

BALDWIN JAMES

HERO TALES

James Baldwin

Hero Tales

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INTRODUCTION

In the world's literature there are certain stories which, told ages ago, can never be forgotten. They have within them that which gives pleasure to all intelligent men, women and children. They appeal to the sympathies, the desires, and the admiration of all sorts and conditions of mankind. These are the stories that are said to be immortal. They have been repeated and re-repeated in many forms and to all kinds of audiences. They have been recited and sung in royal palaces, in the halls of mediaeval castles, and by the camp fires of warring heroes. Parents have taught them to their children, and generation after generation has preserved their memory. They have been written on parchment and printed in books, translated into many languages, abridged, extended, edited, and "adapted." But through all these changes and the vicissitudes of time, they still preserve the qualities that have made them so universally popular.

Chief among these masterpieces of imagination are the tales of gods and heroes that have come down to us from the golden age of Greece, and particularly the tales of Troy that cluster around the narratives of old Homer in his "Iliad" and "Odyssey." Three thousand years or more have passed since they were first recited, and yet they have lost none of their original charm. Few persons of intelligence are unacquainted with these tales, for our literature abounds in allusions to them; and no one who pretends to the possession of culture or learning can afford to be ignorant of them.

Second only in interest, especially to us of Anglo-Saxon descent, are the hero tales of the ancient North and the stirring legends connected with the "Nibelungen Lied." Of much later origin than the Greek stories, and somewhat inferior to them in refinement of thought and delicacy of imagery, these tales partake of the rugged, forceful character of the people among whom they were composed. Yet, with all their austerity and sternness, they are replete with vivid action, and they charm us by their very strength and the lessons which they teach of heroic endurance and the triumph of eternal justice.

Scarcely inferior to these latter, but not so well known to English-speaking people, are the tales of knighthood and chivalry that commemorate the romantic deeds of Charlemagne and his paladins. Written in various languages, and at periods widely separated, these tales present a curious mixture of fact and fiction, of the real and the marvellous, of the beautiful and the grotesque, of pagan superstition and Christian devotion. Although there were, in truth, no knights in the time of Charlemagne, and the institution of chivalry did not exist until many years later, yet these legends are of value as portraying life and manners in that period of history which we call the Dark Ages; and their pictures of knightly courage and generosity, faithfulness, and loyalty, appeal to our nobler feelings and stir our hearts with admiration.

To know something of these three great cycles, or groups, of classic and romantic stories—the hero tales of Troy, those of the ancient North, and those of Charlemagne—is essential to the acquirement of refined literary tastes. For this knowledge will go far toward helping its possessor to enjoy many things in our modern literature that would otherwise be puzzling or obscure. The importance, therefore, of placing some of the best of such tales early within the reach of school children and all young readers cannot be disputed.

In three volumes somewhat larger than the present one—"A Story of the Golden Age," "The Story of Siegfried," and "The Story of Roland"—I have already endeavored to introduce young readers to the most interesting portions of these great cycles of romance, narrating in each the adventures of the hero who is the central figure in the group of legends or tales under consideration. The present volume, made up of selections from these earlier books, has been prepared in response

to repeated suggestions that certain portions of them, and especially some of the independent shorter stories, are well adapted to use in reading-classes at school. Of the seventeen stories herein presented, nine are from the "Golden Age," four from "Siegfried," and four from "Roland." They are, for the most part, episodes, complete in themselves, and connected only by a slender thread with the main narrative. Their intrinsic value is in no way diminished by being thus separated from their former setting, and each tale being independent of the others, they lend themselves more readily to the demands of the schoolroom.

It is well to observe that in no case have I endeavored to repeat the story in its exact original form. To have done so would have defeated the purpose in view; for without proper adaptation such stories are usually neither interesting nor intelligible to children. I have therefore recast and rearranged, using my own words, and adding here a touch of color and here a fanciful idea, as the narrative has seemed to permit or as my audience of school children may demand. Nevertheless, in the end, the essential features of each tale—those which give it value in its original form—remain unchanged.

HOW APOLLO CAME TO PARNASSUS

A very long time ago, Apollo was born in the island of Delos. When the glad news of his birth was told, Earth smiled, and decked herself with flowers; the nymphs of Delos sang songs of joy that were heard to the utmost bounds of Greece; and choirs of white swans flew seven times around the island, piping notes of praise to the pure being who had come to dwell among men. Then Zeus looked down from high Olympus, and crowned the babe with a golden head-band, and put into his hands a silver bow and a sweet-toned lyre such as no man had ever seen; and he gave him a team of white swans to drive, and bade him go forth to teach men the things which are right and good, and to make light that which is hidden in darkness.

So Apollo arose, beautiful as the morning sun, and journeyed through many lands, seeking a dwelling place. He stopped for a time at the foot of Mount Olympus, and played so sweetly upon his lyre that Zeus and all his court were entranced. Then he wandered up and down through the whole length of the Thessalian land; but nowhere could he find a spot in which he was willing to dwell. At length he climbed into his car, and bade his swan team fly with him to the country of the Hyperboreans beyond the far-off northern mountains. Forthwith they obeyed; and through the pure regions of the upper air they bore him, winging their way ever northward. They carried him over many an unknown land, and on the seventh day they came to the Snowy Mountains where the griffins, with lion bodies and eagle wings, guard the golden treasures of the North.

In these mountains, the North Wind has his home; and from his deep caves he now and then comes forth, chilling with his cold and angry breath the orchards and the fair fields of Greece, and bringing death and dire disasters in his train. But northward this blustering Boreas cannot blow, for the heaven-towering mountains stand like a wall against him, and drive him back. Hence it is that beyond these mountains the storms of winter never come, but one happy springtime runs through all the year. There the flowers bloom, and the grain ripens, and the fruits drop mellowing to the earth, and the red wine is pressed from the luscious grape, every day the same.

The Hyperboreans who dwell in that favored land know neither pain nor sickness, nor wearying labor nor eating care; but their youth is as unfading as the springtime, and old age with its wrinkles and its sorrows is evermore a stranger to them. The spirit of evil, which would lead all men to err, has never found entrance among them, and they are free from vile passions and unworthy thoughts; and among them there is neither war, nor wicked deeds, nor fear of the avenging Furies, for their hearts are pure and clean, and never burdened with the love of self.

When the swan team of silver-bowed Apollo had carried him over the Snowy Mountains, they alighted in the Hyperborean land. And the people welcomed Apollo with shouts of joy and songs of triumph, as one for whom they had long been waiting. He took up his abode there, and dwelt with them one whole year, delighting them with his presence, and ruling over them as their king. But when twelve moons had passed, he bethought him that the toiling, suffering men of Greece needed most his aid and care. Therefore he bade the Hyperboreans farewell, and again went up into his sun-bright car; and his winged team carried him back to the land of his birth.

Long time Apollo sought a place where he might build a temple to which men might come to learn of him and to seek his help in time of need. At length he came to a broad plain, by the shore of a beautiful lake; and there he began to build a house, for the land was a pleasant one, well-watered, and rich in grain and fruit. But the nymph that lived in the lake liked not to have Apollo so near her, lest men seeing and loving him should forget to honor her; and one day, garmented with mosses and crowned with lilies, she came and stood before him in the sunlight.

"Apollo of the silver bow," said she, "have you not made a mistake in choosing this place for a dwelling? These rich plains around us will not always be as peaceful as now; for their very richness will tempt the spoiler, and the song of the cicada will then give place to the din of battle. Even in times

of peace you would hardly have a quiet hour here: for great herds of cattle come crowding down every day to my lake for water; the noisy ploughman, driving his team afield, disturbs the morning hour with his boorish shouts; and boys and dogs keep up a constant din, and make life in this place a burden."

"Fair nymph," said Apollo, "I had hoped to dwell here in thy happy vale, a neighbor and friend to thee. Yet, since this place is not what it seems to be, whither shall I go, and where shall I build my house?"

"Go to the cleft in Mount Parnassus," answered the nymph. "There thou canst dwell in peace, and men will come from all parts of the world to do thee honor."

And so Apollo went down to Parnassus, and there in the cleft of the mountain he laid the foundations of his shrine. Then he called the master architects of the world, Trophonius and Agamedes, and gave to them the building of the high walls and the massive roof. When they had finished their work, he said, "Say now what reward you most desire for your labor, and I will give it you."

"Give us," said the brothers, "that which is the best for men."

"It is well," answered Apollo. "When the full moon is seen above the mountain-tops, you shall have your wish."

But when the moon rose full and clear above the heights, the two brothers were dead.

Apollo was pleased with the place which he had chosen for a home; for there he found rest and quiet, and neither the hum of labor nor the din of battle was likely ever to enter. One thing, however, must needs be done before he could have perfect peace. There lived near the foot of the mountain a huge serpent called Python, which was the terror of all the land. Oftentimes, coming out of its den, this monster attacked the flocks and herds, and sometimes even their keepers; and it had been known to carry little children and helpless women to its den, and there devour them.

The men of the place came to Apollo, and prayed him to drive out or destroy their terrible enemy. So, taking in hand his silver bow, he sallied out at break of day to meet the monster when it should issue from its slimy cave. The vile creature shrank back when it saw its radiant enemy, and would fain have hidden itself in the deep gorges of the mountain. But Apollo quickly launched a swift arrow at it, crying, "Thou bane of man, lie thou upon the earth, and enrich it with thy dead body!" The never-erring arrow sped to the mark; and the great beast died, wallowing in its gore. And the people in their joy came out to meet the archer, singing paeans in his praise. They crowned him with wild flowers and wreaths of olives, and hailed him as the Pythian king; and the nightingales sang to him in the groves, and the swallows and cicadas twittered and tuned their melodies in harmony with his lyre.

But as yet there were no priests in Apollo's temple; and he pondered, long doubting, as to whom he should choose. One day he stood upon the mountain's topmost peak, whence he could view all Greece and the seas around it. Far away in the south, he spied a little ship sailing from Crete to sandy Pylos; and the men who were on board were Cretan merchants.

"These men shall serve in my temple!" he cried.

Upward he sprang, and high he soared above the sea; then swiftly descending like a fiery star, he plunged into the waves. There he changed himself into the form of a dolphin, and swam with speed to overtake the vessel.

Long before the ship had reached Pylos, the mighty fish came up with it, and struck its stern. The crew were dumb with terror, and sat still in their places; their oars were motionless; the sail hung limp and useless from the mast. Yet the vessel sped through the waves with the speed of the wind, for the dolphin was driving it forward by the force of his fins. Past many a headland, past Pylos and other pleasant harbors, they hastened. Vainly did the pilot try to land at each favorable place: the ship would not obey her helm. They rounded the headland of Araxus, and came into the long bay of Crissa; and there the dolphin left off guiding the vessel, and swam playfully around it, while a brisk west wind filled the sail, and bore the voyagers safely into port.

Then the dolphin changed into the form of a glowing star, which, shooting high into the heavens, lit up the whole world with its glory; and as the awe-stricken crew stood gazing at the wonder, it fell with the quickness of light upon Mount Parnassus. Into his temple Apollo hastened, and there he kindled an undying fire. Then, in the form of a handsome youth, with golden hair falling in waves upon his shoulders, he hastened to the beach to welcome the Cretan strangers.

"Hall, seamen!" he cried. "Who are you, and whence do you come? Shall I greet you as friends and guests, or shall I know you as robbers bringing death and distress to many a fair home?"

Then answered the Cretan captain, "Fair stranger, the gods have brought us hither; for by no wish of our own have we come. We are Cretan merchants, and we were on our way to Pylos with stores of merchandise, to barter with the tradesmen of that city. But some unknown being, whose might is greater than the might of men, has carried us far beyond our wished-for port, even to this unknown shore. Tell us now, we pray thee, what land is this? And who art thou who lookest so like a god?"

"Friends and guests, for such indeed you must be," answered the radiant youth, "think never again of sailing upon the wine-faced sea, but draw now your vessel high up on the beach. And when you have brought out all your goods and built an altar upon the shore, take of your white barley which you have with you, and offer it reverently to Phoebus Apollo. For I am he; and it was I who brought you hither, so that you might keep my temple, and make known my wishes unto men. And since it was in the form of a dolphin that you first saw me, let the town which stands around my temple be known as Delphi [Dolphin], and let men worship me there as Apollo Delphinus."

Then the Cretans did as he had bidden them: they drew their vessel high up on the white beach, and when they had unladen it of their goods, they built an altar on the shore, and offered white barley to Phoebus Apollo, and gave thanks to the ever-living powers who had saved them from the terrors of the deep. After they had feasted and rested from their long voyage, they turned their faces toward Parnassus; and Apollo, playing sweeter music than men had ever heard, led the way; and the folk of Delphi, with choirs of boys and maidens, came to meet them, singing songs of victory as they helped the Cretans up the steep pathway to the temple in the cleft of the mountain.

"I leave you now to have sole care of my temple," said Apollo. "I charge you to keep it well. Deal righteously with all men; let no unclean thing pass your lips; forget self; guard well your thoughts, and keep your hearts free from guile. If you do these things, you shall be blessed with length of days and all that makes life glad. But if you forget my words, and deal treacherously with men, and cause any to wander from the path of right, then shall you be driven forth homeless and accursed, and others shall take your places in the service of my house."

Then the bright youth left them and hastened away to Mount Olympus. But every year he came again, and looked into his house, and spoke words of warning and of hope to his servants; and men say that he has often been seen on Parnassus, playing his lyre to the listening Muses, or with his sister, Artemis, chasing the mountain deer.

THE HUNT IN THE WOOD OF CALYDON

RELATED BY AUTOLYCUS¹

"When I was younger than I am to-day," said the old chief, as they sat one evening in the light of the blazing brands—"when I was much younger than now, it was my fortune to take part in the most famous boar hunt the world has ever known.

"There lived at that time, in Calydon, a mighty chief named Oineus—and, indeed, I know not but that he still lives. Oineus was rich in vineyards and in orchards, and no other man in all Greece was happier or more blessed than he. He had married, early in life, the Princess Althea, fairest of the maidens of Acarnania; and to them a son had been born, golden-haired and beautiful, whom they called Meleager.

"When Meleager was yet but one day old, his father held him in his arms, and prayed to Zeus and the mighty powers above: 'Grant, Father Zeus, and all ye deathless ones, that this my son may be the foremost among the men of Greece. And let it come to pass, that when they see his valiant deeds, his countrymen shall say, "Behold, this youth is greater than his father," and all of one accord shall hail him as their guardian king.'

"Then his mother, Althea, weeping tears of joy, prayed that the boy might grow up to be pure-minded and gentle, the hope and pride of his parents, and the delight and staff of their declining years.

"Scarcely had the words of prayer died from her lips, when there came into her chamber the three unerring Fates who spin the destinies of men. White-robed and garlanded, they stood beside the babe, and with unwearied fingers drew out the lines of his untried life. Clotho held the golden distaff in her hand, and twirled and twisted the delicate thread. Lachesis, now sad, now hopeful, with her long white fingers held the hour-glass, and framed her lips to say, 'It is enough.' And Atropos, blind and un pitying as the future always is, stood ready, with cruel shears, to clip the twist in twain. Busily and silently Clotho spun; and the golden thread, thin as a spider's web, yet beautiful as a sunbeam, grew longer and more golden between her skilful fingers. Then Lachesis cried out, 'It is finished!' But Atropos hid her shears beneath her mantle, and said, 'Not so. Behold, there is a brand burning upon the hearth. Wait until it is all burned into ashes and smoke, and then I will cut the thread of the child's life. Spin on, sweet Clotho!'

"Quick as thought, Althea sprang forward, snatched the blazing brand from the hearth, and quenched its flame in a jar of water; and when she knew that not a single spark was left glowing upon it, she locked it safely in a chest where none but she could find it. As she did this, the pitiless sisters vanished from her sight, saying as they flitted through the air, 'We bide our time.'

"Meleager grew up to be a tall and fair and gentle youth; and when at last he became a man, he sailed on the ship Argo, with Jason and the great heroes of that day, in search of the Golden Fleece. Many brave deeds were his in foreign lands; and when he came home again to Calydon, he brought with him a fair young wife, gentle Cleopatra, daughter of Idas the boaster.

"Oineus had gathered in his harvest; and he was glad and thankful in his heart, because his fields had yielded plenteously; his vines had been loaded with purple grapes, and his orchards filled with abundance of pleasant fruit. Grateful, as men should always be, to the givers of peace and plenty, he held within his halls a harvest festival, to which he invited the brave and beautiful of all the country round. Happy was this feast, and the hours were bright with smiles and sunshine; and men forgot sorrow and labor, and thought only of the gladness of life.

¹ Autolycus was a famous mountain chief who lived in rude state on the slopes of Parnassus and was noted for his courage and cunning. He was the grandfather of Odysseus (Ulysses), to whom the story is supposed to have been related.

"Then Oineus took of the first-fruits of his fields and his vineyards and his orchards, and offered them with much thankfulness to the givers of good. But he forgot to deck the shrine of Artemis with gifts, little thinking that the huntress queen cared for anything which mortal men might offer her. Ah, woful mistake was that! For, in her anger at the slight, Artemis sent a savage boar, with ivory tusks and foaming mouth, to overrun the lands of Calydon. Many a field did the monster ravage, many a tree uproot; and all the growing vines, which late had borne so rich a vintage, were trampled to the ground.

"Sadly troubled was Oineus, and he knew not what to do. For the fierce beast could not be slain, but with his terrible tusks he had sent many a rash hunter to an untimely death. Then the young man Meleager said, 'I will call together the heroes of Greece, and we will hunt the boar in the wood of Calydon.'

"So at the call of Meleager, the warriors flocked from every land, to join in the hunt of the fierce wild boar. Among them came Castor and Pollux, the twin brothers; and Idas, the boaster, the father-in-law of Meleager; and mighty Jason, captain of the Argo; and Atalanta, the swift-footed daughter of Iasus, of Arcadia; and many Acarnanian huntsmen led by the brothers of Queen Althea. Thither also did I hasten, although men spitefully said that I was far more skilful in taking tame beasts than in slaying wild ones.

"Nine days we feasted in the halls of Oineus; and every day we tried our skill with bows and arrows, and tested the strength of our well-seasoned spears. On the tenth, the bugles sounded, and hounds and huntsmen gathered in the courtyard of the chief, chafing for the hunt.

"Soon we sallied forth from the town, a hundred huntsmen, with dogs innumerable. Through the fields and orchards, laid waste by the savage beast, we passed; and Atalanta, keen of sight and swift of foot, her long hair floating in the wind behind her, led all the rest. It was not long until, in a narrow dell once green with vines and trees, but now strewn thick with withered branches, we roused the fierce creature from his lair.

"At first he fled, followed closely by the baying hounds. Then suddenly he faced his foes; with gnashing teeth and bloodshot eyes, he charged furiously upon them. A score of hounds were slain outright; and Cepheus, of Arcadia, rushing blindly onward, was caught by the beast, and torn in pieces by his sharp tusks. Then swift-footed Atalanta, bounding forward, struck the beast a deadly blow with her spear. He stopped short, and ceased his furious onslaught.

"Terrible were the cries of the wounded creature, as he made a last charge upon the huntsmen. But Meleager with a skilful sword-thrust pierced his heart and the beast fell weltering in his gore. Great joy filled the hearts of the Calydonians when they saw the scourge of their land laid low and helpless. They quickly flayed the beast, and the heroes who had shared in the hunt divided the flesh among them; but the head and the bristly hide they offered to Meleager.

"'Not to me does the prize belong,' he cried, 'but to Atalanta, the swift-footed huntress. For the first wound—the true death stroke, indeed—was given by her; and to her, woman though she be, all honor and the prize must be awarded.'

"With these words, he bore the grinning head and the bristly hide to the young huntress, and laid them at her feet. Then his uncles, the brothers of Queen Althea, rushed angrily forward, saying that no woman should ever bear a prize away from them; and they seized the hide, and would have taken it away, had not Meleager forbidden them. Yet they would not loose their hold upon the prize, but drew their swords, and wrathfully threatened Meleager's life.

"The hero's heart grew hot within him, and he shrank not from the affray. Long and fearful was the struggle—uncles against nephew; but in the end the brothers of Althea lay bleeding upon the ground, while the victor brought again the boar's hide, and laid it the second time at Atalanta's feet. The fair huntress took the prize, and carried it away with her to deck her father's hall in the pleasant Arcadian land. And the heroes, when they had feasted nine other days with King Oineus, betook themselves to their own homes.

"But the hearts of the Acarnanian hunters were bitter toward Meleager, because no part of the wild boar was awarded to them. They called their chiefs around them, and all their brave men, and made war upon King Oineus and Meleager. Many battles did they fight round Calydon; yet so long as Meleager led his warriors to the fray, the Acarnanians fared but ill.

"Then Queen Althea, filled with grief for her brothers' untimely fate, forgot her love for her son, and prayed that her Acarnanian kinsmen might prevail against him. Upon the hard earth she knelt: she beat the ground with her hands, and heaped the dust about her; and, weeping bitter tears, she called upon Hades to avenge her of Meleager. And even as she prayed, the pitiless Furies, wandering amid the darkness, heard her cries, and came, obedient to her wishes.

"When Meleager heard that his mother had turned against him, he withdrew in sorrow to his own house, and sought comfort and peace with his wife, fair Cleopatra; and he would not lead his warriors any more to battle against the Acarnanians. Then the enemy besieged the city: a fearful tumult rose about the gates; the high towers were assaulted, and everywhere the Calydonians were driven back dismayed and beaten.

"With uplifted hands and tearful eyes, King Oineus and the elders of the city came to Meleager, and besought him to take the field again. Rich gifts they offered him. They bade him choose for his own the most fertile farm in Calydon—at the least fifty acres, half for tillage and half for vines; but he would not listen to them.

"The din of battle thickened outside the gates; the towers shook with the thundering blows of the besiegers. Old Oineus with trembling limbs climbed up the stairway to his son's secluded chamber, and, weeping, prayed him to come down and save the city from fire and pillage. Still he kept silent, and went not. His sisters came, and his most trusted friends. 'Come, Meleager,' they prayed, 'forget thy grief, and think only of our great need. Aid thy people, or we shall all perish!'

"None of these prayers moved him. The gates were beaten down; the enemy was within the walls; the tide of battle shook the very tower where Meleager sat; the doom of Calydon seemed to be sealed. Then came the fair Cleopatra, and knelt before her husband, and besought him to withhold no longer the aid which he alone could give. 'O Meleager,' she sobbed, 'none but thou can save us. Wilt thou sit still, and see the city laid in ashes, thy dearest friends slaughtered, and thy wife and sweet babes dragged from their homes and sold into cruel slavery?'

"Then Meleager rose and girded on his armor. To the streets he hastened, shouting his well-known battle cry. Eagerly and hopefully did the Calydonian warriors rally around him. Fiercely did they meet the foe. Terrible was the bloodshed. Back from the battered gates and the crumbling wall the Acarnanian hosts were driven. A panic seized upon them. They turned and fled, and not many of them escaped the swords of Meleager's men.

"Again there was peace in Calydon, and the orchards of King Oineus blossomed and bore fruit as of old; but the gifts and large rewards which the elders had promised to Meleager were forgotten. He had saved his country, but his countrymen were ungrateful.

"Meleager again laid aside his war gear, and sought the quiet of his own home and the cheering presence of fair Cleopatra. For the remembrance of his mother's curse and his country's ingratitude weighed heavily on his mind, and he cared no longer to mingle with his fellow men.

"Then it was that Althea's hatred of her son waxed stronger, and she thought of the half-burned brand which she had hidden, and of the words which the Fatal Sisters had spoken so many years before.

"'He is no longer my son,' said she, 'and why should I withhold the burning of the brand? He can never again bring comfort to my heart; for the blood of my brothers, whom I loved, is upon his head.'

"And she took the charred billet from the place where she had hidden it, and cast it again into the flames. And as it slowly burned away, so did the life of Meleager wane. Lovingly he bade his wife farewell; softly he whispered a prayer to the unseen powers above; and as the flickering flames of the fatal brand died into darkness, he gently breathed his last.

"Then sharp-toothed remorse seized upon Althea, and the mother love which had slept in her bosom was reawakened. Too late, also, the folk of Calydon remembered who it was that had saved them from slavery and death. Down into the comfortless halls of Hades, Althea hastened to seek her son's forgiveness. The loving heart of Cleopatra, surcharged with grief, was broken; and her gentle spirit fled to the world of shades to meet that of her hero-husband. Meleager's sisters would not be consoled, so great was the sorrow which had come upon them; and they wept and lamented day and night, until kind Artemis in pity for their youth changed them into the birds which we call Meleagrides."

THE CHOICE OF HERCULES

When Hercules was a fair-faced youth, and life was all before him, he went out one morning to do an errand for his stepfather. But as he walked his heart was full of bitter thoughts; and he murmured because others no better than himself were living in ease and pleasure, while for him there was naught but a life of labor and pain.

As he thought upon these things, he came to a place where two roads met; and he stopped, not certain which one to take.

The road on his right was hilly and rough; there was no beauty in it or about it: but he saw that it led straight toward the blue mountains in the far distance.

The road on his left was broad and smooth, with shade trees on either side, where sang an innumerable choir of birds; and it went winding among green meadows, where bloomed countless flowers: but it ended in fog and mist long before it reached the wonderful blue mountains in the distance.

While the lad stood in doubt as to these roads, he saw two fair women coming toward him, each on a different road. The one who came by the flowery way reached him first, and Hercules saw that she was as beautiful as a summer day.

Her cheeks were red, her eyes sparkled; she, spoke warm, persuasive words. "O noble youth," she said, "be no longer bowed down with labor and sore trials, but come and follow me, I will lead you into pleasant paths, where there are no storms to disturb and no troubles to annoy. You shall live in ease, with one unending round of music and mirth; and you shall not want for anything that makes life joyous—sparkling wine, or soft couches, or rich robes, or the loving eyes of beautiful maidens. Come with me, and life shall be to you a day-dream of gladness."

By this time the other fair woman had drawn near, and she now spoke to the lad. "I have nothing to promise you," said she, "save that which you shall win with your own strength. The road upon which I would lead you is uneven and hard, and climbs many a hill, and descends into many a valley and quagmire. The views which you will sometimes get from the hilltops are grand and glorious, but the deep valleys are dark, and the ascent from them is toilsome. Nevertheless, the road leads to the blue mountains of endless fame, which you see far away on the horizon. They cannot be reached without labor; in fact, there is nothing worth having that must not be won by toil. If you would have fruits and flowers, you must plant them and care for them; if you would gain the love of your fellow men, you must love them and suffer for them; if you would enjoy the favor of Heaven, you must make yourself worthy of that favor; if you would have eternal fame, you must not scorn the hard road that leads to it."

Then Hercules saw that this lady, although she was as beautiful as the other, had a countenance pure and gentle, like the sky on a balmy morning in May.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Some call me Labor," she answered, "but others know me as Virtue."

Then he turned to the first lady. "And what is your name?" he asked.

"Some call me Pleasure," she said, with a bewitching smile, "but I choose to be known as the Joyous and Happy One."

"Virtue," said Hercules, "I will take thee as my guide! The road of labor and honest effort shall be mine, and my heart shall no longer cherish bitterness or discontent."

And he put his hand into that of Virtue, and entered with her upon the straight and forbidding road which leads to the fair blue mountains on the pale and distant horizon.

ALPHEUS AND ARETHUSA

In Arcadia there is a little mountain stream called Alpheus. It flows through woods and meadows and among the hills for many miles, and then it sinks beneath the rocks. Farther down the valley it rises again, and dancing and sparkling, as if in happy chase of something, it hurries onward towards the plain; but soon it hides itself a second time in underground caverns, making its way through rocky tunnels where the light of day has never been. Then at last it gushes once more from its prison chambers; and, flowing thence with many windings through the fields of Elis, it empties its waters into the sea.

Years ago there was no river Alpheus; the channel through which it flows had not then been hollowed out, and rank grass and tall bending reeds grew thick where now its waters sparkle brightest. It was then that a huntsman, bearing the name of Alpheus, ranged through the woods, and chased the wild deer among the glades and glens of sweet Arcadia. Far away by the lonely sea dwelt his fair young wife, and his lovely babe Orsilochus; but dearer than home or wife or babe to Alpheus, was the free life of the huntsman among the mountain solitudes. For he loved the woods and the blue sky and the singing birds, and the frail flowers upon the hillside; and he longed to live among them always, where his ears could listen to their music, and his eyes look upon their beauty.

"O Artemis, huntress queen!" he cried, "I ask but one boon of thee.

Let me ramble forever among these happy scenes!"

Artemis heard him, and answered his prayer. For, as he spoke, a bright vision passed before him. A sweet-faced maiden went tripping down the valley, culling the choicest flowers, and singing of hope and joy and the blessedness of a life pure and true. It was Arethusa, the Arcadian nymph, by some supposed to be a daughter of old Nereus, the elder of the sea.

Then Alpheus heard no more the songs of the birds, or the music of the breeze; he saw no longer the blue sky above him, or the nodding flowers at his feet: he was blind and deaf to all the world, save only the beautiful nymph. Arethusa was the world to him.

He reached out his arms to catch her; but, swifter than a frightened deer, she fled down the valley, through deep ravines and grassy glades and rocky caverns underneath the hills, and out into the grassy meadows, and across the plains of Elis, to the sounding sea. And Alpheus followed, forgetful of everything but the fleeing vision. When, at length, he reached the sea, he looked back; and, lo! he was no longer a huntsman, but a river doomed to meander forever among the scenes, for love of which he had forgotten his wife and his babe and the duties of life. It was thus that Artemis answered his prayer.

And men say that Arethusa, the nymph, was afterwards changed into a fountain; and that to this day, in the far-off island of Ortygia, that fountain gushes from the rocks in an unfailing, crystal stream. But Orsilochus, the babe forgotten by his father, grew to manhood, and in course of time became the king of the seafaring people of Messene.

THE GOLDEN APPLE

RELATED BY CHEIRON THE CENTAUR²

"There is a cavern somewhere on Mount Pelion larger by far and a thousand times more beautiful than this; but its doorway is hidden to mortals, and but few men have ever stood beneath its vaulted roof. In that cavern the ever-living ones who oversee the affairs of men, once held high carnival; for they had met there at the marriage feast of King Peleus, and the woods and rocks of mighty Pelion echoed with the sound of their merry-making. But wherefore should the marriage feast of a mortal be held in such a place and with guests so noble and so great? I will tell you.

"After Peleus had escaped from a plot which some wicked men had made for his destruction, he dwelt long time with me, who am his grandfather. But the days seemed long to him, thus shut out from fellowship with men, and the sun seemed to move slowly in the heavens; and often he would walk around to the other side of the mountain, and sitting upon a great rock, he would gaze for long hours upon the purple waters of the sea. One morning as thus he sat, he saw the sea nymph Thetis come up out of the waves and walk upon the shore beneath him. Fairer than a dream was she—more beautiful than any picture of nymph or goddess. She was clad in a robe of green silk, woven by the sea maidens in their watery grottoes; and there was a chaplet of pearls upon her head, and sandals of sparkling silver were upon her feet.

"As Peleus gazed upon this lovely creature, he heard a voice whispering in his ear. It was the voice of wise Athena.

"'Most luckless of mortal men,' she said, 'there is recompense in store for those who repent of their wrong-doing, and who, leaving the paths of error, turn again to the road of virtue. The immortals have seen thy sorrow for the evil deeds of thy youth, and they have looked with pity upon thee in thy misfortunes. And now thy days of exile and of sore punishment are drawing to an end. Behold the silver-footed Thetis, most beautiful of the nymphs of the sea, whom even the immortals have wooed in vain! She has been sent to this shore, to be won and wedded by thee.'

"Peleus looked up to see the speaker of these words, but he beheld only a blue cloud resting above the mountain-top; he turned his eyes downward again, and, to his grief, the silver-footed Thetis had vanished in the waves. All day he sat and waited for her return, but she came not. When darkness began to fall he sought me in my cave hall, and told me what he had seen and heard; and I taught him how to win the sea nymph for his bride.

"So when the sun again gilded the crags of Pelion, brave Peleus hid himself among the rocks close by the sea-washed shore, and waited for the coming of the silver-footed lady of the sea. In a little time she rose, beautiful as the star of morning, from the waves. She sat down upon the beach, and dallied with her golden tresses, and sang sweet songs of a happy land in the depths of the sounding sea. Peleus, bearing in mind what I had taught him, arose from his hiding-place, and caught the beautiful creature in his arms. In vain did she struggle to leap into the waves. Seven times she changed her form as he held her: by turns she changed into a fountain of water, into a cloud of mist, into a burning flame, and into a senseless rock. But Peleus held her fast; and she changed then into a tawny lion, and then into a tall tree, and lastly she took her own matchless form again.

² Cheiron the Centaur lived in a cavern on Mount Pelion and was reputed to be the wisest of mortals. All the young heroes of the time, Jason, Achilles, and others, were his pupils and spent their boyhood with him. He is sometimes represented as having the head of a man and the body of a horse; but it is probable that he was only one of a race of men noted for their skill in horsemanship. This story is supposed to have been related by him to young Odysseus (Ulysses), who visited him in his cavern.

"Then Peleus held the lovely Thetis by the hand, and they walked long time together upon the beach, while the birds sang among the trees on Pelion's leafy slopes, and the dolphins sported in the waters at their feet. Thus Peleus wooed the silver-footed lady, and won her love, and she promised to be his bride. Then the immortals were glad; and they fitted up the great cavern on Mount Pelion for a banquet hall, and made therein a wedding feast, such as was never seen before. The vaulted roof of the cavern was decked with gems which shone like the stars of heaven; a thousand torches, held by lovely mountain nymphs, flamed from the niches in the high walls; and upon the floor of polished marble, tables for a thousand guests were ranged.

"When the wedding feast was ready, all those who live on high Olympus, and all the immortals who dwell upon the earth, came to rejoice with King Peleus and his matchless bride; and they brought rich presents for the bridegroom, such as were never given to another man. One gave him a suit of armor, rich and fair, a wonder to behold, which lame Vulcan with rare skill had wrought and fashioned. One bestowed on him the peerless horses, Ballos and Xanthos, and a deftly wrought chariot with trimmings of gold. And I, one of the least of the guests, gave him an ashen spear which I had cut on the mountain top and fashioned with my own hands.

"At the tables sat Zeus, the father of gods and men; and his wife, the white-armed Hera; and smile-loving Aphrodite; and gray-eyed Athena; and all the wisest and the fairest of the immortals. The nymphs of the sea danced in honor of Thetis their sister; and the Muses sang their sweetest songs; and Apollo played upon the lyre. The Fates, too, were there: sad Clotho, twirling her spindle; unloving Lachesis, with wrinkled lips ready to speak the fatal word; and pitiless Atropos, holding in her hand the unsparing shears. And around the table passed the youthful and joy-giving Hebe, pouring out rich draughts of nectar for the guests.

"But there was one among all the immortals who had not been invited to the wedding; it was Eris, the daughter of War and Hate. Her scowling features, and her hot and hasty manners, were ill suited to grace a feast where all should be mirth and gladness; yet in her evil heart she planned to be avenged for the slight which had been put upon her. While the merry-making was at its height, and the company were listening to the music from Apollo's lyre, she came unseen into the hall, and threw a golden apple upon the table. No one knew whence the apple came; but on it were written these words, 'FOR THE FAIREST.'

"'To whom does it belong?' asked Zeus, stroking his brows in sad perplexity.

"The music ceased, and mirth and jollity fled at once from the banquet. The torches, which lit up the scene, flickered and smoked; the lustre of the gems in the vaulted roof was dimmed; dark clouds canopied the great hall: for Eris had taken her place at the table, uninvited and unwelcome though she was.

"'The apple belongs to me,' said Hera, trying to snatch it; 'for I am the queen, and gods and men honor me as having no peer on earth.'

"'Not so!' cried red-lipped Aphrodite. 'With me dwell Love and Joy; and not only do gods and men sing my praises, but all nature rejoices in my presence. The apple is mine, and I will have it!'

"Then Athena joined in the quarrel. 'What is it to be a queen,' said she, 'if at the same time one lacks that good temper which sweetens life? What is it to have a handsome form and face, while the mind is uncouth and ill-looking? Beauty of mind is better than beauty of face; for the former is immortal, while the latter fades and dies. Hence no one has a better right than I to be called the fairest.'

"Then the strife spread among the guests in the hall, each taking sides with the one he loved best; and, where peace and merriment had reigned, now hot words and bitter wrangling were heard. And had not Zeus bidden them keep silence, thus putting an end to the quarrel, all Pelion would have been rent, and the earth shaken to its centre in the mellay that would have followed.

"'Let us waste no words over this matter,' he said. 'It is not for the immortals to say who of their number is most beautiful. But on the slopes of Mount Ida, far across the sea, the fairest of the sons

of men—Paris, a prince of Troy—keeps his flocks; let him judge who is fairest, and let the apple be hers to whom he gives it.'

"Then Hermes, the swift-footed messenger, arose, and led the three goddesses over sea and land to distant Mount Ida, where Paris, with no thought of the wonderful life which lay before him, piped on his shepherd's reeds, and tended his flock of sheep."

PARIS AND CENONE

RELATED BY CHEIRON THE CENTAUR

"On the other side of the sea there stands a city, rich and mighty, the like of which there is none in Greece. The name of this city is Troy, although its inhabitants call it Ilios. There an old man, named Priam, rules over a happy and peace-loving people. He dwells in a great palace of polished marble, on a hill overlooking the plain; and his granaries are stored with corn, and his flocks and herds are pastured on the hills and mountain slopes behind the city.

"Many sons has King Priam; and they are brave and noble youths, well worthy of such a father. The eldest of these sons is Hector, who, the Trojans hope, will live to bring great honor to his native land.

"Just before the second son was born, a strange thing troubled the family of old Priam. The queen dreamed that her babe had turned into a firebrand, which burned up the walls and the high towers of Troy, and left but smouldering ashes where once the proud city stood. She told the king her dream; and when the child was born, they called a soothsayer, who could foresee the mysteries of the future, and they asked him what the vision meant.

"'It means,' said he, 'that this babe, if he lives, shall be a firebrand in Troy, and shall turn its walls and its high towers into heaps of smouldering ashes.'

"'But what shall be done with the child, that he may not do this terrible thing?' asked Priam, greatly sorrowing, for the babe was very beautiful.

"'Do not suffer that he shall live,' answered the soothsayer.

"Priam, the gentlest and most kind-hearted of men, could not bear to harm the babe. So he called his master shepherd, and bade him take the helpless child into the thick woods, which grow high up on the slopes of Mount Ida, behind the city, and there to leave him alone. The wild beasts that roam among those woods, he thought, would doubtless find him, or, in any case, he could not live long without care and nourishment; and thus the dangerous brand would be quenched while yet it was scarcely a spark.

"The shepherd did as he was bidden, although it cost his heart many a sharp pang thus to deal barbarously with the innocent. He laid the smiling infant, wrapped in its brodered tunic, close by the foot of an oak, and then hurried away that he might not hear its cries.

"But the nymphs who haunt the woods and groves, saw the babe, and pitied its helplessness, and cared for it so that it did not die. Some brought it yellow honey from the stores of the wild bees; some fed it with milk from the white goats that pastured on the mountain side; and others stood as sentinels around it, guarding it from the wolves and bears.

"Thus five days passed, and then the shepherd, who could not forget the babe, came cautiously to the spot to see if, mayhap, even its brodered cloak had been spared by the beasts. Sorrowful and shuddering he glanced toward the foot of the tree. To his surprise, the babe was still there; it looked up and smiled, and stretched its fat hands toward him. The shepherd's heart would not let him turn away the second time. He took the child in his arms, and carried it to his own humble home in the valley, where he cared for it and brought it up as his own son.

"The boy grew to be very tall and very handsome; and he was so brave, and so helpful to the shepherds around Mount Ida, that they called him Alexandros, or the helper of men; but his foster-father named him Paris. As he tended his sheep in the mountain dells, he met Oenone, the fairest of the river maidens, guileless and pure as the waters of the stream by whose banks she loved to wander. Day after day he sat with her in the shadow of her woodland home, and talked of innocence and

beauty, and of a life of sweet contentment, and of love; and the maiden listened to him with wide-open eyes and a heart full of trustfulness and faith.

"By and by, Paris and Oenone were wedded; and their little cottage in the mountain glen was the fairest and happiest spot in Ilios. The days sped swiftly by, and neither of them dreamed that any sorrow was in store for them; and to Oenone her shepherd husband was all the world, because he was so noble and brave and handsome and gentle.

"One warm summer afternoon, Paris sat in the shade of a tree at the foot of Mount Ida, while his flocks were pasturing upon the hillside before him. The bees were humming lazily among the flowers; the cicadas were chirping among the leaves above his head; and now and then a bird twittered softly among the bushes behind him. All else was still, as if enjoying to the full the delicious calm of that pleasant day.

"Paris was fashioning a slender reed into a shepherd's flute; while Oenone, sitting in the deeper shadows of some clustering vines, was busy with some simple piece of needlework.

"A sound as of sweet music caused the young shepherd to raise his eyes. Before him stood the four immortals, Hera, Athena, Aphrodite, and Hermes the messenger; their faces shone with a dazzling radiance, and they were fairer than any tongue can describe. At their feet rare flowers sprang up, crocuses and asphodels and white lilies; and the air was filled with the odor of orange blossoms. Paris, scarce knowing what he did, arose to greet them. No handsomer youth ever stood in the presence of beauty. Straight as a mountain pine was he; a leopard-skin hung carelessly upon his shoulders; his head was bare, but his locks clustered round his temples in sunny curls, and formed fit framework for his fair brows.

"Hermes spoke first: 'Paris, we have come to seek thy help; there is strife among the folk who dwell on Mount Olympus. Here are Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite, each claiming to be the fairest, and each clamoring for this prize, this golden apple. Now we pray that you will judge this matter, and give the apple to the one whom you may deem most beautiful.'

"Then Hera began her plea at once: 'I know that I am fairest,' she said, 'for I am queen, and mine it is to rule among gods and men. Give me the prize, and you shall have wealth, and a kingdom, and great glory; and men in aftertimes shall sing your praises.'

"And Paris was half tempted to give the apple, without further ado, to Hera, the proud queen. But gray-eyed Athena spoke: 'There is that, fair youth, which is better than riches or honor or great glory. Listen to me, and I will give thee wisdom and a pure heart; and thy life shall be crowned with peace, and sweetened with love, and made strong by knowledge. And though men may not sing of thee in after-times, thou shall find lasting happiness in the answer of a good conscience towards all things.'

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