

The Labors of Heracles

The mythical story of the Labors of Heracles
by Caroline H. Harding and Samuel B. Harding

The Myth of the Labors of Heracles

Heracles was not one of the immortal gods, like Hermes or Pan. He was the son of a Greek king, and only **became immortal because of his great deeds while living upon the earth.** From his babyhood Heracles was much stronger and braver than his comrades, and as he grew to be a youth he became the wonder of his father's city **He was not always thoughtful, however, in the use of his great power over others; and sometimes he used all the strength of his powerful body without thinking at all what would be the result.**

As Heracles was a prince, he was taught all there was to be learned in those days. He had masters for all his studies, and even had a music teacher who was to teach him to play upon the lyre. One day, as the teacher was giving Heracles his lesson, he was obliged to correct him for mistakes that he had made. This made Heracles very angry, and without thinking what he was doing he struck his teacher with the instrument upon which he had been playing.

His blow was so sudden and fierce that the man fell dead, and **then Heracles wished that he had not grown so strong.** Of course his father, the king, was very angry at what he had done. He said, that **as Heracles could not control his temper and keep from harming other people, he had no longer any right to be a prince.** So he sent him away from his palace to a lonely mountain to be a shepherd there.

Heracles did not like this tame and quiet life, where he had only the sheep for companions. After trying it for a while, he went to the oracle at Delphi to ask if there was not some other way in which he could make up for his thoughtless deed. The oracle showed him such a way; but it was so difficult to that no one would even think of trying it, unless he was very strong and very brave. This was to **perform twelve of the hardest tasks that could be imagined.** Heracles was **so sure of his strength and courage that he began them with a light heart, and thought that he would soon accomplish all that was asked of him.** But he found these labors much more difficult than he had thought they would be, and it was **twelve long years before the last was done.**

As his **first task,** Heracles was asked to **kill a fierce lion** that lived on a lonely mountain and was a terror to all the country round about. He did this without a weapon of any kind, by hunting it to its den, and then **strangling it in his arms.** He took the skin from this lion, and wore it around him as a garment, and cut a great club, which he carried in his hand. So you will see him in almost all of the pictures and statues that were made of him.

The **next task** of Heracles was to **kill a great water-snake called the hydra.** This snake had ten heads, one of which was immortal; and he found that this task was not so simple a thing as crushing the lion to death in his arms. As he cut off each head, two more immediately grew where the one had been, and he was worse off than before. But he finally discovered a way to destroy the snake by burning off the heads instead of cutting them, and at last he was ready to begin his **third task.**

This was not to kill a dreadful beast, but to do something much more difficult. He was to bring a wild boar alive from the place where it lived in the depths of the forest to a certain city. He succeeded in doing this as he had done the first two tasks; and he walked into the town dragging the great beast behind him, to the terror of all the people. The king was so frightened that he rushed away, and hid in an underground hut in the forest. It was only when Heracles had turned the animal loose, and it had disappeared from the city, that he came back. And then he ordered Heracles to be very careful not to bring any more proofs of his bravery into the town, but thereafter to show them outside the city walls.

His fourth task was to capture a deer belonging to Artemis, and bring it also home alive. This deer had horns of gold and hoofs of brass, and was the swiftest animal of its kind. Heracles followed it for a whole year over plain, mountain, and valley, through winter and summer. Each time he neared it, it would bound away, and he could never quite catch it. At last he wounded it with an arrow, and so caught it, and carried it on his shoulders to his city.



Picture of the Labors of Heracles

Heracles continued to do successfully all that was asked of him. One of his tasks was to drive away and destroy great birds which fed on human flesh, and which could shoot out their feathers like arrows at those who came near them. Another was to get a girdle which the god Ares had given to the Queen of the Amazons. Another was to cleanse in a day a filthy stable where three thousand cattle were kept; this he did by turned a river through it, and letting it wash the filth away. Another was to capture a mad bull which belonged to Poseidon. And another was

to bind and bring home from a distant country a herd of fierce horses which fed on human flesh.

But the most wonderful of all his labors were the two which he performed last. These were to find and carry home the apples of the Hesperides, and to bring the three-headed dog Cerberus up from the under-world. Heracles had no idea where to find the apples of the Hesperides, and went up and down the world asking where he should go for them. At last one of the sea-gods told him that he must look for them on some islands far to the west. So he traveled toward the setting sun until he came to where the god Atlas stood holding the blue heavens above the earth upon his shoulders. Here Heracles found that he could go no farther, so he persuaded Atlas to go get the apples for him while he held the heavens in his absence.

Atlas readily agreed, and slipped his heavy burden upon the shoulders of Heracles. Atlas obtained the apples; but he enjoyed the freedom from his burden so much, that, when he came back with them, he proposed to take the apples the remainder of the way home, and leave Heracles to do his work for him. But Heracles had no idea of allowing this. He did not wish to spend the rest of his days standing still under a great burden while Atlas roamed free and happy about the world. So he pretended that he was willing that Atlas should do as he wished, but asked, as a favor, that Atlas would hold the heavens for him a moment while he fitted a cushion to his back, so that he might support the burden more comfortably. Then, when Atlas had kindly taken the burden again, he snatched the apples and hurried away.

The last labor of Heracles was the most terrible one. He was sent to the under-world, where gloomy Hades reigned, to get the dog Cerberus. The journey was so difficult that Hermes and Athena were obliged to go with him and guard him on the way. Hades gave him permission to take the dog if he could do it without club or weapon; and Heracles seized him in his arms, and carried him so to the upper world. This deed was so wonderful that he might never have done anything more all his life long, and still have been the greatest of all heroes. But as long as he lived he continued to wander over the earth and meet with great adventures. When he died at last, he was so beloved by the gods that he was taken to Mount Olympus and made immortal, instead of being sent to the dark under-ground world of the dead.

The Legend and Myth about Labors of Heracles

The Myth of the Labors of Heracles

The story of the Labors of Heracles is featured in the book entitled Greek Gods, Heroes and Men by Caroline H. Harding and Samuel B. Harding, published in 1906 by Scott, Foresman and Company.

Labors of Heracles - A Myth with a Moral

Many of the ancient Myth Stories, like the legend of the Labors of Heracles, incorporate tales with morals that provided the old story-tellers with short examples of exciting tales for kids and children of how to act and behave and reflected important life lessons. The characters of the heroes in this type of fable demonstrated the virtues of courage, love, loyalty, strength, perseverance, leadership and self reliance. Whereas the villains demonstrated all of the vices and were killed or punished by the gods. The old, famous myth story and fable, like

Labors of Heracles, were designed to entertain, thrill and inspire their young listeners...

The Myth of the Labors of Heracles - the Magical World of Myth & Legend

The story of the Labors of Heracles is one of the fantastic stories featured in ancient mythology and legends. Such stories serve as a doorway to enter the world of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. The names of so many of the heroes and characters are known today through movies and games but the actual story about such characters are unknown. Reading a myth story such as Labors of Heracles is the easy way to learn about the stories of the classics.



The Magical World of Myth and Legend

The Short Story and Myth of the Labors of Heracles

The myth about Labors of Heracles is featured in the book entitled Greek Gods, Heroes and Men by Caroline H. Harding and Samuel B. Harding, published in 1906 by Scott, Foresman and Company. Learn about the exciting adventures and dangerous quests undertaken by the mythical characters that feature in the hero myths, fables and stories about the gods and goddesses of Ancient Greece and Rome that are available on this website.



