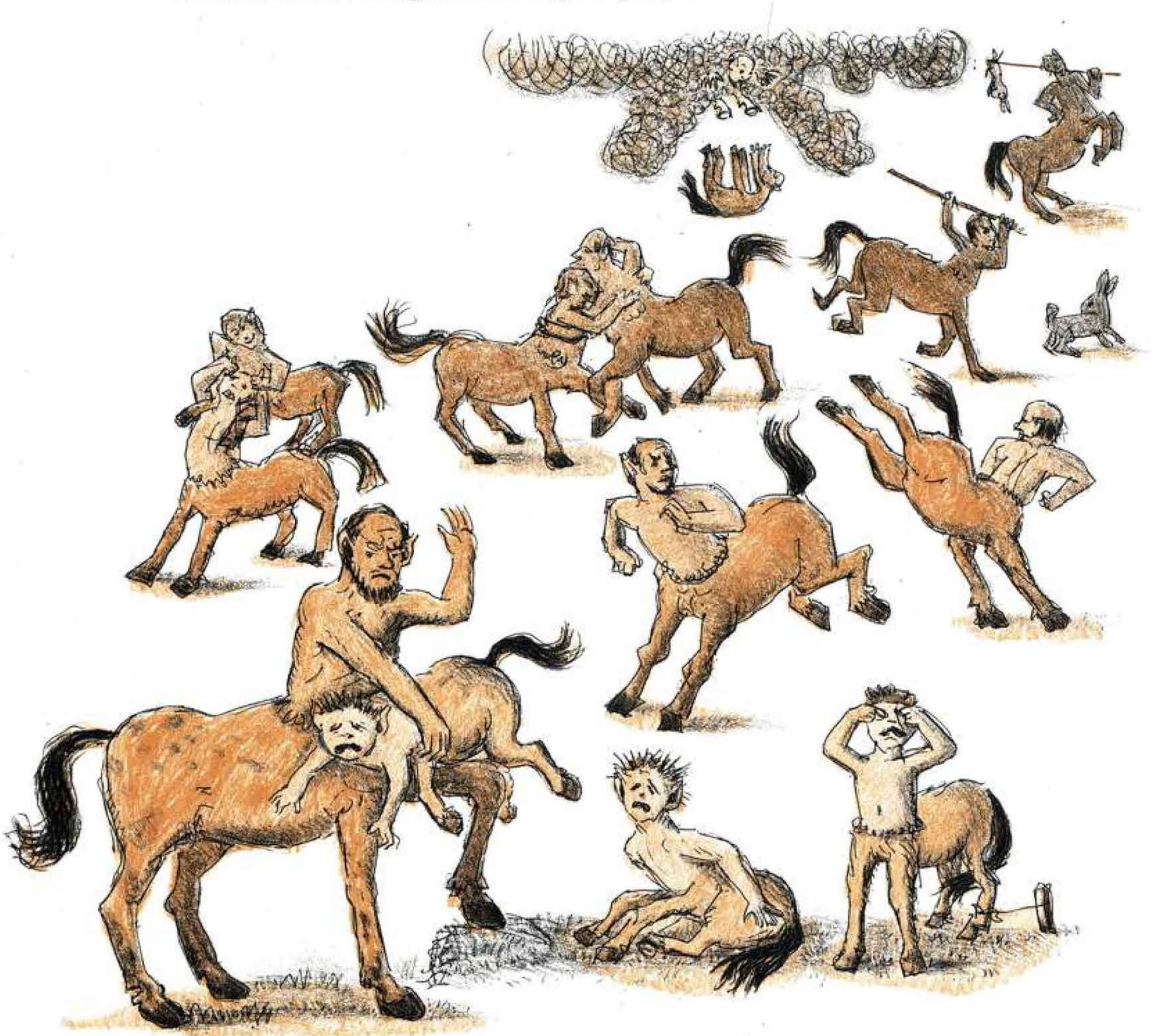


**T**HE WILD AND VULGAR CENTAURS did not honor any of the gods. They were half men and half horses, as cunning as wild men and as savage as untamed horses. They had inherited the worst dispositions of both.

The first centaurs had come tumbling out of a cloud that their father, Ixion, King of the Lapith people, had married, mistaking it for the goddess Hera. Zeus had created the cloud to test the ungodliness of the wicked king who wanted to carry off Hera. Ixion was severely punished for his ungodliness. He was condemned to whirl about forever in the underworld, tied to a flaming wheel, but his offspring, the centaurs, remained on earth as a scourge to the Lapith people.







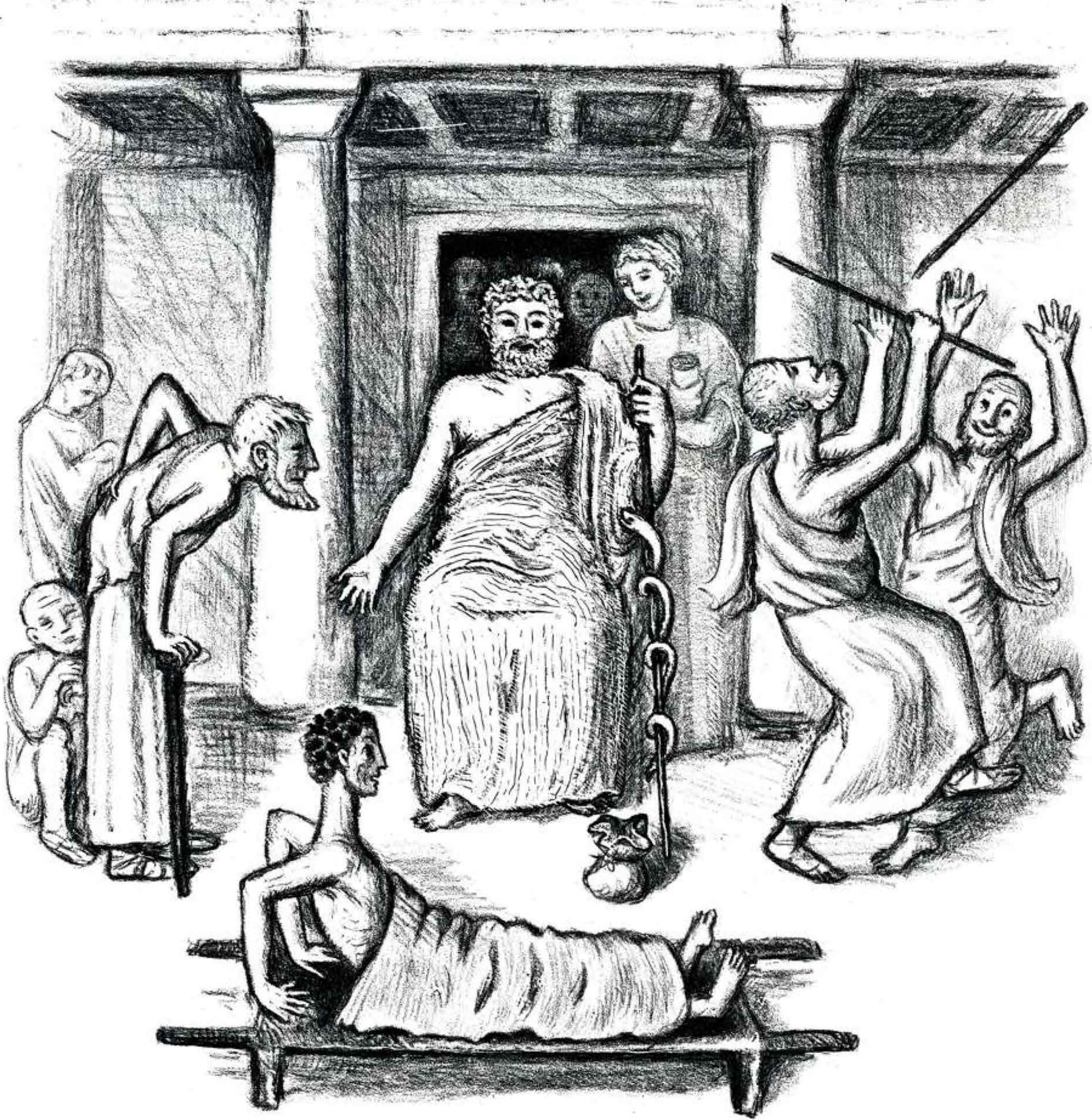
The centaurs lived without law and order, stormed over fields, trampled crops, and carried off the Lapith women, and they ate raw meat. The young centaurs were no better than their elders. They were poorly brought up by parents who kicked them and spanked them and left them to fend for themselves.

There was one centaur who was kind and wise and was fond of children. His name was Chiron. Though he looked like the other centaurs, he wasn't related to them at all. He was the son of Cronus the Titan and was immortal. Chiron was famous as the greatest teacher in Greece. Kings brought their small sons to him so he could raise them in the true spirit of heroes.

In his quiet cave on Mount Pelion, he taught them manly sports and how to use the healing herbs of the earth and how to read the stars in the sky. All his pupils returned to their homes exceeding their fathers in courage and knowledge.

One day Apollo brought to Chiron his little mortal son, Asclepius. His mother, a Lapith princess, had died, and Apollo asked Chiron to raise the boy.





**A**SCLEPIUS grew up in Chiron's cave, raised with loving care, and, being the son of Apollo, he soon surpassed his foster father in his knowledge of healing the sick.



When he was grown, he left Chiron's cave and went down from the mountain to help the people of Greece. He became the first great physician. People flocked to him from far and near, and many who came on crutches went away skipping and dancing. His patients adored him and showered treasures upon him, and it wasn't long before they worshiped him as a god and built temples in his honor. Asclepius put beds in his temples and they became the first hospitals. There he went about from bed to bed, pleased to be looked upon as a god, leaning on a staff entwined with sacred serpents. Serpents knew all the secrets of the earth and often told him the causes and cures for diseases. Sometimes he put his patients to sleep with a magic draught and listened to what they muttered in their dreams. Their words often revealed to him what caused their ailments, and he could then find a cure for them.

Asclepius had a wife and seven children, and all the children followed in their father's footsteps. His sons were his assistant physicians, his daughters were his nurses. Hygeia, one of his daughters, washed and scrubbed her patients from morning to night, and it was a marvel to see how fast they regained their health. Before Hygeia's time, it was thought that soap and water would kill the sick.

Asclepius grew famous, rich, and pink-faced, and as time went on, he grew so skilled in his art that he could even bring the dead back to life. The Fates became upset and complained to Zeus that they measured and clipped the threads of life in vain. Hades too was angry, for he was being cheated out of dead souls. Apollo pointed out to Zeus how much good his son was doing for mankind, and for a while Zeus was lenient. But when Asclepius accepted gold for bringing the dead back to life, Zeus hurled a thunderbolt at him.

Nothing but a small heap of ashes was left of Asclepius, the first great doctor. But his temples and his teachings of medical science remained, and the gods put his image among the stars as a constellation.

Apollo was furious with Zeus for killing his son and wanted revenge. He did not dare to raise his hand against his mighty father, but he slew the Cyclopes who had given Zeus the thunderbolt. Zeus, in his turn, had to revenge the Cyclopes. He punished Apollo by making him serve for a year as a slave on earth.

Apollo found a good master and suffered no hardship. But the gods on high Olympus missed him and his music, the nine Muses most of all.