The Story of the Golden Fleece

BY ANDREW LANG
THE STORY OF
THE GOLDEN FLEECE
Frontispiece—The Story of the Golden Fleece.

Far away to Eastward he flew.
THE STORY
of the GOLDEN
FLEECE

BY
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INTRODUCTORY

This is the story of the Fleece of Gold, and of the Golden Ram, and what he did, and where he died, and how a Dragon guarded his fleece, and who the man was that won it, and of all that befell him on his way to find the Fleece, and on his way home. Because it is a long story, it is divided into parts. And the first part is the tale of "The Children of the Cloud."
THE CHILDREN OF THE CLOUD
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THE GOLDEN FLEECE

CHAPTER I

THE CHILDREN OF THE CLOUD

ONCE upon a time there was a king called Athamas, who reigned in a country beside the Grecian sea. Now, Athamas was a young man, and unmarried, because none of the princesses who then lived seemed to him beautiful enough to be his wife. One day he left his palace and climbed high up into a mountain, following the course of a little river. Now, a great black rock stood on one side of the river, and made
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a corner, round which the water flowed deep and dark. Yet, through the noise of the river, the king thought he heard laughter and voices like the voices of girls. So he climbed very quietly up the rock, and, looking over the edge, there he saw three beautiful maidens bathing in a pool, and splashing each other with the water. Their long yellow hair covered them like cloaks and floated behind them on the pool. One of them was even more beautiful than the others, and as soon as he saw her the king fell in love with her, and said to himself, "This is the wife for me."

Now, as he thought this, his arm touched a stone, which slipped from the top of the rock where he lay, and went leaping, faster and faster as it fell, till it dropped with a splash into the pool.
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below. Then the three maidens heard it, and were frightened, thinking some one was near. So they rushed out of the pool to the grassy bank where their clothes lay, lovely soft clothes, white and gray, and rosy-colored, all shining with pearl drops, and diamonds like dew.

In a moment they had dressed, and then it was as if they had wings, for they rose gently from the ground, and floated softly up and up the windings of the brook. Here and there among the green tops of the mountain-ash trees the king could just see the white robes shining and disappearing, and shining again, till they rose far off like a mist, and so up and up into the sky, and at last he only followed them with his eyes, as they floated like clouds among the other clouds across the blue. All day he watched
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them, and at sunset he saw them sink, golden and rose-colored and purple, and go down into the dark with the setting sun. Now, the king went home to his palace, but he was very unhappy, and nothing gave him any pleasure. All day he roamed about among the hills, and looked for the beautiful girls, but he never found them. And all night he dreamed about them, till he grew thin and pale and was like to die.

Now, the way with sick men then was that they made a pilgrimage to the temple of a god (for they were heathen people, worshiping many gods), and in the temple they offered sacrifices. Then they hoped that the god would appear to them in a dream, and tell them how they might be made well again. So the king drove in his chariot a long way, to the
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town where this temple was. And when he reached it, it was a strange place. The priests were dressed in dogs' skins, with the heads of the dogs drawn down over their faces, and there were live dogs running all about the place, for these were the favorite beasts of the god. And there was an image of him, with a dog crouched at his feet, and in his hand he held a serpent, and fed it from a bowl. So there the king sacrificed before the god, and when night fell he was taken into the temple, and there were many beds made up on the floor and many people lying on them, both rich and poor, hoping that the god would appear to them in a dream, and tell them how they might be healed. There the king lay, like the rest, and for long he could not close his eyes. At length he slept, and
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he dreamed a dream. But it was not the god of the temple that he saw in his dream; he saw a beautiful lady, and she seemed to float above him in a chariot drawn by doves, and all about her was a crowd of chattering sparrows. She was more beautiful than any woman in the world, and she smiled as she looked at the king, and said, "Oh, King Athamas, you are sick for love! Now this you must do: go home, and on the first night of the new moon, climb the hills to that place where you saw the Three Maidens. In the dawn they will come again to the river, and bathe in the pool. Then do you creep out of the wood, and steal the clothes of her you love, and she will not be able to fly away with the rest, and she will be your wife."

Then she smiled again, and her doves
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bore her away, and the king woke, and remembered the dream, and thanked the lady in his heart, for he knew that she was a goddess, the Queen of Love.

Then he drove home, and did all that he had been told. On the first night of the new moon, when she shines like a thin gold thread in the sky, he left his palace, and climbed up through the hills, and hid in the wood by the edge of the pool. When the dawn began to shine silvery, he heard voices, and saw the three girls come floating through the trees, and alight on the river bank, and undress, and run into the water. There they bathed, and splashed each other with the water, laughing in their play. Then he stole to the grassy bank, and seized the clothes of the most beautiful of the three; and they heard him move, and
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rushed out to their clothes. Two of them were clad in a moment, and floated away through the glen, but the third crouched sobbing and weeping under the thick cloak of her yellow hair. Then she prayed the king to give her back her soft gray and rose-colored raiment, but he would not, till she had promised to be his wife. And he told her how long he had loved her, and how the goddess had sent him to be her husband, and at last she promised, and took his hand, and in her shining robes went down the hill with him to the palace. But he felt as if he walked on the air, and she scarcely seemed to touch the ground with her feet. And she told him that her name was Nephele, which meant "a cloud," in their language, and that she was one of the Cloud Fairies that bring the rain, and
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live on the hilltops, and in the high lakes, and water springs, and in the sky.

So they were married, and lived very happily, and had two children, a boy named Phrixus, and a daughter named Helle. And the two children had a beautiful pet, a Ram with a fleece all of gold, which was given them by a young god called Hermes, a beautiful god, with wings on his shoon,—for these were the very Shoon of Swiftness, that he lent afterwards, as perhaps you have read or heard, to the boy, Perseus, who slew the monster, and took the Terrible Head. This Ram the children used to play with, and they would ride on his back, and roll about with him on the flowery meadows.

Now they would all have been happy, but for one thing. When there were
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clouds in the sky, and when there was rain, then their mother, Nephele, was always with them; but when the summer days were hot and cloudless, then she went away, they did not know where. The long dry days made her grow pale and thin, and, at last, she would vanish altogether, and never come again, till the sky grew soft and gray with rain.

Now King Athamas grew weary of this, for often his wife would be long away. Besides there was a very beautiful girl called Ino, a dark girl, who had come in a ship of merchantmen from a far-off country, and had stayed in the city of the king when her friends sailed for Greece. The king saw her, and often she would be at the palace, playing with the children when their mother had disappeared with the Clouds,
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her sisters. Now Ino was a witch, and one day she put some drugs into the king's wine, and when he had drunk it, he quite forgot Nephele, his wife, and fell in love with Ino. And at last he married her, and they had two children, a boy and a girl, and Ino wore the crown, and was queen. And she gave orders that Nephele should never be allowed to enter the palace any more. So Phrixus and Helle never saw their mother, and they were dressed in ragged old skins of deer, and were ill fed, and were set to do hard work in the house, while the children of Ino wore gold crowns in their hair, and were dressed in fine raiment, and had the best of everything.

One day Phrixus and Helle were in the field, herding the sheep, for now they were treated like peasant children, and
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had to work for their bread. And there they met an old woman, all wrinkled, and poorly clothed, and they took pity on her, and brought her home with them. Now Ino saw her, and as she wanted a nurse for her children, she took her in to be the nurse, and the old woman took care of the children, and lived in the house. And she was kind to Phrixus and Helle. But neither of them knew that she was their own mother, Nephele, who had disguised herself as an old woman and a servant, that she might be with her children. And Phrixus and Helle grew strong and tall, and more beautiful than Ino’s children, so she hated them, and determined, at last, to kill them. They all slept at night in one room, but Ino’s children had gold crowns in their hair, and beautiful coverlets on their
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beds. Now, one night, Phrixus was half awake, and he heard the old nurse come, in the dark, and put something on his head, and on his sister’s, and change their coverlets. But he was so drowsy that he half thought it was a dream, and he lay and fell asleep. But, in the dead of night, the wicked stepmother, Ino, crept into the room with a dagger in her hand. And she stole up to the bed of Phrixus, and felt his hair, and his coverlet. Then she went softly to the bed of Helle, and felt her coverlet, and her hair with the gold crown on it. So she supposed these to be her own children, and she kissed them in the dark, and went to the beds of the other two children. She felt their heads, and they had no crowns on, so she killed them, thinking they were Phrixus and Helle. Then she
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crept downstairs, and went back to bed.

Now, in the morning, there were the stepmother Ino's children cold and dead, and nobody knew who had killed them. Only the wicked queen knew, and she, of course, would not tell of herself, but if she hated Phrixus and Helle before, now she hated them a hundred times worse than ever. But the old nurse was gone; nobody ever saw her there again, and everybody but the queen thought that she had killed the two children. Everywhere the king sought for her, but he never found her, for she had gone back to her sisters, the Clouds.

And the Clouds were gone, too! For six long months, from winter to harvest time, the rain never fell. The country was burned up, the trees grew black and
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dry, there was no water in the streams, the corn turned yellow and died before it was come into the ear. The people were starving, the cattle and sheep were perishing, for there was no grass. And every day the sun rose hot and red, and went blazing through the sky without a cloud.

Then the wicked stepmother, Ino, saw her chance. The king sent messengers to consult a prophetess, and to find out what should be done to bring back the clouds and the rain. Then Ino took the messengers, and gave them gold, and threatened also to kill them, if they did not bring the message she wished from the prophetess. Now this message was that Phrixus and Helle must be burned as a sacrifice to the gods.

So the messengers went, and came
back dressed in mourning. And when they were brought before the king, at first they would tell him nothing. But he commanded them to speak, and then they told him what Ino had bidden them to say, that Phrixus and Helle must be offered as a sacrifice to appease the gods.

The king was very sorrowful at this news, but he could not disobey the gods. So poor Phrixus and Helle were wreathed with flowers, as sheep used to be when they were led to be sacrificed, and they were taken to the altar, all the people following and weeping. And the Golden Ram went between them, as they walked to the temple. Then they came within sight of the sea, which lay beneath the cliff where the temple stood, all glittering in the sun, and the happy white sea-birds flying over it.
Then the Ram stopped, and suddenly he spoke to Phrixus, and said: "Lay hold of my horn, and get on my back, and let Helle climb up behind you, and I will carry you far away."

Then Phrixus took hold of the Ram's horn, and Helle mounted behind him, and grasped its golden fleece, and suddenly the Ram rose in the air, and flew above the people's heads, far away over the sea.

Far away to the eastward he flew, and deep below them they saw the sea, and the islands, and the white towers and temples, and the fields, and ships. Eastward always he went, toward the sunrising, and Helle grew dizzy and weary. And finally a kind of sleep came over her, and she let go her hold of the Fleece, and fell from the Ram's back, down and
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down. She fell into the narrow seas, at last, that run between Europe and Asia, and there she was drowned. And that strait is called Helle's Ford, or Hellespont, to this day. But Phrixus and the Ram flew on up the narrow seas, and over the great sea which the Greeks called the Euxine, till they reached a country called Colchis. There the Ram alighted, so tired and weary that he died, and Phrixus had his beautiful Golden Fleece stripped off, and hung on an oak tree in a dark wood. And there it was guarded by a monstrous Dragon, so that nobody dared to go near it. And Phrixus married the king's daughter, and lived long, till he died also, and a king called Æetes ruled that country. Of all the things he had, the rarest was the Golden Fleece, and it became a pro-
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"AND THE GOLDEN RAM WENT BETWEEN THEM AS THEY WALKED TO THE TEMPLE."

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verb that nobody could take that Fleece away, nor deceive the Dragon who guarded it. The next chapter will tell who took the Fleece back to the Grecian land, and how he achieved this adventure.
THE SEARCH FOR THE FLEECE
CHAPTER II

THE SEARCH FOR THE FLEECE

SOME years after the Golden Ram died in Colchis, far across the sea, a certain king reigned in Greece, and his name was Pelias. He was not the rightful king, for he had turned his brother from the throne, and taken it for himself. Now, this brother had a son, a boy called Jason, and he sent him far away from Pelias, up into the mountains. In these hills there was a great cave, and in that cave lived Chiron who was half a horse. He had the head and breast of a man, but a horse’s body and legs. He was famed for knowing more about everything than anyone else in all
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Greece. He knew about the stars, and the plants of earth, which were good for medicine and which were poisonous. He was the best archer with the bow, and the best player of the harp; he knew most songs and stories of old times, for he was the last of a people, half horse and half man, who had dwelt in ancient times on the hills. Therefore, the kings in Greece sent their sons to him to be taught shooting, singing, and telling the truth, and that was all the teaching they had then, except that they learned to hunt, fish, and fight, and throw spears, and toss the hammer and the stone. There Jason lived with Chiron and the boys in the cave, and many of the boys became famous. There was Orpheus who played the harp so sweetly that wild beasts followed his minstrelsy, and even
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the trees danced after him, and settled where he stopped playing; and there was Mopsus who could understand what the birds say to each other; and there was Butes, the handsomest of men; and Tiphys, the best steersman of a ship; and Castor, with his brother Polydeuces, the boxer; and Heracles, the strongest man in the whole world, was there; and Lynceus, whom they called Keen-eye, because he could see so far, and he could see the dead men in their graves under the earth; and there was Ephemus, so swift and light-footed that he could run upon the gray sea and never wet his feet; and there were Calais and Zetes, the two sons of the North Wind, with golden wings upon their feet; and many others were there whose names it would take too long to tell. They all grew up together in the
hills good friends, healthy, and brave, and strong. And they all went out to their own homes at last; but Jason had no home to go to, for his uncle, Pelias, had taken it, and his father was a wanderer. So at last he wearied of being alone, and he said good-by to his old teacher, and went down through the hills toward Iolcos, his father's old home, where his wicked uncle, Pelias, was reigning. As he went, he came to a great, flooded river, running red from bank to bank, rolling the round bowlders along. And there on the bank was an old woman sitting. "Cannot you cross, mother?" said Jason; and she said she could not, but must wait until the flood fell, for there was no bridge. "I'll carry you across," said Jason, "if you will let me carry you."
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So she thanked him, and said it was a kind deed, for she was longing to reach the cottage where her little grandson lay sick.

Then he knelt down, and she climbed upon his back, and he used his spear for a staff, and stepped into the river. It was deeper than he thought, and stronger, but at last he staggered out on the farther bank, far below where he went in. And then he set the old woman down.

"Bless you, my lad, for a strong man and a brave!" she said, "and my blessing go with you to the world's end."

Then he looked and she was gone he did not know where, for she was the greatest of the goddesses, Hera, the wife of Zeus, who had taken the shape of an old woman.
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Then Jason went down limping to the city, for he had lost one shoe in the flood. And when he reached the town he went straight up to the palace, and through the court, and into the open door, and up the hall, where the king was sitting at his table among his men. There Jason stood, leaning on his spear.

When the king saw him he turned white with terror. For he had been told that a man with only one shoe would come some day and take away his kingdom. And here was the half-shod man of whom the prophecy had spoken.

But he still remembered to be courteous, and he bade his men lead the stranger to the baths, and there the attendants bathed him, pouring hot water over him. And they anointed his head with oil, and clothed him in new raiment,
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and brought him back to the hall, and set him down at a table beside the king, and gave him meat and drink.

When he had eaten and was refreshed, the king said: "Now it is time to ask the stranger who he is, and who his parents are, and whence he comes to Iolcos?"

And Jason answered, "I am Jason, Æon's son, your own brother's son, and I am come to take back my kingdom."

The king grew pale again, but he was cunning, and he leaped up and embraced the lad, and made much of him, and had a gold circlet twisted in his hair. Then he said he was old, and weary of judging the people. "And weary work it is," he said, "and no joy therewith shall any king have. For there is a curse on the country, that shall not be taken away till
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the Fleece of Gold is brought home, from the land of the world’s end.”

When Jason heard that he cried, “I shall take the curse away, for I shall bring the Fleece of Gold from the land of the world’s end before I sit on the throne of my father.”

Now this was the very thing that the king wished, for he thought that if once Jason went after the Fleece, certainly he would never come back living to Iolcos. So he said that it could never be done, for the land was far away across the sea, so far that the birds could not come and go in one year, so great a sea was that and perilous. Also, there was a dragon that guarded the Fleece of Gold, and no man could face it and live.

But the idea of fighting a dragon was itself a temptation to Jason, and he made
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a great vow by the water of Styx, an oath the very gods feared to break, that certainly he would bring home that Fleece to Iolcos. And he sent out messengers all over Greece, to all his old friends, and bade them come and help him, for that there was a dragon to kill, and that there would be fighting. And they all came, driving in their chariots down dales and across hills: Heracles, the strong man, with the bow that none other could bend; and Orpheus with his harp, and Castor and Polydeuces, and Zetes and Calais of the golden wings, and Tiphys, the steersman, and young Hylas, still a boy, and as fair as a girl, who always went with Heracles the strong. These came, and many more, and they set shipbuilders to work, and oaks were felled for beams, and ashes for oars, and
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spears were made, and arrows feathered, and swords sharpened. But in the prow of the ship they placed a bough of an oak tree from the forest of Dodona, where the trees can speak. And that bough spoke, and prophesied things to come. And they called the ship "Argo," and they launched her, and put bread, and meat, and wine on board, and hung their shields with their crests outside the bulwarks. Then they said good-by to their friends, went aboard, sat down at the oars, set sail, and so away eastward to Colchis, in the land of the world's end.

All day they rowed, and at night they beached the ship, as was then the custom, for they did not sail at night, and they went on shore, and took supper, and slept, and next day to the sea again. And old Chiron, the man-horse, saw the
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swift ship from his mountain heights, and ran down to the beach; there he stood with the waves of the gray sea breaking over his feet, waving with his mighty hands, and wishing his boys a safe return. And his wife held in her arms the little son of one of the ship’s company, Achilles, the son of Peleus of the Spear and of the goddess of the Sea Foam. So they rowed ever eastward, and ere long they came to a strange isle where dwelt men with six hands apiece, unruly giants. And these giants lay in wait for them on cliffs above the river’s mouth where the ship was moored, and before the dawn they rolled down great rocks on the crew. But Heracles drew his huge bow, the bow for which he slew Eurytus, king of Oeschalia, and wherever a giant showed hand or shoulder
above the cliff, he pinned him through with an arrow, till all were slain. And after that they still held eastward, passing many islands, and towns of men, till they reached Mysia, and the Asian shore. Here they landed, with bad luck. For while they were cutting reeds and grass to strew their beds on the sands, young Hylas, beautiful Hylas, went off with a pitcher in his hand to draw water. He came to a beautiful spring, a deep, clear, green pool, and there the water-fairies lived, whom men called Nereids. There were Eunis, and Nycheia with her April eyes, and when they saw the beautiful Hylas, they longed to have him always with them, to live in the crystal caves beneath the water. For they had never seen anyone so beautiful. And as he stooped with his pitcher and dipped it
to the stream, they caught him softly in their arms, and drew him down below, and no man ever saw him any more, but he dwelt with the water-fairies.

And Heracles the strong, who loved him like a younger brother, wandered all over the country, crying "Hylas! Hylas!" and the boy's voice answered so faintly from below the stream that Heracles never heard him. So he roamed alone in the forests, and the rest of the crew thought he was lost.

Then the sons of the North Wind were angry, and bade them set sail without him, and sail they did, leaving the strong man behind. Long afterward, when the Fleece was won, Heracles met the sons of the North Wind, and slew them with his arrows. And he buried them, and set a great stone on each grave, and one of
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these is ever stirred, and shakes when the North Wind blows. There they lie, and their golden wings are at rest.

Still they sped on, with a west wind blowing, and they came to the country of Giants. Their king was strong, and thought himself the best boxer then living, so he came down to the ship and challenged anyone of that crew; and Polydeuces, the boxer, took up the challenge. So the rest, and the people of the country, made a ring, and Polydeuces and the Giant stepped into the midst, and put up their hands. First they moved round each other cautiously, watching for a chance, and then, as the sun shone forth in the Giant’s face, Polydeuces leaped in and struck him between the eyes with his left hand, and, strong as he was, the Giant staggered and fell.
Then his friends picked him up, and sponged his face with water, and all the crew of "Argo" shouted with joy. He was soon on his feet again, and rushed at Polydeuces, hitting out so hard that he would have killed him if the blow had gone home. But Polydeuces just moved his head a little on one side, and the blow went by, and, as the Giant slipped, Polydeuces planted one in his mouth and another beneath his ear, and was away before the Giant could recover. There they stood, breathing heavily, and glaring at each other, till the giant made another rush, but Polydeuces avoided him, and struck him several blows quickly in the eyes, and now the Giant was almost blind. So Polydeuces at once ended the combat by a right-hand blow on the temple. The Giant fell, and lay as if he were dead.
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When he came to himself again, he had no heart to go on, for his knees shook, and he could hardly see. So Polydeuces made him swear never to challenge strangers again as long as he lived, and then the crew of "Argo" crowned Polydeuces with a wreath of poplar leaves, and they took supper, and Orpheus sang to them, and they slept, and next day they came to the country of the unhappiest of men.

His name was Phineus, and he was a prophet; but, when he came to meet Jason and his company, he seemed more like the ghost of a beggar than a crowned king. For he was blind, and very old, and he wandered like a dream, leaning on a staff, and feeling the wall with his hand. His limbs all trembled, he was but a thing of skin and bone, and all
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foul and filthy to see. At last he reached the doorway and sat down, with his purple cloak fallen round him, and he held up his skinny hands, and welcomed Jason, for, being a prophet, he knew that now he should be delivered from his wretchedness. Now he lived, or rather lingered, in all this misery because he had offended the gods, and had told men what things were to happen in the future beyond what the gods desired that men should know. So they blinded him, and they sent against him hideous monsters with wings and crooked claws, called Harpies, which fell upon him at his meat, and carried it away before he could put it to his mouth. Sometimes they flew off with all the meat; sometimes they left a little, that he might not quite starve, and die, and be at peace, but might live
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in misery. Yet, even what they left was made so foul, and of such evil savor, that even a starving man could scarcely take it within his lips. Thus, this king was the most miserable of all men living.

So he welcomed the heroes, and, above all, Zetes and Calais, the sons of the North Wind, for they, he knew, would help him. And they all went into the wretched, naked hall, and sat down at the tables, and the servants brought meat and drink and placed it before them, the latest and last supper of the Harpies. Then down on the meat swooped the Harpies, like lightning or wind, with clanging brazen wings, and iron claws, and the smell of a battlefield where men lie dead; down they swooped, and flew shrieking away with the food. But the two sons of the North Wind drew their
short swords, and rose in the air on their golden wings, and followed where the Harpies fled, over many a sea and many a land, till they came to a distant isle, and there they slew the Harpies with their swords. And that isle was called "Turn Again," for there the sons of the North Wind turned, and it was late in the night when they came back to the hall of Phineus, and to their companions.

Now, Phineus was telling Jason and his company how they might win their way to Colchis and the world's end, and the wood of the Fleece of Gold. First, he said, you shall come in your ship to the Rocks Wandering, for these rocks wander like living things in the sea, and no ship has ever sailed between them. For they open, like a great mouth, to let ships pass, and when she is between
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their lips they clash again, and crush her in their iron jaws. By this way even winged things may never pass; nay, not even the doves that bear ambrosia to Father Zeus, the lord of Olympus, but the rocks ever catch one even of these. So, when you come near them, you must let loose a dove from the ship, and let her go before you to try the way. And if she flies safely between the rocks from one sea to the other sea, then row with all your might when the rocks open again. But if the rocks close on the bird, then return, and do not try the adventure. But, if you win safely through, then hold right on to the mouth of the River Phasis, and there you shall see the towers of Æêtes, the king, and the grove of the Fleece of Gold. And then do as well as you may.
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So they thanked him, and the next morning they set sail, till they came to a place where high rocks narrowed the sea to the breadth of a river, and the stream ran swift, and the waves roared beneath the rocks, and the wet cliffs belowed. Then Euphemus took the dove in his hands, and set it free, and she flew straight at the pass where the rocks met, and sped right through, and the rocks gnashed like gnashing teeth, but they caught only a feather from her tail. Then slowly the rocks opened again, like a wild beast’s mouth that opens, and Tiphys, the helmsman, shouted, “‘Row on, hard all!’” and he held the ship straight for the pass. And she leaped at the stroke, and the oars bent like bows in the hands of men. Three strokes they pulled, and at each the ship leaped, and
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now they were within the black jaws of the rocks, the water boiling round them, and so dark it was that they could see the stars. But the oarsmen could not see the daylight behind them, and the steersman could not see the daylight in front. Then the great tide rushed in between the rocks like a rushing river, and lifted the ship as if it were lifted by a hand, and through the strait she passed like a bird, and the rocks clashed, and only broke the carved wood of the ship's stern. And the ship reeled in the seething sea beyond, and all the men of Jason bowed their heads over their oars, half dead with the fierce rowing.

Then they set all sail, and the ship sped merrily on, past the shores of the inner sea, past bays and towns, and river
mouths, and round green hills, the tombs of men slain long ago. And, behold, on the top of one mound stood a tall man, clad in rusty armor, and with a broken sword in his hand, and on his head a helmet with a blood-red crest. And thrice he waved his hand, and thrice he shouted aloud, and was no more seen, for this was the ghost of Sthenelus, Actaeon’s son, whom an arrow had slain there long since, and he had come forth from his tomb to see men of his own blood, and to greet Jason and his company. So they anchored there, and slew sheep in sacrifice, and poured blood and wine on the grave of Sthenelus. And there Orpheus left a harp, that the wind might sing in the chords, and make music to Sthenelus below the earth.

Then they sailed on, and at evening
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they saw above their heads the snowy crests of Mount Caucasus, flushed in the sunset; and high in the air they saw, as it were, a black speck that grew greater and greater, and fluttered black wings, and then fell sheer down like a stone. And then they heard a dreadful cry from a valley of the mountain, for there Prometheus was fastened to the rock, and the eagles fed upon him, because he stole fire from the gods, and gave it to men. And the heroes shuddered when they heard his cry; but not long after Heracles came that way, and he slew the eagles with his bow, and set Prometheus free.

But at nightfall they came into the wide mouth of the River Phasis, that flows through the land of the world’s end, and they saw the lights burning in the
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palace of Αἰτες the king. So now they were come to the last stage of their journey, and there they slept, and dreamed of the Fleece of Gold.
THE WINNING OF THE FLEECE
CHAPTER III

THE WINNING OF THE FLEECE

Next morning the heroes awoke, and left the ship moored in the river's mouth, hidden by tall reeds, for they took down the mast, lest it should be seen. Then they walked toward the city of Colchis, and they passed through a strange and horrible wood. Dead men, bound together with cords, were hanging from the branches, for the Colchis people buried women, but hung dead men from the branches of trees. Then they came to the palace, where King Æëtes lived, with his young son Absyrtus, and his daughter Chalciope, who had been the wife of Phrixus,
and his younger daughter, Medea, who was a witch, and the priestess of Brimo, a dreadful goddess. Now Chalciope came out and she welcomed Jason, for she knew the heroes were of her dear husband’s country. And beautiful Medea, the dark witch-girl, saw Jason, and as soon as she saw him she loved him more than her father and her brother and all her father’s house. For his bearing was gallant, and his armor golden, and long yellow hair fell over his shoulders, and over the leopard skin that he wore above his armor. And she turned white and then red, and cast down her eyes, but Chalciope took the heroes to the baths, and gave them food. Then Æetes asked them why they came, and they told him that they desired the Fleece of Gold. Then he was very angry, and
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told them that only to a better man than himself would he give up that Fleece. If any wished to prove himself worthy of it he must tame two bulls which breathed flame from their nostrils, and must plow four acres with these bulls. And then he must sow the field with the teeth of a dragon, and these teeth when sown would immediately grow up into armed men. Jason said that, as it must be, he would try this adventure, but he went sadly enough back to the ship and did not notice how kindly Medea was looking after him as he went.

Now, in the dead of night, Medea could not sleep, because she was so sorry for the stranger, and she knew that she could help him by her magic. Then she remembered how her father would burn her for a witch if she helped Jason, and
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a great shame came on her that she should prefer a stranger to her own people. So she arose in the dark, and stole just as she was to her sister’s room, a white figure roaming like a ghost in the palace. And at her sister’s door she turned back in shame, saying, “No, I will never do it,” and she went back again, and came again, and knew not what to do; but at last she returned to her own bower, and threw herself on her bed, and wept. And her sisters heard her weeping, and came to her, and they cried together, but softly, that no one might hear them. For Chalciope was as eager to help the Greeks for love of her dead husband as Medea was for the love of Jason. And at last Medea promised to carry to the temple of the goddess of whom she was a priestess a drug that
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"AND BEAUTIFUL MEDEA SAW JASON; AND AS SOON AS SHE SAW HIM SHE LOVED HIM."

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would tame the bulls. But still she wept and wished that she were dead, and had a mind to slay herself; yet, all the time, she was longing for the dawn, that she might go and see Jason, and give him the drug, and see his face once more, if she was never to see him again. So, at dawn she bound up her hair, and bathed her face, and took the drug, which was pressed from a flower. That flower first blossomed when the eagle shed the blood of Prometheus on the earth. The virtue of the juice of the flower was this, that if a man anointed himself with it, he could not that day be wounded by swords, and fire could not burn him. So she placed it in a vial beneath her girdle, and so she went secretly to the temple of the goddess. And Jason had been warned by Chalciope to meet her there,
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and he was coming with Mopsus who knew the speech of birds. Then Mopsus heard a crow that sat on a poplar tree speaking to another crow, saying:

"Here comes a silly prophet, and sillier than a goose. He is walking with a young man to meet a maid, and does not know that, while he is there to hear, the maid will not say a word that is in her heart. Go away, foolish prophet; it is not you she cares for."

Then Mopsus smiled, and stopped where he was; but Jason went on, where Medea was pretending to play with the girls, her companions. When she saw Jason she felt as if she could not come forward, nor go back, and she was very pale. But Jason told her not to be afraid, and asked her to help him, but for long she could not answer him; how-
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ever, at the last, she gave him the drug, and taught him how to use it. "So shall you carry the fleece to Iolcos, far from here; but what is it to me where you go, when you have gone from here? Still remember the name of me, Medea, as I shall remember you. And may there come to me some voice, or some bird with the message, whenever you have quite forgotten me."

But Jason answered, "Lady, let the winds blow what voice they will, and what that bird will, let him bring. But no wind or bird shall ever bear the news that I have forgotten you, if you will cross the sea with me, and be my wife."

Then she was glad, and yet she was afraid, at the thought of that dark voyage, with a stranger, from her father's home and her own. So they
parted, Jason to the ship, and Medea to the palace. But in the morning Jason anointed himself and his armor with the drug, and all the heroes struck at him with spears and swords, but the swords would not bite on him nor on his armor. And he felt so strong and light that he leaped in the air with joy, and the sun shone on his glittering shield. Now they all went up together to the field where the bulls were breathing flame. There already was Æetes, and Medea, and all the Colchians had come to see Jason die. A plow had been brought to which he was to harness the bulls. Then he walked up to them, and they blew fire at him that flamed all round him, but the magic drug protected him. He took a horn of one bull in his right hand, and a horn of the other in his left, and dashed
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"HE YOKED THEM TO THE PLOW AND DROVE THEM WITH HIS SPEAR."
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their heads together so mightily that they fell. When they rose, all trembling, he yoked them to the plow, and drove them with his spear, till all the field was plowed in straight ridges and furrows. Then he dipped his helmet in the river, and drank water, for he was weary; and next he sowed the dragon's teeth on the right and left. Then you might see spear points, and sword points, and crests of helmets break up from the soil like shoots of corn, and presently the earth was shaken like sea waves, as armed men leaped out of the furrows, all furious for battle. But Jason, as Medea had told him to do, caught up a great rock, and threw it among them, and he who was struck said to his neighbor, "You struck me; take that!" and ran his spear through that man's breast, but before he
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could draw it out another man had cleft his helmet with a stroke, and so it went. A few minutes of striking and shouting, while the sparks of fire sprang up from helmet and breastplate and shield. And the furrow ran red with blood, and wounded men crawled on hands and knees to strike or stab those that were yet standing and fighting. So ax and sword and spear flashed and fell, till now all the men were down but one, taller and stronger than the rest. Round him he looked, and saw only Jason standing there, and he staggered toward him, bleeding, and lifting his great ax above his head. But Jason only stepped aside from the blow which would have cloven him to the waist, the last blow of the Men of the Dragon's Teeth, for he who struck fell, and there he lay and died.
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Then Jason went to the king, where he sat looking darkly on, and said, "O King, the field is plowed, the seed is sown, the harvest is reaped. Give me now the Fleece of Gold, and let me be gone."

But the king said, "Enough is done. To-morrow is a new day. To-morrow shall you win the Fleece."

Then he looked sidewise at Medea, and she knew that he suspected her, and she was afraid.

Now Æetes went and sat brooding over his wine with the captains of his people; and his mood was bitter, both for loss of the Fleece, and because Jason had won it not by his own prowess, but by the magic aid of Medea. And, as for Medea herself, it was the king's purpose to put her to a cruel death, and this she needed not her witchery to know. And
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a fire was in her eyes, and terrible sounds were ringing in her ears, and it seemed she had but one choice, to drink poison and die, or to flee with the heroes in the ship "Argo." But at last flight seemed better than death. So she hid all her engines of witchcraft in the folds of her gown, and she kissed her bed where she would never sleep again, and the posts of the door, and she caressed the very walls with her hand in that last sad fare- well. And she cut a long lock of her yellow hair, and left it in the room, a keepsake to her mother dear, in memory of her maiden days. "Good-by, my mother," she said, "this long lock I leave thee in place of me; good-by, a long good-by to me who am going on a long journey; good-by, my sister Chalciope, good-by! dear house, good-by!"
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Then she stole from the house, and the bolted doors leaped open at their own accord at the swift spell Medea murmured. With her bare feet she ran down the grassy paths, and the daisies looked black against the white feet of Medea. So she sped to the temple of the goddess, and the moon overhead looked down on her. Many a time had she darkened the moon’s face with her magic song, and now the Lady Moon gazed white upon her, and said, “I am not, then, the only one that wanders in the night for love, as I love Endymion the sleeper, who wakens never! Many a time hast thou darkened my face with thy songs, and made night black with thy sorceries. And now, thou, too, art in love! So go thy way, and bid thy heart endure, for a sore fate is before thee.”
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But Medea hastened on till she came to the high river bank, and saw the heroes, merry at their wine in the light of a blazing fire. Thrice she called aloud, and they heard her, and came to her, and she said, "Save me, my friends, for all is known, and my death is sure. And I will give you the Fleece of Gold for the price of my life."

Then Jason swore that she should be his wife, and more dear to him than all the world. Then she went aboard their boat, and swiftly they rowed to the dark wood where the dragon who never sleeps lay guarding the Fleece of Gold. And she landed, and Jason, and Orpheus with his harp, and through the wood they went, but that old serpent saw them coming, and hissed so loud that women wakened in Colchis town, and children
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cried to their mothers. But Orpheus struck softly on his harp, and he sang a hymn to Sleep, bidding him come and cast a slumber on the dragon's wakeful eyes. This was the song he sang:

Sleep! King of Gods and men!
Come to my call again,
Swift over field and fen,
    Mountain and deep:
Come, bid the waves be still;
Sleep, streams on height and hill;
Beasts, birds, and snakes, thy will
    Conquereth, Sleep!
Come on thy golden wings,
Come ere the swallow sings,
Lulling all living things,
    Fly they or creep!
Come with thy leaden wand,
Come with thy kindly hand,
Soothing on sea or land
    Mortals that weep.
Come from the cloudy west,
Soft over brain and breast,
Bidding the Dragon rest,
    Come to me, Sleep!
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This was Orpheus's song, and he sang so sweetly that the bright, small eyes of the dragon closed, and all his hard coils softened and uncurled. Then Jason set his foot on the dragon's neck and hewed off his head, and lifted down the Golden Fleece from the sacred oak tree, and it shone like a golden cloud at dawn. But he waited not to wonder at it, but he and Medea and Orpheus hurried through the wet wood-paths to the ship, and threw it on board, cast a cloak over it, and bade the heroes sit down to the oars, half of them, but the others to take their shields and stand each beside the oarsmen, to guard them from the arrows of the Colchians. Then he cut the stern cables with his sword, and softly they rowed, under the bank, down the dark river to the sea. But by this time the hissing of
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"THEN JASON SET HIS FOOT ON THE DRAGON'S NECK AND HEWED OFF HIS HEAD."

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the dragon had awakened the Colchians, and lights were flitting by the palace windows, and Æëtes was driving in his chariot with all his men down to the banks of the river. Then their arrows fell like hail about the ship, but they rebounded from the shields of the heroes, and the swift ship sped over the bar, and leaped as she felt the first waves of the salt sea.

And now the Fleece was won. But it was weary work bringing it home to Greece, and that is another story. For Medea and Jason did a deed which angered the gods. They slew her brother Absyrtus, who followed after them with a fleet. And the gods would not let them return by the way they had come, but by strange ways where never another ship has sailed. Up the Istes.
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(the Danube) they rowed, through countries of savage men, till the "Argo" could go no farther, by reason of the narrowness of the stream. Then they hauled her overland, where no man knows, but they launched her on the Elbe at last, and out into a sea where never sail had been seen. Then they were driven wandering out into Ocean, and to a fairy, far-off isle where Lady Circe dwelt, and to the Sirens' Isles, where the singing women of the sea beguile the mariners; but about all these there is a better story, which you may some day read, the story of Odysseus, Laertes's son. And at last the west wind drove them back through the Pillars of Heracles, and so home to waters they knew, and to Iolcos itself, and there they landed with the Fleece,
and the heroes all went home. And Jason was crowned king, at last, on his father’s throne, but he had little joy of his kingdom, for between him and beautiful Medea was the memory of her brother, whom they had slain. And the long story ends but sadly, for they had no happiness at home, and at last they went different ways, and Medea sinned again, a dreadful sin to revenge an evil deed of Jason’s. For she was a woman that knew only hate and love, and where she did not love with all her heart, with all her heart she hated. But on his dying day it may be that he remembered her, when all grew dark around him, and down the ways of night the Golden Fleece floated like a cloud upon the wind of death.

THE END.