

Since numbers and not worth  
 The Gods decree  
 Shall rule and foul the earth,  
 What is, must be.

This is the keynote of the Centaur character, as conceived by the poet: the character of a race of beings "more and other than noblest man, than grandest steed," superhuman not only by their greater animal strength and swiftness, but—in their own opinion—by their resolute, even ferocious, belief in health and power. They bow to no gods, hope not at all, pity no weakness either in others or themselves, hold but one principle of right—"that they should take who have the power, and they should keep who can."

Medon, the younger Centaur, has gone on a foray among the homes of men, the weaklings. He is not killed as Pholus feared, but presently returns to his companion, bringing a human child as spoil.

He wept himself to sleep: behold these limbs,  
 Sturdy, well-knit! . . . Would that there were more light  
 And thou should'st see a child as brave for health  
 And strength, as violent and full of passion . . .  
 Despite his two legs, 'tis a centaur nature.

He tells the tale of his day's work: how he saw first a beautiful maid, then a matron, the mother of his captive, and other human creatures; he remembers his dead centaur mate, Hipponoë, and then again the maid, whose beauty entranced him for a moment. Pholus is alarmed and angry.

Ah! Medon, Medon, how didst thou escape?  
 For every woman is a thing of pity,  
 That teaches love of weakness to the strong . . .  
 They dream of pity when their hands do naught,  
 And if they smile, have thought on tenderness. . . .  
 They spread this madness through the race of men;  
 For men were once as centaurs, proud of strength,  
 And scorned to win by numbers—men were once  
 Our equals, and their wives wholesome as ours,  
 Obedient to the male and calm with health!