HAMILTON WRIGHT MABIE

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTION TO "HEROES EVERY CHILD SHOULD KNOW"

If there had been no real heroes there would have been created imaginary ones, for men cannot live without them. The hero is just as necessary as the farmer, the sailor, the carpenter and the doctor; society could not get on without him. There have been a great many different kinds of heroes, for in every age and among every people the hero has stood for the qualities that were most admired and sought after by the bravest and best; and all ages and peoples have imagined or produced heroes as inevitably as they have made ploughs for turning the soil or ships for getting through the water or weapons with which to fight their enemies. To be some kind of a hero has been the ambition of spirited boys from the beginning of history; and if you want to know what the men and women of a country care for most, you must study their heroes. To the boy the hero stands for the highest success: to the grown man and woman he stands for the deepest and richest life.

Men have always worked with their hands, but they have never been content with that kind of work; they have looked up from the fields and watched the sun and stars; they have cut wood for their fires in the forest, but they have noticed the life which goes on among the trees and they have heard the mysterious sounds which often fill the air in the remotest places. From the beginning men have not only used their hands but their intellect and their imagination; they have had to work or starve, but they have seen the world, thought about it and dreamed about it.

They had worked and thought and dreamed only a little time before they began to explain the marvelous earth on which they found themselves and the strange things that happened in it; the vastness and beauty of the fields, woods, sky and sea, the force of the wind, the coming and going of the day and night, the warmth of summer when everything grew, and the cold of winter when everything died, the rush of the storm and the terrible brightness of the lightning. They had no idea of what we call law or force; they could not think of anything being moved or any noise being made unless there was some one like themselves to move things and make sounds; and so they made stories of gods and giants and heroes and nymphs and fawns; and the myths, which are poetic explanations of the world and of the life of men in it, came into being.

But they did not stop with these great matters; they began to tell stories about themselves and the things they wanted to do and the kind of life they wanted to lead. They wanted ease, power, wealth, happiness, freedom; so they created genii, built palaces, made magic carpets which carried them to the ends of the earth and horses with wings which bore them through the air, peopled the woods and fields with friendly, frolicsome or mischievous little people, who made fires for them if they were friendly, or milked cows, overturned bowls, broke dishes and played all kinds of antics and made all sorts of trouble if they were mischievous or unfriendly. Beside the great myths, like wild flowers in the shade of great trees, there sprang up among the people of almost all countries a host of poetic, satirical, humorous or homely stories of fairies, genii, trolls, giants, dwarfs, imps, and queer creatures of all kinds; so that to the children of two hundred years ago the woods, the fields, the solitary and quiet places everywhere, were full of folk who kept out of sight, but who had a great deal to do with the fortunes and fates of men and women.

From very early times great honor was paid to courage and strength; qualities which won success and impressed the imagination in primitive not less than in highly developed societies. The first heroes were gods or demi-gods, or men of immense strength who did difficult things. When men first began

to live in the world they were in constant peril and faced hardships of every kind; and from the start they had very hard work to do. There were fields to be cultivated, houses to be built, woods to be explored, beasts to be killed and other beasts to be tamed and set to work. There were many things to be done and no tools to work with; there were great storms to be faced and no houses for protection; there was terrible cold and no fire or clothing; there were diseases and no medicine; there were perils on land, in the water and in the air, and no knowledge of the ways of meeting them.

At the very start courage and strength were necessary if life was to be preserved and men were to live together in safety and with comfort. When a strong man appeared he helped his fellows to make themselves more at ease in the world. Sometimes he did this by simply making himself more comfortable and thus showing others how to do it; sometimes he did it by working for his fellows. No matter how selfish a man may be, if he does any real work in the world he works not only for himself but for others. In this way a selfish man like Napoleon does the work of a hero without meaning to do it: for the world is so made that no capable man or woman can be entirely selfish, no matter how hard they try to get and keep everything for themselves.

It was not long before men saw that strong men could not work for themselves without working for others, and there came in very early the idea of service as part of the idea of heroism, and the demi- gods, who were among the earliest heroes, were servants as well as masters. Hercules, the most powerful of the heroes to Greek and Roman boys was set to do the most difficult things not for himself but for others. He destroyed lions, hydras, wild boars, birds with brazen beaks and wings, mad bulls, many-headed monsters, horses which fed on human flesh, dragons, he mastered the three-headed dog Cerberus, he tore asunder the rocks at the Strait of Gibraltar which bear his name to open a channel between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. He fought the Centaur and brought back Alcestis, the wife of Admetus, from the pale regions of death where she had gone to save her husband's life. In all these labors, which were so great that works of extraordinary magnitude have since been called Herculean, the brave, patient, suffering hero, was helping other people rather than helping himself.

And this was true of Thor, the strong god of the Norsemen whose hammer was the most terrible weapon in the world, the roll and crash of thunder being the sound of it and the blinding lightning the flash of it. The gods were the friends of men, giving the light and warmth and fertility of the summer that the fields might bear food for them and the long, bright days might bring them peace and happiness. And the giants were the enemies of men, tirelessly trying to make the fields desolate and stop the singing of birds and shroud the sky in darkness by driving away summer with the icy breath of winter. In this perpetual conflict Thor was the hero of strength and courage, beating back the giants, defeating their schemes and fighting the battle for gods and men with tireless zeal; counting no peril or hardship too great if there was heroic work to be done.

Courage and achievement are the two signs of the hero; he may possess or lack many other qualities, but he must be daring and he must do things and not dream or talk about them.

From the days of Hercules to those of Washington and Livingston, men of heroic spirit have not stopped to count the cost when a deed must be done but have done it, usually with very little talk or noise; for heroes, as a rule, are much more interested in getting their work done than in making themselves conspicuous or winning a reputation. Heroes have often been harsh and even brutal, especially in the earliest times when humane feeling and a compassionate spirit had not been developed; Siegfried, Jason, Gustavas Adolphus and Von Tromp were often arbitrary and oppressive in their attitude toward men; and, in later times, Alfred the Great, William the Silent and Nelson were not without serious defects of temper and sometimes of character. Men are not great or heroic because they are faultless; they are great and heroic because they dare, suffer, achieve and serve.

And men love their heroes not because they have been perfect characters under all conditions, but because they have been brave, true, able, and unselfish, A man may have few faults and count for very little in the world, because he lacks force, daring, the greatness of soul which moves before a generation like a flaming torch; a man may lead a stainless life, not because he is really virtuous but

because he has very few temptations within or without. Some of the most heroic men have put forth more strength in resisting a single temptation than men of theories and more commonplace natures put forth in a life time. The serious faults of heroes are not overlooked or forgotten; the great man is as much the servant of the moral law as the little man, and pays the same price for disobedience; but generosity of spirit, devotion to high aims and capacity for self-sacrifice often outweigh serious offences. Nelson is less a hero because he yielded to a great temptation; but he remains a hero in spite of the stain on his fame. It is much better not to be profane under any circumstances, but when Washington swore fiercely at Charles Lee on the battle field of Monmouth his profanity was the expression of the righteous wrath of a good man. In judging the hero one must take into account the age in which he lived, the differences in moral standards between the past and the present, and the force of the temptations which come with strength of body, passion, imagination, great position, colossal enterprises; these do not conceal or excuse the faults of heroes but they explain those faults.

The men whose bravery and great deeds are described in these pages have been selected not because they are faultless in character and life, but because they were brave, generous, self-forgetful, self- sacrificing and capable of splendid deeds. Men love and honour them not only because they owe them a great deal of gratitude, but because they see in their heroes the kind of men they would like to be; for the possibilities of the heroic are in almost all men. Stories of the heroes have often made other men strong and brave and true in the face of great perils and tasks, and this book is put forth in the faith that it will not only pass on the fame of the heroes of the past but help make heroes in the present.

H. W. M.

CHAPTER I
PERSEUS

Once upon a time there were two princes who were twins. Their names were Acrisius and Proetus, and they lived in the pleasant vale of Argos, far away in Hellas. They had fruitful meadows and vineyards, sheep and oxen, great herds of horses feeding down in Lerna Fen, and all that men could need to make them blest: and yet they were wretched, because they were jealous of each other. From the moment they were born they began to quarrel; and when they grew up each tried to take away the other's share of the kingdom, and keep all for himself.

But there came a prophet to Acrisius and prophesied against him, and said, "Because you have risen up against your own blood, your own blood shall rise up against you; because you have sinned against your kindred, by your kindred you shall be punished. Your daughter Danae shall have a son, and by that son's hands you shall die. So the gods have ordained, and it will surely come to pass."

And at that Acrisius was very much afraid; but he did not mend his ways. He had been cruel to his own family, and, instead of repenting and being kind to them, he went on to be more cruel than ever: for he shut up his fair daughter Danae in a cavern underground, lined with brass, that no one might come near her. So he fancied himself more cunning than the gods: but you will see presently whether he was able to escape them.

Now it came to pass that in time a son came to Danae: so beautiful a babe that any but King Acrisius would have had pity on it. But he had no pity; for he took Danae and her babe down to the seashore, and put them into a great chest and thrust them out to sea, for the winds and the waves to carry them whithersoever they would.

The northwest wind blew freshly out of the blue mountains, and down the pleasant vale of Argos, and away and out to sea. And away and out to sea before it floated the mother and her babe, while all who watched them wept, save that cruel father, King Acrisius.

So they floated on and on, and the chest danced up and down upon the billows, and the baby slept upon its mother's breast: but the poor mother could not sleep, but watched and wept, and she sang to her baby as they floated; and the song which she sang you shall learn yourselves some day.

And now they are past the last blue headland, and in the open sea; and there is nothing round them but the waves, and the sky, and the wind. But the waves are gentle, and the sky is clear, and the breeze is tender and low.

So a night passed, and a day, and a long day it was for Danae; and another night and day beside, till Danae was faint with hunger and weeping, and yet no land appeared. And all the while the babe slept quietly; and at last poor Danae drooped her head and fell asleep likewise with her cheek against the babe's.

After a while she was awakened suddenly; for the chest was jarring and grinding, and the air was full of sound. She looked up, and over her head were mighty cliffs, all red in the setting sun, and around her rocks and breakers, and flying flakes of foam. She clasped her hands together, and shrieked aloud for help. And when she cried, help met her: for now there came over the rocks a tall and stately man, and looked down wonderingly upon poor Danae tossing about in the chest among the waves.

He wore a rough cloak of frieze, and on his head a broad hat to shade his face; in his hand he carried a trident for spearing fish, and over his shoulder was a casting-net; but Danae could see that he was no common man by his stature, and his walk, and his flowing golden hair and beard; and by the two servants who came behind him, carrying baskets for his fish. But she had hardly time to look at him before he had laid aside his trident and leapt down the rocks, and thrown his casting-net so surely over Danae and the chest, that he drew it, and her, and the baby, safe upon a ledge of rock.

Then the fisherman took Danae by the hand, and lifted her out of the chest, and said:

"O beautiful damsel, what strange chance has brought you to this island in so frail a ship? Who are you, and whence? Surely you are some King's daughter and this boy has somewhat more than mortal."

And as he spoke he pointed to the babe; for its face shone like the morning star.

But Danae only held down her head, and sobbed out:

"Tell me to what land I have come, unhappy that I am; and among what men I have fallen!"

And he said, "This isle is called Seriphos, and I am a Hellen, and dwell in it. I am the brother of Polydectes the King; and men call me Dictys the netter, because I catch the fish of the shore."

Then Danae fell down at his feet, and embraced his knees and cried:

"Oh, sir, have pity upon a stranger, whom a cruel doom has driven to your land; and let me live in your house as a servant; but treat me honourably, for I was once a king's daughter, and this my boy (as you have truly said) is of no common race. I will not be a charge to you, or eat the bread of idleness; for I am more skilful in weaving and embroidery than all the maidens of my land."

And she was going on; but Dictys stopped her, and raised her up, and said:

"My daughter, I am old, and my hairs are growing grey; while I have no children to make my home cheerful. Come with me then, and you shall be a daughter to me and to my wife, and this babe shall be our grandchild. For I fear the gods, and show hospitality to all strangers; knowing that good deeds, like evil ones, always return to those who do them."

So Danae was comforted, and went home with Dictys the good fisherman, and was a daughter to him and to his wife.

Fifteen years were passed and gone and the babe was now grown to a tall lad and a sailor, and went many voyages after merchandise to the islands round. His mother called him Perseus; but all the people in Seriphos said that he was not the son of mortal man, and called him Zeus, the son of the king of the Immortals. For though he was but fifteen, he was taller by a head than any man in the island; and he was the most skilful of all in running and wrestling and boxing, and in throwing the quoit and the javelin, and in rowing with the oar, and in playing on the harp, and in all which befits a man. And he was brave and truthful, gentle and courteous, for good old Dictys had trained him well; and well it was for Perseus that he had done so.

Now one day at Samos, while the ship was lading, Perseus wandered into a pleasant wood to get out of the sun, and sat down on the turf and fell asleep. And as he slept a strange dream came to him—the strangest dream which he had ever had in his life.

There came a lady to him through the wood, taller than he, or any mortal man; but beautiful exceedingly, with grey eyes, clear and piercing, but strangely soft and mild. On her head was a helmet, and in her hand a spear. And over her shoulder, above her long blue robes, hung a goat-skin, which bore up a mighty shield of brass, polished like a mirror. She stood and looked at him with her clear grey eyes; and Perseus saw that her eyelids never moved, nor her eyeballs, but looked straight through and through him, and into his very heart, as if she could see all the secrets of his soul, and knew all that he had ever thought or longed for since the day that he was born. And Perseus dropped his eyes, trembling and blushing, as the wonderful lady spoke.

"Perseus, you must do an errand for me."

"Who are you, lady? And how do you know my name?"

"I am Pallas Athene; and I know the thoughts of all men's hearts, and discern their manhood or their baseness. And from the souls of clay I turn away, and they are blest, but not by me. They fatten at ease, like sheep in the pasture, and eat what they did not sow, like oxen in the stall. They grow and spread, like the gourd along the ground; but, like the gourd, they give no shade to the traveller, and when they are ripe death gathers them, and they go down unloved into hell, and their name vanishes out of the land.

"But to the souls of fire I give more fire, and to those who are manful I give a might more than man's. These are the heroes, the sons of the Immortals who are blest, but not like the souls of clay. For I drive them forth by strange paths, Perseus, that they may fight the Titans and the monsters, the enemies of gods and men. Through doubt and need, danger and battle, I drive them; and some of them are slain in the flower of youth, no man knows when or where; and some of them win noble names, and a fair and green old age; but what will be their latter end I know not, and none, save Zeus, the father of gods and men. Tell me now, Perseus, which of these two sorts of men seem to you more blest?"

Then Perseus answered boldly: "Better to die in the flower of youth, on the chance of winning a noble name, than to live at ease like the sheep, and die unloved and unrenowned."

Then that strange lady laughed, and held up her brazen shield, and cried: "See here, Perseus; dare you face such a monster as this, and slay it, that I may place its head upon this shield?"

And in the mirror of the shield there appeared a face and as Perseus looked on it his blood ran cold. It was the face of a beautiful woman; but her cheeks were pale as death, and her brows were knit with everlasting pain, and her lips were thin and bitter like a snake's; and, instead of hair, vipers wreathed about her temples, and shot out their forked tongues; while round her head were folded wings like an eagle's, and upon her bosom claws of brass.

And Perseus looked awhile, and then said: "If there is anything so fierce and foul on earth, it were a noble deed to kill it. Where can I find the monster?"

Then the strange lady smiled again, and said: "Not yet; you are too young, and too unskilled; for this is Medusa the Gorgon, the mother of a monstrous brood."

And Perseus said, "Try me; for since you spoke to me a new soul has come into my breast, and I should be ashamed not to dare anything which I can do. Show me, then, how I can do this!"

"Perseus," said Athene, "think well before you attempt; for this deed requires a seven years' journey, in which you cannot repent or turn back nor escape; but if your heart fails you, you must die in the Unshapen Land, where no man will ever find your bones."

"Better so than live despised," said Perseus. "Tell me, then, oh tell me, fair and wise Goddess, how I can do but this one thing, and then, if need be, die!"

Then Athene smiled and said:

"Be patient, and listen; for if you forget my words, you will indeed die. You must go northward to the country of the Hyperboreans, who live beyond the pole, at the sources of the cold north wind, till you find the three Grey Sisters, who have but one eye and one tooth between them. You must ask them the way to the Nymphs, the daughters of the Evening Star, who dance about the golden tree, in the Atlantic island of the west. They will tell you the way to the Gorgon, that you may slay her, my enemy, the mother of monstrous beasts. Once she was a maiden as beautiful as morn, till in her pride she sinned a sin at which the sun hid his face; and from that day her hair was turned to vipers, and her hands to eagle's claws; and her heart was filled with shame and rage, and her lips with bitter venom; and her eyes became so terrible that whosover looks on them is turned to stone; and her children are the winged horse and the giant of the golden sword; and her grandchildren are Echidna the witch-adder, and Geryon the three-headed tyrant, who feeds his herds beside the herds of hell. So she became the sister of the Gorgons, the daughters of the Queen of the Sea. Touch them not, for they are immortal; but bring me only Medusa's head."

"And I will bring it!" said Perseus; "but how am I to escape her eyes? Will she not freeze me too into stone?"

"You shall take this polished shield," said Athene, "and when you come near her look not at her yourself, but at her image in the brass; so you may strike her safely. And when you have struck off her head, wrap it, with your face turned away, in the folds of the goatskin on which the shield hangs. So you will bring it safely back to me, and win to yourself renown, and a place among the heroes who feast with the Immortals upon the peak where no winds blow."

Then Perseus said, "I will go, though I die in going. But how shall I cross the seas without a ship? And who will show me my way? And when I find her, how shall I slay her, if her scales be iron and brass?"

Now beside Athene appeared a young man more light-limbed than the stag, whose eyes were like sparks of fire. By his side was a scimitar of diamond, all of one clear precious stone, and on his feet were golden sandals, from the heels of which grew living wings.

Then the young man spoke: "These sandals of mine will bear you across the seas, and over hill and dale like a bird, as they bear me all day long; for I am Hermes, the far-famed Argus-slayer, the messenger of the Immortals who dwell on Olympus."

Then Perseus fell down and worshipped, while the young man spoke again:

"The sandals themselves will guide you on the road, for they are divine and cannot stray; and this sword itself the Argus-slayer, will kill her, for it is divine, and needs no second stroke. Arise, and gird them on, and go forth."

So Perseus arose, and girded on the sandals and the sword.

And Athene cried, "Now leap from the cliff and be gone."

But Perseus lingered.

"May I not bid farewell to my mother and to Dictys? And may I not offer burnt offerings to you, and to Hermes the far-famed Argus- slayer, and to Father Zeus above?"

"You shall not bid farewell to your mother, lest your heart relent at her weeping. I will comfort her and Dictys until you return in peace. Nor shall you offer burnt offerings to the Olympians; for your offering shall be Medusa's head. Leap, and trust in the armour of the Immortals."

Then Perseus looked down the cliff and shuddered; but he was ashamed to show his dread. Then he thought of Medusa and the renown before him, and he leapt into the empty air.

And behold, instead of falling he floated, and stood, and ran along the sky. He looked back, but Athene had vanished, and Hermes; and the sandals led him on northward ever, like a crane who follows the spring toward the Ister fens.

So Perseus started on his journey, going dry-shod over land and sea; and his heart was high and joyful, for the winged sandals bore him each day a seven days' journey. And he turned neither to the right hand nor the left, till he came to the Unshapen Land, and the place which has no name.

And seven days he walked through it on a path which few can tell, till he came to the edge of the everlasting night, where the air was full of feathers, and the soil was hard with ice; and there at last he found the three Grey Sisters, by the shore of the freezing sea, nodding upon a white log of driftwood, beneath the cold white winter moon; and they chanted a low song together, "Why the old times were better than the new."

There was no living thing around them, not a fly, not a moss upon the rocks. Neither seal nor sea gull dare come near, lest the ice should clutch them in its claws. The surge broke up in foam, but it fell again in flakes of snow; and it frosted the hair of the three Grey Sisters, and the bones in the ice cliff above their heads. They passed the eye from one to the other, but for all that they could not see; and they passed the tooth from one to the other, but for all that they could not eat; and they sat in the full glare of the moon, but they were none the warmer for her beams. And Perseus pitied the three Grey Sisters; but they did not pity themselves.

So he said, "Oh, venerable mothers, wisdom is the daughter of old age. You therefore should know many things. Tell me, if you can, the path to the Gorgon."

Then one cried, "Who is this who reproaches us with old age?" And another, "This is the voice of one of the children of men."

Then one cried, "Give me the eye, that I may see him"; and another, "Give me the tooth, that I may bite him." But Perseus, when he saw that they were foolish and proud, and did not love the children of men, left off pitying them. Then he stepped close to them, and watched till they passed the eye from hand to hand. And as they groped about between themselves, he held out his own hand

gently, till one of them put the eye into it, fancying that it was the hand of her sister. Then he sprang back, and laughed, and cried:

"Cruel and proud old women, I have your eye; and I will throw it into the sea, unless you tell me the path to the Gorgon, and swear to me that you tell me right."

Then they wept, and chattered, and scolded; but in vain. They were forced to tell the truth, though, when they told it, Perseus could hardly make out the road.

"You must go," they said, "foolish boy, to the southward, into the ugly glare of the sun, till you come to Atlas the Giant, who holds the heaven and the earth apart. And you must ask his daughters, the Hesperides, who are young and foolish like yourself. And now give us back our eye, for we have forgotten all the rest."

So Perseus gave them back their eye. And he leaped away to the southward, leaving the snow and the ice behind. And the terns and the sea gulls swept laughing round his head, and called to him to stop and play, and the dolphins gambolled up as he passed, and offered to carry him on their back. And all night long the sea nymphs sang sweetly. Day by day the sun rose higher and leaped more swiftly into the sea at night, and more swiftly out of the sea at dawn; while Perseus skimmed over the billows like a sea gull, and his feet were never wetted; and leapt on from wave to wave, and his limbs were never weary, till he saw far away a mighty mountain, all rose-red in the setting sun. Perseus knew that it was Atlas, who holds the heavens and the earth apart.

He leapt on shore, and wandered upward, among pleasant valleys and waterfalls. At last he heard sweet voices singing; and he guessed that he was come to the garden of the Nymphs, the daughters of the Evening Star. They sang like nightingales among the thickets, and Perseus stopped to hear their song; but the words which they spoke he could not understand. So he stepped forward and saw them dancing, hand in hand around the charmed tree, which bent under its golden fruit; and round the tree foot was coiled the dragon, old Ladon the sleepless snake, who lies there for ever, listening to the song of the maidens, blinking and watching with dry bright eyes.

Then Perseus stopped, not because he feared the dragon, but because he was bashful before those fair maids; but when they saw him, they too stopped, and called to him with trembling voices:

"Who are you, fair boy? Come dance with us around the tree in the garden which knows no winter, the home of the south wind and the sun. Come hither and play with us awhile; we have danced alone here for a thousand years, and our hearts are weary with longing for a playfellow."

"I cannot dance with you, fair maidens; for I must do the errand of the Immortals. So tell me the way to the Gorgon, lest I wander and perish in the waves."

Then they sighed and wept; and answered:

"The Gorgon! she will freeze you into stone."

"It is better to die like a hero than to live like an ox in a stall. The Immortals have lent me weapons, and they will give me wit to use them."

Then they sighed again and answered: "Fair boy, if you are bent on your own ruin, be it so. We know not the way to the Gorgon; but we will ask the giant Atlas above upon the mountain peak." So they went up the mountain to Atlas their uncle, and Perseus went up with them. And they found the giant kneeling, as he held the heavens and the earth apart.

They asked him, and he answered mildly, pointing to the sea board with his mighty hand, "I can see the Gorgons lying on an island far away, but this youth can never come near them, unless he has the hat of darkness, which whosoever wears cannot be seen."

Then cried Perseus, "Where is that hat, that I may find it?"

But the giant smiled. "No living mortal can find that hat, for it lies in the depths of Hades, in the regions of the dead. But my nieces are immortal, and they shall fetch it for you, if you will promise me one thing and keep your faith."

Then Perseus promised; and the giant said, "When you come back with the head of Medusa, you shall show me the beautiful horror, that I may lose my feeling and my breathing, and become a stone for ever; for it is weary labour for me to hold the heavens and the earth apart."

Then Perseus promised, and the eldest of the Nymphs went down, and into a dark cavern among the cliffs, out of which came smoke and thunder, for it was one of the mouths of hell.

And Perseus and the Nymphs sat down seven days and waited trembling, till the Nymph came up again; and her face was pale, and her eyes dazzled with the light for she had been long in the dreary darkness; but in her hand was the magic hat.

Then all the Nymphs kissed Perseus, and wept over him a long while; but he was only impatient to be gone. And at last they put the hat upon his head, and he vanished out of their sight.

But Perseus went on boldly, past many an ugly sight, far away into the heart of the Unshapen Land, till he heard the rustle of the Gorgons' wings and saw the glitter of their brazen talons; and then he knew that it was time to halt, lest Medusa should freeze him into stone.

He thought awhile with himself, and remembered Athene's words. He arose aloft into the air, and held the mirror of the shield above his head, and looked up into it that he might see all that was below him.

And he saw the three Gorgons sleeping. He knew that they could not see him, because the hat of darkness hid him; and yet he trembled as he sank down near them, so terrible were those brazen claws.

Two of the Gorgons were foul as swine, and lay sleeping heavily, with their mighty wings outspread; but Medusa tossed to and fro restlessly, and as she tossed Perseus pitied her. But as he looked, from among her tresses the vipers' heads awoke, and peeped up with their bright dry eyes, and showed their fangs, and hissed; and Medusa, as she tossed, threw back her wings and showed her brazen claws.

Then Perseus came down and stepped to her boldly, and looked steadfastly on his mirror, and struck with Herpe stoutly once; and he did not need to strike again.

Then he wrapped the head in the goat-skin, turning away his eyes, and sprang into the air aloft, faster than he ever sprang before.

For Medusa's wings and talons rattled as she sank dead upon the rocks; and her two foul sisters woke, and saw her lying dead.

Into the air they sprang yelling, and looked for him who had done the deed. They rushed, sweeping and flapping, like eagles after a hare; and Perseus's blood ran cold as he saw them come howling on his track; and he cried, "Bear me well now, brave sandals, for the hounds of Death are at my heels!"

And well the brave sandals bore him, aloft through cloud and sunshine, across the shoreless sea; and fast followed the hounds of Death. But the sandals were too swift, even for Gorgons, and by nightfall they were far behind, two black specks in the southern sky, till the sun sank and he saw them no more.

Then he came again to Atlas, and the garden of the Nymphs; and when the giant heard him coming he groaned, and said, "Fulfil thy promise to me." Then Perseus held up to him the Gorgon's head, and he had rest from all his toil; for he became a crag of stone, which sleeps forever far above the clouds.

Perseus thanked the Nymphs, and asked them, "By what road shall I go homeward again, for I have wandered far in coming hither?"

And they wept and cried, "Go home no more, but stay and play with us, the lonely maidens, who dwell for ever far away from gods and men."

But he refused, and they told him his road. And he leapt down the mountain, and went on, lessening and lessening like a sea gull, away and out to sea.

So Perseus flitted onward to the northeast, over many a league of sea, till he came to the rolling sand hills and the dreary Lybian shore.

And he flitted on across the desert: over rock ledges, and banks of shingle, and level wastes of sand, and shell drifts bleaching in the sunshine, and the skeletons of great sea monsters, and dead bones of ancient giants, strewn up and down upon the old sea floor. And as he went the blood drops fell to the earth from the Gorgon's head, and became poisonous asps and adders, which breed in the desert to this day.

Over the sands he went, till he saw the Dwarfs who fought with cranes. Their spears were of reeds and rushes, and their houses of the eggshells of the cranes; and Perseus laughed, and went his way to the northeast, hoping all day long to see the blue Mediterranean sparkling, that he might fly across it to his home.

But now came down a mighty wind, and swept him back southward toward the desert. All day long he strove against it; but even the winged sandals could not prevail. So he was forced to float down the wind all night; and when the morning dawned there was nothing but the blinding sun in the blinding blue; and round him there was nothing but the blinding sand.

And Perseus said, "Surely I am not here without the will of the Immortals, for Athene will not lie. Were not these sandals to lead me in the right road? Then the road in which I have tried to go must be a wrong road."

Then suddenly his ears were opened, and he heard the sound of running water. And at that his heart was lifted up, though he scarcely dare believe his ears; and within a bowshot of him was a glen in the sand, and marble rocks, and date trees, and a lawn of gay green grass. And through the lawn a streamlet sparkled and wandered out beyond the trees, and vanished in the sand. And Perseus laughed for joy, and leapt down the cliff and drank of the cool water, and ate of the dates, and slept upon the turf, and leapt up and went forward.

Then he towered in the air like an eagle, for his limbs were strong again; and he flew all night across the mountain till the day began to dawn, and rosy-fingered Eos came blushing up the sky. And then, behold, beneath him was the long green garden of Egypt and the shining stream of Nile.

And he saw cities walled up to heaven, and temples, and obelisks, and pyramids, and giant gods of stone. And he came down amid fields of barley and flax, and millet, and clambering gourds; and saw the people coming out of the gates of a great city, and setting to work, each in his place, among the water courses, parting the streams among the plants cunningly with their feet, according to the wisdom of the Egyptians. But when they saw him they all stopped their work, and gathered round him, and cried:

"Who art thou, fair youth? and what Dearest thou beneath they goat— skin there? Surely thou art one of the Immortals; for thy skin is white like ivory, and ours is red like clay. Thy hair is like threads of gold, and ours is black and curled. Surely thou art one of the Immortals"; and they would have worshipped him then and there; but Perseus said:

"I am not one of the Immortals; but I am a hero of the Hellens. And I have slain the Gorgon in the wilderness, and bear her head with me. Give me food, therefore, that I may go forward and finish my work."

Then they gave him food, and fruit, but they would not let him go. And when the news came into the city that the Gorgon was slain, the priests came out to meet him, and the maidens, with songs and dances, and timbrels and harps; and they would have brought him to their temple and to their King; but Perseus put on the hat of darkness, and vanished away out of their sight.

And Perseus flew along the shore above the sea; and he went on all the day; and he went on all the night.

And at the dawn of day he looked toward the cliffs; and at the water's edge, under a black rock, he saw a white image stand.

"This," thought he, "must surely be the statue of some sea god; I will go near and see what kind of gods these barbarians worship."

But when he came near, it was no statue, but a maiden of flesh and blood; for he could see her tresses streaming in the breeze; and as he came closer still, he could see how she shrank and shivered when the waves sprinkled her with cold salt spray. Her arms were spread above her head, and fastened to the rock with chains of brass; and her head drooped on her bosom, either with sleep, or weariness, or grief. But now and then she looked up and wailed, and called her mother; yet she did not see Perseus, for the cap of darkness was on his head.

Full of pity and indignation, Perseus drew near and looked upon the maid. And, lifting the hat from his head, he flashed into her sight. She shrieked with terror, and tried to hide her face with her hair, for she could not with her hands; but Perseus cried:

"Do not fear me, fair one; I am a Hellen, and no barbarian. What cruel men have bound you? But first I will set you free."

And he tore at the fetters, but they were too strong for him; while the maiden cried:

"Touch me not; I am accursed, devoted as a victim to the sea gods.

They will slay you, if you dare to set me free."

"Let them try," said Perseus; and drawing Herpe from his thigh, he cut through the brass as if it had been flax.

"Now," he said, "you belong to me, and not to these sea gods, whosoever they may be!" But she only called the more on her mother.

"Why call on your mother? She can be no mother to have left you here."

And she answered, weeping:

"I am the daughter of Cepheus, King of Iopa, and my mother is Cassiopoeia of the beautiful tresses, and they called me Andromeda, as long as life was mine. And I stand bound here, hapless that I am, for the sea monster's food, to atone for my mother's sin. For she boasted of me once that I was fairer than the Queen of the Fishes; so she in her wrath sent the sea floods, and her brother the Fire King sent the earthquakes, and wasted all the land, and after the floods a monster bred of the slime what devours all living things. And now he must devour me, guiltless though I am—me who never harmed a living thing, nor saw a fish upon the shore but I gave it life, and threw it back into the sea; for in our land we eat no fish, for fear of their queen. Yet the priests say that nothing but my blood can atone for a sin which I never committed."

But Perseus laughed, and said, "A sea monster? I have fought with worse than him: I would have faced Immortals for your sake: how much more a beast of the sea?"

Then Andromeda looked up at him, and new hope was kindled in her breast, so proud and fair did he stand with one hand round her, and in the other the glittering sword. But she only sighed, and wept the more, and cried:

"Why will you die, young as you are? Is there not death and sorrow enough in the world already? It is noble for me to die, that I may save the lives of a whole people; but you, better than them all, why should I slay you too? Go you your way; I must go mine." And then, suddenly looking up, she pointed to the sea, and shrieked:

"There he comes, with the sunrise, as they promised. I must die now. How shall I endure it? Oh, go! Is it not dreadful enough to be torn piecemeal, without having you to look on?" And she tried to thrust him away.

But he said: "I go; yet promise me one thing ere I go: that if I slay this beast you will be my wife, and come back with me to my kingdom in fruitful Argos. Promise me, and seal it with a kiss."

Then she lifted up her face, and kissed him; and Perseus laughed for joy, and flew upward, while Andromeda crouched trembling on the rock.

On came the great sea monster, coasting along like a huge black galley. His great sides were fringed with clustering shells and seaweeds, and the water gurgled in and out of his wide jaws.

At last he saw Andromeda, and shot forward to take his prey, while the waves foamed white behind him, and before him the fish fled leaping.

Then down from the height of the air fell Perseus like a shooting star; down to the crests of the waves, while Andromeda hid her face as he shouted; and then there was silence for a while.

At last she looked up trembling, and saw Perseus springing toward her; and instead of the monster a long black rock, with the sea rippling quietly round it.

Who then so proud as Perseus, as he leapt back to the rock, and lifted his fair Andromeda in his arms, and flew with her to the cliff top, as a falcon carries a dove?

Who so proud as Perseus, and who so joyful as all the AEthiop people? For they had stood watching the monster from the cliffs, wailing for the maiden's fate. And already a messenger had gone to Cepheus and Cassiopoeia, where they sat in sackcloth and ashes on the ground, in the innermost palace chambers, awaiting their daughter's end. And they came, and all the city with them, to see the wonder, with songs and with dances, with cymbals and harps, and received their daughter back again, as one alive from the dead.

Then Cepheus said, "Hero of the Hellens, stay here with me and be my son-in-law, and I will give you the half of my kingdom."

"I will be your son-in-law," said Perseus, "but of your kingdom I will have none, for I long after the pleasant land of Greece, and my mother who waits for me at home."

Then Cepheus said, "You must not take my daughter away at once, for she is to us like one alive from the dead. Stay with us here a year, and after that you shall return with honour." And Perseus consented. So they went up to the palace; and when they came in, there stood in the hall Phineus, the brother of Cepheus, chafing like a bear robbed of her whelps, and with him his sons, and his servants, and many an armed man, and he cried to Cepheus:

"You shall not marry your daughter to this stranger of whom no one knows even the name. Was not Andromeda betrothed to my son? And now she is safe again, has he not a right to claim her?"

But Perseus laughed, and answered: "If your son is in want of a bride, let him save a maiden for himself."

Then he unveiled the Gorgon's head, and said, "This has delivered my bride from one wild beast; it shall deliver her from many." And as he spoke Phineus and all his men-at-arms stopped short, and stiffened each man as he stood; and before Perseus had drawn the goat-skin over the face again, they were all turned into stone. Then Perseus bade the people bring levers and roll them out.

So they made a great wedding feast, which lasted seven whole days, and who so happy as Perseus and Andromeda?

And when a year was ended Perseus hired Phoenicians from Tyre, and cut down cedars, and built himself a a noble galley; and painted its cheeks with vermilion and pitched its sides with pitch; and in it he put Andromeda, and all her dowry of jewels, and rich shawls, and spices from the East; and great was the weeping when they rowed away. But the remembrance of his brave deed was left behind; and Andromeda's rock was shown at Iopa in Palestine till more than a thousand years were past.

So Perseus and the Phoenicians rowed to the westward, across the sea, till they came to the pleasant Isles of Hellas, and Seriphos, his ancient home.

Then he left his galley on the beach, and went up as of old; and he embraced his mother, and Dictys his good foster-father, and they wept over each other a long while, for it was seven years and more since they had met.

Then he went home to Argos, and reigned there well with fair Andromeda. But the will of the gods was accomplished towards Acrisius, his grandfather, for he died from the falling of a quoit which Perseus had thrown in a game.

Perseus and Andromeda had four sons and three daughters, and died in a good old age. And when they died, the ancients say, Athene took them up into the sky, with Cepheus and Cassiopoeia. And there on starlight nights you may see them shining still; Cepheus with his kingly crown, and Cassiopoeia in her ivory chair, plaiting her star- spangled tresses, and Perseus with the Gorgon's head, and fair Andromeda beside him, spreading her long white arms across the heavens, as she stood when

chained to the stone for the monster. All night long they shine, for a beacon to wandering sailors; but all day they feast with the gods, on the still blue peaks of Olympus.

CHAPTER II
HERCULES

Many, many years ago in the far-off land of Hellas, which we call Greece, lived a happy young couple whose names were Alcmene and Amphitryon. Now Amphitryon, the husband, owned many herds of cattle. So also the father of Alcmene, who was King of Mycenae, owned many.

All these cattle grazing together and watering at the same springs became united in one herd. And this was the cause of much trouble, for Amphitryon fell to quarreling with the father of his wife about his portion of the herd. At last he slew his father-in-law, and from that day he fled his old home at Mycenae.

Alcmene went with her husband and the young couple settled at Thebes, where were born to them two boys—twins—which were later named Hercules and Iphicles.

From the child's very birth Zeus, the King of all heaven that is the air and clouds, and the father of gods and men—from the boy's very birth Zeus loved Hercules. But when Hera, wife of Zeus, who shared his honours, saw this love she was angry. Especially she was angry because Zeus foretold that Hercules should become the greatest of men.

Therefore one night, when the two babies were but eight months old, Hera sent two huge serpents to destroy them. The children were asleep in the great shield of brass which Amphitryon carried in battle for his defence. It was a good bed, for it was round and curved toward the centre, and filled with soft blankets which Alcmene and the maids of the house had woven at their looms. Forward toward this shield the huge snakes were creeping, and just as they lifted their open mouths above the rim, and were making ready to seize them, the twins opened their eyes. Iphicles screamed with fright. His cries wakened their mother, Alcmene, who called in a loud voice for help. But before Amphitryon and the men of the household could draw their swords and rush to the rescue, the baby Hercules, sitting up in the shield unterrified and seizing a serpent in each hand, had choked and strangled them till they died.

From his early years Hercules was instructed in the learning of his time. Castor, the most experienced charioteer of his day, taught him, Eurytus also, how to shoot with a bow and arrows; Linus how to play upon the lyre; and Eumolpus, grandson of the North Wind, drilled him in singing. Thus time passed to his eighteenth year when, so great already had become his strength and knowledge, he killed a fierce lion which had preyed upon the flocks of Amphitryon while they were grazing on Mount Cithaeron, and which had in fact laid waste many a fat farm of the surrounding country.

But the anger of Hera still followed Hercules, and the goddess sent upon him a madness. In this craze the hero did many unhappy deeds. For punishment and in expiation he condemned himself to exile, and at last he went to the great shrine of the god Apollo at Delphi to ask whither he should go and where settle. The Pythia, or priestess in the temple, desired him to settle at Tiryns, to serve as bondman to Eurystheus, who ruled at Mycenae as King, and to perform the great labours which Eurystheus should impose upon him. When these tasks were all accomplished, the inspired priestess added, Hercules should be numbered among the immortal gods.

THE FIRST LABOUR—WRESTLING WITH THE NEMEAN LION

The first task which Eurystheus required of Hercules was to bring him the skin of a lion which no arrow nor other weapon could wound, and which had long been a terror to the good people who lived in Nemea. Hercules set forth armed with bow and quiver, but paused in the outer wood of Nemea long enough to cut himself his famous club. There too he fell in with an honest countryman who pledged him to make a sacrifice to Zeus, the saviour, if he, Hercules, should return victorious;

but if he were slain by the monstrous lion, then the countryman should make the sacrifice a funeral offering to himself as a hero.

So Hercules proceeded, far into a dense wood, deserted because all people feared the fierce beast it protected. On he went till after many days he sighted the lion at rest near the cave which was its den. Standing behind a tree of great girth, Hercules fitted and let fly an arrow. It struck and glanced, leaving the animal unharmed. Then he tried another shot, aiming at the heart. Again the arrow failed. But the lion was by this time roused, and his eyes shot fiery glances, and the heavy roar from his throat made the woods most horribly resound. Then the devoted Hercules seized his heavy wooden club, and rushing forward drove the lion by the suddenness and fierceness of his assault into his den. But the den had two entrances. Against one Hercules rolled huge stones, and entering the cave by the other he grasped the lion's throat with both hands, and thus held him struggling and gasping for breath till he lay at his feet dead.

Hercules swung the mighty bulk upon his shoulders and proceeded to seek the countryman with whom his pledge stood. So great had been his journey, and so hard his search, that he did not find the good man till the last of the thirty days. There he stood just on the point of offering a sheep to Hercules, supposing him dead. Together they sacrificed the sheep to Zeus instead, and Hercules, vigorous and victorious, bore the mighty lion's body to Eurystheus at Mycenae.

Entering the place and throwing the carcass down before the king, Hercules so terrified Eurystheus by this token of his wonderful strength that the King forbade him ever again to enter the city. Indeed some say that the terror of Eurystheus was so great that he had a jar or vessel of brass secretly constructed underground which he might use as a safe retreat in case of danger. This "jar" was probably a chamber and its walls covered within with plates of brass. For now in our own day is seen there at Mycenae a room under the earth, and the nails which fastened the brass plates to the wall still remain. Ever after the conquest of this lion Hercules clothed himself with the skin.

THE SECOND LABOUR—DESTROYING THE LERNEAN HYDRA

The second task of Hercules was to destroy a hydra or water snake which dwelt in the marsh of Lerna, a small lake near Mycenae. The body of this snake was large and from its body sprang nine heads. Eight of these heads were mortal, but the ninth head was undying.

Hercules stepped into his chariot and his dear nephew Iolaus, who was permitted by the Delphic priestess to drive for him, took up the reins. The way to Lerna was pleasant. In spring-time crocuses and hyacinths sprang by the roadside, and in early summer the nightingales sang in the olive groves, vineyard and forest. That so great and horrible a monster could be near!

When Hercules and Iolaus came to Lerna they drew close to ground rising near a spring, and Hercules dismounting and searching found the very hole into which the hydra had retired. Into this he shot fiery arrows. The arrows discomforting the snake it crawled forth and, darting at him furiously, endeavoured to twine itself about his legs. The hero began then to wield his mighty club. He crushed head after head upon the snake's body, but for every one crushed two sprang in its place.

At length the hydra had coiled so firmly round one leg, that Hercules could not move an inch from the spot. And now an enormous crab came from the water out of friendship for the hydra, and that too crept up to Hercules and, seizing his foot, painfully wounded him.

Swinging his club with heroic vigor Hercules beat the crab to death. Then he called to Iolaus to fire a little grove of trees near by. Iolaus at once set the fire, and when the saplings were well aflame he seized them and, standing by the hero, as fast as Hercules cut off a head of the hydra he seared the neck with a flaming brand. The searing prevented the heads from growing again. When all the eight mortal heads had thus been dispatched Hercules struck off the one said to be immortal and buried it in the roadway, setting a heavy stone above. The body of the hydra he cut up and dipped

his arrows in the gall, which was so full of poison that the least scratch from such an arrow would bring certain death.

Eurystheus received the news of the destruction of the water snake with bad grace. He claimed that Hercules had not destroyed the monster alone, but only with the assistance of Iolaus. All the people, however, rejoiced greatly, and they hastened to drain the marsh where the hydra had dwelt so that never again could such an enemy abide upon their lands.

THE THIRD LABOUR—CAPTURING THE ARCADIAN HIND

In the days in which Hercules lived, Arcadia was a beautiful country of cool, sweet-scented woods, clear mountain streams, and sloping meadow-sides from which rose every now and then the roof of a hunter's cottage or a shepherd's hutch. It was a country also peculiarly pleasing to Artemis, the goddess of the chase, and peculiarly also it was the haunt of all animals especially dear to the goddess.

A hind was there of such loveliness and grace that Artemis had marked her for her own, and given her a pair of golden horns so that she might be known from all other deer and her life thus preserved. For no good Hellen, or Greek, would slay for food any animal sacred to a god. This beautiful golden-horned hind Eurystheus ordered Hercules to bring to him alive, for the irreverence of the King did not go so far as to demand her dead.

So Hercules went forth for the hunting and, not wishing to wound the hind, pursued her for one entire year. Up hill he went, down many a mountain dale, across many a gleaming river, through deep forest and open field, and always dancing before him were the golden tips of horns of the hind —near enough to be seen, too far to be seized. At last tired with the pursuit the lovely beast one day took refuge upon a mountain side, and there as she sought the water of a river, Hercules struck her with an arrow. The wound was slight, but it helped the hero to catch the creature, and to lift her to his shoulders. Thereupon, he started for the court of Eurystheus.

But the way was long, and it lay through a part of Arcadia where the bush was heavy, and forests were deep, and mountains were high, and while Hercules was pursuing his way and bearing his meek-eyed burden, he one day met the fair goddess to whom the hind was sacred. Her brother, the beautiful god Apollo, was with her.

Artemis seeing her captured deer cried to the hero, "Mortal, oho! thus wilt thou violate a creature set aside by the gods?" "Mighty Artemis and huntress," answered Hercules, "this hind I know is thine. A twelve-month have I chased and at last caught her. But the god Necessity forced me! Oh, immortal one, I am not impious. Eurystheus commanded me to catch the hind and the priestess of Apollo enjoined me to observe the King's command."

When Artemis understood how Hercules was bond-man she dismissed her anger, and sent him forward with kind words, and thus he brought the golden-horned hind to Mycenae and sent it in to the King.

THE FOURTH LABOUR—CAPTURING THE BOAR OF ERYMANTHUS

In the northwestern part of the famed Arcadia where the golden- horned hind roamed was a range of mountains called Erymanthus. Over the high tops of this range wandered also a wild beast, but unlike the lovely hind he was fierce and terrible of aspect and deadly in encounter. He was known as the boar of Erymanthus. This tusked and terrible being the King of Mycenae, Eurystheus, commanded the mighty Hercules, his bondman, to bring alive to him.

Again Hercules set out, and again he fared over hill and across bright waters, and as he went the birds sang spring songs to him from vine and tree shade, and yellow crocuses carpeted the earth. In his journey he came one day to the home of Pholus, a centaur, who dwelt with other centaurs

upon the side of a mountain. Now the centaurs were, of all the dwellers of that distant land, most unlike us modern folks. For report has it that they were half that noble creature man, and half that noble creature horse: that is to say, they were men as far as the waist, and then came the body of the horse with its swift four feet. There are those, indeed, who claim that the centaurs were men and rode their mountain ponies so deftly that man and horse seemed one whole creature. Be that as it may, upon this mountain side the centaur Pholus dwelt with others of his kind, and there to visit with him came Hercules.

The centaur with his hospitable heart and own hands prepared a dinner of roast meat for the hungry traveller, and as they sat at the board in genial converse they had much enjoyment. But Hercules was also thirsty, and the sparkling water from the mountain spring seemed not to satisfy him. He asked the centaur for wine. "Ah, wine, my guest-friend Hercules," answered Pholus, "I have none of my own. Yonder is a jar of old vintage, but it belongs to all the centaurs of our mountain and I cannot open it." "But friend Pholus," said Hercules pressingly, "I would I had a little for my stomach's sake."

Now the centaur had a kind heart as we have said, and he rejoiced that Hercules had come, and to give the hero his desires he opened the jar. The wine was made from grapes that grew under the fair skies of Arcadia and its fragrance was like a scent of lilies or of roses, and when the soft winds entered the door, near which Hercules sat drinking, it seized the perfume and bore it over the mountain side. Now hear of all the mischief a little wine may make.

The fragrance in the air told the centaurs, wherever each happened to be, that their wine jar had been opened, and they rushed to its resting place perhaps to defend it from any wayfaring thief, perhaps to help drink it, we do not know. But each came angrily to the mouth of the cave of Pholus and all were armed with stones and staves which they had seized as they hastened onward. When they first entered with raging cries and threatening gesture Hercules grasped the brands burning on the hospitable hearth and drove them back. As others pressed behind them the hero drew forth his arrows poisoned with the gall of the Lernean hydra, and sent among them many a shaft. Thus they fought retreating and, they fleeing and Hercules pursuing, came finally to the dwelling of Chiron, most famed of all the centaurs and a teacher of Hercules in his youth, teacher of his great art of surgery.

The wine raging in the veins of Hercules made him for the moment forgetful of all the good Chiron had bestowed upon him, and still letting fly his poisonous arrows he, aiming at another, hit the noblest of the centaurs. Grief seized Hercules when he saw what he had done and he ran and drew out the arrow and applied a soft ointment which Chiron himself had taught him to make. But it was in vain, for the centaur, inspiring teacher and famed for his love of justice as he was, soon gave up the ghost.

Saddened at his own madness Hercules now returned to the cave of his guest-friend Pholus. There among others his host lay, and stark dead. He had drawn an arrow from the body of one who had died from its wound, and, while examining it and wondering how so slight a shaft could be so fatal, had accidentally dropped it out of his hand. It struck his foot and he expired that very moment.

Hercules paid all funeral honour to his friends and afterward departing from the unhappy neighbourhood took up his search of the boar.

Heavy snows were lying on the crests of Erymanthus when Hercules came upon the tracks of the wild creature, and following patiently finally reached his lair. There the boar stood, his tusks pointed outward ready for attack, his eyes snapping vindictively. He was indeed a terrible thing to see.

Hercules, instead of shooting at the animal, began to call, and shouting with loud cries he so confused the boar that he ran into the vast snowdrift standing near by. Thereupon the hero seized and bound him with a wild grapevine he had brought for the purpose. And so swinging him over his shoulder he took his way toward Mycenae.

The King Eurystheus was terribly frightened at the very prospect of having the boar to keep, and when he heard Hercules was coming to town with the animal on his shoulders he took to the brazen

underground chamber, which he had built, when Hercules came in with the body of the Nemean lion. There he stayed for several days, according to a good old historian, Diodorus, who in writing of the King told that he was so great a coward.

THE FIFTH LABOUR—CLEANSING THE STABLES OF AUGEAS

Although Eurystheus was seized with tremor at the coming of Hercules with the Erymanthian boar, still he continued relentless, and demanded the performance of the next task, which was nothing less than the cleaning out in one day of stables where numerous cattle had been confined for many years. These noisome stalls belonged to Augeas, a King of Elis and a man rich in herds—so rich indeed that as the years passed and his cattle increased he could not find men enough to care for his kine and their house. Thus the animals had continued, and had so littered their abiding place that it had become well nigh intolerable and a source of disease and even of pestilence to the people.

When Hercules came to King Augeas he said nothing to him of the command Eurystheus had laid upon him, but looking through the stables which covered a space of many meadows he spoke of the cattle and the evil condition of their housing. "The moon-eyed kine will do better in clean stables," said the wise Hercules, "and if thou wilt pledge me a tenth of thy herds I will clean out thy stalls in a day." To this Augeas delightedly agreed and, speaking as they were in the presence of the young son of the King, Hercules called upon the prince to witness the pact.

Now Hercules in going about the great stables had noticed that at the upper end of their building flowed a swift river, and at the lower end was a second swift stream. When therefore Augeas had pledged himself to the work, Hercules, beginning early next day, took down the walls at the upper end of the stalls and the walls at the lower end. Then with his own mighty hands he dug channels and canals and led the waters of the upper swift-flowing river into the heavily littered floor of the stalls. And the waters rose and pushed the litter before them and made one channel into the lower river, and then another and another and so, working through the hours of the day, the upper river scoured the stables clean and carried the refuse to the lower river. And the lower river took the burden and carried it out to the salt sea, which is ever and always cleaning and purifying whatever comes to its waters. And when night fell there stood the hero Hercules looking at his work—the filthy stables of Augeas cleaned.

When next day Hercules asked for the tenth of the herds which the King had pledged, Augeas refused to stand by his agreement. He had learned that this labour of cleaning his stables had been imposed upon Hercules, and he claimed he should pay nothing for it; in fact, he denied he had promised anything, and offered to lay the matter before judges. The cause therefore was tried, and at the trial the young son of the King, who had witnessed the pact, testified to the truth of Hercules' claim. This so enraged his father that in most high-handed manner he banished both his son and the hero from Elis without waiting for the judgment of the court. Hercules returned to Mycenae. But again the cowardly and contemptible Eurystheus refused to count this labour, saying Hercules had done it for hire.

THE SIXTH LABOUR—SHOOTING THE STYMPHALIAN BIRDS

Far in the famed land of Arcadia is a beautiful lake known so many years ago, as in the time of Hercules, and even by us in our day, as Lake Stymphalus. It is a lake of pure sweet water and it lies, as such waters lie in our own country, high up in mountains and amid hillsides covered with firs and poplars and clinging vines and wild blossoms.

In our day the lake is a resort for gentle singing birds, but in the time of Hercules other birds were there also. The other birds were water fowls, and they had gathered at Lake Stymphalus because they had been driven out of their old home by wolves, who alone were hungrier and more destructive

than they. These fowls had claws of iron, and every feather of theirs was sharper than a barbed arrow, and so strong and fierce and ravenous they were that they would dart from the air and attack hunters, yea, and pecking them down would tear and strip their flesh till but a bony skeleton remained of that which a few minutes before had been a strong, active, buoyant man seeking in the chase food for his hearthside.

To make way with this horrid tribe of the air was the sixth command Eurystheus laid upon Hercules. Toward Lake Stymphalus therefore turned our hero. Again he walked Arcadian waysides, and again as he fared the spring sun shone above, and the birds sang welcome, and the narcissus lifted its golden cup, and as he went his heart rejoiced in his life, whatever the difficulty of his labour, and in the beauty of the world before his eyes. And as he walked also he thought of how he should accomplish the great undertaking upon which he was bent.

While thus deliberating the grey-eyed goddess of wisdom, Athene, came to him—just as this goddess even in our day comes to those who think—and she suggested to his mind that he should scare the fowl from their retreat by brazen rattles. The goddess did even more than put the notion of using a rattle in the mind of Hercules. It is said she actually brought him one, a huge, bronze clapper made for him by the forger of the gods, limping Hephaestus.

Hercules took this rattle and mounting a neighbouring height shook it in his great hands till every hill echoed and the very trees quivered with the horrid sound. And the man-eating birds? Not one remained hidden. Each and every one rose terrified in the air, croaking and working its steely talons and sharp-pointed feathers in dire fear.

Now from his quiver the hero fast picked his barbed arrows, and fast he shot and every shot brought to his feet one of the terrible man- eaters, till at last he had slain every one. Or, if indeed, any of the tribe had escaped, they had flown far away, for never after, in all the long history of Lake Stymphalus, have such creatures appeared again above its fair waters.

So ended the sixth labour of Hercules.

THE SEVENTH LABOUR—CAPTURING THE CRETAN BULL

Just as Zeus who, as we said in the beginning, was King of all heaven that is the air and clouds, so Posidon was King of the sea. With his queen, Amphitrite, he lived far down underneath the waves, and dwelt in a palace splendid with all the beautiful things of the deep.

In the midst of the blue waters of the Mediterranean where Posidon had his home, lies an island called Crete, and long ago in the days when Hercules laboured, a King, whose name was Minos, ruled over this land. The island is long and narrow and has much sea coast, and because of this fact King Minos stood in intimate relations with the god of the sea.

Now one day in an especial burst of friendliness, Minos vowed to sacrifice to Posidon whatever should come out of the salt waters. The god in pleasure at the vow, and to test mayhap the devotion of Minos, sent at once a beautiful bull leaping and swimming through the waves. When the creature had come to the rocky coast and made land, its side shone with such beauty, and its ivory-white horns garlanded with lilies set so like a crown above its graceful head that Minos and all the people who saw it marvelled that anywhere could have grown such a bull. And a sort of greed and deceit seized Minos as he gazed, and for his sacrifice to Posidon he resolved to use another bull. And so he ordered his herdsman to take this fair creature that had come from the sea and to put it among his herd, and also to bring forth another for the offering.

Because of this avarice of Minos the god below the waves was angry and he made the bull wild and furious, so that no herdsman dared approach to feed or care for it. For his seventh task Eurystheus commanded Hercules to fetch him this mad bull of Crete.

Hercules accordingly boarded one of the ships that plied in that far-off day, as well as in this time of ours, between the rocky coast of Crete and the fair land of Hellas, and in due time the hero

came to Minos' court. "I have come, sire," said Hercules, "for the mad bull that terrifies thy herdsmen and is rumoured beyond capture." "Ay, young man," cried the king, "thou hast come for my bull and my bull shalt thou have. When thou hast taken it, it is thine," and the King laughed grimly, for the strength and fury of the creature he deemed beyond any man's control.

Hercules sought the grove where Posidon's gift had strayed from its fellows, and there deftly seizing it by the horns, he bound its feet with stout straps of bull's hide and its horns he padded with moss of the sea from which it came, and so having made it powerless he lifted it to his shoulders and carried it to the shore. A swift black ship was just spreading sail from Crete, and entering upon it the hero soon ended his journey and laid his capture before Eurystheus. A day or two later Hercules loosed the bull, which, after wandering through the woodlands of Arcadia, crossed the isthmus and came to the plains of Marathon, whence, after doing much damage, it swam off to sea and was never heard of after.

So far we have told how Hercules accomplished seven of the tasks laid upon him. Space does not permit us to recount in detail the other five. The eighth task was to bring to Eurystheus the man-eating mares of the King of Windy Thrace. The ninth task was to fetch a girdle which Ares, god of war, had given the Queen of the Amazons—an exceedingly difficult labour, for the Amazons were a nation of women-warriors renowned for valour. For the tenth task Eurystheus demanded the purple oxen of a famous giant who dwelt on an island far out in the ocean. The eleventh task was to bring apples from the garden of the Hesperides—golden apples guarded by a dragon with a hundred heads, no one of which ever closed its eyes in sleep. And the twelfth and last task, which was to free the mighty Hercules from his bondage to cowardly Eurystheus, was to fetch Cerberus, the three-headed dog, who guarded the entrance to Hades, the unseen abode of departed spirits.

Each and every one of these labours the strong hero accomplished. Having won his freedom and gained the honours promised by the priestess at Delphi many years before, Hercules worked many a noble deed and finally in reward for his much enduring and his aid to mortals, he was carried upon a thunder cloud to the upper air, and entered into the very gates of heaven.

CHAPTER III
DANIEL

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom.

And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the King should have no damage.

Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the King thought to set him over the whole realm.

Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.

Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.

Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the King, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever.

All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee, O King, he shall be cast into the den of lions.

Now, O King, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.

Wherefore King Darius signed the writing and the decree.

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

Then they came near, and spake before the King concerning the King's decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of any god or man within thirty days, save of thee, O King, shall be cast into the den of lions? The King answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.

Then answered they and said before the King, That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O King, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day.

Then the King, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him.

Then these men assembled unto the King, and said unto the King, Know, O King, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the King establisheth may be changed.

Then the King commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the King spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.

And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the King sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.

Then the King went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his sleep went from him.

Then the King arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.

And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the King spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

Then said Daniel unto the King, O King, live for ever.

My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me: and also before thee, O King, have I done no hurt.

Then was the King exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.

CHAPTER IV
DAVID

The Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh, which belongeth to Judah, and pitched between Shochoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim.

And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines.

And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side; and there was a valley between them.

And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.

And he had an helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass.

And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders.

And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and one bearing a shield went before him.

And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me.

If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us.

And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.

When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid.

Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem-judah, whose name was Jesse; and he had eight sons: and the man went among men for an old man in the days of Saul.

And the three eldest sons of Jesse went and followed Saul to the battle: and the names of his three sons that went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next unto him Abinadab, and the third Shammah.

And David was the youngest: and the three eldest followed Saul.

But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days.

And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren;

And carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge.

Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.

And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him; and he came to the trench, as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle.

For Israel and the Philistines had put the battle in array army against army.

And David left his carriage in the hand of the keeper of the carriage, and ran into the army, and came and saluted his brethren.

And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the Philistine of Gam, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words; and David heard them.

And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid.

And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up; and it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the King will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel.

And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?

And the people answered him after this manner, saying, So shall it be done to the man that killeth him.

And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle.

And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?

And he turned from him toward another, and spake after the same manner: and the people answered him again after the former manner.

And when the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed them before Saul: and he sent for him.

And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.

And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.

And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock:

And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.

Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.

David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee.

And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail.

And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he essayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him.

And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.

And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bore the shield went before him.

And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance.

And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field.

Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands.

And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.

And David put his hand to his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth.

So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David.

Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled.

And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines, until thou comest to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell down by the way to Shaaraim, even unto Gath, and unto Ekron.

And the children of Irsael returned from chasing after the Philistines, and they spoiled their tents.

And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armour in his tent.

And when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said unto Abner, the captain of the host, Abner, whose son is this youth? And Abner said, As thy soul liveth, O King, I cannot tell.

And the King said, Enquire thou whose son the stripling is.

And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand.

And Saul said to him, Whose son art thou, thou young man? And David answered, I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.

CHAPTER V
ST. GEORGE

In the year 280, in a town in Cappadocia, was born that great soldier and champion of the oppressed whom we call St. George. His parents were Christians, and by them, and especially by his mother, he was most carefully instructed and trained.

When the youth came to the age of seventeen years he took up the profession of arms, and since he was gifted with beauty of person, intelligence, and an exquisite courtesy, he rose rapidly to a considerable military rank. Especially he pleased his imperial master, Diocletian.

One day while the Emperor, who was devoted to the worship of Apollo, was consulting at a shrine of that god upon an affair of much importance, from the dark depths of the cavern came forth a voice saying, "The just who are on the earth keep me from telling the truth. By them the inspiration of the Sacred Tripod is made a lie." At once the Emperor was stricken with consternation and asked who these just people were. "Master," answered one of the priests of Apollo, "they are the Christians." This answer so enraged Diocletian that he rekindled his persecutions.

Now from the first the young soldier George had burned with indignation because of the unspeakable cruelties put upon Christians, and he had spoken out boldly in defence of his brethren. His friends had counselled silence and prudence. But George would have none. He knew, however, that he might be called upon to suffer at any time, and he hoped to do better work for the world and to die after braver effort. He therefore distributed his money and his fine apparel among the poor and needy, set free all the slaves he possessed, and went forth upon knightly travel.

While pricking one day through the plains of Libya he came to a certain city called Silene, the people of which were bewailing a dire misfortune that had come upon them. An enormous dragon had issued from a marsh neighbouring the town and had devoured all their flocks and herds. Already the monster had taken dwelling near the city walls, and at such distance the people had been able to keep him only by granting him two sheep every day for his food and drink. If they had failed in this he would have come within their walls and poisoned every man, woman, and child with his plague-like breath.

But now already all the flocks and herds had been eaten. Nothing remained to fill the insatiable maw of the dragon but the little people of the homes and hearths of all the town. Every day two children were now given him. Each child taken was under the age of fifteen, and was chosen by lot. Thus it happened that every house and every street and all the public squares echoed with the wailing of unhappy parents and the cries of the innocents who were soon to be offered.

Now it chanced that the King of the city had one daughter, an exceeding fair girl both in mind and body, and after many days of the choosing of lots for the sacrifice, and after many a blooming girl and boy had met an unhappy death, the lot fell to this maiden, Cleodolinda. When her father, the King, heard his misfortune, in his despair he offered all the gold in the state treasury and even half his kingdom, to redeem the maiden. But at this many fathers and mothers who had lost their children murmured greatly and said, "O King, art thou just? By thy edict thou hast made us desolate. And now behold thou wouldst withhold thine own child!"

Thus the people spake, and speaking they waxed wroth greatly, and so joining together they marched threatening to burn the King in his palace unless he delivered the maiden to fulfil her lot. To such demands the King perforce submitted, and at last he asked only a delay of eight days which he might spend with the lovely girl and bewail her fate. This the people granted.

At the end of the time agreed to the fair victim was led forth. She fell at her father's feet asking his blessing and protesting she was ready to die for her people. Then amid tears and lamentations she was led to the walls and put without. The gates were shut and barred against her.

She walked towards the dwelling of the dragon, slowly and painfully, for the road was strewn with the bones of her playmates, and she wept as she went on her way.

It was this very morning that George, courageously seeking to help the weak, and strong to serve the truth, was passing by in his knightly journeying. He saw stretched before him the noisome path, and, moved to see so beautiful a maiden in tears, he checked his charger and asked her why she wept. The whole pitiful story she recounted, to which the valiant one answered, "Fear not; I will deliver you."

"Oh noble youth," cried the fair victim, "tarry not here lest you perish with me. Fly, I beseech you."

"God forbid that I should fly," said George in answer; "I will lift my hand against this loathly thing, and I will deliver you through the power that lives in all true followers of Christ."

At that moment the dragon was seen coming forth from his lair half flying and half crawling towards them. "Fly, I beseech you, brave knight," cried the fair girl trembling, "Leave me here to die."

But George answered not. Rather he put spurs to his horse and, calling upon his Lord, rushed towards the monster, and, after a terrible and prolonged combat, pinned the mighty hulk to the earth with his lance. Then he called to the maiden to bring him her girdle. With this he bound the dragon fast, and gave the end of the girdle into her hand, and the subdued monster crawled after them like a dog.

Walking in this way they approached the city. All the onlooking people were stricken with terror, but George called out to them saying, "Fear nothing. Only believe in Christ, through whose help I have conquered this adversary, and live in accord with His teachings, and I will destroy him before your eyes."

So the King and the people believed and such a life they endeavoured to live.

Then St. George slew the dragon and cut off his head, and the King gave great treasure to the knight. But all the rewards George distributed among the sick and necessitous and kept nothing for himself, and then he went further on his way of helpfulness.

About this time the Emperor Diocletian issued an edict which was published the length and breadth of his empire. This edict was nailed to the doors of temples, upon the walls of public markets, in all places people frequented, and those who read it read it with terror and hid their faces in despair. For it condemned all Christians. But St. George when he saw the writing was filled with indignation. That spirit and courage which comes to all of us from communion with the eternal powers heartened and strengthened him, and he tore down the unhappy utterance and trampled it under foot.

Thus prepared for death George approached the Emperor. "What wouldst thou?" cried Diocletian angrily, having heard from his proconsul Dacian that this young man deserved torture. "Liberty, sir, for the innocent Christians," answered the martyr. "At the least liberty, since their liberty can hurt no one."

"Young man," returned Diocletian with threatening looks, "think of thine own liberty and thy future."

Before George could make answer the ill-will of the tyrant waxed to ardent hatred and he summoned guards to take the martyr to prison. Once within the dungeon the keepers threw him to the ground, put his feet in stocks and placed a stone of great weight upon his chest. But even so, in the midst of torture, the blessed one ceased not to give thanks to God for this opportunity to bear witness to Christ's teachings.

The next day they stretched the martyr on a wheel full of sharp spokes. But a voice from heaven came to comfort him and said, "George, fear not; so it is with those who witness to the truth." And there appeared to him an angel brighter than the sun, clothed in a white robe, who stretched out a hand to embrace and encourage him in his pain. Two of the officers of the prison who saw this beautiful vision became Christians and from that day endeavoured to live after the teachings of Christ.

There is still another tale that after George had been comforted by the angel who descended from heaven, his tormentors flung him into a cauldron of boiling lead, and when they believed they had subdued him by the force of his agonies, they brought him to a temple to assist in their worship, and the people ran in crowds to behold his humiliation, and the priests mocked him.

The Emperor, seeing the constancy of George, once more sought to move him by entreaties. But the great soldier refused to be judged by words, only by deeds. He even demanded to go to see the gods Diocletian himself worshipped.

The Emperor, believing that at length George was coming to his right mind, and was about to yield, ordered the Roman Senate and people to assemble in order that all might be witnesses of George's acknowledgement of his own, Diocletian's, gods.

When they were thus gathered together in the Emperor's temple, and the eyes of all the people were fixed upon the weak and tortured saint to see what he would do, he drew near a statue of the sun-god Apollo, and stretching out his hand toward the image he said slowly, "Wouldst thou that I should offer thee sacrifices as to a god?" The demon who was in the statue made answer, "I am not God. There is but one God and Christ is his greatest prophet." At that very hour were heard horrible wailing sounds coming from the mouths of idols the world over, and the statues of the old gods either all fell over or crumbled to dust. One account says that St. George knelt down and prayed, and thunder and lightning from heaven fell upon the idols and destroyed them.

Angry at the breaking of their power, the priests of the gods cried to the Emperor that he must rid himself of so potent a magician and cut off his head. The priests also incited the people to lay hands on the martyr.

So it was commanded that George, the Christian knight, should be beheaded. He was dragged to the place of execution, and there, bending his neck to the sword of the executioner and absorbed in prayer, he received bravely and thankfully the stroke of death in April, 303.

So stands St. George ever before the youth of the world, one of the champions of Christendom, a model of courage, a brave interceder for the oppressed, an example of pure, firm and enduring doing for others, a true soldier of Christ.

CHAPTER VI
KING ARTHUR

Long years ago, there ruled over Britain a King called Uther Pendragon. A mighty prince was he, and feared by all men; yet, when he sought the love of the fair Igraine of Cornwall, she would have naught to do with him, so that, from grief and disappointment, Uther fell sick, and at last seemed like to die.

Now in those days, there lived a famous magician named Merlin, so powerful that he could change his form at will, or even make himself invisible; nor was there any place so remote but that he could reach it at once, merely by wishing himself there. One day, suddenly he stood at Uther's bedside, and said: "Sir King, I know thy grief, and am ready to help thee. Only promise to give me, at his birth, the son that shall be born to thee, and thou shalt have thy heart's desire." To this the King agreed joyfully, and Merlin kept his word: for he gave Uther the form of one whom Igraine had loved dearly, and so she took him willingly for her husband.

When the time had come that a child should be born to the King and Queen, Merlin appeared before Uther to remind him of his promise; and Uther swore it should be as he had said. Three days later, a prince was born and, with pomp and ceremony, was christened by the name of Arthur; but immediately thereafter, the King commanded that the child should be carried to the postern-gate, there to be given to the old man who would be found waiting without.

Not long after, Uther fell sick, and he knew that his end was come; so, by Merlin's advice; he called together his knights and barons, and said to them: "My death draws near. I charge you, therefore, that ye obey my son even as ye have obeyed me; and my curse upon him if he claim not the crown when he is a man grown." Then the King turned his face to the wall and died.

Scarcely was Uther laid in his grave before disputes arose. Few of the nobles had seen Arthur or even heard of him, and not one of them would have been willing to be ruled by a child; rather, each thought himself fitted to be King, and, strengthening his own castle, made war on his neighbours until confusion alone was supreme and the poor groaned because there was none to help them.

Now when Merlin carried away Arthur—for Merlin was the old man who had stood at the postern-gate—he had known all that would happen, and had taken the child to keep him safe from the fierce barons until he should be of age to rule wisely and well, and perform all the wonders prophesied of him. He gave the child to the care of the good knight Sir Ector to bring up with his son Kay, but revealed not to him that it was the son of Uther Pendragon that was given into his charge.

At last, when years had passed and Arthur was grown a tall youth well skilled in knightly exercises, Merlin went to the Archbishop of Canterbury and advised him that he should call together at Christmas-time all the chief men of the realm to the great cathedral in London; "For," said Merlin, "there shall be seen a great marvel by which it shall be made clear to all men who is the lawful King of this land." The Archbishop did as Merlin counselled. Under pain of a fearful curse, he bade barons and knights come to London to keep the feast, and to pray heaven to send peace to the realm.

The people hastened to obey the Archbishop's commands, and, from all sides, barons and knights came riding in to keep the birth-feast of our Lord. And when they had prayed, and were coming forth from the cathedral, they saw a strange sight. There, in the open space before the church, stood, on a great stone, an anvil thrust through with a sword; and on the stone were written these words: "Whoso can draw forth this sword, is rightful King of Britain born."

At once there were fierce quarrels, each man clamouring to be the first to try his fortune, none doubting his own success. Then the Archbishop decreed that each should make the venture in turn, from the greatest baron to the least knight, and each in turn, having put forth his utmost strength, failed to move the sword one inch, and drew back ashamed. So the Archbishop dismissed the company,

and having appointed guards to watch over the stone, sent messengers through all the land to give word of great jousts to be held in London at Easter, when each knight could give proof of his skill and courage, and try whether the adventure of the sword was for him.

Among those who rode to London at Easter was the good Sir Ector, and with him his son, Sir Kay, newly made a knight, and the young Arthur. When the morning came that the jousts should begin, Sir Kay and Arthur mounted their horses and set out for the lists; but before they reached the field, Kay looked and saw that he had left his sword behind. Immediately Arthur turned back to fetch it for him, only to find the house fast shut, for all were gone to view the tournament. Sore vexed was Arthur, fearing lest his brother Kay should lose his chance of gaining glory, till, of a sudden, he bethought him of the sword in the great anvil before the cathedral. Thither he rode with all speed, and the guards having deserted their post to view the tournament, there was none to forbid him the adventure. He leapt from his horse, seized the hilt, and instantly drew forth the sword as easily as from a scabbard; then, mounting his horse and thinking no marvel of what he had done, he rode after his brother and handed him the weapon.

When Kay looked at it, he saw at once that it was the wondrous sword from the stone. In great joy he sought his father, and showing it to him, said: "Then must I be King of Britain." But Sir Ector bade him say how he came by the sword, and when Sir Kay told how Arthur had brought it to him, Sir Ector bent his knee to the boy, and said: "Sir, I perceive that ye are my King, and here I tender you my homage"; and Kay did as his father. Then the three sought the Archbishop, to whom they related all that had happened; and he, much marvelling, called the people together to the great stone, and bade Arthur thrust back the sword and draw it forth again in the presence of all, which he did with ease. But an angry murmur arose from the barons, who cried that what a boy could do, a man could do; so, at the Archbishop's word, the sword was put back, and each man, whether baron or knight, tried in his turn to draw it forth, and failed. Then, for the third time, Arthur drew forth the sword. Immediately there arose from the people a great shout: "Arthur is King! Arthur is King! We will have no King but Arthur"; and, though the great barons scowled and threatened, they fell on their knees before him while the Archbishop placed the crown upon his head, and swore to obey him faithfully as their lord and sovereign.

Thus Arthur was made King; and to all he did justice, righting wrongs and giving to all their dues. Nor was he forgetful of those that had been his friends; for Kay, whom he loved as a brother, he made Seneschal and chief of his household, and to Sir Ector, his foster father, he gave broad lands.

Thus Arthur was made King, but he had to fight for his own; for eleven great kings drew together and refused to acknowledge him as their lord, and chief amongst the rebels was King Lot of Orknev who had married Arthur's sister, Bellicent.

By Merlin's advice, Arthur sent for help overseas, to Ban and Bors, the two great Kings who ruled in Gaul. With their aid, he overthrew his foes in a great battle near the river Trent; and then he passed with them into their own lands and helped them drive out their enemies. So there was ever great friendship between Arthur and the Kings Ban and Bors, and all their kindred; and afterward some of the most famous Knights of the Round Table were of that kin.

Then King Arthur set himself to restore order throughout his kingdom. To all who would submit and amend their evil ways, he showed kindness; but those who persisted in oppression and wrong he removed, putting in their places others who would deal justly with the people. And because the land had become overrun with forest during the days of misrule, he cut roads through the thickets, that no longer wild beasts and men, fiercer than the beasts, should lurk in their gloom, to the harm of the weak and defenceless. Thus it came to pass that soon the peasant ploughed his fields in safety, and where had been wastes, men dwelt again in peace and prosperity.

Amongst the lesser Kings whom Arthur helped to rebuild their towns and restore order, was King Leodegrance of Cameliard. Now Leodegrance had one fair child, his daughter Guenevere; and from the time that first he saw her, Arthur gave her all his love. So he sought counsel of Merlin, his

chief adviser. Merlin heard the King sorrowfully, and he said: "Sir King, when a man's heart is set, he may not change. Yet had it been well if ye had loved another."

So the King sent his knights to Leodegrance, to ask of him his daughter; and Leodegrance consented, rejoicing to wed her to so good and knightly a King. With great pomp, the princess was conducted to Canterbury, and there the King met her, and they two were wed by the Archbishop in the great Cathedral, amid the rejoicings of the people.

On that same day did Arthur found his Order of the Round Table, the fame of which was to spread throughout Christendom and endure through all time. Now the Round Table had been made for King Uther Pendragon by Merlin, who had meant thereby to set forth plainly to all men the roundness of the earth. After Uther died, King Leodegrance had possessed it; but when Arthur was wed, he sent it to him as a gift, and great was the King's joy at receiving it. One hundred and fifty knights might take their places about it, and for them Merlin made sieges, or seats. One hundred and twenty-eight did Arthur knight at that great feast; thereafter, if any sieges were empty, at the high festival of Pentecost new knights were ordained to fill them, and by magic was the name of each knight found inscribed, in letters of gold, in his proper siege. One seat only long remained unoccupied, and that was the Siege Perilous. No knight might occupy it until the coming of Sir Galahad; for, without danger to his life, none might sit there who was not free from all stain of sin.

With pomp and ceremony did each knight take upon him the vows of true knighthood: to obey the King; to show mercy to all who asked it; to defend the weak; and for no worldly gain to fight in a wrongful cause: and all the knights rejoiced together, doing honour to Arthur and to his Queen. Then they rode forth to right the wrong and help the oppressed, and by their aid the King held his realm in peace, doing justice to all.

Now, as time passed, King Arthur gathered into his Order of the Round Table knights whose peers shall never be found in any age; and foremost amongst them all was Sir Launcelot du Lac. Such was his strength that none against whom he laid lance in rest could keep the saddle, and no shield was proof against his sword dint; but for his courtesy even more than for his courage and strength, Sir Launcelot was famed far and near. Gentle he was and ever the first to rejoice in the renown of another; and in the jousts, he would avoid encounter with the young and untried knight, letting him pass to gain glory if he might.

It would take a great book to record all the famous deeds of Sir Launcelot, and all his adventures. He was of Gaul, for his father, King Ban, ruled over Benwick; he was named Launcelot du Lac by the Lady of the Lake who reared him when his mother died. Early he won renown; then, when there was peace in his own land, he passed into Britain, to Arthur's Court, where the King received him gladly, and made him Knight of the Round Table and took him for his trustiest friend. And so it was that, when Guenevere was to be brought to Canterbury, to be married to the King, Launcelot was chief of the knights sent to wait upon her, and of this came the sorrow of later days. For, from the moment he saw her, Sir Launcelot loved Guenevere, for her sake remaining wifeless all his days, and in all things being her faithful knight. But busy-bodies and mischief- makers spoke evil of Sir Launcelot and the Queen, and from their talk came the undoing of the King and the downfall of his great work. But that was after long years, and after many true knights had lived their lives, honouring the King and Queen, and doing great deeds.

Before Merlin passed from the world of men, he had uttered many marvellous prophesies, and one that boded ill to King Arthur; for he foretold that, in the days to come, a son of Arthur's sister should stir up bitter war against the King, and at last a great battle should be fought, when many a brave knight should find his doom.

Now, among the nephews of Arthur, was one most dishonourable; his name was Mordred. No knightly deed had he ever done, and he hated to hear the good report of others because he himself was a coward and envious. But of all the Round Table there was none that Mordred hated more than Sir Launcelot du Lac, whom all true knights held in most honour; and not the less did Mordred hate

Launcelot that he was the knight whom Queen Guenevere had in most esteem. So, at last, his jealous rage passing all bounds, he spoke evil of the Queen and of Launcelot, saying that they were traitors to the King. Now Sir Gawain and Sir Gareth, Mordred's brothers, refused to give ear to these slanders, holding that Sir Launcelot, in his knightly service of the Queen, did honour to King Arthur also; but by ill-fortune another brother, Sir Agravaine, had ill-will to the Queen, and professed to believe Mordred's evil tales. So the two went to King Arthur with their ill stories.

Now when Arthur had heard them, he was wroth; for never would he lightly believe evil of any, and Sir Launcelot was the knight whom he loved above all others. Sternly then he bade them begone and come no more to him with unproven tales against any, and, least of all, against Sir Launcelot and their lady, the Queen.

The two departed, but in their hearts was hatred against Launcelot and the Queen, more bitter than ever for the rebuke they had called down upon themselves.

Great was the King's grief. Despite all that Mordred could say, he was slow to doubt Sir Launcelot, whom he loved, but his mind was filled with forebodings; and well he knew that their kin would seek vengeance on Sir Launcelot, and the noble fellowship of the Round Table be utterly destroyed.

All too soon it proved even as the King had feared. Many were found to hold with Sir Mordred; some from envy of the honour and worship of the noble Sir Launcelot; and among them even were those who dared to raise their voice against the Queen herself, calling for judgment upon her as leagued with a traitor against the King, and as having caused the death of so many good knights. Now in those days the law was that if any one were accused of treason by witnesses, or taken in the act, that one should die the death by burning, be it man or woman, knight or churl. So then the murmurs grew to a loud clamour that the law should have its course, and that King Arthur should pass sentence on the Queen. Then was the King's woe doubled; "For," said he, "I sit as King to be a rightful judge and keep all the law; wherefore I may not do battle for my own Queen, and now there is none other to help her." So a decree was issued that Queen Guenevere should be burnt at the stake outside the walls of Carlisle.

Forthwith, King Arthur sent for his nephew, Sir Gawain, and said to him: "Fair nephew, I give it in charge to you to see that all is done as has been decreed." But Sir Gawain answered boldly: "Sir King, never will I be present to see my lady the Queen die. It is of ill counsel that ye have consented to her death." Then the King bade Gawain send his two young brothers, Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris, to receive his commands, and these he desired to attend the Queen to the place of execution. So Gareth made answer for both: "My Lord the King, we owe you obedience in all things, but know that it is sore against our wills that we obey you in this; nor will we appear in arms in the place where that noble lady shall die"; then sorrowfully they mounted their horses and rode to Carlisle.

When the day appointed had come, the Queen was led forth to a place without the walls of Carlisle, and there she was bound to the stake to be burnt to death. Loud were her ladies' lamentations, and many a lord was found to weep at that grievous sight of a Queen brought so low; yet was there none who dared come forward as her champion, lest he should be suspected of treason. As for Gareth and Gaheris, they could not bear the sight and stood with their faces covered in their mantles. Then, just as the torch was to be applied to the faggots, there was a sound as of many horses galloping, and the next instant a band of knights rushed upon the astonished throng, their leader cutting down all who crossed his path until he had reached the Queen, whom he lifted to his saddle and bore from the press. Then all men knew that it was Sir Launcelot, come knightly to rescue the Queen, and in their hearts they rejoiced. So with little hindrance they rode away, Sir Launcelot and all his kin with the Queen in their midst, till they came to the castle of the Joyous Garde where they held the Queen in safety and all reverence.

At last Sir Launcelot desired of King Arthur assurance of liberty for the Queen, as also safe conduct for himself and his knights, that he might bring Dame Guenevere, with due honour, to the King at Carlisle; and thereto the King pledged his word.

So Launcelot set forth with the Queen, and behind them rode a hundred knights arrayed in green velvet, the housings of the horses of the same all studded with precious stones; thus they passed through the city of Carlisle, openly, in the sight of all, and there were many who rejoiced that the Queen was come again and Sir Launcelot with her, though they of Gawain's party scowled upon him.

When they were come into the great hall where Arthur sat, with Sir Gawain and other great lords about him, Sir Launcelot led Guenevere to the throne and both knelt before the King; then, rising, Sir Launcelot lifted the Queen to her feet, and thus he spoke to King Arthur, boldly and well before the whole court: "My lord, Sir Arthur, I bring you here your Queen, than whom no truer nor nobler lady ever lived; and here stand I, Sir Launcelot du Lac, ready to do battle with any that dare gainsay it"; and with these words Sir Launcelot turned and looked upon the lords and knights present in their places, but none would challenge him in that cause, not even Sir Gawain, for he had ever affirmed that Dame Guenevere was a true and honourable lady.

Then Sir Launcelot spoke again; "Now, my Lord Arthur, in my own defence it behooves me to say that never in aught have I been false to you."

"Peace," said the King to Sir Launcelot: "We give you fifteen days in which to leave this kingdom." Then Sir Launcelot sighed heavily and said: "Full well I see that nothing availeth me." Then he went to the Queen where she sat, and said: "Madam, the time is come when I must leave this fair realm that I have loved. Think well of me, I pray you, and send for me if ever there be aught in which a true knight may serve lady." Therewith he turned him about and, without greeting to any, passed through the hall, and with his faithful knights rode to the Joyous Garde, though ever thereafter, in memory of that sad day, he called it the Dolorous Garde.

In after times when the King had passed overseas to France, leaving Sir Mordred to rule Britain in his stead, there came messengers from Britain bearing letters for King Arthur; and more evil news than they brought might not well be, for they told how Sir Mordred had usurped his uncle's realm. First, he had caused it to be noised abroad that King Arthur was slain in battle with Sir Launcelot, and, since there be many ever ready to believe any idle rumour and eager for any change, it had been no hard task for Sir Mordred to call the lords to a Parliament and persuade them to make him King. But the Queen could not be brought to believe that her lord was dead, so she took refuge in the Tower of London from Sir Mordred's violence, nor was she to be induced to leave her strong refuge for aught that Mordred could promise or threaten.

Forthwith, King Arthur bade his host make ready to move, and when they had reached the coast, they embarked and made sail to reach Britain with all possible speed.

Sir Mordred, on his part, had heard of their sailing, and hasted to get together a great army. It was grievous to see how many a stout knight held by Mordred, ay, even many whom Arthur himself had raised to honour and fortune; for it is the nature of men to be fickle. Thus is was that, when Arthur drew near to Dover, he found Mordred with a mighty host, waiting to oppose his landing. Then there was a great sea-fight, those of Mordred's party going out in boats, to board King Arthur's ships and slay him and his men or ever they should come to land. Right valiantly did King Arthur bear him, as was his wont, and boldly his followers fought in his cause, so that at last they drove off their enemies and landed at Dover in spite of Mordred and his array.

Now, by this time, many that Mordred had cheated by his lying reports, had drawn unto King Arthur, to whom at heart they had ever been loyal, knowing him for a true and noble King and hating themselves for having been deceived by such a false usurper as Sir Mordred.

One night, as King Arthur slept, he thought that Sir Gawain stood before him, looking just as he did in life, and said to him: "My uncle and my King, God in his great love has suffered me to come unto you, to warn you that in no wise ye fight on the morrow; for if ye do, ye shall be slain,

and with you the most part of the people on both sides. Make ye, therefore, a treaty." Immediately, the King awoke and called to him the best and wisest of his knights. Then all were agreed that, on any terms whatsoever, a treaty should be made with Sir Mordred, even as Sir Gawain had said; and, with the dawn, messengers went to the camp of the enemy, to call Sir Mordred to a conference. So it was determined that the meeting should take place in the sight of both armies, in an open space between the two camps, and that King Arthur and Mordred should each be accompanied by fourteen knights. Little enough faith had either in the other, so when they set forth to the meeting, they bade their hosts join battle if ever they saw a sword drawn.

Now as they talked, it befell that an adder, coming out of a bush hard by, stung a knight in the foot; and he, seeing the snake, drew his sword to kill it and thought no harm thereby. But on the instant that the sword flashed, the trumpets blared on both sides and the two hosts rushed to battle. Never was there fought a fight of such enmity; for brother fought with brother, and comrade with comrade, and fiercely they cut and thrust, with many a bitter word between; while King Arthur himself, his heart hot within him, rode through and through the battle, seeking the traitor Mordred. So they fought all day, till at last the evening fell. Then Arthur, looking round him, saw of his valiant knights but two left, Sir Lucan and Sir Bedivere, and these sore wounded; and there, over against him, by a great heap of the dead, stood Sir Mordred, the cause of all this ruin. Thereupon the King, his heart nigh broken with grief for the loss of his true knights, cried with a loud voice, "Traitor! now is thy doom upon thee!" and with his spear gripped in both hands, he rushed upon Sir Mordred and smote him that the weapon stood out a fathom behind. And Sir Mordred knew that he had his death wound. With all the might that he had, he thrust him up the spear to the haft and, with his sword, struck King Arthur upon the head, that the steel pierced the helmet and bit into the head; then Mordred fell back, stark and dead.

Sir Lucan and Sir Bedivere went to the King where he lay, swooning from the blow, and bore him to a little chapel on the seashore. As they laid him on the ground, Sir Lucan fell dead beside the King, and Arthur, coming to himself, found but Sir Bedivere alive beside him.

So King Arthur lay wounded to the death, grieving, not that his end was come, but for the desolation of his kingdom and the loss of his good knights. And looking upon the body of Sir Lucan, he sighed and said: "Alas! true knight, dead for my sake! If I lived, I should ever grieve for thy death, but now mine own end draws nigh." Then, turning to Sir Bedivere, who stood sorrowing beside him, he said: "Leave weeping now, for the time is short and much to do. Hereafter shalt thou weep if thou wilt. But take now my sword Excalibur, hasten to the water side, and fling it into the deep. Then, watch what happens and bring me word thereof." "My Lord," said Sir Bedivere, "your command shall be obeyed"; and, taking the sword, he departed. But as he went on his way, he looked on the sword, how wondrously it was formed and the hilt all studded with precious stones; and, as he looked, he called to mind the marvel by which it had come into the King's keeping. For on a certain day, as Arthur walked on the shore of a great lake, there had appeared above the surface of the water a hand brandishing a sword. On the instant, the King had leaped into a boat, and, rowing into the lake, had got the sword and brought it back to land. Then he had seen how, on one side the blade, was written, "Keep me," but on the other, "Throw me away," and, sore perplexed, he had shown it to Merlin, the great wizard, who said: "Keep it now. The time for casting away has not yet come." Thinking on this, it seemed to Bedivere that no good, but harm, must come of obeying the King's word; so hiding the sword under a tree, he hastened back to the little chapel. Then said the King: "What saw'st thou?" "Sir," answered Bedivere, "I saw naught but the waves, heard naught but the wind." "That is untrue," said King Arthur; "I charge thee, as thou art true knight, go again and spare not to throw away the sword."

Sir Bedivere departed a second time, and his mind was to obey his lord; but when he took the sword in his hand, he thought: "Sin it is and shameful, to throw away so glorious a sword" Then, hiding it again, he hastened back to the King. "What saw'st thou?" said Sir Arthur. "Sir, I saw the water lap

on the crags." Then spoke the King in great wrath: "Traitor and unkind! Twice hast thou betrayed me! Art dazzled by the splendour of the jewels, thou that, till now, hast ever been dear and true to me? Go yet again, but if thou fail me this time, I will arise and, with mine own hands, slay thee."

Then Sir Bedivere left the King and, that time, he took the sword quickly from the place where he had hidden it and, forbearing even to look upon it, he twisted the belt about it and flung it with all his force into the water. A wondrous sight he saw for, as the sword touched the water, a hand rose from out the deep, caught it, brandished it thrice, and drew it beneath the surface.

Sir Bedivere hastened back to the King and told him what he had seen. "It is well," said Arthur; "now, bear me to the water's edge; and hasten, I pray thee, for I have tarried overlong and my wound has taken cold." So Sir Bedivere raised the King on. his back and bore him tenderly to the lonely shore, where the lapping waves floated many an empty helmet and the fitful moonlight fell on the upturned faces of the dead. Scarce had they reached the shore when there hove in sight a barge, and on its deck stood three tall women, robed all in black and wearing crowns on their heads. "Place me in the barge," said the King, and softly Sir Bedivere lifted the King into it. And these three Queens wept sore over Arthur, and one took his head in her lap and chafed his hands, crying: "Alas! my brother, thou hast been overlong in coming and, I fear me, thy wound has taken cold." Then the barge began to move slowly from the land. When Sir Bedivere saw this, he lifted up his voice and cried with a bitter cry: "Ah! my Lord Arthur, thou art taken from me! And I, whither shall I go?" "Comfort thyself," said the King, "for in me is no comfort more. I pass to the Valley of Avilion, to heal me of my grievous wound. If thou seest me never again, pray for me."

So the barge floated away out of sight, and Sir Bedivere stood straining his eyes after it till it had vanished utterly. Then he turned him about and journeyed through the forest until, at daybreak, he reached a hermitage. Entering it, he prayed the holy hermit that he might abide with him, and there he spent the rest of his life in prayer and holy exercise.

But of King Arthur is no more known. Some men, indeed, say that he is not dead, but abides in the happy Valley of Avilion until such time as his country's need is sorest, when he shall come again and deliver it. Others say that, of a truth, he is dead, and that, in the far West, his tomb may be seen, and written on it these words:

"Here lies Arthur, once King and King to be"

CHAPTER VII
SIR GALAHAD

Many times had the Feast of Pentecost come round, and many were the knights that Arthur had made after he founded the Order of the Round Table; yet no knight had appeared who dared claim the seat named by Merlin the Siege Perilous. At last, one vigil of the great feast, a lady came to Arthur's court at Camelot and asked Sir Launcelot to ride with her into the forest hard by, for a purpose not then to be revealed. Launcelot consenting, they rode together until they came to a nunnery hidden deep in the forest; and there the lady bade Launcelot dismount, and led him into a great and stately room. Presently there entered twelve nuns and with them a youth, the fairest that Launcelot had ever seen. "Sir," said the nuns, "we have brought up this child in our midst, and now that he is grown to manhood, we pray you make him knight, for of none worthier could he receive the honour." "Is this thy own desire?" asked Launcelot of the young squire; and when he said that so it was, Launcelot promised to make him knight after the great festival had been celebrated in the church next day.

So on the morrow, after they had worshipped, Launcelot knighted Galahad—for that was the youth's name—and asked him if he would ride at once with him to the King's court; but the young knight excusing himself, Sir Launcelot rode back alone to Camelot, where all rejoiced that he was returned in time to keep the feast with the whole Order of the Round Table.

Now, according to his custom, King Arthur was waiting for some marvel to befall before he and his knights sat down to the banquet. Presently a squire entered the hall and said: "Sir King, a great wonder has appeared. There floats on the river a mighty stone, as it were a block of red marble, and it is thrust through by a sword, the hilt of which is set thick with precious stones." On hearing this, the King and all his knights went forth to view the stone and found it as the squire had said; moreover, looking closer, they read these words: "None shall draw me hence, but only he by whose side I must hang; and he shall be the best knight in all the world." Immediately, all bade Launcelot draw forth the sword, but he refused, saying that the sword was not for him. Then, at the King's command, Sir Gawain made the attempt and failed, as did Sir Percivale after him. So the knights knew the adventure was not for them, and returning to the hall, took their places about the Round Table.

No sooner were they seated than an aged man, clothed all in white, entered the hall, followed by a young knight in red armour, by whose side hung an empty scabbard. The old man approached King Arthur and bowing low before him, said: "Sir, I bring you a young knight of the house and lineage of Joseph of Arimathea, and through him shall great glory be won for all the land of Britain." Greatly did King Arthur rejoice to hear this, and welcomed the two right royally. Then when the young knight had saluted the King, the old man led him to the Siege Perilous and drew off its silken cover; and all the knights were amazed, for they saw that where had been engraved the words, "The Siege Perilous," was written now in shining gold: "This is the Siege of the noble prince, Sir Galahad." Straightway the young man seated himself there where none other had ever sat without danger to his life; and all who saw it said, one to another: "Surely this is he that shall achieve the Holy Grail." Now the Holy Grail was the blessed dish from which our Lord had eaten the Last Supper, and it had been brought to the land of Britain by Joseph of Arimathea; but because of men's sinfulness, it had been withdrawn from human sight, only that, from time to to time, it appeared to the pure in heart.

When all had partaken of the royal banquet, King Arthur bade Sir Galahad come with him to the river's brink; and showing him the floating stone with the sword thrust through it, told him how his knights had failed to draw forth the sword. "Sir," said Galahad, "it is no marvel that they failed, for the adventure was meant for me, as my empty scabbard shows." So saying, lightly he drew the sword from the heart of the stone, and lightly he slid it into the scabbard at his side. While all yet wondered at this adventure of the sword, there came riding to them a lady on a white palfrey who,

saluting King Arthur, said: "Sir King, Nacien the hermit sends thee word that this day shall great honour be shown to thee and all thine house; for the Holy Grail shall appear in thy hall, and thou and all thy fellowship shall be fed therefrom." And so to Launcelot she said: "Sir Knight, thou hast ever been the best knight of all the world; but another has come to whom thou must yield precedence." Then Launcelot answered humbly: "I know well I was never the best." "Ay, of a truth thou wast and art still, of sinful men," said she, and rode away before any could question her further.

So, that evening, when all were gathered about the Round Table, each knight in his own siege, suddenly there was heard a crash of thunder, so mighty that the hall trembled, and there flashed into the hall a sunbeam, brighter far than any that had ever before been seen; and then, draped all in white samite, there glided through the air what none might see, yet what all knew to be the Holy Grail. And all the air was filled with sweet odours, and on every one was shed a light in which he looked fairer and nobler than ever before. So they sat in an amazed silence, till presently King Arthur rose and gave thanks to God for the grace given to him and to his court. Then up sprang Sir Gawain and made his avow to follow for a year and a day the Quest of the Holy Grail, if perchance he might be granted the vision of it. Immediately other of the knights followed his example, binding themselves to the Quest of the Holy Grail until, in all, one hundred and fifty had vowed themselves to the adventure.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.