



THE HEROES

GREEK FAIRY TALES FOR MY CHILDREN

CHARLES KINGSLEY

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OR
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BY
CHARLES KINGSLEY

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And at last Ancaios shouted, 'Endure a little while, brave friends, the worst is surely past; for I can see the pure west wind ruffle the water, and hear the roar of ocean on the sands. So raise up the mast, and set the sail, and face what comes like men.'

Then out spoke the magic bough, 'Ah, would that I had perished long ago, and been whelmed by the dread blue rocks, beneath the fierce swell of the Euxine! Better so, than to wander for ever, disgraced by the guilt of my princes; for the blood of Absyrtus still tracks me, and woe follows hard upon woe. And now some dark horror will clutch me, if I come near the Isle of Ierne.⁷ Unless you will cling to the land, and sail southward and southward for ever, I shall wander beyond the Atlantic, to the ocean which has no shore.'

Then they blest the magic bough, and sailed southward along the land. But ere they could pass Ierne, the land of mists and storms, the wild wind came down, dark and roaring, and caught the sail, and strained the ropes. And away they drove twelve nights, on the wide wild western sea, through the foam, and over the rollers, while they saw neither sun nor stars. And they cried again, 'We shall perish, for we know not where we are. We are lost in the dreary damp darkness, and cannot tell north from south.'

But Lynceus the long-sighted called gaily from the bows, 'Take heart again, brave sailors; for I see a pine-clad isle, and the halls of the kind Earth-mother, with a crown of clouds around them.'

But Orpheus said, 'Turn from them, for no living man can land there: there is no harbour on the coast, but steep-walled cliffs all round.'

So Ancaios turned the ship away; and for three days more they sailed on, till they came to Aiaia, Circe's home, and the fairy island of the West.⁸

And there Jason bid them land, and seek about for any sign of living man. And as they went inland Circe met them, coming down toward the ship; and they trembled when they saw her, for her hair, and face, and robes shone like flame.

And she came and looked at Medeia; and Medeia hid her face beneath her veil.

And Circe cried, 'Ah, wretched girl, have you forgotten all your sins, that you come hither to my island, where the flowers bloom all the year round? Where is your aged father, and the brother whom you killed? Little do I expect you to return in safety with these strangers whom you love. I will send you food and wine: but your ship must not stay here, for it is foul with sin, and foul with sin its crew.'

And the heroes prayed her, but in vain, and cried, 'Cleanse us from our guilt!' But she sent them away, and said, 'Go on to Malea, and there you may be cleansed, and return home.'

⁷ Britain?

⁸ The Azores?

