



DEMOPHON

A TRAVELLER'S TALE

by

FORREST REID

* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook *

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: Demophon, a Traveller's Tale

Date of first publication: 1927

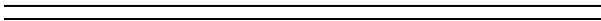
Author: Forrest Reid (1875-1947)

Date first posted: Apr. 11, 2020

Date last updated: Apr. 11, 2020

Faded Page eBook #20200417

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Chuck Greif & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>



BY THE SAME WRITER:

THE BRACKNELS
FOLLOWING DARKNESS
THE GENTLE LOVER
AT THE DOOR OF THE GATE
THE SPRING SONG
W. B. YEATS: A Critical Study
A GARDEN BY THE SEA
PIRATES OF THE SPRING
PENDER AMONG THE RESIDENTS
APOSTATE



DEMOPHON

A TRAVELLER'S TALE

by

FORREST REID

W. COLLINS SONS AND CO. LTD.

MCM XXVII

Copyright, 1927.

Printed in Great Britain.

To

J. S. R.

*In Affectionate Token of a
Long Friendship*

*But of Demophon, the son of Keleos, it is
said that when he grew to boyhood he*

*wandered from his father's house, and
because of something divine in him met
with divine adventures.*

CONTENTS

| CHAP | PAGE |
|---|------|
| I. <i>The Coming of the Nurse</i> | 13 |
| II. <i>The Childhood of Demophon</i> | 23 |
| III. <i>A Boy on a Farm</i> | 40 |
| IV. <i>Pholos</i> | 46 |
| V. <i>On the Mountains</i> | 61 |
| VI. <i>Kidnappers</i> | 74 |
| VII. <i>The Pirate Ship</i> | 83 |
| VIII. <i>Glaukos</i> | 101 |
| IX. <i>The Wrecker</i> | 114 |
| X. <i>The Trainer</i> | 129 |
| XI. <i>The Stone Serpent</i> | 149 |
| XII. <i>Thebes</i> | 165 |
| XIII. <i>The Cave of Sophron</i> | 180 |
| XIV. <i>The Cave of Sophron (continued)</i> | 202 |
| XV. <i>Euphorion</i> | 208 |
| XVI. <i>The Magic Valley</i> | 228 |
| XVII. <i>The House of the Witch</i> | 246 |
| XVIII. <i>Journey's End</i> | 265 |

CHAPTER I

The Coming of the Nurse

BEYOND the grove of laurels sacred to Artemis lay a blue, crinkled sea. It glittered dazzlingly in the hot sunshine; and far out in the bay where water and sky met, the dark rocks of Salamis rose like a dream-island, because a God had dropped a haze about them.

High overhead an eagle passed, bearing some small white woolly beast in his talons; and before he had disappeared there emerged on to the rough dusty track that wound up from the shore through the hillside fields a man, a little girl, and two goats. The man climbed slowly and laboriously, having a heavy wine-skin upon his shoulders; the little girl carried a basket of figs; the goats, with the perversity of their kind, strayed to this side or to that.

The man walked without lifting his gaze from the stony path before him. His name was Keleos. He was on the threshold of old age, his beard was grizzled, his skin tanned like leather, and the sweat ran in beads from the roots of his matted hair to his bushy eyebrows. The little girl was hot too, but she was almost naked, and her slenderness made her cool to look at. Her body was thin as a boy's; her limbs were burnt by the sun to a golden brown. She had a very dirty face, because she had rubbed a dirty hand across it more than once; nevertheless, she was beautiful. For the third time, in the shrill monotonous voice of childhood, she called out, "Daddy, is this a good place?"

Her father had promised to rest when they reached a suitable resting place, but the suitable resting place seemed

always a little farther on; and he answered now, without raising his head, "The spring is near. Then we can rest and drink too, and you can cool your hands and face in the water, Iole."

Iole was silent. Not because she had no more to say, but because behind her father's back she had stuffed her mouth with a fig. As soon as she had swallowed it she began again: "Daddy, may I give Demophon some figs?"

The man shook his head.

"Why mayn't I?" Iole asked. But already her attention had wandered, following a butterfly that kept hovering a few yards in front of her, spreading out his gorgeous wings when he alit for a moment on a stone in the path. She piped on, "Daddy, why mayn't I?" and the man answered gravely, "You know he is too sick to care for them, my bird."

Iole dropped a pace behind and chose another fig. She looked up in the direction of the house, which was not yet in sight, though she could see the fields beside it, yellow with the ripened corn. To-morrow the reapers would be busy, and to-morrow she, too, would be busy, helping to tie up the sheaves, but more particularly searching for nests of field mice. Then, as her eyes rested upon them, the colour of the fields changed. A ripple of wind, it might be, sweeping across them and bending the heavy ears sideways: but Iole knew that it was the spirit of the Great Mother herself passing through the corn, and for a moment her expression became thoughtful.

She knew it was a God who was responsible for her brother's sickness; or if not a God, then a bogey, such as the wicked Mormo. Or it might be a witch, or a vampire, or even a possessor of the evil eye. Demophon, at any rate, had been

hung about with charms and amulets till he resembled a small idol, though these precautions had been taken too late to make him any better.

A turn in the path aroused her from meditation. She hastened her steps, because she wanted to be first at the well. She was not first, however; somebody was there before her; an old woman, who was sitting on a great flat stone under the lime tree, and looking down into the water.

Iole stopped abruptly; but the woman did not turn her head. Though she seemed old, and looked tired and worn and melancholy, she was not, Iole presently thought, really very old. She was strong, and her body was erect. It was her hair that was old, old and gray, gray as the stone on which she sat; and it was drawn down smoothly in two rippling waves on either side of her broad forehead. Her throat rose like a strong column from the loose draperies of her dark robe; her feet were slender and beautiful. Suddenly she lifted her eyes, and they were very deep and stern.

Nobody spoke—neither Keleos, nor the woman, nor the goats, nor Iole.

At last the child took a step forward. “Mother,” she whispered, holding out her basket with its fruit. And still the woman made no movement.

Keleos sat down and wiped the sweat from his eyes. He greeted the stranger, and invited her to come with them to the farm house.

She shook her head. “I am looking for my daughter,” she answered.

Keleos gazed down towards the sea. He did not renew his invitation, and once or twice he glanced at the woman uneasily. She was not of their part of the world, he knew.

Better to keep silent and wait for an explanation till she should give it of her own accord.

Such, however, was not Iole's view. Before Keleos could check her first question she had asked three. "Are you waiting for her? Is she really lost? Was she a little girl like me?"

"Be quiet, ill-mannered child," her father broke in hurriedly.

But the woman did not seem to be offended. "She was older than you," she answered. "I think she has been stolen."

"By pirates?" Iole guessed; and her next thought was that it would be pleasant to be stolen by pirates—great fierce bearded men with gold rings in their ears. They might make her their queen. Then she would live on an island of her own, and send them all over the world in search of treasures. And she would have black slaves, Ethiopian boys; and tame panthers from Lydia. And the slaves would swing a great fan of peacock feathers to keep the room cool, and the panthers

So absorbing were Iole's visions that she ceased to pay much attention to what the stranger was saying. Iole had begun to envy the stolen daughter. Nothing ever happened at Eleusis. You might go down to the sea day after day and never catch a glimpse of a pirate. The woman was talking now to her father, and what she talked about was not very interesting. It was of her own wanderings, and she seemed to have found nothing and to have had no adventures.

Still, when at the end of it all Keleos again urged the stranger to come with them, Iole also whispered, "Come."

But the woman did not stir till Keleos began to tell her about Demophon. Then she got up, and they knew that she

had yielded; and it was only now, as she rose and stood in the green flickering shadow of the lime tree, that they saw how tall she was—taller than Keleos. There was a majesty about her, a grandeur, something commanding and awe-inspiring, so that Iole instinctively clasped her father's hand, half wishing they had not been so persistent in their invitation.

They resumed their journey, the goats now walking quietly in front, side by side, demure as boys in the procession of Apollo. After them came Iole, and behind her Keleos and the stranger, whose name was Deo. And as she climbed the stony path Deo stooped from time to time to gather the dark poppies growing beside it.

Presently the farm house came into view—a low oblong building of wood and unbaked brick. On one side of the gate was a willow in whose hollow trunk the bees had swarmed; on the other was a rough wooden image of Priapos, which, with the old dog Tauros, guarded the entrance. Behind the house was an orchard, its trees covered with pink-and-white blossom. Some of this blossom had already fallen, and lay among the long green grass like a light drift of coloured snow. And through the apple boughs a blue thread of smoke rose from a hidden fire, bearing the sharp bitter pungency of burning leaves.

Tauros had got up at the sound of familiar footsteps, and he advanced to meet them, with a bushy wagging tail and a caution bred of rheumatism. Iole rushed on past him and into the house to tell her mother of the visitor, so that before Deo and her father reached the door Metanira herself was there, with the younger girl Rhodea peeping out from behind her.

Metanira was thin, dry, and sharp-featured. In her small, quickly-moving eyes there was neither the benevolence nor

the candour that shone in the simple open gaze of her husband. She had an air of suspicion and peevishness, and the thin, wry smile with which she welcomed the stranger did not alter this expression.

Nevertheless, her words were kindly enough as she invited Deo into the house. It was a much larger house than it had appeared to be from the road. The principal room was wide and lofty, with great smoke-blackened beams that supported the roof and were half lost in shadow. A fire smouldered on the open hearth, and on the farther wall were doors, now closed, leading to the sleeping chambers. The seats had blue woven coverings; there was a big square table, waxed and polished; and in one corner, his white face still puckered though his feeble crying had ceased on their entrance, lay Demophon. His toys were strewn beside him. Tauros, who had come in last, walked slowly up to him, but the others hung in the background, for, though nobody could have said why, a feeling of expectancy seemed to fill the room as the stranger, with the poppies in her hand, crossed the dark earthen floor and stooped down over the bed.

They saw her kiss the sick boy on his mouth, and then they saw a marvellous thing, for at that kiss the paleness left his cheeks and the flush of health returned to them. They saw him stop crying and his tears turn first to wonder, and then to a half-sleepy laughter, as the new nurse lifted him from his bed and held his naked body in her bosom.

A murmur rose from the little group of watchers by the door. Iole clapped her hands, and Rhodea in imitation clapped hers also. Keleos and Metanira dropped on their knees, because they believed they had received a direct answer to their prayers, and that the Gods had chosen this

woman as their intermediary. But already, in the midst of her thanksgiving, the practical mind of Metanira was planning how they might keep the stranger with them. They might tell her that she was likely to find her lost daughter here. After all, she was just as likely to find her here as anywhere else. So Metanira began immediately to produce arguments and persuasions. She remembered a dream she had had a few days ago, in which she had seen a maiden wandering over the fields at night, with a lighted lantern in her hand; and she had come up the path to the house, and had put the lantern on the ground and had knocked at the door. Clearly a God must have sent this dream, and clearly its meaning was that the lost girl would find her way sooner or later to the farm.

Keleos listened gravely to his wife's words. He was a pious old man, but for some reason the Gods never communicated with him directly, so that it was always through Metanira that he learned of their purposes and desires. Deo said nothing at all; nor was it possible to read in her countenance whether she had been impressed by Metanira's dream. She was busy infusing the poppies she had gathered in warm milk, and when the drink was ready she gave it to the little boy, who, after he had swallowed it, sank into a quiet sleep.

Metanira, through a running monologue constantly broken by some fresh inspiration, now set to the preparation of their own evening meal, while Iole laid the table. All the good things the larder contained were spread out in a feast—curds and milk, yellow loaves, cheese and onions, apples and honey, dark purple wine in goat-skin bottles, and water from the spring.

CHAPTER II

The Childhood of Demophon

FROM that memorable day upon which he passed into the keeping of the new nurse, Demophon thrived and grew apace. Of the nurse herself they learned nothing beyond the extremely little she had already told them, and they stood too deeply in awe of her to ask the questions Metanira never tired of asking when she was not there. They were questions, to be sure, upon which only Deo could have thrown much light, but Metanira continued to ask them, supplying the answers also, and if these were more remarkable for variety than consistency, at least nobody was in a position to contradict them. Metanira, at the same time, had the good sense to refrain from interfering between Deo and her little boy, though the stranger's methods were in some respects by no means to her liking.

For in this small household Deo and her charge lived very much apart. To Keleos it mattered nothing; he went his customary ways; but Metanira found it harder and harder to accept an arrangement which practically ignored her existence. It was humiliating. Deep down in her heart she was still grateful to the woman who had saved her child's life (or at least had arrived at the mysterious turning point in his illness, for Metanira was becoming sceptical): nevertheless, she was hurt by Deo's attitude of aloofness. If the nurse was fond of one member of the family, it seemed to Metanira that she ought to be fond of them all. And if she wasn't fond of them all—then she might at least try not to show it quite so plainly.

At first she had thought Deo to be merely reserved, and she had waited hopefully for this reserve to thaw into a more genial relationship. As the months passed, however, the futility of such a hope became apparent. It was not reserve at all: it was an unconscious and complete indifference. In vain Deo's attention was drawn to the charms of Iole and Rhodea: the nurse looked at them, and then, without a word, sank back into her own thoughts. What *were* these thoughts, Metanira wanted to know? And why did she refuse to speak even of her lost daughter? It was only with Keleos that she now and again entered into conversation, giving him advice about farming matters, of which she seemed to possess an exhaustive knowledge. And since her advice invariably led to the happiest results, Keleos had come to regard her with an absurd admiration. There was no use in appealing to him. Metanira's growing dissatisfaction was in fact expressed chiefly to the pots and pans, and in sudden unexpected slaps of which Iole and Rhodea bore the brunt. She admitted all Deo's good qualities, but because one did this there was no need to be blind to her faults. Metanira was not blind to them. She decided that of all human imperfections what she most disliked was secretiveness. It was not, she assured her husband, that she had the slightest wish to pry into Deo's affairs (though one would have thought that between two women more or less of the same age there might be *some* little show of confidence); it was——

Metanira never definitely stated *what* it was, so Keleos never quite understood. But if she did not wish to pry into Deo's secrets—then he did not see what she had to complain of. He himself did not believe there *were* any secrets.

That was because he was a man, Metanira told him. All women had secrets—including, if he cared to know it, his own wife. This last remark, however, was lost upon Keleos. He had passed the age when it might have aroused uneasiness. He merely pointed out how Demophon was flourishing under the new nurse's care, and Metanira could not deny it. The boy was growing in strength and beauty as she had never known a child to grow before. "Why does she want to sit up at night after everybody else has gone to bed?" Metanira demanded, choosing a safer point of attack. "When does *she* go to bed? Twice I lay awake on purpose to listen, and I never heard a sound. What does she do? And the fires she keeps up! They're not out even in the morning. Why should she waste so much wood?"

"Surely that is a small matter!" Keleos answered good-humouredly. "What are a few logs of wood—one way or another?"

Metanira had expected this reply. "You don't understand," she said impatiently. "Nobody grudges her the wood.... If there was any *sense* in it! But there isn't; and she might easily fall asleep and the whole place be set on fire. I've peeped through the door, and the room was as bright as day. We don't want to be all burned in our beds."

That night she tried again to lie awake and listen, but it was hard after the long toil of the day, and very soon she fell asleep.

Her grievance remained alert. It entered into her dreams, and she dreamed of a long conversation with Deo, in which she boldly asked as many questions as she wanted to. In the morning this bravery had vanished.... And so it went on, till at last it seemed to Metanira that unless she could share *one*

of these mysterious vigils with Deo her mind would never be at rest again.

On the very next night, summoning up all her courage, she resolved to do so. She entered with a rather tremulous excuse of sleeplessness, and sat down by Deo's side. The nurse took no notice of the excuse, nor indeed of Metanira's presence. And very soon poor Metanira wished she had not come. The hearth, as she had expected it to be, was heaped with great logs that blazed and crackled, shooting out fierce tongues of scarlet flame, like angry serpents, and filling the whole room with light and rapid shadows. The economical Metanira longed to extinguish the fire, but she dared not say a word. In front of it Deo sat motionless. She had taken Demophon from his bed, and he sat on her knees, wide awake and watching the flames, holding out his hands as if to encourage them. Surely he ought to have been asleep hours ago! To Metanira, watching him wistfully, he never once turned his head.

She had again that painful, humiliating feeling of supreme unimportance. And she felt incapable of drawing attention to herself by even the timidest speech; for alone here, in the great empty hall at night, with this mysterious nurse, her subconscious uneasiness had risen to the surface and had turned to fear. It was not that she could associate any thought of evil with that stern silent figure beside her. It was almost, indeed, a holy dread, such as might be awakened by the loneliness of great plains and silent mountains, by the sea or the sky. And it seemed to Metanira that Demophon, little boy though he was, had somehow passed out of her reach, had passed from *her* small busy world into this other, vaster, more remote world, which was Deo's—that he was no longer her son, but the son of the woman who held him in her arms.

Irrepressible tears rose in Metanira's eyes and flowed one by one down her thin cheeks. But she uttered no sound, made no complaint.

And presently, try as she would to keep awake, the drowsy coils of sleep began to steal like a heavy vapour into her brain. Through the gathering dimness, that grew ever denser and closer, she became aware of a shadowy form towering above her; then she ceased to struggle, and her soul was borne down and down, far below the level of consciousness....

When she opened her eyes dawn was breaking, and she was once more in her own bed in her own room. She would have liked to believe she had never left it—to believe she had only dreamed of that late visit—of Deo, and the child, and the fire. But she could not deceive herself; she knew it had all actually happened.... Keleos was yawning and muttering below his breath: he was up and dressing, moving about in the semi-darkness of the gray winter morning....

So the days slid by, till winter turned to spring, and the new tender herbage, like a delicate green mist, crept over the awakened earth, and over the dark boughs of the trees. The birds were abroad, happily building their small houses. In the valleys were violets, crocuses, and hyacinths. Primroses decked the mossy banks of the water meadows, and the sweet fresh perfume of leaf and blossom mingled pleasantly with the salt smell of the sea.

Iole and Rhodea gathered baskets full of wild flowers, making the whole farm house gay with them. Demophon had attained his seventh birthday; and in face and body and limbs was lovely as a little God. He would sit in the swing near the

oak tree, while Deo pushed it high and higher, and Tauros watched it till he grew tired of moving his old head from side to side. But when Iole pushed it, it only went a little way, and when Rhodea pushed it, it did not go at all.

Nobody could have imagined he had ever been ill. He laughed and shouted and played from morning till night. Even if he fell and hurt himself he did not cry. To simple-hearted Keleos it was a joy to watch him: only to Metanira there seemed something unnatural in that flawless physical perfection. It would have pleased her better had he, when he tumbled and cut his knees, come weeping to her for consolation; it would have pleased her better had she to find an excuse now and again for some passing fretfulness such as other children showed. How could she feel he was really hers when she could neither scold him nor comfort him?

And a new anxiety had arisen, for in these golden days of early summer Deo kept him for long hours out of doors, and they wandered deep into the woods, only returning when the evening shadows were stretching across the fields. Had she been able to watch them in their rambles, Metanira might have been more alarmed still. What kind of nurse was this, at whose touch a bright, new flower would spring up out of the ground? Demophon would dance round it, shouting and clapping his hands. He, too, touched the grassy bank with a small finger in very careful imitation of Deo; but no flower sprang up, though he stood gazing in solemn expectancy. Then Deo, whom Metanira knew only as cold and stern and silent, would laugh and catch him in her arms and hold him close, breathing a divine sweetness about him, so that the flame of life in him was strengthened, and through all his body and limbs there glowed the dawning spirit of a God.

And sometimes in the very heart of the woodland, where a stream ran out from a rocky ferny cave, and the dark mossy ground was starred with red anemones, a visitor would come to them. He was a boy of fifteen or thereabouts. His thick hair was short and curly—so curly that it was like the little curls of astrakhan, except that it was yellow. The first faintest golden down had just touched his cheeks, and his bright eyes were the merriest Demophon had ever seen. He wore nothing but a big flat-brimmed country hat at the back of his head, and on his feet sandals with queer little wings attached to them. He carried a rod, and twining up this rod were two golden snakes. The moment he saw him Demophon felt happier than he had ever felt before.

This boy must be a boy Deo knew, for she was not a bit surprised to see him; but it was for Demophon he had come, and in two minutes they were friends. He was the most wonderful person in the world. He could make toys out of wood or clay or pomegranate skin; he made a pipe of hemlock stalks (binding the hollow stems with white wax), and when it was finished he showed Demophon how to blow out of it musical sounds. He taught him how to throw a spinning quoit; he taught him how to run and leap and wrestle and box and swim; he turned the sylvan glade into a green gymnasium and Demophon himself into the smallest of small athletes.

They were the jolliest sports imaginable, though with his present instructor Demophon would have found any sport jolly. He had conceived for him a kind of worshipping admiration, and trotted after him whithersoever he led, filled with unbounded trust. He imitated this glorious leader in all his words and actions, sometimes so unsuccessfully that his

hero would nearly die of laughing. But probably the leader was less careless than he seemed to be. Deo, at all events, was willing to trust them together far out of her sight and hearing, nor did Demophon's subsequent descriptions of hairbreadth escapes and reckless adventures bring more than a smile to her lips. Even when he told her how he had fallen out of the very top of an oak tree, and how the other boy had just managed to catch him before he reached the ground, she only made him promise that he would not attempt such feats when he was by himself. And once he asked her, "Is he my brother?"

She looked at him in surprise, for Demophon was quite old enough to know that brothers are not picked up in the woods in this haphazard fashion. He did know it. He himself did not understand why he had asked such a question; and the only explanation he could give was to repeat passionately, "I want him always—always."

Deo took him in her arms. "You queer little boy," she murmured, looking into his dark, shining eyes. "You are very human after all."

"I love him," Demophon answered. "And I love you...." Then he added, as if the thought dimly troubled him, "I don't think I love anybody else. Ought I to?"

"You love Keleos a little," Deo said, "and Tauros."

Next morning the woodboy brought a young ram on his shoulders. He gave it to Demophon, telling him it was a present for him, if he could keep it; and he watched him closely as he struggled to do so. Demophon struggled stoutly, very red in the face, till the ram suddenly butted him in the stomach. Then he tumbled over in the grass, and the

woodboy laughed; but the ram ran away and was never seen again.

Demophon had learned to be nearly as silent concerning his doings as Deo herself, yet a chance word about this ram, the wooden boats, the Pan-pipes, and other similar treasures, set the parents asking questions, and then exchanging conjectures as to who the mysterious playmate might be. Keleos could think of nobody, but Metanira thought of Linos, the son of Phaleris, an idle, good-for-nothing boy, much given to wandering about the countryside, spying after the water nymphs, and the cause of endless trouble to his good old father and mother, who were decent hard-working people. In this way she created for herself a further grievance against Deo, who, characteristically, either could not or would not tell them anything. Nor was it removed when she discovered that the new playmate could not have been Linos, because Linos had run away from home early in the year, following a troop of dancers to Megara. The fact is, in Metanira's heart, her first feeling of gratitude to Deo had long since given place to jealousy. From now on she began to take wretched counsel with herself, and at last, in the name of prudence, to shape a secret plan.

Every night, as usual, she retired early with her husband to their bedchamber; but one night, as soon as she heard from his breathing that Keleos had dropped asleep, she got up, and wrapping a woollen fleece about her, sat down to wait. She was very patient, and not till she believed it to be past the middle of the night did she stealthily open her door. Then, like a ghost, Metanira glided into that room where the fire was burning with its great light. Before the hearth sat Deo,

and kneeling on her knees was Demophon. His hands were clasped round Deo's neck, and she was anointing his body, though with what mysterious unguent Metanira could not tell. But as she stood there a sudden thought, and this time a quite new thought, came to her. It entered her mind, not as a suspicion, not as a possibility, but fully grown, as if some one had whispered it in her ear. Tales had reached her, as they had indeed reached all the world, of the witches of Thessaly, of their powerful charms which could raise furious storms on a cloudless night, or draw down the moon into a pail of water. And Metanira was convinced that she had been harbouring one of these baleful women in her house. She knew enough of their magic to know what unholy transformation followed on the anointment of their bodies. She half expected at that moment to see feathers sprouting on the body of Demophon, to see both nurse and boy taking flight in the form of screech-owls. It had been by magic, she now saw, that Demophon had been cured. It had been by magic that first he had been made sick, thus giving the witch an opportunity to enter the house, and so to draw him more completely within her power. And suddenly her blood froze in horror, for she saw Deo bend down with the boy in her arms, and place him in the red heart of the fire, and rake the ashes over him. So great was the shock she received that for a few seconds she could neither move nor speak. Then her wild shrieks rang through the sleeping house, and she rushed from her hiding-place. But Deo had already snatched the boy out of the fire and set him on the floor, where he stood, covered with cinders, clutching her dark robe.

Aroused by the mother's screams, the others—Keleos, Iole, Rhodea—appeared in the doorway, trembling, fearful of what they might find. Metanira, pointing to Deo, continued to

scream. She had lost all self-control, and with her gray disordered hair and white convulsed face looked herself at that moment much more like a witch than Deo did.

“She is a witch! The stranger is a witch!” Metanira shrieked, tearing herself free from Keleos, who had put his arms round her and was trying to restrain her. “Ask her what she has done with our child. I saw her smear his body with her drugs. I saw her put him in the fire. But it is she who shall be burned—burned alive——” Her voice broke suddenly and she dropped to the floor moaning and wailing.

And Deo stood there, terrible at last in her anger. “Fool,” she said pitilessly. “Poor raving fool. I would have made your son immortal. I, even I, swear it by the waters of Styx. Eternal youth I would have given him, and the glory of the deathless Gods. Nightly I anointed him with ambrosia, and nightly I placed him like a brand in the fire, and nightly there was burned out of him some portion of the gross and earthy element. The task was almost accomplished, but now it is undone—undone by prying and suspicion. Take him back, then; but know that you have dragged him back to change and old age and death... Yet because he has lain on my knees, and breathed my breath, some touch of divinity must still be his, marking him off from the common race of men. For I am Demeter, great even among the Immortals, and I came here because that old man’s simple heart found favour in my eyes. Now I must go again, and you will never see me more.”

As she spoke, she pushed Demophon to his mother. And suddenly her form towered up, filling the room with a blinding glory, and her head touched the roof-beams. The

semblance of age dropped from her; her yellow hair was like the corn at harvest time.

But the wretched Metanira and Keleos fell on their knees at her feet, begging her forgiveness. Iole and Rhodea too knelt down, weeping, though they did not know what had happened, except that it was some terrifying calamity. Only Demophon remained as he was. He wanted his Deo, and he still clutched her robe. But the Goddess loosened his grasp and pushed him towards his mother. Then she passed out of the house, and there was a loud beating of immense wings, and a chariot drawn by two dragons rushed down through the moon-washed night. The winged dragons stood there in the moonshine, their great eyes glowing like emerald lamps, their fierce tails lashing the ground, their green and scarlet scales shining like precious stones over which a stream of fire flows. The Goddess stepped into her golden chariot, and the dragons spread their coloured, gorgeous wings, which were eyed like a peacock's tail. And they mounted into the wide air, and rose higher and higher, passing across the face of the moon, and leaving a trail of crimson stars behind them as they sped up through the sky to Olympos.

When the last flaming star had burned out; when the chariot had utterly disappeared, silence flowed back over the earth, like the closing in of sundered waters. In the dark heavens once more only the moon floated, shedding peace on the quiet fields. A nightingale began to sing; a cock crew; the shrill voices of the frogs rose from the water meadows. Then, kneeling side by side on the holy ground before the door, Keleos and his wife and children prayed aloud to the offended Goddess.

When they re-entered the house they found Demophon standing in the middle of the floor, sulky and covered with cinders. Passionately Metanira clasped him in her arms. Already her alarm had subsided. She was conscious now only of the love that for so long had found no outlet. Her thoughts were not the thoughts of Keleos. Secretly she was glad that the Goddess had gone away; secretly she was glad that she had spied upon her, and screamed; secretly she was glad that Demophon was not a little God but a little boy, and that she had him now, once more and for ever, all to herself. But she felt him struggle in her arms, and as he fought against her close embrace her tears fell. She spoke little love words to him, but he frowned and repulsed her, and drew streaks of dirt across his wet cheeks as he rubbed away his tears. He did not want her, he did not want Iole, he did not want Rhodea, he did not want Keleos, he wanted Deo. He lifted his hand and struck at Metanira, who still tried to clasp him. "You sent her away. You sent her away," he cried, bursting anew into angry sobs. "Leave me alone. I hate you."

CHAPTER III

A Boy on a Farm

It would have been natural enough had the abrupt and dramatic departure of the nurse led to a great deal of discussion; but such was not the case. For one thing, except Keleos, Metanira, and the children, nobody knew in what manner she had gone; and Keleos and Metanira did not allude to the subject. Metanira, though she regretted nothing, had her own reasons for preserving silence; Keleos, whatever he may have thought, kept his thoughts to himself; Iole and Rhodea were strictly forbidden to mention the matter. And as they grew older it was assumed that the children had forgotten. It was particularly assumed that Demophon had forgotten, because this was desirable even if improbable, and since that unfortunate night he had never spoken Deo's name. In fact, the one visible consequence that had accrued from this now closed episode was the careful watch thenceforward kept on all the little boy's comings and goings.

Apart from this, his upbringing was normal. Once or twice he had tried to escape by himself, and on each of these occasions he had run in the direction of the wood, but had been captured before reaching it. And it was noticeable that he had allowed himself to be brought back without a struggle or a murmur. Such a good little boy! After that brief outburst, when he had so naughtily repulsed his mother, he had become a singularly docile child. Not quite such a bright little fellow as before, perhaps; indeed, sometimes dull and apathetic; but his bodily health remained perfect, and there was no more nonsense about woodboys or other questionable

companions. Metanira, yielding to a nameless superstition, confiscated all the gifts he had brought home from that now distrusted wood. One morning, when she was alone, she made a bonfire of the lot—toys, Pan-pipes, and everything—after which she felt a good deal easier. She felt too, perhaps, just a tiny pang of compunction when she saw Demophon silently searching for his treasures, and then, also in silence, abandoning the search.

When he was ten years old he was sent to school at Eleusis. He was escorted thither by an old and trustworthy slave, who carried his lyre and his tablets, and never, either going or coming, let him out of sight for a moment. The school was kept by Pittakos, a poet. Here Demophon was taught to read and to write and to count. He was also taught music, and to speak or chant poetry—chiefly the poetry of Pittakos, who accompanied his pupils on a flute. But these lessons were not so romantic as they sound: the poetry was of a didactic and improving character, and Pittakos himself was getting old and crabbed. He would fly into a temper on the slightest provocation—if his pupils forgot to wipe their fingers on a piece of bread after eating, if they sat down on the sandy floor with their legs crossed, or if they omitted, when they got up, to rub out the marks they had made. When they were walking through the streets of Eleusis they must never raise their eyes from the ground; they must never address a stranger; they must never speak to a person older than themselves, even if they knew him, unless that person spoke to them first; they must not loiter before the shops, nor go near the public baths and gymnasiums; they must not laugh loudly, nor play tricks, nor do anything that could

possibly attract attention. And Demophon obeyed most of these instructions, and was really in all respects a paragon as compared with several of his schoolmates; in spite of which he got many a scolding, while Pittakos rolled his eyes and waved his leather strap and threatened to use it on the first boy he heard uttering a whisper. He was the crossdest old man imaginable.

But naturally a considerable part of the boy's time was passed at home on the farm. It was a quite agreeable life, because such tasks as he performed were only the light and voluntary tasks that sprang out of his own interest in them. Here, and in all open-air lore, his father was his teacher. It was his father who taught him the names of the stars, who taught him the names of the trees, and to what God each belonged—the oak to Zeus, the fig and the vine to Dionysos, the myrtle to Aphrodite, the olive to Athena, the laurel to Zeus and Apollo, the pine to Poseidon. It was his father who taught him never to cross a stream without first saying a prayer and bathing his hands in the pure water; who taught him to bow himself to the shining car of Helios, when he went out of doors at sunrise.

But most of what he learned had to do with the farm. He learned that the time to reap the corn is at the morning rising of the Pleiades; that the time for breaking up the ground is when the cranes are flying southward in October, and the autumnal rains are near; that to get rid of the mice who may be injuring the crops, you must go out to the fields before dawn and write this inscription on an unhewn stone: "O King Mouse, dwelling in this field, neither injure me yourself nor allow another mouse to do so. I give you all the fields of the

next farm, but I swear by the Mother of the Gods that if I catch you here again I will cut you in seven pieces.”

Keleos taught him the rules and prayers that ensure the fruitfulness of cattle and of the earth, taught him how to make the simple sacrifices of fruit and barley, of pulse and olive-oil and honeycombs—pastoral customs, pastoral wisdom, which he would one day, in turn, hand on to his own children.

And it was all pleasant enough to a dreamy and imaginative boy. Pleasant, too, were the scents of summer and of autumn, of the fallen apples and pears and ripe plums. Pleasant were the sights and sounds of the fields—the women with corn baskets on their heads, the reapers with their moon-shaped sickles, cutting and binding the corn, while the old man moved about superintending the work. The straw was not cut too close, but was left to be ploughed into the ground for manure. And the great white oxen, yoked to the plough, or threshing the grain under their feet, were to Demophon most beautiful of all.

But sometimes another mood would awaken in him, a mood in which he felt a restless desire to go out and explore the unknown world. In his mind there still floated memories of Deo and their early days together—memories, above all, of that beloved playmate, whom he now guessed to have been Hermes, the divine son of the nymph Maia. Then he would climb a hill and gaze along the road leading to Athens, twelve miles away; or along the road to Megara. Somewhere, beyond the reach of vision, beyond the rolling fields and plains and that blue distant line of mountains, were those two whom he longed to see again, and one of whom still visited and spoke to him in dreams that often seemed more than dreams. He had sought out the green cave in the wood, but

the woodboy had not come to him, and the lonely beauty of the place, because it reminded him at every turn of his lost friend, had been intolerably sad. It had made him so sad, indeed, that after a second visit he had not gone back...

On his fourteenth birthday, on a morning of wintry sunshine, Demophon went down to the little temple by the sea, and kneeling at the altar stone, dedicated to the Goddess the newly shorn locks of his hair.

CHAPTER IV

Pholos

As spring drew near again, Demophon more and more frequently might have been discovered on his hill-top. He would sit there in the young bright grass with his back against a hollow stone, his whole body so quiet that birds would alight at his feet, and King Mouse, who had his nest under this particular stone, found him a terrible nuisance. His time was always the late afternoon, and when the sun sinking in his fiery bed had turned the horizon to a cloud of gold it was easy to believe that that brightness hung above a dragon-guarded orchard, or even marked the gateway to Elysium. Out there, at all events, somewhere in that wide world, was his friend; out there, at this very moment, was the boy with the golden rod. If only he knew where he was most likely to find him; if only he knew which path to take! And Demophon would linger till the light had faded to an ashen grayness, and the moon had floated up the darkening sky, before at last, and with an ever-increasing reluctance, he retraced his steps and descended the hill to his own home.

In the farm house they would be sitting waiting for him, the supper laid, Keleos half asleep, Metanira at her spinning-wheel. But Iole had found her pirate lover and was lost for ever, and Rhodea was married to an image carver in Eleusis. The laughter of the old creaking house was silenced, its light was hidden; the shadow of old age rested upon it. Metanira was busy as ever, but she had grown rheumatic and was hard to please. Tauros was dead. Keleos had become so deaf that unless you shouted in his ear he heard nothing. As for

Demophon himself, he still attended the school of Pittakos, but his days there were numbered: the farm awaited him, the farmer's life, though his spirit, his intelligence, all his instincts, reached out towards something utterly different.

One evening, having returned later than usual from school, he climbed the hill and sat hugging his knees, with his back to the farm house and the fields surrounding it. Behind him the ground dropped steeply to the ancient homestead, but in the direction in which he gazed the slope was more gradual, ending in a small coppice whose trees were now distinguishable only as a blur of deeper darkness on the twilight landscape. Demophon was not thinking of the coppice, though his eyes rested upon it, when out of its obscurity a vague white shape for a moment emerged. It was gone again on the instant, leaving him puzzled, for it had been considerably larger than a goat, and yet it was unlikely that one of the oxen could have strayed. It had indeed been more like a man on horseback than anything else, only horses were rare in the neighbourhood, and why should a man on horseback be hiding in that spot? Demophon gazed intently at the point where the mysterious form had appeared, but though he now and then fancied something was looking out at him through the fringe of shadowy branches, he knew it to be fancy, because, at that distance, no face really could be visible. It would not take him long to run down the slope and explore the little wood, and he felt he ought to do so. It might be a ghost, for though, from its size and shape, it could not be the ghost of a man, Demophon knew that animals had ghosts, having himself seen in dreams the phantom of the old dog Tauros. To tell the truth, if he had thought it to be a human ghost he would not have ventured near it; but the ghost of a beast could do him no harm, since there is no such thing as an

evil beast. Therefore, after some further deliberation, he descended the slope, keeping a cautious watch on the whole line of trees.

When he had nearly reached the wood's edge he heard the sound of a branch snapping, and then a rustling in the tangled brushwood. This was no ghost; and from the heaviness of the movements he guessed it to be an ox, after all. He came to a standstill. Whatever was there was straight in front of him and not fifty yards away, hidden by the matted bushes and trees.

Again he heard a heavy plunging sound, and this time caught a glimpse of something pale moving between the branches. Then, all at once, a white shape broke through the wall of leaves and stood facing him, remaining at first as still as Demophon himself, but after a little taking a step forward, and then another, till, seeing that the boy did not run away, the shy, beautiful creature trotted quietly up to him.

Demophon was far too surprised to think of running away. The monster before him was as strange as he was splendid. He understood why he had thought of a rider on horseback; for from the body of this great milk-white horse there did spring the body of a man—but he was neither man nor horse; he was a centaur. His long tail switched the tops of the tall grasses; from time to time one delicate hoof pawed the ground. Then half proudly, half defiantly, like an impulsive child, he said, "I am Pholos, and you are the boy on the hill."

"Yes," Demophon answered in wonderment.

"I saw you first," said Pholos quickly. "I saw you long before you saw me."

But Demophon did not think of disputing this claim. "I wasn't hiding," he said. "I was on the top of a hill, right out

in the open: it would have been strange if you hadn't seen me.... Why did you hide?" he went on, his interest overcoming his first feeling of alarm. "I thought you must be an ox strayed from the farm."

"I hid because I was not sure of you," said Pholos.

Demophon was disappointed. Such a confession, coming from so large and powerful a creature, was not what he had expected. "Surely you weren't frightened!" he said.

"No, not exactly." Pholos pawed the ground again, with a slight air of embarrassment. "You see—— Well, once or twice accidents have happened, and I didn't want another."

"Accidents!... Accidents to you, do you mean?"

"No, not to me.... But boys—and even men—are inclined to snatch up stones when they see any one who is not just the same as themselves. That is what happened before; and then _____"

"You don't mean that you killed them!" Demophon exclaimed, very much shocked.

"No, no, I hope not," Pholos answered quickly. "I expect they recovered. But they are so easily hurt."

"I don't believe they recovered at all," said Demophon sternly. "And I don't know why you should have come here. You must have known that there are always men and boys where there are farms."

"Yes," Pholos admitted. "But I came very early in the morning, and all day I slept in that thicket.... And to-morrow morning I knew I should be leagues away—among the mountains of Thessaly, most likely."

There was a long silence, and then Demophon sighed. "When are you going?" he asked.

“Now—now—at once.” Pholos seemed suddenly all eagerness to be off. He shook himself and kicked up his heels. “Jump on my back and I will take you with me. What is your name?”

“My name is Demophon and I live in the farm house on the other side of the hill. You can’t see it from here, but it is quite close.” He added this by way of precaution, just in case Pholos should think he was all alone.

But Pholos was not listening. “I will take you to Cheiron’s cave. He lives at the foot of Mount Pelion, and he will make you his pupil.”

“I have a master already,” Demophon replied. “And Mount Pelion is too far away. I must be going home.”

“Far! What matter how far it is? Cheiron is a great teacher. He has had lots of pupils—Herakles, Odysseus, Iason, Achilles, Helen’s brothers—I can’t tell you how many. But they all did very well afterwards.”

“Why should he teach a stranger?” Demophon asked suspiciously. “And why should you want to take me to him?”

“Because you want to go. Besides, I think you are really a little God, or else that a God has you under his protection.”

Demophon shook his head. “I’m not,” he answered. “I am only an ordinary boy. My father is just a farmer, and I am going to be a farmer too.”

“What made you sigh, then, when I spoke of a journey?”

“I didn’t know I had sighed.”

“Well—you did—I heard you,” said Pholos. “Quite a deep sigh, too. I will take you to Cheiron. He has nobody just now: at least, nobody very promising.”

Demophon drew back a pace. “Thank you; but I can’t possibly come,” he answered. “For one thing, I shouldn’t be allowed.”

“But you want to come—I know you want to come,” Pholos said impatiently. “And that is all that matters. So jump up——”

“It isn’t all that matters. If I had a brother who could take my place, then perhaps——”

“Was it of this you were thinking while you sat up there on the hill-top?”

“No.”

“What were you thinking of? I could see even from here that it was something difficult. Was it a problem? If five crows eat five plums in five minutes, how many plums will six crows eat in an hour?”

“I don’t call *that* difficult,” said Demophon. “It’s nothing to what Pittakos gives us. Seventy-two is the answer.”

“It isn’t,” said Pholos.

“Yes, it is. And at any rate I wasn’t doing problems: I was just remembering—remembering what happened once—when a stranger came to our house.”

“What happened?” asked Pholos curiously. At the same time he drew a step nearer, while Demophon took two steps backward.

“It was when I was a child. The lady Deo was my nurse. She stayed with us for nearly a year disguised as an old woman. But my mother made her angry and she went away.”

“It is dangerous to make a Goddess angry.”

“We did not know she was a Goddess.... You are not a God, Pholos, are you?”

“The Gods are the children of Earth and Sky and Night and the Sea. My mother was the nymph Philura, and my father was Kronos. He married her in the shape of a horse—I don’t know why. It was very unfortunate, really, for mother was ashamed of us because we were monsters. So she deserted us. And Kronos is shut up in his tower in the Holy Islands.”

“Poor Pholos.... Where are the Holy Islands?”

“I don’t know.”

“If I found them I might find——” But Demophon broke off to sigh once more. Then he could not help adding, “There was a boy with a golden rod and winged sandals who used to come to us in the woods. He was my friend, my playmate.”

Pholos, with his head cocked on one side, looked at him triumphantly. The white moon threw their shadows on the grass—a big black shadow for Pholos and a slim little shadow for Demophon. “I *knew* there was a ‘something’ about you,” Pholos said, “and you told me there wasn’t.”

“Neither there is.”

“Nonsense. Do you imagine ordinary little boys have Gods for their playmates?”

“But it happened—oh, ever so long ago. And perhaps he wasn’t a God....”

“The road to the right leads to Elysium,” said Pholos. “Further than that I cannot guide you.”

Demophon turned to the right; but the silvery dusk was all around them, and he could see only a little way.

“Over hills and valleys and rivers and seas,” Pholos went on in a drowsy sing-song, “and the sun shines there while it is night here.”

Demophon stood close against the white horse, with his arm round his shoulder. “Tell me more, dear Pholos,” he coaxed, stroking the smooth silky coat.

“There are fields of crimson roses, and three times a year the trees bear fruit. No storms blow there, and there is no snow. But neither is it too hot. The land is never parched, and the sea wind breathes softly through the branches. There, by the streams that flow through green meadows, every one is happy after his own fashion—making music or poetry, or wrestling, or playing games, or running races, or dancing—and the lover is with his beloved.”

“There is a magic in the night, isn’t there?” Demophon half whispered. “It seems to be all round us, and the leaves are glittering.... Suppose I went with you, but only just a very little way?”

“There is always a magic in the moon,” Pholos answered. “And I have seen the witches of Thessaly draw her down out of the sky to lie foaming and sick upon the grass.... Climb up on my back, little Demophon, for I am swifter than the wind, and yet I will carry you so smoothly that you may drop asleep and still not fall off. Lean forward and put your two arms round me.”

It seemed to Demophon that he had not moved, and yet somehow he was on the centaur’s back.

“Hold tight,” Pholos called out in sudden excitement.

“But I don’t want to go far,” Demophon answered uneasily. “You will stop, Pholos, when I tell you to stop, won’t you?”

“Yes—yes. Have no fear.”

“Remember, you’ve promised.”

“I’ve promised that no harm will come to you.”

“You’ve promised to stop——”

But the wind was humming in his ears, and the trees slid past him, and in a minute or two they were out in the open country, and in another few minutes all the old familiar landmarks were behind them. They rushed through the moonlight, and the rhythmic beating of the centaur’s hoofs was like a music that shut out everything but the passionate joy of speed. The moonshine spread a silver carpet over the wide plain; they heard the calling of owls, and now and then, when they passed within earshot of some outlying farm, they set half a dozen dogs a-barking. But soon the barking sounded faint behind them, and still they flew on and on. They crossed streams and skirted the rocky walls of mountains, and Demophon kept crying, “Stop—stop,” and at last Pholos stopped.

Demophon slid dizzily to the grass. “Where are we?” he asked. “You have brought me too far. How am I to get home again?”

“You will get home quite easily: it is no distance.” Pholos knelt down and then rolled over on the grass just like an ordinary horse.

“But where are we?” Demophon persisted.

Pholos did not answer at once, but at last he said, “I’m not quite sure where we are.”

“You’re not sure!” Demophon repeated.

Pholos wrinkled his brows. “I ought to know, of course. But—— You see, I wanted a run so badly that I didn’t bother much about the direction. We passed Parnassos on our left....”

“I must go home,” Demophon cried indignantly. “You had no right to bring me all this distance. Nobody knows where I

am. They will think an accident has happened to me, or that I have run away. How long will it take me to get back?"

Pholos considered while he scratched his head. "That is a very difficult question," he confessed at length. "Because—— Well, it depends so much, doesn't it, on how fast you can run and how soon you get out of breath... But very likely it will take you longer to get back than it has taken me to come. You have only two legs, whereas I have four, and am considered to be an exceptionally fast runner even by my brothers. Suppose we put it as a problem. If four legs can run four miles in four minutes, how long will it take two legs to run——"

"It isn't four miles, and it will take me days and days," declared Demophon angrily. "You know it, and I told you to stop ages ago."

Pholos looked very repentant. "Something seemed to get into my feet," he explained apologetically. "There was a magic in the night, and——"

"You are only saying that because I said it," Demophon interrupted crossly. "You know perfectly well you could have stopped any time you wanted to."

"I will take you to the cave of Cheiron. He is wise and good and you will be his pupil."

"I told you before I didn't want to be his pupil. You keep on repeating the same things. And now we are lost, and I don't believe you have the least idea where we are."

He looked up at the dark silent mountain which rose high above them. A stream fell down with a splashing sound between the rocks, and the ground they rested on was thick with heather. Certainly, at this hour, it seemed a singularly wild and lonely spot.

“We are not lost,” Pholos said. “Because, though I do not know the name of this particular place, we can go straight from here to Mount Pelion, when we have rested for an hour or two.... And over there is the sea.”

“That helps us a lot!” Demophon muttered sulkily.

“Yes, it does, doesn’t it?” Pholos agreed. “And if you insist on going home, all you have to do is to go back by the way we came.”

“I tell you I don’t *know* the way we came. What’s the use of talking like that!”

Pholos seemed surprised. “But surely at your age you can find your way home as easily from one place as from another!”

“Oh, indeed! Well, it so happens that at my age I can do nothing of the sort.”

Pholos was still incredulous. “But how can you go wrong? You just have to turn in the right direction, and keep on till _____”

“How am I to *know* it is the right direction?” Demophon cried, raising his voice a little in increasing exasperation.

“Really, Pholos——!”

“You can feel it. It will *be* the right direction.”

“It will be nothing of the sort,” said Demophon; but he saw it was no use arguing and relapsed into a moody silence.

Pholos remained puzzled. “Why not?” he presently asked. And “Why not?” he kept on repeating till in the end Demophon was obliged to answer.

“Because everybody isn’t the same as you. I can’t feel directions. I hadn’t the slightest notion we were near the sea.”

“It isn’t so very near,” Pholos admitted. “A few miles, perhaps.”

There was a long pause during which the boy yawned twice. The scent of the heather and the soft springiness of it, and the splashing of the stream, had begun to make him drowsy. He was still annoyed with Pholos, but he was becoming more sleepy than angry; and as he nestled up closer to his companion and began to feel warmer and cosier, he told himself it was his own fault, for getting on the centaur’s back, and that very likely in the morning he would be able to persuade Pholos to take him back to the farm. He had now grown quite accustomed to his monster, who seemed really much more like a horse than a man. Yes, it would be easy to get him to go back in the morning. And with this thought Demophon fell asleep.

CHAPTER V

On the Mountains

BUT alas! when he woke up again, Pholos was gone. Gone without a word. Demophon did not understand it; but so ended his plan for riding home, and so ended his trust in centaurs. Here he was, left stranded, miles away from Eleusis, with not a living creature in sight, not a house, not so much as a ploughed field, but only a stretch of rocky heather, and behind him the bare mountain. He felt uncommonly hungry, too. He had had no supper on the previous night, and, as he surveyed the barren country all around him, he could see small likelihood of breakfast either.

In the stream he washed himself, and then stood perfectly still, trying, like Pholos, to “feel” the direction of home. The effort was unsuccessful. The only thing of which he could be quite sure was that they had not crossed the mountain, so he set out at a venture, and in an hour or two struck a rough path, which presently led him to a road with well-marked wagon ruts. The land was becoming more promising; there were silvery poplars by the wayside; but as yet he had met nobody and seen no house nor flocks nor any signs of cultivation. The morning was far advanced when he reached a spot where his road was bisected by another, narrower road. Here, at the crossing of the ways, stood a shrine dedicated to the Triple Hekate. There were some round cakes upon the altar, left there either for a passing wayfarer like himself, or in honour of the Goddess; and, though they were far from fresh, he swallowed them to the last crumb before sitting down in the shade to consider what he should do next.

High overhead burned the afternoon sun. The entire landscape, and even the sky, had acquired a hard enamelled brilliance. The two white roads ran on perfectly straight as far as the eye could reach, but not a speck was visible on either of them, nor was there any sound to be heard except the shrill singing of the grasshoppers. Demophon took off his cloak and rolled it into a pillow. It was pleasant to lie here, even though it might be wiser to push on—at least till he should have reached a house where he could get proper directions, food, and perhaps a lodging for the night....

And then a quite new thought entered his mind. Now that he was at last come out into this world he had so often longed to visit, would it not be foolish to turn back? The summer months lay before him, and had he actually planned to run away he could not have chosen a better time....

Only, he must send word to his parents.... Otherwise he would be no better than Linos—who had run away, and sent no messages, and never returned. Demophon did not want to be like that.... But he would be sure to meet somebody—somebody travelling to Eleusis—who would carry a message to the old people, tell them all was well. He would keep a sharp look-out for such a traveller, and for a day or two at least there was no hurry....

The sunshine was making him a little sleepy.... Still, he must not go to sleep; for if he did, it might be dark when he awakened, and in the darkness he would be more lost than he was at present....

He wondered if he *had* been dozing! Surely the sun was much lower than it ought to be? At that moment he heard a voice—quite near—and also the squeaking and rumbling and bumping of a cart. Noisy as the cart was, it was not so noisy

as its driver. Demophon jumped up to look. It was a mule cart, driven by a young man who was singing at the top of his voice, but who, on catching sight of Demophon, suddenly broke off his song and pulled up.

He was a countryman, with an honest, pleasant, good-humoured face. But he looked flushed, as if he had been drinking, and evidently he was rejoiced to find a companion with whom he could drink still more, for he immediately produced a wooden cup, which he waved in the air while he shouted to Demophon to approach.

The boy obeyed, but drank only a few mouthfuls of the dark wine poured out for him. Seeing, however, that the cart was laden with provisions, he mentioned that he was hungry. The driver was perhaps in a generous mood, or perhaps it was that he had grown hungry himself: at any rate, he at once began to rummage among his baskets, and very soon had set out by the roadside enough food for half a dozen people. While Demophon ate, he himself drank, and listened to an account of the adventure with Pholos. He appeared to have some difficulty in grasping what actually had happened, but this did not prevent him from expressing the warmest approval of Demophon's conduct, and the sternest condemnation of the faithless Pholos. As for directions and advice, he overflowed with them. "Take what food you want; it all belongs to my father, and you will need it. The first thing you have to do is to cross the mountains. Your way lies on the other side of them. Then you'll be a little nearer home—though not very much." And he began to troll out in a baritone voice of wonderful power and melodiousness:—

“Over the mountains,
Sacred to Pan,
There you must journey,
My little man.”

“Only they’re not sacred to Pan, but to Dionysos,” he added, stopping abruptly. Then he drank another cup of wine, and asked, “Do you know any songs?”

“I know some that Pittakos taught me,” Demophon answered.

“Pittakos—Pittakos—who might he be, now?”

“He is a poet of Eleusis. I went to his school.”

“A good poet and a bad schoolmaster; or perhaps a good schoolmaster and a bad poet. We’ll hear him at any rate—Pittakos of Eleusis—and if he’s not utterly impossible I’ll drink his health and the health of all poets and all schoolmasters. Now, pupil, the Muses are gathering round us, and this wooden cup shall be the prize.”

Demophon thought for a while, his bright dark eyes fixed on the mule-driver’s face. Then he opened his mouth and began to chant in a piercing and monotonous sing-song, just as Pittakos had taught him to do, a poem with this auspicious opening:—

“First honour the Gods, and then thy parents.”

The mule-driver’s jaw dropped. As the poem proceeded his expression became more and more that of a man suffering from some acute internal discomfort. He stared at Demophon, and Demophon stared at him—across the remains of their picnic—but the poem went on. Every single word of it was a word of wisdom; every line showed Pittakos to be a learned

and virtuous person; it was only this graceless young mule-driver who was vile. For when he had listened to two hundred of Pittakos's hexameters the mule-driver rebelled. Two hundred sufficed, and he put an end to the performance by the simple means of leaning forward and clapping a large hand over Demophon's mouth. After which he took a deeper draught than any yet.

But he said nothing, though over the top of the swaying cup he eyed Demophon reproachfully, and it was quite three minutes before his countenance cleared. Then all at once he recovered his cheerfulness, and at the same time announced his intention of remaining in this spot till morning. The companionship of Demophon was dearer to him than aught else in the world; they would never more be parted; and in pledge of this they would drink just one further drink together. Pittakos was an old driveller who deserved mutilation; his pupil's singing was deplorable; nevertheless not even this should be allowed to cast a shadow on their friendship....

Demophon, who after all had only sung because he had been asked to sing, felt offended by this criticism. In silence he collected what would be sufficient for a couple of good meals, while the young wagoner regarded him benevolently. He had reached the stage when a hiccup now and then interrupted his flow of lively and affectionate conversation; but nothing else did; and the mule, with the reins hanging loose on its back, patiently cropped the grass.

Evening was approaching. The boy, having packed up his provisions, stood by the docile animal, stroking its long soft nose and saying good-bye. The mule-driver too said good-bye. He said it again and again, but always found something

else to say, of the utmost importance, immediately afterwards. In the end, seeing that their parting was likely to be prolonged as the night of Zeus and Alkmena, Demophon walked away.

When he had gone a hundred yards or so, he stopped and looked round. The young wagoner had clambered back into his cart and the mule had started. Even as Demophon watched, however, the cart gave a sudden bump and the driver disappeared from view. He had fallen back among his packages, but made no attempt to recover his position, and the boy was on the point of returning to see if all was well when a burst of song reassured him. The song continued, though all but the singer's feet remained invisible. The mule plodded on, apparently needing no guidance, and Demophon turned his face once more to the mountains.

They were a considerable distance off—at least an hour's walk, he thought—but he had had a good long rest, and his journey with Pholos had given him a taste for nocturnal rambles. The sun was already setting, and the hills he was approaching seemed very thickly wooded. But when he reached them he found the ascent was easy, and it would have been easier still had it not been for the darkness which closed down upon him the moment he got among the trees. Now indeed he had to proceed cautiously, because there were many loose fragments of rock lying about; and as he slowly advanced he became aware of a secret movement all around him. He could see nothing, he could hear very little, and yet he knew a great many creatures of various sizes, furred or feathered, were scurrying past him through the brushwood. It puzzled him, because there seemed to be no cause for this commotion. Not a breath of wind was stirring, the only

intruder was himself, and the fugitives, if they *were* fugitives, were running not away from, but towards him. He stopped to listen. Yes, there were countless little rustlings and clawings, though never a squeak nor a call.

Demophon climbed on, being obliged to pick his steps more and more carefully as the way became rougher; and when the trees at last began to widen out again, and he knew he had reached the wood's edge, the stars and the moon were bright in the sky.

Suddenly he started in fear, for a human face hung there a yard or two in front of him—hung there in the darkness, without a visible body, directly in his path. Next moment he recognised the painted mask of Dionysos, which had been attached to a pine tree; and while he stood gazing at it he heard the sound of distant music—a far-off tuneless wood-note, broken ever and again by a faint, shivering crash. It must be very distant, he thought, for it reached him only fitfully; and a long time elapsed before he made out that human voices were mixed with it. But there was not a trace of the singers, and though he had now passed well beyond the wood's fringe, a dark bare tract still stretched up between him and the topmost line of the mountain, from the other side of which the music must be coming.

The slope had grown almost precipitous—a towering wall of rock to which he was obliged to cling with his hands. He had the moon's light, however, and the ground was firm, not slaty, so that he seldom made a false step. The music did not seem to get any louder till he had nearly reached the top, and it was only then that he could distinguish clearly its component elements—the rounded fluting of wind instruments, mingled with the strident clashing of

tambourines and cymbals.... Demophon knew it to be the music of the God, and once more, placed at the very summit, he came upon his image—a wooden post without arms, but covered with leafy boughs, and with a mask daubed in bright vermilion to represent the head.

He scrambled over the last ridge and gazed down into the depths below. He could see the red flames of torches darting hither and thither, but they might have been gigantic fireflies, for nothing except these moving flames was visible.

Nevertheless, he knew that the worshippers were there, gathered in that spot to evoke their dark ambiguous God and the fructifying powers of Earth. He could hear their cries distinctly—Evoé! Evoé! Io! Iacchos! Iacchos!—and he paused in doubt, for it might be wiser to make a detour before beginning the descent.

Prudence fought against curiosity. The mysterious noises he had heard in the wood were accounted for. A spirit of fear was in the air, and if the wild creatures had quitted their haunts and sought safety far down on the other side of the mountain, it behoved him, too, to be careful. For he knew how this God filled his worshippers with a mystic passion, which turned sometimes to madness; he knew of deeds of hideous cruelty performed in his name—of victims torn limb from limb, of the drinking of blood. Tales more unpleasant still were told. If the victim was sometimes a goat, it was also whispered that he was sometimes a boy; and Demophon had an idea that the death of that boy would be no easy one. He would undergo at least such sufferings as the Boy-God himself had undergone at the hands of the Titans. Yet there could not be much danger in drawing just a little closer, since

he could always run away, and he had great confidence in his fleetness of foot.

He took every precaution as he descended. He avoided the light of the bonfires, keeping in the shadow of rocks and trees, and at last, when he was quite near, creeping on all fours along the ground. He peered through the brushwood into an open glade which was lit by torches and by three or four blazing fires. The clamour was now deafening; it made him want to put his fingers in his ears; and at the same time a peculiar influence began to reach him, so that he had to fight against a desire to leap out from his hiding-place and join in the winding, rhythmic dance. It was a half-hypnotic fascination. The delirious clashing of cymbals, the shrilling of flutes, and that whirling and beating of tambourines rose madly into the night. If there were men present, he did not see any; he saw only women. In the red flare of the torches they moved in a dizzy yet ordered pattern. Their hair was unbound and streamed behind them, their faces were uplifted, their lips were apart, their eyes shone with a dangerous ecstasy, their feet were white on the bruised and trampled grass. They were clothed in dappled fawn skins, in black goat skins, and many carried the ivy-twisted thyrsos that was the emblem of their master. The dance itself was passionate, was curiously like a dance of witches: it had filled their faces with thirst; a cloud of sorcery seemed to trail from tree to tree, creating in the air an unnatural heat, as from the breath of an open furnace.

Through the quivering atmosphere, through the winding pattern of the dance, Demophon presently became aware of a figure coming and going, which he had not seen at first. In the beginning it was shadowy and diaphanous, but as he

watched it it grew ever more definite, till at last it was solid flesh beneath whose feet the grass was crushed and bent as beneath the feet of the other dancers. It was the figure of a youth—lithe, delicate, and beautiful with an equivocal beauty. In his hand he held a rod tipped with a pine-cone, and into his long hair a spray of convolvulus was twisted. His face and body were pale, his mouth red, and he moved with a kind of caressing and feline grace.

For a while he moved in the dance and then drew apart under the trees, and Demophon suddenly knew that to the worshippers he had never been visible. But they had felt his nearness, and the music grew wilder and the dance more and more vertiginous, till at last, one by one, exhausted, they dropped out and lay upon the grass where they had fallen, with swimming eyes and panting limbs. And gradually, while they lay there, a cloud seemed to be lifted, the whole atmosphere changed, the night air once more grew cool, a soft breeze awakened, and the dew descended.

The God had disappeared; the dew dropped presently on sleeping figures; and Demophon crept out from his hiding-place. For a minute or two he stood looking down at the scattered slumberers, who lay as if dead. The abandon of their attitudes, the heavy unconsciousness into which they had sunk, suggested something deeper than normal sleep. A feeling of aversion arose in him, and he turned his eyes away as from a sight shameful and degrading. This disgust had awakened suddenly and pitilessly; it was the disgust that follows gratified curiosity; he felt that he hated these women with an almost cruel hatred, as he turned his back on them, and hastened on down to the valley below.

CHAPTER VI

Kidnappers

HE awoke with the screaming of sea-birds in his ears, but perhaps it was only the echo of a dream....

Yet surely there was something familiar in this sharp salt taste of the air, in the aspect of this sandy plain with its smooth rounded hillocks, in this sparse coarse grass. It certainly *looked* as if he were approaching the sea.... If so, he must have lost his bearings completely, for he had thought last night he was journeying away from it. And those dancers—they must have come from some town! Where was it, then? After he had finished breakfast he climbed the nearest mound to get a better view.

The sea was there, and a dark line of coast, but, so far as he could discover, that was all. There was not even a fisherman's hut, let alone a town. Demophon hesitated. Thanks to the young wagoner, he had sufficient food to last him for a day's tramping, and if he followed the coast it must in the end bring him to a village. He decided to risk it, and half an hour later reached the shore. It was rough and craggy, broken into numerous creeks, in one of which a long narrow black ship, hidden by high walls of rock, lay at anchor. He stood gazing down upon her. No fishing boat this: and not a soul aboard, so far as he could discover. Nevertheless, she gave him an impression of a hound straining on a leash, of being all ready and eager to start. In a trice, he felt sure, those sails could be unfurled, those oars run out, and the ship herself skimming over the waves. So very much alive and alert did she appear

that Demophon approached no nearer, but after standing staring for a while, walked on.

He kept as close to the sea's edge as the rugged nature of the coast permitted. It was full tide, and in the sunshine the water sparkled and danced as if inviting him to enter it. Presently he reached a spot where a pyramid of broad flat rocks shelved down to within a foot or two of the surface, and here he determined to bathe. Beyond the fringe of seaweed was a white sandy bottom; the rocks themselves were pleasantly warm, and Demophon threw off his cloak and sandals.

He tried the temperature with one foot; it was cool but not cold. With the sound of his own splash in his ears he turned on his back and floated. The low ground swell lifted and dipped his body like a piece of drifting wood. There was a salt sting in his mouth and nostrils; he did not actually swim, but the palms of his hands pressed now and then against the water, guiding his movements. His eyes, wide open, looked up into a deep blue sky, and he had a feeling of floating somewhere above the water, as if in an immense and gently rocking cradle, poised between sky and earth. It seemed to him that this was exactly how the moon must feel. The moon was hollow like a shell, or a boat—thin and fragile—so light that it did not fall down....

He slid round on to his breast and swam for perhaps two hundred yards out to sea. Then once more he floated. The harsh voracious squawking of a flock of gulls abruptly broke the spell of solitude and silence, and he turned to see them wheeling and diving in pursuit of a shoal of small fishes that had come in between him and the shore. They were catching them like flies; the little silvery shapes glittered in the

sunshine as they were snapped up: at the same time he saw on the rock where he had left his clothes a young boy standing watching him.

Demophon swam lazily back, wondering who the watcher could be. He thought of the vessel in the creek, and of course there might be houses nearer than he imagined. But as he clambered out on to the rocks he knew that this was no ship's boy, nor one who had lived even so rough a life as himself. His whole appearance indicated a delicate nurture; his skin was not tanned as Demophon's was; he was slender, with dark hair that twisted and waved low down on his neck, like the tendrils of a climbing plant; he had narrow, amber-coloured, glinting eyes, and every time Demophon glanced at him he smiled.

He said nothing, but neither did he go away when Demophon sat down in the sun to dry. And presently a question about the boat lying in the creek set him talking. He knew nothing of her, had not seen her, but he had often sailed in ships. He had been in far countries—in Egypt and in India. Demophon decided that his father must be a great traveller—and his mother perhaps belonged to a distant land, which would account for a strangeness in him.

He spoke of his own adventure last night in the mountains, and the other boy, lying prone on the smooth rock, listened, with his cupped hands supporting his chin, and his unblinking, shadowless eyes gazing out to sea. Suddenly, in the midst of what Demophon was telling him, he darted his hand into a cleft between the rocks, and drew out a lizard. In a moment he had crushed it and flung its broken, writhing body into the water.

There was something so wantonly destructive in this deed that Demophon's primary impulse was to throw the slayer after the slain. The impulse passed, however, for he realised that the action must have been largely unconscious. It had not been done for pleasure, because the expression of the boy's face had not altered; it had meant no more to him than the plucking of a blade of grass. Yet to Demophon this second discovery was almost as disconcerting as the act itself had been, and he stammered and broke off in the middle of his story.

At the same time he heard a slight noise behind him—the noise of some one breathing—and turning, saw a swarthy evil face within a few feet of his own, peering at them over the rocks. Before he could utter a warning, he had been flung on his back, and a heavy knee was squeezing the breath out of his body. He squirmed and kicked and wriggled, but four more rascals came running up, and one of them deftly passed a rope round him, fastening his arms to his sides. The lizard-slayer they bound more leisurely, for he had neither attempted to escape, nor offered the slightest resistance.

They were a villainous-looking crew, with scarred dirty faces, and matted hair and beards. They had knives in their belts, their hairy bodies were half naked, and their breaths stank abominably of stale wine and garlic. Demophon began to call for help, but at the first cry he felt the point of a knife pressed against his throat.

“Are you going to stop that row, or do you want your gullet slit?” asked the kneeling sailor in a thick low voice.

With his wicked little pig's eyes inflamed and savage, he seemed perfectly prepared to put his threat into action, but one of his mates caught him by the arm. “Don't be a fool.

What use will he be with a cut throat? Let him shout his bellyful: there's nobody to hear him."

The kneeling man looked up. "He's mine, isn't he?" he sneered. "Or perhaps you think it was you that caught him?" He thrust his face closer to Demophon's. "I'll slit your throat if I feel like it, or if you let so much as another squeal out of you."

This speech provoked a general outburst. "He's not yours, so don't you be making any mistake about it. You're getting a deal too handy with that knife."

"Perhaps he thinks it's the only knife," said a fat, oily-looking sailor, who had been the last to arrive, and who stood now contemplating the scene with a placid smile. "Is that what you think, Medon? I remember you once threatened poor old Abas just as you are threatening that boy. And then something unexpected happened—didn't it, Medon?—and you've never threatened him since."

Medon gave poor old Abas a singularly venomous look, but he did not reply. "You step out quickly," he spat at Demophon, "unless you want hurt. There's places where a prod won't do no harm."

"Let me go," cried Demophon. "What do you want with me?"

"We want you to come to the ship, laddie," explained the fat sailor kindly. "And if you come quietly you'll be well treated. You've never been to sea, I dare say; so you'll be glad to have a nice voyage, along with a lot of nice sailor-men for company."

A laugh arose from two of the sailor-men in question; but Medon did not laugh, nor a small, cadaverous, scared-faced man, who with remarkable presence of mind had already

folded Demophon's cloak and sandals into a bundle, and who, as he hovered furtively in the background, had more the air of a pickpocket than a pirate.

"Give me my clothes," Demophon demanded curtly.

"When you're safely on board and out at sea, my boy," Abas replied. "Till then you'll do very well as you are. The Captain won't be shocked, because he's a travelled man, and broad-minded." He glanced round at the small furtive sailor, and started in dismay. "Well, if that aren't too bad, now! There's somebody's got your clothes already. It's that Boukolos, too, and he's a terror when he's roused. We wouldn't none of us dare to take them from him."

This sally was greeted with a still louder laugh, and the flush deepened on Demophon's face. The fat sailor continued imperturbably: "See how nice your friend's behaving. He knows it's no good, so he don't bawl, and don't kick, and—don't get treated rough."

At these words, and with extraordinary composure, the other boy spoke. "It would be wiser to unbind us," he said.

Even in his present plight Demophon could not help looking at him with curiosity. He must know that once on board ship they would be completely in the power of these ruffians; yet his tranquillity was unassumed, seemed even to be mingled with a shade of amusement. Nor was Demophon the only one to notice it. The timid Boukolos, who had just begun to sneak quietly away, paused, and glanced round uneasily at the lizard-slayer. Boukolos still held Demophon's clothing tucked under his arm, but he began to talk rapidly in a strange dialect.

Abas shrugged his shoulders. "What does it matter?" he answered, without troubling to disguise his words. "The

richer their fathers, the better price they'll pay. And if they don't, the Persian will.... Who *are* you?" he asked, giving the rope that bound Demophon a sudden vicious twist, so that he could not suppress a cry. The pain brought tears to his eyes, but he forced them back, and answered sturdily enough.

"I am Demophon, the son of Keleos of Eleusis."

"And who are you?" asked Abas, turning to the other boy.

"I am Dion. We are brothers. Our father, Keleos, sent us on a visit to our uncle, whose house is not an hour's journey from here."

Abas fixed a prolonged and scrutinising gaze upon him. "Well—that may be a lie or it mayn't," he remarked, after a lengthy and suggestive pause. "It's a wise child that knows its own father, and it's sometimes a wiser child that doesn't. The Captain'll be the best judge, though he's not what you'd call a terribly believing man. So now we'll be stepping out to the ship."

Demophon would have struggled still, but he knew it to be useless; for these rascals would never have had the impudence to attack them in broad daylight unless the spot were quite deserted. Their design evidently was to offer them for ransom, or, if it seemed more profitable, to sell them as slaves. He suspected that with the exceptions of Medon and Abas they were a cowardly lot, who would take to their heels at the first serious alarm, but it was quite plain that they were utterly unscrupulous. And it would be foolish to expect mercy from any of them so long as they felt secure, which was just what they would feel when they had reached their boat and set sail for the high seas.

CHAPTER VII

The Pirate Ship

THE blackest forebodings flocked about Demophon's soul, like bedraggled rooks about a rainy rookery. He sat forlorn and lonely in the stern of the ship, watching the foam that followed in their wake. Three days ago the coast line had faded out; unknown islands had detached themselves from the horizon, had grown larger, and sunk again into the distance. Now the sun was disappearing in a blood-red sky, and the moon had risen.

He was no longer bound, he was free to move about from wall to wall of this ship that was his cage. Dion lay sleeping in the shadow under the gunwale; and the brown sail bellied in a fair wind, as the boat sped on her rapid course towards a problematic destination....

Night drew on and the sky darkened to a purple-black. Two or three of the pirates were playing knuckle-bones by the light of a lantern; most of the others, having ceased to ply the oars, sprawled amid heaps of tumbled skins, and like Dion were asleep. But at the prow stood a watchman, and in the stern, not far from Demophon, stood the steersman, gaunt and motionless, his eyes fixed on the course they were following....

It had been a calamitous voyage from the start. Wind and weather had favoured them; yet one disaster had succeeded another, till the crew had begun to murmur openly, and to look askance upon their two captives, as though they had brought the ill-luck with them. First a fire had broken out—nobody knew how. It had been checked in time; but a little

later the sailor on the look-out had suddenly thrown his arms above his head, and with a cry had plunged into the sea. It had been done in the sight of all; a rope had been thrown to him; but he had never risen to the surface; it was as if something had been waiting for him and had drawn him under. After this, a superstitious dread began to see signs and omens in all things: mysterious tales were passed from mouth to mouth, and whispered in every corner of the ship. In the general demoralisation there arose quarrels and stabbings—causeless, springing from a mere word: and men would awaken from evil dreams screaming with fear, yet unable to remember what they had dreamed. Some shadowy terror was pursuing them: the steersman declared that at night he had seen eyes, that were like the eyes of an enormous cat, glaring at him through the darkness.

Demophon had noticed this growing uneasiness, and at first had hoped that he and Dion might profit by it. But now he knew it only increased their danger. Two thrusts from a stealthy knife, and the ship would be rid of them for ever; while for the murderer there would be small risk of detection. He had spoken of this danger to Dion, but Dion would not listen to him. Indeed, he slept most of the time—slept for hours on end, like an animal—and when he was not sleeping he would lie watching the water or the clouds—indolently, dreamily—his thoughts far away. Demophon had once asked him why he had pretended to be his brother, why he had not told his father's real name, but he had only answered that he did not know why.

“Don't you want me for a brother?” he had asked, and somehow Demophon could not be angry.

Yet he knew it was no time for playfulness, and said so. “They don’t believe you; and because they don’t believe you, they don’t believe me. So they have not tried to get a ransom, and nobody will know where we are or what has happened. Yet it would be better for us to be bought back by our fathers than to be the slaves of this Persian.”

“There will be no Persian, Demophon, and you will not be a slave. Why not trust me? If you did you would find it pleasant enough lying here in the sun, watching those fools sweating and blistering their hands.”

“But what can you do, Dion?” Then he added with a sigh, “You are very brave: you don’t seem to care what happens. Are you the son of a king?”

Dion laughed merrily. “You forget I am your brother.”

“It is you who don’t trust *me*,” said Demophon.

“Yes, I trust you.... Dion really is my name. And I promise to tell you whose son I am before we leave this ship.”

All that had passed between them only a few hours ago, and now Dion lay sleeping as calmly as a child....

The stars twinkled, and strange phosphorescent lights gleamed on the water. But with the coming of night the wind had begun to blow more fitfully; the sails flapped and drooped, till at last, in a dead calm, the boat no more than drifted on an oily sea.

Demophon thought sadly of his father and mother and of the farm. He did not know when he should see his home again—perhaps never. He did not know whither the ship was bound, nor what fate lay before him, except that he was to be sold for a slave. This he did know, because the steersman,

who seemed in a rough way not unkindly, had told him so, adding, for his consolation, that all things happen at the will of the Gods....

He lay waiting for sleep, but he could not sleep; not even in the darkness. Yet in the end he must have dropped off, and slept soundly too, for when he opened his eyes it was morning. He felt cold and stiff. The sun was hidden, and a thick white mist enveloped everything. The ship was drenched with it; great beads of moisture dripped from the ropes as if after heavy rain, and he could see nothing—nothing but this milky shroud which closed them in on all sides and sent a chill into his bones.

He heard Dion's voice; Dion was clamouring for food, and, to Demophon's surprise, food was at once brought. They sat eating it together, and presently Dion said, "I am going to answer your question to-day. So you see I have not kept you long."

"What question—I have asked you so many questions?" Demophon returned apathetically.

"I am going to tell you who I am."

Demophon waited, with his hand halfway to his mouth.

"Not just now; not till later," Dion laughed. "But I think it has gone on long enough—this voyage. I am tired of the Captain and I am tired of the crew. To-day you and I will take command."

Demophon said nothing: he also was tired of the Captain and the crew; but Dion's words were foolish. He looked at him, and as he looked a sudden light dawned in his mind. This must be the true explanation! And indeed it accounted for everything—the insensibility to danger—even the killing of the lizard. All those stories about India and Egypt, too—

illusions only—fairy-tales of a disordered imagination. He put his hand on Dion's shoulder. "Whatever happens," he said, "so long as we are together I will take care of you."

The fog had begun to lift, yielding at last to the sunlight, and growing ever more transparent; till in the end it divided and floated away in scattered wisps, like wreaths of smoke, revealing at no great distance the curving outline of an island shore.

Simultaneously an excited cry arose among the crew. "Chios!—Chios!" And all rushed to the side of the vessel.

The Captain, a huge black-bearded man, was in a passion. "How can it be Chios?" he bawled. "What course were you keeping? There has been some trickery at work." He turned upon the unfortunate steersman, who seemed to have relapsed into a state of coma. "I myself all day kept her headed for Krete. She was heading straight for Krete when I gave you the helm. Is Chios on the way to Krete? Is it on the way to Africa?"

"We must have drifted in the fog," the steersman muttered helplessly. "We must have struck a secret current."

"Secret damnation!" yelled the Captain. "I know every secret current in these seas, because there are none. And I know when somebody is trying to fool me. How could we drift all this distance in a few hours?"

A confused murmur arose among the sailors. The word "Magic!" was repeated again and again as they stared now at the island and now into one another's faces. The wave of superstition passing over them made them deaf to the Captain's oaths. "Did you not notice the moon last night—

how close she had dropped? And there were sounds—I heard them—like a distant music, the flute of Silenos....”

The steersman awoke out of his trance. “I was against bringing them,” he cried. “I said from the first no good would come of it. You would not listen, you would not even consent to hold them at a ransom, because you said the Persian would pay an enormous price.”

All eyes were turned on Demophon and his companion, and again a muttering of “Magic!” arose.

But the Captain was furious. “Magic! I’ll show you what kind of magic it is!” He took a step towards the steersman, his fist clenched as if he were about to strike him to the deck. “I saw you talking to that one—after I gave you the helm—listening to his bribes.”

He drew his knife, but at this moment Dion sprang forward, and flinging himself at his feet, clasped him round the knees. “O kindest, noblest of men,” he implored tearfully, “if that is indeed Chios, land us there where we have friends. We have done you no harm, and the immortal Gods will bless you and bring you safely home to your wife and children.”

But the Captain was a bachelor, and the softness of this speech, so far from turning away wrath, merely earned for the suppliant a cuff on the ear that sent him sprawling. Then the Captain saw Abas. “What are you grinning at,” he shouted, “standing there like a fat ape?”

Dion continued to pour out his prayers. Again he twined his arms round the Captain’s knees, nearly bringing him to the ground as he invoked blessings upon his head.

“Think of our parents,” he wailed. “They are growing old and have no other children. Remember the days when you

yourself were a boy, innocent and gentle, your father's pride, the darling of your mother."

At this touching picture an irrepressible and hoarse chuckle arose from Abas. "He's got you to a T, Captain, he has. Might a' bin sailin' these seas with you all his life." But the Captain, whose face had grown purple, seemed on the verge of apoplexy.

"Bind that boy," he spluttered, struggling to disengage his legs from the clinging Dion, who was now weeping copiously.

Nobody moved, and the Captain, at last freeing himself by a vicious kick, turned a baleful glare round his crew. He selected Medon, as at once the most stupid and the most brutal; he selected Boukolos, as too cowardly to disobey him. "You two," he shouted. "Get ropes and bind this boy."

"You can't—you mustn't," cried Demophon, rushing to the rescue. "He—he doesn't know what he's saying. Can't you see he's not quite—like other people."

"I'll soon make him like other people," said the Captain, and with a single thrust he knocked Demophon reeling back against the bulkhead. At the same time he seized Dion and held him—one hand twisted in his hair, and the other gripping him by the scruff of the neck.

Dion instantly set up a howl; the tears streamed down his cheeks; he even kicked the Captain's shins, but his bare feet could do no great damage. And meanwhile ropes were quickly found: in fact they were literally heaped upon Boukolos by his obliging shipmates. He stood festooned with them, his head nodding and his legs quaking, while Medon watched him with savage contempt.

“Bind him to the mast,” the Captain ordered. “And when I’ve done with him he’ll be more striped than the hydra of Lerna.” But he had a second thought. “Bind them both to the mast, and fetch me the whip. We’ll see what their magic will do for them then!”

Medon advanced with alacrity, for it was the kind of task he enjoyed; Boukolos followed trembling, as if galvanised into temporary activity only by the Captain’s steady glare. But the two boys offered no resistance as they were led to the centre of the ship.

“Tie their hands above their heads,” the Captain roared. “Tie their ankles. The young one first.”

The young one appeared to be Dion, who, shaking off the feeble Boukolos, now of his own accord took up a position—with the mast behind him. Once more he spoke, and this time not to the Captain, nor to Medon and Boukolos, but to the gaping crew. “Take the ship into Chios,” he said, “and let us go free. What are you afraid of? Is it of that man—your Captain? You can easily overpower him. He is armed, but all of you are armed, and he is only one against many. Decide quickly, for as soon as these ugly fools get busy it will be too late.”

He no longer wept: his face was lit up with a mischievous laughter, and his eyes danced with the glee of a child. He looked exactly like some young scapegrace carrying out the merriest of pranks; but Demophon, who had been watching the Captain, knew that from now on any chance they might once have had of finding mercy was gone.

Yet there was a pause, and in the midst of it Boukolos suddenly dropped his ropes and fled. Not so quickly, however, but that the Captain was quicker. Boukolos ran on a

few steps, turned completely round, gave a queer little apologetic cough, and collapsed in a heap, with the handle of a knife sticking out from his back. Medon chuckled; but in the strange, tense, spellbound stillness this was the only sound. Then very slowly and deliberately Medon put a running noose on the rope he held. He took a step forward and passed the loop over Dion's head and shoulders, drawing the long end round the mast.

It snapped in his hand, and he drew back with an oath, for the moment it had come in contact with the boy's body the rope had turned into a green convolvulus, and at the same time Dion stretched out his right arm and drew Demophon closer. They stood now, side by side, in the face of the Captain and his crew, and many things began to happen simultaneously. A thin, far-off music, like the music Demophon had heard upon the mountain, sounded overhead. The mast trembled, broke into bud and branch, and ivy sprang up and twined about it. The rigging turned into twisting vines with countless leaves and tendrils that spread in all directions; and all the wood of which the ship was built came alive, broke into branch and bud, and from the helm and the thole-pins and the oars leaves burst forth. The deck grew green, and a stream of dark wine flowed down the middle of the boat from bow to stern. Thicker and thicker grew the leafy bower, gleaming with heavy clusters of purple grapes, while the pirates, huddled in a mass, retreated as far from their two prisoners as possible. Dion laughed gleefully, but nobody else laughed; and presently through the green leaves were thrust two sleek dark heads, with yellow shining eyes, and jaws that dripped moisture. Slowly and softly they came out into the open—two spotted panthers, their tails lashing their flanks, a deep rumbling in their throats. Down

on their bellies they crouched, their bodies quivering as, padded step by step, they drew nearer. Then a cloud of madness or of panic descended on the crew. Screams rang through the ship, and the pirates leaped into the sea. But the panthers were among them, and those who had hesitated were mauled and mangled before their torn and bleeding bodies found a refuge in the water.

It was all over in a few minutes. Again sounded that distant burst of music, and with it the fruit and leaves and the two great spotted beasts faded slowly out, and the boat assumed its former aspect, only now Dion and Demophon were alone on its blood-spattered deck. Here and there, on the rippling glancing water stained with sinister red streaks and patches, the head of a swimmer bobbed up and down, but most of those who had plunged overboard had sunk like stones.

In silence Demophon watched the survivors striking out for the shore. He leaned over the side of the boat with Dion behind him; but it had all come and gone so quickly that he felt dazed, and as if one half of his mind were still in a dream while the other half were awake.

One by one the bobbing heads disappeared, till only three or four remained.... Then Demophon heard a voice—the voice of Dion. “Why are you so gloomy, when your enemies are all either drowned or soon to be drowned, for none will reach the island alive?”

Still Demophon gave no answer.

“What is the matter?” Dion asked. “Why won’t you look at me?”

At this he did turn, half expectant of some further transformation, but he saw only the delicate boy who had watched him from the rocks, who without a struggle had

allowed himself to be captured, who had knelt weeping at the Captain's feet.

"Who are you?" The words were involuntary, for he knew already who he was, and desired no reply.

"I am only a little boy lost on the high seas," Dion whined pitifully. "Why won't you be kind to me?"

Demophon looked into his face. "You are not a little boy," he said.

There was a silence. His eyes were fixed on Dion's, and at last he whispered: "I know you, but when I saw you on the mountain you were different."

He tried to look away, but he could not; he seemed to be gazing into two fathomless golden pools that were drawing his spirit down into their depths. And the boy he had talked with on the rocks was gone, though he could still see him—like a shadow, a phantom—flickering behind and through this other darker form.

It was the Other who replied—slowly, gravely, even gently—though the sound of the words beat upon Demophon's consciousness like the thunder of waves on a winter shore.

"I am Eleuthereus; I am Sabazios; I am Bromios. I am Iacchos; I am Zagreus; I am Dionysos."

A slight shudder passed through Demophon's body, not of pain nor of fear, but the shudder a wild animal gives before it yields to the unknown hand that is caressing it.

"I am the God of life and of death. In Attika I am the Flower God, and the Athenians sacrifice to me that their crops may be good. I am the God of wine and of fire, of water and of gold. I am the God of trees. I am the Hunter, I am the Man-Slayer, and Eater of Raw Flesh. Yet I am the

God of poetry and dancing, and it was I who discovered the vine, the apple, the fig, and all fruit trees; and who first yoked the ox to the plough. I am the God of madness and possession; I am the Twice-Born—the Slayer and the Slain. I am divine and I am human; I have gone down into hell and have risen again from the dead. I am the God of flowing milk and honey; I am the Worshipper and the Worshipped. I bring in my train the Oreads and Dryads, the Satyrs and Sileni; I bring the incense of the East and the burning sun of Asia. Woe to him who rejects me or makes mock of me, for the mother will seize upon her own son and tear him limb from limb. I am the youngest of the Gods, the son of Zeus and Semele. My mother bound her lover by an oath that he would show himself to her in his true form, and her wish was granted. But her body was consumed in the divine fire, because she might not look upon that glory and survive. Me he plucked living into safety, sewing me up within his own thigh. And for the same reason—because he feared the jealousy of Hera—when I was for the second time born, he hid me in a cave on Mount Nysa. A stream of water glides through the hollow cave, and the floor is soft with ferns; and this was my nursery, and here I passed my childhood, sleeping in a winnowing fan, watched over by the Nymphs. Yet even here my enemies found me, and to escape them I fled into the sea. Then I determined to seek out in the Kingdom of the Dead the mother I had never known. The way lies through the bottomless Alkyonian Lake in the dismal region of Lerna. I came to it from Argos, between Mount Pontinos and the sea, and crossed the flat swampy ground to the lonely pool. Its stagnant glassy surface was like a black mirror surrounded by shivering reeds and grasses; a tall poplar had grown up by the shore. The wind rustled

through the thin reeds and shook the poplar leaves; the last light was in the sky, as I, solitary and naked, stood on the gloomy bank. Something moved below the surface of the water: something raised a flat monstrous head, with white sightless eyes, before sinking back again into the unknown depths. I was afraid, yet I plunged into the pool, letting it swallow me as I dropped down through it like a stone. In the country of the dead, in the dim twilight, the dry bloodless souls flocked round me, twittering like bats, but I beat them off with my staff and called my mother's name. I saw her ghost approaching, but Hades would not give her back to me—not till I had promised to send him in return what I loved best on earth. I promised, and took my mother's hand, and led her from that desolate place, and found a home for her in heaven. And to Hades I sent in fulfilment of my word a myrtle tree, which alone, of all earthly trees or plants, grows now within his kingdom.”

The voice ceased, and Demophon once more awakened to his surroundings. He was standing beside Dion—the Dion he knew—the boy of the rocks—whose hand rested lightly on his shoulder with the careless familiar touch of boyish friendliness. The wind was in his ears, and the brown square sails were filled. He heard a faint far singing that might have been the voices of the sirens swimming in their violet caves. A troop of dolphins escorted them.

And the ship flew onward, breaking the blue water into two snowy lines of foam, but keeping always on an even keel.

“Where are we going?” Demophon asked.

“To Euboea. There I shall leave you, for I am going to Naxos.”

Demophon suddenly felt that the speed of the ship had increased enormously, and that its smooth level flight was more like the flight of a swallow than of a boat. Rapidly the land drew nearer, but when they were within a mile perhaps of the coast, where the waves were breaking on a narrow stony beach, the boat slowed down and finally stood still.

“We are near enough,” said Dion, in a voice Demophon hardly heard, for all at once he had grown strangely drowsy. “I will lower you into the water; the dolphins will carry you ashore.”

It was as if he had lost all power of movement and were indeed dreaming. For somehow the boat was no longer there, nor Dion, and yet he was still floating across the water. The splashing of the waves grew closer and closer, and he knew if he could but open his eyes that he must be very near the land. The floating ceased, the waves were pounding all about him, and he found himself on his hands and knees in quite shallow water, through which he crawled out on to a bank of sand above the high-tide mark. Trying to stand up, he found himself reeling like a drunken man, so he lay down where he was, in the purple shadow cast by a clump of bushes.

CHAPTER VIII

Glaukos

As Demophon sat up and rubbed his eyes he had a feeling that a long time must have elapsed since he had lain down under these straggling myrtle bushes.

He stared about him. So this was Euboea! And he had no clothes. Not that it mattered much: even the loss of his sandals did not trouble him, for he was well used to running about barefoot. The only thing he might really need was a hat.

The bank on which he sat making these reflections was perhaps a stone's throw from the water's edge, and when he got up his feet sank ankle deep in the warm powdery sand. He stretched himself and turned round to look at the country inland. Just here, at all events, it was a barren marshy country, thickly grown with sedge-grass, reeds, and osiers, amid which a solitary goat was feeding. But the goat was a sign of human proximity, even if she had strayed, as seemed likely, from her proper pastures.

Demophon approached her with coaxing words that concealed the purpose in his heart. He gathered a handful of fresh young willow leaves and held them out as a peace offering. The goat eyed her wooer with a coldly suspicious glance; but the spot she had found was such an oasis of tender greenery that she could not bear to leave it—not even when Demophon slid down beneath her and proceeded to take a good deal more than he had given. The milk, after all, was nothing to her, and the crisp sweet willow shoots were

much, so a perfect harmony reigned while the double meal was in progress.

Demophon arose feeling more comfortable. He attempted to stroke the goat's shaggy neck, but received a sharp rap on the knuckles for his pains. So he left the fickle creature there and ran on down to the beach to hunt for shell-fish.

When he could eat no more he considered what he should do next. He had wandered across the shingle as far as one of the horns of the bay's crescent, where the rocks formed a causeway which jutted far out into the water, like the backbone of some fantastic monster whose skeleton had been uncovered by the tide. One would have thought that for the present he might have had enough of the sea, yet he clambered along these slippery rocks with their glistening weedy pools, and to the extreme end of them, where the water was deep and green. Here he stood, his feet planted firmly on a dark slab, against which the swell washed with a sucking, reluctant sound. His body had the tint of sun-warmed ivory. Motionless he stood, watching a boat he thought must be a fishing boat. It appeared to be skirting the island shore, and he wondered if it were making for the mainland, for that was where he too must go: though whether to turn north, south, east, or west, he had no idea....

He had ceased to watch the fishing boat; he was looking down into the water. Or at least he had been a moment ago, for now he was looking straight into two large round blue eyes which were rising slowly, slowly towards him. With a start he awoke out of his daydream.... And that was not seaweed at all, that green oozy tangle; it was hair. Hastily he stepped back on to the higher rocks: in fact, only just in time, if this monster had purposed to seize him.

But was it a monster? Was it not a man? Now the entire head had emerged above the surface, and, to Demophon's alarm, was being followed by huge bluish arms and shoulders. He was on the point of taking to his heels when a swirling commotion in the water showed him there was no danger. This extraordinary person could not run after him. His upper parts might be those of a man—an enormous, unwieldy man—but lower down he was certainly a fish. And at any rate he possessed the most innocent face imaginable: the expression in his round blue eyes was exactly that of a surprised kitten.

Still, there was no denying he was very ugly; his hair and beard being dark green, his skin blue, his nose broad and flat, his mouth spreading from ear to ear, while on his forehead, just peeping through the thick green trailing hair, were two budding horns.

He looked at Demophon, and Demophon looked at him. It was a long look, conveying on the boy's side a somewhat distrustful curiosity, and on the monster's an extreme friendliness and simplicity. The sea-man shook the water from his hair, and at the same time a few shells and a small silver fish, which had managed to get itself entangled, but which now darted away. He opened his large mouth and there issued from it a voice deep and rumbling, but not harsh, because it had something of the broken wave-music in it; and perhaps he was making it soft on purpose. "Are you a human boy?" he asked.

There was a note of anxiety in the question which sounded strange to Demophon; but he answered "Yes," and added, "Haven't you seen one before?"

The blue eyes suddenly cleared and it was evident that the monster was relieved. “Yes, oh yes; it isn’t that; please don’t be offended. It is only—— Well, one never knows; and it makes it so much easier and pleasanter when one does know——easier to talk, I mean.”

Demophon considered this and found it reasonable enough. “But what did you think I was?” he said. “I mean at first. What did you think I might be, if I wasn’t a boy?”

“If you weren’t a boy?... What did I think?... Well, you see, I am now a kind of God myself; and sometimes the real Gods come here—and—it is all rather new to me: I haven’t had much experience. But I am glad you are what you say you are.”

“I am a real boy—Demophon.”

“Yes, yes; I don’t doubt you—not for a moment.... I ought to have known without asking.... Only, as I say, how *is* one to know? You might have been Eros, or you might have been Hermes. They both go about like young boys—and Dionysos too, now and then. I was a boy once myself, though you would hardly believe it. I mean a real boy—like you. Mother used to say I was the stupidest that was ever born, but I don’t see how she could tell that. Still, she said it—often and often. And she said there was a kind of animal that was stupider. I forget what its name was, but it was so stupid that it ate its own feet. When I say feet, I mean that it ate some part of itself; perhaps it was its tail. At any rate, it was stupider than me. Of course, I don’t call that a proper proof; for it might only have been absent-minded, like a philosopher when he falls down a well—a thing that is constantly happening.”

“But you said you were a God,” Demophon interrupted. “If that is so, I don’t see how you can ever have been a boy....”

And, you know, you don't *look* as if you had."

"I was—really—a boy. I was Glaukos. You'd be surprised. Aren't you surprised?"

"I am, a little," Demophon confessed.

"I knew you would be. I was a fisherboy, too—nothing very grand—and when I grew older I became a fisher-*man*. I lived with mother in a hut on the shore."

Glaukos waited, as if for Demophon to make a remark; but when none was forthcoming he broke the pause himself. "Why don't you ask me *where* we lived?" he said, with suppressed eagerness.

"Because you've just told me," Demophon replied. "You said you lived in a hut on the sea shore."

"Yes, but you don't know what shore. You ought to ask about that. You ought to ask where the hut was. It might have been in lots of places."

"Where was it?" asked Demophon wonderingly.

"It was in Euboea, where you be a'now." And Glaukos broke into a prolonged chuckle which presently became a roar of laughter that might have been heard half a mile away.

"It was a joke," he explained. "I don't think perhaps you saw it. When you said, 'Where was it?' I said——"

"Yes, yes," Demophon interposed hurriedly, for Glaukos looked as if he might be going to laugh again. "It was a very good joke: I saw it quite plainly."

Glaukos climbed half out on to the rocks, though he still kept his tail in the water. "Shall I tell you my story?" he asked.

"I should like to hear it very much," Demophon returned politely.

Glaukos scratched his ears, smiled, and then sighed. “It is an interesting story. I have told it often. In fact I used to tell it to Scylla every summer evening. There was a pool where she used to come to sit.... But now she avoids it,” he added with sudden indignation. “And she runs away the moment she catches sight of me.”

“Perhaps you told her the story too often,” Demophon could not help suggesting.

“I didn’t. I liked telling it.”

“Yes, but——” He did not finish what he had been going to say, however. Instead, he went on soothingly, “Tell it to me, Glaukos. I won’t avoid you.”

“You *are* avoiding me,” Glaukos answered, only half mollified. “You’ve moved over to the other side of the rocks—as far away as you can possibly get.”

Demophon had indeed retreated a few steps when the enormous bulk of Glaukos had come slithering across the edge; but on this he drew a little nearer. “You look so wet,” he explained in apology.

“I must keep wet,” Glaukos replied. “I can’t help it. As soon as the sun begins to dry me *now* I shall have to get back into the water. But I’ll take you with me. There’s a wreck quite near, and skeletons—just the kind of thing you’d love.”

“You promised to tell me your story,” Demophon reminded him.

“Yes—yes—so I did.” And Glaukos brightened up. “I don’t think I had even begun it, had I? Well, when I was a fisherman, one evening I had taken in my nets and was getting ready to go home. I had had a good catch, too, and I spread all the fishes, big and little, out on the grass to count

them. I'm not very good at counting—not so good at it as you are, I expect—and when I was beginning for the third or fourth time, and had got as far as nine—— When I say nine, I mean ten or eleven, or some high number, for of course I can't be quite sure after all these years what it was.”

“Of course not,” Demophon agreed.

“Well then, when I had got as far as nine (let us say) for the third or fourth time, I noticed that the fish were nibbling the grass as hard as they could, and were growing uncommonly lively too, though they had been all out of breath and gasping and trembling when I had tumbled them from the net. I was so astonished at the way they were behaving that I could do nothing to stop them when they began to wriggle back to the sea; and—will you believe it—every one of those fishes escaped! Yes, every single one of them. With a flip and flap of their tails, off they went, plop, plop, plop, down into the water, one after the other, under my very nose! ‘What will mother say about this?’ I thought; and for a good half-hour I stood there staring after them. But staring didn't bring them back again, and here would poor mother be without a fish for her supper, and nothing to comfort her except to tell me about the animal that ate its own feet. Was it magic? Was it the work of a witch who wanted to play me a trick? Or were these particular fishes the pets of some Sea-God? I thought of all those possibilities before I remembered the grass, how they had nibbled it, a thing I had never seen a fish to do before. ‘Aha!’ I chuckled, ‘that explains the mystery. There is something mighty queer about this grass.’ And I gaped at it for a good while, though I must confess it looked very ordinary. Just to try it, I plucked a blade and swallowed it. Immediately afterwards, I knew I had done a foolish thing.

But the grass was down my gullet beyond recall, and already I had begun to feel a terrible longing for the sea. Actually, I wanted to follow those fishes right into the water. ‘No, no,’ I said. ‘This will never do. Mother will be coming to look for you. You get along home, Glaukos, and tell her just what has happened.’ But there was no use talking, for by the time I had reached the word ‘home’ I was up to my neck in the water. And I will say this, the Sea-Gods were most kind. They did their best; especially Tethys, who had often watched me when I was out in my boat, and had taken quite a fancy to me. She swam round and round me, singing a magic song. Nine times she repeated it, and then she bathed my body in the waters of a hundred streams. I can remember as much as that, but I can’t remember any more. I think I must have fainted, for when I came to myself I was as I am now. Perhaps you wouldn’t call it coming to myself; for my hair and beard were green, my flesh was blue, all my features were different, and my legs were gone. And I had grown so big, too. The first time Scylla saw me she screamed, and though afterwards she got used to me, mother never did. Mother wouldn’t believe a word I told her; she wouldn’t believe I was Glaukos at all; and she accused me of having drowned her boy, and very likely eaten him into the bargain.”

“That was unfortunate,” Demophon sympathised, while Glaukos wiped away a tear or two. “Still, you know, it must have been a rather hard story to believe.... And as for Scylla, if she was just an ordinary girl, I don’t quite see how she *could* have married you. Where would you have lived?”

“In the water,” Glaukos answered sulkily. “She was the daughter of a nymph herself, if it comes to that.... And I have a splendid house. It is covered with shells and oyster-pearls

and crystals and seaweeds, and the strangest creatures come swimming up to look in at the windows. Scylla would have liked it. Everything would have been so new to her, and she was always one to like what was new.”

“I expect she thought she might turn blue and green, perhaps, or maybe get a fish’s tail.”

“But they are nice colours, don’t you think?” Glaukos asked a little doubtfully.

“Very nice. When I saw your hair first, I thought it was a lovely bit of seaweed.”

Glaukos smiled. “Yes, it is rather lovely,” he said. “So is my tail. You should see the spray I can make with it!”

“Where does this magic grass grow?” asked Demophon.

“Just there, at the end of the rocks: you must have walked over it.... But, my goodness, how the time does fly! I’m afraid I’ll have to be getting back home. Did you hear a shell blowing by any chance?”

“No: and you’re not half dry yet.”

“I am—a great deal too dry. And this sun is very bad for me.” Glaukos seemed all at once to have developed an unexpected fussiness. “You don’t understand, but I really must take a dip for a minute, and I’m sure I heard the lunch shell.” He slid back into the water with a heavy splash, and it was several minutes before his green head reappeared.

“I feel much better now. Come in. Come in,” he cried, holding out his arms.

Demophon shook his head.

“Why won’t you? It’s quite warm, and you can ride on my back.”

“I don’t want to, thank you.”

But at these words the vast form began to float slowly away, and he knew that the sensitive Glaukos was offended.

“Glaukos! Glaukos!” he called.

“What is it? You are an unkind, naughty boy. You don’t know how lonely I am, with nobody but dolphins to play with.”

“But I can’t come. I am looking for some one. Tell me, Glaukos, where I shall find Hermes? You say you have seen him.”

“I said nothing of the sort—and it is better not to look for people. When you do find them, they don’t want you. Scylla is lost because I loved her; and you, though you pretend to be friends, are really only thinking of how you can get away. It is always like that.”

“But can’t you help me even a little, Glaukos?”

“Why should I help you? You don’t like me. Why don’t you ask some wise man who knows everything?”

“I do like you, Glaukos. I like you very much. Tell me where I shall find such a man. Dear Glaukos, don’t be cross with me. I would come and see your house, and the wrecked ship, and the skeletons, if I had time. Glaukos, Glaukos, listen....”

But Glaukos had vanished under the waves, and though Demophon called his name again and again, he did not return.

CHAPTER IX

The Wrecker

HE loitered about for a while, gathering a further supply of shell-fish, though he was obliged to eat them raw and they made him very thirsty. The goat, too, was gone, so there would be no more milk.

It was past noon. The rocks and mountains glittered in the hot sunshine with an unnatural lustre, and this island of fantasy might well, he thought, be the home of magic. It had a beauty, but that beauty bore no resemblance to the deep leafy beauty he loved best: the colours had the hard polished sheen of precious gems and metals—turquoise and amethyst, emerald and gold. Here must be the pool where Scylla used to come, while her uncouth lover lurked under the shadow of the rocks. And this green patch was the enchanted grass. Before leaving he plaited a rope out of its coarse stringy blades and tied it round his neck.

From this spot, zigzagging inland across the marsh towards distant hills, was a cattle track. It led very likely to a farmstead of some kind, yet Demophon thought it wiser to keep by the sea. And he walked on, mile after mile, through the glowing afternoon, meeting nobody but a solitary shepherd with whom he rested for a few minutes, and who gave him half a loaf of barley bread out of his srip.

For some time past the ground had been gradually ascending, and now he was considerably above the sea level, on the top of a long line of cliffs, which stretched on and on, like a high ruined wall of rough gray stones, as far as his sight could reach. These cliffs were not precipitous; at any

point he could have clambered down to the narrow strip of lace-like foam where the waves broke almost at their base; and the sound of the waves kept him company, weaving a delicate music through his thoughts, which were pleasant thoughts, such as hover on the verge of dreamland, and occasionally wing their way across the border.

His dreamland, like that of most boys who dream at all, was a happy and lovely place. Its lights and shadows, its clouds and pools, were reflected in Demophon's countenance as he walked. He had a feeling that an invisible companion was keeping pace beside him, whispering in his ear, asking him questions. Suppose this whole world of sea and rocks and heather were only a reflection of another, more perfect world? It might be that the great blue dome arching above him was a kind of lake, and that he was walking at the bottom of the lake, amid the coloured images mirrored in its depths. Suppose that it was out of the world above the lake, the real world, not this world of images, that Dion had come, and Deo, and Hermes, and that when he had lost them it was only because they had passed back into it again, leaving him still a prisoner among shadows? What *was* reality? What were its floating boundaries, and out of what world had Dion's panthers appeared? How had they come and gone, leaving no trace behind them? What happened to the whiteness of the snowflake drifting down from the gray winter clouds and disappearing in mid-air? Demophon stamped upon the ground, and it was solid; but at the same time he knew he had only to sleep and dream, and straightway those solid rocks would dissolve into other shapes, another country. It was in this other country that he still met his woodboy. Perhaps, had he never visited it, he would by now have forgotten the past. At least, he would have thought of it all differently, for had it

not been for these later meetings his first childish love could have grown no deeper. And it *had* grown deeper: his woodboy had not abandoned him: he was very close to him now. Demophon wanted him to be closer still—he wanted to see him face to face.... Towards evening he reached a solitary house, which stood, bare and dark, in the midst of a small garden.

Now this house surprised him, because it was built in a spot where one would have expected nobody but a hermit to choose to dwell. There was nothing here but the rocks and the sea—broken, jagged rocks, and a restless, foaming sea—and the soil was so poor, so sandy and stony, that only the hardiest plants could grow in it. He looked at it, and looked at it again. He was tired, and ready for food and sleep; but also he was becoming more cautious, so he sat down where he was hidden by a hedge of gray spiky bushes, and waited. He had a mind to learn something of the inmates of this black wooden house before he approached any nearer, yet he waited for a long time and still nobody appeared. The last light faded; the white moon rose; he would have taken the cabin to be empty and abandoned were it not that he had seen a thread of smoke issuing from it. Somebody, therefore, must live there. And in fact, hardly had he set foot on the rough path, preparatory to making a closer inspection, when the door opened and an old man advanced, peering into the moonlight, his figure framed by the darkness behind him. He was a queer old man—queer as the house he lived in—tall and thin, with a pale straggling beard and long loose white hair. He spied his visitor at once, and called out in a high shrill reedy voice, “Come in. Come in.”

Demophon drew nearer, but slowly, and with several pauses, for this old man was not entirely reassuring. Though so old, he seemed vigorous and active. He stooped a little, but he had a quick, darting glance that rested nowhere; and his eyes were bright as a bird's under their white bushy brows.

Inside the house all was obscure. The fire on the hearth had sunk low, and Demophon could distinguish nothing till the old man lit a lamp, and then through the smoky atmosphere he perceived that the entire structure consisted of this one large room, whose roof and whose walls were lost in shadow. The old man evidently lived alone here, without even a dog for company.... And he must have been sitting in the dark....

This last thought was disquieting. Demophon could not have said why, but as he watched the replenishing of the fire he wished that he had not entered this hut, wished that he was far away from it—supperless, tired, a wanderer in the night. “You are hungry; you must be hungry,” the old man kept repeating in his shrill and windy voice. He moved quickly here and there, darting about the room with an uncanny agility, stretching out swift and incredibly long arms. His unnatural thinness, his bright eyes, and the rapidity of his movements, made Demophon think of a spider who has not been visited for some time by flies.

Another unhappy thought!... Without turning his head, the old man went on unctuously, ingratiatingly, “I am Laomedon. You knew that, I dare say. You knew about old Laomedon, or you would not have come in search of him. He has another name—but he will tell you that later.... Little stranger, won't you tell me your own name and to what country you belong, and why you have come to me, for I think I was expecting you.”

Yet he hardly listened when Demophon gave him a brief account of his story, and he made no comment on what he heard, nor asked any questions. After he had finished preparing supper they sat down opposite each other and ate in silence, except when the old man, whose thoughts seemed busy, muttered unintelligible words to himself. But presently he said, "So you have come to live with me, little naked boy. When I first saw you in the moonlight I looked for your bow and arrows; and I said to myself, 'What can he want with Laomedon? He has made a mistake: he has come to the wrong house.' But then I saw you had no bow and no quiver.... Well, we shall have fine times together."

Demophon looked at him, and the uneasiness that had gathered in his mind deepened. "I must go in the morning," he answered. "I am on my way to Chalkis. A shepherd I met told me to go to Chalkis, and that from there I could cross to the mainland."

The old man paid no heed to these words, but rose to clear away the food; and when all was tidy he sat down again by the hearth, facing his guest.

He smiled at him with a crafty smile, but Demophon could never catch his eyes, for they flitted past him, darting here and there and everywhere, only coming to rest when they were fixed on some remote and dusky corner.

"I will teach you how to light the beacon that brings in the ships.... We will light it on stormy nights when the moon is hidden and the clouds thick overhead. We will light it on dark nights, when the winds are shrieking, when the foam is flying, when the sea is hungry—hungry and cruel and desperate as a famished beast. That is the night when the sailor longs for harbour, that is the night he makes for shelter

—any shelter—the shelter our beacon points to. And just when he believes he has reached it, just when he thinks his prayers have been answered, he sees what is really there—the sharp rocks, the jagged treacherous rocks, piercing up through the black pounding waves and the churning foam, like greedy fangs. He screams: I tell you he screams, and he is so close that we shall hear him scream. He forces the helm round madly, but it is too late, his ship comes crashing on. It shivers, and splinters, and the black water boils, and the wind howls.” A peal of wild laughter suddenly rang through the echoing room, and Demophon started to his feet.

The old man waved him back. “Sit down—sit down. We will talk of something else. What shall we talk about?... We shall hear them; the storm will carry their cries to where we stand laughing far above the black water, safe in a cave I will show you.” He leaned forward and stretching out long bony fingers touched the boy’s knees. “Do you know who I am, now?” he whispered. “Can you not guess?... I am the priest of Death.”

Demophon shrank away from him, and his stool grated on the hard earth. But the old man, as if reading his thoughts, suddenly skipped across the room and fastened the door. Then he returned to his seat by the hearth and there was a silence, which was presently broken by a long low chuckle that seemed to stop the beating of the boy’s heart, so soulless and inhuman it sounded.

Fear kept him dumb. Oh, what had tempted him to enter this house! And there was no way out except through that heavily-barred door. He glanced round like a trapped animal. There must be an opening near the roof to let out the smoke,

but he could never reach it, and even if he could, it would be too narrow for his body to pass through.

All at once the fire fell in, and an arrow of light darted upward, revealing an object before invisible, but now glittering on the wall above the old man's head. Demophon's gaze remained glued to that object. He tried to look away, but his eyes immediately returned to it. It was a knife, with a long, pointed blade—very sharp, very bright, and with a double edge that tapered gradually. Suddenly he became aware that Laomedon was watching him.

He pushed back his stool as if he found the fire too hot, but the old man took no notice. "What do you say? Won't we have fine times?" he asked.

"Yes," Demophon quavered. "Will you please show me the cave now?"

"Not to-night—not to-night," Laomedon answered softly. "It is getting late, and you are tired. You must go to bed soon and have a long sleep. That will do you good.... But on the night we light the beacon I will show it to you.... And in the morning we will go down to the edge of the sea and find them lying there—so still and so white. And we shall find other things—all lying there waiting for us. Some of them we will hide, but not all—not the dead men: those we will carry up to our cave, one by one—and lay them out in a stiff white row."

He bent forward over the fire, which shone on his silver hair and on his long restless hands; but his eyes kept glancing furtively at Demophon, and Demophon had only one clear thought—that he must do his best to conciliate this wicked old man, and keep him in good humour. Gladly now would he have been back on board the pirate ship, for he would a

thousand times rather be shut up with the worst of the pirates than in this room with Laomedon. A mysterious horror—dark, unintelligible—seemed to float in the air, like a clammy web that one might break again and again, but that still clung, with its soft threads perpetually renewed as they were spun out of that disordered brain. He had been tired and longing for sleep, but now not for the world would he have lain down or closed his eyes. And again, as if he had read his thoughts, Laomedon rose.

“I must get your bed ready.... over here by the hearth ... it will not take me long.”

Demophon turned his head this way and that, following every movement the old man made as he began to walk swiftly to and fro upon the floor, and when Laomedon passed for a moment behind him he jumped to his feet.

He stood with his back to the hearth. He would have seized the knife, but it was out of reach, and he feared to arouse Laomedon’s anger, who perhaps, after all, meant him no harm. Only, why was he so anxious for him to go to bed? Why did he not go to bed himself? Laomedon was now over in a corner of the room: he had his back turned, and was stooping above a chest, whose lid he had just raised. To reach the knife Demophon would have to mount upon the stool, and he began stealthily to move it closer to the wall. There was a slight noise, but the old man seemed too absorbed to notice it, and Demophon put one foot on the stool.... Yet he hardly knew what he should do with the knife when it was in his possession.... Laomedon was drawing something out of the chest; he had not once looked round. Demophon sprang on to the stool, but in his haste and nervousness he

overbalanced it, and stool and boy came together with a crash to the ground.

Before he could recover himself a large net had descended upon him. He screamed; he wriggled and struggled and fought with tooth and nail, but the meshes of the net enveloped him, were twisted round and round him, were drawn ever tighter, till he could move neither hand nor foot. He lay there panting, looking up into the long thin smiling face of his host. The old man moved the lamp so that it shone upon his captive: then he sat down once more by the fire. But from time to time he bent his white head and peered closer, and from time to time he stretched forth a long prying finger and poked at Demophon through the net. Whenever he did so the boy shuddered away from his touch, as if it had been that of the knife: but there was no anger in Laomedon's face; he was still smiling, and he began again to mutter into his thin floating beard, and though his eyes were wild his voice had the softness of a caress.

“A beautiful silver fish,” he crooned, “a beautiful little Sea-God is caught in the old fisherman's net.”

“You horrible old man,” cried Demophon, “let me go.”

“Perfect little body; swift feet and cunning hands; face lovely as the open sky—you have come to the old fisherman through the cool shining ways of the sea, and now you are his.... Little Poseidon, little Nereus, little watery God of Love.... You told me your name, but I have forgotten it.... And to-morrow, facing the great glorious sun and the open sea and the trackless air, you will lie upon the altar.” He bent lower. “Be still: be still! I can see your heart fluttering in your breast. You have nothing to fear. In my hands the knife is so swift that you will not even feel it; and there is nothing to

fear afterwards. If you are indeed a God death cannot touch you; and if you are a mortal you will become straightway part of the God; your spirit will be his spirit, your eyes his eyes, your breath his breath.”

But these comforting words brought no comfort to Demophon, who watched this now half-dreaming old man with an expression of intense dislike.

Laomedon put fresh fuel on the fire, stirred it, and drew closer to it, rubbing his big-knuckled hands together, nodding his white head on his breast, and sometimes shutting his eyes for several minutes. But always he opened them again, and each time his countenance would light up as if he had discovered his silver fish anew; and a strange glee would float across his face, and he would begin again to chant his unholy benedicites.

So the night wore on, till Demophon began to think the old man was never going to bed at all. At last, however, he got up, and dragging a bundle of rags from a corner, lay down on them. Almost immediately he began to snore. But his snoring was so sudden and so loud that Demophon feared he might be shamming, and for a long time made no movement. All at once he opened his eyes with a start and knew that he too must have dropped asleep. It could only have been the briefest of slumbers, because there was still a red glow half hidden in the gray ashes. The old man now lay silent as if dead.

Very cautiously Demophon rolled himself over on the hard earthen floor. Fortunately the fire had sunk so low that he was able to lie close to it, and to scatter the embers. He held the rope that was drawn round the net and round his arms over one red fragment after another, till his skin was scorched and

tiny red sparks ran along the blackened cords. Gradually the strength was charred out of them, and at last he was able to free his hands. After this it was easy enough to loosen the remaining cords and to wriggle himself out of the net.

He had accomplished it all with but little noise, but the task of getting out of the hut was still before him. He crept in the direction of the door. The firelight was too feeble to penetrate the thick darkness and he could see nothing. He thought of the knife: he might be able to stab the old man in his sleep. Only that would be horrible, and certainly he would not attempt it till everything else had failed.

He found the door and began to pull at one of the bars that held it, but it was very stiff, and he feared to use his full strength lest he should awaken Laomedon. And suddenly he heard a movement behind him—the old man was on his feet. Demophon, with an irrepressible cry, sprang back across the room. Laomedon, however, seemed not to know he was there. With two great tugs he pulled out the bolts and the door swung wide: then, leaving it open behind him, he strode out into the twilight of dawn. In a second Demophon was after him, but the old man seemed to have forgotten his existence, and as he walked with huge strides down the path towards the cliffs, he never once turned his head. Demophon watched his gaunt figure till it was out of sight: then he took the opposite direction and ran till his breath was gone, and that wicked hut far, far behind him. Not a sound reached him now, for he had been running away from the sea also, and it was as if the whole earth were empty. He was too weary to seek for any better resting-place, nor did the wide bare plain on which he found himself give promise of such, so he dropped down just where he was and slept.

CHAPTER X

The Trainer

WITHOUT knowing it he had lain down not far from a road, and the first sound to awaken him was a gay tinkling of bells, accompanied by the clop, clop, clop of iron hooves beating in unison. A car was passing, drawn by two powerful black and white horses, but the driver pulled up on catching sight of Demophon. He was a middle-aged man, thick-set and ruddy, with a broad, good-humoured, rather coarsely handsome face. He beckoned with his whip, while his horses sniffed the morning air and tossed their heads and rang their bells, making a fine show with their long tails that nearly swept the ground, their glossy coats and dark lustrous eyes. The driver beckoned again, and Demophon ran up to see what he wanted.

Apparently he wanted to satisfy his curiosity, but he seemed a genial, kind-hearted person, and when Demophon had answered his questions, offered to take him in the car. His name, he said, was Talos, and these horses he had bred and trained himself. This latter piece of information was the result of Demophon's frank praise of them, which pleased Talos, who smiled with a wide smile that included both horses and boy. "I think they cannot help but win at Thebes," he said, "though I am going to let my son drive them, and it will be his first race."

Demophon was stroking the proud yet gentle creatures, and Talos watched him closely. "What do you want me to do about this Laomedon?" he asked. "There is no road, you say, and his hut is a couple of miles off. We'd better tell the

people in the first town or village we reach, and leave the matter to them.... Do you see that stone over there—the flat one near the little bush?”

Demophon followed the direction of the pointing whip. “Yes,” he answered.

“Well—just run there and back, like a good boy, will you?”

Demophon hesitated. He looked uncertainly into the trainer’s face, for he was not quite sure whether to take his words seriously.

“I mean it,” Talos laughed. “I have a reason. I want to see how you do it.”

Demophon darted off, circled the stone, and ran back again.

“And now jump up beside me,” Talos said, “and you can tell me the rest of your adventures.”

But instead of listening, as soon as the car started he began to ask more questions. “Tell me,” he said, “have you ever entered for the boys’ foot-race?”

Demophon shook his head.

“I don’t mean at Thebes; but anywhere?”

“Sometimes we ran races at school.”

“But you have never competed in any proper race—any big race, any public race?”

“No.”

Talos nodded, and seemed pleased. He shook the reins, but he made no further remark until it occurred to him that Demophon must be hungry. With his foot he pushed a basket out from under the seat and told the boy to take what he wanted.

Demophon lost no time in obeying, for he was very hungry indeed. And as they drove along he munched his breakfast, and between the mouthfuls described his journey from the time he had left home down to his encounter with Glaukos. Here he stopped abruptly.

“What’s the matter?” Talos asked, who had been listening with an indulgent grin on his bold, good-tempered face.

Demophon’s own countenance had suddenly clouded. “It’s my magic grass,” he answered dolefully. “I must have lost it. The string must have broken when I was rolled up in the net.”

“Magic grass! Is that all?” Talos, with a flick of his long whip, picked a fly from the left-hand horse’s shoulder. “You’ll soon find plenty more.”

“No; but this was really magic,” Demophon persisted. “And I had plaited it into a string and tied it round my neck to keep it safe.”

“A talisman?”

“It was the grass that turned Glaukos into a fish.”

Talos chuckled. “Well, I don’t suppose you wanted to eat it, did you, and become a fish?”

“No, but——”

“Perhaps you thought of trying experiments on other people? You’d have given me a bit—is that it?”

“No, of course not.”

“Then I don’t think you’ve lost much. However——” He began to fumble in his breast, and produced a small box fastened to a cord. “You can have this,” he said. “It’s better than magic grass—never been known to fail.”

Demophon took the box. It was made of brown polished wood, and was about the size of a pigeon’s egg. It was

composed of two identical pieces which screwed together, and when he had unscrewed them he found inside what looked like a small dry black bulb.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Moly. I thought you would have recognised it at once! You can wear it round your neck; and from what you’ve been telling me, I don’t doubt but it will be more useful to you than it ever was to me.”

Demophon examined it with great seriousness. “Is it a charm?” he asked.

“Not exactly. At least, I don’t think that is its chief property. It is used more as an antidote against enchantments. If your friend Glaukos had swallowed a bit of it after eating that grass, for instance, it would have made him all right again in no time.”

The friend of Glaukos screwed up the box and hung it round his neck, while Talos watched him with a twinkle in his blue eyes. But presently scruples of conscience seemed to assail Demophon. “Are you sure you want to give it to me?” he said. “It is very kind of you, but I don’t think I ought to take it.” And he would have unfastened the box again had not the trainer put out his hand and prevented him.

“Keep it—keep it. You are sure to meet with a magician or a witch before long, and at my age I run less risk.”

“But why?... I don’t see what difference your age can make.”

“Don’t you?... Well—it does.... I suppose it is because the things that happen to us are usually like ourselves, so that when we begin to get old and dull only dull things happen. To tell you the truth, I don’t believe that if Pholos were to

gallop across our path now I should see him. You would see him, and the horses might, but I don't think I should. And if I went down to sit on the rocks, and Glaukos swam up to have a look at me, when I came to tell you about it afterwards, my story wouldn't sound a bit like yours. I should tell you that what with the warmth of the sun and the noise of the waves I had begun to feel drowsy, and that in the end I had had an odd kind of dream in which I had talked with a sea-monster who came up out of the water, and the foam was his beard and the seaweed his hair."

"Then, I suppose, you think *I* only dreamed it," Demophon answered, a little hurt.

"I think very likely you dream everything," said Talos amiably. "In fact, you may be dreaming now. Shall I pinch you and see what happens?"

Demophon did not answer at once, but after a long silence he said, "You must have believed in the moly, or you wouldn't have kept it for so long."

"That," said Talos, "*is* rather wonderful, for I can't imagine why I did keep it. Certainly it wasn't because I had much faith in the person who gave it to me. I think I must have kept it as a memento of him. His name was Polyidos, and he gave it to me when I was about your age and he was about mine. He had gathered it himself on Mount Kyllene, or said he had, for I shouldn't be surprised if he had really dug it up in our own garden. He wasn't one to part willingly with anything he thought very precious."

"But you say he was old, and gave it to you just the way you have given it to me," Demophon replied. "Of course, I don't mean that you are really old," he added hurriedly—"not nearly so old as my father... Was Polyidos your uncle?"

“My uncle? Polyidos?” Talos burst into a roar of laughter. “What on earth put that into your head?”

“I don’t know. I just thought he might have been. Everybody is somebody’s uncle, I suppose.”

Talos looked at him, and continued to laugh. “Well, I refuse to have Polyidos as mine.... Though,” he added, a moment or two later, “I don’t see why I should be so eager to disown him either; for I rather liked the old rascal.... No, he was just my master, my tutor—whatever you care to call it—and even that not for very long.”

“Like Pittakos,” Demophon said. “I have a master called Pittakos. He is a poet.”

“Polyidos was not a poet. He was a diviner. My father was not interested in poets, but he was the most superstitious man in all Hellas, and the important thing for Polyidos was to get a footing in our house as quickly as possible.... He must have found it easier than he ever could have hoped. Prophets, wizards, dabblers in the mysteries—all such were sure of a welcome from my father. He would tell them his dreams, and they would supply suitable interpretations. Everything that concerned us—everything that concerned me in particular—was discussed and provided for in this light, so that there were times when my whole future, as you might say, hung on an indigestion.... If I hadn’t been pretty wide awake, and able to look after myself, and if my mother hadn’t happened to detest all soothsayers, however venerable, goodness knows what would have become of me.”

“And what *did* happen?” Demophon asked, as Talos became absorbed in these reawakened memories.

The trainer had pushed back his hat from a flushed and sunburned face. He looked at Demophon half comically.

“You want to hear about my adventures with Polyidos? I don’t know that I ought to tell you. You’ll probably think there wasn’t much to choose between master and pupil, and I’ve already told you my opinion of the master.... However _____”

“You say he gave you this moly.”

“Yes, but not just then. The moly was a parting gift. If you really want the whole business we must go back to the beginning.”

Demophon settled himself to listen. He was feeling just now very contented, and a little sleepy after the hazards of his agitating night. The car rolled along leisurely through the morning sunshine. And more and more the robust and comfortable body of his companion became a cushion against which he leaned, as he listened drowsily to the queer tale of Polyidos.

“Well, as I say,” the trainer began, “it was a chance for this Polyidos—the chance of a lifetime. My father being the way he was, I mean. And Polyidos, if not all that he professed to be, had at least quick wits. In fact, he lived by them. I don’t believe that man had ever done an honest day’s work in his life....”

Talos paused. There were many breaks in his story, and each represented something which brought a slow smile to his face—something which he perhaps kept to himself, for Demophon allowed him to take his own time and his own way, being too lazy to interrupt him.

“Polyidos happened to arrive with us at a time when I had fallen sick. My father was anxious. Because I was his only child he always got anxious when there was the slightest thing the matter with me, and when he was anxious the Gods

usually sent him a dream. They did so now. My sickness had come on at bedtime, and was not at all an uncommon one. For me, at least, it presented no mystery—but then I knew all about the unripe plums with which I had gorged myself that afternoon. In spite of this, I made as much fuss as if my last hour were come, and of course never breathed a word about the plums.... So that night my father dreamed, and his dream told him I should die unless the one man able to cure me could be found. How he was to be found the dream did not make clear, though my father declared he himself would be able to recognise him by the description he would give of a certain favourite cow—a cow named Nossis....

“My bed had been brought out and made up by the hearth, and I was lying there, feeling a great deal better than I pretended to be, when next morning he told all this to Polyidos, who had arrived a few minutes earlier, a complete stranger, and in appearance the sort of person who begs his way from house to house, except that he looked better nourished than an ordinary tramp and that his face wore an expression of a kind of jovial and debased distinction. He had come in, seeking what hospitality he might find and what opportunities the Gods might send him. I could see him pricking up his ears at once, and just then my father was called from the room.

“Instantly Polyidos fixed his eyes upon me. My own eyes were staring straight at him, and I don’t know how it was exactly, but without a word spoken, without so much as a nod or a wink, our future relations were established. ‘The cow?’ he said simply, and I had just time to tell him that this brilliant creature was of three colours—white, red, and black—before my father returned, bringing my mother with him. I

pretended to be asleep, and Polyidos had fallen into a trance....

“It was this remarkable sight that met my parents’ gaze as they crossed the threshold, and stood looking at us in uncertainty. Me they did not attempt to awaken; they were unable to arouse Polyidos. My mother spoke, but he did not hear her; my father plucked him by his rather uncleanly garment, but he did not open his eyes. As I watched the whole scene through the narrowest slits between my own eyelids, I was secretly shaking with laughter—but I managed to control myself, and my father, more and more impressed by the extraordinary state of affairs, stood awe-struck and silent, hardly venturing to draw his breath.... Then Polyidos, still without opening his eyes, spoke in a strange, far-off voice, as if from another world. ‘She is a mulberry,’ he muttered uneasily. ‘I see a mulberry—unripe, ripening, and ripe—a mulberry which while it ripens changes colour, turns from white to red, and from red to black. White, red, and black.’ He sighed profoundly and awoke, gazing about him with a bewildered, lost expression, as if not knowing where he was....

“Such a bare-faced mummery, you might think, could hardly have imposed upon a child of six; and indeed it only got a most unflattering sniff from my mother; but it was more than sufficient to satisfy my father. He was amazed, and at the same time overjoyed. After this nobody would be able to deny the prophetic virtue of his dreams. Polyidos ceased to be an object of charity—the kind of wandering guest who is warmed and fed and tolerated for a few hours, and then sent about his business: he became my honoured physician; and

since, wisely, he did not attempt to doctor me, but employed only mysterious rites and incantations, I speedily recovered....

“Of course, I was amused and delighted with my own share in this dubious performance. That I had helped to make a fool of my father did not trouble me in the least. I was far more to blame, really, than Polyidos, who even now strikes me as having, to some extent at any rate, deserved his success. He had not been ten minutes in my presence; I had not once opened my lips to him; he had merely looked at me and I had looked back; and yet that had been enough—enough for him to run the risk which he certainly had taken. For, naturally, if I had betrayed him, he would have been flung out of doors there and then, neck and crop; and would very likely have been beaten into the bargain. Yet he had trusted to his insight, to his sense of character, to his amazing penetration. It was the finest performance as a diviner he was destined to give while in my company....”

Talos smiled. He had slackened the reins, and the horses took the opportunity to drop into a walk.

“But it did not deceive my mother, though she remained ignorant of my share in the matter. To all her suspicions and questions I returned a point-blank denial. Still, she was not convinced. For her I was by no means the innocent little cherub my father believed me. She had a very shrewd idea of the true origin of my illness, and after my rapid recovery at once suggested that we need detain Polyidos no longer. So accomplished a person must be in very great demand, and it would be unfair for us to take advantage of his good nature. Thus she put it, but with an extraordinary bitterness, for the truth is she had taken a violent dislike to Polyidos, not only because she suspected he had tricked us, but also because of

the slovenliness of his habits, and of his freedom of speech. She was not, however, to get rid of him so easily. Polyidos was more than a match for her. He might be gross in his appetites, but he was not gross in his intellects. While treating her with all outward deference, and even with an obsequious politeness, he at the same time did not budge an inch. On the contrary, in a long private conversation he persuaded my father that he could teach me the art of divination, and my father jumped at the chance. I, I regret to say, jumped at it also. Not that I believed any more than my mother did in Polyidos, and I had better reasons for my doubts. For that matter, anybody with eyes could have seen he was simply a lazy unscrupulous old rip—dirty in his dress and person, fond of talking, and still fonder of eating and drinking. In fact, it was for these very weaknesses I welcomed him. I knew he would not bother me so long as I left him in peace; I knew he had taken a liking to me and would be proportionately indulgent; I knew, for I had already had more than one sample of it, that his conversation could be extremely amusing when it ceased to be edifying; which happened, I may add, the instant we were left alone together. We had nothing to hide from each other: I know Polyidos and Polyidos knew me. To do him justice, if I had possessed a desire for learning I dare say he would have gratified it, for he was really learned, and though his practice was simply the pursuit of enjoyment wherever enjoyment was to be found, he had never lost his taste for intellectual pleasures. The other pleasures, unfortunately, were more easily within my comprehension, and it was not in his nature to enforce the distasteful. From time to time he would remember that his job was to make a little wizard of me, and then he would give me a lesson. But whether he really was versed in these occult

arts, or whether, as I strongly suspect, he invented what he taught me out of his own imagination and on the spur of the moment, I cannot now be sure. Nor did it matter much, since I paid scant attention to him. I was not interested in divination; I was only interested in horses and sports and games. If Polyidos could have told me who was going to win such and such a race I should have been an enthusiastic pupil; but this kind of verifiable prophecy was beneath him, and I could make nothing myself of either entrails or the flight of birds. I treated Polyidos not as a master but as a comrade. Almost at once I saw that it did not matter what I said to him, and consequently many of our conversations were of a nature to do little honour to his reputation either as a wise man or a pious. They were, in the end, the means of his downfall, for one day my mother overheard him describing to me with great gusto an adventure of his youth. She was furious, and of course, though most unjustly, laid the entire blame on him. The scene that followed was terrible. I fled at the beginning of it, but its echoes pursued me, and at the end of it Polyidos left. Yet, strangely enough, it was only now, in this hour of his disgrace, that I discovered a genuine liking for the old man. My affection was not mingled with respect; I believed Polyidos to be a thoroughgoing old scamp; but at the same time I could not help knowing that I was a thoroughgoing young one.... And he *was* amusing. I would have saved him if I could; but, since that was impossible, I did the only other thing I could think of, which was to steal a skin of wine and such provisions as I could lay hands on, and with these to follow him. He embraced me tenderly (not without first casting a cautious glance all round to see that we were unobserved); he even shed a tear as he accepted my gifts; but the offer of my continued companionship he refused

discreetly yet firmly. Immediately afterwards he remembered the wrongs he had suffered, and his indignation led to the strangest request I had ever heard. Opening his mouth wide, he asked me to spit into it. I drew back; I was even shocked. As I have said, my feeling for my master was not one of veneration; but still, there are limits—— Polyidos, however, insisted. He clasped his arms about me, and in the end I had to obey—I spat into his mouth. ‘And now,’ he sighed, ‘the art you have learned from me is lost: you will forget all I have taught you.’

“I burst out laughing; I could not help it. The arts he had really taught me I was most unlikely to forget, and those he referred to I had never known. But Polyidos regarded me with reproach. ‘Tell your father, when you go home, what you have done,’ he said, ‘and how a shrewish woman’s vile temper has robbed you of a sacred gift.’ Nor would he let me go till I had solemnly pledged myself to repeat those very words; which I did, when I reached home, with the result that my father was as angry with me as if I had deliberately thrown away a priceless treasure. He still had implicit faith in the mysterious pretensions of Polyidos, and he would not believe me when I assured him that I knew as much about divination now as I had ever known. He questioned me, and because I could remember only odds and ends of the absurd rigmarole I had been taught, and had even these odds and ends all jumbled up, he took this as proving the truth of Polyidos’s words. My mother pointed out that it proved nothing but his brazen-faced effrontery—the reference to a shrewish woman had annoyed her intensely—but her interference merely called down fresh wrath on my unlucky head. ‘You shouldn’t have spat. You should have refused to spit,’ my father kept on repeating. ‘How was I to know?’ I

screamed in self defence. ‘He didn’t tell me till afterwards.’ The whole scene was grotesque, and one which would have appealed irresistibly to Polyidos. But all I got out of it was a beating, after which I was sent supperless to bed. My mother, as I say, took my part. ‘It’s your own fault,’ she told my father. ‘You needn’t punish the innocent child for your own foolishness.’ And more I think because she was angry with him than because she sympathised with me, she brought me, in secret, a much better supper than usual. But I vowed I would have nothing more to do with prophets, and I have kept my word.”

Talos chuckled over his own story. He shook the reins and glanced sidelong at Demophon. “Now, what would you think of giving up your wanderings and coming to my house?” he suddenly proposed. “I can train a horse, and I can train a boy, when either is worth it. You have a chance of the greatest glory of all—the glory of the successful athlete. When I saw you I knew it, and in such matters at least I do not need to consult oracles. I could tell it from the way you ran to meet the car, though you were not putting out your full speed. You ran straight from your hips, with the easy, natural lope of a wolf, which means not only speed but endurance. That is why I made you run again. How would you like to be a champion—first among the boys, and then among the youths? Your name would be blazoned across Greece. You would have poems written to you; you would be remembered for ever. And I, too, should have my small share of fame for having trained you. You see, I am speaking quite frankly. I do not want to dazzle you with false hopes, but my whole life has been devoted to these things, and I can say truthfully I never yet saw material that looked to me at first sight so promising.”

Demophon flushed. The praise of Talos was very pleasant, and the thought of winning glory in the great games was very pleasant too. But another thought haunted him more closely, and the bright picture painted by Talos carried his memory back to earlier races run in the deep summer woodland, and to his first trainer. "I cannot come now, Talos," he answered. "I want to visit Sophron."

"What! Sophron of Thebes? The philosopher?" Such a reply was the last Talos had expected, and his voice expressed a half incredulous disgust.

"Yes. A shepherd told me he was a wise man; and Glaukos told me only a wise man could help me."

"But he has turned hermit. He has left the city and lives somewhere in a cave in the mountains. Whatever fame he may once have had is already half forgotten. If it had been Euphorion now, I could have understood—but Sophron!"

"Even so, I must find him."

"And if he persuades you to become his pupil? He will certainly try to do so.... But you are not serious—you cannot be serious?"

"I am serious, Talos; and why should he persuade me? I am only going to ask him a question. I shall not stay long."

"Will you promise, then, to come to me after you have talked with Sophron?"

Demophon hung his head. It seemed very ungrateful still to refuse. But it would not be more grateful to say yes and then, perhaps, be unable to keep his word. "I cannot promise that," he answered in a low voice. "I can only promise that I will not forget."

“Well, we shall have plenty of time to talk it over between this and our journey’s end,” said Talos more cheerfully. “And if you change your mind you can tell me.”

“Are you going to take me all the way, then?”

“I thought that was what you wanted—to go to the mainland.”

“Yes, it is.”

“Well then, I am going there too, though not directly to Thebes. I shall have to leave you on the road to Aulis, for there our ways part—unless you think better of it and come with me to my son’s house.”

Demophon said nothing, but Talos, as they rolled along, began to tell him stories of the great sports. His stories were chiefly about the footraces, for they were designed to fire Demophon’s imagination and ambition. The trainer’s own imagination was of a sufficiently homely quality, yet because he genuinely believed the life he was describing to be the finest in the world, and because he genuinely believed that in this boy he had discovered a treasure beyond estimation, his words had the glow and the enthusiasm of conviction.

CHAPTER XI

The Stone Serpent

NONE the less, when, two or three days later, they parted company on the road to Aulis, Demophon still had not changed his mind.

To Talos such obduracy was inexplicable. Each evening, on their journey, he had gathered together the boys of the village where they intended to put up for the night, and had improvised a gymnasium and racing ground. It had not been difficult to do, for everywhere he was well known, and the boys were eager to compete. Not one of them but would have given all he possessed for the chance which Demophon set aside so lightly. Under the grave eyes of their fathers they did their utmost to win the approval of the trainer. Talos put them through their paces; now and then he pointed out a fault, now and then he dropped a word of encouragement or praise, but the result of these competitions only confirmed his faith in his own boy. It was a genuine discovery, there could be no doubt of it, and as he watched Demophon—half angrily, but wholly in admiration—Talos racked his brains to find some means of keeping him. It went to his heart merely to think of such material being wasted, and he called on all the Gods to implant wisdom in that shapely black head, which just now seemed so woefully crowded with phantasies.

Demophon's assertion that he thought his first trainer had been Hermes, was received in indulgent silence. It was on a par with all the rest. The boy, no doubt, was odd—a little touched mentally—but that did not prevent him from being singularly pleasant in his speech and manners, and above all

it would not prevent him from becoming a glorious athlete, a kind of younger Achilles; and Talos, when he had reached this point, would call down maledictions on the unconscious and unoffending Sophron. So intent was he on winning Demophon, and so uncertain was he of success, that he lost much of his interest in his horses. That admiration of physical perfection, common to all his countrymen, in Talos amounted to a religion. He was willing to make any promise Demophon might demand; he was willing to adopt him as his own son; but promises and prayers were equally unavailing, and on the road to Aulis they parted.

Talos embraced him almost with tears. In his disappointment he told himself that the boy must be naturally hard-hearted. Had he not abandoned his home and his poor old father and mother without a qualm? It was the first time the trainer had given a thought to these worthy folk, but now he was ready to regard them as shockingly badly treated.

Demophon returned his kiss warmly enough, but his eyes were untroubled and his lips smiling. "He doesn't care," Talos repeated to himself. "He's willing to pass his whole life without once going near a racecourse; he'd rather listen to the talk of some old wind-bag like Sophron. I practically rescued him from the clutches of a murderer; I brought him all this way in my car; the very clothes he is wearing I gave him; that basket of food he is carrying I gave him; and in the end he leaves me like this!" He held the reins gathered up in his hands, but his head was turned to watch the retreating figure. "He'll never come back.... Sophron will fill his mind with all sorts of notions about the dignity of philosophy and the vulgarity of athletics. He will teach him to feed on shadows. They are all the same—all these sophists.... But perhaps he

will come back.” The trainer sighed and gave the reins a slight jerk, which was enough for the impatient horses. When Demophon looked round to wave his hand the car was gone.

He walked on in the direction Talos had told him to follow. He really felt quite as light-hearted as the trainer believed him to be. The horses had been splendid, Talos had been a kind and amusing companion, the suppers at the inns, the wrestling and jumping and racing with the other boys—all had been very jolly; yet somehow he was glad to be afoot again, a solitary rover. It was not that he did not like company; but he liked above all things freedom;—and there was much more in the world than racing and wrestling, though Talos did not appear to think so.

Demophon would have sung had the road been a lonely one, but there were carts on it, drawn by mules or oxen, and he returned the greetings the drivers gave him, though refusing all offers of a lift. In the fields he saw shepherds guarding their flocks, but he did not turn aside to speak with any one; and it was only when the sun was at its height, marking the hour of noon, that he entered a wood to eat his dinner and to rest. He followed a path through the trees, which presently led him to an open glade, sunlit and lawn-like, with a small temple standing in the midst. The temple was no more than a square of slender fluted columns surrounding an altar and itself surrounded by a motionless sea of leaves. A lizard was basking on the white marble steps; ring-doves cooed softly through the air; a spring of clear water formed a space of brighter green where it oozed over its grassy brink. And hard by the spring, at the roots of a plane-tree, was a great serpent carved out of marble, yet so

perfectly that every scale showed, and the thing seemed asleep.

Demophon gazed at it in admiration and astonishment. The carver of this image must be a very skilful artist indeed. Yet he wondered at the same time why it should be just where it was. Had it been within the temple it might have represented the tutelary spirit of this quiet spot—a spirit of the underworld, passing between the living and the dead—symbol of the renewal of life, symbol of fertility—or possibly connected with the healing art of Asklepios, or even the image of the God himself, for he knew that it was in the form of a great gray snake that Asklepios appeared to those who sought his aid.

He passed his hand over the flattened head and the smooth coils, so cold and rigid; then in the shadow of the plane-tree he sat down to eat his dinner. When he had finished he scattered his crumbs for the birds and quenched his thirst at the spring. But the serpent fascinated him and he returned to it. Once more he sat down beside it and gazed into the sunlight through the thin half-transparent leaves. How golden green they were against the dark blue sky, and how smooth and golden his own limbs looked as he stretched himself on his back among the long crimson sorrels and grasses. A very small frog, shining like polished bronze, jumped on to his body, and then another and another. At the moment of contact they felt icy cold against his hot skin, but afterwards he did not feel them, for they sat quite still. The leaves barely quivered; the ring-doves had ceased to call; the profound stillness was broken only by that low undertone of hidden life which in summer is never silent, and which is like the breathing of Earth.

Demophon lay almost as quiet as the stone serpent. The deep colours that floated before his eyes, blue and green and gold, seemed to swim and mix into each other like water mixing into water. At times he closed his eyes for a little, and again he opened them; and he was still awake, and yet somehow he heard a small voice that was very close to him and that kept on repeating, "Help me. Help me."

Who was it? Who wanted to be helped? What voice could it be, for it was not a human voice? He tried to sit up, to turn his head, to look round, but the earth spell bound him, and the voice went on calling, now louder, now fainter, now no more than a whisper in his ear. "Demophon—Demophon.... Help me, dear little Demophon."

"Where are you?" Demophon asked, but he had to think this question, for when he tried to speak no sound came. Yet the voice answered at once, "I am here, close beside you. I am so tired of lying still, and I do not know what has become of my wife and children. You will help me, won't you? and then I will love you for ever."

"But how can I help you?" Demophon thought; and this time the voice answered quite loudly, "The moly that is in your box—give me some of that."

He sat up with a start, and the tiny frogs, who now numbered more than a dozen, simultaneously jumped off his body and legs in all directions, like bathers from a diving-stage. He rubbed his eyes; he had been dreaming; but surely something had aroused him, and quite abruptly too. The woods were wrapped in the same drowsy peace as before; not a leaf was stirring; not a rustle in the grass; nothing had come or gone. There was only the memory of a voice, of two or three words; and he had lost the connection that might have

given them a meaning. All he could remember was “Help me; help me!” and then—something about moly, the moly in his box.

He turned, and as he did so his eyes fell on the stone serpent. Demophon looked at the frozen coils that wound through the grass; he looked with a closer and closer attention. For the strangest thoughts were moving behind his dark narrowed eyes. Could it be that? Could it possibly—— So many odd things had happened! At least it would do no harm to try: and he began to unscrew the small ivy-wood box. The moly was there; he shook it out into the palm of his hand, and to his fancy the dry little black root, though shrivelled and withered, looked mysteriously alive and powerful. He broke off a piece, which he placed on the serpent’s tongue, pushing it farther and farther back, for to his surprise he found there was actually a cavity in the throat, and he wondered by what means it could have been hollowed out and how far it reached. He withdrew his hand and watched the serpent with curious eyes.

Nothing happened. To be sure, there was no particular reason why anything *should* happen, except that Demophon was learning to expect the marvellous. Even Polyidos had said the moly was only an antidote against enchantment, while Talos had practically denied that it was moly at all. He sat back on his haunches with a slight start, for something *was* happening. The pale, creamy colour of the marble was changing, darkening. The darkness was spreading rapidly, like the stain of a breath on polished steel. And at the same time it was breaking up, other colours were coming out through it—a bright, wondrous, mottled pattern that grew ever softer and more luminous. There was a faint tremor as of

a long indrawn breath, a sudden swelling rippling movement from throat to tail, and then the snake lifted its head. It lifted it higher and higher, till it was on a level with Demophon's own head, and the long body waved this way and that, as if trying its cramped and stiffened muscles. The lidless eyes shone like jewels, the forked tongue spat in and out, and suddenly Demophon was held fast in coils which wound about him so closely that he could not move. He shut his eyes; he did not even utter a cry, for he knew that in another moment the coils would contract and crush out his life.

But the minutes passed, and still he felt no pain. He ventured to open his eyes; he ventured to take breath again, for the coils that wound about him had been drawn no tighter. He felt something cold in contact with his cheek, and an almost unbearable tickling, first in one ear and then in the other. It was produced by the tongue of the serpent, who was licking the inside of his ears, and no sooner was the task accomplished than the whole weight of the twining body slid from him and he felt himself free.

Demophon drew a long sigh and looked at the serpent, who was looking at him with bright unblinking eyes. "Sss—sss," it hissed softly. "You are a good boy, and I hope I didn't frighten you."

"No—at least yes—just for a minute," Demophon replied a little unsteadily.

"There was no other way," the serpent said. "You wouldn't have stood still if I hadn't held you, and I had to wash your ears before you could understand me. Now, for a day or two at any rate, you will be able to understand what every animal or bird says—not only in your dreams but when you are awake. Of course, there are some animals who don't talk, and

others who won't talk, and others again who are too lazy or stupid to talk about anything interesting—cows, for instance; to listen to a cow you would think there was nothing in the world but grass and milking-time and the beauty of their children.”

“I like cows,” said Demophon. “I am sure they are good and—kind.”

“Oh, they're kind enough,” the serpent admitted, “but, personally, I prefer intelligence. And let me tell you, laziness and stupidity are by no means always signs of good-nature. Nobody could have been lazier and stupider than the Minotaur, and he was as spiteful as a centipede. You, on the other hand, look to me quite a bright child, yet I know you are a kind one.”

“You seem to be very clever yourself,” Demophon replied, which was the most he could truthfully say, for there was a peevish tone in the serpent's voice that made him not at all sure about its temper.

“Yes, I am,” the serpent agreed, “and it was just because I was so clever that the Gods kept me lying there like a stone image all these years. You can't imagine how dull it was. I don't feel too bright even now—when I think how everybody I once knew must be dead and gone long ago.”

“But you aren't a real serpent, are you?” Demophon asked in surprise.

The serpent's voice took a sharper note. “What is the child talking about? Of course I'm real. What else could I be?”

“I thought you were a statue, and that the moly——”

“Moly, fiddlesticks! You don't seem to be such a smart little boy after all. What could moly do except bring me back

to my proper self?”

“But how did you become the—the way you were?” Demophon was almost frightened to ask the question, the serpent seemed so easily offended.

And now it reared itself up quite suddenly to its full height and gave an angry hiss. “It was most unjust! I shall maintain that till my last breath—no matter who hears me.” Its voice had risen to a scream of rage, and Demophon hastily drew back. “If anybody was to be punished it should have been that Kalchas. How was I to know he would guess what I meant?”

“But I don’t understand,” Demophon stammered, for the serpent was looking at him as if it expected him to say something. “Please don’t be cross, but you see I don’t know what it was you did do.”

“Don’t know!” the serpent repeated passionately, while its whole body trembled with agitation. “Don’t even know!... I foretold how long the siege of Troy would last—but of course a little thing like that is too unimportant to be remembered.”

“I am sure it is remembered,” Demophon hastened to say. “Only, nobody happened to tell me about it.... And I think you were treated very unfairly,” he added.

The serpent looked slightly mollified. “I foretold it,” it went on more calmly, “in such a way that no ordinary person would have understood what I meant. How was I to guess there was a soothsayer among them—this wretched Kalchas? All the Achaians were here, or at any rate most of those who afterwards became famous—for their ships were gathered in Aulis harbour. Agamemnon was Field-marshal, and Achilles, who was then fifteen years old, was Admiral of the Fleet.”

Demophon gasped. “You don’t mean to say——! Why, I’m nearly fifteen myself!”

“Yes, but you are rather childish for your age,” said the serpent a little unkindly. “Achilles was a great deal more advanced. He even had a son—Neoptolemos—though he had not yet seen him, because the child was born after he had set out for Troy. That, however, has no bearing on the matter we are discussing. As I say, the Achaians were here, sacrificing to the Gods, when I slipped out from beneath the altar and climbed a tree which had a sparrow’s nest in it. There were eight young birds in the nest, and the mother made nine. So I swallowed them all, one after the other, and this Kalchas immediately screamed out that the siege would last for nine years, but that in the tenth Troy would come toppling down. Can you imagine such a busybody! It was he who told the secret; it was he who ought to have been punished; but he wasn’t—it was I. No sooner had the words passed his lips than I felt a numbness grip my whole body. It was a dreadful feeling—not exactly painful, but in a way almost worse. I tried to cling on to the tree, but it was no use, I fell to the ground, and had barely strength to drag myself a yard or two across the grass before I became as you found me.... There I have lain for I don’t know how many years.” Two large round tears, whether of sorrow or of anger, dropped from the serpent’s shining eyes. They lay there sparkling on the grass, and presently Demophon picked them up, for they had grown solid, as if frozen.

“Yes, you may keep them,” said the serpent. “They are worth quite a lot—diamonds.... I lay there so long that I began to mark the passing of time not by the rising and setting of the sun but by the changing colours of the leaves.

Autumn after autumn the dead leaves came fluttering down over me till I was buried in them, and spring after spring they were brushed away like rustling ghosts, and I saw the world grown green again.”

“Perhaps it wasn’t quite so long as you think,” Demophon suggested consolingly. “Of course, it must have *seemed* very long——”

“I tell you it *was*,” cried the serpent angrily. “It was longer—much longer.”

“But your children may still be alive.”

“Alive!” the serpent almost shrieked. “When do you think it all happened? I never heard such nonsense. I don’t expect even my great grandchildren are alive.”

Demophon saw that he was only making matters worse, so he kept silent, and presently the serpent went on more quietly, “I’m sorry for getting excited, but really, you know, your remarks would try most people’s patience. They’re well meant, no doubt, but when one has been patient as long as I have, it’s a relief even to be able to lose one’s temper. We serpents have always been treated badly. One would think that the earth wasn’t as much ours as yours. And we have been wickedly slandered into the bargain. There was my own nephew Sosipolis, who went to help the Eleans when they were at war with Arkadia. He went in the likeness of a young boy like you, and they placed him at the head of their army. Then he changed himself back into a snake, and the Arkadians took to their heels, simply tumbling over each other in their eagerness to run away.... But what is the use of talking of these things; everybody knows we’ve met with nothing but ingratitude. Why, I dare say, if you hadn’t been a most exceptional little boy, you never would have tried to

bring me back to life.... But we've gossiped long enough: I must take some exercise and find out what is going on in the world."

And with these words it glided away into the undergrowth before Demophon had time to open his mouth. A moment later, however, the broad flattened head flashed out once more into the sunshine, and swayed to and fro, poised above the low bushes.

"Sleep on the ground," it hissed, and this time quite gently. "Sleep always with your ear to the ground, that the wisdom of Earth may pass into your dreams. She is the mother of us all, and will tell you all you need to know.... And remember that when you are in trouble you can count on the whole tribe of serpents—if they can help you. I will pass the word. You will be as one of ourselves. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Demophon, but he did not know whether the serpent heard him, it was gone so quickly. And the minute it was gone he of course thought of the questions he might have asked it. He wished these creatures were less abrupt and unexpected in their actions and words. They gave him no time to collect his ideas. Pholos, Glaukos, and now the serpent—they had all abandoned him just when he had wanted them to stay. He hoped Sophron would prove less elusive; but Sophron, though a philosopher, was after all only a man, and he very much doubted now if a man, even the wisest man, would be able to give him the kind of help he needed.

CHAPTER XII

Thebes

As he drew near the city he kept a sharp look-out for Talos, though he did not know when nor by what route the trainer would arrive. The road wound through cultivated fields and a flat, well-watered land. The air was thick with the dust of traffic, and behind him, and in front and on each side of him, was a noisy cheerful throng of holiday-makers. Already, beyond the wide plain with its two rivers, he could see the walls and towers of the town—the town of seven gates—the oldest town in Greece—built by King Ogyges before the great flood; already they were approaching the tombs, which stood with their stone carvings on either side of the road. And the crowd—laughing, grumbling, pushing, jesting—carried him along; children darting under the mules' heads, women chattering, drivers cursing, beggars raising their whine, blind men tapping with their sticks, now and then the yelping of a dog.

“Those be makers of magic,” whispered a countryman in Demophon's ear. He was pacing beside a small donkey and he pointed to a troupe of four persons, a man, a youth, and two boys of nine or ten, all very dark-skinned, the man clothed in a long saffron-coloured robe, the children naked. “Africans,” he went on. “We shall see them later swallowing fire and juggling with knives, and the boys, perhaps, telling a fortune to the foolish.”

“Then they are not really magicians?” said Demophon, dropping into step.

“Would a true magician pass round the begging-bowl? But see! here comes one who has no need to beg.”

The crowd had parted to make way for a man who rode slowly forward on a rough-haired pony of the sturdy mountain breed. He was not alone, but the half-dozen youths who accompanied him kept a few paces behind—like a bodyguard, except that they were talking gaily. The Master neither smiled nor spoke, nor looked to right nor left. He was tall, and the pony on which he sat made him look taller than he actually was. But it did not make him look ridiculous, as it might well have done had his appearance been less impressive. He had reached but not passed middle-age; and his features, somewhat Asiatic in type, were of an ascetic refinement. He wore a cloak white as snow and fastened at the shoulder with a splendid jewelled clasp; his hair and beard were perfumed; and he rode on through the crowd as if lost in meditation.

“It is Euphorion,” said the donkey-driver, in a reverential undertone. “And those others are his disciples.”

Demophon looked after them. “What Euphorion?” he asked. “Euphorion of Ephesos?”

“The same: the greatest of all philosophers. His wisdom was acquired from the Gods themselves, with whom he has often spoken.”

“Or says he has,” growled a harsh voice behind them. “What is to prevent me or anybody else from making a similar claim?”

Demophon turned and gazed into the small close-set eyes of a sour-faced person, whose hair was matted with dust and sweat, who carried a thick staff, and who walked with a limp.

“What might prevent you, my friend,” answered the donkey-driver, “is your appearance.”

There was a laugh from those within earshot, but the lame man was not silenced. “The wise do not come with visions of other worlds,” he answered, scowling at the circle of grinning faces. “Nor with tales of past lives that none can verify, nor oracular sayings that may be twisted to mean anything. They leave such stuff to the poets.”

“It is not Euphorion but Sophron whom I seek,” said Demophon to the donkey-driver. “Will he, too, be in Thebes?”

“Sophron? No. He despises the city; he despises the games; he despises everything other men venerate. Here you have an example of the teaching of Sophron—in our friend here, who sneers at poetry, and speaks contemptuously of oracles and of the Gods.” And the donkey-driver shrugged a shoulder to indicate the decrier of Euphorion, who was pressing so closely on their heels that Demophon could feel his warm breath blowing on his cheek.

“I did not speak contemptuously of the Gods,” the harsh voice ground out once more. “I spoke of a person who is as much a man as you or I, but yet would like us to believe him different. The boy, if he would learn philosophy, is right to choose Sophron, who at least is honest.”

“No doubt he would be wiser still to turn to one even now treading in his shadow,” jeered the donkey-driver. “Tell him when you last spoke with Euphorion—or with Sophron either.”

“I have spoken with Sophron more than once,” the lame man replied.

“Well, he will not find Sophron in Thebes. He is late by some thirty years.”

“Nor will he find Euphorion, unless he is the son of a rich man, which I doubt, or he would not be alone and afoot among all this rabble.”

“Rabble yourself!” cried a woman, whom in his eagerness he had elbowed out of the way. “Who are you, to insult decent people and push them about—with your crooked leg and your filthy tunic and your face that would send a child screaming to his nurse?”

The lame man spat on the ground. “I am free, at any rate,” he retorted bitterly; “not a slave such as half of those I see around me. And if there is dust on my tunic, the tunic itself is not one I stole from my master when he was drunk. I am a citizen of Tanagra, a potter, and if this boy likes to come with me I will teach him my trade when I return.”

“Return whither?” asked the donkey-driver scornfully.

“To Tanagra. Have you anything to say against the town or the plan?”

“Much: but it shall be in the boy’s ears, not yours.”

“Yet possibly I may have something for *your* ears,” the lame man threatened, drawing now level with them, in spite of the screams of the woman whom he had again thrust to one side.

He grasped his stick menacingly, but the donkey-driver looked him up and down unmoved, while Demophon took the opportunity to slip away. Passing nimbly through the crowd, he soon left these quarrelsome persons behind him, though their voices followed him, and the sound of a scuffle, in which the woman’s shrill cries were mingled. It was

strange, he reflected, how everybody he spoke to seemed immediately to want to take possession of him, quite regardless of any plans he might have of his own.

He entered Thebes by the Proitidian Gate, and followed the stream of traffic towards the heart of the town. Here the streets were narrow, and where there was an open space every available inch was occupied by tents pitched for the accommodation of the visitors, who were flocking in from all quarters, so that the market-place resembled a gigantic fair. Demophon mingled with the motley gathering—flute-players and priests, mountebanks and respectable citizens, vendors of sweetmeats, Persians in their tall caps and long sleeves, serpent-charmers and healers of the sick, children naked or in the scantiest of clothing, and women muffled up to the eyes and wearing purple shoes. He stared at the scented transparent silks and finery; he read the verses hung up on the doors of courtesans by love-sick youths; and everywhere about him was the droning and chatter of strange tongues.

An old woman with a face dry and brown and wrinkled as a withered pomegranate, who had watched him moving idly from spot to spot, standing before the shops, or peeping through the circles gathered around quacks and jugglers, suddenly approached him and touched him on the shoulder. He drew back quickly, but her fleshless fingers, curved like the claws of a bird, closed round his wrist, and drew him apart from the crowd, while she began a rapid tale of how his fortune might be made. She herself would make it if only he would trust her. There was no one like her in all Greece for that. The boys and girls whom she taught to dance were let out to the rich for feasts and received marvellous gifts. And the life was so easy and gay and pleasant. She treated them

all as if they were her own children, not one had ever tried to leave her.

Demophon shook her off, but as she continued to dog his footsteps, he ran down a side street to avoid her. It led him farther and farther from the market-place, till gradually the noise and tumult behind him sank to a faint murmur, and at last completely died away.

Turning a corner, he found himself among the gardens on the outskirts of the town. He kept close to the walls, sometimes peeping outside them, and everywhere he came upon signs of the city's ancient glory, monuments to a history that was not only human, but divine. For it was here that Alkmene had given birth to Herakles, and Semele to Dionysos. He saw the dragon's well, and the field where Kadmos sowed the teeth that had sprung up as armed men. He saw the sacred hill and the temple of Ismenian Apollo, with its laurel-crowned, white-robed boy priest. He saw the Fountain of Dirke and the hill whereon the Sphinx had crouched brooding over the doomed town. He entered a temple of Herakles, and gazed on a figure of the God carved in wood by Daidalos, and fastened by a chain lest it should be tempted to wander from that place.

Hard by was a gymnasium, with an open court, and baths, and a running-ground. Demophon peeped into the covered halls which were used in wet weather, and explored the adjoining pleasure grounds, where friends met to converse and philosophers walked with their pupils. All along the paths were marble benches, but only two or three of these were now occupied, for it was an hour when the place was more or less deserted. He half expected to be asked his business or ordered away, but nobody interfered with him,

and nobody spoke to him, though one or two gave him a kindly glance as he passed.

The central avenue was shaded by two rows of dark pines, and on the last seat of all he sat down. It was so quiet that it was difficult to believe a few minutes' walk would bring him back into the noise and tumult of the city. The line of pine trees against the deep sky looked quaintly stiff and formal. At the end of the path a peacock appeared, spreading his gorgeous tail and moving towards him with delicate mincing steps. Demophon, glancing round first to see that he was unobserved, unpacked his midday meal, which this beautiful glittering creature deigned to share with him.

When he had finished he rested for a while, but people were beginning to arrive—men and boys—and presently his curiosity led him back towards the gymnasium. On his way he met a young man who carried in his hand a roll of parchment, and who smiled at him and half paused. Demophon half paused too, because it occurred to him that here, if anywhere, was the place to make inquiries about Sophron, to find out where he really lived, and what kind of reception he might hope to receive from him.

The young Theban was regarding him with an inquisitive and yet friendly look. "You want to speak to me? Tell me how I can help you. But first—let us choose a seat in the shade—there is one just over there. Kleanthes has his eyes on it, but he is fat and we shall forestall him."

The seat was only a few paces off, down a side alley, and when they had reached it the young Theban spoke again. "You are a stranger, I think? Perhaps you have come to run in the boys' race to-morrow?" He laid his roll of parchment on the stone bench beside him. "And that," he added, "is a

poem. Don't let me leave it behind me, though I'm hardly likely to do so."

Demophon felt all at once very bashful. He was conscious that he was dusty and travel-stained, a most incongruous intruder among this company and in these quiet and certainly private groves. The old woman in the market-place, he fancied, had taken him for a runaway slave; the potter, too, very likely. He kept silent, feeling all the time that this Theban must secretly be rather puzzled about him, though he was too polite to ask questions and continued to talk in the same friendly tone.

"I don't suppose you are interested in poetry: I know I wasn't at your age. And now I am ready to sacrifice half a night's sleep over a single line. It is strange—difficult to account for—something like falling in love." He laughed, and his laugh was as pleasant as his voice and his face.

"This afternoon my poem will be criticised, and when that is over I shall be in a bad temper; so now is your time if there is anything I can do for you."

"I only want to ask a question," said Demophon shyly. "Can you tell me where I shall find Sophron?"

"I can tell you where you won't find him, and that is in Thebes."

"Oh," Demophon murmured, and seeing his disappointment the poet added, "Perhaps I can tell you a little more."

"You don't know where he lives?"

"Yes, I do. He lives in a cave beneath Mount Helikon—though it is not because he worships the Muses. You must

take the road to Thespieae, and from there it is only four or five miles: anybody in the town will direct you.”

“Thank you,” said Demophon, getting up.

“But you aren’t going, surely, straight off, just like that!” his companion exclaimed, half in surprise and half in amusement.

The boy hesitated. “No. I don’t think I shall go till to-morrow morning. It would be too late now, by the time I arrived; and the cave may not be easy to find.”

“To-morrow will be the first day of the games. Don’t you want to see them?”

“I should like to see them—but I cannot wait.”

“Is there so great a hurry? Sophron, you know, will still be there—next week, next year; and you are young.” He smiled, hesitated in his turn, and Demophon, guessing his thoughts, said,—

“You would like to ask me who I am and where I come from?”

“I think you are a little brother of Hermes and that you have come out of the woods or from the stars. If you tell me that is true you will have answered all my questions.”

“It is not true. I am the son of a farmer, and I come from Eleusis.”

“In search of Sophron?” The young Theban laughed now quite frankly. “After all, in a way, that is just as wonderful as if you *had* flown down from a star.”

“Why? Why is it wonderful?” Demophon asked.

“Well—there are several reasons. One, I think, must be that your father can’t possibly have allowed it—which means that you have run away. Another is that Sophron himself is so

—so unromantic. The only fascinating thing he ever did was to hide himself in the wilderness. He is not popular. He holds the crankiest opinions—that slaves are as good as free men, that slavery itself should be abolished, that women should be given the education and freedom of men, that to expose a child is to commit murder, that most of our stories about the Gods are either intellectually or morally revolting and consequently untrue. Of course I know he is a great man, but I should have thought that just at present the pursuit of pure reason—which is all Sophron will offer you—would be hardly so attractive as, say, pirates.”

“There is nothing less attractive than pirates,” answered Demophon, in the accents of complete disillusionment.

“I only used ‘pirates’ as a symbol—the symbol of adventure. Of course it is a tremendous adventure looking for Sophron,” he added, “but isn’t there a chance of disappointment when you find him?”

“I am not *really* looking for Sophron. Not—that is—in the way you mean. I only want him to help me to find somebody else.” Demophon suddenly coloured, and his hands plucked at his tunic. “Glaukos told me that a wise man might be able to help me—a man who possessed all knowledge—even knowledge of the Gods.”

“Glaukos? I do not think I know Glaukos. Is he, too, a sophist? At any rate, I’m afraid he exaggerated. You see, I once visited Sophron myself—not so many years ago. No man has all knowledge. If he had, there would be nothing left for him to live for.... And if it is about the Gods you are curious, there is one who arrived in Thebes to-day who has often spoken with them—which is more than Sophron, to do him justice, would ever claim.”

“You mean Euphorion? I saw him.”

“Riding on the little gray stallion, and wrapped in divine contemplation, I suppose? Choosing also the busiest hour of the day and the most public road.”

“You think he is pretending, then?” said Demophon gravely.

“My dear little Hermes, I think he is a poet without the art of poetry: a poet among philosophers and a philosopher among poets.... All of which, you must remember, may mean no more than that I am vain and envious—and a proof of the vanity lies rolled up before you.”

“I do not think you are vain, and why should you envy a philosopher? You would be more likely to envy a *real* poet.”

“That sounds as if it ought to be true. On the other hand, I have envied the most improbable people—dancers and boxers and even politicians.... But now I must go and read my poem, so before I leave you, tell me whose guest you will be in Thebes.”

“I shall find a place to sleep—somewhere; and I have food.”

“Which means, I suppose, that you know no one and have nowhere to go.”

“I know Talos, the trainer—if he has arrived. And if not, I am used to sleeping in the open.”

“Now listen to me, Hermes,” said the Theban, placing a hand on Demophon’s shoulder. “You are not going to sleep in the open. The town is full of rogues and rascals of all sorts who would cut your throat as soon as look at you. When you are tired of staring at the sights, ask anybody to direct you to

the house of Kylon.” He waited a moment and then said, “Is it a promise?”

“Yes—if——”

“There must be no ‘ifs.’ I shall be going home in an hour or two, so why not come with me now and listen to my poem? It will really be best; for the town, as I say, is crowded with disreputable persons. Later we will go out amongst them if you like. There will be torchlight processions, and a great deal of noise and many varieties of bad manners. But such things are interesting—provided, always, one can escape from them. Supposing you stay with me, it is very likely that you will see and hear Euphorion, and after all the most famous sophist in Greece is at least as well worth seeing as an Ethiopian serpent-charmer or a few drunken horse-dealers. Come, or we shall be late for our lecture.”

CHAPTER XIII

The Cave of Sophron

EARLY next morning, in spite of all persuasions to stay for at least one day of the games, Demophon left Thebes. At the gate of the city he met the last stragglers coming in, but he had not travelled above a mile before he reached solitude. Kylon had put him on the straight road, so that he had nothing to do but follow it; and towards noon the little town of Thespieae came into sight. Except for a few women and children, and two or three very old men, it appeared deserted. Demophon made inquiries, and the old men shook their beards. All knew of Sophron, but none had ever been to see him; and none could give him the exact directions he required. In the end a small boy spoke up, pointing to a clump of trees, which stood out upon the plain about a mile distant. "That is the way," he piped shrilly, "past that grove and on to the hills." The old men continued to shake their heads. The child didn't know anything about it: he was merely trying to make himself important: and they looked at him reproachfully through faded, mournful eyes.

The boy ran after Demophon. "I do know," he cried. "When you reach the trees, keep just a *very* little to the left; and the cave is not on the hillside, but under it. You will see the garden; it is quite easy to find: you will not see the cave itself because it is hidden by rowan-trees. And proceed cautiously, for there are many wild beasts—lions and tigers and bears."

This final warning somewhat weakened Demophon's confidence in what had gone before. It was extremely

improbable that there were lions and tigers and bears, unless Sophron kept a menagerie; but, since he had no better plan of his own, he decided to follow his small guide's directions.

He struck out across the fields towards the spot pointed out. The open-air life of the past weeks had hardened his muscles, so that in spite of the sun-scorched miles he had already covered he felt no fatigue. He reached the grove, and found there a pool deep enough to tempt him to bathe. He had stripped, and was standing among the tufted reeds and grasses on the brink when he had a sudden premonition of danger.

Demophon knew that a God had warned him. He stood still for a minute or two, and then knelt down and gazed through the clear water, half expecting to see some silvery daughter of Nereus lurking below—waiting for him, ready to fling her white arms round him and drag him to her grot. But he saw in that tranquil glass only the trees and the rushes and the sky, and his own face bending above the surface. How dark he had grown! His skin was burned to a deep brown, and his tumbled hair fell over his forehead like the black wing of a raven.

Very cool the water appeared, and pleasant—but Demophon was too pious a boy to think of disregarding the sign he had received; and he knew now that for all its pleasantness the pool must be haunted. Its very quiet, in fact, seemed ominous; not a fish stirred, not a bubble rose. So he made his prayer to whatever deity had watched over his safety, and resumed his journey. Yet the incident had somehow altered the train of his thoughts. It had turned his mind to a grave and reverent musing. He would have liked more than anything to have met that kind God face to face, so

that he might have spoken his gratitude. Was it his own dear God, or was it Pan?—for the spot was indeed such a spot as Pan chose at noon for his concerts. Yet there had been no sound, not a whisper...

The afternoon sunshine flooded the wide plain, and as he walked through it he seemed to be walking through a kind of sea that was dancing with millions and millions of little golden sparks of light. The grasshoppers shrilled like birds: all the soft din that filled his ears came from insects: it was as if the world had been abandoned by everything else.

Sometimes, where there was a flat stone or a bare patch of sandy soil, a lizard or a snake glittered in ecstatic trance. They never moved, even when he passed close by them. And Demophon suddenly knew that he and the snakes and the lizards and the grasshoppers and the coloured butterflies and even the earth over which he walked, were one. And he knew at the same time that what united them was just this spirit which had guarded him by the pool. It was in this they all drew their breath and had their common life. It was the spirit of love—but hatred and fear were death. It was not a very clear thought doubtless; perhaps it was not even a thought at all; and yet it lit up his mind, and something else that was not his mind. His very body was lost in its happiness, so that he passed swiftly across the rough ground, as he had seen birds sliding down the air on motionless wide wings.

What was it—this something that was not his mind, that was even closer to him than his mind? It dwelt in him: it was the sadness which rose and mingled with the beauty that flowed in through his eyes from the summer fields, and through his ears from the wind and the sea: it was his longing for his lost playmate, his love for those spotted snakes, his

friendship with this tiny flying beetle that had settled on his hand. It dwelt in him; but might it not be truer to say that it *was* Demophon? His home really was, then, in those far-off islands in the West; and he was not setting out on a journey, but going back, going home. A sudden mist gathered in his eyes, and he shook his head half angrily. How foolish he was getting, and how babyish! And looking up he saw that the dark, wooded slopes of Helikon were close at hand.

On his left was a tract of cultivated soil, and above this spot was a cluster of feathery rowan-trees. Demophon's mood instantly changed, for it looked very much as if his guide had been right, after all. At the same moment a loud barking broke upon his ears, and then a human voice, at the sound of which the barking ceased. Entering the enclosure, he came face to face with a man whose foot still rested on the spade with which he had been digging. He was a man well past middle-age, not tall, but very powerfully built; and his hairy arms and chest were bare. His gray hair was rough; he had a short rough beard, a thick nose, a wrinkled and overhanging forehead, and deep-set gray eyes. An old weathered oak growing near a young willow shoot would not have made a greater contrast than this man made with the visitor who had come to see him.

The boy stood still while three large shaggy dogs sniffed at his legs, at first impartially, then with a slow wagging of heavy tails to announce that in their opinion all was well. The inspection over, they returned to their master, who was much slower to arrive at a conclusion. Under his steady gaze Demophon resolved that he should neither be the first to speak nor the first to look away. Such resolves are easy to make, they are much less easy to keep, and presently he felt

the blood mounting to his cheeks. It was now an agony to continue to gaze into Sophron's eyes, and in the end he lowered his head, abashed.

Immediately afterwards he heard a voice, deep and not unlike the growl of an approaching storm. "Food and a bath for the unknown guest. These things come first. Then may follow questions as to his name, his country, and the object of his journey."

But Demophon answered all the questions in a single breath. It was as if he feared to be turned away before he had time to finish. When he looked up Sophron was smiling, and a heavy hand descended on his shoulder, remaining there till they had reached the house.

It was not really a house—a house built by hands: it was just a large cave under the hill, which Sophron shared with several birds and quite a number of beasts. There were two owls, a hedgehog, a gander and his family, a seagull, the three dogs, two goats, a donkey, and a catamountain. To this company he was introduced and for a minute or two his welcome seemed uncertain. But in the end the seagull perched on his head, the donkey leaned over his shoulder, while the leopard purred and rubbed against his legs. And because they did not know of Demophon's encounter with the serpent they all spoke quite freely before him.

"It is a man," said the seagull.

"Not quite a man," the dogs corrected, "a boy. A boy is a young man."

"It is the same thing," argued the seagull.

"No, it isn't," brayed the donkey.

“Not at all the same,” purred the leopard, “very much nearer to us.”

“Much nearer in some ways, but still less to be trusted,” hooted the owls. “Particularly amongst eggs.”

“This one is all right,” said the leopard. “Not that I should be afraid of him even if he wasn’t, for I could tear his delicate body to pieces before he had time to cry out.”

“Such a thing to say!” the three dogs cried in indignant chorus, but the leopard only smiled and went on rubbing himself against Demophon.

“He has no feathers,” hissed the young geese, and were instantly suppressed by their mother.

“No fur,” said the leopard, “and his claws and teeth couldn’t harm a rabbit.”

“No horns,” bleated the goats.

“No beak,” yelled the seagull.

“No quills,” squeaked the hedgehog in a little voice that could scarcely be heard above the general din, though he almost burst himself in the attempt.

For the time being, in fact, conversation between Sophron and his guest was rather superfluous, since not one word of it was audible; but when the first clamour had quieted down they were able to exchange a remark or two. And when Demophon had bathed and eaten they went out before the mouth of the cave, and sat down to take the air and talk in the evening sun. All the animals except the owls accompanied them: the leopard stretched his beautiful body at the boy’s feet, but the donkey and the dogs and the other creatures remained faithful to Sophron.

“And now tell me how you found your way here?” Sophron asked.

“Kylon directed me, and a little boy in Thespieae. I left Thebes early this morning. It was the first day of the games.”

“Yet they allowed you to come! It is surprising that you found anybody willing to direct you.”

“You are not forgotten,” Demophon answered. “Neither in Thebes nor elsewhere.”

Sophron smiled somewhat bleakly. “No, I am not forgotten; but to be remembered is not always to be loved. For thirty years my thoughts have been tossed restlessly up and down Greece, but the average Theban would rather claim kinship with some broken-nosed boxer of the second rank than with me.”

“Still, you are famous, and immortal fame is the crown of life.” Demophon was quoting, parrot-like, a favourite phrase of his master, Pittakos. For himself it had not much meaning, and upon Sophron it produced no effect whatever.

“Words, child, words. You have been listening to Euphorion or some other gifted person. Nothing is immortal—neither this earth nor the sun that warms it: still less the pitiful race of beings who creep about between the two, and who will disappear the day after that warmth is withdrawn.”

The boy’s limpid and still childish eyes were fixed upon Sophron’s face. “Then you do not want to be remembered by those who will come after, and their children and their grandchildren and their great grandchildren?” he asked gravely.

The corners of Sophron’s mouth twitched with the beginning of a smile. It was as if he had recollected the age of

his present auditor, for the hint of bitterness his manner had betrayed was gone when he next spoke. “How can it matter, Demophon, whether I am remembered or not? If my name chances to survive for a few years after my death, the person associated with it will quite certainly bear no resemblance to me as I really was. And why should I expect the opinion of posterity to be worth more than that of my contemporaries? I should first have to believe that the men and women of the future will be better and more intelligent than those who are living now.”

“And don’t you believe that, Sophron? What is the use of philosophy if everything is to remain the same?”

“It *is* of very little use, child, except to a few in each generation. The average man will always believe just what he wishes to believe. I myself, in Thebes, in the old days, made a reputation by announcing my guesses as eternal laws; and if I had continued to do so I should still have pupils and disciples. But when I lost this glibness, and the appearance of infallibility ceased to charm me, I lost my disciples too. They were dissatisfied, and it was natural that they should be, for I had gradually come to be certain of only one thing, which was that in philosophy nothing can be certain. Our life is too brief, our means of acquiring knowledge too scanty. Even if we chanced on the truth we could never really know that it was true.”

“But surely, Sophron, there are *some* things we can know: I mean the things we see with our own eyes.”

Sophron had been stroking the dogs, but at Demophon’s words he glanced up with an expression on his face not unlike that of a chess-player who has long been deprived of his favourite game, and who now sees the board, with all its

familiar pieces, set out once more before him. "It is our eyes, then, that give us this knowledge, you think?" he questioned encouragingly.

"Yes. When I look at that tree there I know it is a tree."

"But suppose a madman were to look at it, might he not say it was a giant, and run into the cave for a sword?"

"That is so," Demophon admitted, and his thoughts slid uneasily to Laomedon.

But Sophron called them back, and it was exactly as if he had pushed a pawn on to another square. "And he would not deliberately be telling a lie," he suggested, "he would say it because he really believed it?"

"Yes, I suppose so," Demophon answered.

"Then, in this case at least, his eyes would declare the tree to be one thing, while your eyes would declare it to be another and quite different thing."

"Of course I really meant, when I said our eyes, our reason," Demophon hastened to explain. "It is only because the madman's mind is sick that he believes he is looking at a giant."

Sophron accepted the amendment. "Then it is our mind that is all important, not our eyes," he asked, "and it is upon our mind that we must depend for knowledge of the truth? Or we might put it in this way perhaps: that the mind is master, and the bodily senses are its slaves?"

"Yes, that was my meaning."

"And I think you must be right. Only, tell me, Demophon, if, instead of coming to visit me, you had remained in Thebes, and had run in a foot-race against one who ran twice as swiftly as you, would he have beaten you?"

“I should think it very probable,” answered Demophon, laughing.

“But suppose the race had been set for a hundred yards, and he had given you four yards start, would he still have beaten you?”

“Yes, of course. If he ran twice as quickly as I did he would beat me even if the race were only for nine yards.”

“And here again, it is your mind, your reason, that shows you the truth?”

“It is.”

“But to win the race he must first pass you, and before passing you he must first come level with you—is not that so?”

“Yes.”

“And we must remember that he gave you four yards’ start.”

Demophon nodded.

“So that—since he runs twice as fast as you do—while he is running those four yards you will run two?”

“Yes.”

“And while he is running those two, you will run one?”

“Yes.”

“And while he is running that one, you will run half a yard. All that is quite plain, is it not?”

“Quite.”

“In fact, we might go on dividing and dividing the distance to infinity, but still you will always be just half that distance in front of him?”

Demophon paused; he began to see whither the argument was leading. "I suppose so," he admitted reluctantly.

"Therefore, even in infinity, he can never overtake you."

"No."

"But the spectators, cheering and shouting, would, in their excitement, imagine they saw him overtaking you, and perhaps even passing you and reaching the goal first?"

"They certainly *would* see it," said Demophon stoutly, "there would be no imagination about it."

"Then, at the races, it is not on our reason but on our eyes that we ought to depend for knowledge of the truth?"

"I suppose so."

"And similarly, if some one were to shoot an arrow at you, if you trusted your reason you would not be at all afraid?"

"I should be very much afraid, if he shot straight."

"But before the arrow could reach you, it would have to go half way, would it not?"

"It would."

"And before it had gone half way, it would have to go the half of that?"

"Yes."

"And so, again, we can carry on our division to infinity, but always there is, no matter how minute the distance, half of it still to be traversed, till we find that perpetual motion is after all perpetual rest."

Demophon was silent. He was sure Sophron's argument must have a flaw in it somewhere, but he could not discover the flaw. He thought and thought till his head began to swim, but still he could find no answer.

And Sophron watched him; they all watched him—the dogs, the goats, the seagull, the leopard—as he sat with knitted brows, battling with an enigma that ever eluded him.

“Then what am I to depend on,” he asked at last, “if I am not to depend on what I see and hear and feel, and not on what my mind tells me about these things?”

“We must indeed depend on our faculties, Demophon, since they are all we possess; but we must not believe that the opinions they may lead us to form are necessarily true opinions, or that they have brought us any nearer to reality. What *is* reality? When you are asleep your dream-world seems to be real, yet when you wake up it is your waking-world that seems so.”

Demophon’s face was lit up by a sudden smile. “It is strange that you should say this, Sophron, because, when I was walking by the sea in Euboea, I thought of this very thing. It seemed to me that there might be a world above this world, out of which things appeared, and into which they disappeared again. But there is no reason why there should be. And even if there was—— I mean——the world I see when I am awake *must* be the real world, otherwise I shouldn’t *be* awake.”

Sophron smiled. “And how do you know you are? How do you know that you will not awake out of this waking-world one day, and find yourself in still another?”

“I know it, I suppose, because this is always here, and goes on just the same whether I am asleep or awake, whereas the other——”

“It too goes on, for another dreamer.”

“Yes, but still—— One remains the same, and the other changes.”

“Both change. Everything changes. The world before you at this moment is changing while you watch it. You cannot step twice into the same river. You no sooner say a thing is, than it is not. Antissa and Pharos and Tyre were once surrounded by the sea, but now they form parts of the mainland. Helike and Buris were once cities of Achaia: now the sea washes over them, and the fisherman, on a clear day, dropping down his lines, can sometimes catch a glimpse of their ruins far below the keel of his boat. Near Troizen there is a hill that was once a plain, and we find shells on the tops of the highest mountains, to prove they were once on a level with the ocean bed. Nothing remains; all things are passing into something else. The body you have to-day is not quite the body you had yesterday, and in a few years it will be completely different. That which was once a plant becomes an animal, that which was an animal becomes a plant. There was a time when that sinking sun was not yet lit, and there will be a time when its flame will flicker in and out like the flame of a dying lamp. Who is the measurer of such time, and who is to say whether it is short or long, whether it is or is not? To these midges flying about us their lives may seem as long as ours do to us. All is obscure: we know nothing, and age sweeps away everything—even understanding, even desire, even memory. Often we see the good coming to an evil end, and the wicked flourishing. And it is the same with our own actions: we cannot tell what will spring from them—sometimes good comes where we looked for harm, sometimes harm where we expected good. So it may be that to the Gods there is neither good nor evil:—upward or downward, for all we know, the way may be the same.”

“Then we can be sure of nothing,” said Demophon sadly, “nothing at all?”

“Nothing at all.... The Thracians, it is said, mourn at the birth of a child, and rejoice at death. But we cannot be sure that death is the end, or that the grave brings rest.”

Demophon was silent. He stroked the head of the leopard, who looked up at him drowsily with half-closed golden eyes. “Yet I was very happy on my way here,” he said at last softly, “when I was coming to you, Sophron, through the fields. And I think I could be happy living as you live.”

“What I said was not meant to discourage you,” Sophron answered. “Indeed, if that were all, then your finding me would have been a misfortune. But it is not all, for I too believe a man may gain happiness, if he can be persuaded to look for it where it really is.”

“And where is that, Sophron?”

“Within himself. That is why I left the city. In the city I was dependent upon others. Nominally I was free, in reality I was bound. My mind had grown so warped that the praise even of the ignorant and foolish was precious to me, their blame disturbing. I desired things, not for their intrinsic worth, but merely because others were eager to possess them. I pursued pleasure, and was swayed this way and that by vagrant passions. My life had lost its innocence. Out here, alone, in the shadow of the woods and the mountains, it seemed to me I might regain what I had lost.”

“And have you, Sophron? Have you found what you sought?”

“I have found something that is at least better than what I left. It is not perfect, because there is no perfection on this earth, no complete fulfilment of the soul’s desire.... And often I feel lonely.”

Demophon had slid from his stool to the ground, and he lay now with his head pillowed on the leopard's velvet flank, which he could feel softly rising and falling under his cheek. And presently, through the apple-scented dusk that had crept over the earth, he again heard Sophron's voice.

"Sometimes, at an hour such as this, and when I am sitting here after the day's work, I have a vision. Whether it is indeed the truth, I do not know, or whether I am merely looking into the glass of my own imagination. Let us call it a vision of the age of innocence, and assume that it lies behind us, for it is easier to see it there than in the years to come. Long ago, then, Demophon, a single community embraced heaven and earth, and Gods and men and animals were united in friendship, and order and temperance and righteousness prevailed. All the wild creatures were tame and friendly to man, because he, on his part, was kind and just to them, recognising that in each animal there is something beautiful. To have shed their blood would have seemed to him as dreadful a crime as the murder of a brother. The sacrifice of flesh was unknown. The altars of the Gods were kept pure with offerings of myrrh and grain and fruits and flowers, and libations of yellow honey poured upon the ground. And man in that age did not build great cities, but cultivated the land, and lived simply amid his children and his fields and flocks, and there were no kings, no hunters, no soldiers, no wars. If a man were skilled in the arts, if he had wisdom or were a maker of songs and music, he did not travel over all Hellas seeking ever new audiences in his greediness of fame and wealth, but was content to gladden his own friends with whatsoever gift he possessed. This was the golden age, and in this age men were happy. They fed on fruits and on milk, and it was not until they had abandoned this custom that the

world was changed. It is said that the first animals to be sacrificed were the sow and the goat, because the sow rooted among the newly-sown crops, and the goat ate the tender vine shoots. Thus evil sprang from greed, from man's desire to preserve all things for himself. And soon the blood of innocent and helpful creatures like the ox and the sheep began to be spilled on many altars, for a mad belief had arisen that the Gods were pleased by such crimes. And now the strange sight might be seen of men who purified themselves by defiling themselves. To-day that sight is common: the earth reeks of blood, and in the frenzy it arouses the fool believes he hears a divine voice. In the temple of Apollo at Argos the priestess drinks the blood of a lamb before she prophesies. At Aegira she drinks the blood of a bull. The Kretans tear a live bull in pieces in honour of Dionysos. Everywhere it is blood, the smell of blood and the taste of blood, that is supposed to draw down the God and to bring man into communion with him. We grow uneasy at the thought of human sacrifice, but we may be sure that in the sight of Earth the murder of any of her children is odious."

The owls had flown out from the dark mouth of the cave, and circled noiselessly over their heads before disappearing into the night. The moon had risen, and gray moths hovered like small ghosts about the folded and sleeping flowers. The leopard yawned, and rising to his feet, hollowed his back. "I came over the mountains from Armenia," he said, "and I crossed the sea in the ship of Bromios. One night I was standing by a stream when the wind brought me a fragrance which I followed. It was the odour of the gum of the storax-tree. To-day I thought of seeking the forest again, and of seeking a mate; but now this boy has arrived I shall put off my journey. In the morning I will play with him, and to-night

I will sleep near him, within reach of his hand. Then he will scratch me behind my ears and on my throat.”

To this speech there was no reply. The dogs affected not to hear it, and drew closer to Sophron, looking up into his face. And when he laid his hand on their heads, or even met their glances for a moment, they thumped on the ground with their tails.

Demophon, too, got up, and walked a little way into the darkness. He stood under an apple-tree, and his hand grasped the rough cool bark. He wondered why Sophron had not asked him any questions, as everybody else had done. But there would be plenty of time to tell his story, because he had decided to stay here for a while. After all, if leopards and owls and hedgehogs could come and go as they pleased, surely a boy might do as much. Sophron, he supposed, would deny that he had any more rights than a hedgehog, but at least he had equal rights. Only he knew now that Sophron could not help him.... It was strange how distant the Gods seemed to be from all his new-found friends—from Talos, and Kylon, and now Sophron. It was the one point they had in common. Sophron spoke of them as if either they did not exist or else took no interest in human affairs. It had not been so much his words as his manner. It did not seem to matter to Sophron whether the Gods were there or not. Nothing mattered but the earth creatures. The beasts who shared his cave—these, Demophon felt, were dearer to Sophron than all the Gods of Olympus.

CHAPTER XIV

The Cave of Sophron—(continued)

So it was that the old philosopher found himself once more with a pupil, and though he said not one word upon the subject, Demophon knew that he was pleased.

Sophron's mind was too different in type to gain a permanent influence over that of his young disciple; nevertheless, at this particular stage it was perhaps the best influence he could have encountered. For Sophron made him use his intellect. He grounded him in the rules of logic, and insisted on his submitting everything to the examination of reason. It was essentially a scientific training, a training in intellectual honesty. He was instructed in mathematics and in natural philosophy. He learned about the heavenly bodies and their movements. The moon Sophron believed to be inhabited, but was careful to add that this opinion was based entirely on its appearance. Of the mysterious influence it exercised over earthly plants and animals he was more assured, because it was susceptible of proof. Observation had established beyond doubt that the growth of all plants corresponds with the waxing of the moon. The onion, which for some unaccountable reason sprouts when the moon is waning, being the single exception....

Sophron taught him about bees, and the laws of their house—of the walling of the combs and the shaping of the cells; how the old bees have the town in charge, while the young ones go abroad to collect honey; how they protect their king in battle, and of the courage with which they seek a glorious death. He gave examples, gleaned from his own experiments,

of their wonderful intelligence: how, on a stormy day, they will carry a small pebble as ballast, so that the wind will have less power to blow them about. And whether it is the result of this intelligence, or whether their wisdom itself springs from the absence of passion, they alone, of all living creatures, take no delight in love, but gather their children straight from the fresh flowers and scented shrubs. Many other curious facts of natural history he set before his pupil—how the chameleon takes the colour of whatever thing it rests upon; how the hyena changes its sex and becomes now male and now female; how coral, which is a soft plant under water, hardens into stone at the first touch of air. “But these transformations are no stranger, Demophon, than others you must have observed for yourself: tiny-footed worms, creepers among green leaves, changing into gay butterflies; frogs growing out of little fishes. And there are those,” he added, “who even believe that the earth itself is alive, and breathes through its deep hollow mountains.”

“I have felt it breathing,” Demophon answered. “And I think I have felt its thoughts—for sometimes they are loving, and sometimes cold and indifferent.” He was already slipping away into his own world, but Sophron, who knew and was trying to wean him from this fanciful predisposition, hastened to turn the conversation into more sober channels.

So they would talk, master and pupil, as they sat each evening within the circle of listening beasts; but Demophon rarely spoke of his own adventures, and the more wonderful among them he did not so much as mention, feeling instinctively that Sophron would dismiss them as mere dream-stuff—the phantasies and delusions of an uncontrolled imagination. He was tired of being called a dreamer. Even

Kylon, who was a poet, had not taken him seriously, while Talos, he more than suspected, had thought him a little mad. They regarded him as for a brief period he himself had regarded Dion. The very object of his journey—his secret, sacred quest—the very thing about which he had come to ask Sophron's advice—upon this he kept the most guarded silence of all.

Day by day they worked in their fields and gardens, and the life, though uneventful as the farm life at Eleusis, was very pleasant to the boy. At night, too, it was pleasant to lie in the cave, which was cool and dry and roomy. His bed was made of olive leaves and vine cuttings, and the leopard lay at his feet. But sometimes, if it grew chilly towards dawn, a word would bring the great spotted beast to his side. Then they would lie close together, and Demophon, with his arms round the leopard, would drop comfortably asleep again, warmed by the warmth of its body.

For the nights were beginning to grow cooler; summer was giving place to autumn, and the apples lay strewn upon the ground. The vintage was at hand, and they had made ready their wine-press. Then, when all was in order, he and Sophron cut the grapes, and gathering them in baskets, threw them into the press and trod them to a dark purple pool, which a few days later they strained and poured into the vessels prepared to receive it...

Yet, though the nights were chilly, the days were still hot, and it was on one such day that Demophon, having wandered several miles from the cave, found himself at last on the edge of a cliff. Below him he saw a wailing company of women carrying the image of Adonis across the barren stony beach.

He knew of the custom but had never watched the actual rites performed, for it was all more or less an innovation, the God himself an alien, the mortal son of Myrrha, owing his divinity to the love of Persephone and Aphrodite. Lying in the sun-parched grass, inhaling the scent of wild thyme and the salt sleepy air, Demophon watched the band of mourners—with loosened hair and bared breasts—committing their dead God to the sea. They sang the song of his life and slaying, they sang of his burial and return in the spring; and through the languor of the afternoon the dirge-like chant arose, exotic and voluptuous, expressing the strange dual existence of Adonis, and that ambiguous Eastern cult, which was in part a cult of physical desire, and in part a dreamy cult of death.

When he returned he told Sophron of what he had heard and seen. It had caught his imagination, appealing to an as yet subconscious impulse in his mind and body. And something of his mood passed into his words, giving them a colour which was familiar enough to the old philosopher, who first looked at him and then sighed. He did not utter, however, the thought that was in his mind; instead he spoke with a half scornful disapproval of the new religion with its Asiatic softness. Its God was an effeminate youth whose beauty awakened love-sickness in hysterical women. “If he is a God, why do they weep over him?” Sophron asked unsympathetically. “And if he is really to be pitied, then he is not a God.” But a little later he added, “Nothing that comes out of the East is good. Religion should be a preparation for life, not a preparation for death; and a religion that finds its votaries chiefly among women is not a profitable subject for the thoughts of a man. Forget what you have seen. Take the dogs and climb the mountain-side to-night, and let the cold

wind blow all memory of it from you, as it would the fumes of wine.”

Next morning the weather had changed: it was really cold. A gray mist hung half-way down the mountain, completely hiding its summit. A flock of gulls came flying in from the sea, the swallows skimmed low over the ground, the frogs were croaking in the pond beyond the garden, and all these signs, as Demophon knew, betokened the approach of rain. Rain and winter were at hand: but his plans were settled; he had made up his mind to spend the winter with Sophron.... And that afternoon they had a visitor.

CHAPTER XV

Euphorion

DEMOPHON saw him first. He would have recognised that shaggy pony anywhere: and the man in white riding on his back—nobody who had once seen *him* could ever forget him. He ran back to the cave, where Sophron was busy at the wash-tub. “Euphorion is coming,” he cried. “He is coming—all alone—on the gray stallion.”

“But why so much excitement, child?” Sophron answered placidly, as he wrung out the clothes and tilted up the tub, letting the dirty steaming water splash upon the ground.

“You don’t understand!” cried Demophon, watching his master’s deliberate movements with repressed impatience. “He will be here in a minute or two, and he must be coming to see US!—COMING ON PURPOSE!”

“That is always a possibility,” Sophron admitted, while he hung up various articles on the clothes-line to dry, “but even if it were a certainty, life would continue much as before.”

Demophon shrugged his shoulders. If Sophron chose to ignore so distinguished a visitor, it was not his place to pass remarks; though he thought such behaviour strange. In fact, as Euphorion rode up, Sophron did no more than place his two hands on the boy’s shoulders, and, standing thus a little behind him, assume an attitude of watchful neutrality not unlike that he had adopted on Demophon’s own arrival. Suddenly, however, he pushed the boy forward. “Go and take his pony from him. We will sit in the open air.”

Euphorion had dismounted, and Demophon, eager to obey, ran to receive the reins from his hands. But he was careful to

miss as little as possible of the greeting that passed between the two sophists.

It was, on Sophron's side, far from effusive. "Welcome, Euphorion," he said, in a tone of chilly politeness. "It was good of you to ride out all this distance to view our retreat—if we can indeed flatter ourselves that such was the object of your journey."

"My object was to see you, Sophron, not your farm." Euphorion's voice and manner were gracious and deferential, contrasting most favourably, Demophon thought, with his master's. "I shall be leaving for Athens in a day or two, and I was determined not to miss this opportunity of paying you a visit."

"Ah, they told you, then, where I had hidden myself. I have been here some thirty years."

"And I should have come long ago, only, as you know, I am a wanderer, and make but a brief stay in any one place."

Demophon had brought out the seats, and Euphorion now sat down. "Your disciple," he added, "I saw one afternoon in Thebes."

"Yes," Sophron answered. "He, also, saw you."

The disciple had pricked up his ears. That Euphorion should have noticed him was as pleasant as it was surprising, for he had not expected to be noticed. Squatted on his heels in Sophron's shadow, he listened with all his might, intensely interested in this encounter. Above all, he found his master's attitude puzzling. He divined in it a latent hostility; yet surely, since this was their first meeting, Sophron ought at least to receive their guest with an open mind. That was what he, Demophon, was prepared to do; and he gazed earnestly at Euphorion and thought he had never seen a countenance so

dignified and serene. It made him think of the silent snow-wrapped peaks of lofty mountains; it was utterly different from the broad rugged race of Sophron, upon which every human passion seemed to have left its track. Sophron, he knew very well, had drunk and revelled and loved and hated like other men—perhaps even more than most—though the power of his intellect had carried him through, and eventually beyond, the storm. But Euphorion was like a man who had lived his whole life in an impregnable spiritual fastness. To Demophon he appeared wonderful—wonderful, like—like, again, those cold, mysterious mountain tops. And to think he had actually, among his many listeners that afternoon in Thebes, taken note of *him*! He must even have made inquiries about him!—probably from Kylon, or from one of Kylon’s friends....

“And so you are going to Athens, Euphorion,” Sophron was saying. “I have not been there since I was a youth—and that is long ago. Even Athens, I suppose, will only be a stage in your journey, for you seem to be tireless and never to need rest.”

“That is true. No city, no country, has held me long.”

“And you are, moreover, a direct disproof of the children’s proverb about rolling stones, for you have acquired both great wealth and great honour.”

This was better, Demophon thought, though even now there was an ambiguous note in Sophron’s voice not entirely reassuring. Euphorion replied with perfect courteousness.

“Yes, Sophron, I am rich.... And therefore, I think, you are inclined to despise me. It is strange, because I have heard that you consider riches unimportant. Why, then, should their presence or absence count in one particular instance? I

believe all things to be sent by the Gods; consequently I see no more reason for refusing this gift than I do for refusing any other.”

“But you must not defend yourself, Euphorion, nor imagine that I despise you. Your argument is irrefutable, though worldly possessions may sometimes strike those of us who lack them as the gifts of men rather than of the Gods. In our envy, I’m afraid, we are apt to seize upon any kind of consolation.”

“Then you hold, Sophron, that men can act contrarily to the will of the Gods?”

“I see you wish to drive me into a corner, but it is my own fault and I must abide the consequences. And even you, Euphorion, will hardly maintain that such crimes as the violation of sanctuaries, and the desecration of altars, are accomplished by the will of the Gods. I should go further, and say that every wicked or foolish act must be contrary to their will. Otherwise we should have to believe that they take a pleasure in evil and in folly, which is impossible.”

“Are you not assuming that our intelligence is equal to the divine intelligence? To a child, certain of his father’s acts may appear tyrannous and cruel, though these very acts have been devised for his safety. I believe men and Gods to be of one kindred, but I also believe that in understanding they are as far apart as they are in power.”

“Yet such words themselves, if they are more than a mere assertion of personal opinion, must spring from an intelligence that has grasped at least something of the nature of divinity.”

“That is true; and the souls of the wise do, in fact—though very slowly—draw closer to the Gods. In their upward

progress such souls eventually become incarnate as seers, poets, philosophers—nor does the progress end there.”

“You mean that a man actually may become like a God?”

“I mean that, Sophron.”

There was a pause, during which Sophron gazed straight before him, with a countenance bleak and impassive as stone.

“Your words would appear stranger to me,” he said at last, quietly, “had I not been told that you held this very belief. But will you also say that such a man may attain to this God-state while he still lives on earth—among other men, and apparently as one of themselves?”

“I do say so, Sophron. The last stage, though it be long delayed, must in the end be reached.”

Demophon had turned eagerly from one to the other of the two speakers. He could not think why Sophron should once more relapse into silence, just when they seemed on the point of a revelation. He gave him a little nudge to continue the argument, but it had no effect except that Sophron began to stroke his disciple’s hair gently and absently, just as he might have fondled one of the dogs. Demophon did not object to being petted; he rather liked it indeed; but at present he was much more interested in what Euphorion might have to tell them, and he would tell them nothing if nobody asked any questions.

It was not a question which eventually came from Sophron’s lips, while he twisted one of the boy’s dark locks round and round his finger. “Your views, Euphorion, are hard for a plain man to comprehend. But they have brought to my mind certain rumours which may be true or may be false, for I have no means of judging them.”

“What are these rumours, Sophron? I suspect from your manner that they concern me. Were they offered to you as facts, or merely as doubtful tales?”

“They were offered to me as facts; but then, so many things are offered to me as facts. And my informant grew impatient the moment I began to question them. He said that when you were walking by a certain river the waters had whispered your name; he said you had been seen, had even lectured, in two places at the same time; he said that in the temple of Athene at Argos you had recognised, hanging on the wall, the armour you yourself had worn long ago at the taking of Troy.”

Euphorion remained unmoved. He neither denied nor admitted the truth of these statements. It seemed as if the conversation were at an end; but presently his glance met the wondering gaze of Demophon fixed intently upon him, and then he spoke.

“When the eyes of the soul are opened, it can look back far along the path it has travelled. Memory begins to stir, at first uneasily, as if still half drowned in sleep; but gradually it awakens, the clouds dissolve, and at last all things become clear. In this way I, too, have looked back through time, and the knowledge I had lost I have recovered. It is as if one were to gaze down the dizzy path by which one has climbed a mountain, noting the clefts and crevices, the little tufts of grass, the footholds and stepping-stones, that mark the track.... So I have looked, and so I remember.... For I have been a fish, a tortoise, a lynx, an eagle, a girl, a boy....”

“And now you have reached your final incarnation?”

Again Euphorion was silent, and Sophron sighed faintly—though not so faintly but that Demophon heard him. He

himself believed every word Euphorion had said. And he tried, as he sat there, to recall his own past lives, to remember at least *one* of them. But he found he could not remember even the beginning of his present life—could not remember being born, could not remember the time when he was still unable to talk—which was discouraging.

Euphorion had begun once more to speak. His head was thrown slightly back, his calm passionless face never altered; only in the eyes, whose pupils dilated and contracted like those of the leopard crouched at Demophon's feet, did the expression now and then change. And his voice was like the sound of music. It trailed melodiously on certain words, giving them a new meaning, drawing at least one of his listeners ever closer to him, so that soon there was nothing else in the world but that golden voice calling up out of the empty air vision after vision. And Demophon had the impression that the voice was speaking to *him*, that it was in some inexplicable way passing Sophron by, excluding Sophron, even at the very time that it was drawing delicate silken threads about his own soul.

“At my birth,” Euphorion began simply, “there was implanted in me a thirst for knowledge, as there is implanted in others a thirst for glory, or for love or for battle. When I was still a boy I resolved to learn all the teachings of all the philosophers both of the past and of the present. I studied so insatiably that my father became afraid for my health, and tried by persuasions and punishments to induce me to be more moderate; but neither his words nor his punishments could turn me from my course. When I found that my masters at home could teach me nothing further, I left my own country, and went out into the world....

“Well aware that my father would be opposed to my going, I departed secretly, in the night, saying good-bye to no one, and leaving no message to tell whither I had gone. I found a ship which carried me to Krete, and from Krete I crossed to Achaia. I wandered hither and thither seeking new masters, questioning them so importunately that they revealed to me much they withheld even from their avowed disciples. With some I remained many months, with others no longer than a day; but with none did I remain after I had learned all his thoughts, and to none did I speak of my own thoughts. I was ripening, but I was not yet ripe, and I knew I should not be till I had experienced all experiences, and tasted of all wisdoms. I passed through Greece—north, south, east, and west. I was initiated into the mysteries, and through the mouth of the unconscious priest I listened to the voice of the God. At the sacrifice to Zeus on Mount Lukeios I stood within the sacred precinct where neither man nor beast casts a shadow. And when the sacrifice was completed, I watched what had been a man descend the mountain side with burning eyes, and gray bristling hide, and jaws from which the moisture dropped in foam....

“At Lebadea I sought out the priest of Trophonios. I begged him to allow me to go down to the oracle, but he refused, because I refused to shed the sacrificial blood.... That night he came to me pale and trembling, and besought me to forget his words. He led me to the river Herkuna, and there I was bathed by the two boy servants of the temple, and he himself anointed my body with oil. At the fountain of the river I drank, and all memory of the past faded from my mind. I was clothed in white linen, with fillets of wool, and white woollen slippers were bound upon my feet. Through the doors of brass I descended into the cave by means of a

ladder which immediately afterwards was drawn up. There is a smaller cave in the side of the larger, and as I sat at the bottom of the chasm a hidden force, like the current of a river, drew me through its narrow entrance. Three days later I ascended again through the brazen doors. The priests, who had believed me dead, spoke to me fearfully. They set me on a throne in the temple and asked me to tell them what I had seen and heard, but when I remained silent they withdrew backwards, nor was any one near when presently I arose and went out from that place....

“I journeyed north to Thrace, through the country of the Kikones, where there is a river that if a man drink of its waters his vitals are turned to stone. From Thrace I passed into Asia, keeping close to the shores of the Euxine Sea. On the road from Herakleia I reached at nightfall an abyss that is the home of the Erinyes. By its brink I waited till the moon had risen. Then, speaking the mystic words, I smote with my rod three times upon the ground, and the avenging ghosts issued forth, white and terrible. They rushed upon me, striving furiously to pass the barrier I had drawn around me in the air. The light had grown sickly and evil through the contamination of their presence; the air was foul as if blown from a newly-opened grave; their shrieks tore my ears, yet I remained unmoved. One question I was permitted to ask, and when they had answered it I dismissed them, and they sank back into the earth like a writhing smoke. But I, wrapping my mantle about my head, stood pondering still in that spot, for the words they had uttered were obscure. And as I stood there a band of robbers surrounded me, and their eyes under their long hair glittered in the moonlight. They cried out on me to follow them, but their voices sounded in my ears like the foolish buzzing of flies, and the stream of my thoughts

flowed on uninterrupted. Then their leader approached, and drawing his knife, made to plunge it into my throat. His hand grasped my mantle, and, as he tore it away, for the first time he looked into my face. A trembling seized him, the knife fell from his grasp, and the sweat broke out on his forehead, but I neither spoke nor moved as they fled back into the darkness.... On the next night, at the same hour, the meaning that had eluded me became clear, and I pursued my journey. I went north as far as Mount Kaukasos, where I saw, still hanging there, the chains which had bound Prometheus. And so great was his bulk that the chains which had fastened his hands were two hundred yards apart....

“In Palestine I came to the Dead Sea, in which nothing can be drowned, for it will receive no living thing. Gloomy and sullen it looked, as I stood upon the shore in the starlight, under the dark twisted apple-trees. I cast an unlit lantern upon the water and it sank instantly to the bottom, but a lantern that I had lighted floated, by which I knew that life is in the nature of a flame....

“In Arabia I talked with the magicians, and they offered to teach me their spells, and the language of birds, which they acquire by feeding on the heart and liver of serpents. I stayed with them for two days, and by that time saw they could teach me nothing. They tried to keep me; they cursed me because I would not join them, nor reveal to them the secret of my mission. And one stretched out his hand to bind me with a charm. But when I rose above the ground and floated in the air before them, they grovelled on their faces in the sand....

“On the Red Sea I took ship. At the prow and at the stern hung brazen bells to frighten away the sea-monsters which

swarmed about us. I passed through the lakes of Ethiopia and southward as far as the Mountains of the Moon. In that immense stillness, unbroken by the presence of man or bird or beast, I listened to the music of the spheres, till the divine order was revealed to me, and stamped itself upon my soul, so that its echo whispers there for evermore....

“I returned through Egypt, and one night I stood before the Sphinx. I called on the spirit that lives in the stone, and summoned it with all my power. For twelve hours I struggled with it, but the crouching beast did not reply, nor did its eyelids once quiver. By this defeat I knew that my probation was still unaccomplished, though already strange tales were whispered about me, and when I entered a city the men and women and children flocked after me, seeking charms and oracles. They approached me as one might approach a God, begging me to cure their sick, to bind the winds, to call down the rain, to banish pestilence, even to resurrect the dead....

“In Egypt I saw the statue of Memnon, King of the Ethiopians, who was slain by Achilles. The image still has a kind of life in it, and when the first beams of the rising sun touch it, it gives one great cry of joy that floats out over land and sea.... Beyond Egyptian Thebes there lived a dragon which preyed upon the city, so that all went in fear of their lives. With my own eyes I saw it carrying off a child and his mother. It dropped down out of the clouds with a noise like the clashing of brass, and when it had seized its victims it rose into the air again, holding them screaming in its talons. I followed it to its lair. The ground still trembled where it had gone to earth, and by this I knew it was not far below the surface. So I laid at the entrance of the burrow a scarlet cloak embroidered with runes. Then the dragon put out his head,

and his crest was a fiery crimson, and his green eyes blazed with a great light. But as he stretched his head over the golden runes sleep fell upon him; and even now he lies there dreaming, and will do so till the cloth has mouldered into dust. And I did this, and did not slay the dragon, but left him only bound in this fashion, because I had made a vow never to take the life of any creature—either bird, or beast, or fish, or insect.”

“Once I saw two dragons,” Demophon interrupted, forgetting his manners in the wonder of this story. “It was when I was a little boy. They came in the night to our house, and I was not frightened, though everybody else was.”

“Then, dear, you have seen twice as many as Euphorion,” Sophron answered gently. “Your fearlessness, also, we may take as quite auspicious.”

Demophon blushed and wished he had not spoken. Euphorion, he was glad to see, took no notice.

“At the springs of the Nile,” Euphorion went on, “towards evening, I saw the Phœnix sitting on his nest. In size and appearance he was like an eagle, but his body shone with a golden fire. His nest was built of clay covered over with cassia-bark and cinnamon, and the gum of frankincense, and slender stalks of nard, amid whose precious odours he sat waiting for death. The sky behind him was a lake of pale green light, and through his opened beak he sang his funeral hymn. Once in five hundred years he builds his nest in this spot, and from the body of the father the young Phœnix rises; and when he has grown strong, and his wings have gained power, he uproots the nest and flies with it to the sacred City of the Sun, and lays it down before the doors of the temple. But I did not linger there; and on the coast of Tripolis, near

the country of the Lotos Eaters, I once more entered a ship, and sailed for Italy. We passed along the Sicilian coast, between Charybdis and Scylla, and the ship seemed to be winged, so swift was our passage. We struck anchor near Baiae, but I pushed northward through the dismal swamps of Cumae, seeking the grotto of the Sibyl. On the road, she met me, for she had already seen my coming in her magic glass. She was old and withered and dry, fragile and brown as a winter leaf, no taller than a child of six, but wrinkled with innumerable years. Her voice was thin and husky as the whispering of barley ears when the wind sweeps over the field, and it seemed impossible that so frail a body could hold the fierce soul struggling to be free. Yet she told me she had already lived for seven hundred years, and pointed to a tiny heap of sand. In her girlhood, when Apollo had loved her, she had begged him for as many years of life as that heap contained of grains. Her foolish prayer had been granted—foolish because she had forgotten to ask for perpetual youth, and old age had come upon her at the same time as it comes to all. There were a thousand grains of sand in the heap, and three hundred years of life still remained to be lived. The tears glistened on her withered cheeks, and when I said, ‘What boon would you ask now, Sibyl?’ she answered, ‘I would die.’ ”

With the last word Euphorion’s head had sunk forward on his breast, and he became lost in reverie. Nobody spoke, for though Demophon had many questions in his mind, he did not like to break the silence. The history of Euphorion’s journey had impressed him profoundly; it had awakened in him the old restlessness which life with Sophron had temporarily banished. He looked up at his master and was

shocked to see upon his countenance an expression of complete indifference.

It was Sophron who spoke first. “Then, I suppose, Euphorion, you teach your followers to abstain from bloodshed? I had heard that it was one of your doctrines, and on this point at least our views are the same.”

Euphorion turned to him, but again Demophon had the impression that it was not to Sophron his words were primarily addressed. “The sin of the blood-shedder is indeed the greatest of all sins,” he answered, “and his punishment the most terrible. For he is condemned to be thrust back among the lower forms of life. Air drives him into the sea, and Sea spews him forth on the earth, and Earth casts him into the fire of the sun, and Sun back into the currents of Air. All must receive him, but all hate him, and all seek to get rid of him; so that he becomes a fugitive and a wanderer, and must be born again and again through countless ages before he can wash out that stain and find absolution.”

“And it is the Gods and man’s relation to the Gods that is usually the subject of your lectures?”

“It must be so, Sophron, because it is only through a right understanding of such things, and of his true destiny, that man can hope to pass from the lower to the higher. The proof of this lies in the very nature of the soul itself, which remains restless and perpetually dissatisfied while it is bound to earth.”

“And a right understanding of the Gods leads, I suppose, to a rejection of all the popular stories about them—such stories, for instance, as those that attribute to them every kind of human folly and passion. You, Euphorion, probably teach that God is one and indivisible—day and night, winter and

summer, light and darkness, mind and matter—and that when we give him a form or a name, or limit him in any way, we are only saying that he is not God.”

“You know very well, Sophron, that such is not my view. It is much more like your own teaching, by which you at one time led your pupils to scoff at religion.”

“It would be kinder, Euphorion, and I think even truer, to say that I led them to scoff at superstition. For I value freedom above all things, and there can be no freedom while the mind is haunted by ghostly fears, so that it trembles at a shadow, and is swayed this way and that by belief in lucky days and unlucky days, by omens and signs and oracles.”

“Is there anything to be gained, Sophron, by discussing these matters? We are both too old to change, and it is likely that we shall only grow embittered, each seeking to triumph over the other, not in the hope of converting him, but merely for the sake of getting the better of the argument.”

“You are right. Let me even whisper in your ear, Euphorion, since I know it will go no further, that the destiny you have painted as a crowning glory fills me with misgiving rather than envy. I have no desire to become a God. To me it seems that the best gift philosophy can bestow is to free our minds from both hopes and fears concerning a very doubtful future. Such a philosophy brings with it its own particular duties, which are of a kind you have not mentioned. When we cease to believe that for either man or beast any divine compensation awaits him, it becomes doubly imperative that we should try to make the earthly lives of all creatures as pleasant as possible. In my own case, since my friends are not human, this happens to be easy——”

“I am human,” Demophon interposed.

“Yes, and I have not made you very happy. Not happy enough to want to stay with us.”

Demophon frowned slightly. “That is different,” he said. “But I shall always want to come back.”

Their guest had risen, and he hastened to attend to him. For a moment, in silence, Euphorion laid his two hands upon the boy’s head, and seemed to be pronouncing a benediction or a prayer. Then, having bidden farewell to Sophron, he rode slowly away into the dusk, while master and pupil stood side by side watching him till he had disappeared.

CHAPTER XVI

The Magic Valley

ALL that winter, which was unusually long and severe, Demophon remained with Sophron and the beasts. In the early days of spring he began to think of resuming his travels, but first, since he was not more than two days' journey from home, he would pay the old people a visit. They would find him altered, he supposed, for he had been away a year, and in the last few months especially he had grown a great deal. Work on the farm, running naked in the sun and wind, wrestling and romping with the leopard, bathing in the cold mountain streams and breathing the pure mountain air—all this had done much to develop his body, had deepened his chest and hardened his muscles; he was no longer a child, he was nearly as tall as Sophron, and sometimes he was astonished at his own strength.

There were two ways he could take—one, the high road from Thebes to Eleusis; and the other, not a road at all. It was this latter he chose. The chain of mountains dividing Boiotia from his own country of Attika would be his guide, and after bidding good-bye to Sophron and the animals, and promising to return soon—certainly before the end of summer—he set out.

He reached the hills he had marked down as the first stage of his journey towards evening. Here he selected a camping ground, and next set about gathering sticks and brushwood to build up his fire. The fire was for company, because somehow, now that he had reached it, this spot did not awaken confidence. Under the empty sky the mountains

towered, dark and forbidding; and it was here, Demophon remembered, that the child Oidipous had been exposed, fastened by his foot to a tree, and abandoned to any prowling beast that might pass by. It was here that Aktaion had been devoured by his dogs, and Pentheus torn to pieces by his mother. It was here that Apollo had shot down one by one all the boy children of Niobe.... That night, as it happened, he was actually startled out of his sleep by an ugly scream. He sat up. His fire was nearly dead, and all around him was a thick curtain of darkness. He did not think the scream had been human, and yet it certainly was not the cry of any animal he could name. Demophon piled the last remaining sticks on the red embers, and wrapping himself up again in his cloak, tried to believe he had been dreaming.

In the morning sunshine he was quite sure he had, for all his gloomy impressions were vanished. He skirted the roots of the mountains, and found them honeycombed by half-concealed fissures and crevices. But at the end of an hour's scrambling over broken rocks he reached the entrance to a narrow gorge, which looked as if it might serve his purpose. It broadened rapidly as he followed its windings, till at last it became a grassy sunlit valley, completely sheltered from the winds, and with a stream that issued from a cave in the hollow mountain. The soft green carpet—half moss, half grass—was strewn with fallen boulders; the slope on either side was woodland; and sometimes between the dark or silvery tree-trunks he saw the white flash of a rabbit or the gleam of a bird's wing....

It was growing hot now, for the sun hung directly overhead, and when he reached a wide enough pool, though the water did not take him much above his knees, Demophon

bathed in it. He was glad he had not gone by the road, he was glad he had not missed this valley, which was curiously attractive. It was like a place that had never been visited by any human being till he himself had chanced upon it. And indeed this might easily be the truth, for the rough narrow entrance gave no promise of what lay beyond. Yet at the very moment these thoughts were passing through his mind, Demophon might, had he turned his head, have seen between the bushes on the slope behind him a face peering out.

He rose from his bath and sat down beside a bed of scarlet anemones to put on his sandals. Then he slung his clothing over his shoulder and walked on, leaving the sun to dry his body.

He could see that at no great distance the valley again closed to a narrow gorge, and beyond this, he supposed, lay the open fields within fourteen or fifteen miles of Eleusis. Now that he was so near home he began to draw a picture of his arrival, and to plan how he could make it more dramatic. He wondered if it would be possible for him to disguise himself, like Odysseus, and to come in with news of the lost wanderer, describing how he had met him far away. Then there would be eager questions from his mother, slower questions from Keleos, his own veiled replies, the suspense, the sudden revelation when he jumped up and they recognised him....

These lively images were abruptly dispersed by a sharp noise, like the snapping of a dry branch under somebody's foot. Demophon turned quickly. He gazed up the leafy hillside through the flickering shafts of sunlight and shadow, but at first saw nobody; and he was about to continue his journey, thinking the sound must have been made by some

wild creature he had disturbed, when a girl stepped out from her hiding-place and came lightly down the slope to meet him. She was young—not many years older, it seemed to Demophon, than he was himself—and in her right hand she grasped a long, sharp spear. Her dress was white, embroidered with small delicate green leaves and sprigs of lilac flowers, and her shoes were green. Her hair when she passed into the shadow was red, but when the sun shone on it, it became gold. Her face had a creamy pallor, and her narrow eyes were set just the slightest shade aslant. As he watched her the first impression of strangeness gave place to beauty, though it still remained a beauty unlike any he had ever beheld. It was partly the shape of the face that gave it this unusual character (for it was broad at the top and tapered to a feline pointed chin), it was partly the peculiar expression of the eyes. He found himself gazing fixedly into those eyes, and it was as if for a moment or two something heavy and dark were pressing down upon his brain. Then, through a kind of dizziness, he became aware that she was smiling at him, and that a faint flush had swept up under her delicate skin, and subsided again, leaving her white as before.

She stood, leaning upon her spear, and looking at him in a way that made him feel self-conscious and shy.

“O loveliest of boys,” she said simply, “what are you doing here alone and unarmed? Do you not know there are wild beasts in these mountains—savage boars who would tear your body with their tusks, and trample you to death? Now, above all, they are dangerous, for not long ago some hunters came with their dogs, and they are eager for revenge.”

Demophon did not respond to her smiles. “I have seen nothing more dangerous than a rabbit,” he answered, “and

surely if it is safe for you, who are a woman, it is safe for me.”

She laughed softly. “Are you so mighty a warrior, then, whose cheeks are smoother than my own? Besides, I have this spear, and I do not carry it for show. My father taught me how to use it, and taught me woodcraft, and to shoot with a bow. And I am not far from our house, as you would see if it were not for those trees.”

There was a brief silence, and Demophon made to pass on his way. But she took a step that brought her directly into his path, and stretched out her arms so that he could not pass.

“What is your name?” she asked.

“Demophon.”

“I am Xanthis. Come with me to my father’s house. He is not at home, but you can rest there for a while, and afterwards continue on your journey.”

“You are very kind, Xanthis, but I am in a hurry. It is better that I should go straight on.”

“Surely you can spare an hour or two. If my father had been here he would have welcomed you, but he has gone to visit a very old friend, Sophron, the philosopher.”

“Sophron!”

“Yes. He lives at the foot of Mount Helikon, with a crowd of animals, and a disciple of singular beauty, who came to him nobody knows whence, but whom some believe to be a messenger of the Gods.”

Demophon looked down. If her father was a friend of Sophron perhaps he ought not to refuse. It made it, at any rate, more difficult.

“Why must you hurry?” Xanthis asked. “How long have you been on your journey?”

“For about a—year,” Demophon was obliged to admit.

“You have waited a year, and now you cannot even wait an hour!”

“It is just because I have waited so long,” he began, but knew it sounded foolish, and stopped, shamefacedly.

“Come,” Xanthis coaxed him. “Why are you afraid? I have no mother, no brothers nor sisters; there is nobody in the house but our slaves. Even when my father is there it is lonely, for he is silent and old.... Besides, I love you.”

“How can you possibly love me, Xanthis, when you have only known me two or three minutes?”

“It is more than that: I followed you from the pool. But I do not want you to love *me*. I only want to be with you for a little, for even if you go now and I never see you again I shall never forget you.”

“O yes, you will,” answered Demophon ungraciously, “because there is nothing to remember.”

“Why are you angry with me?” said Xanthis.

“I am not angry; but I think you are rather silly, and I am sure your father would be *very* angry with you.”

“I shall not tell him.”

But this so simple way out of the difficulty did not commend itself to the boy. “One of the slaves would tell him,” he answered.

“What matter? Why should he not know? Why shouldn’t you come?” And indeed there did not appear to be any reason except that he did not want to.

“Won’t you forgive me?” Xanthis went on softly.

Demophon frowned. “There is nothing to forgive.... And I don’t see why you are making such a fuss.”

“I will not make a fuss. It is not my fault: it is some God who has made me love you.” She flung down her spear, and catching his hand held it against her breast. “You can feel how my heart is beating, which shows I am telling you the truth. Now do you believe me?”

“I feel nothing,” answered Demophon sulkily, snatching his hand away. “And at any rate, if your heart didn’t beat you would die.”

The corners of Xanthis’s mouth began to droop. “Why are you so unkind to me? Have you no sisters?”

“I have two sisters, but they don’t behave in this way.”

“In what way, Demophon?”

“Talking all this nonsense about—love. You ought to be ashamed, at your age.”

“Have you never loved any one?”

“Yes, I have; but it didn’t make me want to annoy them, or ask them to feel my heart beating.”

Xanthis sighed, and after a brief pause she said meekly, “Are your sisters beautiful? I think they must be.”

“Well, they’re not; they’re perfectly ordinary.... And I don’t like being called beautiful, either.”

“Am *I* beautiful, Demophon? Look at me and tell me the truth.”

Demophon stared obstinately at the ground.

“Tell me—tell me,” Xanthis persisted, laughing.

“Oh—you’re all right, I dare say,” he answered grudgingly.

But Xanthis had joined her two hands behind his neck and had forced him to raise his head. And now his face was so close to her own that she bent forward and kissed him on the mouth. He struggled, and broke away at last, half choked for breath.

“Good-bye,” he said.

Xanthis again threw her arms round him, and it was impossible, without actual roughness, to loosen her embrace. “Come with me,” she whispered, “and I will show you wonderful things.... I will show you a pool, and when you look into it you will be able to see whatever you desire. You will see your own home just as it really is at that moment; and all who are there, and what they are doing. I will give you presents to take with you, for the house is full of curious things, and all are mine to do what I like with, to keep or to give away. I have slaves who will dance for you and play music. I have wines such as you have never tasted. I will give you delicious fruits and sweetmeats. I will show you a book in which are pictures of the world as it was a thousand years ago, and as it will be a thousand years from now. I will teach you how to find hidden watersprings, and how to find buried gold. If you like, I can put you to sleep, and send your soul out into the air or down into the ocean, to the moon or among the stars; and when you awaken you will remember all you have seen.”

Demophon hesitated. Xanthis was exaggerating, he knew, for these were the promises of an enchantress; but even if only a small portion of what she said were true, it seemed a pity not to go to the house. He need not stay long, and since she was so fond of him there could be no danger. He felt her

hot dry hand clasping his tightly, and he allowed her to lead him through the trees and up the woody hillside.

And suddenly a garden was before them—green and shady, dark and mossy and damp—a garden of herbs and ferns and grasses, of shrubs and trailing plants, with the water dropping from the lichened rocks, with a fountain rising from a wide-lipped marble basin in which floated flat dark water-lily leaves. The garden was entirely green—dark green—except where, at the end of an avenue of yew-trees, there was a mound of red earth, which seemed to have been heaped up recently, for nothing grew upon it. And this mound was somehow unsightly, unpleasant, he could not have told why; but a few paces farther on it was hidden by the trees.

The house was built of marble, the roof supported by tall slender columns, and the steps leading down to the green and flowerless garden were of marble also. Within, the light was coloured by curtains of transparent silk. The floor was strewn with rugs and cushions, after the fashion of the East, and an Indian child, with a grave face and solemn eyes, sat in a corner strumming on a lute. Upon his head a pigeon was perched, its coral-coloured claws tightly twisted in the thick black hair. No one else was visible, but Xanthis clapped her hands, and three girl slaves entered. Like the boy, these girls were dark-skinned, foreign, belonging to a race and speaking a tongue unknown to Demophon. They led him to the bath chamber, and poured warm perfumed water over him, and anointed him with oil.

When Xanthis brought him back to the larger room, the child with the pigeon and the lute was still there, squatted in his corner, exactly in the same position. His grave eyes never left Demophon, but their expression remained detached and

indifferent. Xanthis again clapped her hands, and this time food was carried in. It was as strange as everything else—either the food itself, or more probably the cooking which disguised it—but Demophon was hungry, and at least the fruits, the sweetmeats and the wine, were all that she had promised.

Lolling on his cushions in a somewhat lordly fashion, he thought that this must be how great kings and princes lived. The flatteries of Xanthis, mingled with the wine he had drunk, had begun already to give him a foolish idea of his importance. Next moment it suffered instant eclipse, as he encountered the regard of the boy with the lute. Demophon flushed. There was a quality in that dispassionate gaze which had the effect of making him very angry. And he knew that Xanthis must have read his thoughts, for she made a sign, and the child in the corner withdrew.

“Who is he?” Demophon asked, with a half sullen note in his voice which would have astonished Sophron or any other of his friends.

“His name is Mârouf, and his country is Nubia. Would you like him to be whipped? He shall be tied up and whipped with rods here before you, till you say it is enough.”

This proposal, and still more the tone in which it was uttered, brought him to his senses. “Would you really do such a thing?” he asked, hardly able to believe his ears.

“It was your own wish, wasn’t it?” answered Xanthis carelessly. “But since it is gone, it does not matter.”

He was about to deny indignantly that such a wish had ever entered his mind, but something stopped him; he was not quite sure; perhaps, just for an instant——

And he began to feel uneasy. Who and what was Xanthis? He did not like this reading of thoughts, this haste to gratify momentary impulses one was ashamed of next minute, and which really were not wishes at all. He looked round the walls of the room, and the paintings on them were disquieting too. He had hardly noticed them before; all their details had been hidden in shadow; but now they seemed to have acquired an unnatural brilliance, to flame and glow as if a light were shining through them from behind. They were beautiful, and they were at the same time ugly, because of what was happening in them. Surely such things did not, could not, take place in real life. They were the inventions of a diseased, or a depraved imagination. He had a sudden desire to escape from this house. He would go at once. Mechanically he raised the cup Xanthis had given him to his lips, and when he put it down half emptied, his determination had already flickered out. Again he looked at the pictures, and though they were the same as before they created now a different impression, and he examined them with curiosity but without repulsion.

“Let us go out,” Xanthis said at last.

She led the way, and he followed her through a door and up a flight of stone stairs. It was like climbing up a well, and when they reached the top they were on the flat roof of the house, and to his surprise it was night, and the moon had risen above the trees. At the same moment a noise of music broke out from somewhere below them. Facing the rising moon, with her hands stretched out to it and her red hair shining in its light, Xanthis began to sing. Her pale face was slightly lifted, her lips parted, and in her half-shut eyes there swam an ecstasy that was poured out in the rich and

passionate music of her voice. She was singing to the moon, and he had a strange illusion that she was crowned with oak-leaves and tiny serpents, and that she held a spear of moonlight in her hand. But she was singing now of him, Demophon, and in that melody there was the same mingling of voluptuousness and sadness which he had heard in the hymn to Adonis, but which was here infinitely intensified, because it had become personal and immediate. He felt himself trembling as he was caught up in its exultation; he felt the notes sounding and thrilling within his own body at the same time as he heard them swelling out, rising, curving, sinking, under the starry dome of night. They filled the velvet moon-washed air; they mixed with the scents that rose from the mysterious garden; every nerve in his body responded to their rapture and thirst.

Yet when she had ended, and slowly turned to kiss him, the spell snapped. He drew back: he did not want to be kissed. As imagination threatened to become reality, he suddenly grew cold. This real love-making bored him. A single touch was sufficient to denude the whole scene of its enchantment....

Evening after evening he listened to Xanthis singing, and in the end it was always the same. Pitifully, humbly, she would ask him if he loved her; and he would answer "No."

He hated her to ask him; it spoiled all that had gone before; and though sometimes, not to be too ungracious, he would say that he liked her, he was not sure that he did even that. And presently she saw that the music was losing its first fascination. He was growing restless, he accused her of not having shown him any of the wonders she had promised, he talked of going home and said he had already stayed too long.

Then Xanthis saw that if she was to keep him she must employ other arts. He was too young to be bound by the enchantments she had used; she must wait a little, but in the meantime she must keep him. And she could only keep him by first whetting and then gratifying his curiosity. Each day she had to find something fresh. It was against her will that she adopted this plan, for she knew the risk she was running. Fortunately, he seemed completely ignorant of the art of sorcery. She had easily found out the extent of his knowledge, and he apparently regarded it as a kind of harmless though difficult game.

And most of all he liked to gaze at the pictures she called up in her magic pool. He would hang over it for hours, gazing down at its inky surface, which in the beginning would appear opaque, reflecting nothing but his own face as he stooped above it. Then there would begin a strange, gyrating movement below; and when this passed the picture would leap out, bright in all its colours.

He saw the deep forest glade; he saw the dance of Silenos. He saw the Satyrs, Fauns, and Nymphs, gathered in a watching circle, while Silenos himself, in his eagerness to win the prize, twirled ever more rapidly. Round and round he twirled, faster and faster, till, like a spinning top, he seemed to be at rest. For his movements had become invisible, and at last his very body dissolved, and all at once, losing its shape, it became a river rushing headlong to the sea. His back became the river bed, his hair and beard were the reeds swaying in the stream, even his pipes resumed their original form, and were only the reeds growing in the shallows....

The vision faded out, and Demophon saw only his own face gazing back at him, with dark expectant eyes and parted

lips. "More! More!" he insisted, and Xanthis was obliged to humour him. Again the pool was troubled, and this time, when its agitation subsided, he saw a hollow mountain through which a stream flowed over a gravelly bed. It was the drowsy river of Lethe, on whose banks bloomed dark purple and crimson poppies. Through the soundless twilight he could see into a cavern, where on a great throne of ebony, strewn with black feathers, Hypnos lay asleep. His pale limbs were relaxed, and on each side of him were empty dream shapes; but behind the throne, and deep within the gloom of the cavern, stood his thousand sons. One of these now glided out through the entrance of the cave, and spreading his broad wings floated over the dark earth. He flew on till he reached a lonely cabin by the wild sea shore, and there he dropped noiselessly down. Immediately his form was changed and became like that of a sailor, but with water dripping from his clothes and oozing from his hair and running down his white face. Out of the darkness and rain and wind, he entered the cabin and stood beside a bed on which a woman lay sleeping. Then the woman's sleep became troubled, and in a little while she awoke crying and wailing, and calling to her terrified children that their father was drowned. She had seen his drowned body in a dream; he was lost, the boat was lost.... Her children started up and gathered round her, and the hut was filled with weeping and lamentation....

Thus Xanthis held him with her day after day. He could not tear himself from the fascination of the pool: for the pool was like a theatre wherein all the drama of life and death was enacted for his pleasure.

CHAPTER XVII

The House of the Witch

THEY were only harmless magics Xanthis showed him, but as he watched her bruising the herbs she gathered in her green damp garden, and distilling their powerful juices into crystal phials, while she sang over them the charm of Hekate, he was certain that he had not seen all. His curiosity had awakened suspicion: he no longer believed the story about her father—that he was the friend of Sophron; she had invented this to lure him to the house, and very likely there was no father at all....

What had happened to the child with the lute? Demophon had never seen him again. But indeed there was something strange about all these slaves. When they had accomplished their tasks they disappeared; he never saw them either in the house or outside; he never heard a sound; yet when Xanthis clapped her hands, there they were, ready to bring in the food, to make music or to dance—in short, to do her bidding whatsoever it might be. And once, between the curtains at dusk, he had caught a glimpse of a dark face watching him; and its eyes had glowed like red brands. With a bound he had crossed the room—but there was nobody there. Nor was there a door in the empty space behind the curtain—nothing but the bare marble wall—either he had seen a demon or the whole thing had been an illusion....

What took place at night while he was sleeping? There had been nights when sleep had come upon him so overpoweringly, and had lasted so far into the next day, that he could not believe it to be natural. This had occurred three

times—at intervals of perhaps a fortnight—and there must be *something* to account for it, though when he had questioned Xanthis she had only laughed....

He was standing in a corner of the garden, beside a weeping ash-tree, while these thoughts and doubts flickered to and fro in his mind. It was not a corner he had ever visited before, because it was close to that mound to which he had taken an instinctive dislike. But it was out of sight of the house, and just now he wished to be alone. He would indeed have gone down into the valley had he not promised Xanthis to wait for her; so he waited, but waited where she would not at first think of looking for him. And while he pondered, more and more dubiously, the wind set the leaves of the ash-tree quivering, and their whisper reached the fringes of his consciousness, but no more, for his mind was troubled.

He stood there—and the trembling leaves continued to make a low murmur, which gradually forced itself upon his attention, as the noise of a persistent knocking will in the end break through the dreams of the heaviest sleeper. The knocking in this case was the sound of a single word repeated over and over again: and suddenly Demophon awoke. It *was* a word. “Fly—fly—fly,” the tree was saying. “Fly—fly—fly—fly.”

The wind dropped, and the voice ceased, but Demophon’s wits were by this time startled into alertness. He divided the branches, and stepping inside their green hollow circle, waited for the wind to return. He leaned against the trunk, hidden by the long drooping branches, quiet as a mouse so that he might not miss the faintest sigh, and presently again he heard the voice.

“I am not a tree—not an ordinary tree,” it said quite plainly, but very softly—so softly that it was as if the leaves were whispering within his mind. “Flee out of this valley, which is enchanted, which is the home of the witch Xanthis. Once, long ago, I came here to gather wild garlic, but Xanthis crept upon me while I was filling my basket, and sprinkled me with her magic drugs. I had brought my little boy to keep me company, and I knew he was playing not far away, though out of sight. I tried to call to him, to warn him. I tried to run to him, but my feet clung to the ground. One cry I did give, but I felt the cold stiff bark spreading up my limbs, already my hair was turning into leaves. And when my little boy appeared—for he had heard me—it was too late; I could not speak, I could not tell him. He flung his arms round me and clung to me and I tried to protect him with my branches, while Xanthis laughed. She seized him in her cruel hands; she tore him from me and I heard him screaming in terror as she dragged him to the house. Then the screams stopped suddenly, and I never heard nor saw him again.... All that was long, long ago.... For Xanthis is old—old and hideous—though she can assume a form that is young and beautiful. But I have seen her as she really is: I have seen her at night. I have seen her flitting over those trees on great gray sluggish wings, leathery and heavy like a bat’s. I have seen her at her loathsome feast: I have seen what lives there, buried in that mound.... But first I must tell you how you may——”

The wind died, and the whispering leafy voice died with it, and instead of the voice of the tree Demophon heard the voice of Xanthis calling his name. He crept through the bushes on his hands and knees, not coming out into the open till he was as far from the ash-tree as possible. He did not

want her to know he had found it: she might suspect something, even though she had never heard it talk.

Xanthis did not scold him for hiding: she was sweeter to him than ever. All that evening she fawned on him and flattered him, while he, on his side, tried to be just the same as before. But it was difficult. Moreover he had a feeling, through all her blandishments, that secretly she was growing impatient....

One thing he must find out as soon as possible, and that was what the tree had been on the point of telling him. He had an idea that it was something most urgent—something on which even his life, perhaps, depended. And next morning, by rare good fortune, an opportunity occurred, for Xanthis retired to her closet of medicines, leaving the field unexpectedly free.

Demophon was rejoiced at his luck. He hurried to the ash-tree. There was a light wind blowing, and in a very few minutes, he felt, the secret would be in his grasp. Then he could bid defiance to Xanthis and all her wicked arts. But when he reached the spot where the ash-tree had been, he found only the bare trunk lying on the ground, charred and blackened, as if blasted by lightning.

He was startled. It was a proof of the power of Xanthis, and it was a proof, also, of her cunning. For he saw now that the whole scene must have been arranged by her—that she had left him alone, not by chance, but on purpose, knowing what he knew, knowing that he would come to the tree, and knowing what he would find. It was a warning—a warning of what he might expect for himself should Xanthis become his enemy. The hour on which she began to tire of him would be

the hour of his doom: and already he had noticed her impatience....

Demophon stood looking down over the valley. He would have taken to flight there and then, had he not been convinced that this was what she expected him to do. It might be that every stick and stone in that valley was enchanted. At any rate, Xanthis must be watching him, must have laid a snare into which he would fall at the first attempt to escape. If she had left the door of his cage open, it could only be because she had woven an invisible net all round it—a net into which he would blunder just when he believed himself to be safe.

He slipped through the thicket, and at the edge of the valley stretched himself flat upon the ground. He suspected Xanthis was not far away, but he could not help that: he must take a risk.

And he began to call softly, very softly, again and again, till at last a flat smooth little head peeped out above the long grass, which barely stirred as a small serpent glided up to him. Demophon spoke rapidly in a low voice, and when he had finished the serpent began to hiss. But, alas! his hearing had lost its fineness, and he could not make out a single word. He begged the serpent to cleanse his ears, and it was just about to do so, when they heard a sweet voice singing close at hand. It was Xanthis once more. She must have followed him, she must be keeping a close guard over him, playing with him like a cat with a mouse, though she carried her big osier basket, and pretended to be busy and quite unconscious of his nearness as she stooped over the moist green beds, gathering herbs.... The snake darted into hiding, and Demophon went back to the house....

He flung himself down on a heap of cushions. How he hated this house now—and all it contained! But it was not in his nature to cease from struggling or to abandon hope. He even at this moment saw, for the first time, a slender, slender ray of light gleaming remotely in the darkness. It was a mere possibility—a possibility suggested by certain words spoken by the ash-tree.... The ash-tree had seen Xanthis like that.... Then, perhaps, on those nights when he was lying unconscious—she was far away. It *must* be so, for why else should she put him to sleep? and he was convinced now that in some mysterious fashion she did put him to sleep. It must be because she had a secret and absorbing business to transact—a business which prevented her from keeping guard. If only he could remain awake, then, when he was supposed to be asleep, he might, for an hour or two at least, find himself at liberty. And even as he reached this conclusion there floated before his mind a definite image....

It was that of a stone flask, with a squat body and a very long neck. Its colour was greenish, and the stone resembled some kind of chalcedony. He remembered it, he thought, partly because of its queer shape, but more especially because it had been produced on only two or three occasions. He knew where Xanthis kept it. It was not brought in by her slaves: she kept it herself. He went now to the little closet where she stored her magic potions, and to his surprise the key was in the lock, and the flask was there.

Demophon shook it. It was nearly full. Then, returning to the large room, he clapped his hands and waited for what might happen.

He was not at all sure that anything would happen: he had never tried to summon a slave before, and these particular

slaves were so odd: moreover, they might have received orders from Xanthis not to attend to him. One came, nevertheless—dark and lithe and soundless—and Demophon told him to bring some wine. The slave bowed low and vanished, but in the twinkling of an eye he was back again. Demophon waited till he had once more withdrawn, and then he acted rapidly.

First he made sure he was not being spied on; then he ran to the closet, and taking out the flask, poured its contents into the magic pool. From the wine the slave had brought him he refilled the flask, being careful to put in as nearly the right quantity as he could guess without exact measurement. All this occupied only a few minutes, and now he clapped his hands for the second time, and when his orders had been carried out, lay back on the cushions, his hands clasped behind his head, for the next move was with Xanthis.

It had become, indeed, a rather absorbing game, though of course he *might* be all wrong, the contents of the flask might not have been drugged, in which case he would have gained no advantage. Only why, if his guess were wrong, should she keep this one particular flask in her cupboard, producing it only now and then, though to all appearance the wine it contained was no different from what he was accustomed to drink. Surely she must keep it for a special purpose—all ready for use when the occasion arose.

And that very night Xanthis brought out the green flask. Watching her closely, yet without seeming to watch her, he read far more clearly, because he was actually looking for them, those signs of restlessness and preoccupation which he was now persuaded had accompanied each of its previous appearances. Xanthis was suffering. She did her best to

conceal it; she was particularly animated, particularly eager to please him; she invented tales to amuse him, she kissed his hands: but her lips seemed to scorch his skin, and he had a strange impression that all her body was consumed by a burning flame, so that it contained not one drop of moisture. He even fancied that this time she had put off too long doing whatever it was she was accustomed to do, and that it was only by a painful effort she prevented him from detecting in her a physical change. Once at least, when he pretended to be looking elsewhere, he caught in her eyes a red gleam that reminded him of those other eyes which had watched him from behind the curtains. Then he saw her bite on her lips till surely the blood would have come if there had been any blood there.

And he felt now, more and more strongly with every touch she gave him, a profound physical repulsion. She poured the bubbling golden wine out of the flask into a flat crystal cup, which she held out to him. He took it in both hands and drank.

“Do you think your father will soon return?” he asked deliberately, as he set down the empty cup.

Xanthis looked at him. An alteration, ever so slight, yet still perceptible, *had* begun to take place in her. There was a change, too, in her voice, which had grown a little hoarse.

“We will talk of that to-morrow,” she answered. “And of other things—of ash-trees and serpents.... What have you done with your little box?” And suddenly she laughed.

Demophon put his hand inside his tunic: the box which had contained the moly was gone. Nevertheless, he had faith—faith in his luck, in his star, in his divine guardian, in himself.

“How did you know?” he asked, with pretended indifference.

“I can see the broken end of the string,” Xanthis replied.

There was a short pause, after which she began again to speak, and this time she spoke slowly, as if to allow the veiled menace each word contained to sink deep into his mind. “I think I have been mistaken in you; I think I have treated you too much as if you were a child.”

“And now you know I’m not.” But his voice lacked the assurance he tried to put into it, and Xanthis continued quietly.

“Yes, I know more now—much more.... I know, for instance, that you don’t like me. But there are ways, Demophon, of overcoming dislike.”

“I suppose so.... Not very satisfactory ways, perhaps.”

“No, not very satisfactory. That is why I have been so patient.”

Demophon looked at her. “Are you threatening me?” he asked—with an immense effort, for this kind of battle of wills was more trying than any struggle in the open would have been.

And then, all at once, to his surprise, Xanthis seemed to capitulate. She smiled, though her smile had become a grimace. “If I wanted to harm you,” she said, “surely it would be foolish to begin by putting you on your guard!”

“Yes, unless you were quite, quite sure. Then it might be just a part of the amusement.”

Xanthis smiled again, but she did not answer, for outside the musicians had begun to play.

He could not be quite sure how long the drug took to act, but he knew the effect was not immediate, and he allowed another half-hour to elapse before he began to show signs of sleepiness. His yawns grew more frequent, his eyes would half close and then drowsily open again; and he noticed that she was watching him with an at first stealthy but soon more and more open intentness. At last he got up, and with all the heaviness he could assume, wished her goodnight. He crossed the room and drew aside the curtain behind which his bed was prepared.

Five minutes later he was breathing slowly and deeply, as if in profound slumber. Yet, though the music outside had ceased almost on the instant, a long time passed before he heard a movement within the room. He did not open his eyes nor alter his breathing. But he could feel a light shining down on his face, and knew she must be holding the lamp very near to him. This feeling was not pleasant; he fancied that his heart had begun to thump audibly. Then the light was withdrawn and he hoped his trial was over. But she had only set the lamp on the floor, and next moment he felt his hand grasped. He allowed his arm to remain perfectly flaccid while she lifted it, and the instant she relaxed her hold he let it fall dead on the coverlet.

What precautions she was taking, he thought! He had laid himself down on his right side, so that he faced the room, but now he felt himself being lifted and turned completely round. Even if he opened his eyes, he would be able to see nothing in this position, unless she happened also to draw the curtain, when he might risk turning back and peeping through. She did not draw the curtain, she left it wide open, and blew out

the three lamps one after the other, plunging both room and alcove into profound darkness.

It began to look as if his suspicions after all were groundless. It might easily be that she came every night to gaze at him when he was asleep. It would be quite like her to do so. But then he remembered the lifting and dropping of his arm, which could only have been a test.

He raised his head slightly, for he could hear faint rustlings from the adjoining room. He listened, but suddenly she was back again, bending over him. Then a door opened, letting in a rush of cool night air. The door closed, and he somehow knew he was alone.

Without hesitation Demophon jumped up and padded across the floor. He crept out by the way Xanthis must have taken, crouching in the shadows and moving with the utmost precaution. But it was unnecessary. The whole garden was flooded with moonlight, and it was quite easy to see her as she hastened over the dewy grass, nor did she once look behind her—not even when she reached the avenue of yew-trees, into whose blackness next moment she disappeared.

Demophon followed more slowly. He knew where that avenue ended, and he did not enter it, but crept along the outer edge of the trees, and before he had reached the clearing stopped. Flat on his stomach now, though the cold dew-drenched earth made him shiver, he crawled through a clump of laurels. Before him, as he carefully parted the branches, he saw an open space, in the middle of which was the low circular mound. If he had not liked this spot in daylight, he liked it still less now; but the movements of Xanthis were interesting. She had divested herself of every stitch of clothing, and with a spade had begun to dig a

shallow trench all round that sinister hump of earth, whose very nakedness carried with it an ugly suggestion.

Xanthis worked with feverish energy, and before many minutes her task was completed. Instantly she dropped her spade, and turning round three times, stretched her arms towards the full moon, and began to chant a litany in words Demophon did not understand. But he could see her face, and though it was still recognisable, it was horridly changed.

A sharp bleat broke through the incantation. It seemed to bring it to a close, for Xanthis sprang to the thicket, and by main force dragged a black goat, which must have been tethered to one of the trees, towards the mound. With astonishing strength, for the terrified beast struggled desperately, she forced it to the trench, and drove a knife up to the hilt in its throat. The goat staggered, then dropped to its knees, while the dark blood gushed out on the ground.

Again Xanthis began to chant her spells, but her voice had become indescribably harsh and grating—not even like a human voice—and the blood that was spilled on the ground was drawn up into the moon. The moon's whiteness turned to crimson; the face of Xanthis was the livid face of a corpse; and horrible crawling things appeared upon her body, as if they had issued out of her flesh. She raised above her head an iron pot and flung its contents—a white frothing liquid—over the mound. It sank into the earth, which began at once to heave and boil and bubble. There was something alive below the earth—something large, which was struggling and working its way to the surface....

Demophon did not wait to see any more. He sprang to his feet and fled across the grass and across the garden. He had almost reached the house when it flashed upon him that this

was the last place where he wanted to be. He must get down through the woods, down to the valley, and beyond that to freedom.

He turned. The garden was empty. Absorbed in her task, Xanthis either had not heard him, or had not troubled to pursue him. He skirted the extreme edge of the garden, keeping as far from the yew-tree avenue as possible; then, scrambling through the brushwood, he gained the outskirts of the wood. But beneath the trees it was pitch dark, and again and again he tripped as he slid and tumbled down the slope. With a last sliding rush that brought an avalanche of loose earth and stones behind him, he plunged out into the moonlit valley. And suddenly he gave a cry—half of fear, half of loathing—for standing there in front of him, straight in his path, was Xanthis.

Xanthis, not as she had appeared by the mound, but in all her radiant youth and beauty. Barely a moment he hesitated, then swerved to one side, trusting to his speed. But she did not try to stop him—only, as he passed, he saw her lift her arm, and felt the cold drops of some liquid sprinkling his body. He did not care; he ran on. But he had not taken twenty steps before, like the stab of a knife, an icy wave struck through him, paralysing his nerves, turning his limbs to lead.

He made an immense effort, but it was useless; he could not move one foot before the other. He heard the low laugh of Xanthis. Heavy as a statue he stood, while she walked up to him. Her hands passed over him, but he did not feel her touch till all at once his strength returned, the blood moved again in his veins, and he bounded on. Bounded indeed, for something had happened to him. He had dropped on all fours, he could *feel* himself changed. A thick coat of hair rippled over him,

he opened his mouth to cry aloud, and a long-drawn howl, dismal and despairing, issued from his throat.

But it was not the howl of a dog: it was the howl of a wolf, and the next time it came it was the howl of an angry wolf. As a boy, Demophon's actions were wont to follow swiftly on his thoughts, and this characteristic remained with him now. The white form of Xanthis was still visible when he suddenly checked in his headlong course and wheeled round.

Perhaps, at that instant, Xanthis herself realised she had made a mistake. It would have been just as easy, and certainly wiser, to have turned him into a smaller and less dangerous creature. When she saw that he had stopped, and instead of skulking into hiding among the bushes was standing in the open moonlight watching her—his eyes blazing, his gray mane bristling, his fangs bared—she began to scramble up the slope as hastily as possible. She was agile, and she had a long start, and the wolf still hesitated; nevertheless, before she had reached the top Xanthis began to scream. She fled on; she reached the path; but her speed availed her nothing. With a last agonised effort she stumbled out into the open garden, and at the same moment a dark body rose into the air behind her. One scream more, and Xanthis lay still, for her neck was broken as by the jaws of a steel trap.

The wolf stood looking down at her, but almost immediately he raised his head, sniffing. Something was happening—he did not know what—but he heard a wailing sound coming from the direction of the house. It was followed by a rushing in the air overhead, and by a rumbling from the earth. The ground had begun to tremble, the white marble house was rocking to and fro on its foundations, and

suddenly it collapsed with an appalling crash, while a dense cloud of dust floated up through the moonlight. When it had subsided, there was nothing left but a heap of broken stones and columns lying in the midst of a ruined garden.

Gazing on this scene of desolation stood no longer a wolf, but a very tired boy. He glanced down at Xanthis, and instantly drew back in disgust. For Xanthis was not there: there was nothing there but a moving, quivering heap—alive, but not with the life of Xanthis. Demophon plunged down into the valley.

He ran on, though he was ready to drop. He still ran, though the mountain gorge grew ever narrower and more rocky. The grass and the stream were left behind, and it was through a crevice not much wider than his own body that he eventually emerged into the open country. He was in the fields and plains of Attika, his native land. A faint light in the east announced the breaking of dawn, and presently the light flushed to a soft rose colour, and he knew morning was at hand.

He pushed on across the fields, keeping a straight track, till he chanced on a wooden image of Hermes, which had been set up to mark a division in the land. It seemed to him a good omen, so in this place, amid the first drowsy twittering of the birds, he lay down.

CHAPTER XVIII

Journey's End

HE was awakened by the sun shining on his face. A cool breeze was blowing, and his mind and body felt refreshed, as if they had been newly cleansed. He had a sense of recovered sanity; he felt that he had recovered actually from a spiritual sickness, some poison or enchantment, so that his very memory of it, of all that fevered unnatural life with Xanthis, its exotic luxuries, its enervation and excitement, was grown faint and unreal. He remembered everything clearly up till the beginning of his journey through the valley, but after that all was confused, bewildering, inexplicable....

Demophon sprang to his feet, and then stood motionless. Before him, and on and on to where the sky seemed to rest upon it like a soft blue veil, stretched an immense unbroken plain. But it was not grown with grass, it was composed of fields of wheat and barley, which in the distance showed flat and still as a wash of colour, but closer at hand trembled under the light wandering winds that shook the nearly ripened ears. Where the growth was more scanty there were gleams of pure blue—the blue of corn flowers—gleams of white and red—the white and red of daisies and pimpurnels. And the very openness of the landscape lent it a cool and delicate beauty—a beauty responsive to every change of cloud and sunshine—a beauty perpetually changing in expression as the cloud shadows swept across it.

Here and there, like small islands, rose clumps of hawthorn and bramble, thickets of dog rose and honeysuckle, crowning the bank of some hollow, and sparkling with dew. The air was

filled with the golden wine of sunshine, with scents so mingled as to be hardly distinguishable, the dark scents of earth, the green scents of growing things. It was filled, too, with a low murmurous noise, the fanning of tiny transparent wings, the stirring of minute particles of soil—the stirring of pollen, of swelling bud and dropping seed, the rustling of leaf against leaf, blade against blade—sounds so low that the distant voice of a bird was sufficient to drown them utterly. And now and then a hardly perceptible motion in the corn showed that some larger creature—furred or scaled or feathered—was moving through it. A beetle droned close by Demophon's cheek, a yellow moth hovered just above him, a bumble bee crawled over his foot....

This place was sacred. The wooden image of the God, when the wind touched it, made a faint humming sound. He had slept under the shadow of that image, and its benign influence had passed into him....

Perhaps in his sleep he had received a direct message, for he had a feeling of happiness, a profound assurance of safety. It was indeed not unlike the feeling which had come to him that afternoon when, after leaving Glaukos, he had wandered along the cliffs of Euboea. Or when he had knelt by the haunted pool. Now, as then, he was conscious of a watchful, guarding spirit—an angel, a God, a protector, a lover—one who had been with him, perhaps, from the beginning, ready in the moment of danger to intervene—sending forgetfulness to Laomedon, giving a voice to the ash-tree, clouding the mind of the witch so that he had been able to escape out of her snares.

For how else could he have come through all those perils unharmed? Demophon had a sudden sense of a great brightness in the sky, of an approaching glory. And he was not alone in this recognition: the music of bird and insect had died away; into the very air had come a new quality—a quality of expectancy, of hushed excitement....

And still—silence.... But the silence was not oppressive, was not even dreamy; behind it he was aware of an intensely wakeful, vigilant life. Something—some person—some revelation or fulfilment—was drawing near—and the whole world of nature *knew*.

Demophon broke off a branch of honeysuckle. He laid it at the foot of the image and knelt down before it. Then he bowed his head and prayed.

“O God of the wide-spreading fields, Hermes, for you I gathered this honeysuckle I found growing by the wayside. Grant that my mind and heart may be fresh and clean as these flowers, and accept this gift which is the gift of fidelity and love.”

His eyes remained closed, and his hands folded. He knelt on. He knelt on because an indescribable gladness had entered into and filled his body and spirit. He knelt on till close beside him a voice spoke his name. He knew that voice; he knew who stood there, and he raised his head. Though he was older, and somehow graver than Demophon remembered him; though he was a youth, a young shepherd, he was still the boy who had come to him in the woods, his lost playmate, his hero, his friend. Demophon knew those tight golden curls, that open brow, those clear gray eyes and parted lips.

“Where have you been? Where have you been?” he cried, hiding his face in the warm fleecy cloak.

A full and passionate joy swept through him as he clung in that close embrace. “I have been looking for you so long,” he said, still keeping his countenance hidden. “Why did you leave me? I looked for you in the wood.... I called your name. I waited and waited. I did not think you had forgotten me, but I did not understand....”

The voice of Hermes was pleasant and loving—with the woodboy’s laughter in it, the laughter of his old playfellow. “I could not be with you always; but never for long was I far away. And sometimes you did see me—in a dream.”

“And now you will never go away again?”

“I must, Demophon. And I think you know that. One day you will be with me; but it cannot be yet. See, I will give you a token, and for the rest you must trust me. You have trusted me in the past—that is why I am here now.”

He plucked one of the golden hairs from his own head and placed it among Demophon’s black ones. “And now you are indisputably mine,” he said; “marked with my mark. Not all the kings of the earth could remove it. I will tell you further, that I myself, even if I desired to, could not remove it, for our laws are not like your laws, and what we have once decreed remains unalterable.”

Demophon put his hand up to his hair, touching it very carefully, as if he hoped to feel among all that dark mop this one particular golden thread. “Is it there?” he whispered.

“It is there,” Hermes answered, “and it is there for ever. I have done, though in a different way, something of what Deo tried to do. Just exactly what she had planned can never now be done: that golden hair will not prevent you from growing old. But it is a promise that at the appointed time I shall come again for you; and that in the end all will be well.... And now

we had better be starting on our journey. I am going to see you safely home, and though at your father's gate I must say good-bye, the whole long day is before us."

So they set out together, hand in hand, through the waving barley fields.

September, 1925.

November, 1926.

LONDON AND GLASGOW: COLLINS' CLEAR-TYPE PRESS

[The end of *Demophon, a Traveller's Tale* by Forrest Reid]