

There, too, as in Argolis, the myth is blended with facts of local warfare; Heracles fights for Thebes against the Minyae of Orchomenus. But the true Dorian Heracles is seen in other parts of the Theban story,—as when he strangles the snakes in his cradle, and slays the lion of Cithaeron. His last act at Thebes is that which he does in the madness sent on him by Hera,—the slaughter of the children borne to him by Megara, daughter of Creon. This Theban tradition was another compromise with Argive legend, which claimed his best years for the twelve labours. How, then, was he to be severed from Thebes, the home of his youth? He must be forced to fly from it, as blood-guilty—the guilt being excused by Hera's visitation. Further, Thebes had to account for the non-existence of Theban nobles claiming a direct descent from him. Therefore he slew his Theban children.

Thessalian legends.

Lastly, there are the Thessalian legends. These belong especially to Trachis, the chief town of Malis, and to the neighbouring region of Mount Oeta. Here, too, there is an element of disguised history; Heracles is the friend of Dorians; he works for the honour of Apollo, the god of the Thessalo-Delphic amphictyony; he conquers aliens, like Cycnus, or establishes good relations with them, as with the Trachinian king Ceyx. But the spirit of an older conception animates one part of the Thessalian legend,—the hero's fiery death on the summit of Oeta, when Zeus receives him into heaven. The journey to the Hesperides was probably an older symbol of immortality attained after toil; but if that fable has the charm of the sunset, the legend of Oeta has the grandeur of the hills.

These three cycles of myth,—the Argive, the Boeotian, and the Thessalian,—alone reveal the true old-Dorian Heracles. The traditions found elsewhere are either merely local, expressing the desire of particular Dorian communities to link their own deeds with his name, as at Rhodes and Cos; or they show the influence of non-Dorian poets, who altered the original character of the story by interweaving it with other threads of folk-lore. Thus in the *Trachiniae* the legend of Oeta is combined with legends of Aetolia. We shall understand this process better if we consider the place of Heracles in that