



***JOSEPH  
JACOBS***

***THE BOOK  
OF WONDER  
VOYAGES***



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**Joseph Jacobs**

# **The Book of Wonder Voyages**

EAN 8596547156000

DigiCat, 2022

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# Preface

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It was my custom for several years to tell my children every Friday night a voyage, told in the first person, but, if the truth must come out, simply "lifted" or at best adapted from all the imaginary voyages I could come across. I led the youngsters to understand that I had gone through one hundred voyages in my time, but that I should never be able to tell them my hundredth voyage, for if I told *that* I should burst. Sure enough I got to the ninety-ninth voyage, and on the following Friday there was, of course, no narrative forthcoming. But the following week a deputation from the young ones begged for my hundredth voyage, whatever the consequences.

I have thought that if my poor recital of these imaginary voyages could rouse interest and curiosity to such an unfilial pitch among my own children the originals from which I derived them might be equally attractive to other children; and I have brought together in the present volume the most memorable of those flights of the imagination which form almost as marked a class of popular literature as fairy tales themselves. It seems as natural to build ships, as to build castles, in the air; and there can be but few children of any age that have not at one time or another seen themselves transported to lands where the ordinary Laws of Mechanics or Physiology do not apply, and things throw off the causal nexus of common life. But though we fly our kite of imagination, it is always secured, if only by a thread, to

earthly fact, and in the wildest flights of imaginary voyagers there is always some germ of geographic truth.

So natural is this tendency towards these voyages to the Land of Fancy that we find specimens of them in almost all lands, and it has been my aim in the present collection to bring characteristic specimens from as many and as diverse quarters as my space permitted. Hellas gives us *The Argonauts*; the Celts tell *The Voyage of Maelduin*, which attracted Tennyson's notice. *Sindbad* would have perhaps been the appropriate representative of Arabia, but one hesitates to divorce him from the "Nights," and Mr. Batten had treated him in his appropriate connection. So I have selected Hasan of Bassorah and his *Voyage to the Islands of Wak-Wak* to represent Arabia. Curiously enough, the greatest voyagers of all, the Norsemen, seemingly found little temptation to let their imagination play about their business concerns, and in order to obtain a representative Wonder Voyage from the most wonderful voyagers of medieval times, I have had to combine two minor sagas which can be classed under that *genre*.

To be at all effective, a Wonder Voyage requires a certain amount of sea-room. One does not get one's sea legs, so to speak, till a sheet or two of print has been let loose. Hence I have not been able to include more than four or five voyages in the present volume but they will surely serve as Winter Nights' Tales. They should be read when the stormy winds do blow, do blow.

The story of *The Argonauts* had been told so well by Kingsley that I dared not commit the sacrilege of producing a rival version. I have to thank Messrs. Macmillan for

permitting me to utilise his "Heroes." Mr. Alfred Nutt with his usual kindness has provided me with a version of *Maelduin*, in which he has had permission from Dr. Whitley Stokes to use his translation which appeared in the *Revue Celtique*. Hasan I have retold in an abridged form, using as my "originals" the three translations from the Arabic, none of which were sufficiently simple to suit the audience for whom I intended his Adventures. For my Icelandic I have had to resort to the friendly offices of the Rev. J. Sephton, who has been good enough to translate the Eric Saga for this volume, while I have combined with it an adaptation of Thorkill's "Voyage to the World Beyond the Ocean," from *Saxo Grammaticus*, utilising for that purpose Mr. Elton's version published by the Folk-Lore Society. To all these gentlemen I hereby record my grateful thanks.

As the world grows old and grey, and men become everywhere alike, the value of the imagination for ornament and for delight will become more and more appreciated, even in education. The training and the practice of the imagination will become ever increasingly important as life gets more neutral tinted. Let therefore our children be early trained to adventurous voyages on the Sea of Imagination.

JOSEPH JACOBS.



# The Argonauts

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I

HOW THE CENTAUR TRAINED THE HEROES ON PELION

**N**OW I have a tale of heroes who sailed away into a distant land, to win themselves renown forever, in the adventure of the Golden Fleece.

And what was that Golden Fleece?

The old Hellens said that it hung in Colchis, which we call the Circassian coast, nailed to a beech tree in the War-god's wood; and that it was the fleece of the wondrous ram who bore Phrixus and Helle across the Euxine Sea. For Phrixus and Helle were the children of the cloud-nymph, and of Athamas the Minuan King. And when a famine came upon the land, their cruel stepmother Ino wished to kill them that her own children might reign, and said that they must be sacrificed on an altar, to turn away the anger of the gods. So the poor children were brought to the altar, and the priest stood ready with his knife, when out of the clouds came the Golden Ram, and took them on his back, and vanished. Then madness came upon that foolish king, Athamas, and ruin upon Ino and her children. For Athamas killed one of them in his fury, and Ino fled from him with the other in her arms, and leaped from a cliff into the sea, and was changed into



#### PHRIXUS AND HELLE

a dolphin, such as you have seen, which wanders over the waves forever sighing, with its little one clasped to its breast.

But the people drove out King Athamas, because he had killed his child; and he roamed about in his misery, till he came to the Oracle in Delphi. And the Oracle told him that he must wander for his sin, till the wild beasts should feast him as their guest. So he went on in hunger and sorrow for many a weary day, till he saw a pack of wolves. The wolves were tearing a sheep; but when they saw Athamas they fled, and left the sheep for him, and he ate of it; and then he knew that the oracle was fulfilled at last. So he wandered no more; but settled, and built a town, and became a king again.

But the ram carried the two children far away over land and sea, till he came to the Thracian Chersonese, and there Helle fell into the sea. So those narrow straits are called "Hellespont" after her; and they bear that name until this day.

Then the ram flew on with Phrixus to the northeast across the sea which we call the Black Sea now; but the Hellens called it Euxine. And at last, they say, he stopped at

Colchis, on the steep Circassian coast; and there Phrixus married Chalciope, the daughter of Aietes the king; and offered the ram in sacrifice; and Aietes nailed the ram's fleece to a beech, in the grove of Ares the War-god.

And after a while Phrixus died, and was buried, but his spirit had no rest; for he was buried far from his native land, and the pleasant hills of Hellas. So he came in dreams to the heroes of the Minuiai, and called sadly by their beds, "Come and set my spirit free, that I may go home to my fathers and to my kinsfolk, and the pleasant Minuan land."

And they asked, "How shall we set your spirit free?"

"You must sail over the sea to Colchis, and bring home the golden fleece; and then my spirit will come back with it, and I shall sleep with my fathers and have rest."

He came thus, and called to them often; but when they woke they looked at each other, and said: "Who dare sail to Colchis, or bring home the golden fleece?" And in all the country none was brave enough to try it; for the man and the time were not come.

Phrixus had a cousin called Æson, who was king in Iolcos by the sea. There he ruled over the rich Minuan heroes, as Athamas his uncle ruled in Boëotia; and, like Athamas, he was an unhappy man. For he had a stepbrother named Pelias, of whom some said that he was a nymph's son, and there were dark and sad tales about his birth. When he was a babe he was cast out on the mountains, and a wild mare came by and kicked him. But a shepherd passing found the baby, with its face all blackened by the blow; and took him home, and called him Pelias, because his face was bruised and black. And he grew up fierce and lawless, and did many

a fearful deed; and at last he drove out Æson his stepbrother, and then his own brother Neleus, and took the kingdom to himself, and ruled over the rich Minuan heroes, in Iolcos by the sea.

And Æson, when he was driven out, went sadly away out of the town, leading his little son by the hand; and he said to himself, "I must hide the child in the mountains; or Pelias will surely kill him because he is the heir."

So he went up from the sea across the valley, through the vineyards and the olive groves, and across the torrent of Anauros, toward Pelion the ancient mountain, whose brows are white with snow.



#### ÆSON AND JASON

He went up and up into the mountain, over marsh, and crag, and down, till the boy was tired and footsore, and Æson had to bear him in his arms, till he came to the mouth of a lonely cave, at the foot of a mighty cliff.

Above the cliff the snow wreaths hung, dripping and cracking in the sun; but at its foot around the cave's mouth grew all fair flowers and herbs, as if in a garden, ranged in order, each sort by itself. There they grew gayly in the

sunshine, and the spray of the torrent from above; while from the cave came the sound of music, and a man's voice singing to the harp.

Then Æson put down the lad, and whispered:

"Fear not, but go in, and whomsoever you shall find, lay your hands upon his knees and say, 'In the name of Zeus, the father of gods and men, I am your guest from this day forth.'"

Then the lad went in without trembling, for he too was a hero's son; but when he was within, he stopped in wonder to listen to that magic song.

And there he saw the singer lying upon bearskins and fragrant boughs: Chiron, the ancient centaur, the wisest of all things beneath the sky. Down to the waist he was a man, but below he was a noble horse; his white hair rolled down over his broad shoulders, and his white beard over his broad brown chest; and his eyes were wise and mild, and his forehead like a mountain wall.

And in his hands he held a harp of gold, and struck it with a golden key; and as he struck, he sang till his eyes glittered, and filled all the cave with light.

And he sang of the birth of Time, and of the heavens and the dancing stars; and of the ocean, and the ether, and the fire, and the shaping of the wondrous earth. And he sang of the treasures of the hills, and the hidden jewels of the mine, and the veins of fire and metal, and the virtues of all healing herbs, and of the speech of birds, and of prophecy, and of hidden things to come.

Then he sang of health, and strength, and manhood, and a valiant heart; and of music, and hunting, and wrestling,

and all the games which heroes love; and of travel, and wars, and sieges, and a noble death in fight; and then he sang of peace and plenty, and of equal justice in the land; and as he sang the boy listened wide-eyed, and forgot his errand in the song.

And at the last old Chiron was silent, and called the lad with a soft voice.

And the lad ran trembling to him, and would have laid his hands upon his knees; but Chiron smiled, and said, "Call hither your father Æson, for I know you, and all that has befallen, and saw you both afar in the valley, even before you left the town."

Then Æson came in sadly, and Chiron asked him, "Why earnest you not yourself to me, Æson the Æolid? "

And Æson said:

"I thought, Chiron will pity the lad if he sees him come alone; and I wished to try whether he was fearless, and dare venture like a hero's son. But now I entreat you by Father Zeus, let the boy be your guest till better times, and train him among the sons of the heroes, that he may avenge his father's house."

Then Chiron smiled, and drew the lad to him, and laid his hand upon his golden locks, and said, "Are you afraid of my horse's hoofs, fair boy, or will you be my pupil from this day?"

"I would gladly have horse's hoofs like you, if I could sing such songs as yours."

And Chiron laughed, and said, "Sit here by me till sundown, when your playfellows will come home, and you

shall learn like them to be a king, worthy to rule over gallant men."

Then he turned to Æson, and said: "Go back in peace, and bend before the storm like a prudent man. This boy shall not cross the Anauros again, till he has become a glory to you and to the house of Æolus."

And Æson wept over his son and went away; but the boy did not weep, so full was his fancy of that strange cave, and the centaur, and his song, and the playfellows whom he was to see.

Then Chiron put the lyre into his hands, and taught him how to play it, till the sun sank low behind the cliff, and a shout was heard outside.

And then in came the sons of the heroes, Æneas, and Hercules, and Peleus, and many another mighty name.

And great Chiron leaped up joyfully, and his hoofs made the cave resound, as they shouted, "Come out, Father Chiron; come out and see our game." And one cried, "I have killed two deer"; and another, "I took a wildcat among the crags"; and Hercules dragged a wild goat after him by its horns, for he was as huge as a mountain crag; and Cæneus carried a bear cub under each arm, and laughed when they scratched and bit, for neither tooth nor steel could wound him.

And Chiron praised them all, each according to his deserts.

Only one walked apart and silent, Æsculapius, the too-wise child, with his bosom full of herbs and flowers, and round his wrist a spotted snake; he came with downcast eyes to Chiron, and whispered how he had watched the



snake cast its old skin, and grow young again before his eyes, and how he had gone down into a village in the vale, and cured a dying man with a herb which he had seen a sick goat eat.

And Chiron smiled, and said, "To each Athené and Apollo give some gift, and each is worthy in his place; but to this child they have given an honor beyond all honors, to cure while others kill."

Then the lads brought in wood, and split it, and lighted a blazing fire; and others skinned the deer and quartered them, and set them to roast before the fire; and while the venison was cooking they bathed in the snow torrent, and washed away the dust and sweat.

And then all ate till they could eat no more (for they had tasted nothing since the dawn), and drank of the clear spring water, for wine is not fit for growing lads. And when the remnants were put away, they all lay down upon the skins and leaves about the fire, and each took the lyre in turn, and sang and played with all his heart.

And after a while they all went out to a plot of grass at the cave's mouth, and there they boxed, and ran, and wrestled, and laughed till the stones fell from the cliffs.

Then Chiron took his lyre, and all the lads joined hands; and as he played, they danced to his measure, in and out, and round and round. There they danced hand in hand, till the night fell over land and sea, while the black glen shone with their broad white limbs and the gleam of their golden hair.

And the lad danced with them, delighted, and then slept a wholesome sleep, upon fragrant leaves of bay, and myrtle,

and marjoram, and flowers of thyme; and rose at the dawn, and bathed in the torrent, and became a schoolfellow to the heroes' sons, and forgot Iolcos, and his father, and all his former life. But he grew strong, and brave, and cunning, upon the pleasant downs of Pelion, in the keen hungry mountain air. And he learned to wrestle, and to box, and to hunt, and to play upon the harp; and next he learned to ride, for old Chiron used to mount him on his back; and he learned the virtues of all herbs, and how to cure all wounds; and Chiron called him Jason the healer, and that is his name until this day.

## II

### HOW JASON LOST HIS SANDAL IN ANAUROS

**A**ND ten years came and went, and Jason was grown to be a mighty man. Some of his fellows were gone, and some were growing up by his side. Æsculapius was gone into Peloponnese to work his wondrous cures on men; and some say he used to raise the dead to life. And Hercules was gone to Thebes to fulfill those famous labors which have become a proverb among men. And Peleus had married a sea-nymph, and his wedding is famous to this day. And Æneas was gone home to Troy, and many a noble tale you will read of him, and of all the other gallant heroes, the scholars of Chiron the just. And it happened on a day that Jason stood on the mountain, and looked north and south and east and west; and Chiron stood by him and watched him, for he knew that the time was come.

And Jason looked and saw the plains of Thessaly, where the Lapithai breed their horses; and the lake of Boibé, and the stream which runs northward to Peneus and Tempe; and he looked north, and saw the mountain wall which guards the Magnesian shore; Olympus, the seat of the Immortals, and Ossa, and Pelion, where he stood. Then he looked east and saw the bright blue sea, which stretched away forever toward the dawn. Then he looked south, and saw a pleasant land, with white-walled towns and farms nestling along the shore of a land-locked bay, while the smoke rose blue among the trees; and he knew it for the bay of Pagasai, and the rich lowlands of Hæmonia, and Iolcos by the sea.

Then he sighed, and asked, "Is it true what the heroes tell me—that I am heir of that fair land?"

"And what good would it be to you, Jason, if you were heir of that fair land?"

"I would take it and keep it."

"A strong man has taken it and kept it long. Are you stronger than Pelias the terrible?"

"I can try my strength with his," said Jason; but Chiron sighed, and said:

"You have many a danger to go through before you rule in Iolcos by the sea: many a danger and many a woe; and strange troubles in strange lands, such as man never saw before."

"The happier I," said Jason, "to see what man never saw before."

And Chiron sighed again, and said: "The eaglet must leave the nest when it is fledged. Will you go to Iolcos by the sea? Then promise me two things before you go."

Jason promised, and Chiron answered, "Speak harshly to no soul whom you may meet, and stand by the word which you shall speak."

Jason wondered why Chiron asked this of him; but he knew that the Centaur was a prophet, and saw things long before they came. So he promised, and leaped down the mountain, to take his fortune like a man.

He went down through the arbutus thickets, and across the downs of thyme, till he came to the vineyard walls, and the pomegranates and the olives in the glen; and among the olives roared Anauros, all foaming with a summer flood.

And on the bank of Anauros sat a woman, all wrinkled, gray, and old; her head shook palsied on her breast, and her hands shook palsied on her knees; and when she saw Jason, she spoke, whining, "Who will carry me across the flood?"

Jason was bold and hasty, and was just going to leap into the flood: and yet he thought twice before he leaped, so loud roared the torrent down, all brown from the mountain rains, and silver-veined with melting snow; while underneath he could hear the boulders rumbling like the tramp of horsemen or the roll of wheels, as they ground along the narrow channel, and shook the rocks on which he stood.

But the old woman whined all the more: "I am weak and old, fair youth. For Hera's sake, carry me over the torrent."

And Jason was going to answer her scornfully, when Chiron's words came to his mind.

So he said, "For Hera's sake, the Queen of the Immortals on Olympus, I will carry you over the torrent, unless we both are drowned midway."

Then the old dame leaped upon his back as nimbly as a goat; and Jason staggered in, wondering; and the first step was up to his knees.

The first step was up to his knees, and the second step was up to his waist; and the stones rolled about his feet, and his feet slipped about the stones; so he went on staggering and panting, while the old woman cried from off his back:

"Fool, you have wet my mantle! Do you make game of poor old souls like me?"

Jason had half a mind to drop her, and let her get through the torrent by herself; but Chiron's words were in his mind, and he said only, "Patience, mother; the best horse may stumble some day."

At last he staggered to the shore, and set her down upon the bank; and a strong man he needed to have been, or that wild water he never would have crossed.

He lay panting a while upon the bank, and then leaped up to go upon his journey; but he cast one look at the old woman, for he thought, "She should thank me once at least."

And as he looked, she grew fairer than all women, and taller than all men on earth; and her garments shone like the summer sea, and her jewels like the stars of heaven; and over her forehead was a veil, woven of the golden clouds of sunset; and through the veil she looked down on him, with great soft heifer's eyes; with great eyes, mild and awful, which filled all the glen with light.

And Jason fell upon his knees, and hid his face between his hands.