

L I F E O F
T H E S E U S

P L U T A R C H

T R A N S L A T E D B Y
A U B R E Y S T E W A R T
& G E O R G E L O N G

I

As in books on geography, Sossius Senecio, the writers crowd the countries of which they know nothing into the furthest margins of their maps, and write upon them legends such as, “In this direction lie waterless deserts full of wild beasts;” or, “Unexplored morasses;” or, “Here it is as cold as Scythia;” or, “A frozen sea;” so I, in my writings on Parallel Lives, go through that period of time where history rests on the firm basis of facts, and may truly say, “All beyond this is portentous and fabulous, inhabited by poets and mythologers, and there is nothing true or certain.”

When I had written the lives of Lykurgus the lawgiver and Numa the king, it appeared to me natural to go back to Romulus also, as I was engaged on the history of times so close to his. So

when I was reflecting, in the words of Aeschylus,

“Against this chieftain, who can best
contend?

Whom shall I match in fight, what trusty
friend?”

it occurred to me to compare the founder of the fair and famous city of Athens with him, and to contrast Theseus with the father of unconquered glorious Rome. Putting aside, then, the mythological element, let us examine his story, and wherever it obstinately defies probability, and cannot be explained by natural agency, let us beg the indulgence of our readers, who will kindly make allowance for tales of antiquity.

Theseus appears to have several points of resemblance to Romulus. Both were unacknowledged illegitimate children, and were reputed to descend from the Gods.

“Both warriors, well we all do know,”

and both were wise as well as powerful. The one founded Rome, while the other was the joint founder of Athens; and these are two of the most famous of cities. Both carried off women by violence, and neither of them escaped domestic misfortune and retribution, but towards the end of their lives both were at variance with their countrymen, if we may put any trust in the least extravagant writings upon the subject.

Theseus traced his descent on the father's side from Erechtheus and the original Autochthones, while on the mother's side he was descended from Pelops. For Pelops surpassed all the other princes of the Peloponnesus in the number of his children as well as in wealth; and of these he gave many of his daughters in marriage to the chief men of the country, and established many of his sons as rulers in various cities. One of these, Pittheus, the grandfather of Theseus, founded Troezen, which is indeed but a little state, though he had a greater reputation than any man of his time for eloquence and wisdom. The nature of this wisdom of his seems to have been much of the same kind as that which made the reputation of Hesiod, in the collection of maxims

known as the *Works and Days*. One of these maxims is indeed ascribed to Pittheus:

“Let promised pay be truly paid to
friends.”

At any rate, this is what Aristotle the philosopher has recorded; and also Euripides, when he speaks of Hippolytus as “child of holy Pittheus,” shows the prevailing opinion about Pittheus. Now Aegeus desired to have children, and the Oracle at Delphi is said to have given him the well-known response, forbidding him to have intercourse with any woman before he reached Athens, but not appearing to explain this clearly. Consequently, on his way home, he went to Troezen, and asked the advice of Pittheus about the response of the God, which ran thus:

“Great chief, the wine-skin’s foot must
closed remain,
Till thou to Athens art returned again.”

Pittheus clearly perceived what the oracle must mean, and persuaded or cheated Aegeus into an intrigue with Aethra. Afterwards, when he discovered that he had conversed with the daughter of Pittheus, as he imagined that she might prove with child, he left behind him his sword and sandals hidden under a great stone, which had a hollow inside it exactly fitting them. This he told to Aethra alone, and charged her if a son of his should be born, and on growing to man's estate should be able to lift the stone and take from under it the deposit, that she should send him at once with these things to himself, in all secrecy, and as far as possible concealing his journey from observation. For he greatly feared the sons of Pallas, who plotted against him, and despised him on account of his childlessness, they themselves being fifty brothers, all the sons of Pallas.

When Aethra's child was born, some writers say that he was at once named Theseus, from the tokens placed under the stone; others say that he was afterwards so named at Athens, when Aegeus acknowledged him as his son. He was brought up by his grandfather Pittheus, and had a master and tutor, Konnidas, to whom even to the present day, the Athenians sacrifice a ram on the day before the feast of Theseus, a mark of respect which is much more justly due to him, than those which they pay to Silanion and Parrhasius, who have only made pictures and statues of Theseus.

As it was at that period still the custom for those who were coming to man's estate to go to Delphi and offer to the god the first-fruits of their hair (which was then cut for the first time), Theseus went to Delphi, and they say that a place there is even to this day named after him. But he only cut the front part of his hair, as Homer tells us the Abantes did, and this fashion of cutting the hair was called Theseus's fashion because of him. The Abantes first began to cut their hair in this manner, not having, as some say, been taught to do so by the Arabians, nor yet from any wish to imitate the Mysians, but because they were a warlike race, and met their foes in close combat, and studied above all to come to a hand-to-hand fight with their enemy, as Archilochus

bears witness in his verses:

“They use no slings nor bows,
Euboea’s martial lords,
But hand to hand they close
And conquer with their swords.”

So they cut their hair short in front, that their enemies might not grasp it. And they say that Alexander of Macedon for the same reason ordered his generals to have the beards of the Macedonians shaved, because they were a convenient handle for the enemy to grasp.

Now while he was yet a child, Aethra concealed the real parentage of Theseus, and a story was circulated by Pittheus that his father was Poseidon. For the people of Troezen have an especial reverence for Poseidon; he is their tutelar deity; to him they offer first-fruits of their harvest, and they stamp their money with the trident as their badge. But when he was grown into a youth, and proved both strong in body and of good sound sense, then Aethra led him to the stone, told him the truth about his father, and bade him take the tokens from beneath it and sail to Athens with them. He easily lifted the stone, but determined not to go to Athens by sea, though the voyage was a safe and easy one, and though his mother and his grandfather implored him to go that way.

By land it was a difficult matter to reach Athens, as the whole way was infested with robbers and bandits. That time, it seems, produced men of great and unwearied strength and swiftness, who made no good use of these powers, but treated all men with overbearing insolence, taking advantage of their strength to overpower and slay all who fell into their hands, and disregarding justice and right and kindly feeling, which they said were only approved of by those who dared not do injury to others, or feared to be injured themselves, while men who could get the upper hand by force might disregard them. Of these ruffians, Herakles in his wanderings cut off a good many, but others had escaped him by concealing themselves, or had been contemptuously spared by him on account of their insignificance. But Herakles had the misfortune to kill Iphitus, and thereupon sailed to Lydia and was for a long time a slave in that country under Omphale, which

condition he had imposed upon himself as a penance for the murder of his friend. During this period the country of Lydia enjoyed peace and repose; but in Greece the old plague of brigandage broke out afresh, as there was now no one to put it down. So that the journey overland to Athens from Peloponnesus was full of peril; and Pittheus, by relating to Theseus who each of these evildoers was, and how they treated strangers, tried to prevail upon him to go by sea. But it appears that Theseus had for a long time in his heart been excited by the renown of Herakles for courage: he thought more of him than of anyone else, and loved above all to listen to those who talked of him, especially if they had seen and spoken to him. Now he could no longer conceal that he was in the same condition as Themistokles in later times, when he said that the trophy of Miltiades would not let him sleep. Just so did the admiration which Theseus conceived

for Herakles make him dream by night of his great exploits, and by day determine to equal them by similar achievements of his own.

As it happened, they were connected, being second cousins; for Aethra was the daughter of Pittheus, and Alkmene the daughter of Lysidike, and Lysidike and Pittheus were brother and sister, being the children of Pelops and Hippodameia. So Theseus thought that it would be a great and unbearable disgrace to him that his cousin should go everywhere and clear the sea and land of the brigands who infested them, and he should refuse to undertake the adventures that came in his way; throwing discredit upon his reputed father by a pusillanimous flight by sea, and upon his real father by bringing him only the sandals and an unfleshed sword, and not proving his noble birth by the evidence of some brave deed accomplished by him. In this spirit he set

out on his journey, with the intention of doing wrong to no one, but of avenging himself on anyone who offered wrong to him.

V I I I

And first in Epidaurus he slew Periphetes, who used a club as his weapon, and on this account was called the club-bearer, because he laid hands upon him and forbade him to proceed farther on his way. The club took his fancy, and he adopted it as a weapon, and always used it, just as Herakles used his lion's skin; for the skin was a proof of how huge a beast the wearer had overcome, while the club, invincible in the hands of Theseus, had yet been worsted when used against him. At the Isthmus he destroyed Sinis the Pine-bender by the very device by which he had slain so many people, and that too without having ever practised the art, proving that true valour is better than practice and training. Sinis had a daughter, a tall and beautiful girl, named Perigoune.

When her father fell she ran and hid herself. Theseus sought her everywhere, but she fled into a place where wild asparagus grew thick, and with a simple child-like faith besought the plants to conceal her, as if they could understand her words, promising that if they did so she never would destroy or burn them. However, when Theseus called to her, pledging himself to take care of her and do her no hurt, she came out, and afterwards bore Theseus a son, named Melanippus. She afterwards was given by Theseus in marriage to Deïoneus, the son of Eurytus of Oechalia. Ioxus, a son of Melanippus, and Theseus's grandchild, took part in Ornytus's settlement in Caria; and for this reason the descendants of Ioxus have a family custom not to burn the asparagus plant, but to reverence and worship it.

Now the wild sow of Krommyon, whom they called Phaia, was no ordinary beast, but a fierce creature and hard to conquer. This animal he turned out of his way to destroy, that it might not be thought that he performed his exploits of necessity. Besides, he said, a brave man need only punish wicked men when they came in his way, but that in the case of wild beasts he must himself seek them out and attack them. Some say that Phaia was a murderous and licentious woman who carried on brigandage at Krommyon, and was called a sow from her life and habits, and that Theseus put her to death.

Before coming to Megara he slew Skeiron by flinging him down a precipice into the sea, so the story runs, because he was a robber, but some say that from arrogance he used to hold out his feet to strangers and bid them wash them, and that then he kicked the washers into the sea. But Megarian writers, in opposition to common tradition, and, as Simonides says, “warring with all antiquity,” say that Skeiron was not an arrogant brigand, but repressed brigandage, loved those who were good and just, and was related to them. For, they point out, Aeakus is thought to have been the most righteous of all the Greeks, and Kychreus of Salamis was worshipped as a god, and the virtue of Peleus and Telamon is known to all. Yet Skeiron was the son-in-law of Kychreus,

and father-in-law of Aeakus, and grandfather of Peleus and Telamon, who were both of them sons of Endeis, the daughter of Skeiron and his wife Chariklo. It is not then reasonable to suppose that these, the noblest men of their time, would make alliances with a malefactor, and give and receive from him what they prized most dearly. But they say that Theseus slew Skeiron, not when he first went to Athens, but that afterwards he took the town of Eleusis which belonged to the Megarians, by dealing treacherously with Diokles, who was the chief magistrate there, and that on that occasion he killed Skeiron. This is what tradition says on both sides.

At Eleusis Theseus overcame Kerkyon of Arcadia in wrestling and killed him, and after journeying a little farther he killed Damastes, who was surnamed Prokroustes, by compelling him to fit his own body to his bed, just as he used to fit the bodies of strangers to it. This he did in imitation of Herakles; for he used to retort upon his aggressors the same treatment which they intended for him. Thus Herakles offered up Busiris as a sacrifice, and overcame Antaeus in wrestling, and Kyknus in single combat, and killed Termerus by breaking his skull. This is, they say, the origin of the proverb "a Termerian mischief," for Termerus, it seems, struck passers-by with his head, and so killed them. So also did Theseus sally forth and chastise evildoers, making them undergo the

same cruelties which they practised on others,
thus justly punishing them for their crimes in
their own wicked fashion.

As he proceeded on his way, and reached the river Kephisus, men of the Phytalid race were the first to meet and greet him. He demanded to be purified from the guilt of bloodshed, and they purified him, made propitiatory offerings, and also entertained him in their houses, being the first persons from whom he had received any kindness on his journey. It is said to have been on the eighth day of the month Kronion, which is now called Hekatombeion, that he came to his own city. On entering it he found public affairs disturbed by factions, and the house of Aegeus in great disorder; for Medea, who had been banished from Corinth, was living with Aegeus, and had engaged by her drugs to enable Aegeus to have children. She was the first to discover who

Theseus was, while Aegeus, who was an old man, and feared everyone because of the disturbed state of society, did not recognise him. Consequently she advised Aegeus to invite him to a feast, that she might poison him. Theseus accordingly came to Aegeus's table. He did not wish to be the first to tell his name, but, to give his father an opportunity of recognising him, he drew his sword, as if he meant to cut some of the meat with it, and showed it to Aegeus. Aegeus at once recognised it, upset the cup of poison, looked closely at his son and embraced him. He then called a public meeting and made Theseus known as his son to the citizens, with whom he was already very popular because of his bravery. It is said that when the cup was upset the poison was spilt in the place where now there is the enclosure in the Delphinium, for there Aegeus dwelt; and the Herms to the east of the temple there they call the one who is "at the door of Aegeus."

X I I I

But the sons of Pallas, who had previously to this expected that they would inherit the kingdom on the death of Aegeus without issue, now that Theseus was declared the heir, were much enraged, first that Aegeus should be king, a man who was merely an adopted child of Pandion, and had no blood relationship to Erechtheus, and next that Theseus, a stranger and a foreigner, should inherit the kingdom. They consequently declared war. Dividing themselves into two bodies, the one proceeded to march openly upon the city from Sphettus, under the command of Pallas their father, while the other lay in ambush at Gargettus, in order that they might fall upon their opponents on two sides at once. But there was a herald among them named Leos, of the

township of Agnus, who betrayed the plans of the sons of Pallas to Theseus. He suddenly attacked those who were in ambush, and killed them all, hearing which the other body under Pallas dispersed. From this time forth they say that the township of Pallene has never intermarried with that of Agnus, and that it is not customary amongst them for heralds to begin a proclamation with the words “acouete Leo” (oyez), for they hate the name of Leo because of the treachery of that man.

X I V

Now Theseus, who wished for employment and also to make himself popular with the people, went to attack the bull of Marathon, who had caused no little trouble to the inhabitants of Tetrapolis. He overcame the beast, and drove it alive through the city for all men to see, and then sacrificed it to Apollo of Delphi. Hekale, too, and the legend of her having entertained Theseus, does not seem altogether without foundation in fact; for the people of the neighbouring townships used to assemble and perform what was called the Hekalesian sacrifice to Zeus Hekalus, and they also used to honour Hekale, calling her by the affectionate diminutive Hekaline, because she also, when feasting Theseus, who was very young, embraced him in a motherly way, and

used such like endearing diminutives. She also made a vow on Theseus's behalf, when he was going forth to battle, that if he returned safe she would sacrifice to Zeus; but as she died before he returned, she had the above-mentioned honours instituted by command of Theseus, as a grateful return for her hospitality. This is the legend as told by Philochorus.

Shortly after this the ship from Crete arrived for the third time to collect the customary tribute. Most writers agree that the origin of this was, that on the death of Androgeus, in Attica, which was ascribed to treachery, his father Minos went to war, and wrought much evil to the country, which at the same time was afflicted by scourges from Heaven (for the land did not bear fruit, and there was a great pestilence and the rivers sank into the earth). So that as the oracle told the Athenians that, if they propitiated Minos and came to terms with him, the anger of Heaven would cease and they should have a respite from their sufferings, they sent an embassy to Minos and prevailed on him to make peace, on the condition that every nine years they should send him

a tribute of seven youths and seven maidens. The most tragic of the legends states these poor children when they reached Crete were thrown into the Labyrinth, and there either were devoured by the Minotaur or else perished with hunger, being unable to find the way out. The Minotaur, as Euripides tells us, was

“A form commingled, and a monstrous
birth,
Half man, half bull, in twofold shape
combined.”

Philochorus says that the Cretans do not recognise this story, but say that the Labyrinth was merely a prison, like any other, from which escape was impossible, and that Minos instituted gymnastic games in honour of Androgeus, in which the prizes for the victors were these children, who till then were kept in the Labyrinth. Also they say that the victor in the first contest was a man of great power in the state, a general of the name of Taurus, who was of harsh and savage temper, and ill-treated the Athenian children. And Aristotle himself, in his treatise on the constitution of the Bottiaean, evidently does not believe that the children were put to death by Minos, but that they lived in Crete as slaves, until extreme old age; and that one day the

Cretans, in performance of an ancient vow, sent first-fruits of their population to Delphi. Among those who were thus sent were the descendants of the Athenians, and, as they could not maintain themselves there, they first passed over to Italy, and there settled near Iapygium, and from thence again removed to Thrace, and took the name of Bottiaean. For this reason, the Bottiaean maidens when performing a certain sacrifice sing “Let us go to Athens.” Thus it seems to be a terrible thing to incur the hatred of a city powerful in speech and song; for on the Attic stage Minos is always vilified and traduced, and though he was called “Most Kingly” by Hesiod, and “Friend of Zeus” by Homer, it gained him no credit, but the playwrights overwhelmed him with abuse, styling him cruel and violent. And yet Minos is said to have been a king and a law-giver, and Rhadamanthus to have been a judge under him, carrying out his decrees.

So when the time of the third payment of the tribute arrived, and those fathers who had sons not yet grown up had to submit to draw lots, the unhappy people began to revile Aegeus, complaining that he, although the author of this calamity, yet took no share in their affliction, but endured to see them left childless, robbed of their own legitimate offspring, while he made a foreigner and a bastard the heir to his kingdom. This vexed Theseus, and determining not to hold aloof, but to share the fortunes of the people, he came forward and offered himself without being drawn by lot. The people all admired his courage and patriotism, and Aegeus finding that his prayers and entreaties had no effect on his unalterable resolution, proceeded to choose the

rest by lot. Hellenikus says that the city did not select the youths and maidens by lot, but that Minos himself came thither and chose them, and that he picked out Theseus first of all, upon the usual conditions, which were that the Athenians should furnish a ship, and that the youths should embark in it and sail with him, not carrying with them any weapon of war; and that when the Minotaur was slain, the tribute should cease. Formerly, no one had any hope of safety; so they used to send out the ship with a black sail, as if it were going to a certain doom; but now Theseus so encouraged his father, and boasted that he would overcome the Minotaur, that he gave a second sail, a white one, to the steersman, and charged him on his return, if Theseus were safe, to hoist the white one, if not, the black one as a sign of mourning. But Simonides says that it was not a white sail which was given by Aegeus, but “a scarlet sail embrued in holm oak’s juice,” and

that this was agreed on by him as the signal of safety. The ship was steered by Phereklus the son of Amarsyas, according to Simonides.

But Philochorus says that Theseus had one Nausithous sent him from Skirus of Salamis, to steer the ship, and Phaeax to act as look-out, as the Athenians had not yet turned their attention to the sea.

One of the youths chosen by lot was Menestheos the son of Skirus's daughter. The truth of this account is attested by the shrines of Nausithous and Phaeax, which Theseus built at Phalerum, and by the feast called the Kybernesia or pilot's festival, which is held in their honour.

X V I I I

When the lots were drawn Theseus brought the chosen youths from the Prytaneum, and proceeding to the temple of the Delphian Apollo, offered the suppliants' bough to Apollo on their behalf. This was a bough of the sacred olive-tree bound with fillets of white wool. And after praying he went to sea on the sixth day of the month Munychion, on which day even now they send maidens as suppliants to the temple of the Delphian Apollo. And there is a legend that the Delphian oracle told him that Aphrodite would be his guide and fellow-traveller, and that when he was sacrificing a she-goat to her by the seaside, it became a he-goat; wherefore the goddess is called Epitragia.

When they reached Crete, according to most historians and poets, Ariadne fell in love with him, and from her he received the clue of string, and was taught how to thread the mazes of the Labyrinth. He slew the Minotaur, and, taking with him Ariadne and the youths, sailed away. Pherekydes also says that Theseus also knocked out the bottoms of the Cretan ships, to prevent pursuit. But Demon says that Taurus, Minos's general, was slain in a sea-fight in the harbour, when Theseus sailed away. But according to Philochorus, when Minos instituted his games, Taurus was expected to win every prize, and was grudged this honour; for his great influence and his unpopular manners made him disliked, and scandal said that he was too intimate with

Pasiphae. On this account, when Theseus offered to contend with him, Minos agreed. And, as it was the custom in Crete for women as well as men to be spectators of the games, Ariadne was present, and was struck with the appearance of Theseus, and his strength, as he conquered all competitors. Minos was especially pleased, in the wrestling match, at Taurus's defeat and shame, and, restoring the children to Theseus, remitted the tribute for the future. Kleidemus tells the story in his own fashion and at unnecessary length, beginning much farther back. There was, he says, a decree passed by all the Greeks, that no ship should sail from any port with more than five hands on board, but Jason alone, the master of the great ship Argo, should cruise about, and keep the sea free of pirates. Now when Daedalus fled to Athens, Minos, contrary to the decree, pursued him in long war galleys, and being driven to Sicily by a storm, died there.

When his son Deukalion sent a warlike message to the Athenians, bidding them give up Daedalus to him, or else threatening that he would put to death the children whom Minos had taken as hostages, Theseus returned him a gentle answer, begging for the life of Daedalus, who was his own cousin and blood relation, being the son of Merope, the daughter of Erechtheus. But he busied himself with building a fleet, some of it in Attica, in the country of the Thymaitadae, far from any place of resort of strangers, and some in Troezen, under the management of Pittheus, as he did not wish his preparations to be known. But when the ships were ready to set sail, having with him as pilots, Daedalus himself and some Cretan exiles, as no one knew that he was coming, and the Cretans thought that it was a friendly fleet that was advancing, he seized the harbour, and marched at once to Knossus before his arrival was known. Then he fought a battle at

the gates of the Labyrinth, and slew Deukalion and his body-guard. As Ariadne now succeeded to the throne, he made peace with her, took back the youths, and formed an alliance between the Cretans and the Athenians, in which each nation swore that it would not begin a war against the other.

There are many more stories about these events, and about Ariadne, none of which agree in any particulars. Some say that she hanged herself when deserted by Theseus, and some, that she was taken to Naxos by his sailors, and there dwelt with Oenarus, the priest of Dionysus, having been deserted by Theseus, who was in love with another.

“For Aegle’s love disturbed his breast.”

This line, we are told by Hereas of Megara, was struck out of Hesiod’s poems by Peisistratus; and again he says that he inserted into Homer’s description of the Shades,

“Peirithous and Theseus, born of gods,”

to please the Athenians. Some writers say that Theseus had by Ariadne two sons, Staphylus and Oenopion, whom Ion of Chios follows when he speaks of his own native city as that

“Which erst Oenopion stablished,
Theseus’ son.”

The pleasantest of these legends are in nearly everyone’s mouth. But Paeon of Amathus gives an account peculiar to himself, that Theseus was driven by a storm to Cyprus, and that Ariadne, who was pregnant, suffered much from the motion of the ship, and became so ill, that she was set on shore, but Theseus had to return to take charge of the ship, and was blown off to sea. The women of the country took care of Ariadne, and comforted her in her bereavement, even bringing forged letters to her as if from Theseus, and rendering her assistance during her confinement; and when she died in childbirth, they

buried her. Theseus, on his return, grieved much, and left money to the people of the country, bidding them sacrifice to Ariadne; he also set up two little statues, one of silver, and the other of brass. And at this sacrifice, which takes place on the second day of the month Gorpiaeus, one of the young men lies down on the ground, and imitates the cries of a woman in travail; and the people of Amathus call that the grove of Ariadne Aphrodite, in which they show her tomb.

But some writers of Naxos tell a different story, peculiar to themselves, that there were two Minoses and two Ariadnes, of whom one, they say, was married to Dionysus in Naxos, and was the mother of Staphylus and his brother, while the younger was carried off by Theseus, and came to Naxos after he deserted her; and a nurse called Korkyne came with her, whose tomb they point out. Then Naxians also says that this Ariadne died there, and is honoured, but not so much as

the elder; for at the feast in honour of the elder,
there are merriment and revelry, but at that of the
younger gloomy rites are mingled with mirth.

Theseus, when he sailed away from Crete, touched at Delos; here he sacrificed to the god and offered up the statue of Aphrodite, which Ariadne had given him; and besides this, he and the youths with him danced a measure which they say is still practised by the people of Delos to this day, being an imitation of the turnings and windings of the Labyrinth expressed by complicated evolutions performed in regular order. This kind of dance is called by the Delians “the crane dance,” according to Dikaearchus. It was danced round the altar of the Horns, which is all formed of horns from the left side. They also say that he instituted games at Delos, and that then for the first time a palm was given by him to the victor.

As he approached Attica, both he and his steersman in their delight forgot to hoist the sail which was to be a signal of their safety to Aegeus; and he in his despair flung himself down the cliffs and perished. Theseus, as soon as he reached the harbour, performed at Phalerum the sacrifices which he had vowed to the gods if he returned safe, and sent off a herald to the city with the news of his safe return. This man met with many who were lamenting the death of the king, and, as was natural, with others who were delighted at the news of their safety, and who congratulated him and wished to crown him with garlands. These he received, but placed them on his herald's staff, and when he came back to the seashore, finding that Theseus had not completed

his libation, he waited outside the temple, not wishing to disturb the sacrifice. When the libation was finished he announced the death of Aegeus, and then they all hurried up to the city with loud lamentations: wherefore to this day, at the Oschophoria, they say that it is not the herald that is crowned, but his staff, and that at the libations the bystanders cry out, “Eleleu, Iou, Iou;” of which cries the first is used by men in haste, or raising the paeon for battle, while the second is used by persons in surprise and trouble.

Theseus, after burying his father, paid his vow to Apollo, on the seventh day of the month Pyanepsion; for on this day it was that the rescued youths went up into the city. The boiling of pulse, which is customary on this anniversary, is said to be done because the rescued youths put what remained of their pulse together into one pot, boiled it all, and merrily feasted on it together. And on this day also, the Athenians carry about

the Eiresione, a bough of the olive tree garlanded with wool, just as Theseus had before carried the suppliants' bough, and covered with first-fruits of all sorts of produce, because the barrenness of the land ceased on that day; and they sing,

“Eiresione, bring us figs
And wheaten loaves, and oil,
And wine to quaff, that we may all
Host merrily from toil.”

However, some say that these ceremonies are performed in memory of the Herakleidae, who were thus entertained by the Athenians; but most writers tell the tale as I have told it.

Now the thirty-oared ship, in which Theseus sailed with the youths, and came back safe, was kept by the Athenians up to the time of Demetrius Phalereus. They constantly removed the decayed part of her timbers, and renewed them with sound wood, so that the ship became an illustration to philosophers of the doctrine of growth and change, as some argued that it remained the same, and others, that it did not remain the same. The feast of the Oschophoria, or of carrying boughs, which to this day the Athenians celebrate, was instituted by Theseus. For he did not take with him all the maidens who were drawn by lot, but he chose two youths, his intimate friends, who were feminine and fair to look upon, but of manly spirit; these by warm baths

and avoiding the heat of the sun and careful tending of their hair and skin he completely metamorphosed, teaching them to imitate the voice and carriage and walk of maidens. These two were then substituted in the place of two of the girls, and deceived everyone; and when they returned, he and these two youths walked in procession, dressed as now those who carry boughs at the Oschophoria are dressed. They carry them in honour of Dionysus and Ariadne, because of the legend, or rather because they returned home when the harvest was being gathered in. And the women called supper-carriers join in carrying them and partake of the sacrifice, in imitation of the mothers of those who were drawn by lot; for they used continually to bring their children food. Also, old tales are told, because these women used to tell their children such ones, to encourage and amuse them.

These things are related by the historian

Demus. Moreover, a sacred enclosure was dedicated to Theseus, and those families out of whom the tribute of the children had been gathered were bidden to contribute to sacrifices to him. These sacrifices were presided over by the Phytalidae, which post Theseus bestowed upon them as a recompense for their hospitality towards him.

X X I V

After the death of Aegeus, Theseus conceived a great and important design. He gathered together all the inhabitants of Attica and made them citizens of one city, whereas before they had lived dispersed, so as to be hard to assemble together for the common weal, and at times even fighting with one another.

He visited all the villages and tribes, and won their consent; the poor and lower classes gladly accepting his proposals, while he gained over the more powerful by promising that the new constitution should not include a king, but that it should be a pure commonwealth, with himself merely acting as general of its army and guardian of its laws, while in other respects it would allow perfect freedom and equality to everyone. By

these arguments he convinced some of them, and the rest knowing his power and courage chose rather to be persuaded than forced into compliance. He therefore destroyed the prytaneia, the senate house, and the magistracy of each individual township, built one common prytaneum and senate house for them all on the site of the present acropolis, called the city Athens, and instituted the Panathenaic festival common to all of them. He also instituted a festival for the resident aliens, on the sixteenth of the month, Hekatombeion, which is still kept up. And having, according to his promise, laid down his sovereign power, he arranged the new constitution under the auspices of the gods; for he made inquiry at Delphi as to how he should deal with the city, and received the following answer:

“Thou son of Aegeus and of Pittheus’
maid,
My father hath within thy city laid

The bounds of many cities; weigh not
down

Thy soul with thought; the bladder
cannot drown.”

The same thing they say was afterwards prophesied by the Sibyl concerning the city, in these words:

“The bladder may be dipped, but cannot
drown.”

Wishing still further to increase the number of his citizens, he invited all strangers to come and share equal privileges, and they say that the words now used, "Come hither all ye peoples," was the proclamation then used by Theseus, establishing as it were a commonwealth of all nations. But he did not permit his state to fall into the disorder which this influx of all kinds of people would probably have produced, but divided the people into three classes, of Eupatridae or nobles, Geomori or farmers, Demiurgi or artisans. To the Eupatridae he assigned the care of religious rites, the supply of magistrates for the city, and the interpretation of the laws and customs sacred or profane, yet he placed them on an equality with the other citizens, thinking that the

nobles would always excel in dignity, the farmers in usefulness, and the artisans in numbers. Aristotle tells us that he was the first who inclined to democracy, and gave up the title of king; and Homer seems to confirm this view by speaking of the people of the Athenians alone of all the states mentioned in his catalogue of ships. Theseus also struck money with the figure of a bull, either alluding to the bull of Marathon, or Taurus, Minos' general, or else to encourage farming among the citizens. Hence they say came the words, "worth ten," or "worth a hundred oxen." He permanently annexed Megara to Attica, and set up the famous pillar on the Isthmus, on which he wrote the distinction between the countries in two trimeter lines, of which the one looking east says,

"This is not Peloponnesus, but Ionia,"

and the one looking west says,

“This is Peloponnesus, not Ionia.”

And also he instituted games there, in emulation of Herakles; that, just as Herakles had ordained that the Greeks should celebrate the Olympic games in honour of Zeus, so by Theseus’s appointment they should celebrate the Isthmian games in honour of Poseidon.

The festival which was previously established there in honour of Melikerta used to be celebrated by night, and to be more like a religious mystery than a great spectacle and gathering. Some writers assert that the Isthmian games were established in honour of Skeiron, and that Theseus wished to make them an atonement for the murder of his kinsman; for Skeiron was the son of Kanethus and of Henioche the daughter of Pitheus. Others say that this festival was established in honour of Sinis, not of Skeiron. Be this as it may, Theseus established it, and stipulated

with the Corinthians that visitors from Athens who came to the games should have a seat of honour in as large a space as could be covered by a sail of the public ship which carried them, when stretched out on the ground. This we are told by Hellanikus and Andron of Halikarnassus.

Besides this, according to Philochorus and other writers, he sailed with Herakles to the Euxine, took part in the campaign against the Amazons, and received Antiope as the reward for his valour; but most historians, among whom are Pherekydes, Hellanikus, and Herodorus, say that Theseus made an expedition of his own later than that of Herakles, and that he took the Amazon captive, which is a more reasonable story. For no one of his companions is said to have captured an Amazon; while Bion relates that he caught this one by treachery and carried her off; for the Amazons, he says, were not averse to men, and did not avoid Theseus when he touched at their coast, but even offered him presents. He invited the bearer of these on board his ship; and when

she had embarked he set sail. But one, Menekrates, who has written a history of the town of Nikaia in Bithynia, states that Theseus spent a long time in that country with Antiope, and that there were three young Athenians, brothers, who were his companions in arms, by name Euneon, Thoas, and Soloeis. Soloeis fell in love with Antiope, and, without telling his brothers, confided his passion to one of his comrades. This man laid the matter before Antiope, who firmly rejected his pretensions, but treated him quietly and discreetly, telling Theseus nothing about it. Soloeis, in despair at his rejection, leaped into a river and perished; and Theseus then at length learned the cause of the young man's death. In his sorrow he remembered and applied to himself an oracle he had received from Delphi. It had been enjoined upon him by the Pythia that whenever he should be struck down with special sorrow in a foreign land, he should found a city in

that place and leave some of his companions there as its chiefs. In consequence of this the city which he founded was called Pythopolis, in honour of the Pythian Apollo, and the neighbouring river was called Soloeis, after the youth who died in it. He left there the brothers of Soloeis as the chiefs and lawgivers of the new city, and together, with them one Hermus, an Athenian Eupatrid. In consequence of this, the people of Pythopolis call a certain place in their city the house of Hermes, by a mistaken accentuation transferring the honour due to their founder, to their god Hermes.

This was the origin of the war with the Amazons; and it seems to have been carried on in no feeble or womanish spirit, for they never could have encamped in the city nor have fought a battle close to the Pnyx and the Museum unless they had conquered the rest of the country, so as to be able to approach the city safely. It is hard to believe, as Hellanikus relates, that they crossed the Cimmerian Bosphorus on the ice; but that they encamped almost in the city is borne witness to by the local names, and by the tombs of the fallen. For a long time both parties held aloof, unwilling to engage; but at last Theseus, after sacrificing to Phobos (Fear), attacked them. The battle took place in the month Boedromion, on the day on which the Athenians celebrate the feast

Boedromia. Kleidemus gives us accurate details, stating that the left wing of the Amazons stood at the place now called the Amazoneum, while the right reached up to the Pnyx, at the place where the gilded figure of Victory now stands. The Athenians attacked them on this side, issuing from the Museum, and the tombs of the fallen are to be seen along the street which leads to the gate near the shrine of the hero Chalkodus, which is called the Peiraeic gate. On this side the women forced them back as far as the temple of the Eumenides, but on the other side those who assailed them from the temple of Pallas, Ardetus, and the Lyceum, drove their right wing in confusion back to their camp with great slaughter. In the fourth month of the war a peace was brought about by Hippolyte; for this writer names the wife of Theseus Hippolyte, not Antiope. Some relate that she was slain fighting by the side of Theseus by a javelin hurled by one

Molpadia, and that the column which stands beside the temple of Olympian Earth is sacred to her memory. It is not to be wondered at that history should be at fault when dealing with such ancient events as these, for there is another story at variance with this, to the effect that Antiope caused the wounded Amazons to be secretly transported to Chalkis, where they were taken care of, and some of them were buried there, at what is now called the Amazoneum. However, it is a proof of the war having ended in a treaty of peace, that the place near the temple of Theseus where they swore to observe it, is still called Horeomosium, and that the sacrifice to the Amazons always has taken place before the festival of Theseus. The people of Megara also show a burying-place of the Amazons, as one goes from the market-place to what they call Rhus, where the lozenge-shaped building stands. It is said that some others died at Chaeronea, and were

buried by the little stream which it seems was anciently called Thermodon, but now is called Haemon, about which we have treated in the life of Demosthenes. It would appear that the Amazons did not even get across Thessaly without trouble, for graves of them are shown to this day at Skotussa and Kynoskephalae.

The above is all that is worthy of mention about the Amazons; for, as to the story which the author of the *Theseid* relates about this attack of the Amazons being brought about by Antiope to revenge herself upon Theseus for his marriage with Phaedra, and how she and her Amazons fought, and how Herakles slew them, all this is clearly fabulous. After the death of Antiope, Theseus married Phaedra, having a son by Antiope named Hippolytus, or Demophon, according to Pindar. As for his misfortunes with this wife and son, as the account given by historians does not differ from that which appears in the plays of the tragic poets, we must believe them to have happened as all these writers say.

However, there are certain other legends about Theseus' marriage which have never appeared on the stage, which have neither a creditable beginning nor a prosperous termination: for it is said that he carried off one Anaxo, a Troezenian girl, and after slaying Sinis and Kerkyon he forced their daughters, and that he married Periboea the mother of Ajax and also Phereboea and Iope the daughter of Iphikles: and, as has been told already, it was on account of his love for Aegle the daughter of Panopeus that he deserted Ariadne, which was a shameful and discreditable action. And in addition to all this he is charged with carrying off Helen, which brought war upon Attica, and exile and destruction on himself; about which we shall speak presently. But,

though many adventures were undertaken by the heroes of those times, Herodorus is of opinion that Theseus took no part in any of them, except with the Lapithae in their fight with the Centaurs; though other writers say that he went to Kolchis with Jason and took part with Meleager in the hunt of the Kalydonian boar.

From these legends arises the proverb, “Not without Theseus;” also he by himself without any comrades performed many glorious deeds, from which the saying came into vogue, “This is another Herakles.”

Theseus, together with Adrastus, effected the recovery of the bodies of those who fell under the walls of the Cadmea at Thebes, not after conquering the Thebans, as Euripides puts it in his play, but by a truce and convention, according to most writers. Philochorus even states that this was the first occasion on which a truce was made for the recovery of those slain in battle. But we

have shown in our *Life of Herakles* that he was the first to restore the corpses of the slain to the enemy. The tombs of the rank and file are to be seen at Eleutherae, but those of the chiefs at Eleusis, by favour of Theseus to Adrastus. Euripides's play of the *Suppliants* is contradicted by that of Aeschylus, the *Eleusinians*, in which Theseus is introduced giving orders for this to be done.

X X X

His friendship for Peirithous is said to have arisen in the following manner: He had a great reputation for strength and courage; Peirithous, wishing to make trial of these, drove his cattle away from the plain of Marathon, and when he learned that Theseus was pursuing them, armed, he did not retire, but turned and faced him. Each man then admiring the beauty and courage of his opponent, refrained from battle, and first Peirithous holding out his hand bade Theseus himself assess the damages of his raid upon the cattle, saying that he himself would willingly submit to whatever penalty the other might inflict. Theseus thought no more of their quarrel, and invited him to become his friend and comrade; and they ratified their compact of friendship by

an oath. Hereupon, Peirithous, who was about to marry Deidameia, begged Theseus to come and visit his country and meet the Lapithae. He also had invited the Centaurs to the banquet; and as they in their drunken insolence laid hands upon the women, the Lapithae attacked them. Some of them they slew, and the rest they overcame, and afterwards, with the assistance of Theseus, banished from their country. Herodorus, however, says that this is not how these events took place, but that the war was going on, and that Theseus went to help the Lapithae and while on his way thither first beheld Herakles, whom he made a point of visiting at Trachis, where he was resting after his labours and wanderings; and that they met with many compliments and much good feeling on both sides. But one would more incline to those writers who tell us that they often met, and that Herakles was initiated by Theseus's desire, and was also purified before

initiation at his instance, which ceremony was necessary because of some reckless action.

X X X I

Theseus was fifty years old, according to Hellanikus, when he carried off Helen, who was a mere child. For this reason some who wish to clear him of this, the heaviest of all the charges against him, say that it was not he who carried off Helen, but that Idas and Lynkeus carried her off and deposited her in his keeping. Afterwards the Twin Brethren came and demanded her back, but he would not give her up; or even it is said that Tyn-dareus himself handed her over to him, because he feared that Enarsphorus the son of Hippo-coon would take her by force, she being only a child at the time. But the most probable story and that which most writers agree in is the following: The two friends, Theseus and Peirithous, came to Sparta, seized the maiden, who was

dancing in the temple of Artemis Orthia, and carried her off. As the pursuers followed no farther than Tegea, they felt no alarm, but leisurely travelled through Peloponnesus, and made a compact that whichever of them should win Helen by lot was to have her to wife, but must help the other to a marriage. They cast lots on this understanding, and Theseus won. As the maiden was not yet ripe for marriage he took her with him to Aphidnae, and there placing his mother with her gave her into the charge of his friend Aphidnus, bidding him watch over her and keep her presence secret. He himself in order to repay his obligation to Peirithous went on a journey with him to Epirus to obtain the daughter of Aidoneus the king of the Molossians, who called his wife Persephone, his daughter Kore, and his dog Cerberus. All the suitors of his daughter were bidden by him to fight this dog, and the victor was to receive her hand. However,

as he learned that Peirithous and his friend were come, not as wooers, but as ravishers, he cast them into prison. He put an end to Peirithous at once, by means of his dog, but only guarded Theseus strictly.

Now at this period Mnestheus, the son of Peteus, who was the son of Orneus, who was the son of Erechtheus, first of all mankind they say took to the arts of a demagogue, and to currying favour with the people. This man formed a league of the nobles, who had long borne Theseus a grudge for having destroyed the local jurisdiction and privileges of each of the Eupatrids by collecting them all together into the capital, where they were no more than his subjects and slaves; and he also excited the common people by telling them that although they were enjoying a fancied freedom they really had been deprived of their ancestral privileges and sacred rites, and made to endure the rule of one foreign despot, instead of that of many good kings of their own blood.

While he was thus busily employed, the invasion of Attica by the sons of Tyndareus greatly assisted his revolutionary scheme; so that some say that it was he who invited them to come. At first they abstained from violence, and confined themselves to asking that their sister Helen should be given up to them; but when they were told by the citizens that she was not in their hands, and that they knew not where she was, they proceeded to warlike measures. Akademos, who had by some means discovered that she was concealed at Aphidnae, now told them where she was; for which cause he was honoured by the sons of Tyndareus during his life, and also the Lacedaemonians, though they often invaded the country and ravaged it unsparingly, yet never touched the place called the Akademeia, for Akademos's sake. Dikaearchus says that Echemus and Marathus, two Arcadians, took part in that war with the sons of Tyndareus; and that

from the first the place now called Akademeia was then named Echedemia, and that from the second the township of Marathon takes its names, because he in accordance with some oracle voluntarily offered himself as a sacrifice there in the sight of the whole army.

However, the sons of Tyndareus came to Aphidnae, and took the place after a battle, in which it is said that Alykus fell, the son of Skeiron, who then was fighting on the side of the Dioskuri. In memory of this man it is said that the place in the territory of Megara where his remains lie is called Alykus. But Hereas writes that Alykus was slain by Theseus at Aphidnae, and as evidence he quotes this verse about Alykus,

“Him whom Theseus slew in the spacious
streets of Aphidnae,
Fighting for fair-haired Helen.”

But it is not likely that if Theseus had been there,

his mother and the town of Aphidnae would
have been taken.

After the fall of Aphidnae, the people of Athens became terrified, and were persuaded by Mnestheus to admit the sons of Tyndareus to the city, and to treat them as friends, because, he said, they were only at war with Theseus, who had been the first to use violence, and were the saviours and benefactors of the rest of mankind. These words of his were confirmed by their behaviour, for, victorious as they were, they yet demanded nothing except initiation into the mysteries, as they were, no less than Herakles, connected with the city. This was permitted them, and they were adopted by Aphidnus, as Herakles had been by Pylius. They received divine honours, being addressed as “Anakes,” either because of the cessation of the war, or from the care

they took, when they had such a large army within the walls of Athens, that no one should be wronged; for those who take care of or guard anything are said to do it “anagos,” and perhaps for this reason kings are called “Anaktes.” Some say that they were called Anakas because of the appearance of their stars in the heavens above, for the Attics called “above” “anekas.”

X X X I V

It is said that Aethra, the mother of Theseus, was carried off as a captive to Lacedaemon, and thence to Troy with Helen, and Homer supports this view, when he says that there followed Helen,

“Aithra the daughter of Pittheus and
large-eyed Klymene.”

Others reject this verse, and the legend about Mounychus, who is said to have been the bastard son of Laodike, by Demophoon, and to have been brought up in Troy by Aithra. But Istrus, in his thirteenth book of his *History of Attica*, tells quite a different and peculiar story about Aithra, that he had heard that Paris was conquered by Achilles and Patroklos near the river Spercheius, in Thessaly, and that Hector took the city of

Troezen by storm, and amongst the plunder carried off Aithra, who had been left there. But this seems impossible.

X X X V

Now Aidoneus the Molossian king chanced to be entertaining Herakles, and related to him the story of Theseus and Peirithous, what they had intended to do, and how they had been caught in the act and punished. Herakles was much grieved at hearing how one had perished ingloriously, and the other was like to perish. He thought that nothing would be gained by reproaching the king for his conduct to Peirithous, but he begged for the life of Theseus, and pointed out that the release of his friend was a favour which he deserved. Aidoneus agreed, and Theseus, when set free, returned to Athens, where he found that his party was not yet overpowered. Whatever consecrated grounds had been set apart for him by the city, he dedicated

to Herakles, and called Heraklea instead of Thesea, except four, according to Philochorus. But, as he at once wished to preside and manage the state as before, he was met by factious opposition, for he found that those who had been his enemies before, had now learned not to fear him, while the common people had become corrupted, and now required to be specially flattered instead of doing their duty in silence.

He endeavoured to establish his government by force, but was overpowered by faction; and at last, despairing of success, he secretly sent his children to Euboea, to Elephenor, the son of Chalkodous; and he himself, after solemnly uttering curses on the Athenians at Gargettus, where now is the place called Araterion, or the place of curses, set sail for Skyros, where he was, he imagined, on friendly terms with the inhabitants, and possessed a paternal estate in the island. At that time Lykomedes was king of Skyros;

so he proceeded to demand from him his lands, in order to live there, though some say that he asked him to assist him against the Athenians. Lykomedes, either in fear of the great reputation of Theseus, or else to gain the favour of Mnestheus, led him up to the highest mountain top in the country, on the pretext of showing him his estate from thence, and pushed him over a precipice. Some say that he stumbled and fell of himself, as he was walking after supper, according to his custom. As soon as he was dead, no one thought any more of him, but Mnestheus reigned over the Athenians, while Theseus's children were brought up as private citizens by Elephenor, and followed him to Ilium. When Mnestheus died at Ilium, they returned home and resumed their rightful sovereignty. In subsequent times, among many other things which led the Athenians to honour Theseus as a hero or demi-god, most remarkable was his appearance at the battle

of Marathon, where his spirit was seen by many, clad in armour, leading the charge against the barbarians.

After the Persian war, in the archonship of Phaedo, the Athenians were told by the Delphian Oracle to take home the bones of Theseus and keep them with the greatest care and honour. There was great difficulty in obtaining them and in discovering his tomb, on account of the wild and savage habits of the natives of the island. However, Kimon took the island, as is written in my history of his Life, and making it a point of honour to discover his tomb, he chanced to behold an eagle pecking with its beak and scratching with its talons at a small rising ground. Here he dug, imagining that the spot had been pointed out by a miracle. There was found the coffin of a man of great stature, and lying beside it a brazen lance-head and a sword.

These relics were brought to Athens by Kimon, on board of his trireme, and the delighted Athenians received them with splendid processions and sacrifices, just as if the hero himself were come to the city. He is buried in the midst of the city, near where the Gymnasium now stands, and his tomb is a place of sanctuary for slaves, and all that are poor and oppressed, because Theseus, during his life, was the champion and avenger of the poor, and always kindly hearkened to their prayers. Their greatest sacrifice in his honour takes place on the eighth of the month of Pyanepsion, upon which day he and the youths came back from Crete. But besides this they hold a service in his honour on the eighth of all the other months, either because it was on the eighth day of Hekatombeion that he first arrived in Athens from Troezen, as is related by Diodorus the topographer, or else thinking that number to be especially his own, because he is said to have been

the son of Poseidon, and Poseidon is honoured on the eighth day of every month. For the number eight is the first cube of an even number, and is double the first square, and therefore peculiarly represents the immovable abiding power of that god whom we address as “the steadfast,” and the “earth upholder.”

C O L O P H O N

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