

BELLEROPHON AND THE CHIMERA

By MORRIS J. STEELE

Because a King set traps to kill him, this Greek became one of the greatest legendary heroes of ancient time

BELLEROPHON, or Bellerophon, was the son of Glaucus, and the grandson of Sisyphus, who was one of the great men of ancient Ephyre, or modern Corinth.

When Anteia, wife of Proteus, King of Argos, fell in love with him, she made overtures which were rejected by Bellerophon. True to the tradition of "a woman spurned" she sought revenge; and true to the "Potiphar's wife" theme, she accused him to her husband.

Proteus thereupon sent Bellerophon to his father-in-law, Iobates, King of Lycia, bearing a note which directed Iobates to have him killed.

However, previous to this event, Bellerophon had succeeded in taming the winged horse, Pegasus, at Corinth, and thus rode the animal to Lycia.

Arriving there, the King sent him in a suicidal mission against the Chimera, which was a fire-breathing monster, part goat, part serpent, part lion. In a thrilling battle, mounted on Pegasus, Bellerophon succeeded in killing the Chimera.

Iobates was not baffled for long. He promptly sent Bellerophon against a warlike tribe, the Solymi. Bellerophon administered the whole tribe a resounding whipping and returned triumphant, eager for more battles.

Obligingly Iobates sent him against the Amazons, who, in addition to being fearsome warriors, were also women. Nothing daunted, Bellerophon forgot his gentlemanly instincts long enough to cuff them around in unmerciful fashion, emerging the victor over very potent muscles and non-existent feminine charm. (It has been said that the Amazons amputated their right breast to avoid obstruction of the strings of their mighty bows.)

Irked by his constant failures to execute the doughty young warrior, Iobates selected a group of his own chosen warriors and laid an ambush for the youth. It was to be outright murder. It turned out to be a form of murder, all right, but Bellerophon did the murdering. He waded through the ambushers with great gusto and came up yelling for more.

There was only one thing for Iobates to do; he recognized the fact that Bellerophon was more than human, and capitalized on the realization by marrying his daughter to him.

A lot of money must have gone with the deal,

and the reason for it might be apparent when we consider that legend says nothing about the daughter's looks, which in legend means she hadn't any—at any rate, Bellerophon lived in prosperity for several years.

It is said the gods love battle—especially if someone else is doing the battling; which may be the reason that Bellerophon finally fell out of favor with them. Two of his children died, and Bellerophon was grief-stricken. He became a wanderer, shunning mankind.

One version of legend gives a more definite reason for Bellerophon's simpleton-like visit to Lycia bearing a note directing his own destruction. It seems he was fleeing from the consequences of slaying the Corinthian hero, Bellerus, or his own brother, as some accounts have it.

That Bellerophon recognized the fact that someone was after his scalp is revealed by his subsequent visit to Proteus to take Anteia for what may have been the first "ride." He took her on the winged horse, Pegasus, to a great height and revenged himself by the simple expedient of dropping her off and telling her to walk back.

It might have been the effects of his sudden affluence after his marriage to the daughter of Iobates that caused his falling into disfavor with the gods. It is said that men with nothing to occupy their time, and too much money, get into mischief by thinking up things to do that are a little too ambitious. Bellerophon, having a winged horse, hit on the idea of flying to heaven. We can understand why the gods objected.

They caused him to fall from his horse. Perhaps this is the best proof of his innate toughness, because the fall only lamed him, in spite of the fact that he bailed out without a parachute.

Bellerophon, according to accounts of the details of his first amazing feat, the taming of Pegasus, accomplished the trick by means of a special bridle given him by the goddess, Athena.

Although Bellerophon is considered to be a strictly Greek hero, he was actually stolen by the Greek mythologists from an Oriental beginning. Little is known of his exploits as an Oriental hero, although they must have been considerable, or he would not have been adopted by the publicity-loving Greeks.

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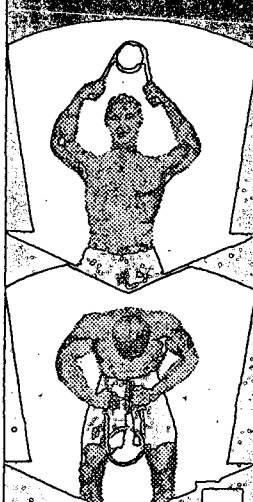
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