

The Twelve Labors of Hercules



Hercules in his cradle strangles two serpents.

Classical Greco-Roman Mythology

1 Slaying the Nemæan Lion

By Juno's hate urged on, Alcmene's Son,
At sixteen years his noble toils begun.
Nemæa's dreadful lion first he sought,
The savage slew and to Eurystheus brought,
From his huge sides his shaggy spoils he tore,
Around him threw, and e'er in triumph wore.

2 Slaying the Nine-headed Lernæan Hydra

On Lerna's pest the undaunted Hero rushes,
With massy club her hundred heads he crushes,
In vain. One crushed, two hissing heads arise,
Till good Iolas to each wound applies
The burning brand. Dipped in the hydra's gall,
His arrows slightest wound is death to all.

3 Capture the Mænalæan Stag

A stag with horns of gold and feet of brass,
On Mænalus bounds o'er the unbending grass,
To Diane sacred, this he's doomed to bring,
Unhurt into the presence of the king,
Forbid to wound, how take a stag so fleet?
A twelvemonth's end scarce saw the task complete.

4 Capture the Erymanthian Boar

To Erymanthus next his course is bent,
To seize the boar by incensed Diane sent,
The fell destroyer bound he o'er him flings,
And unto scared Eurystheus quickly brings,
The trembling tyrant shrinks aghast with dread,
And in his brazen vessel hides his coward head.

5 Clean the Stables of Augeas in a Single Day

To cleanse the Augean Stables now he's sped,
Where thirty years three thousand oxen fed;
The task for man too great. A river's course
He turned, and through the stables urged its force,
The tide resistless rolls, and in one day
The gathered filth of years is swept away.

6 Slay the Stymphalides

The Lake Stymphalus by his arm was freed,
From those dire birds on human flesh who feed,
By Pallas' aid the dreadful race subdued,
No more its banks with whitening bones are strewed.
Honored by all mankind he now returns,
But still Eurystheus' envious hatred burns.

7 Capture the Cretan Bull

A furious bull with nostrils breathing fire,
To punish Minos sent by Neptune's ire,
Roams wild in vengeance thro' his wide domains,
And death and terror spreads o'er Crete's fair plains;
But soon the bellowing beast alive he caught,
And vainly struggling to Eurystheus brought.

8 Steal the Horses of Diomedes

Fell Diomed, whose horses fat with gore,
His subjects bodies in their mangers tore,
He next overthrew. And as old authors say,
The tyrant gave to his own steeds a prey,
On Mount Olympus rent by savage beasts,
No more the horses make on man their horrid feasts.

9 Obtain the Girdle of the Amazon Hippolyta

By Fate constrained Eurystheus to obey,
The matchless Hero now must bend his way,
To gain the golden girdle which adorns
The queen of Amazons. Who proudly scorns
To yield, and in her warriors doth confide—
But vanquished she becomes great Theseus' bride.

10 Obtain the Cattle of Geryon

A giant king in Gades once did keep,
(Unlike their gentle race) carnivorous sheep,
The triple monster slain, amidst his rocks
He left to birds a prey, and seized his flocks,
Which by Eurystheus' order brought away
He unto Argos safely did convey.

11 Capture Cerberus

In fetters Hercules fierce Cerberus tied,
And took him trembling from grim Pluto's side,
From realms of darkness dragged away to light,
The yelling monster sickened at the sight,
And from his jaws the foam which fell to earth,
Unto the poisonous aconite gave birth.

12 Steal the Apples of the Hesperides

To crown his deeds, so wondrous and so great,
Upon his shoulders vast Olympus' weight
He bore, while Atlas did the apples bring,
Which bridal Juno gave to Heaven's dread king.
And now the dragon guarded apples won,
The godlike hero, saw his labors done.