

enabled him to return to his own home, where he now expected to spend the remainder of his life in peace.

Although somewhat aged by this time, Theseus was still anxious to marry, and looked about him for a wife to cheer his loneliness. Suddenly he remembered that Ariadne's younger sister, Phædra, must be a charming young princess, and sent an embassy to obtain her hand in marriage. The embassy proved successful, and Phædra came to Athens; but, young and extremely beautiful, she was not at all delighted with her aged husband, and, instead of falling in love with him, bestowed all her affections upon his son, Hippolytus, a virtuous youth, who utterly refused to listen to her proposals to elope. In her anger at finding her advances scorned, Phædra went to Theseus and accused Hippolytus of attempting to kidnap her. Theseus, greatly incensed at what he deemed his son's dishonorable behavior, implored Neptune to punish the youth, who was even then riding in his chariot close by the shore. In answer to this prayer, a great wave suddenly arose, dashed over the chariot, and drowned the young charioteer, whose lifeless corpse was finally flung ashore at Phædra's feet. When the unfortunate queen saw the result of her false accusations, she confessed her crime, and, in her remorse and despair, hung herself.

As for Theseus, soured by these repeated misfortunes, he grew so stern and tyrannical, that he gradually alienated his people's affections, until at last they hated him, and banished him to the Island of Scyros, where, in obedience to a secret order, Lycomedes, the king, treacherously slew him by hurling him from the top of a steep cliff into the sea. As usual, when too late, the Athenians repented of their ingratitude, and in a fit of tardy remorse deified this hero, and built a magnificent temple on the Acropolis in his honor. This building, now used as a museum, contains many relics of Greek art. Theseus' bones were piously brought back, and inhumed in Athens, where he was long worshiped as a demigod.

Phædra and Hippolytus.

Death of Theseus.

CHAPTER XXII.

JASON.

AT Iolcus, in Thessaly, there once reigned a virtuous king, Æson, with his good wife, Alcimede. Their happiness, however, was soon disturbed by Pelias, the king's brother, who, aided by an armed host, took forcible possession of the throne. Æson and Alcimede, in fear of their lives, were forced to resort to a hasty and secret flight, taking with them their only son, Jason.

The king and queen soon found a place of refuge, but, afraid lest their hiding place should be discovered and they should all be slain by the cruel Pelias, they intrusted their son to the Centaur Chiron, revealing to him alone the secret of the child's birth, and bidding him train him up to avenge their wrongs.

Chiron discharged his duties most faithfully, trained the young prince with great care, and soon made him the wisest and most skillful of his pupils. The years spent by Jason in the diligent acquisition of knowledge, strength, and skill, passed very quickly; and at last the time came when Chiron made known to him the secret of his birth, and the story of the wrongs inflicted by Pelias, the usurper, upon his unfortunate parents.

This tale aroused the young prince's anger, and made him solemnly vow to punish his uncle, or perish in the attempt. Chiron encouraged him to start, and in parting bade him remember that Pelias alone had injured him, but that all the rest of the human race were entitled to any aid he could bestow. Jason listened respectfully to his tutor's last instructions; then, girding his sword and putting on his sandals, he set out on his journey to Iolcus.

Jason's
vow.

It was early in the spring, and the young man had not gone very far before he came to a stream, which, owing to the usual freshets of the season, was almost impassable. Jason, however, quite undaunted by the rushing, foaming waters, was about to attempt the crossing, when he saw an aged woman not far from him, gazing in helpless despair at the waters she could not cross.

Naturally kind-hearted and helpful, and, besides that, mindful of Chiron's last recommendation, Jason offered the old woman his assistance, proposing to carry her across on his back if she would but lend him her staff to lean upon. The old woman gladly accepted this offer; and a few moments later, Jason, bending beneath his strange load, was battling with the rapid current.

After many an effort, breathless and almost exhausted, Jason reached the opposite bank, and, after depositing his burden there, scrambled up beside her, casting a rueful glance at the torrent, which had wrenched off one of his golden sandals. He was about to part from the old dame with a kindly farewell, when she was suddenly transformed into a large, handsome, imperious-looking woman, whom, owing to the peacock by her side, he immediately recognized as Juno, queen of heaven. He bent low before her, and claimed her aid and protection, which she graciously promised ere she vanished from his sight.

With eager steps Jason now pressed onward, nor paused until he came in view of his native city. As he drew near, he noticed an unusual concourse of people, and upon inquiry discovered that Pelias was celebrating a festival in honor of the immortal gods. Up the steep ascent leading to the temple Jason hastened, and pressed on to the innermost circle of spectators, until he stood in full view of his enemy Pelias, who, unconscious of coming evil, continued offering the sacrifice.

At last the ceremony was completed, and the king cast an arrogant glance over the assembled people. His eyes suddenly fell

upon Jason's naked foot, and he grew pale with horror as there flashed into his memory the recollection of an ancient oracle, warning him to beware of the

The one
sandal.

man who appeared before him wearing but one sandal. Pelias tremblingly bade the guards bring forth the uninvited stranger. His orders were obeyed; and Jason, confronting his uncle boldly, summoned him to make a full restitution of the power he had so unjustly seized.

To surrender power and wealth and return to obscurity was not to be thought of; but Pelias artfully concealed his displeasure, and told his nephew that they would discuss the matter and come to an amicable understanding after the banquet, which was already spread and awaiting their presence. During the festive meal, bards sang of all the heroic deeds accomplished by great men; and Pelias, by judicious flattery, stimulated Jason to attempt similar feats. At last the musicians recited the story of Phryxus and Helle, the son and daughter of Athamas and Nephele, who, to escape the cruel treatment of their stepmother, Ino (p. 174), mounted a winged, golden-fleeced ram sent by Neptune to transport them to Colchis.

The ram flew over land and sea; but Helle, frightened at the sight of the waves tossing far beneath her, suddenly lost her hold on the golden fleece, and tumbled off the ram's back into a portion of the sea since known as the Hellespont,

“Where beauteous Helle found a watery grave.”

MELEAGER.

Phryxus, more fortunate than his sister, reached Colchis in safety, and in gratitude to the gods sacrificed the ram they had sent to deliver him, and hung its golden fleece on a tree, near which he stationed a dragon to guard it night and day. The bards then went on to relate that the glittering trophy still hung there, awaiting a hand bold enough to slay the dragon and bear it off.

This tale and his liberal potations greatly excited the youth Jason; and Pelias, perceiving it, hypocritically regretted his inability to win the golden fleece, and softly insinuated that young men of the present generation were not brave enough to risk

their lives in such a glorious cause. The usurper's crafty remarks had the desired effect; for Jason suddenly sprang from his seat, and vowed he would go in quest of the golden fleece. Pelias, quite certain that the rash youth would lose his life in the attempt, and thus cause no more trouble, with much difficulty restrained all expressions of joy, and dared him to make the attempt.

“With terror struck, lest by young Jason's hand
His crown should be rent from him, Pelias sought
By machinations dark to slay his foe.
From Colchis' realm to bring the golden fleece
He charged the youth.”

ORPHIC ARGONAUTICS.

When Jason, sobered and refreshed by a long night's rest, perceived how foolish had been his vow, he would fain have recalled it; but, mindful of Chiron's teachings ever to be true to his word, he resolved to depart for Colchis. To secure Juno's assistance, he began by visiting her shrine at Dodona, where the oracle, a Speaking Oak, assured him of the goddess's good will and efficacious protection. Next the Speaking Oak bade him cut off one of its own mighty limbs, and carve from it a figurehead for the swift-sailing vessel which Minerva, at Juno's request, would build for his use from pine trees grown on Mount Pelion.

Jason, having finished his figurehead, found that it too had the gift of speech, and that it would occasionally vouchsafe sage counsel in the direction of his affairs. When quite completed, Jason called his vessel the Argo (swift-sailing), and speedily collected a crew of heroes as brave as himself, among whom were Hercules, Castor, Pollux, Peleus, Admetus, Theseus, and Orpheus, who were all glad to undertake the perilous journey to lands unknown. To speed them on their way, Juno then bargained with Æolus for favorable winds, and forbade any tempest which might work them harm.

“Then with a whistling breeze did Juno fill the sail,
And Argo, self-impell'd, shot swift before the gale.”

ONOMACRITUS (Elton's tr.).

On several occasions the heroes landed, either to renew their stock of provisions or to recruit their strength, but in general every delay brought them some misfortune. Once Hercules, having landed with a youth named Hylas to cut wood for new oars, bade the youth go to a neighboring spring and draw a pitcher of water to quench the thirst produced by his exertions. The youth promptly departed; but as he bent over the fountain, the nymphs, enamored with his beauty, drew him down into their moist abode to keep them company. Hercules, after vainly waiting for Hylas' return, went in search of him, but could find no trace of him, and, in his grief and disappointment at the death of his young friend, refused to continue the expedition, and, deserting the Argonauts, made his way home alone and on foot.

On another occasion, when Jason visited Phineus, the blind king of Thrace, he heard that this monarch's life was imbibed by the Harpies, vile monsters, part woman, part bird, who ate or befouled all the food placed before him, and never let him eat a mouthful in peace. Having repeated this tale to his companions, the two sons of Boreas, who were also in the Argo, begged permission to drive them away. Jason could not refuse their request; and the two youths, with drawn swords, pursued the Harpies to the Strophades Islands, where the birds promised to remain.

Jason, sailing on in the mean while, was attacked by a flock of brazen-feathered birds, which rained their sharp plumage down upon the Argonauts, wounding many of them sorely. The captain of the expedition, seeing weapons were of no avail against these foes, consulted the figurehead, and, in obedience to its directions, clashed his arms against his shield, until, terrified by the din, the brazen-feathered birds flew rapidly away, uttering discordant cries of terror.

Some time during the course of their journey the Argonauts came to the Symplegades,—floating rocks which continually crashed together, and ground to powder all objects caught between them. Jason knew he was obliged to pass between these rocks or give up the expedition: so, calculating that the speed of his vessel was equal to that of a dove on the wing, he sent one out before him. The dove flew safely between the rocks, losing only one of its tail feathers as they again clashed together. Watching his opportunity, therefore, Jason bade his men row swiftly. The Argo darted through the opening, and, when the rocks again came into contact, they merely grazed the rudder. As a vessel had passed between them unharmed, their power for evil left them, and they were chained fast to the bottom of the sea, near the mouth of the Bosphorus, where they remained immovable like any other rocks.

The Argonauts, after other adventures far too numerous to recount in detail, reached the Colchian shores, and presented themselves before Æetes, the king, to whom they made known their errand. Loath to part with his golden treasure, Æetes declared, that, before Jason could obtain the fleece, he must catch and harness two wild, fire-breathing bulls dedicated to Vulcan, and make use of them to plow a stony piece of ground sacred to Mars. This done, he must sow the field with some dragon's teeth, as Cadmus had done (p. 48), conquer the giants which would spring up, and, last of all, slay the guardian dragon, or the fleece would never be his.

One of these tasks would have sufficed to dismay many a brave youth; but Jason was of the dauntless kind, and merely hastened down to his vessel to ask the figurehead how he had better proceed. On his way to the seashore he met the king's daughter, Medea, a beautiful young sorceress, who had been charmed by his modest but firm bearing, and who was quite ready to bring her magic to his aid if he would but promise to marry her. Jason, susceptible to her attractions, and free from any conflicting ties, readily agreed to her proposal,

The
Symplegades.

Arrival at
Colchis.

Medea's
aid.

and, carrying out her directions, caught and harnessed the fiery bulls, plowed the field, and sowed it with the dragon's teeth.

“And how he yoked the bulls, whose breathings fiery glow'd,
And with the dragons' teeth the furrow'd acres sow'd.”

ONOMACRITUS (Elton's tr.).

But when he saw glittering spears and helmets grow out of the ground, and beheld the close ranks of giants in full armor, he was filled with dismay, and would have fled had it been possible. However, aware that such a performance would insure his ruin, he stood his ground, and, when the phalanx was quite near him, threw a handful of dust full in the giants' faces. Blinded with the sand, the giants attacked one another, and in a short time were exterminated.

“They, like swift dogs,

Ranging in fierceness, on each other turn'd
Tumultuous battle. On their mother earth
By their own spears they sank; like pines, or oaks,
Strew'd by a whirlwind in the mountain dale.”

APOLLONIUS RHODIUS (Elton's tr.).

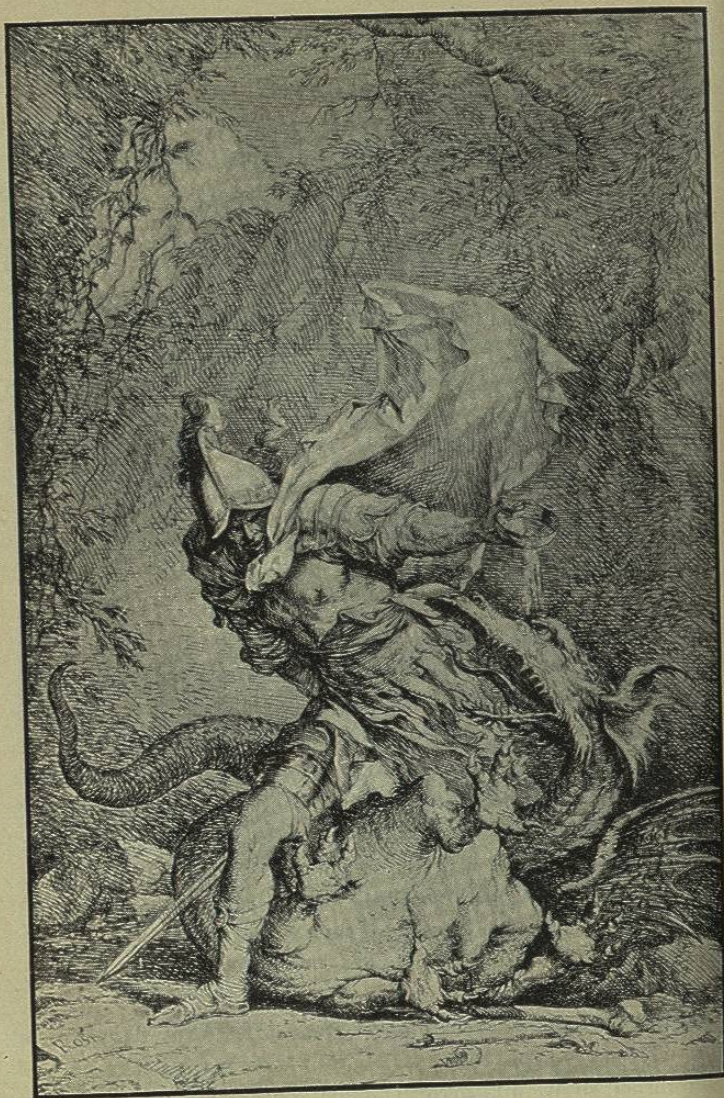
Accompanied by Medea, Jason next hastened to the tree where the dragon kept guard over his treasure. An opiate prepared by Medea's magic skill soon made the dragon forget his charge in a profound sleep, and enabled Jason to draw near enough to sever his frightful head from his hideous trunk. Jason then tore the coveted fleece from the branch where it had hung for many a year, and bore it in triumph to the Argo.

The fleece
captured.

“Exulting Jason grasped the shining hide,
His last of labors, and his envied pride.
Slow from the groaning branch the fleece was rent.”

FLACCUS (Elton's tr.).

His companions, who had made ready for a hasty departure, were already seated at their oars; and, as soon as he had embarked with Medea and her attendants, the Argo shot out of the Colchian harbor.



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JASON AND THE DRAGON.—Salvator Rosa.

“How softly stole from home the luckless-wedded maid,
Through darkness of the night, in linen robe array'd;
By Fate to Argo led, and urged by soft desire,
Nor yet regarding aught her father's furious ire.”

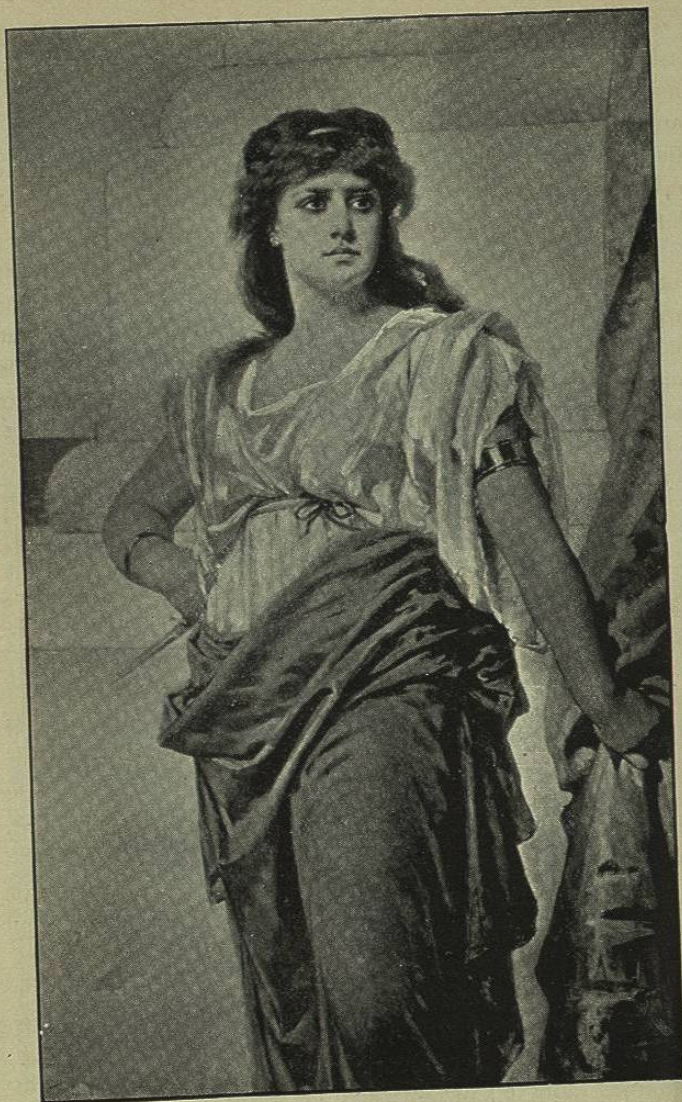
ONOMACRITUS (Elton's tr.).

When morning dawned and Æetes awoke, he heard that the dragon was slain, the fleece stolen, his daughter gone, and the Grecian ship far out of sight. No time was lost in useless wailing, but a vessel was hurriedly launched and manned, and the king in person set out in pursuit of the fugitives, who had, moreover, taken his most precious treasure, his only son and heir, Absyrtus. Although the Colchian men were good sailors and skillful rowers, they did not catch sight of the Argo until they came near the mouth of the Danube, and Æetes wildly called to his daughter to return to her home and to her father.

“Stay thy rash flight! and, from the distant main,—
For oh! thou canst, my daughter,—turn again.
Whither depart? the vessel backward steer;
Thy friends, thy still fond father, wait thee here.”

FLACCUS (Elton's tr.).

But Medea had no wish to be torn away from Jason's arms, and, instead of listening to her father's entreaties, urged the Argonauts to redoubled efforts. Little by little the distance between the two vessels grew less; the Colchian rowers were gaining upon the Greek; and Medea saw, that, unless she found means to delay her father, he would overtake her and compel her to return. With her own hands she therefore slew her little brother, Absyrtus, and cut his body into pieces, which she dropped over the side of the vessel one by one. Æetes, a helpless witness of this cruel, awful deed, piously collected his son's remains, and, in pausing to do so, lost sight of the Argo, and all hope of recovering his unnatural daughter: so he returned sadly to Colchis, where he buried his son's remains with due solemnity.



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MEDEA.—Sichel.

In the mean while, Pelias had reigned contentedly over Thes-saly, confident that Jason would never return. Imagine his dis-may, therefore, when he heard that the Argo had arrived, bearing Jason, now the proud possessor of the renowned golden fleece. Ere he could take measures to maintain his usurped authority, Jason appeared, and compelled him to resign the throne in favor of the rightful king, Æson.

Pelias
dethroned.

Unfortunately, Æson was now so old and decrepit, that power had no charms for him: so Jason begged Medea to use her magic in his behalf, and restore him to the vigor and beauty of his early manhood. To gratify Jason, Medea called all her magic into play, and by some mysterious process restored Æson to all his former youth, strength, activity, and grace.

“Medea’s spells dispersed the weight of years,
And Æson stood a youth ’mid youthful peers.”

WORDSWORTH.

As soon as Pelias’ daughters heard of this miraculous trans-formation, they hastened to Medea and implored her to give them the recipe, that they might rejuvenate their father also. The sorceress maliciously bade them cut their father’s body into small pieces, and boil them in a cal-dron with certain herbs, declaring that, if the directions were care-fully carried out, the result would be satisfactory; but, when the too credulous maidens carried out these instructions, they only slew the father whom they had so dearly loved.

The magic
recipe.

Days and years now passed happily and uneventfully for Jason and Medea; but at last their affection for each other cooled, and Jason fell in love with Glauce, or Creusa. Frantic with jealousy, Medea prepared and sent the maiden a magic robe, which she no sooner donned than she was seized with terrible convulsions, in which she died. Medea, still full of resentment against Jason, then slew her own children, and, mounting her dragon car, de-parted, leaving a message for Jason, purporting that the Argo would yet cause his death.

Jason, a victim of remorse and despair, now led a weary and sorrowful life, and every day he wandered down to the shore, where he sat under the shade of the Argo's hulk, which was slowly rotting away.

Death of Jason. One day, while he was sitting there musing over his youthful adventures and Medea's strange prophecy, a sudden gale detached a beam, which, falling on his head, fractured his skull and caused instantaneous death.

The Argonautic expedition is emblematic of the first long maritime voyage undertaken by the Greeks for commercial purposes; while the golden fleece which Jason brought back from Colchis is but a symbol of the untold riches they found in the East, and brought back to their own native land.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CALYDONIAN HUNT.

CENEUS and Althæa, King and Queen of Calydon, in Ætolia, were very happy in the possession of a little son, Meleager, only a few days old, until they heard that the Fates had decreed the child should live only as long as the brand Birth of Meleager. then smoking and crackling on the hearth. The parents were motionless with grief, until Althæa, with true mother's wit, snatched the brand from the fire, plunged it into an earthen jar filled with water, quenched the flames which were consuming it, and, carefully laying it aside, announced her intention to keep it forever.

Meleager, thus saved from an untimely death by his mother's presence of mind, grew up a brave and handsome youth, and joined the Argonautic expedition. While he was absent, his father omitted the yearly sacrifice to Diana, who, enraged at his neglect, sent a monstrous boar to devour his subjects and devastate his realm. Meleager, on his return, gathered together all the brave men of the country, and instituted a great hunt, whose main object was the capture or death of the obnoxious boar.

Jason, Nestor, Peleus, Admetus, Theseus, Pirithous, and many other noted heroes, came at his call; but the attention of all the spectators was specially attracted by Castor and The hunters. Pollux, and by the fair Atalanta, daughter of Iasius, King of Arcadia. This princess had led a very adventurous life; for when but a babe, her father, disappointed to see a daughter instead of the longed-for son, had exposed her on Mount Parthenium to the fury of the wild beasts. Some hunters,