

The First Labour: The Nemean Lion

The First Labour which Eurystheus imposed on Heracles, when he came to reside at Tiryns, was to kill and flay the Nemean, or Cleonaean lion, an enormous beast with a pelt proof against iron, bronze, and stone.

Arriving at Cleonae, between Corinth and Argos, Heracles lodged in the house of a day-labourer, or shepherd, named Molorchus, whose son the lion had killed. When Molorchus was about to offer a ram in propitiation of Hera, Heracles restrained him. 'Wait thirty days,' he said. 'If I return safely, sacrifice to Saviour Zeus; if I do not, sacrifice to me as a hero!'

Heracles reached Nemea at midday, but since the lion had depopulated the neighbourhood, he found no one to direct him; nor were any tracks to be seen. Having first searched Mount Apesas – so called after Apesantus, a shepherd whom the lion had killed – Heracles visited Mount Tretus, and presently descried the lion coming back to its lair, bespattered with blood from the day's slaughter. He shot a flight of arrows at it, but they rebounded harmlessly from the thick pelt, and the lion licked its chops, yawning. Next, he used his sword, which bent as though made of lead; finally he heaved up his club and dealt the lion such a blow on the muzzle that it entered its double-mouthed cave, shaking its head – not for pain, however, but because of the singing in its ears. Heracles, with a rueful glance at his shattered club, then netted one entrance of the cave, and went in by the other. Aware now that the monster was proof against all weapons, he began to wrestle with it. The lion bit off one of his fingers; but, holding its head in chancery, Heracles squeezed hard until it choked to death.

Carrying the carcass on his shoulders, Heracles returned to

Cleonae, where he arrived on the thirtieth day, and found Molorchus on the point of offering him a heroic sacrifice; instead, they sacrificed together to Saviour Zeus. When this had been done, Heracles cut himself a new club and, after making several alterations in the Nemean Games hitherto celebrated in honour of Opheltes, and rededicating them to Zeus, took the lion's carcass to Mycenae. Eurystheus, amazed and terrified, forbade him ever again to enter the city; in future he was to display the fruits of his Labours outside the gates.

For a while, Heracles was at a loss how to flay the lion, until by divine inspiration, he thought of employing its own razor-sharp claws, and soon could wear the invulnerable pelt as armour, and the head as a helmet. Meanwhile, Eurystheus ordered his smiths to forge him a bronze jar, which he buried beneath the earth. Henceforth, whenever the approach of Heracles was signalled, he took refuge in it and sent his orders by a herald – a son of Pelops, named Copreus, whom he had purified for murder.

The Second Labour: The Lernaean Hydra

The Second Labour ordered by Eurystheus was the destruction of the Lernaean Hydra, a monster born to Typhon and Echidne, and reared by Hera as a menace to Heracles.

Lerna stands beside the sea, some five miles from the city of Argos. To the west rises Mount Pontinus, with its sacred grove of plane-trees. Every year, secret nocturnal rites were held at Lerna in honour of Dionysus, who descended to Tartarus at this point when he went to fetch Semele; and, not far off, the Mysteries of Lernaean Demeter were celebrated in an enclosure which marks the place where Hades and Persephone also descended to Tartarus.

This fertile and holy district was once terrorized by the Hydra, which had its lair beneath a plane-tree at the sevenfold source of the river Amymon and haunted the unfathomable Lernaean swamp near by, the grave of many an incautious traveller. The Hydra had a prodigious dog-like body, and eight or nine snaky heads, one of them immortal; but some credit it with fifty, or one hundred, or even ten thousand heads. At all events, it was so venomous that its very breath, or the smell of its tracks, could destroy life.

Athene had pondered how Heracles might best kill this monster and, when he reached Lerna, driven there in his chariot by Iolaus, she pointed out the Hydra's lair to him. On her advice, he forced the Hydra to emerge by pelting it with burning arrows, and then held his breath while he caught hold of it. But the monster twined around his feet, in an endeavour to trip him up. In vain did he batter at its heads with his club: no sooner was one crushed, than two or three more grew in its place.

An enormous crab scuttled from the swamp to aid the Hydra, and nipped Heracles's foot; furiously crushing its shell, he shouted to Iolaus for assistance. Iolaus set one corner of the grove alight and then, to prevent the Hydra from sprouting new heads, seared their roots with blazing branches; thus the flow of blood was checked.

Now using a sword, or a golden falchion, Heracles severed the immortal head, part of which was of gold, and buried it, still hissing, under a heavy rock beside the road to Elaeus. The carcass he disembowelled, and dipped his arrows in the gall. Henceforth, the least wound from one of them was invariably fatal.

In reward for the crab's services, Hera set its image among the twelve signs of the Zodiac; and Eurystheus would not count this Labour as duly accomplished, because Iolaus had supplied the fire-brands.

The Third Labour: The Ceryneian Hind

Heracles's Third Labour was to capture the Ceryneian Hind, and bring her alive from Oenoe to Mycenae. This swift, dappled creature had brazen hooves and golden horns like a stag, so that some call her a stag. She was sacred to Artemis who, when only a child, saw five hinds, larger than bulls, grazing on the banks of the dark-pebbled Thessalian river Anaurus at the foot of the Parrhasian Mountains; the sun twinkled on their horns. Running in pursuit, she caught four of them, one after the other, with her own hands, and harnessed them to her chariot; the fifth fled across the river Celadon to the Ceryneian Hill – as Hera intended, already having Heracles's Labours in mind.

Loth either to kill or wound the hind, Heracles performed this Labour without exerting the least force. He hunted her tirelessly for one whole year, his chase taking him as far as Istria and the Land of the Hyperboreans. When, exhausted at last, she took refuge on Mount Artemisium, and thence descended to the river Ladon, Heracles let fly and pinned her forelegs together with an arrow, which passed between bone and sinew, drawing no blood. He then caught her, laid her across his shoulders, and hastened through Arcadia to Mycenae. Artemis came to meet Heracles, rebuking him for having ill-used her holy beast, but he pleaded necessity, and put the blame on Eurystheus. Her anger was thus appeased, and she let him carry the hind alive to Mycenae.

The Fourth Labour: The Erymanthian Boar

The Fourth Labour imposed on Heracles was to capture alive the Erymanthian Boar: a fierce, enormous beast which haunted the cypress-covered slopes of Mount Erymanthus, and the thickets of Arcadian Mount Lampeia; and ravaged the country around Psophis.

Heracles, passing through Pholoë on his way to Erymanthus – where he killed one Saurus, a cruel bandit – was entertained by the Centaur Pholus, whom one of the ash-nymphs bore to Silenus. Pholus set roast meat before Heracles, but himself preferred the raw, and dared not open the Centaurs' communal wine jar until Heracles reminded him that it was the very jar which, four generations earlier, Dionysus had left in the cave against this very occasion. The Centaurs grew angry when they smelt the strong wine. Armed with great rocks, uprooted fir-trees, firebrands, and butchers' axes, they made a rush at Pholus's cave. While Pholus hid in terror, Heracles boldly repelled Ancius and Agrius, his first two assailants, with a volley of firebrands. Nephelē, the Centaurs' cloudy grandmother, then poured down a smart shower of rain, which loosened Heracles's bow-string and made the ground slippery. However, he showed himself worthy of his former achievements, and killed several Centaurs, among them Oreus and Hylaeus. The rest fled as far as Malea, where they took refuge with Cheiron, their king, who had been driven from Mount Pelion by the Lapiths.

A parting arrow from Heracles's bow passed through Elatus's arm, and stuck quivering in Cheiron's knee. Distressed at the accident to his old friend, Heracles drew out the arrow and, though Cheiron himself supplied the vulneraries for dressing the wound, they were of no avail and he retired howling in agony to his cave; yet could not die, because he was immortal. Prometheus later offered to accept immortality in his stead, and Zeus approved this arrangement.

Pholus, in the meantime, while burying his dead kinsmen, drew out one of Heracles's arrows and examined it. 'How can so robust a creature have succumbed to a mere scratch?' he wondered. But the arrow slipped from his fingers and, piercing his foot, killed him there and then. Heracles broke off the pursuit and returned to Pholoë, where he buried Pholus with unusual honours at the foot of the mountain which has taken his name.

Heracles now set off to chase the boar by the river Erymanthus. To take so savage a beast alive was a task of unusual difficulty; but he dislodged it from a thicket with loud halloos, drove it into a deep snow drift, and sprang upon its back. He bound it in chains, and carried it alive on his shoulders to Mycenae; but when he heard that the Argonauts were gathering for their voyage to Colchis, dropped the boar outside the market place and, instead of waiting for further orders from Eurystheus, who was hiding in his bronze jar, went off with Hylas to join the expedition. It is not known who despatched the captured boar, but its tusks were preserved in the temple of Apollo at Cumae.

The Fifth Labour: The Stables of Augeias

Heracles's Fifth Labour was to cleanse King Augeias's filthy cattle yard in one day. Eurystheus gleefully pictured Heracles's disgust at having to load the dung into baskets and carry these away on his shoulders. Augeias, King of Elis, was the son of Helius, by Naupiadame, a daughter of Amphiadamus. Others call him the son of Poseidon. In flocks and herds he was the wealthiest man on earth: for, by a divine dispensation, his were immune against disease and inimitably fertile, nor did they ever miscarry. Although in almost every case they produced female offspring, he nevertheless had three hundred white-legged black bulls and two hundred red stud-bulls; besides twelve outstanding silvery-white bulls, sacred to his father Helius. These twelve defended his herds against marauding wild beasts from the wooded hills.

Now, the dung in Augeias's cattle yard and sheepfolds had not been cleared away for many years, and though its noisome stench did not affect the beasts themselves, it spread a pestilence across the whole Peloponnese. Moreover, the valley pastures were so deep in dung that they could no longer be ploughed for grain.

Heracles hailed Augeias from afar, and undertook to cleanse the yard before nightfall in return for a tithe of the cattle. Augeias laughed incredulously, and called Phyleus, his eldest son, to witness Heracles's offer. 'Swear to accomplish the task before nightfall,' Phyleus demanded. The oath which Heracles now took by his father's name was the first and last one he ever swore. Augeias likewise took an oath to keep his side of the bargain.

On the advice of Menedemus the Elean, and aided by Iolaus, Heracles first breached the wall of the yard in two places, and next diverted the neighbouring rivers Alpheus and Peneius, so that their streams rushed through the yard, swept it clean and then went on to cleanse the sheepfolds and the valley pastures. Thus Heracles accomplished this Labour in one day, restoring the land to health, and not soiling so much as his little finger. But Augeias, on being informed by Copreus that Heracles had already been under orders from Eurystheus to cleanse the cattle yards, refused to pay the reward and even dared deny that he and Heracles had struck a bargain.

Heracles suggested that the case be submitted to arbitration; yet when the judges were seated, and Phyleus, subpoenaed by Heracles, testified to the truth, Augeias sprang up in a rage and banished them both from Elis, asserting that he had been tricked by Heracles, since the River-gods, not he, had done the work. To make matters even worse, Eurystheus refused to count this Labour as one of the ten, because Heracles had been in Augeias's hire.

The Sixth Labour: The Stymphalian Birds

Heracles's Sixth Labour was to remove the countless brazen-beaked, brazen-clawed, brazen-winged, man-eating birds, sacred to Ares, which, frightened by the wolves of Wolves' Ravine on the Orchomenan Road, had flocked to the Stymphalian Marsh. Here they bred and waded beside the river of the same name, occasionally taking to the air in great flocks, to kill men and beasts by discharging a shower of brazen feathers and at the same time muting a poisonous excrement, which blighted the crops.

On arrival at the marsh, which lay surrounded by dense woods, Heracles found himself unable to drive away the birds with his arrows; they were too numerous. Moreover, the marsh seemed neither solid enough to support a man walking, nor liquid enough for the use of a boat. As Heracles paused irresolutely on the bank, Athene gave him a pair of brazen castanets, made by Hephaestus; or it may have been a rattle. Standing on a spur of Mount Cyllene, which overlooks the marsh, Heracles clacked the castanets, or shook the rattle, raising such a din that the birds soared up in one great flock, mad with terror. He shot down scores of them as they flew off to the Isle of Ares in the Black Sea, where they were afterwards found by the Argonauts.

The Seventh Labour: The Cretan Bull

Eurystheus ordered Heracles, as his Seventh Labour, to capture the Cretan Bull withheld by Minos from sacrifice to Poseidon, which sired the Minotaur on Pasiphaë. At this time it was ravaging Crete, especially the region watered by the river Tethris, rooting up crops and levelling orchard walls.

When Heracles sailed to Crete, Minos offered him every assistance in his power, but he preferred to capture the bull single-handed, though it belched scorching flames. After a long struggle, he brought the monster across to Mycenae, where Eurystheus, dedicating it to Hera, set it free. Hera however, loathing a gift which redounded to Heracles's glory, drove the bull first to Sparta, and then back through Arcadia and across the Isthmus to Attic Marathon, whence Theseus later dragged it to Athens as a sacrifice to Athene.

The Eighth Labour: The Mares of Diomedes

Eurystheus ordered Heracles, as his Eighth Labour, to capture the four savage mares of Thracian King Diomedes - it is disputed whether he was the son of Ares and Cyrene, or born of an incestuous relationship between Asterië and her father Atlas - who ruled the warlike Bistones, and whose stables, at the now vanished city of Tirida, were the terror of Thrace. Diomedes kept the mares tethered with iron chains to bronze mangers, and fed them on the flesh of his unsuspecting guests.

With a number of volunteers Heracles set sail for Thrace, visiting his friend King Admetus of Pherae on the way. Arrived at Tirida, he overpowered Diomedes's grooms and drove the mares down to the sea, where he left them on a knoll in charge of his minion Abderus, and then turned to repel the Bistones as they rushed in pursuit. His party being outnumbered, he overcame them by ingeniously cutting a channel which caused the sea to flood the low-lying plain; when they turned to run, he pursued them, stunned Diomedes with his club, dragged his body around the lake that had now formed, and set it before his own mares, which tore at the still living flesh. Their hunger being now fully assuaged - for, while Heracles was away, they had also devoured Abderus - he mastered them without much trouble.

The Ninth Labour: Hippolyte's Girdle

Heracles's Ninth Labour was to fetch for Eurystheus's daughter Admete the golden girdle of Ares worn by the Amazonian queen Hippolyte. Taking one ship and a company of volunteers, among whom were Iolaus, Telamon of Aegina, Peleus of Iolcus and, according to some accounts, Theseus of Athens, Heracles set sail for the river Thermodon.

The Amazons were children of Ares by the Naiad Harmonia, born in the glens of Phrygian Acmonia; but some call their mother Aphrodite, or Otrere, daughter of Ares. At first they lived beside the river Amazon, now named after Tanais, a son of the Amazon Lysippe, who offended Aphrodite by his scorn of marriage and his devotion to war. In revenge, Aphrodite caused Tanais to fall in love with his mother; but, rather than yield to an incestuous passion, he flung himself into the river and drowned. To escape the reproaches of his ghost, Lysippe then led her daughters around the Black Sea coast, to a plain by the river Thermodon, which rises in the lofty Amazonian mountains. There they formed three tribes, each of which founded a city.

The Amazons reckoned descent only through the mother, and Lysippe had laid it down that the men must perform all household tasks, while the women fought and governed. The arms and legs of infant boys were therefore broken to incapacitate them for war or travel. These unnatural women, whom the Scythians call Oeorpata, showed no regard for justice or decency, but were famous warriors, being the first to employ cavalry. They carried brazen bows and short shields shaped like a half moon; their helmets, clothes, and girdles were made from the skins of wild beasts. Lysippe, before she fell in battle, built the great city of Themiscyra, and defeated every tribe as far as the river Tanais. With the spoils of her campaigns she raised temples to Ares, and others to Artemis Tauropolus whose worship she established. Her descendants extended the Amazonian empire westward across the river Tanais, to Thrace; and again, on the southern coast, westward across the Thermodon to Phrygia. Three famous Amazonian queens, Marpesia, Lampado, and Hippo, seized a great part of Asia Minor and Syria, and founded the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Cyrene, and Myrine. It was on this expedition that the Amazons captured Troy, Priam being then still a child. But while detachments of the Amazonian army went home laden with vast quantities of spoil, the rest, staying to consolidate their power in Asia Minor, were driven out by an alliance of barbarian tribes, and lost their queen Marpesia.

By the time that Heracles came to visit the Amazons, they had all returned to the river Thermodon, and their three cities were ruled by Hippolyte, Antiope, and Melanippe. On his way, he put in at the island of Paros, famous for its marble, which King Rhadamanthys had bequeathed to one Alcaeus, a son of Androgeus; but four of Minos's sons, Eurymedon, Chryses, Nephalion, and Philolau, had also settled there. When a couple of Heracles's crew, landing to fetch water, were murdered by Minos's sons, he indignantly killed all four of them, and pressed the Parians so hard that they sent envoys offering, in requital for the dead sailors, any two men whom he might choose to be his slaves. Satisfied by this proposal, Heracles raised the siege and chose King Alcaeus and his brother Sthenelus, whom he took aboard his ship. Next, he sailed through the Hellespont and Bosphorus to Mariandyne in Mysia, where he was entertained by King Lycus the Paphlagonian, son of Dascylus and grandson of Tantalus. In return, he supported Lycus in a war with the Bebrycans, killing many, including their king Mygdon, brother of Amycus, and recovered much Paphlagonian land from the Bebrycans; this he restored to Lycus, who renamed it Heracleia in his honour. Later, Heracleia was colonized by Megarians and Tanagrans on the advice of the Pythoness at Delphi, who told them to plant a colony beside the Black Sea, in a region dedicated to Heracles.

Arrived at the mouth of the river Thermodon, Heracles cast anchor in the harbour of Themiscyra, where Hippolyte paid him a visit and, attracted by his muscular body, offered him Ares's girdle as a love gift. But Hera had meanwhile gone about, disguised in Amazon dress, spreading a rumour that these strangers planned to abduct Hippolyte; whereupon the incensed warrior-women mounted their horses and charged down on the ship. Heracles, suspecting treachery, killed Hippolyte offhand, removed her girdle, seized her axe and other weapons, and prepared to defend himself. He killed each of the Amazon leaders in turn, putting their army to flight after great slaughter.

On his return from Themiscyra, Heracles came again to Mariandyne, and competed in the funeral games of King Lycus's brother Priolus, who had been killed by the Mysians. Heracles boxed against the Mariandyne champion Titias, knocked out all his teeth and killed him with a blow to the temple. In proof of his regret for this accident, he subdued the Mysians and the Phrygians on Dascylus's behalf; but he also subdued the Bithynians, as far as the mouth of the river Rhebas and the summit of Mount Colone, and claimed their kingdom for himself. Pelops's Paphlagonians voluntarily surrendered to him. However, no sooner had Heracles departed, than the Bebrycans, under Amycus, son of Poseidon, once more robbed Lycus of his land, extending their frontier to the river Hypius.

Sailing thence to Troy, Heracles rescued Hesione from a sea-monster; and continued his voyage to Thracian Aenus, where he was entertained by Poltys; and, just as he was putting to sea again, shot and killed on the Aenian beach Poltys's insolent brother Sarpedon, a son of Poseidon. Next, he subjugated the Thracians who had settled

in Thasos, and bestowed the island on the sons of Androgeus, whom he had carried off from Paros; and at Torone was challenged to a wrestling match by Polygonus and Telegonus, sons of Proteus, both of whom he killed.

Returning to Mycenae at last, Heracles handed the girdle to Eurystheus, who gave it to Admete. As for the other spoil taken from the Amazons: he presented their rich robes to the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, and Hippolyte's axe to Queen Omphale, who included it among the sacred regalia of the Lydian kings. Eventually it was taken to a Carian temple of Labradian Zeus, and placed in the hand of his divine image.

The Tenth Labour: The Cattle of Geryon

Heracles's Tenth Labour was to fetch the famous cattle of Geryon from Erytheia, an island near the Ocean stream, without either demand or payment. Geryon, a son of Chrysaor and Callirhoë, a daughter of the Titan Oceanus, was the King of Tartessus in Spain, and reputedly the strongest man alive. He had been born with three heads, six hands, and three bodies joined together at the waist. Geryon's shambling red cattle, beasts of marvellous beauty, were guarded by the herdsman Eurytion, son of Ares, and by the two-headed watchdog Orthrus - formerly Atlas's property - born of Typhon and Echidne.

During his passage through Europe, Heracles destroyed many wild beasts and, when at last he reached Tartessus, erected a pair of pillars facing each other across the straits, one in Europe, one in Africa. (These Pillars of Heracles are usually identified with Mount Calpe in Europe, and Abyla, or Abilyx in Africa.) Some hold that the two continents were formerly joined together, and that he cut a channel between them, or thrust the cliffs apart; others say that, on the contrary, he narrowed the existing straits to discourage the entry of whales and other sea-monsters.

Helius beamed down upon Heracles who, finding it impossible to work in such heat, strung his bow and let fly an arrow at the god. 'Enough of that!' cried Helius angrily. Heracles apologized for his ill-temper, and unstrung his bow at once. Not to be outdone in courtesy, Helius lent Heracles his golden goblet, shaped like a water-lily, in which he sailed to Erytheia; but the Titan Oceanus, to try him, made the goblet pitch violently upon the waves. Heracles again drew his bow, which frightened Oceanus into calming the sea.

On his arrival, he ascended Mount Abas. The dog Orthrus rushed at him, barking, but Heracles's club struck him lifeless; and Eurytion, Geryon's herdsman, hurrying to Orthrus's aid, died in the same manner. Heracles then proceeded to drive away the cattle. Menoetes, who was pasturing the cattle of Hades near by, took the news to Geryon. Challenged to battle, Heracles ran to Geryon's flank and shot him sideways through all three bodies with a single arrow. As Hera hastened to Geryon's assistance, Heracles wounded her with an arrow in the right breast, and she fled. Thus he won the cattle, without either demand or payment, and embarked in the golden goblet, which he then sailed across to Tartessus and gratefully returned to Helius. From Geryon's blood sprang a tree which, at the time of the Pleiades' rising, bears stoneless cherry-like fruit.

How he then drove the cattle to Mycenae is much disputed, but according to a probable account he passed through the territory of Abdera, a Phoenician settlement, and then through Spain, leaving behind some of his followers as colonists. In the Pyrenees, he courted and buried the Bebrycan princess Pyrene, from whom this mountain range takes its name. He then visited Gaul, where he abolished a barbarous native custom of killing strangers, and won so many hearts by his generous deeds that he was able to found a large city, to which he gave the name Alesia, or 'Wandering', in commemoration of his travels. The Gauls honoured Alesia as the hearth and mother-city of their whole land and claimed descent from Heracles's union with a tall princess named Galata, who chose him as her lover and bred that warlike people.

When Heracles was driving Geryon's cattle through Liguria, two sons of Poseidon named Ialebion and Dercynus tried to steal them from him, and were both killed. At one stage of his battle with hostile Ligurian forces, Heracles ran out of arrows, and knelt down, in tears, wounded and exhausted. The ground being of soft mould, he could find no stones to throw at the enemy - Ligys, the brother of Ialebion, was their leader - until Zeus, pitying his tears, overshadowed the earth with a cloud, from which a shower of stones hailed down; and with these he put the Ligurians to flight. Zeus set among the stars an image of Heracles fighting the Ligurians, known as the constellation Engonasis. Another memorial of this battle survives on earth: namely the broad, circular plain lying between Marseilles and the mouths of the river Rhône, about fifteen miles from the sea, called 'The Stony Plain', because it is strewn with stones the size of a man's fist; brine springs are also found there.

In his passage over the Ligurian Alps, Heracles carved a road fit for his armies and baggage trains; he also broke up all robber bands that infested the pass, before Cis-alpine Gaul and Etruria. Only after wandering down the whole coast of Italy, and crossing into Sicily, did it occur to him: 'I have taken the wrong road!' The Romans say that, on reaching the Albula - afterwards called the Tiber - he was welcomed by King Evander, an exile from Arcadia. At evening, he swam across, driving the cattle before him, and lay down to rest on a grassy bed. In a deep cave near by, lived a vast hideous, three-headed shepherd named Cacus, a son of Hephaestus and Medusa, who was the dread and disgrace of the Aventine Forest, and puffed flames from each of his three mouths. Human skulls and arms hung nailed above the lintels of his cave, and the ground inside gleamed

white with the bones of his victims. While Heracles slept, Cacus stole the two finest of his bulls; as well as four heifers, which he dragged backwards by their tails into his lair.

At the first streak of dawn, Heracles awoke, and at once noticed that the cattle were missing. After searching for them in vain, he was about to drive the remainder onward, when one of the stolen heifers lowed hungrily. Heracles traced the sound to the cave, but found the entrance barred by a rock which ten yoke of oxen could hardly have moved; nevertheless, he heaved it aside as though it had been a pebble and, undaunted by the smoky flames which Cacus was now belching, grappled with him and battered his face to pulp.

Aided by King Evander, Heracles then built an altar to Zeus, at which he sacrificed one of the recovered bulls, and afterwards made arrangements for his own worship. According to the Romans, Heracles freed King Evander from the tribute owed to the Etruscans; killed King Faunus, whose custom was to sacrifice strangers at the altar of his father Hermes; and begot Latinus, the ancestor of the Latins, on Faunus's widow, or daughter. Heracles is also believed to have founded Pompeii and Herculaneum; to have fought giants on the Phlegraean Plain of Cumae; and to have built a causeway one mile long across the Lucrine Gulf, called the Heracleian Road, down which he drove Geryon's cattle.

It is further said that, as he lay down to rest near the frontier of Rhegium and Epizephyrian Locris, a bull broke away from the herd and, plunging into the sea, swam over to Sicily. Heracles, going in pursuit, found it concealed among the herds of Eryx, King of the Elymans, a son of Aphrodite by Butes. Eryx, who was a wrestler and boxer, challenged him to a fivefold contest. Heracles accepted the challenge, on condition that Eryx would stake his kingdom against the runaway bull, and won the first four events; finally, in the wrestling match, he lifted Eryx high into the air, dashed him to the ground and killed him - which taught the Sicilians that not everyone born of a goddess is necessarily immortal. In this manner, Heracles won Eryx's kingdom, which he left the inhabitants to enjoy until one of his own descendants should come to claim it.

Continuing on his way through Sicily, Heracles came to the site where now stands the city of Syracuse; there he offered sacrifices, and instituted the annual festival beside the sacred chasm of Cyane, down which Hades snatched Core to the Underworld. To those who honoured Heracles in the Plain of Leontini, he left undying memorials of his visit. Close to the city of Agrigium, the hoof marks of his cattle were found imprinted on a stony road, as though in wax; and, regarding this as an intimation of his own immortality, Heracles accepted from the inhabitants those divine honours which he had hitherto consistently refused. Then, in acknowledgement of their favours, he dug a lake four furlongs in circumference outside the city walls, and established local sanctuaries of Iolau and Geryon.

Returning to Italy in search of another route to Greece, Heracles drove his cattle up the eastern coast, proposing to drive them through Isthria into Epirus, and thence to the Peloponnese by way of the Isthmus. But at the head of the Adriatic Gulf Hera sent a gadfly, which stampeded the cows, driving them across Thrace and into the Scythian desert. There Heracles pursued them and, having recovered most of the strayed cattle, drove them back across the river Strymon, which he dammed with stones for the purpose, and encountered no further adventures until the giant herdsman Alcyoneus, having taken possession of the Corinthian Isthmus, hurled a rock at the army which once more followed Heracles, crushing no less than twelve chariots and double that number of horsemen. This was the same Alcyoneus who twice stole Helius's sacred cattle: from Erytheia, and from the citadel of Corinth. He now ran forward, picked up the rock again, and this time hurled it at Heracles, who banded it back with his club and so killed the giant.

The Eleventh Labour: The Apples of the Hesperides

Heracles had performed these Ten Labours in the space of eight years and one month; but Eurystheus, discounting the Second and the Fifth, set him two more. The Eleventh Labour was to fetch fruit from the golden apple-tree, Mother Earth's wedding gift to Hera, with which she had been so delighted that she planted it in her own divine garden. This garden lay on the slopes of Mount Atlas, where the panting chariot-horses of the Sun complete their journey, and where Atlas's sheep and cattle, one thousand herds of each, wander over their undisputed pastures. When Hera found, one day, that Atlas's daughters, the Hesperides, to whom she had entrusted the tree, were pilfering the apples, she set the ever-watchful dragon Ladon to coil around the tree as its guardian.

Though the apples were Hera's, Atlas took a gardener's pride in them and, when Themis warned him: 'One day long hence, Titan, your tree shall be stripped of its gold by a son of Zeus,' Atlas, who had not then been punished with his terrible task of supporting the celestial globe upon his shoulders, built solid walls around the orchard, and expelled all strangers from his land.

Heracles, not knowing in what direction the Garden of the Hesperides lay, marched through Illyria to the river Po, the home of the oracular sea-god Nereus. When Heracles came, the river-nymphs, daughters of Zeus and Themis, showed him Nereus asleep. He seized the hoary old sea-god and, clinging to him despite his many Protean changes, forced him to prophesy how the golden apples could be won.

Nereus had advised Heracles not to pluck the apples himself, but to employ Atlas as his agent, meanwhile relieving him of his fantastic burden; therefore on arriving at the Garden of the Hesperides, he asked Atlas to do him a favour. Atlas would have undertaken almost

any task for the sake of an hour's respite, but he feared Ladon, whom Heracles thereupon killed with an arrow shot over the garden wall. Heracles now bent his back to receive the weight of the celestial globe, and Atlas walked away, returning presently with three apples plucked by his daughters. He found the sense of freedom delicious. 'I will take these apples to Eurystheus myself without fail,' he said, 'if you hold up the heavens for a few months longer.' Heracles pretended to agree but, having been warned by Nereus not to accept any such offer, begged Atlas to support the globe for one moment more, while he put a pad on his head. Atlas, easily deceived, laid the apples on the ground and resumed his burden; whereupon Heracles picked them up and went away with an ironical farewell.

After some months Heracles brought the apples to Eurystheus, who handed them back to him; he then gave them to Athene, and she returned them to the nymphs, since it was unlawful that Hera's property should pass from their hands. Feeling thirsty after this labour, Heracles stamped his foot and made a stream of water gush out, which later saved the lives of the Argonauts when they were cast up high and dry on the Libyan desert. Meanwhile Hera, weeping for Ladon, set his image among the stars as the constellation of the Serpent.

Heracles did not return to Mycenae by a direct route. He first traversed Libya, whose King Antaeus, son of Poseidon and Mother Earth, was in the habit of forcing strangers to wrestle with him until they were exhausted, whereupon he killed them; for not only was he a strong and skilful athlete, but whenever he touched the earth, his strength revived. He saved the skulls of his victims to roof a temple of Poseidon. It is not known whether Heracles, who was determined to end this barbarous practice, challenged Antaeus, or was challenged by him. Antaeus, however, proved no easy victim, being a giant who lived in a cave beneath a towering cliff, where he feasted on the flesh of lions, and slept on the bare ground in order to conserve and increase his already colossal strength.

In preparation for the wrestling match, both combatants cast off their lion pelts, but while Heracles rubbed himself with oil in the Olympic fashion, Antaeus poured hot sand over his limbs lest contact with the earth through the soles of his feet alone should prove insufficient. Heracles planned to preserve his strength and wear Antaeus down, but after tossing him full length on the ground, he was amazed to see the giant's muscles swell and a healthy flush suffuse his limbs as Mother Earth revived him. The combatants grappled again, and presently Antaeus flung himself down of his own accord, not waiting to be thrown; upon which, Heracles, realizing what he was at, lifted him high into the air, then cracked his ribs and, despite the hollow groans of Mother Earth, held him aloft until he died.

Next, Heracles visited the Oracle at Ammon, and then struck south, and founded a hundred-gated city, named Thebes in honour of his birthplace; but some say that Osiris had already founded it. All this time, the King of Egypt was Antaeus's brother Busiris, a son of Poseidon by Lysianassa, the daughter of Epaphus. Now, Busiris's kingdom had once been visited with drought and famine for eight or nine years, and he had sent for Greek augurs to give him advice. His nephew, a learned Cyprian seer, named Phrasius, son of Pygmalion, announced that the famine would cease if every year one stranger were sacrificed in honour of Zeus. Busiris began with Phrasius himself, and afterwards sacrificed other chance guests, until the arrival of Heracles, who let the priests hale him off to the altar. They bound his hair with a fillet, and Busiris, calling upon the gods, was about to raise the sacrificial axe, when Heracles burst his bonds and slew Busiris, Busiris's son Amphidamas, and all the priestly attendants.

Next, Heracles traversed Asia and finally reached the Caucasus Mountains, where Prometheus had been fettered while every day a griffon-vulture, born of Typhon and Echidne, tore at his liver. Zeus had long repented of his punishment, because Prometheus had since sent him a kindly warning not to marry Thetis, lest he might beget one greater than himself; and now, when Heracles pleaded for Prometheus's pardon, granted this without demur. Having once, however, condemned him to everlasting punishment, Zeus stipulated that, in order still to appear a prisoner, he must wear a ring made from his chains and set with Caucasian stone – and this was the first ring ever to contain a setting. But Prometheus's sufferings were destined to last until some immortal should voluntarily go to Tartarus in his stead; so Heracles reminded Zeus of Cheiron, who was longing to resign the gift of immortality ever since he had suffered his incurable wound. Thus no further impediment remained, and Heracles, invoking Hunter Apollo, shot the griffon-vulture through the heart and set Prometheus free.

The Twelfth Labour: The Capture of Cerberus

Heracles's last, and most difficult, Labour was to bring the dog Cerberus up from Tartarus. As a preliminary, he went to Eleusis where he asked to partake of the Mysteries and wear the myrtle wreath. Since in Heracles's day Athenians alone were admitted, Theseus suggested that a certain Pylus should adopt him. This Pylus did, and when Heracles had been purified for his slaughter of the Centaurs, because no one with blood-stained hands could view the Mysteries, he was duly initiated by Orpheus's son Musaeus, Theseus acting as his sponsor.

Thus cleansed and prepared, Heracles descended to Tartarus from Laconian Taenarum. He was guided by Athene and Hermes – for whenever, exhausted by his Labours, he cried out in despair to Zeus, Athene always came hastening down to comfort him. Terrified by Heracles's scowl, Charon ferried him across the river Styx without

demur. As Heracles stepped ashore from the crazy boat, all the ghosts fled, except Meleager and the Gorgon Medusa. At sight of Medusa he drew his sword, but Hermes reassured him that she was only a phantom; and when he aimed an arrow at Meleager, who was wearing bright armour, Meleager laughed. 'You have nothing to fear from the dead,' he said, and they chatted amicably for a while, Heracles offering in the end to marry Meleager's sister Deianeira.

Near the gates of Tartarus, Heracles found his friends Theseus and Perithous fastened to cruel chairs, and wrenched Theseus free, but was obliged to leave Perithous behind; next, he rolled away the stone under which Demeter had imprisoned Ascalaphus; and then, wishing to gratify the ghosts with a gift of warm blood, slaughtered one of Hades's cattle. Their herdsman, Menoetes, or Menoetius, the son of Ceuthonymus, challenged him to a wrestling match, but was seized around the middle and had his ribs crushed. At this, Persephone, who came out from her palace and greeted Heracles like a brother, intervened and pleaded for Menoetes's life.

When Heracles demanded Cerberus, Hades, standing by his wife's side, replied grimly: 'He is yours, if you can master him without using your club or your arrows.' Heracles found the dog chained to the gates of Acheron, and resolutely gripped him by the throat – from which rose three heads, each maned with serpents. The barbed tail flew up to strike, but Heracles, protected by the lion pelt, did not relax his grip until Cerberus choked and yielded.

With Athene's assistance, Heracles recrossed the river Styx in safety, and then half-dragged, half-carried Cerberus up the chasm near Troezen, through which Dionysus had conducted his mother Semele. When Heracles brought him to Mycenae, Eurystheus, who was offering a sacrifice, handed him a slave's portion, reserving the best cuts for his own kinsmen; and Heracles showed his just resentment by killing three of Eurystheus's sons: Perimedes, Eurybius, and Erypilus.