years to come proved itself a nation of heroes and was so called by fame. But who can tell how much these heroes were indebted for this honorable distinction which has remained by them to this day, to the early vigorous education which those doughty champions of old imparted to them, not by preaching or advice, but by their own dauntless example.

Can we wonder if their people's passionate gratitude and unselfish admiration survived those glorious men through ages? Can we wonder if after centuries had come and gone the memory of their deeds and persons appeared to later generations through a halo of wonder and awe?

Deeds of a remote past always assume gigantic proportions. "Surely," men would say, "surely, those heroes were more than ordinary mortals! They had more than human strength, endurance, wisdom. Neither iron fang nor claw of steel could harm them. They died, indeed, but of their nature they must have been half divine; their mothers were human, but surely the gods themselves were their fathers."

And thus it was settled, and for many, many hundreds of years the Greeks continued to honor their ancient heroes as half-divine men, or demi-gods, and to erect altars to them and come to them with prayers and offerings. The Greek had to grow in mind and soul high enough to grasp the truth that there can be only one God, and that no man, high as he may tower above his kind, can be more than human.

But it was a beautiful and ennobling belief, and at first sight it seems a pity that it was ever lost, yet in reality it was a great gain, for men may think they have an excuse for not putting forth their bravest efforts if they believe that the gods only can achieve deeds of courage. There is no reason why men may not aspire to any height of bravery which has been gained by other men.

The undying energy embodied in the characters of these old heroes is the inheritance of every child. The children of America are not born the sons of ruling houses. But they are destined to be the guardians and rulers of their native land. And if the children take into their future lives the heroism they first realize in ancient story, they will find themselves, when the time comes, armed with the same courage, endurance, and love of human beings which have made the heroes of all lands and ages.

CHAPTER I

THE BABE HERAKLES

Far away in the land of Argos there once lived a beautiful maiden, the daughter of a brave king. She was tall and fair and her name was Alkmene. Her father was rich in the possession of many oxen.

Her husband also owned great herds of oxen. He had so many that he could not tell them from those of the king. So he quarrelled with the king and slew him. Then he took Alkmene and fled from his native land. They came to Thebes and made it their home.

Here Herakles was born, the babe who was stronger than the strongest of men. The goddess, Hera, hated Herakles. She was the wife of Zeus, the Lord of Thunder and King of Heaven. Hera was angry because Zeus loved him, and she was jealous because Zeus had foretold that Herakles would become the greatest of men. More than that Zeus had deceived Hera and sent the infant Herakles to her to be nursed that he might be made strong and god-like by tasting divine milk.

So Hera sent two large snakes to devour the babe when she found out what child it was that she had fed. Herakles lay asleep in the great brazen shield which his father carried in battle, for he had no other cradle. The fearful serpents crept up with open mouths into the shield with the sleeping babe.

As soon as Alkmene saw them she was terribly frightened and called in a loud voice for help. His father, hearing the outcry of Alkmene, ran into the house with his sword drawn and a great many warriors came with weapons in their hands.

Herakles was only eight months old, but before his father could reach him he sat up in his bed and seized the serpents by their necks with his little hands. He squeezed and choked them with such force that they died.

When Alkmene saw that the two snakes were dead and that Herakles was safe, she rejoiced greatly. But Hera's heart was filled with wrath and she began to plan more mischief against the child.

Herakles had his free will as long as he was a boy. His teachers were celebrated heroes who taught him boxing, wrestling, riding, and all kinds of games. He learned to read and write and to hurl the spear and shoot with bows and arrows. Linos taught him music.

Herakles had a violent temper, and one day as Linos was teaching him to play the lute, the good teacher had reason to punish him. Herakles flew into a rage at this and struck Linos and killed him. Then his father sent him to the hills and left him to the care of herdsmen.

The boy grew to be very large and strong. While he was yet a youth he slew a lion of great size that had killed many of his father's cattle. He went home wearing the lion's skin as a sign of his victory.

Because he was so brave the King of Thebes gave his daughter to him in marriage and he lived happily with her for many years. But a sudden insanity came upon him during which he mistook his wife and children for wild beasts and shot them down with his bow and arrows. When Herakles recovered from his insanity and saw what he had done his grief was boundless.

CHAPTER II

HERAKLES IS DOOMED TO SERVE EURYSTHEUS

The wrath of Hera followed Herakles. When Zeus saw that Hera's heart was filled with anger toward Herakles, he mused within his own mind how he might best appease her resentment and protect the young man.

So he called the gods together in council and they advised that Herakles be placed in bondage to his uncle Eurystheus, to serve him as a slave, and they ordained that he should perform twelve hard tasks, after which he would be numbered among the gods.

Eurystheus was a mean fellow, stupid and cowardly. He was glad enough to have a chance to bully a man wiser and stronger than himself. He was born in Tiryns, a great fortress with many castles, built upon a large rock, but he had been made King of Argos and lived in the capital, Mykenæ, and he resolved to keep Herakles as far away from the kingdom as possible, for in his heart he was afraid of him.

Herakles was grieved at being compelled to serve a man so much below him in strength and character, so he consulted the oracle at Delphi to see if there was any escape, but he did not murmur, for he was willing to obey the law of the gods.

The oracle of Delphi was a mysterious influence, a divine spirit which expressed itself through a priestess living in a sacred temple. It was supposed to be the voice of the god Apollo using this human agency for making known his will to men. The priestess became inspired to utter Apollo's holy laws by sitting on a golden tripod (or stool with three legs) over a chasm in the rock, from whence arose a sacred, sulphurous vapor which she breathed in as the breath of the god, and which caused her to breathe out his commands in wonderful sayings.

The chasm from which the vapor issued was called The Chasm of the Oracle, and was in a large apartment or room in the temple. This celebrated temple had many columns of marble and splendid rooms made beautiful with thousands of marble statues. It stood on the side of Mount Parnassos, whose snow-covered head reaches into the clouds and looks down into the blue Gulf of Corinth below it to the south.

It was here that Apollo killed the great dragon, Pytho, which had been the scourge of the land for many years, and the grateful people built the temple in his honor. The oracle bade Herakles go forth to be the slave of Eurystheus and so atone for all his sins, but it gave him as a compensation a dear friend, Iolaos, who was also his young nephew. Wherever Herakles went Iolaos went with him and helped him.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST LABOR – THE NEMEAN LION

It happened that a fearful lion lived in Nemea, a wild district in upper Argolis, and it devastated all the land and was the terror of the inhabitants. Eurystheus ordered Herakles to bring him the skin of this lion. So Herakles took his bow, his quiver, and heavy club and started out in search of the beast.

When he had reached a little town which is in the neighborhood of Nemea he was kindly received by a good countryman, who promised to put him on the track of the lion if he would sacrifice the animal to Zeus.

Herakles promised, and the countryman went with him to show him the way. When they reached the place where traces of the lion were seen, Herakles said to his guide: "Remain here thirty days. If I return safely from the lion-hunt you must sacrifice a sheep to Zeus, for he is the god who will have saved me. But if I am slain by the lion you must sacrifice the sheep to me, for after my death I shall be honored as a hero." Having said this, Herakles went his way.

He reached the wilderness of Nemea, where he spent several days in looking for the lion, but without success. Not a trace of him could be found, nor did he fall in with any human being, for there was no one bold enough to wander around in that wilderness. Finally he spied the lion as he was about to crawl into his den.

The lion was indeed worthy of his terrible fame. His size was prodigious, his eyes shot forth flames of fire, and his tongue licked his bloody chops. When he roared, the whole desert resounded.

But Herakles stood fearlessly near a grove from whence he might approach the lion, and suddenly shot at him with his bow and arrow, hitting him squarely in the breast. The arrow glanced aside, and slipping around the lion's neck, fell on a rock behind him. When Herakles saw this he knew that the lion was proof against arrows and must be killed in some other way, and seizing his club, he gave chase to him.

The lion made for a cave which had two mouths. Herakles closed up one of the entrances with heavy rocks and entered the other. He seized the lion by the throat and then came a terrible struggle, but Herakles squeezed him in his mighty arms until he gasped for breath, and at last lay dead.

Then Herakles took up the huge body and, throwing it easily over his shoulder, returned to the place where he had left the countryman. It was on the last of the thirty appointed days, and the rustic, supposing that Herakles had come to his death through the lion, was about to offer up a sheep as a sacrifice in his honor.

He rejoiced greatly when he saw Herakles alive and victorious, and the sheep was offered up to Zeus. Herakles left the little town and went to Mykenæ to the house of his uncle and showed him the dead body of the terrible lion. Eurystheus was so greatly frightened at the sight that he hid himself within a tower whose walls were built of solid brass.

And he ordered Herakles not to enter the city again, but to stay outside of its gates until he had performed the other labors.

Herakles stripped the skin from the lion with his fingers, although it was so tough, and knowing it to be arrow-proof, took it for a cloak and wore it as long as he lived.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND LABOR – HERAKLES KILLS THE WATER-SNAKE OF LAKE LERNA

Not far from Mykenæ is a small lake called Lerna. It is formed from a large spring at the foot of a hill. In this lake there lived a water-snake called the Hydra. It was a snake of uncommon size, with nine heads. Eight of the heads were mortal, but the one in the middle was immortal.

The Hydra frequently came out of the water and swallowed up herds of cattle, laying waste the surrounding country. Eurystheus ordered Herakles to kill the snake, so he put on his lion's skin, and taking his club, started out. He mounted his chariot and took his faithful friend Iolaos, who acted as charioteer.

Every warrior had to have a charioteer to drive the horses, leaving him free to use both of his hands. But driving was by no means the charioteer's only duty; he had also to look out for danger and protect the warrior with his shield as well as to supply him with arrows from the quiver suspended at the side of every chariot, and with reserve spears when his own was broken in the fray.

It is clear, therefore, that the warrior's life was entirely in the hands of his charioteer, so it is no wonder that only the hero's dearest and most trusted friends were allowed to serve him in this way.

After driving along for a while through groves of olive-trees and past pleasant vineyards, they came to wild places and saw Lake Lerna gleaming through the trees. Having reached the lake, Herakles descended from the chariot, left the horses in care of Iolaos, and went to hunt for the snake.

He found it in a swampy place where it was hiding. Herakles shot some burning arrows at the Hydra and forced it to come out. It darted furiously at him, but he met it fearlessly, put his foot upon its tail, and with his club began to strike off its heads. He could not accomplish anything in this way, for as fast as he knocked off one head two others grew in its place.

The snake coiled itself so firmly around one of Herakles' legs that he was no longer able to stir from the place. Added to all this there came a huge crab to the assistance of the snake. It crept up to Herakles' foot, and seizing it with its sharp claws, inflicted painful wounds. Herakles killed the crab with his club and called Iolaos to help him.

Under Herakles' directions Iolaos produced a fire-brand which he applied to the neck as fast as Herakles cut off one of the snake's heads, in this way preventing them from growing again. Finally it came the turn of the head which could not die. Cutting it off Herakles buried it in the ground, placing a heavy stone over it.

Then he dipped some arrows into the Hydra's blood, which was poisonous, so that whoever was wounded by one of them could not be healed. The least scratch inflicted by such an arrow was incurable.

Eurystheus, of course, had no word of praise for his great bondsman, but the people, knowing that the place was now safe, flocked to the land in great numbers and drained the lake, which was really not much more than a big marshy pond, and in their new homes they blessed the hero's name forever. That was the prize for which Herakles cared the most.

If you should go to-day to that old battle-field of Herakles you would still find the spring flowing from the rocks, but Lake Lerna exists only in story.

CHAPTER V

THE THIRD LABOR – THE GOLDEN-HORNED HIND

The lower part of Greece is a most peculiar-looking bit of country. You would think it had been torn off from the bulk of the land but kept hanging on to it by a small narrow strip. Then, too, its shape is so queer that it has been compared to all sorts of things; sometimes to a mulberry leaf, sometimes to an open hand.

If we keep to the latter comparison, we will find that the part which answers to the palm of the hand is a large and intricate knot of high wooded mountains which shoot out spurs in all directions. These spurs with the land attached to them stretch out into the sea as so many small peninsulas and not badly represent the fingers of the hand. The central knot of mountains is even now different from the country all around.

The people there are wilder, very much given to robbery and violence and very slow to accept new ways of life or improvements of any kind. In the old heroic times of several thousand years ago that country was simply an impassable wilderness.

It was overcrowded with wild beasts, among which the bear must have been the most plentiful since the land was named after him, Arcadia – the land of Bears. Wolves were known also to abound.

The men who had their villages in the narrow valleys by the mountain-streams were fierce and lawless. There was nothing for them to do but to keep goats and hunt all day long. Arcadia was truly the paradise of hunters and therefore held as specially sacred to the beautiful huntress, the goddess, Artemis – the Lady of the Chase. She roamed over hills and valleys and through woods and groves by moonlight to protect the herds and flocks, this beautiful daughter of Zeus.

In these same mountains of Arcadia there roamed a lovely Hind sacred to Queen Artemis, who gave her golden horns so that she might be known from other deer by the huntsmen. Thus they might be saved from the crime of slaying what was sacred to the gods. Eurystheus ordered Herakles to bring him the Hind alive, for he did not dare to have her killed.

Herakles spent a whole year seeking her from the mountain-tops down to the valleys, through tangles of brush, over streams and in forests, but he was not able to catch her. After a long chase he forced her at last to take refuge on the side of a mountain and from that place to go down to a river to drink.

In order that he might prevent the deer from crossing the water, Herakles was obliged slightly to wound one of her legs. Not till then was he able to secure his game and carry it to Eurystheus.

On his way to Mykenæ Herakles was met by Artemis, who upbraided him for having captured the Hind belonging to her. Herakles made answer: "Great Goddess, if I have chased and caught thy deer, I did it out of necessity, not impiety; for thou well knowest that the gods ordered me to be a servant to Eurystheus and he commanded me to catch the Hind."

With these words he soothed the anger of the goddess and brought the golden-horned Hind to Mykenæ.

CHAPTER VI

THE FOURTH LABOR – THE ERYMANTHIAN BOAR

Elis is a beautiful plain lying to the north and west of Arcadia. Here once in five years there was a great festival in honor of Zeus, when all the men and boys ran races, wrestled, boxed and played all sorts of games. Between Arcadia and Elis there is a high mountain-range, called Erymanthos. There a terrible Boar had its lair.

The Boar frequently left its den and came down into the plains and killed cattle, destroyed fields of grain and attacked people. Eurystheus, having heard of this Boar, made up his mind that he wanted the beast alive, and so ordered Herakles to bring it to him.

The hero put on his lion skin once more and started for the mountain. On his way he stopped at a little town where the Centaurs had their home. These strange people were half man and half horse. We have heard that they were really men, but such good riders that they seemed to be one with their mountain ponies.

Their home was just on the edge of a high plain, covered with oak-trees and looking down across a wild valley, through which flowed the Erymanthos River. There were many forests and little streams and dreadful gorges in the valley, where these horsemen used to hunt and fish.

The Centaur Chief, Pholos, received Herakles as a guest and gave him cooked meat to eat, while he ate it raw himself, after the Centaurs' custom.

When Herakles had eaten his fill, he said to Pholos: "Thy food is indeed good and tasteful. But I should enjoy it still more if I could have a sip of wine, for I am very thirsty." To which Pholos replied: "My dear guest, we have very fine and fragrant wine in this mountain, and I should like nothing better than to give thee some of it. But I am afraid to do so, because it has a strong aroma, and the other Centaurs, if they smelt it, might come to my cave and want some. They are very fierce and lawless, and might do thee great harm."

"Let not that trouble thee," said Herakles. "I am not afraid of the Centaurs." So the wine was placed before him and he drank of it. In a little while a great noise was heard outside of the cave, a shouting of many wild voices and a stamping of many horses' feet. What Pholos feared had come to pass.

The Centaurs had smelt the fragrance of the wine and in full armor had made for the cave of Pholos. Then began a terrible fight. The Centaurs fell upon Herakles with pine-branches, rocks, axes, and fire-brands, and the clouds, their mothers, poured a flood of water on him. But Herakles was too clever for them. He put two to flight, prevented others from entering the cave, and shot the rest down with his arrows.

Pholos was a kind-hearted chief, and hearing one of the Centaurs crying for help outside of his cave, went out to him and tried to pull the arrow from his wound, wondering at the same time that so slight a weapon could cause his death. But the arrow slipped out of his hand and struck his own foot. It made only a scratch, but it could not be healed, for the arrow was one of those which Herakles had dipped in the blood of the Hydra, and poor Pholos breathed his last.

The death of his kind host was a great sorrow to Herakles, for in those times, when there was so little safety in travelling, the bond of kindness and gratitude between host and guest was one of the closest and most sacred, often more so than that between members of the same family. In all their later lives, host and guest could never meet as enemies, and if the chances of war brought them face to face as foes, they were not expected to fight. They exchanged greetings and gifts and drove off in different directions.

Herakles therefore sincerely mourned his friend, performed over him the proper funeral rites, and buried him with all due honors in the side of the mountain. There he left him, sore at heart, but

comforted by knowing that he had done all he could do to reconcile the shade of Pholos, and that his soul would bear him no grudge in Spirit Land.

Then Herakles went on his way in search of the Boar. He soon spied him in a dense thicket and chased him to the very top of the mountain. The mountain-top was covered with deep snow, which prevented the Boar from running fast enough to escape. So Herakles ran up to him, caught him in a net, threw him over his shoulder and carried him off alive to Mykenæ.

It is said that Eurystheus hid himself in a large brazen bowl when he heard Herakles approaching the city, and that Herakles threw the Boar into the same brazen bowl as the safest place in which to keep him. How astonished Eurystheus must have been to find himself in such terrible company! And we can fancy that he scrambled out with all possible haste.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIFTH LABOR – HERAKLES CLEANS THE AUGEIAN STABLES

We have already read about Elis, a plain in the southwestern part of Greece, where all the people used to worship Zeus and where they built a wonderful temple in his honor. They built a temple to Hera, his wife, also, and many other temples which were filled with statues. What a fine time you would have if you could only go and see this beautiful land. Perhaps you will some time.

The temples are in ruins now, and they cover enough ground for a small town. The huge blocks of marble lie on the ground just as they fell, and there are the marble floors as people used to see them two thousand years ago. There is a high hill close to the ruins. It is called the mountain of Kronos, “Old Father Time.” Kronos is said to have been one of the early kings of Elis and he was the father of Zeus. He swallowed up his children when they were babes, if we care to believe what is said of him, and the story could easily be true, for Time swallows everything if he is only long enough about it.

The strong men and the boys used to come to Elis to have athletic games in honor of Zeus. They ran races, they boxed, they shot arrows and did all sorts of things to show how strong they were. There are two rivers at the foot of Mount Kronos, and beyond the rivers are many low hills where people used to sit and watch the games.

There was at one time a king of Elis, Augeias, who was so rich in cattle that he hardly knew what to do with them and consequently he built a stable miles long and drove his cows into it. He did this year after year and the herds kept growing larger. He could not get men enough to take care of his stables and the cows could hardly get into them on account of the filth; or if they did get in they were never sure of getting out again because the dirt was piled so high.

Eurystheus thought he had found a disagreeable and impossible task for Herakles, and so he ordered him to clean out the stables in one day. Herakles told Augeias that he must clean the barns and promised to do it in one day if he would give him one-tenth of all his cows. The king thought Herakles would never be able to do it in one day and readily promised him in the presence of his son one-tenth of the cows.

The king’s stables were close to the two rivers, near Mount Kronos. Herakles cut channels and sent the rivers running into the stables. They rushed along and carried the dirt out so quickly that the king was astonished. He did not intend to pay the promised reward and pretended that he never made any such promise.

And he said he would have the matter come before a court and the judges should decide it. Then Herakles called the little prince as a witness before the judges, and the boy told the truth about it, which caused the king to fall into such a rage that he sent both his son and Herakles out of the country. Herakles left the land of Elis and went back to Mykenæ. But his heart was filled with contempt for the faithless king.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SIXTH LABOR – THE BIRDS OF STYMPHALOS

On the northern limit of Arcadia is a huge cliff, over which pours a black ribbon of water. At the bottom of the cliff it is lost among piles of rocks. The water itself is not black, but it appears so because the rock is covered with black moss, and so the stream is called the Styx or Black Water.

The Styx is icy cold and it runs along under the ground so that it seems to belong to the dead, and is called the River of Death. When the gods used to make a promise which they did not dare to break they said, “I promise by the Styx.” This promise was called “the Great Oath of the Gods.”

Farther on in the land of Arcadia there is a vale called Stymphalos. It lies among the mountains and is open to the storms of winter and the floods of spring. And there are a lake and a city both called Stymphalos. The people of Athens hope to carry the water of this lake to Athens by means of an underground channel. All about the lake are hills covered with firs and plane-trees.

Lake Stymphalos was the home of a countless number of birds which held noisy meetings in the woods. They had iron claws and their feathers were sharper than arrows. They were so strong and fierce that they dared attack men, and would tear them to pieces that they might feast upon human flesh. They bore a striking resemblance to the Harpies, and were the terror of all the people who lived near Stymphalos.

Eurystheus ordered Herakles to drive the birds away. So Herakles took his bow and quiver and went to the lake. But the forests were so dense that he could not see the birds, and he sat down to think of the best way to drive them out. Suddenly the goddess of wisdom came to him to help him.

The goddess gave him a huge rattle and told him how to use it. Herakles went up on to the highest mountain that lies near the lake and shook the rattle with a will. The birds were so frightened by the noise that they came out of the thick wood where their nests were and flew high up into the air.

Their heavy feathers fell like flakes in a driving snow-storm. Herakles shot at the birds with his arrows. He killed a great many of them and the rest were so scared that they flew away and were never seen again at Stymphalos.

CHAPTER IX

THE SEVENTH LABOR – HERAKLES CATCHES THE MAD BULL OF CRETE

There is an island south of Greece which is so large that it would take you from early morning until late at night to sail past it. There are high mountains all along the shore and they look as if they were covered with snow. There is a cave in one of the mountains where Zeus was hidden when he was a babe so that his father, Kronos, should not swallow him. The nymphs fed him on honey and a famous goat gave him milk.

The name of this island was Crete, and Minos ruled there as king. It was his duty to sacrifice to Poseidon, the God of the Sea, whatever came up out of the water.

Minos was rich and greedy. He loved his cattle better than the will of the gods. It came to pass that a wonderful Bull rose from the sea while Minos was king. When Minos saw him he admired the beauty of the animal so much that he resolved to keep him. He drove the Bull into his barn and sacrificed another to the God of the Sea.

Poseidon grew angry with him and caused the Bull to become mad so that no one dared to approach him. Eurystheus ordered Herakles to catch him and bring him to Mykenæ.

So Herakles went to Crete and begged Minos to give him the Bull. The king told him that he was entirely welcome to the Bull if he could catch him. Herakles seized him by the horns and bound his feet together and carried him off to Mykenæ.

There he showed the mad animal to Eurystheus and then set him free. The Bull wandered off to Sparta and over the hills of Arcadia and crossing the Isthmus, he reached Marathon, where he left the land and swam off into the sea.

CHAPTER X

THE EIGHTH LABOR – THE HORSES OF DIOMEDES

Greece was bounded on the north by a wild and mountainous land, called Thrace. The natives were not of Greek stock and remained fierce, lawless, and cruel for a long time after Greece had become the most civilized of countries. They were so quarrelsome and such desperate fighters that their country was supposed to be the favorite residence of the war god, Ares.

The king who reigned in Thrace at the time of Herakles was so much worse than the rest of the people that he was said to be Ares' own son, and he was called the storm king. He was very fond of horses and kept a breed of them after his own heart. They were man-eating horses, which he fed on the flesh of any strangers who came to that country or that were wrecked on the shore, thus breaking the most sacred laws and making himself hated by men and gods. The horses were blood-thirsty and so furious that they had to be chained to their stalls.

Eurystheus commanded Herakles to bring these horses to his stables in Mykenæ. This time Herakles took several friends with him, who helped him catch the horses and lead them to the shore. Diomedes, having heard of the robbery, started in pursuit with many armed men.

Herakles and his friends went by sea. They attacked the guards and led the horses down to the ship. A terrible battle followed, in which the wicked king was slain by Herakles, who threw him as food to the horses. The warriors who helped Diomedes were put to flight and some of Herakles' best men were also killed. With the rest he drove the horses into his ship and brought them safely to Mykenæ.

Eurystheus, of course, had no intention of keeping them in his stables and had them set loose. They ran off into the forests of Arcadia and were never seen again. It was thought that they were devoured by the mountain wolves.

CHAPTER XI

THE NINTH LABOR – THE GIRDLE OF HIPPOLYTE

Eurystheus, as we have seen, sent Herakles a little farther every time in hopes of never seeing him again. It would take you a whole day going on the best steamer to get to Crete from Athens, and in those days, when steamers had not been thought of, the sailing must have been slow indeed. Eurystheus now sent the hero yet farther off to the Black Sea, on the southern shore of which there lived the Amazons, a nation of warlike women.

The Amazons were brought up like men. Their main occupation was war, and they were excellent horsewomen. They were sharpshooters with the bow and arrow. Hippolyte, the queen of the Amazons, was a brave and handsome woman. She wore a celebrated girdle, the gift of Ares, as a sign of her queenly rank.

Eurystheus had a daughter who had heard of the beauty of the famous girdle which was worn by the Amazon queen. She begged her father to send Herakles to bring it to her. Then Eurystheus ordered Herakles to fetch the girdle, and he manned a ship and sailed away, taking several companions with him.

After many wanderings they reached the Black Sea and sailed to the Amazon country. Queen Hippolyte was at once informed that some strangers had arrived from a far-off land, and she came down to the shore to learn why they had come. Herakles told her that a princess had sent him to get the girdle given her by Ares. Hippolyte admired the bold hero for his frankness and promised that she would give it to him.

But Hera changed herself into an Amazon and rushing into the midst of an army of them cried out, “The strangers are carrying off our queen!” Then all the Amazons snatched up their arms and rushed on horseback to the ship. When Herakles saw them coming armed to attack his men, he thought Hippolyte had betrayed him and he slew her and took her girdle.

Then he attacked the rest of the Amazons and put them to flight. When the battle was over, Herakles and his companions went on board the ship and sailed for home.

Soon after they had started on their way to Mykenæ they found Hesione, the daughter of Laömedon, on the shore chained to a rock. Laömedon was at that time king of Troy, and Herakles and his companions stopped to find out why the daughter of a great king had to suffer such a terrible punishment. She told Herakles that Apollo, the sun god, and Poseidon, the god of the sea, once took on the form of man and began to build walls around the city of Troy. Her father promised to aid them but neglected to keep his promise. This conduct made the gods indignant and Apollo sent a pestilence to rage in the city while Poseidon sent a sea-monster which came up out of the ocean and devoured the people.

Laömedon asked the priest of Apollo how he might appease the wrath of the gods. The priest answered that the city would be freed from the double plague if Laömedon would chain his daughter to the rock on the shore where the monster might devour her.

Laömedon obeyed the oracle and had her chained to the cliff near the sea. Just then Herakles arrived and stopped near the shore, when Laömedon with hot tears entreated him to save his daughter. Herakles promised to do it under the condition that Laömedon should give him as a reward a famous horse in his possession.

Herakles killed the sea-monster, but Laömedon again did not keep his promise and Herakles left Troy, his heart filled with scorn for the faithless king. On his return to Mykenæ he gave the girdle of the Amazon queen to his cousin, the daughter of Eurystheus.

CHAPTER XII

THE TENTH LABOR – THE CATTLE OF GERYON

Iberia, now called Spain, lies at the farthest end of Europe, and beyond it, in the Atlantic, is an island which was once the home of Geryon, a famous giant. His body was as large around as three other men's bodies put together. He had three heads and three pairs of legs and six arms. He had huge wings also and carried dangerous weapons.

Geryon was the lord of many herds of cattle. He had one herd of red oxen, as red as the sky at the setting of the sun, and they were guarded by a trusty herdsman and a fierce two-headed dog. Eurystheus ordered Herakles to bring the cattle to Mykenæ.

Herakles having overcome numberless difficulties, wandering through wild deserts and unknown lands, finally reached the open ocean, the end of all. There he erected as a monument two pillars opposite each other, one on the African shore, and one in Europe. These were called the Pillars of Herakles in those days, but now they are known as the Rocks of Ceuta and Gibraltar.

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