



# *How Theseus Fell by His Pride*

Charles Kingsley

Greek

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But that fair Ariadne never came to Athens with her husband. Some say that Theseus left her sleeping on Naxos among the Cyclades; and that Dionusos the wine-king found her, and took her up into the sky, as you shall see some day in a painting of old Titian's, one of the most glorious pictures upon earth. And some say that Dionusos drove away Theseus, and took Ariadne from him by force: but however that may be, in his haste or in his grief, Theseus forgot to put up the white sail. Now Ægeus his father sat and watched on Sunium day after day, and strained his old eyes across the sea to see the ship afar. And when he saw the black sail, and not the white one, he gave up Theseus for dead, and in his grief he fell into the sea, and died; so it is called the Ægean to this day.

And now Theseus was king of Athens, and he guarded it and ruled it well.

For he killed the bull of Marathon, which had killed Androgeos, Minos's son; and he drove back the famous Amazons, the warlike women of the East, when they came from Asia, and conquered all Hellas, and broke into Athens itself. But Theseus stopped them there, and conquered them, and took Hippolute their queen to be his wife. Then he went out to fight against the Lapithai, and Peirithoos their famous king: but when the two

heroes came face to face they loved each other, and embraced, and became noble friends; so that the friendship of Theseus and Peirithoos is a proverb even now. And he gathered (so the Athenians say) all the boroughs of the land together, and knit them into one strong people, while before they were all parted and weak: and many another wise thing he did, so that his people honoured him after he was dead, for many a hundred years, as the father of their freedom and their laws. And six hundred years after his death, in the famous fight at Marathon, men said that they saw the ghost of Theseus, with his mighty brazen club, fighting in the van of battle against the invading Persians, for the country which he loved. And twenty years after Marathon his bones (they say) were found in Scuros, an isle beyond the sea; and they were bigger than the bones of mortal man. So the Athenians brought them home in triumph; and all the people came out to welcome them; and they built over them a noble temple, and adorned it with sculptures and paintings in which were told all the noble deeds of Theseus, and the Centaurs, and the Lapithai, and the Amazons; and the ruins of it are standing still.

But why did they find his bones in Scuros? Why did he not die in peace at Athens, and sleep by his father's side? Because after his triumph he grew proud, and broke the laws of God and man. And one thing worst of all he did, which brought him to his grave with sorrow. For he went down (they say beneath the earth) with that bold Peirithoos his friend, to help him to carry off Persephone, the queen of the world below. But Peirithoos was killed miserably, in the dark fire-kingdoms under ground; and Theseus was chained to a rock in everlasting pain. And there he sat for years, till Heracles the mighty came down to bring up the three-headed dog who sits at Pluto's gate. So Heracles loosed him from his chain, and brought him up to the light once more.

But when he came back his people had forgotten him, and Castor and Polydeuces, the sons of the wondrous Swan, had invaded his land, and carried off his mother Aithra for a slave, in revenge for a grievous wrong.

So the fair land of Athens was wasted, and another king ruled it, who drove out Theseus shamefully, and he fled across the sea to Scuros. And there he lived in sadness, in the house of Lucomedes the king, till Lucomedes killed him by treachery, and there was an end of all his labours.

So it is still, my children, and so it will be to the end. In those old Greeks, and in us also, all strength and virtue come from God. But if men grow proud and self-willed, and misuse God's fair gifts, He lets them go their own ways, and fall pitifully, that the glory may be His alone. God help us all, and give us wisdom, and courage to do noble deeds! but God keep pride from us when we have done them, lest we fall, and come to shame!

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