



The Labors of Hercules

from *Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths*, by Bernard Evslin (1966); Introduction from Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* (1940)

Ovid gives an account of Hercules' life, but very briefly, quite unlike his usual extremely detailed method. He never cares to dwell on heroic exploits; he loves best a pathetic story. (i.e., a story that inspires "pathos," pity and sadness—F.) At first sight it seems odd that he passes over Hercules' slaying of his wife and children, but that tale has been told by a master, the fifth-century poet Euripides, and Ovid's reticence was probably due to his intelligence. He has very little to say about any of the myths the Greek tragedians write of. He passes over also one of the most famous tales about Hercules, how he freed Alcestis from death, which was the subject of another of Euripides' plays. Sophocles, Euripides' contemporary, describes how the hero died. His adventure with the snakes when he was a baby is told by Pindar in the fifth century and by Theocritus in the third...

Hercules is perhaps the best known of the Greek heroes and the stories about him and what he achieved are seemingly endless. In fact, there are so many that it is likely that the exploits of other, less popular men and gods were, in the course of time, attributed to him. If not, he was an amazing man indeed.

Zeus was Hercules's father, but his mother was Alcmena, a mortal woman. Hera resented the presence of yet another new baby about which she knew nothing and, full of vengeance, devised a plan to destroy the child. She decided to put two poisonous serpents in his cradle. However, though Hercules was only a few weeks old, he was already so strong that the serpents were no threat to him. He seized them in his fists, twisted them into a knot and so strangled them both.

Hera accepted defeat, for the time being, and Hercules grew

into a youth of immense strength and physical courage. The celebrated athlete Polydeuces, whose story will be told later, trained him in the use of arms; from Autolycus, a son of Hermes, he learned to wrestle; and from Eurytus, grandson of Apollo, he learned to shoot with bow and arrows. He was instructed in the arts, too, and became a fine lute player.

Having mastered such a wide variety of accomplishments, the young man meditated for some while on how his life should be spent. One day, when he was walking on Mount Cithaeron, two women appeared before him. Their names were Pleasure and Virtue, and they offered him a choice. Pleasure offered a life of ease and plenty, Virtue a life of toil and struggle and some sorrow, but with the promise of glory at the end of it. Hercules chose Virtue, and immediately began looking for a worthy cause for which he could fight.

His first good deed was to relieve the city of Thebes of a heavy tribute it had been forced to pay to a neighbouring state. To show his gratitude Creon, the king of Thebes, gave Hercules his lovely daughter Megara. Hercules and Megara were happy together and soon had fine children. But the sorrow foretold by Virtue came all too soon. Hera saw her chance to strike once more and she drove Hercules mad, so that he imagined that Megara and his children were his enemies. In a terrible rage, he killed them all.

The madness passed and Hercules, grief-stricken, journeyed to Delphi to ask the oracle how he could atone for what he had done. "Go forth to the city of Tiryns in Argolis, where Eurystheus is king," said the oracle. "There, for the span of twelve years, you must serve Eurystheus. If you carry out faithfully all the tasks he gives you, forgiveness will come to you and your soul will be at peace." So saying, the oracle fell silent and Hercules set out on his journey.

The first of the twelve tasks or labors which King Eurystheus set Hercules did not take him far from Tiryns. News had reached the palace that the countryside at Nemea, near Corinth, was being laid waste by a lion which came down from the hills each night, killing and maiming as it went. Both animals and men were its prey, and now the peasants of the area were too frightened to leave their homes, even when the sun was high.

"The lion must be killed," Eurystheus told Hercules, "and flayed, too. You must return with its skin as proof that it is really dead. But take the utmost care, for it is said that no weapon so far devised can penetrate its tawny hide."

Hercules took his sword and spear and a stout club and, with a net of thick rope over his shoulder, he set off. Two days later, having learned from a terrified shepherd that the lion's lair was in a cave in the hillside not far distant, he made his way there. It was early morning, and Hercules crouched near some bushes by the cave's entrance to wait for the lion to return from its night's hunting. Presently it came over the brow of the hill, slinking from bush to bush, its great jaws dripping blood. Huge and powerful, the very appearance of the lion would have made most men turn and fly.

Undaunted, Hercules stepped out into its path, and as he raised his spear the lion paused. The spear whistled through the air, and the great beast sprang forward with a roar. But though Hercules's aim was true, the spear bounced harmlessly from the great beast's chest.

Dodging to one side, Hercules thrust his sword with all his strength at the lion's flank, but the sword had no more effect than it would have had on solid rock. Snarling with rage, the lion whirled and charged once more. Hercules rose to his full height and, throwing his useless sword to the ground, swung his club with all the strength he possessed so that it whistled through the air like a meteor descending. As the club struck, the gaping jaws of the lion snapped shut and it staggered under the blow. Dazed and for the moment afraid, the lion sped quickly into its cave before Hercules could take advantage of the damage he had done.

He had proof enough now that no ordinary weapon was any use against the lion: even his club could not subdue it. Hercules decided to try cunning. He fixed his net across the mouth of the cave and then crept inside through another opening in the rocks. Trapped in the narrow space, the lion roared defiance and backed into the net, for in the twisting passages of the cave it could not gather itself for a spring. Relentlessly, Hercules advanced and the earth trembled as the pair met; but the fight was brief. With a lightning thrust, Hercules's hands were on the lion's throat and after only a short, final struggle the lion lay lifeless before him.

He rested a while, wondering how he could flay the lion if no knife could pierce its skin. At last inspiration came. He severed one of the animal's own scythe-like, curved claws and used this to remove the skin. Then, wrapping it around him, he returned to Tiryns.

Lerna, not many miles from Argos, was a desolate place. A river ran through it and great swamps stretched out on either side. These swamps were the home of the Hydra, a monster with nine snake-like heads that preyed on any travellers who passed that way. Many warriors and hunters had tried to stalk and kill it, but without success. People said that when one head was cut off another at once grew in its place so that the monster was as strong as before. One head among the nine was immortal. It was against the Hydra that King Eurystheus next sent Hercules.

Dressed as he now always was in the skin of the Nemean lion, he set out in his chariot for the marshes, driven by his nephew, Iolaus. The wind whistled over the bleak landscape and the tall, plumed reeds bent before it. Sea-birds called in the distance.

The Hydra did not appear at once, but Iolaus pointed to a grove of plane trees on a neck of slightly higher land, where it was thought to have its home. Hercules fired burning arrows into the air, so that they fell among the trees and at once a great hissing sound drowned the cries of the gulls as the many-headed beast came writhing out from the trees, its forked tongues darting in and out and evil shining from every wicked eye.

Hercules advanced and struck at the Hydra with his sword. A head flew through the air, but instantly another began growing in its place. He struck again and yet again. Two more heads were gone, but two soon replaced them. In retaliation, the Hydra coiled itself about Hercules's legs to crush him. He fought fiercely on, but against such an enemy it was hard to see how he could win.

Alone by the chariot Iolaus watched — but there was another watcher, too: from far above, Hera looked down on the terrible struggle.

"I have waited long enough for a chance to avenge myself on Zeus," she mused. "His son shall now perish by my hand." With these words she caused two giant crabs to crawl from the muddy waters of the marsh below, where the fight was taking place. Slowly they moved towards the fight and their armored claws closed on Hercules's bare ankles. Their relentless grip would have crushed the bones of most men, but Hercules kicked the crabs away and brought his foot down on them with a hammer-blow that cracked their shells in two.

Now Hercules was tiring and he called Iolaus to his aid. He lit a torch of burning wood and, as Hercules severed one head after another with his sword, he seared the stumps which were left, so that new heads could not grow. Gradually the Hydra weakened, and with a last mighty sweep of his sword, Hercules cut off its one immortal head and stamped it into the soft earth until the fierce light of evil in its eyes shone no more. Being half a god himself, Hercules had the power to destroy an immortal. He dipped his arrows into the Hydra's venom to give them even greater deadliness against future enemies.¹

The third labor of Hercules was less demanding on his strength and courage, though it tested his patience and his skill as a hunter. It was to capture unharmed the hind of Ceryneia and to take it to Tiryns. This hind was said to be one which had escaped when Artemis had sent out her hounds to find deer to draw her chariot. She had coveted it for its golden horns. After it had escaped, it went to live on the rocky lower slopes of the hills to the north of the province of Arcadia.

¹ Our friend Pausanias (Remember him? *Description of Greece*?) was less than impressed with this accomplishment of Hercules:

"At the source of the Amymoné grows a plane tree, beneath which, they say, the hydra (water-snake) grew. I am ready to believe that this beast was superior in size to other water-snakes, and that its poison had something in it so deadly that Heracles treated the points of his arrows with its gall. It had, however, in my opinion, one head, and not several. It was Peisander of Camirus who, in order that the beast might appear more frightful and his poetry might be more remarkable, represented the hydra with its many heads."

Description of Greece 2.37.4

It's an interesting mix of credulity ("of course a guy named Heracles fought a Hydra") and skepticism ("but there's *no way* it had nine heads!")...

Day and night Hercules stalked the hind across the land, as spring turned to summer and autumn to winter. It seemed at first that its speed and cunning would keep it safe from Hercules as well as from Artemis. Then, as the spring flowers bloomed once more, the hind grew weary. It had travelled many, many miles across plains and over mountains and still the relentless hunter pursued it. Exhausted, it lay down to sleep one night, and was so tired that it did not wake at once when morning came. Hercules found it in a hollow in the hills and, creeping quietly to the spot where it lay, gently spread his hunting net over it. Thus he captured it unharmed and, as the king had asked, carried it home to Tiryns.

“You have done well,” said King Eurystheus, “but I have a fourth task for you to perform when you have rested.”

“I need no rest,” Hercules told him. “The pursuit of the hind was just gentle exercise and I am ready for what may come.”

“That is good,” said the king. “For to capture the Erymanthian boar alive is something not to be undertaken lightly.”

“What is that?” Hercules asked, for he had been away so long, he had not heard of the latest troubles.

“News has come from a district far to the northeast, on the borders of Arcadia, where the river Erymanthus runs. A savage boar of enormous size has reduced the whole province to a state of terror. Its tusks are said to be the length of a man’s arm, and it fears neither man nor beast. But it must, like the hind of Ceryneia, be taken alive.”

Next morning Hercules set out once more. After five days he reached the river. There was no need to ask anyone where the wild boar might be, for there was snow on the ground and almost at once he was able to pick up its trail. The marks of its cloven hooves were so large that Hercules gripped his sword more tightly and looked warily about him as he followed the trail.

Soon he heard a restless movement and a loud snorting coming from beyond a thicket of leafless bushes. He stopped and stood silently looking about him. To the left of the thicket the snow lay deep, where it had drifted into a hollow. With great caution he crept to the right and, rounding the thicket, just had time to see that the boar was there before throwing back his head and letting out a nerve-shattering bellow. Not surprisingly, the boar, started into a panic, fled from him with a squeal of fear, heading directly away from him towards the hidden hollow. Next moment it was floundering helplessly in the deep snowdrift. It was the work of a minute for Hercules to cast his net over it and bind it fast with strong ropes. Taking its great weight on his broad shoulders, he carried it away.²

King Eurystheus was not too pleased when he heard how easily Hercules had captured the boar. The tasks he set were intended to be almost impossible and the king thought hard before he decided what the next one should be. Finally he told Hercules that he must clean the stables of King Augeias in one day. On a visit to the king, Eurystheus had seen that many of the buildings were knee-deep in the droppings of cattle and horses, and great piles of dung filled the yards around them. Clearly, they had not been cleaned out for many years. Pestilence was spreading from the stables over the province of Elis, where Augeias ruled, but he was too lazy to do anything about it. He raised no objection when Hercules arrived and told him of Eurystheus’s command, but he laughed when he heard that it was to be done in one day.

“One barrow-load alone will take an hour. A hundred — perhaps a thousand — barrows would be needed, and no day that I know of has a thousand hours in it,” he said.

Hercules smiled to himself. He had seen that the river Alpheus flowed near and already had a plan. He built a dam across the river, diverting its swiftly flowing waters so that they came rushing through the yards and stables, sweeping all the filth before them till not one scrap remained.

² During this labor, Hercules manages to get in a fight with a bunch of centaurs. (Don’t ask—it’s kind of complicated.) Anyway, he gets the better of them, and as they are running away, he fires off a couple of his super-Hydra-charged arrows at them. To his dismay, one of them sticks in the knee of the centaur Chiron, the great healer and teacher, who had tutored so many of the Greek heroes, including Hercules himself. Because of the potency of the Hydra’s poison, even Chiron is unable to heal his wound, and being immortal, he cannot die—so he lives instead in great pain, until... (to be continued)

“Use your thousand barrows to carry the earth from the dam, so that the river may resume its course,” Hercules told Augeias, with a twinkle in his grey eyes. Then he returned to Tiryns once again to find out what his sixth labor might be.

The king told him that many of the most skilled bowmen in Greece had recently returned from an unsuccessful raid on the haunts of the Stymphalian birds. These birds lived on the marshes that bordered Lake Stymphalus, in the shadow of Mount Cyllene, where Hermes was born. The birds, which were rather like storks, had claws and beaks of brass and could shed heavy, brass feathers from their wings at will. The falling feathers pierced the skulls of anyone they dropped on and the birds then swooped down to devour the body.

Because of the treacherous, boggy ground and the birds’ wariness of strangers, it was almost impossible to come within arrow-shot of them. Moreover, they seemed to sense if a man were armed or not. If he was not, they would attack. If he was, they would keep away. Eurystheus told Hercules that the birds must somehow be driven from the land.

Armed with his bow and arrows, Hercules first tried stalking the birds in conventional fashion, inching his way through the thin reeds. However, under his weight the soft ground gave way to the oozing mud beneath it and he only just managed to scramble back in time to firmer ground.

Away in the distance he could still see the birds moving on their stilt-like legs on the lake shore. They seemed not in the least worried by the presence of an intruder. Experience had told them that they were safe if they stayed where they were.

During the years of his labors, Hercules encountered the gods from time to time and sometimes they gave him help and advice. It happened that Athene was passing through Arcadia at this time and she reached Mount Cyllene while Hercules was there. He told her about his problem and she produced for him a huge brass rattle, which had been made for her by Hephaestus.

“It makes a noise like the crackling of a forest fire,” she told him.

Hercules was doubtful if this would have much effect on the birds, but as he could not think of anything else himself, he decided to try it. Taking the rattle, he climbed some way up the mountain until the whole lake lay spread out before him. He raised the rattle above his head and twirled it round and the birds immediately rose up from the further shore in a great cloud, startled by the strange noise. In panic they wheeled about, their harsh cries sounding their alarm, and then headed towards him. For a moment Hercules thought that they would attack him and he shot arrow after arrow into the air. A number of the birds fell, but the others passed high overhead and were soon lost to sight. By nightfall they had not returned. Hercules waited one day more to make sure that they did not come back, then went on his way to Tiryns.

Eurystheus’s next order was that Hercules should capture an enormous, fire-breathing bull which was running free on the island of Crete, destroying crops and goring people who got in its way. It was said to have sired the monstrous Minotaur, half man, half bull, which was imprisoned on the same island. Hercules’s task was to capture the bull and bring it to Tiryns.

So Hercules set out on a long sea crossing to the island of Crete, where he was welcomed by King Minos in his city of Knossos. Minos told him how the people of Crete could not venture from the city without risking their lives, and how grateful he would be if Hercules could capture the bull.

“If you are in need of help, you have only to ask. Anything you need shall be provided instantly,” King Minos told him.

Hercules knew that the bull, formidable though it might be, had no magical powers. He thought his own agility and strength should be more than a match for it, provided always that he could escape the searing blast of the fire which came from its nostrils. He found the bull easily, just outside the city walls, and leaped sideways as it charged. As it went past him he sprang on to its back, seizing its horns and wrestling it to the ground. Soon its legs were firmly bound and, flexing his shoulders, Hercules lifted it up bodily and carried it to where his ship was anchored in a harbor near the capital.

Minos gratefully wished him farewell and Hercules set sail for Nauplia, the nearest port to Tiryns on the mainland of Greece. Once back in the city, Hercules delivered the bull to King Eurystheus, who unwisely let it go free. In the course of time it wandered northwards, passing the great fortress of Mycenae and crossing

the isthmus that joins the northern and southern parts of Greece at Corinth. Finally it settled on the plain of Marathon on the coast near Athens, where it began a new reign of terror which lasted until another hero, Theseus, finally destroyed it.

By this time, however, Hercules had set out from Nauplia at the start of his eighth adventure. He travelled by ship far to the north, to Thrace, a land ruled by the fiery king Diomedes. The journey lasted many days, some of fair weather, some of wild storms. The ship sailed up through the Aegean Sea until it landed at the Thracian port of Abdera. From there, Hercules travelled overland to the capital, Tirida.

Diomedes was friendly, but Hercules was on his guard, for Eurystheus had warned him what to expect. The king of Thrace was a fine warrior, but wild and cruel in his ways: he fed the mares which he harnessed to his war chariot on the flesh of those he conquered in battle. When he was not fighting, the mares still had to be fed and the king's solution to the problem was to order his guards to cut the throats of the palace guests. Their bodies were then placed in the mangers of the royal stables where the mares tore them greedily limb from limb. Hercules was to tame the mares and take them back to Tiryns. First, however, he had to avoid the usual fate of Diomedes's guests.

He decided to lose no time but to act before Diomedes could suspect the purpose of his visit. He went to bed early on his first night, but lay with his sword by his side and did not sleep. The hours passed slowly, but no one came to harm him and just before dawn he rose and crept quietly from his room. He made his way down a long passage, to a side door which he knew was guarded by a single sentry.

The man was dozing at his post and Hercules overcame him quickly before he could cry out. Then he stole like a shadow to where the stables stood, a dark mass against a sky which was beginning to lighten with the approach of day. The grooms who tended the mares were, like the sentry, half asleep and Hercules overpowered them one by one until all lay senseless on the ground. So far things had gone well, but he knew that the hardest part of his task was yet to come.

The four mares were tethered in their stalls by iron chains and these would have to be broken before they could be set free. Hercules could hear the mares moving restlessly, for they scented the presence of a stranger and were growing alarmed. Hercules knew that he could snap the restraining chains, using the strength of his arms alone, but to attempt this he would have to go close to the mares and risk being torn to pieces or kicked to death by them. He must find some way of keeping out of range of those death-dealing jaws and flying hooves. He looked about him and in the growing light spied a woodman's axe by the door. This was just what he wanted.

He fetched it and then stood near the end stall. He could see that the chains which held the mares were linked to iron staples driven into oak uprights, the tops of which vanished into the shadows under the roof. Hercules braced himself and raised the axe above his head. As the axe fell, the first staple went flying, wrenched from the wood. The startled mares reared and plunged, but before they realized what was happening, the axe was swinging at the second staple, and again, and yet a fourth time, before Hercules darted clear. The mares were free and, trailing their chains behind them, they milled about terrifyingly in the confined space. But it was only a moment before they made for the doorway with a clatter of hooves loud enough to wake the dead.

Certainly they woke Diomedes and his guards, who came running down to the stables as Hercules raced after the mares to drive them on to a piece of high ground. A long inlet from the distant sea curled round three sides of the hill, and Hercules quickly cut a channel so that water completely surrounded it and rushed in a flood over the strip of land the guards were crossing in pursuit. They turned to flee, but Hercules sprang over the flood and, outrunning them easily, felled them one by one with blows from his axe. Finally even Diomedes himself lay dead, and Hercules dragged his body to the hilltop, where his own mares devoured his body. Their hunger appeased, they became sufficiently docile for Hercules to bind their jaws with strong cord before driving them back to his ship for the journey home to Tiryns.

Hercules's ninth labor was to bring back to Eurystheus the golden girdle of Hippolyte, queen of a race of Amazons who lived on the shores of the Black Sea. Once more it was a long voyage, but eventually Hercules landed safely.

At first Hippolyte offered him the girdle as a gift in token of her esteem and everything seemed to be going well. However, at this point Hera decided to interfere once more. She spread a rumor that Hercules's true purpose was to seize Hippolyte herself and carry her off. Angry at this supposed deception, the Amazons took up arms. Hercules soon put them to flight, but during the fighting he killed Hippolyte with his sword. Sorrowful that he had been misjudged and at the unexpected outcome of his visit, Hercules took the girdle and set sail once more for Nauplia.

For his next task, Hercules had to steal a herd of oxen from Geryon, the king of Tartessus on the Spanish peninsula. Geryon was a frightening figure: above his thick waist he had three bodies, each with its own arms and head. To get to Spain, Hercules borrowed the golden bowl which Helios the sun god used to return to his palace in the east after his daily journey across the sky. As he passed through the narrow straits which separate Spain from Africa, Hercules set up two great pillars of rock, one on either continent, to show he had passed that way. To this day they are known as the Pillars of Hercules. Then he set off overland to Tartessus, where Geryon kept his oxen pastured on a hillside under the care of a herdsman, Eurytion, and a fierce, two-headed dog called Orthrus.

Hercules killed the dog, Orthrus, with one arrow, and Eurytion with another. He was driving off the oxen when Geryon himself appeared and started to pursue him. However, Hercules hid behind a rock and, as the king drew level with him, fired at him from the side so that a single arrow pierced all three bodies and Geryon fell dead. With the oxen beside him in the golden bowl, Hercules sailed once more for Greece, his tenth labor completed.

"Next, you must bring back to me apples from the tree of Hesperides," Eurystheus told him. "The tree stands in a garden on the slopes of Mount Atlas in the province of Mauretania, beyond the Libyan Sea."

Hercules knew that this apple tree had been a wedding gift to Hera and that it was guarded by a fierce dragon. To defy Hera by taking her gift was a great risk, but Hercules thought that if necessary he could call on Atlas for aid. The Titan god crouched on the mountain-top above the orchard, eternally bearing the weight of the heavens on his massive shoulders. His daughters tended the garden where the apples of Hesperides grew and Hercules had been advised that the girls should gather the apples for him, but that he should not attempt to do so himself.

He arrived in Mauretania and killed the dragon. Then he climbed the mountainside near the garden. Above him towered Atlas and Hercules explained why he had come.

"My daughters will gladly fetch you some apples," Atlas said, "but I must find them first to tell them."

"Can I not search them out?" Hercules asked. The Titan shook his head.

"It might take you many days," he said. "I know the most likely places to find them and if you will take my heavy load for just a short while I will fetch them to you with the least possible delay."

So Hercules took the burden of the heavens on his own back and Atlas set off down the mountain. The daughters must, after all, have been close by, for Atlas soon returned with the two girls, who carried with them a basket of the precious apples. Hercules was impatient to be on his way but Atlas, enjoying the first freedom he had had for many, many years, was not anxious to change places with him once again. Hercules began to suspect that the god had had other reasons for offering to fetch the girls himself. The longer Hercules shouldered the Titan's load, the less keen Atlas would be to take it back.

"When I have rested a while, you can go," Atlas said, but he did not sound as if he really meant it. His voice was hesitant, like that of a person who was not used to deception. Hercules decided that it would be best to appear to agree. He told Atlas that in its present position the load was badly balanced and uncomfortable, and if Atlas would take the heavens once more for a brief moment, he would prepare himself to take the weight better. So Atlas bent his shoulders and Hercules transferred the heavens to him again. It was only when Hercules set off with the apples down the mountainside that Atlas realized he had been tricked, and

that his brief rest was ended. Strangely, Hera did not interfere with Hercules this time, and he returned safely to Tiryns.³

For his twelfth and last labor, Hercules had to visit the Underworld, and bring back Cerberus, the fierce hound which stood guard there. Descending into a deep cavern near Sparta, Hercules, with Hermes as his guide, soon came to the dark, swirling waters of the River Styx. Charon the boatman was reluctant to ferry Hercules across, for only the souls of the dead were allowed to pass that way. Luckily, Hermes so confused Charon with persuasive arguments that at last he consented to ferry Hercules across. And so, seeing many terrible sights as he went, Hercules entered the Underworld, where Hades and Persephone sat upon their thrones.

“You may take Cerberus back with you to Tiryns for a short time if you can overcome him without the use of sword, spear or arrows,” they told Hercules, smiling at each other, for they did not think that he could succeed. However, when Hercules approached Cerberus, he simply took the skin of the Nemean lion from his shoulders and threw it at the three snarling heads, entangling them in its folds so that they were helpless. Gathering the dog in his arms, Hercules set off for the world above with a light heart: his twelve labors were completed, and the guilt from the death of his family was erased at last.

³ In some versions of this Labor, Hercules travels to the Caucasus Mountains to see Prometheus, where he is chained to a rock having his liver eaten by the eagle every day. Some say it was Prometheus who gave Hercules the idea to ask for Atlas' help in getting the apples in return for his freedom. In other versions, Hercules simply shows up, post-apples, to release Prometheus.

In any event, Zeus has repented of his punishment of Prometheus, especially since Prometheus had warned him against marrying the goddess Thetis. For some reason, though, Prometheus could not be freed until some other immortal would volunteer to go to Tartarus in his place—which brings us back to Chiron. Suffering eternally from his incurable wound, and tired from such a long existence anyway, Chiron was only too happy to bring his life to a close, and Prometheus was freed. Some say Chiron was honored by the gods with the constellation Centarus.