

BLIND THAMYRIS

By T. STURGE MOORE

SINCE my father was a hero and my mother a goddess of the woods, I was sent when twelve years old to the cave of Chiron, that he might instruct me in wisdom and valour. This life, divorced from all female tenderness, appealed to my pride, and only at night were my eyes ever moistened with regret. I was now free to follow a stream until, too weary to advance further, some cradle of scented herbs would lure me to rest and doze. At length twilight brought me an energy, winged with dread of the dusking forests, that carried me right home to the cavern. The sources were always my goal, the more easy descent seawards never tempted my morning moods: and, as he taught me the lyre or the control of my voice, Chiron remarked that a similar bent was evinced by an instinctive preference for those words and cadences that lead the spirit away from the high-roads of thought and feeling. Surely emotions well up in the fastnesses of tranquillity, close under the blue and white of heaven, more virginal than can be experienced in lowland retreats? As time wore on, Chiron, the daily lesson being ended, began to speak to me of a rhapsodist, former pupil and great favourite of his. "Agenor," he began, "like thyself, Thamyris was ever striving to reach the summits before joint and sinew were sufficiently tough. Alas, though he has often brought back with him the rarest strophes and melodies, men have refused to listen to them! They prefer a music that better harmonises with their garish sea-board towns, and he wanders shrouded in an ever deeper gloom." With a sigh he paused, and I waited, expecting to be warned not thus to estrange myself from humanity by persistently climbing among the hills. But he seemed unable so to conclude, and presently bid me run away and practise throwing the spear.

One forenoon when wind, so strong as to seem foreign to the settled brilliance of the weather, was bowing the fir-trees, and now here, now there, their backs arched silverly, flashing like waves on the dark green ridges, while the sound was that of a chorus of Titans rejoicing in violence (so much so that we had to retreat well back within the cave before we could hear ourselves play or sing), Chiron broke off the lesson, still disturbed it may be by the hurly-burly without, though it strained but faintly through the stillness held under that roof of rock. He sat gazing forth into the sunny turbulence, so grandly though jaggedly framed; and I, leaning back against his flank, watched his moved visage worn with much living. Then for the first time he began to recite me actual words of Thamyris, recalling how

their public delivery had proved that those who thronged round the other rhapsodists would never collect about him.

Untouched white cloud,
Like a task acclaimed
When the heart is young,
Thou fliest higher
Than the eagle deed
That is praised by men

Unheeded silence,
In the night or at noon,
Thou singest to the hilltops
A song that is richer
Than the tales of war
Which men crowd to hear.

Magnificent joys
Lie about like garments
Amazingly brodered;
A god has discarded them
Before launching upward
In naked loneliness.

But no human hand
Lifts a single tunic;
No man's heart prefigures
The deep satisfaction
Of moving vested
In the pictured raiment
That a god walked the earth in.

Chiron was silent, and I dreamed of finding and putting on the slough of Apollo. I saw myself in a sultry glare climbing boulders with grey lichen-crusted cheeks, and dark moss-bearded cavities down which I peered in hopes of finding a cupful of collected dew. At last I arrived on the crest, and there, at the bottom of a crater of wild tumbled blocks, lay gleaming somewhat silver and violet and blue. I scrambled down; a pattern of scaled serpents was looped inextricably over white samite. I lifted it, and from the inside there slipped with a swish a body-vest of pale vermilion rippled with gold in a device of arrows, each drawn to the head in a sturdy bow: an armoury of the proper size for an host of mice had it been real instead of pictured. I gasped; and Chiron's eyes met mine, so that I blushed all down my neck.

Months later, on my return at dusk from a day's ramble, I learned from our new pupil, the little Achilles, that Chiron had been fetched away by two other centaurs, and expected to be absent all night, perhaps longer. We prepared and ate our supper of chestnuts boiled and then mashed in milk, and were shortly rolled in separate bears' skins to sleep. Achilles, who was but just turned six, was soon off, but I lay hour after hour forecasting

coming events with eyes wide open. I cannot now revive those dreamy adventures, and only recollect that Thamyris figured in no few, and how fevered I was by the thought that, being mysteriously like him, much sadness and disappointment lay in wait for me. At last moonlight began to edge into the cave; travelling along the wall it soon lit up a trophy, the skull and huge hooped horns of an ibex; and next the rug made of four chamois hides that Chiron hangs over his flanks and crupper in winter, when round his bust he wraps thick folds of brown knitted wool; not long after it was bathing the ebony lyre inlaid with polished iridescent sea-shell that has both its fluted pillars and their screw-heads enamelled with lines of scarlet. This wonder Jason had brought back from Colchis and sent up by an embassy to Chiron. I rose and, stealing softly to it, looked up, not at the well-loved colours of the lyre, but towards the tranquil effulgence that had woken them out of the darkness, and was surprised to see that there were many swift-travelling clouds in the sky, for while I lay in the shelter the night had seemed quite still. At that moment the moon was covered, and the cave became so dark that I stepped outside and saw the moonlight fast growing again on the lawn lower down, where we throw the spear and wrestling matches take place. I hurried to meet it and, once there, the terror and attraction of the hills at night shook me; for was I not brought forth by the regent of a bosky grove? Though its sacred safety rustled leagues from where I stood, might I not brave these mountain forests, being able so to account for my hardihood? I was carried away, neither walking nor running, but at a sort of shaken trot that seemed dictated by the thudding of my heart. The almost level path wound along our valley high above the torrent, which it would meet and cross some two miles deeper in this fold under Pelion. My limbs moved as it were unbidden; once or twice I stopped and said, "This is a dream," till the indescribable reality of everything drove me on. My teeth were frequently jolted, yet the cold did not seem intense enough to chatter them, and surely I was not abjectly frightened? This notion roused my self-control and calmed me till I slipped along like a peaceful thought, unchallenged yet alert. The stream was crossed by the fallen fir-trunk, and the path returned eastward on the opposite side of the valley till the distant mouth of the cave was passed and the forefront of this new ridge won. Here the view was immense, embracing islands in the sea and snowy Olympus and the unnumbered chains of the mountainous coast. Here I squatted on the short fine turf and folded both arms across my knees as a cushion for my chin. Perhaps I dozed, for my head was heavy when I lifted it to make sure of a sound—the trampling of centaurs a great way off. "They are returning," I said to myself, and laid an ear against the earth, and then peered into the darkness, for the moon lit nothing now except one band of sea far out behind the islands. All but certain by which track they were coming, I plunged headlong downward through the brushwood as though it had been broad day, intending to cut their road on the moor above the cliffs. How many times I floundered

into bushes or barked a shin against bough or boulder, those who have done such things may imagine. I at last stumbled out on the heather hundreds of feet beneath, limping but consoled to fancy my troubles ended. Before I had cleared a thousand yards I fell, ricking my ankle, and rose with difficulty, for an agony like death whenever my foot pressed the ground routed the very notion of an inexhaustible endurance latent within me. I fell again on to the thick springy couch of scented ling and soon felt deliciously relieved. Violent activity had chased the last vestige of night-terror, and the wind moaning round me made even that barren place homelike as with the movements of a familiar presence. The slightest jerk to my right foot and immediately my brow was beaded with sweat, for pain like a savage dog held my ankle in its jaws, and would grind them anew if I stirred. Hooves thundered nearer and nearer; the noise so invaded my consciousness that to cry for help seemed as useless as to halloo against tempestuous breakers on a rocky shore, yet simultaneously there returned on me all that Chiron had taught of the diverse tribes of sound—how some are irreconcilable while others easily agree, how the loudest of one family may fail to drown small ones of distinct origin, and in a continuous and familiar uproar their different calibre may startle even as in silence. Fed by these memories hope grew strong, and I cried out, "Father Chiron, Father Chiron, I am here, and must die if you do not come." Then I listened: all was still. At first I feared they had reached the hills and entered the valley so that the sound of their trampling was walled off. Just then it began again more slowly and unexpectedly near, so I shouted, "Father Chiron, do not leave me to the wolves!" Then his voice answered, and tears streamed over my face and sobs so shook me that I could not make out his words, yet between the spasms I gasped, "This way, this way!" And he came and knelt beside me, first on his fore-knees, then settling down on his haunches gradually so as not to scare me by the blundering of his fetlocks. His large gentle hand felt my moist burning brow while I pointed at my helpless ankle; then he lifted it between thumb and finger, and with the index of the other hand began to stroke the swelling thoughtfully. Then lifting his head he shouted, "Rhoetus, find me some sorrel or lettuce, and if you see any straight wands cut me one or two. Catch! Here is my knife!" and he slipped the thong by which it hung over his head. Now I must tell you it was a delicately smithied blade with both edges sharp, and lived, point foremost, in a snug trough cut along the yellow boxwood handle over which a lid of box was spliced, the open end being secured by a wedge of ebony attached by a thong. For use, the blade was first shaken out on the palm, then its heft-end replaced and secured by tapping the wedge with a stone. It was our great pleasure to borrow this knife and scratch lions or eagles upon a horn, or out of soft pine carve straight-robed Athena with casque and spear. I know every cut that defines her attitude, but can never give her features, either terrible or beautiful. But Chiron was repeating to me, "Did not Achilles tell you that I could not be back before morning?" for my

mind had suddenly wandered to my foster-mother's farm kitchen in the lowlands forty miles away. "Yes, he told me, but I could not sleep, and at last I wanted to explore the woods by moonlight; after I heard you coming, in running I caught my foot in the twisted trunks of this heather." With a low husky chuckle he said, "Though I am supposed to be really wise, the simplicity of your explanation has surprised me harbouring sinister forebodings." I had no inkling then how he dreaded lest the violence of centaur-herds and the knavery of townsmen, like clashing flints, should cause a conflagration. For ever more pressingly he forebodes the violation of his cavern's peace, the only spot left where men and centaurs foregather kindly. At that time I attributed his words to the ocean of his wisdom, which, like a shore-bred child, I was accustomed to hear murmur, content if now and again the beauty of a thought meant for me stranded like a dainty shell at my feet. Hitherto I had lain like one bed-ridden, haunted by the seriousness of that pain, but now, sitting up and taking advantage of the licence accorded to sufferers, I dared to show a curiosity which every endeavour would have suppressed had my right ankle been as sound as the left, and asked, "Where have you been, Father Chiron?" His husky laugh allowed the indulgence I had claimed, and his voice grew strained as he answered, "I was called to the death-bed of my best-beloved son Thamyris." "Is he very sick?" I asked. "Not now, for he moaned me his last epode and ended like the swan." At that I lay back once more and looked across the heather at the moon, unwilling to embarrass his sorrow by staring at it. And after a pause Chiron in a very low voice began to croon:

Falcon daughters of Apollo,
 Ye spur on a man to sing,
 Rend with pangs sharp as a sword:
 Then for his best award
 Faint praise and a broken wing.
 Is it for larks to follow
 The snow-feathered cloud?
 They are dusky and hot and fragile
 And scarcely contain a proud
 Insanely throbbing heart:
 Ye are amber-eyed, sleek and agile,
 Taloned and savagely smart.
 When the fierce blood bursts our pulses,
 Darkened like Hades at noon,
 There falls from the towering ether
 A mangled mass of feather.
 An end to the pain that convulses
 Life with ambition is boon
 Enough for a soul uplifted,
 And by each of you severally gifted.

When silence had nursed the memory of this for a space I glanced at Chiron; his wet eyes stared steadily at the moon. He roused himself and

began to shout to hasten Rhoetus, and the young centaur soon approached, bounding wildly, a mat of tresses flapping like a black flag about his head. Chiron took the knife, the leaves and the two sallows, and measuring these last against my leg cut two wands from their stouter ends, split them and placed their flat sides against the leaves in which he packed my tender joint. He next cut strands from under his white beard as long as his arm; with one he bound the splints lightly round my calf and with the other secured them beneath my foot. Rising, he helped me up, and warned me not to put any weight on the cage, which lengthened and imprisoned my leg. He then signed to Rhoetus to lift me on to his back, and side by side the two began walking across the heath; the sky was once more almost clear and the moon was setting. The sea, though it could be heard, was hidden by the heathery hillocks which thatched its cliffs, as Olympus and the great ranges were behind hills tawny and russet with beech and alder but hooded in evergreen firs that towered dead black in the moonlight. A whistle sounded, and there was Caudon waiting three hundred paces off. Rhoetus advanced, crying to him, "It is my turn to carry the body now," but his piebald fellow immediately heaved something on to his shoulder and set off at a gallop. "What is it?" I said to Chiron, round whose vast waist my arms clung. "They shame our breed," he replied. "Ghosts of the dead never haunt centaurs, so for them the lifeless body is no more than an empty smock. Men are born with older fears and cradled in whispering awe. Reverence is thus taught them, first by terror, and then by esteem, if they consort with finely-tempered minds. But these rough colts, deprived of the first, scarce heed the second lesson yet. Poor Thamyris, the fair course of thy days was driven about till, willy-nilly, it clashed with the coarse-grained crowd; and must thy body be tossed, fought for, and whirled away in the fury of this boisterous rivalry?" They were fetching wide curves across the heath; sometimes even Caudon's piebald flanks were lost in the darkness, and they became a mere chivy of distancing sounds; then again both toiled on the skyline above the cliffs, like shadows on a wall. Their shouts had at first betokened no more than horse-play, but took now an angrier accent. Chiron smartened his pace, and I felt that his spirit was chafing, and when they next drew within earshot he shouted commands to arrest them of such sternness as they were not sufficiently enslaved by passion to disregard, and they came severally, muttering, heated, and resentful towards us. The old centaur reproached them for thus jolting the body of his friend. "But he feels nothing," argued Caudon. "Well, well, had he been a skin of choice wine, you should have carried him with more care." "Wine can be spoilt with shaking—but a corpse!" grumbled Rhoetus. "Still for all he once was . . ." "Why, he was so mad as to put out his own eyes!" grunted Caudon, and Rhoetus continued, "They say he died because he refused to eat in a rage that outlasted his life." "Yet I, who am old enough to be your sire's grandsire, have often wished the hour stayed when his fingers wandered the strings." "Years

ago!" they interjected. "Last evening he kissed my hands and taught me words that fly straight to the heart." Neither colt retorted, and the silence seemed so consecrated to the gravity of the wise Chiron's sorrow that I feared to break it, though devoured with curiosity about this unaccountable madness, blindness, and death. We had entered the valley and were climbing at a foot-pace among the trees. Though the moon had set, the sky had not darkened but greyed with the dawn. As the light increased the body absorbed my attention; it hung wrapped in a coarse and torn cloak over Rhoetus's shoulder; for Caudon had ceded it to him soon after they left arguing with Chiron. The arms dangled along his muscular back and the dead hands flopped and turned upon the glossy black hide to which his brown skin gave place below the loins. They went a little in advance of us, and at times I could divine just how the head hung, by some yellow hair that appeared and disappeared behind a rent in the cloak which, swaying, opened and closed like the ill-hinged door of a granary loft that, swinging in the wind, shows the gleam of golden grain to a mid-winter day. My head had dropped in a doze before we reached the place where a path branches down to the bathing pool, and Chiron bade Rhoetus and Caudon carry the body up to the cave, build a fire, and seethe meat, for all would be more than common hungry. But me he carried down to the large pool that spreads out from the foot of a fall in the torrent; and at the outer brim of this basin, where the clear water becomes shallow and escapes in many minor cascades downwards, he chose a bank of sward and laid me gently down where the water would flow over my damaged foot. While I lounged at ease he himself gravely walked down under the pool; the water rose above the horse and only the man remained; still he trod carefully deeper, the white stones being often slippery with green weed; and now his beard and hair were floating like foam about his shoulders, as though a smaller column of invisible water were drilling the quivering surface right out in front of the torrent that thundered into boiling suds at the foot of the dripping rocks. Still his hooves felt their way down, till the billowy outward curves were sweeping right over his head. The white limestone lit up the depths and rendered his figure clearly visible, though it seemed strangely stunted; his chestnut crupper, silvered as it was with age, became violet by contrast with the icy blue water. All around thinned boughs hung out long yellow leaves, and the reflections of some of them flickered like fish about him. Time seemed to have ceased and all hostile conditions to have been suspended in favour of this magnificently weathered creature, that he might become divinely amphibious and death stand disarmed before him. Far above, a level shaft of sunlight from over the mountain shoulder suddenly caught the tree-tops. A naked scaffold of dark trunk, bough and intricately forking branch sustained each thin tower-like tent of brilliant leaves. Thus, their grand swelling shapes hollow instead of dense with foliage, tanned or yellow instead of green, these chestnuts whose flaunting camps reach far up the valleys made a last stand against the disenchanting

season of storms. The banks beneath were thick with fallen leaves interspersed with clusters of nuts like hedgehogs. The whole vividly coloured scene swam in the limpid transparent slumber which tuned my breathing, though it had not closed my eyes. I thought, "He will stay under too long and I shall never hear how poor Thamyris went mad," yet it seemed acceptable or at least necessary that I should never hear and that he should remain immersed for ever. No, he lifted his head and parted his hair and rubbed his eyes, and came up as slowly and solemnly out of the pool as he had descended into it. Streaming and refreshed, he cantered round its shallow brim, splashing with his hooves; he shook and wrung from hair and beard streamers of diamond drops, quivering the while the glossy coat of his nether body to free its shaggy skirts, and whisking his tail against his hocks. Pausing beside me, he smiled into my sleepy eyes and said, "How goes the ankle?" I murmured that it was so cold as to have stopped aching, and I could not now feel whether it were there or not. He drew me a little higher up till my bandaged foot was out of the numbing flow. Roused by this I could no longer refrain from asking what had driven poor Thamyris mad; and the answer came, soothing the terror that it stirred in my soul by the grave compassion with which it was pronounced. "He could not endure to watch those whose attention he had in vain tried to capture, grouped about some common rhapsodist who, with shouts, recounted how one man killed another in some freebooting foray. He must have wandered unwanted and uninspired for months before at last he stood near the ships where fishermen had been chipping holes in large flints in order to thread them along the bottom of their great sweep-net. These had often split before they were pierced, and fragments with knife-like edges lay all about. Suddenly dashing down his lyre, he stooped and seized two sharp pieces, and sobbing out that his eyes should never again watch a crowd like that gaping upon the wharf at this bawler, he jabbed at his eyes. Others told me how they heard him, and turned to see blood streaming from his face and beard and from the two red hands that he waved as he staggered, unaccustomed to darkness. They thought some goddess in the shape of a sea-hawk must have struck him with her beak, and vanished as swiftly as she had come through the twilight. Afterward, when his broken lyre was found, they concluded that the Muses had sent her because he, though a mere mortal, sang such songs as might in the halls of Olympus be preferred to their own, for only among the gods, as those fishermen fancied, could he have found suitable audience. They led him to the temple of Apollo; there the priest killed a snake and bound its body across his bleeding orbits, and the wounds healed, but sight did not return. Later on, when he felt how he never knew where he was or who was near—when no one could lead him far towards the stony peaks he loved, for dread always overtook them at the danger of steep places for a blind man whose daimon left him totally unwarned—he refused food and sat all day on the temple steps, and never begged an alms or stooped to gather what was thrown him. At night the

hierodules had sometimes heard him mutter as though he prayed for vengeance. They even believed that he had challenged the nine Muses to a trial of skill, offering to yield body and mind to their displeasure if he failed, but should he outsing them, then each of them was to submit her body to bear him a child. For servile minds, Agenor, ascribe the motives familiar to themselves to those whose outstanding actions they must perforce canvass. Thus he endured not only perpetual darkness, but companionless solitude where streams of men were constantly passing; hearing voices but not one conversable. Then when death first warned him, he sent a message to me; this was delivered to Rhoetus and Caudon, who bore it on up the shoulders of Pelion." And gazing round, he continued, "In this spot shall he rest, screened by these chestnuts from the cruel moons of summer; here shall a grave be dug. The distance from the cave is convenient, and bathers may often consent to remain while I rechant one of his lays, till, departing, they breathe a pious wish for the peace of him whose life was full of strife and storms, though he never joined in battle, or trod the planks of a ship. When I stood by his side he said, 'O god-like beast, no other ears ever listened to me with pleasure as thine did. Thou hast been rewarded with extended life, for thy actions and customs are swayed neither by fear nor by greed, but in the eyes of the young and in quiet haunts thou hast sought the wisdom most easily wed to divine melodies. Thou wilt understand and perhaps pity these strophes born of my anguish.' His fevered reveries would seem so to have exalted me that he used an address such as gods expect, and with the same trance-like utterance feebly and slowly delivered the hymn I repeated to you on the heath, but then the end came. Now you had better lie here for to-day lest you should jar that ankle, and I will send Achilles to you with some meat." I wondered over all I had heard, not without dread of a similar fate, till Achilles came and wanted to know what I had seen in the night, whether nymphs or daimons or Artemis herself. As I ate the warm meat or broke the brown crusts between sips of wine, I told him. Then with all the roguish effrontery of his beauty, shaking his long yellow curls, he laughed, "I should have done as you did for all the rest, Agenor, but I should not have sprained my ankle," and he danced off singing, "No, indeed, indeed no!" while I, dropping the drained horn into the empty maple bowl, rolled over and slept.

When I woke the sun had passed the meridian, and the sound of a spade and the thud of falling clods could be heard, and looking across I saw Caudon working in a grave on a crest of the opposite bank; soon the blade rang on the rock and his action became that of shovelling out the loam. Next, Chiron and Rhoetus arrived, carrying the body between them wound in a long and splendid pall. This had been sent by Thetis as a present with Achilles when he joined us in July. It measured six yards by four, and might have served for a temple curtain or to drape a royal bed. The goddess herself had worked it far out under the sea, aided by the silver-shoed daughters of

Doris. Flying over a ground of deep blue were seen harpies with black wings spread and every feather tipped with white, their brown bodies shaped like large eggs; they wore coral necklaces, and had the heads of women with singing mouths and long streaming raven curls. Yet they were armless and had the legs and talons of a bird. Each of the score was exactly like every other, and side by side and one after another they flew across the deep noon sky. So they sweep by close above some ship, with sweet voices advising mariners of a greater glory amid ocean than where sails are often met around the coast. Though well they know that from the vacant unislanded main the venturer has rarely returned. Chiron had no use in his cavern for a cloth so splendid, and he had determined to devote this to the honour of Thamyris. They laid his body, wholly enveloped in it, along the turf beside the grave, while they spread in it the autumn-tinted bracken that Achilles had been cutting with a sickle, and, armful after armful, had made a mountainous heap of. Next they lowered him in the great blue cloth on to that sun-saturated couch. Then Chiron took his lyre and sang :

A gentle spring was that long past
Which brought thee to my cave;
For thought yet more than action brave,
O daring spirit, now thou hast
Gleaned all that feeble mortals give
To those in whom intenser joy has sought to live
Here woodland peace broods ever, here
Shall water always carol in thine ear.

Caudon and Rhoetus now chanted the usual chorus of "Last Farewell," Achilles and myself piping in as well as their loud voices would let us. The rest of the bracken was then thrown down and on that the dark loam, the turfs were replaced, wine spilled in libation and grain strewn. The rites were ended: the two centaurs shouldered spade and mattock and clattered off. Achilles asked if he might go into the woods with his bow and arrow to shoot something. Chiron nodded consent and came to examine my ankle. While he uncased it and did it up again with fresh leaves, I asked why, if Thamyris so loved the lonely hills and scorned men, he was so angry at seeing them crowd about other rhapsodists. When he had finished with my foot he replied, "One of our friend's hymns is now trotting in my head," then touching his lyre he chanted :

From the west upward
I toiled heavy-hearted;
From the east joyous,
Poising his weight on
An arching instep,
Came man to meet me.

And high in the azure,
 Where the rocks ended
 We sat down, friends.
 He heard there how often
 Was said, shown or felt
 The thing that rebuked me.

Then laughed and pretended
 That what the hand fashioned,
 House, sword or dead body,
 Alone remained;
 Thoughts and intentions
 Lost their existence.

His glad voice inveigled
 Belief from my candour;
 And lo! he was gone.
 Poising my weight on
 An arching instep
 Down I came, gaily
 Facing the sunset,
 As though in the sea-port
 That glittered beneath it
 I had not yet smitten
 The sonorous lyre.
 As though the folk there
 Had come from the eastward
 That very morning
 And found empty houses
 And ships abandoned,
 Needing only to be cleaned and repainted,
 And meant to make them gay as spring flowers,
 And were sure in the twilight
 To gather about me.

“ There, that is his own answer to your question. I do not think he craved just *any* praise, nor did he much over-prize his own gift; and you see he was not thinking of this coast, but of one facing the other way, so that the poet could arrive from the quarter opposite to the sun and meet him at noon on the peak. As much as to say, ‘ Not myself, nor this town’s people, but any place, any people, any poet.’ He worshipped man, and it angered him to see homespun preferred to the skyey fabric the god had helped him weave. He regretted his violence and could not live without those eyes it had cost him.” Having drawn these sentences one by one from his sad heart, Chiron lapsed into silence till I asked, “ But why did he address the Muses as enemies in his last hymn, if what the folk said was quite false ? ” “ It is strange. Can they have appeared to him smartly fledged in white plumage, with dapper tail and wings and vulture heart ? Stately women clothed in daffodil chitons delighted my gaze the only time I ever had a glimpse of them.” “ When was that ? ” “ I was scarcely older than yourself, and

woke in a cave to see them sitting and resting at its mouth, delicately grouped against the dawn. I remember Euterpe's lap full of flowers, and Melpomene, for her hair was stormy, black and unbound, and a deep brown cloak had slipped from her shoulders, but still hung over her elbows; it was only afterwards that I regretted not having noted the features of Urania, but assuredly no single one of them had the eye of a hawk. They rose as I woke, and strolled on. I crept after them, but when I turned the buttress of rock, no glad-robed figure was in sight, though it seemed that choral voices floated in the air; yet soon I found myself listening to silence, so could not be sure." "It must be sad to sing unpraised, however beautiful the words." "Yes, boy, and the ecstasy that sings is counterfaced with a destroying rage; that is perhaps why his darkened soul figured the Muses as birds of prey." "Do you know any more of his rhapsodies?" "Perhaps I can recall another," and he struck some strange bell-like notes and then sang:

Leap, Ibex, leap: the drop
 From that mountain turret-top
 Is sheer two hundred feet!
 Crash head foremost to the rock;
 Those massive hoops, thy curved horns, take the shock
 And throw thee up! Albeit
 Tossed by their supple springs,
 Without the help of wings,
 Scarcely may eye believe
 Thou hast righted in the air!
 Rashness thou dost retrieve;
 Whence thou wast bounced, even there
 Arrivest without let;
 Four sturdy hooves of jet
 Plant thee on the slab thine eye
 Had chosen from on high.

So melodist that haunts
 The spirit-firing peaks,
 And deep in azure chants,
 Must take like dizzy leap
 Back to some sea-board town
 To find the praise he seeks.

And would he still his fervour keep,
 As fine resilience will he need
 So featly to light down,
 Hoop-horned Goat, as thine,
 By chamois herds acclaimed divine!

A god's grace truly will he need
 If he be not to suffer, not to bleed—
 A shattered heart and brain a-fire,
 A trodden mantle and snapt lyre!

And how by headlong rapture whirled and blinded
Should he know where 'tis won or how to find it?
That unpredictable address
Whose magic cleaves the rough quartz stone
And makes its secret crystals known
When the most boorish bless
The most divine
And flash back to their eyes the grace by which they shine!

This history has been written with Chiron's help, who says we have often found more appropriate words than were actually used, yet have not departed from truth as Clio bestows it on those who do her unfeigned reverence.

I covered this sheepskin years ago in the cave and have kept it ever since; now I must soon bequeath it to the care of others. Achilles and Chiron are both long since dead, and who wants to hear the lays of Thamyris now? I never picked up the slough of any god; though a bit later, when my foot was sufficiently healed for me to limp about, I found behind some bushes, where Caudon or Rhoetus had chucked it, the filthy ragged homespun mantle of Thamyris, for when I spread it out one could see where the blood had run down from his eyes by the dark stains. I folded it and laid it at the foot of his grave and raised a pyramid of stones over it, bringing them toilsomely from the pool each day as my ankle grew stronger, even as in two or three years' time I was adding crooked letter to crooked letter on the inside of this skin that Thamyris might be remembered. And as I wrote I was persuaded, in spite of Chiron's presentiment and that vivid dream of a white chlamys brodered over with blue, violet, and silver serpents, that such "magnificent joys" would never be mine. Which secret conviction, as I grew a beard and it grew grey, has been proved correct. Maeonides, best loved of all rhapsodists, may have found it, though when I heard him chant the war for Troy, he also was dressed in homespun and already blind; but old Agenor has kept his two eyes as safely as this sheepskin.