

Stories from the Odyssey eBook

Stories from the Odyssey

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Page 1

ODYSSEUS AND PENELOPE

CONCLUSION

PRONOUNCING LIST OF NAMES

ILLUSTRATIONS

READING FROM HOMER (L. Alma Tadema)

Penelope (The Vatican, Rome)

Telemachus departing from Nestor (Henry Howard)

Odysseus and NAUSICAAe (Charles Gleyre)

Odysseus and Polyphemus (J. M. W. Turner)

Circe (Sir E. Burne-Jones)

The return of Odysseus (L. F. Schuetzenberger)

Odysseus and Eurycleia (Christian G. Heyne)

INTRODUCTION

The impersonal character of the Homeric poems has left us entirely in the dark as to the birthplace, the history, and the date, of their author. So complete is the darkness which surrounds the name of Homer that his very existence has been disputed, and his works have been declared to be an ingenious compilation, drawn from the productions of a multitude of singers. It is not my intention here to enter into the endless and barren controversy which has raged round this question. It will be more to the purpose to try and form some general idea of the characteristics of the Greek Epic; and to do this it is necessary to give a brief review of the political and social conditions in which it was produced.

I

The world as known to Homer is a mere fragment of territory, including a good part of the mainland of Greece, with the islands and coast districts of the AEGæan. Outside of these limits his knowledge of geography is narrow indeed. He has heard of Sicily, which



he speaks of under the name of Thrinacia; and he speaks once of Libya, or the north coast of Africa, as a district famous for its breed of sheep. There is one vague reference to the vast Scythian or Tartar race (called by Homer Thracians), who live on the milk of mares; and he mentions a copper-coloured people, the “Red-faces,” who dwell far remote in the east and west. The Nile is mentioned, under the name of AEgyptus; and the Egyptians are celebrated by the poet as a people skilled in medicine, a statement which is repeated by Herodotus. The Phoenicians appear several times in the *Odyssey*, and we hear once or twice of the Sidonians, as skilled workers in metal. As soon as we pass these boundaries, we enter at once into the region of fairyland.

II

In speaking of the religion of the Homeric Greeks we have to draw a distinction between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In the *Iliad* the gods play a much livelier and more human part than in the latter poem, and it is highly remarkable that the only comic scenes in the first and greatest of epics are those in which the gods are the chief actors—as when the lame Hephaestus takes upon him the office of cupbearer at the Olympian banquet, or when Artemis gets her ears boxed by the angry Hera. It would almost seem as if there were a vein of deliberate satire running through these descriptions, so daring is the treatment of the divine personages.



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In the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, religion has become more spiritual. Olympus is no longer the mountain of that name, but a vague term, like our “heaven,” denoting a place remote from all earthly cares and passions, a far-off abode in the stainless ether, where the gods dwell in everlasting peace, and from which they occasionally descend, to give an eye to the righteous and unrighteous deeds of men.

In his conception of the state of the soul after death Homer is very interesting. His *Hades*, or place of departed spirits, is a dim, shadowy region beyond the setting of the sun, where, after life’s trials are over, the souls of men keep up a faint and feeble being. It is highly significant that the word which in Homer means “self” has also the meaning of “body”—showing how intimately the sense of personal identity was associated with the condition of bodily existence. The disembodied spirit is compared to a shadow, a dream, or a waft of smoke. “Alas!” cries Achilles, after a visit from the ghost of Patroclus, “I perceive that even in the halls of Hades there is a spirit and a phantom, but understanding none at all”; for the mental condition of these cold, uncomfortable ghosts is as feeble as their bodily form is shadowy and unsubstantial. They hover about with a fitful motion, uttering thin, gibbering cries, like the voice of a bat, and before they can obtain strength to converse with a visitor from the other world, they have to be fortified by a draught of fresh blood. The subject is summed up by Achilles, when Odysseus felicitates him on the honour which he enjoys, even in Hades: “Tell me not of comfort in death,” he says: “I had rather be the thrall of the poorest wight that ever tilled a thankless soil for bread, than rule as king over all the shades of the departed.”

III

Homeric society is essentially aristocratic. At its head stands the king, who may be a great potentate, like Agamemnon, ruling over a wide extent of territory, or a petty prince, like Odysseus, who exercises a sort of patriarchal authority within the limits of a small island. The person of the king is sacred, and his office is hereditary. He bears the title of *Diogenes*, “Jove-born,” and is under the especial protection of the supreme ruler of Olympus. He is leader in war, chief judge, president of the council of elders, and representative of the state at the public sacrifices. The symbol of his office is the sceptre, which in some cases is handed down as an heirloom from father to son.

Next to the king stand the elders, a title which has no reference to age, but merely denotes those of noble birth and breeding. The elders form a senate, or deliberative body, before which all questions of public importance are laid by the king. Their decisions are afterwards communicated to the general assembly of the people, who signify their approval or dissent by tumultuous cries, but have no power of altering or reversing the measures proposed by the nobles. Thus we have already the three main elements of political life: king, lords, and commons—though the position of the last is at present almost entirely passive.



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IV

The morality of the Homeric age is such as we may expect to find among a people which has only partially emerged from barbarism. Crimes of violence are very common, and a familiar figure in the society of this period is that of the fugitive, who “has slain a man,” and is flying from the vengeance of his family. Patroclus, when a mere boy, kills his youthful playmate in a quarrel over a game of knucklebones—an incident which may be seen illustrated in one of the statues in the British Museum. One of the typical scenes of Hellenic life depicted on the shield of Achilles is a trial for homicide; and such cases were of so frequent occurrence that they afford materials for a simile in the last book of the *Iliad*.

Where life is held so cheap, opinion is not likely to be very strict in matters of property. And we find accordingly a general acquiescence in “the good old rule, the ancient plan, that they may take who have the power, and they may keep who can.” Cattle-lifting is as common as it formerly was on the Scottish border. The bold buccaneer is a character as familiar as in the good old days when Drake and Raleigh singed the Spanish king’s beard, with this important difference, that the buccaneer of ancient Greece plundered Greek and barbarian with fine impartiality. A common question addressed to persons newly arrived from the sea is, “Are you a merchant, a traveller, or a pirate?” And this curious query implies no reproach, and calls for no resentment. Still more startling are the terms in which Autolycus, the maternal grandfather of Odysseus, is spoken of. This worthy, we are informed, “surpassed all mankind in thieving and lying”; and the information is given in a manner which shows that the poet intended it as a grave compliment. In another passage the same hero is celebrated as an accomplished burglar. So low was the standard of Homeric ethics in this respect; and even in the historical age of Greece, want of honesty and want of truthfulness were too often conspicuous failings in some of her most famous men.

Even more shocking to the moral sense is the wild ferocity which sometimes breaks out in the language and conduct of both men and women. The horrible practice of mutilating the dead after a battle is viewed with indifference, and even with complacency, by the bravest warriors. Even Patroclus, the most amiable of the heroes in the *Iliad*, proposes to inflict this dastardly outrage on the body of the fallen Sarpedon. Achilles drags the body of Hector behind his chariot from the battlefield, and keeps it in his tent for many days, that he may repeat this hideous form of vengeance in honour of his slaughtered friend. When the dying Hector begs him to restore his body to the Trojans for burial he replies with savage taunts, and wishes that he could find it in his heart to carve the flesh of Hector and eat it raw! And Hecuba, the venerable Queen of Troy, expresses herself in similar terms when Priam is preparing to set forth on his mission to the tent of Achilles.

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Turning now to the more attractive side of the picture, we shall find much to admire in the character of Homer's heroes. In the first place we have to note their intense vitality and keen sense of pleasure, natural to a young and vigorous people. The outlook on life is generally bright and cheerful, and there is hardly any trace of that corroding pessimism which meets us in later literature. Cases of suicide, so common in the tragedians, are almost unknown.

In one respect, and that too a point of the very highest importance, the Greeks of this age were far in advance of those who came after them, and not behind the most polished nations of modern Europe. We refer to the beauty, the tenderness, and the purity of their domestic relations. The whole story of the *Odyssey* is founded on the faithful wedded love of Odysseus and Penelope, and the contrasted example of Agamemnon and his demon wife is repeatedly held up to scorn and abhorrence. The world's poetry affords no nobler scene than the parting of Hector and Andromache in the *Iliad*, nor has the ideal of perfect marriage ever found grander expression than in the words addressed by Odysseus to Nausicaae: "There is nothing mightier and nobler than when man and wife are of one mind and heart in a house, a grief to their foes, and to their friends a great joy, but their own hearts know it best." [1]

[Footnote 1: Butcher and Lang's translation.]

Hospitality in a primitive state of society, where inns are unknown, is not so much a virtue as a necessity. Even in these early times the Greeks, within the limits of their little world, were great travellers, and their swift chariots, and galleys propelled by sail and oar, enabled them to make considerable journeys with speed and safety. Arrived at their destination for the night they were sure of a warm welcome at the first house at which they presented themselves; and he who played the host on one occasion expected and found a like return when, perhaps years afterwards, he was brought by business or pleasure to the home of his former guest. Nor were these privileges confined to the wealthy and noble, who were able, when the time came, to make payment in kind, but the poorest and most helpless outcast, the beggar, the fugitive, and the exile, found countenance and protection, when he made his plea in the name of Zeus, the god of hospitality.

V

This frankness and simplicity of manners runs through the whole life of the Homeric Greek, and is reflected in every page of the two great epics which are the lasting monuments of that bright and happy age. As civilisation advances, and life becomes more complicated and artificial, human activity tends more and more to split up into an infinite number of minute occupations, and the whole time and energy of each individual are not more than sufficient to make him master in some little corner of art, science, or industry. A



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vast system of commerce brings the products of the whole world to our doors; and it is almost appalling to think of the millions of toiling hands and busy brains which must pass all their days in unceasing toil, in order that the humblest citizen may find his daily wants supplied. To give only one example: how vast and tremendous is the machinery which must be set at work before a single letter or post-card can reach its destination! This multiplication of needs, and endless subdivision of labour, too often results in stunting and crippling the development of the individual, so that it becomes harder, as time advances, to find a complete man, with all his faculties matured by equable and harmonious growth.

Very different were the conditions of life in the Homeric age. Then the wealthy man's house was a little world in itself, capable of supplying all the simple wants of its inhabitants. The women spun wool and flax, the produce of the estate, and wove them into cloth and linen, to be dyed and wrought into garments by the same skilful hands. On the sunny slopes of the hills within sight of the doors the grapes were ripening against the happy time of vintage, when merry troops of children would bring them home with dance and song to be trodden in the winepress. Nearer at hand was the well-kept orchard, bowing under its burden of apples, pears, and figs; and groves of grey olive-trees promised abundance of oil. In the valleys waved rich harvests of wheat and barley, which were reaped, threshed, ground, and made into bread, by the master's thralls. Herds of oxen, and flocks of sheep and goats, roved on the broad upland pastures, and in the forest multitudes of swine were fattening on the beech-mast and acorns.

And the owner of all these blessings was no luxurious drone, living in idleness on the labour of other men's hands. He was, in the fullest sense of the word, the father of his household. His was the vigilant eye which watched and directed every member in the little army of workers, and his the generous hand which dealt out bountiful reward for faithful service. If need were he could take his share in the hardest field labour, and plough a straight furrow, or mow a heavy crop of grass from dawn till sunset without breaking his fast. Nothing was too great or too little to engage his attention, as the necessity arose. He was a warrior, whose single prowess might go far in deciding the issue of a hard-fought battle—an orator, discoursing with weighty eloquence on grave questions of state—a judge, whose decisions helped to build up the as yet unwritten code of law. Descending from these high altitudes, he could take up his bow and spear, and go forth to hunt the boar and the stag, or wield the woodman's axe, or the carpenter's saw and chisel. He could kill, dress, and serve his own dinner; and when the strenuous day was over, he could tune the harp, discourse sweet music, and sing of the deeds of heroes and gods.



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Such was the versatility, and such the many-sided energy, of the Greek as he appears in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. And as these two poems contain the elements of all subsequent thought and progress in the Greek nation, so in the typical character of Odysseus are concentrated all the qualities which distinguish the individual Greek—his insatiable curiosity, which left no field of thought unexplored—his spirit of daring enterprise, which carried the banner of civilisation to the borders of India and the Straits of Gibraltar—and his subtlety and craft, which in a later age made him a byword to the grave moralists of Rome.

In the *Iliad* Odysseus is constantly exhibited as a contrast to the youthful Achilles. Wherever prudence, experience, and policy, are required, Odysseus comes to the front. In Achilles, with his furious passions and ill-regulated impulses, there is always something of the barbarian; while Odysseus in all his actions obeys the voice of reason. It will readily be seen that such a character, essentially intellectual, always moving within due measure, never breaking out into eccentricity or excess, would appeal less to the popular imagination than the fiery nature of Pelides, “strenuous, passionate, implacable, and fierce.” And on this ground we may partly explain the unamiable light in which Odysseus appears in later Greek literature. Already in Pindar we find him singled out for disapproval. In Sophocles he has sunk still lower; and in Euripides his degradation is completed.

VI

Space does not allow us to give a detailed criticism of the *Odyssey* as a poem, and determine its relation to the *Iliad*. We must content ourselves with quoting the words of the most eloquent of ancient critics, which sum up the subject with admirable brevity and insight: “Homer in his *Odyssey* may be compared to the setting sun: he is still as great as ever, but he has lost his fervent heat. The strain is now pitched in a lower key than in the ‘Tale of Troy divine’: we begin to miss that high and equable sublimity which never flags or sinks, that continuous current of moving incidents, those rapid transitions, that force of eloquence, that opulence of imagery which is ever true to nature. Like the sea when it retires upon itself and leaves its shores waste and bare, henceforth the tide of sublimity begins to ebb, and draws us away into the dim region of myth and legend.”[1]

[Footnote 1: Longinus: “On the Sublime.” Translated by H.L. Havell, B.A. p. 20. Macmillan & Co.]

STORIES FROM THE ODYSSEY

Telemachus, Penelope, and the Suitors



I

In a high, level spot, commanding a view of the sea, stands the house of Odysseus, the mightiest prince in Ithaca. It is a spacious building, two storeys high, constructed entirely of wood, and surrounded on all sides by a strong wooden fence. Within the enclosure, and in front of the house, is a wide courtyard, containing the stables, and other offices of the household.

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A proud maiden was Penelope, when Odysseus wedded her in her youthful bloom, and made her the mistress of his fair dwelling and his rich domain. One happy year they lived together, and a son was born to them, whom they named Telemachus. Then war arose between Greece and Asia, and Odysseus was summoned to join the train of chieftains who followed Agamemnon to win back Helen, his brother's wife. Ten years the war lasted; then Troy was taken, and those who had survived the struggle returned to their homes. Among these was Odysseus, who set sail with joyful heart, hoping, before many days were passed, to take up anew the thread of domestic happiness which had been so rudely broken. But since that hour he has vanished from sight, and for ten long years from the fall of Troy the house has been mourning its absent lord.

During the last three years a new trouble has been present, to fill the cup of Penelope's sorrow to the brim. A host of suitors, drawn from the most powerful families in Ithaca and the neighbouring islands, have beset the house of Odysseus, desiring to wed his wife and possess her wealth. All her friends urge her to make choice of a husband from that clamorous band; for no one now believes that there is any hope left of Odysseus' return. Only Penelope still clings to the belief that he is yet living, and will one day come home. So for three years she has put them off by a cunning trick. She began to weave a shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes, promising that, as soon as the garment was finished, she would wed one of the suitors. Then all day long she wove that choice web; and every night she undid the work of the day, unravelling the threads which she had woven. So for three years she beguiled the suitors, but at last she was betrayed by her handmaids, and the fraud was discovered. The princes upbraided her loudly for her deceit, and became more importunate than ever. The substance of Odysseus was wasting away; for day after day the wooers came thronging to the house, a hundred strong, and feasted at the expense of its absent master, and drank up his wine.

No hope seems left to the heartbroken, faithful wife. Even her son has grown impatient at the waste of his goods, and urges her to make the hard choice, and the hateful hour is at hand which will part her for ever from the scene of her brief wedded joy.

[Illustration: Penelope]

II

It was the hour of noon, and the sun was beating hot on the rocky hills of Ithaca, when a solitary wayfarer was seen approaching the outer gateway which led into the courtyard of Odysseus' house. He was a man of middle age, dressed like a chieftain, and carrying a long spear in his hand. Passing through the covered gateway he halted abruptly, and gazed in astonishment at the strange sight which met his eyes. All was noise and bustle in the courtyard, where a busy troop of servants were preparing the

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materials for a great feast. Some were carrying smoking joints of roast meat, others were filling huge bowls with wine and water, and others were washing the tables and setting them out to dry. In the portico before the house sat a great company of young nobles, comely of aspect, and daintily attired, taking their ease on couches of raw ox-hide, and playing at draughts to while away the time until the banquet should be ready. Loud was their talk, and boisterous their laughter, as of men who have no respect for themselves or for others. "Surely this was the house of Odysseus," murmured the stranger to himself, "but now it seems like a den of thieves. But who is that tall and goodly lad, who sits apart, with gloomy brow, and seems ill-pleased with the doings of that riotous crew? Surely I should know that face, the very face of my old friend as I knew him long years ago."

As he spoke, the youth who had attracted his notice glanced in his direction, and seeing a stranger standing unheeded at the entrance, he rose from his seat and came with hasty step and heightened colour towards him. "Forgive me, friend," he said, with hand outstretched in welcome, "that I marked thee not before. My thoughts were far away. But come into the house, and sit down to meat, and when thou hast eaten we will inquire the reason of thy coming."

So saying, and taking the stranger's spear, he led him into the great hall of the house, and sat down with him in a corner, remote from the noise of the revel. And a handmaid bare water in a golden ewer, and poured it over their hands into a basin of silver; and when they had washed, a table was set before them, heaped with delicate fare. Then host and guest took their meal together, and comforted their hearts with wine.

Before they had finished, the whole company came trooping in from the courtyard, and filled the room with uproar, calling aloud for food and drink. Not a chair was left empty, and the servants hurried to and fro, supplying the wants of these unwelcome visitors. Vast quantities of flesh were consumed, and many a stout jar of wine was drained to the dregs, to supply the wants of that greedy multitude.

When at last their hunger was appeased, and every goblet stood empty, Phemius, the minstrel, stood up in their midst, and after striking a few chords on his harp, began to sing a famous lay. Then the youth who had been entertaining the stranger drew closer his chair, and thus addressed him, speaking low in his ear: "Thou seest what fair company we keep, how wanton they are, and how gay. Yet there was once a man who would have driven them, like beaten hounds, from this hall, even he whose substance they are devouring. But his bones lie whitening at the bottom of the sea, and we who are left must tamely suffer this wrong. But now thou hast eaten, and I may question thee without reproach. Say, therefore, who art thou, and where is thy home? Comest thou for the first time to Ithaca, or art thou an old friend of this house, bound to us by ties of ancient hospitality?"



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“My name is Mentès,” answered the stranger, “and I am a prince of the Taphians, a bold race of sailors. I am a friend of this house, well known to its master, Odysseus, and his father, Laertes. Be of good cheer, for he whom thou mournest is not dead, nor shall his coming be much longer delayed. But tell me now of a truth, art not thou the son of that man? I knew him well, and thou hast the very face and eyes of Odysseus.”

“My mother calls me his son,” replied the youth, who was indeed Telemachus himself, “and I am bound to believe her. Would that it were otherwise! I have little cause to bless my birth.”

“Yet shalt thou surely be blest,” said Mentès; “thou art not unmarked of the eye of Heaven. But answer me once more, what means this lawless riot in the house? And what cause has brought all these men hither?”

“This also thou shalt know,” replied Telemachus. “These are the princes who have come to woo my mother; and while she keeps them waiting for her answer they eat up my father’s goods. Ere long, methinks, they will make an end of me also.”

“Fit wooers indeed for the wife of such a man!” said Mentès with a bitter smile. “Would that he were standing among them now as I saw him once in my father’s house, armed with helmet and shield and spear! He would soon wed them to another bride. But whether it be God’s will that he return or not, ’tis for thee to devise means to drive these men from thy house. Take heed, therefore, to my words, and do as I bid thee. Tomorrow thou shalt summon the suitors to the place of assembly, and charge them that they depart to their homes. And do thou thyself fit out a ship, with twenty rowers, and get thee to Pylos, where the aged Nestor dwells, and inquire of him concerning thy father. From Pylos proceed to Sparta, the kingdom of Menelaus; he was the last of the Greeks to reach home, after the fall of Troy; and perchance thou mayest learn something from him. And if thou hearest sure tidings of thy father’s death, then get thee home, and raise a tomb to his memory, and keep his funeral feast. Then let thy mother wed whom she will; and if these men still beset thee, thou must devise means to slay them, either by guile or openly. Thou art now a man, and must play a man’s part. Hast thou not heard of the fame which Orestes won, when he slew the murderer of his sire? Be thou valiant, even as he; tall thou art, and fair, and shouldst be a stout man of thy hands. But ’tis time for me to be going; my ship awaits me in the harbour, and my comrades will be tired of waiting for me.”

“Stay yet awhile,” answered Telemachus, “until thou hast refreshed thyself with the bath; and I will give thee a costly gift to bear with thee as a memorial of thy visit.” But even as he spoke Mentès rose from his seat and, gliding like a shadow through the sunlit doorway, disappeared. Telemachus followed, in wonder and displeasure; but no trace of the strange visitor was to be seen. Looking upward he saw a great sea-eagle winging his way towards the shore; and a voice seemed to whisper in his ear: “No

mortal was thy guest, but the great goddess Athene, daughter of Zeus, and ever thy father's true comrade and faithful ally."



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III

With a strange elation of spirits Telemachus returned to the hall, and sat down among the suitors. Hitherto he had shown a certain weakness and indecision of character, natural in a young lad, who had grown up without the strong guiding hand of a father, and who, since the first dawn of his manhood, had been surrounded by a host of subtle foes. But the words of Athene have gone home, and he resolves that from this hour he will take his proper place in the house as his mother's guardian and the heir of a great prince.

There was an unwonted stillness among that lawless troop, and they sat silent and attentive in the great, dimly lighted chamber. For the minstrel was singing a sweet and solemn strain, which told of the home-coming of the Greeks from Troy, and of all the disasters which befell them on the way. Suddenly the singer paused in the midst of his lay, for his fine ear had caught the sound of a sobbing sigh. Looking round, he saw a tall and stately lady standing in the doorway which led to the women's apartments at the back of the house. She was closely veiled, but he instantly recognised the form of Penelope, his beloved mistress.

"Phemius," said Penelope, in a tone of gentle reproach, "hast thou no other lay to sing, but must needs recite this tale of woe, which fills my soul with tears, by calling up the image of him for whom I sorrow night and day?"

Phemius stood abashed, and ventured no reply; but Telemachus answered for him. "Mother," he said, "blame not the sweet minstrel for his song. The bard is not the author of the woes of which he sings, but Zeus assigns to each his portion of good and ill; and thou must submit to his ordinance, like many another lady who has lost her lord. Thou hast thy province in the house, and I mine; thine is to govern thy handmaids, and mine to take the lead where the men are gathered together. And I say that the minstrel has chosen well."

There was a new note of command in the voice of Telemachus as he uttered these words. Penelope heard it, and wondered what change had come over her son; but a hundred bold eyes were gazing insolently at her, and without another word she turned away, and ascended the steep stairs which led to her bower. There she reclined on a couch, and her tears flowed freely; for the song of Phemius had reopened the fountain of her grief. Presently the sound of sobbing died away, and she drew her breath gently in a sweet and placid sleep.

The sudden appearance of Penelope had excited the suitors, and they began to brawl noisily among themselves. Presently Telemachus raised his voice, commanding silence for the minstrel. "And I have something else to say unto you," he added. "To-morrow at dawn I bid you come to the place of assembly, that we may make an end of these wild

doings in my house. I will bear it no longer, but will publish your evil deeds to the ears of gods and men.”



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Among the suitors there was a certain Antinous, a tall and stout fellow, of commanding presence, who was looked up to by the others as a sort of leader, being the boldest and most brutal in the band. And now he answered for the rest "Heaven speed thy boasting, young braggart!" he cried in rude and jeering tones. "It will be a happy day for the men of Ithaca when they have thee for their king."

"I claim not the kingdom," answered Telemachus firmly, "but I am resolved to be master in my own house."

By the side of Antinous sat Eurymachus, who was next to him in power and rank. This was a smooth and subtle villain, not less dangerous than Antinous, but glib and plausible of speech. And he too made answer after his kind: "Telemachus, thou sayest well, and none can dispute thy right. But with thy good leave I would ask thee concerning the stranger. He seemed a goodly man; but why did he start up and leave us so suddenly? Did he bring any tidings of thy father?"

"There can be no tidings of him," answered Telemachus sadly, "except that we shall never see him again. And as to this stranger, it was Mentès, a friend of my father's, and prince of the Taphians."

Night was now coming on, the suitors departed to their homes, and Telemachus, who meditated an early start next day, retired early to his chamber. The room where he slept stood in the courtyard, apart from the house, and was reached by a stairway. He was attended by an aged dame, Eurycleia, who had nursed him in his infancy. And all night long he lay sleepless, pondering on the perils and the adventures which awaited him.

The Assembly; The Voyage of Telemachus

I

At the first peep of dawn Telemachus was afoot, and summoning the heralds he ordered them to make proclamation of an assembly to be held in a public place in the town of Ithaca. Then he went down to the place of assembly, with two favourite hounds following close at his heels; and when he arrived he found the princes and elders of the people already gathered together. All eyes were turned to the gallant lad, as he sat down on his father's seat among the noblest of the sons of Ithaca. Never had he worn so princely an air, or seemed so worthy of his mighty sire.

Then the old chieftain Aegyptus began the debate; he was bent double with age, and one of his sons, Antiphus, had followed Odysseus to Troy, while another, Eurynomus, was among the suitors of Penelope. It was of Antiphus that he thought, as he stood up and made harangue among the elders:



“Who has summoned us hither, and what is his need? Never have we met together in council since the day when Odysseus set sail from Ithaca. Hath any tidings come of the return of those who followed him to Troy, or is it some other business of public moment which has called us hither? But whoever sent out this summons, I doubt not he is a worthy man, and may Zeus accomplish his purpose, whatever it be.”



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Such chance sayings were regarded as a sign of Heaven's will, and Telemachus rejoiced in spirit at the old man's blessing. And forthwith he stood up in the midst, and, taking the sceptre from the herald's hand, rushed at once into the subject of which his mind was full.

"Behold me here, old man," he said, addressing Aegyptus. "It is I who have called you together, and surely not without a cause. Is it not enough that I have lost my brave father, whose gentleness and loving-kindness ye all knew, when he was your king? But must I sit still, day after day, and see the fattest of my flocks and herds slaughtered, and the red wine poured out wastefully, by these men who have come to woo my mother? Take shame to yourselves, and restrain them; fear the reproach of men, and the wrath of Heaven, and suffer me not thus to be evilly entreated, unless ye harbour revengeful thoughts against my father, for some wrong which he has done you."

He had spoken thus far, when tears choked his voice, and flinging the sceptre on the ground he returned to his seat. There was a general feeling of compassion among his hearers, and not one of the suitors ventured to answer him, save only Antinous, who began in his wonted style of brutal insolence, upbraiding Telemachus in violent terms, and throwing all the blame on Penelope, who, he said, had beguiled them for three years by holding out promises which she never meant to fulfil. Then he told the story of Penelope's web, and concluded his speech with these words:

"As long as thy mother continues in this mind, so long will we stay here and consume thy living. If thou wouldst be quit of us, send her to her father's house and bid her marry the man of her choice."

Telemachus replied: "How can I drive away the mother who bare me and nourished me? And where shall I find means to pay back her dower? But most of all I dread my mother's curse. No, never shall that word be spoken by me. Therefore, if ye know aught of fair and honest dealing, depart from my house, and live on your own goods; but if it seems good to you to eat up another man's living, then will I appeal to the justice of heaven, and pray for vengeance on your heads."

"Behold, his prayer is answered," cried Halitherses, a venerable elder, with snow-white beard, who was skilled in augury; and looking up they saw two eagles winging their way at full speed towards the place of assembly. Now the two great birds hovered over the meeting; and just at this moment they wheeled round and attacked each other fiercely with beak and claw. After fighting for some time they shot away to the right and were soon lost to view. Then Halitherses spake again, interpreting the omen: "Hearken, men of Ithaca, to my words, and to you, the suitors of Penelope, especially do I speak. Woe is coming upon you; I see it rising and swelling as a wave. Not long shall Odysseus be absent, but even now he is near at hand hatching mischief for those who sit here. And many another shall suffer, besides these who have done the wrong. Therefore, I say, let us stop their evil deeds, or let them cease themselves. The hour is near at hand which I

foretold, when Odysseus embarked for Troy: I said that after many sufferings, having lost all his comrades, unknown to all in the twentieth year he should come home. And now all these things are coming to pass.”



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Then up rose Eurymachus, in an angry and scornful mood. "Old man," said he, "go home and prophesy to thine own children, lest some harm befall thee here. Thinkest thou that every fowl of the air is a messenger from heaven? Odysseus has perished, and would that thou hadst perished with him! Art thou not ashamed to take sides with this malapert boy, feeding his passion and folly with thy crazy prophecies? Doubtless thou lookest to him for favour and reward, but thou wilt find that his friendship will cost thee dear. Telemachus has heard our answer to his complaint; let him keep his eloquence for his froward mother, and bring her to a better mind, for neither his speeches nor thy prophecies will turn us from our purpose."

The principal object of the meeting was now attained: the villainy of the suitors had been publicly exposed, and they were left without excuse or hope of mercy when the day of reckoning should arrive. Accordingly Telemachus, dismissing the subject of his wrongs, now spoke of his intended voyage to Pylos and Sparta, and begged for the loan of a ship to carry him and his comrades to the mainland.

No response was made to his request; but one man still attempted to rouse public opinion against the suitors. This was Mentor, an old friend of Odysseus, who had been left in charge of his household on his departure from Ithaca. "Is there not one among you," he cried indignantly, "who will speak a word for Telemachus, or testify against the wickedness of these men? No more let kings be gentle and merciful towards their people, as was Odysseus when he ruled over you, loving and tender-hearted as a father. Let righteousness give place to oppression, if these are its rewards. There you sit, like cowed and beaten men, and suffer a handful of worthless men to lord it over you all."

After this last appeal, which was as fruitless as the others, the meeting broke up, and the suitors returned to their revels in the house of Odysseus.

II

Full of anxious thought, Telemachus went down to the shore, wondering how he should find means to accomplish his voyage. Stooping down, he bathed his hands in the sea, and after this act of purification he lifted up his hands and prayed to Athene: "O thou who camest yesterday to our house, and badest me go on this quest, give ear and help me in this strait."

He had hardly finished his prayer when he heard a footstep, and looking round saw Mentor, who had come to his aid at the meeting, approaching from the town. "Be not cast down," said Mentor, "remember whose son thou art, and all shall be well with thee. As to this voyage, that shall be my care. I will find thee a ship, and will go with thee to Pylos. Meanwhile go thou home and make ready all things for victualling the ship, corn and wine and barley-meal, and bestow them heedfully in vessels and in bags of leather.

Ships there are in plenty, new and old, in seagirt Ithaca; I will choose the best of them all, and man her with a crew who will serve thee freely and with all goodwill.”



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Away went Telemachus, much comforted in spirit, though his heart fluttered when he thought of the great adventure which lay before him. When he entered the courtyard of his house he found the suitors flaying goats and singeing swine for the midday feast. Antinous hailed his coming with a rude laugh, and running up to him seized his hand and said mockingly: "Well met, Sir Eloquence! Thy face, I see, is full of care, as of one who is bent on high designs. But lay thy graver burdens aside for awhile, and eat and drink with us. Thou shalt want neither ship nor men to carry thee to holy Pylos."

Telemachus snatched his hand away, and answered sternly: "My thoughts are not of feasting and merry-making, nor would I eat and drink with you if they were. I am no longer a child, to be flouted and robbed without a word. I tell you I shall find it in my heart to do you a mischief, before many days are passed. But now I am going, as I said, on this journey. I must go as a passenger, since ye will not lend me a ship."

Many a scornful face was turned upon him, and many a taunt aimed at him, as he uttered these bold words. "We are all undone!" cried one in pretended alarm, "Telemachus is gone to gather an army in Pylos or in Sparta, and he will come back with his mighty men and take all our lives." "Or perhaps he is going to bring poison from Ephyra," said another, "and he will cast it in the bowl, and we shall be all dead corpses. [1]" And a third cried: "Take care of thyself, Telemachus, or we shall have double labour because of thee, in dividing thy goods among us."

[Footnote 1: 2 Kings xix. 35.]

But the taunts of fools and knaves have no sting for honest ears. Without another word Telemachus left that gibing mob, and went straight to the strong-room where his father's treasure was stored. There lay heaps of gold and silver, and chests full of fine raiment, and great jars of fragrant olive-oil. Along the wall was a long row of portly casks, filled with the choicest wine; there they had stood untouched for twenty years, awaiting the master's return. All this wealth was given in charge to Eurycleia, the nurse of Telemachus, a wise and careful dame, who watched the chamber day and night. Her Telemachus now summoned, and said: "Fill me twelve jars of wine—not the best, which thou art keeping for my father, but the next best to that. And take twenty measures of barley-meal, and store it in sacks of leather, and keep all these things together till I send for them. Keep close counsel, and above all let not my mother know. I am going to Sparta and to sandy Pylos to inquire of my father's return; and I shall start in the evening when my mother is gone to rest."

"Who put such a thought into thy heart?" cried Eurycleia in wailing tones. "Why wilt thou take this dreadful journey, thou, an only child, so loved, and so dear? Odysseus is lost for ever, and if thou go we shall lose thee too, for the suitors will plot thy ruin while thou art far away."



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“Fear nothing for me,” answered Telemachus, “Heaven’s eye is upon me, and the hand of Zeus is spread over me. Swear to me now that thou wilt not tell my mother until twelve days have past.” Eurycleia swore as he bade her, and at once set about making the preparations for his journey.

The suitors were in high spirits at the result of the meeting, and they ate heavily and drank deeply to celebrate their triumph. Hence it happened that they retired to rest earlier than usual, being drowsy from their intemperate revel; and when Telemachus returned to the banquet-hall he found all the guests departed, and the servants removing the remains of the feast. Soon afterwards Mentor appeared, and announced that the ship lay ready at her moorings outside the harbour. The stores were carried down to the sea, and stowed under the rowers’ benches. “All hands on board!” cried Mentor, and took his place in the stern, Telemachus sitting by his side. The crew sat ready at their oars, the ship was cast loose from the moorings, and a few vigorous strokes impelled her into deep water. Then a strong breeze sprang up from the west, the big sail was set, and the good ship bounded joyfully over the waves, with the white wake roaring behind. The oars were shipped, the sheets made fast, and all the company pledged each other in brimming cups, drinking to their prosperous voyage.

The Visit to Nestor at Pylos

I

So all night long the ship clave her way; and at sunrise they reached the flat, sandy coast of Pylos. There they found a great multitude assembled, keeping the feast of Poseidon with sacrifices of oxen. The solemn rite was nearly ended when they brought their vessel to land.

“Courage, now,” said Mentor to Telemachus, seeing the young lad somewhat abashed by the presence of so large a company. “Remember whom thou seekest, and lay thy modest scruples aside. Thou seest that venerable man, still tall and erect, though he numbers more than a hundred years. That is Nestor, son of Neleus, wisest of the Greeks, a king and the friend and counsellor of kings. Go straight to him, and tell him thy errand.”

Seeing Telemachus, who was a homebred youth, still hanging back, in dread of that august presence, Mentor renewed his friendly remonstrances, “What, still tongue-tied?” he said, taking him by the arm, and leading him forward. “Heaven mend thy wits, poor lad! Knowest thou not that thou art a child of great hopes, and a favourite of heaven?”



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When they came to the place where Nestor was seated with his sons, they found them busy preparing the feast which followed the sacrifice. As soon as those of Nestor's company saw the strangers they came forward in a body to greet them, and made them sit down in places of honour, where soft fleeces were heaped up on the level sand. A youth, about the same age as Telemachus, placed a goblet of gold in Mentor's hand, and gave him that portion of the flesh which was set apart as an offering to the gods. "Welcome, friend," he said, after pledging him from the cup. "Put up thy prayer with us to the lord Poseidon, for it is to his feast that ye have come. And when thou hast prayed, give the cup to thy young companion, who has been bred, methinks, as I have, to deeds of piety."

Mentor first asked a blessing on their hosts, and then prayed for a prosperous issue to their own adventure. After him Telemachus uttered his prayer in similar words, and then they all sat down to meat. When they had finished, Nestor looked earnestly at them, and asked them who they were, and what was the purpose of their journey. "Are ye merchants," he said, "or bold buccaneers, who roam the seas, a peril to others, and ever in peril themselves?"

Telemachus, cheered by good fare, and encouraged by the kind manner of Nestor, answered confidently, and explained the nature of his errand. "Concerning all the other Greeks," he added, "we know at least the manner of their death; but even this poor comfort is denied to the wife and son of Odysseus. Therefore, if thou hast aught to tell, I beseech thee by thy friendship with my father, let me know all, and soften not the tale, out of kindness or pity to me."

"Ah! my friend," answered Nestor. "What woeful memories thou hast awakened by thy words!—perils by land and perils by water, long years of siege and battle, sleepless nights and toilsome days. Ill-fated land of Troy! the grave of Grecian chivalry! There lies heroic Ajax, there lies Achilles, and Patroclus, sage in counsel, and there lies Antilochus, my own dear son, fleet of foot and strong of hand. And art thou indeed the son of Odysseus, whom none could match in craft and strategy? But why do I ask? When thou speakest, I seem to hear the very tones of his voice. He was my friend, one with me in mind and heart, and during all the time of the siege we took counsel together for the weal of Greece. But when the war was over disasters came thick and fast upon the host. And first, division arose between the two sons of Atreus; Agamemnon wished to abide in Troy until sacrifice had been offered to appease the anger of Athene, but Menelaus advised immediate departure. The party of Menelaus, of whom I was one, launched their ships and sailed to Tenedos; there Odysseus, who had set sail with us, put back to the mainland of Asia, wishing to do a favour to Agamemnon. But I, and Diomedes with me, set forth at once, and, crossing the sea



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from Lesbos, came to Euboea; thence, after sacrifice to Poseidon, I steered due south, and parting from Diomedes at Argos continued my voyage, and landed safe in Pylos. Thus it happened that I was not witness of the good or evil fortunes of the other Greeks on their voyage home, and know only by rumour how they fared. Of Agamemnon's fate thou hast surely heard thyself, how he was murdered on his own hearth by the treachery of Aegisthus, and how the murder was avenged by Orestes. Happy the father who has such a son! And such, methinks, art thou."

"Ay," answered Telemachus, when Nestor had finished his long story, "I have heard of that glorious deed; and would to heaven that by the might of my hands I might so take vengeance on the evil men who have come to woo my mother, and who fill my house with injury and outrage."

"Ah! thou hast reminded me," said Nestor. "I heard of the shameful wrong which thou hast suffered. But do not despair! Who knows but that Odysseus will yet return, and make them drink the cup which they have filled? It may well come to pass, if Athene continues to thy house the favour which she showed thy father, plain for all eyes to see, in the land of Troy."

"Nay, 'tis too much to hope," answered Telemachus with a sigh, "the thing is too hard—even a god could hardly bring it to pass."

"Now out on thy faint heart!" cried Mentor, who hitherto had sat silent. "Better for him that his homecoming should be long delayed than that he should have died, like Agamemnon, fresh from his victory. Heaven will guide him yet to his own door, though now he be at the uttermost parts of the earth."

Telemachus shook his head as he answered: "No more of that, I pray thee; it can never be." Then, addressing Nestor, he said: "I would fain ask thee more concerning the manner of Agamemnon's death. Where was Menelaus when that foul deed was done? And how did Aegisthus contrive to slay a man mightier far than himself?"

"Thou askest well," replied Nestor. "Menelaus was far away, or we should have another tale to tell. And had the return of Menelaus not been delayed, vengeance would have been forestalled by many years. Yea, the dogs would have eaten the flesh of that vile churl, and not a tear would have been shed for him. But this is how it fell out: while we were toiling and warring at Troy, Aegisthus sat close to the ear of Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife, and poured sweet poison into her mind. For a long while she refused to hearken to his base proposals, for she was of a good understanding, and moreover there was ever at her side a minstrel, into whose care Agamemnon had given her when he went to Troy. But Aegisthus seized upon the minstrel, and left him on a

desert island to be devoured by carrion birds. Then Clytaemnestra yielded to his suit, and he brought her to his own house.



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“But as to thy question concerning Menelaus, he left Troy in my company, as I told thee, and we sailed together as far as Sunium. There Menelaus lost his steersman, who was visited by Apollo with sudden death, as he sat by the helm; so he remained there to bury his comrade. But his misfortunes were not yet over; for when he reached the steep headland at Malea a violent storm arose, and parted his fleet. Some of his ships ran into Crete for shelter, while he himself was carried away to Egypt, where he remained many days, and gathered store of wealth.

“Now thou understandest why Aegisthus was able to work his will on Agamemnon, and why he escaped vengeance so long. For seven years he sat on the throne of golden Mycenae, and grievously oppressed the people. But in the eighth year came Orestes, and cut him off in the fulness of his sin; and on that very day Menelaus came to him, loaded with the treasures of Egypt.

“Far and long had he wandered; but so do not thou, my child. Leave not thy house unguarded, while so many foes are gathered against thee, lest when thou return thou find thyself stripped of all. But to Menelaus I would have thee go; him thou must by all means consult; for who knows what he may have learnt on that wondrous voyage? Vast is the space of water over which he has travelled, not to be measured in one year by a bird in her speediest flight. If thou wilt, thou canst go to Sparta in thy ship, or if thou choose to go by land, my chariots and my horses are thine for this service, and my sons shall guide you on the way.”

II

Amid such talk as this, with many a brave story “of moving accidents by flood and field,” and many a pithy saw from the white-haired Nestor, who had lived so long and seen so much, the hours glided swiftly by, and the red sun was stooping to the horizon when Mentor rose from his seat and said: “We must be going; the hour of rest is at hand, and to-morrow we have far to go.”

“Tarry yet a little,” said Nestor, “and eat a morsel and drink a cup with us. And after that, if ye are fain to sleep, ye shall have fit lodging in my house. Heaven forbid that I should suffer such guests as you to sleep on the cold deck, covered with dew, as if I were some needy wretch, with never a blanket to spare for a friend. May the gods preserve me from such a reproach!”

“Thou sayest well,” answered Mentor, “and Telemachus shall be thy guest to-night. But for me, I pray thee have me excused. My place is on the ship, that I may give an eye to the crew, for I am the only man of experience among them. And to-morrow I must go to Elis, to recover a debt of long standing due to me there. I leave Telemachus to thy care, that thou mayest cherish him and speed him on his way.”



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As he said these words, while all eyes were fixed upon him, the speaker vanished from sight, and in his stead a great sea-eagle rose into the air, and sped westwards towards the setting sun. Long they sat speechless and amazed, and Nestor was the first to break the silence. "Great things are in store for thee, my son," said he to Telemachus, "since thou keepest such company thus early in life. This was none other than Jove's mighty daughter, Athene, who honoured thy father so highly among the Greeks. Be gracious to us, our queen, and let thy blessing rest on me and on my house! and I will offer to thee a yearling heifer, that hath never felt the yoke. To thee will I sacrifice her, when I have made gilt her horns with gold."

Then Nestor led the way to his house, and Telemachus sat down with him and his sons in the hall. And they filled a bowl with wine eleven years old, exceeding choice, which was reserved for honoured guests. And after they had finished the bowl, and offered prayer to Athene, they parted for the night. For Telemachus a bed was prepared in the portico, and close by him slept Pisistratus, the youngest of Nestor's sons.

When Telemachus rose next morning he found his host already afoot, giving orders to his sons to prepare the sacrifice to Athene. One was sent to fetch the heifer, another to summon the goldsmith, and a third to bring up the crew of Telemachus' ship, while the rest busied themselves in raising the altar and making all ready for the sacrifice.

Presently the heifer was driven lowing into the courtyard, and the goldsmith followed with the instruments of his art. Nestor gave him gold, and the smith beat it into thin leaf with his hammer, and laid it skilfully over the horns of the heifer. A handmaid brought pure water, and barley-meal in a basket, while one of Nestor's sons stood ready with an axe, and another held a bowl to catch the blood. Then Nestor dipped his hands in the water, took barley-meal from the basket and sprinkled it on the head of the beast, and cutting a tuft of hair from the forehead cast it into the fire. The prayer was spoken, and all due rites being ended he who held the axe smote the heifer on the head, just behind the horns. The women raised the sacrificial cry as the heifer dropped to the ground; and next they whose office it was lifted up the victim's head, and Pisistratus cut the throat. When the last quiver of life was over they flayed the carcass, cut strips of flesh from the thighs, and enveloping them in fat, burnt them on the altar. The gods had now their share of the feast; the rest was cut into slices, and broiled over the live embers.

While the meal was preparing, Telemachus enjoyed the refreshment of a bath; and Polycaste, the youngest of Nestor's daughters, waited on him; for such was the patriarchal simplicity of those days. When he had bathed, and finished his morning meal, the chariot was brought out, and a strong pair of horses led under the yoke. And the house-dame came with a basket, loaded with wine and delicate viands, and placed it behind the seat. Telemachus took his place by the side of Pisistratus, who was to drive the horses; the last farewells were spoken, Pisistratus cracked his whip, and away they went under the echoing gateway, and on through the streets of Pylos.

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[Illustration: Telemachus departing from Nestor]

That night they slept at the house of a friend, and early next day they continued their journey. The way grew steep and difficult, great masses of mountains rose near at hand, and at length they entered a wide valley, covered with waving fields of corn. By sunset they reached the end of their journey, and drew up before the stately portals of King Menelaus.

Telemachus at Sparta

I

Menelaus was keeping the double marriage feast of his son and daughter, and his house was thronged with wedding guests. All sat silent and attentive, listening to the strains of a harper, and watching the gambols of a pair of tumblers, who were whirling in giddy reels round the hall. Presently voices were heard at the entrance, and one of the squires of Menelaus came and informed his master that two strangers of noble mien were standing without, craving hospitality. "Shall I bring them in," asked the squire, "or send them on to another house?"

"Hast thou lost thy wits?" answered Menelaus in some heat, being touched in his most sensitive point. "Shall we, who owe so much to the kindness of strangers, in the long years of our wanderings, send any man from our doors? Unyoke the horses, and bid our new guests enter."

Four or five servants hastened to do his bidding. The horses, covered with sweat from their hard journey, were unyoked and led into the stable, and Telemachus, with his companion, was ushered with all courtesy into the great hall of Menelaus. The palace was one of the wealthiest and most splendid in Greece; and Telemachus, accustomed to a much humbler style of dwelling, stood amazed at the glories which met his eyes. After bathing and changing their raiment they returned to the hall, and were assigned places close to the chair of Menelaus.

The prince greeted them kindly, and said: "Welcome to our halls, young sirs. Ye are, as I see, of no mean descent, for Zeus has set his stamp on your faces,[1] and none can mistake the signs of kingly birth. When ye have eaten, we will inquire of you further."

[Footnote 1: In Homer, all kings and their families are supposed to be descended from Zeus.]

A plentiful and delicate meal was promptly set before the young travellers, and they ate and drank with keen appetite. When they had finished, Telemachus said to Pisistratus, speaking low, that he might not be overheard: "Dear son of Nestor, is not this a brave

place! Hast thou ever seen such lavish ornament of silver, and gold, and ivory? Surely such is the dwelling of Olympian Zeus; more magnificent it can hardly be.”



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The quick ear of Menelaus caught his last words, and he answered, smiling: "Nay, my friend, no mortal may vie with the everlasting glories of Zeus. But whether any man can equal me in riches, I know not. For indeed I wandered far and long to gather all this treasure, to Cyprus, and Phoenicia, and Egypt, to Aethiopia, and Sidon, and the African shore, a land unmatched in its countless multitudes of sheep. There the ewes bring forth young three times a year, and the poorest shepherd has abundance of cheese, and flesh, and milk. From all these lands I gathered many a costly freight, and now I dwell in the midst of plenty. Nevertheless my heart is sad, when I think of all that I have lost. Had I returned home straight from Troy, I should have come back a poor man, for my house had gone to waste in my absence; but I should not have had to mourn for the death of my brother, struck down, as doubtless ye have heard, by a murderer's hand. And then the thought lies heavy upon me of all those who fell in my cause at Troy, and especially of one who was dear to me above all, Odysseus, ever the foremost in every toil and adventure. His image haunts me by day and by night, marring my slumbers, and making my food taste bitter in my mouth. He was a man of many woes, and sorrowful is the lot of his wife Penelope and Telemachus his son."

At this mention of his father Telemachus could not control his tears, but covered his face with his mantle, and wept without restraint. Menelaus saw his emotion, and began to suspect who he was; but for the present he said nothing.

A slight stir was now heard at the back of the hall, and a low murmur went round among the guests, who whispered to each other: "The Queen! The Queen!" And in she came softly, with slow and stately step, Helen, the daughter of Tyndareus, and wife of Menelaus, fairest among all the high-born dames of Greece. Her wondrous beauty was now ripened into matronly perfection, but now and then a shadow seemed to pass over her face, like the ghost of an old sin, long repented and forgiven. A handmaid set a chair for her, throwing over it a soft rug, and brought a footstool for her feet, while another bare a silver basket, with rims of gold, and placed it ready, filled with purple yarn. When Helen was seated, she gazed long and earnestly at Telemachus, and then, turning to her husband, she said; "Menelaus, shall I utter the thought which is in my heart? Nay, speak I must. Ne'er saw I such a likeness, either in man or woman, as is the likeness of this fair youth to Odysseus. Surely this is Telemachus, whom he left an infant in Ithaca when the host was summoned to Troy to fight in a worthless woman's cause."

"I have marked it too," answered Menelaus. "Such were his very hands and feet, and the carriage of his head, and the glance of his eye. Moreover, when I made mention of Odysseus he covered his face, and wept full sore."

Telemachus was still too much distressed to speak, and Pisistratus had to answer for him: "Thou sayest truly, my lord; it is Telemachus himself. Nestor sent me with him to inquire of thee, and crave counsel of thy wisdom. He is left like an orphan in his home, with none to aid him, and take his father's place."



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Then Menelaus drew near to Telemachus, and taking his hand kindly said: "Welcome again, and thrice welcome to these halls, thou son of my trustiest friend and helper! It was the dream of my life to bring Odysseus and all his household from Ithaca, and give him a home and a city in this land, that we might grow old together in friendship and loving-kindness, never to be parted until death. But envious heaven has blighted my hopes and hindered his return."

At these sad words every eye was moist, and all sat silent, absorbed in sorrowful memories. Pisistratus was the first to speak, and his words roused the rest from their melancholy mood. "Son of Atreus," he said, "my father has often spoken of thy wisdom, and perchance it has taught thee that sorrow is an ill guest at a banquet. The dead, indeed, claim their due, and he would be hard-hearted who would grudge them the poor tribute of a tear. But we cannot mourn for ever, even for such a one as my brother Antilochus, whom I never saw, but thou knewest him well, stout in battle, and swift in the pursuit."

"'Tis well said," replied Menelaus. "Thou art wise beyond thy years, and a true son of Nestor. Happy is he, beyond the common lot of men, and smooth and fair runs the thread of his Destiny. He dwells in a green old age in his father's house, and sees his sons growing up around him, true heirs of his valour and prudence. Now let us banish care, and get to our supper, for the day is far spent, and we have matter for talk which will last us all the morrow."

When they had finished eating, and the cups were about to be replenished, Helen rose from her seat, and, whispering a few words to the cupbearer, left the hall. In a few minutes she returned, carrying in her hand a small phial, whose contents she poured into the great mixing-bowl from which the cups were filled. "Now, drink," she said, "and fear not that black care will pay us a second visit to-night. I have poured into the wine a drug of wondrous potency and virtue, which was given me in Egypt by Polydamna, the wife of Thon. Many such drugs the soil of Egypt bears, some baneful and some good. And the Egyptians are skilled in such craft beyond all mankind. He who drinks of this drug will be armed for that day against all the assaults of sorrow, and will not shed one tear, though his father and mother were to die, no, not though he saw his brother or his son slain before his eyes. So mighty is the virtue of this drug." And when they had drunk of the magic potion Helen began again: "'Tis now the witching hour, when all hearts are opened, and the burden of life presses lightest on men's shoulders. Come, let me tell you a story, one among many, of the deeds and the hardihood of Odysseus. It was in the days of the siege, and the Trojans were kept close prisoners in their city by the leaguer of the Greeks. Then he disguised himself as a beggar, clothed himself in filthy rags, and marred his goodly person with



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cruel stripes. In such fashion he entered the foemen's walls, as if he were a slave flying from a hard master.[1] And I alone in all the city knew who he was. So I brought him to my house, and began to question him; but he made as if he understood not. But when I entertained him as an honoured guest, and swore a solemn oath not to betray him, he trusted me, and declared all the purpose of the Greeks. At dead of night he stole out into the town, and, having slain many of the Trojans with the edge of the sword, he went back to the camp, and brought much information to his friends.

[Footnote 1: Compare the stratagem of Zopyrus, in "Stories from Greek History."]

"When morning came, the voice of wailing rose high in the streets of Troy; but my heart rejoiced, for I was filled with longing for my home, and my eyes were opened to the folly which I had wrought by the beguilement of Aphrodite, when I left my fatherland and broke faith with my lord."

"Tis a good story, and thou hast told it well, fair wife," said Menelaus. "Now hear my tale. It was the time when I and the other champions were shut up in the wooden horse; and Odysseus was with us. Then thou camest thither, led, I suppose, by some god, hostile to Greece, who wished to work our ruin; and Deiphobus followed thee. Three times thou didst pace around our hollow ambush, feeling it with thy hands, and calling aloud to the princes of Greece by name; and thy voice was like the voice of all their wives. There we sat, I, and Diomedes, and the rest, and heard thee calling. Now I and Diomedes were minded to answer thee, or to go forth and confer with thee; but Odysseus suffered it not, and when one of our number was about to lift up his voice he pressed his hands on that foolish mouth, and restrained him by force until thou hadst left the place. And so he saved all our lives."

"Yes," said Telemachus, "he had a heart of iron. But what has it availed him? It could not save him from ruin. Howbeit, no more of this; 'tis time to go to rest and forget our cares in sleep."

II

Early next morning Telemachus found his host sitting by his bedside; and as soon as he was dressed Menelaus led him to a quiet place, and inquired the reason of his coming. He listened with attention while Telemachus explained the purpose of his visit; but when he heard of the suitors, and their riot and waste, he was filled with indignation.

"What!" he cried, "would these dastards fill the seat and wed the wife of that mighty man? Their lot shall be the lot of a pair of fawns, left by the mother hind in a lion's lair. The hind goes forth to pasture, and in her absence the lion returns, and devours them

where they lie. Even so shall Odysseus return, and bring swift destruction on the whole crew.



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“But thou hast asked me what I know of the fortunes of Odysseus, since he departed from Troy; and verily I will tell thee all that I have heard, without turning aside in my tale. I must go back to the time when I lay wind-bound with my ships in a little island off the mouth of the Nile. The island is called Pharos, and it is distant a day’s voyage from the river’s mouth. I had lain there twenty days, and still not a breath of air ruffled the glassy surface of the sea. All our stores were consumed, and we had nothing to eat but the fish which my men caught with rudely fashioned hooks and lines. One day I left my men busy with their angling, and wandered away along the shore, full of sad thoughts, and wondering how all this would end. Suddenly I heard a light footstep on the pebbles, and there stepped forth from behind a tall rock a young maiden in white, flowing robes. Full of dread I saw her coming towards me; for I knew that she was no mortal woman. But her look was gracious, and her voice was sweet; so I took courage as she said: ‘Who art thou, stranger, and why lingerest thou with thy company in this desert place? I am Eidothea, daughter of Proteus, the ancient one of the sea; and I am ready to help thee, if thou wilt tell me thy need.’

“Then I told her how I had been kept an unwilling captive on the island, and begged her to let me know what power I had offended, that he might be appeased by sacrifice, and suffer the wind to blow. ‘There is one who can tell thee all that thou desirest to know,’ answered she. ‘Yea, Proteus, my father, will show thee how to win thy path across the watery waste. No secrets are hidden from him, neither on earth nor in the sea; and he can tell thee all that hath befallen in thy house in the long years of thine absence. Now hearken, and I will tell thee how thou mayest wring from him all his secrets. Every day at noon he comes forth from the sea, and lays him down to sleep in a rocky cave; and about him are couched his herd of seals. I will bring thee to the place in the early morning, and set thee in ambush to await his coming. Choose three of the stoutest of thy men to aid thee in the adventure, and as soon as thou seest him asleep rush upon him and hold him fast. He will struggle hard, and take a hundred different shapes; but loose him not until he return to his own form, and then will he reveal to thee all that he has to tell.’

“So saying, the goddess disappeared beneath the waves. Next morning I went with three picked men to the appointed place, and soon Eidothea arrived, bearing four hides of seals, freshly flayed. Then she hollowed out four pits in the sand for us to lie in, and clothed us in the skins, and couched us together. Now that bed had like to have been our last, for we were stifled by the dreadful stench of the seabred seals. But the goddess saw our distress, and found a remedy; for she brought ambrosia and set it beneath our nostrils, and that heavenly perfume overpowered the noisome stench.



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“So all the morning we lay and wafted patiently, and at noon the seals came up out of the sea and lay down in order on the sand. Last of all came Proteus, and counted his herd, reckoning us among their number, with no suspicion of guile. We waited until he was fast asleep, and then we rushed from our ambush and seized him hand and foot. Long and hard was the struggle, and many the shapes which he took. First he became a bearded lion, then a snake, then a leopard, then a huge boar; after these he turned into running water and a tall, leafy tree. But we only held him the more firmly, and at last he grew weary and spake to me in his own shape: ‘What wouldst thou have, son of Atreus, and who has taught thee to outwit me and take me captive by craft?’

“‘Thou knowest my need,’ I answered; ‘why dost thou waste thy words? Tell me rather how I may find release from my present strait’

“‘Hear, then,’ said he: ‘thou hast forgotten thy duty to Zeus and the other gods. Not a victim bled, not a prayer was offered, when thou didst embark on this voyage. Go back to Egypt, to the holy waters of Nile, and there pay thy vows, and offer a great sacrifice to their offended deity; thus, and thus only, canst thou win thy return to thine own country and thy stately home.’

“When I heard this my heart was broken within me, to think of that long and perilous path across the misty deep. Nevertheless I consented to take that journey, for I saw no other way of escape. And after I had promised to obey him, I began to inquire further of the fate of Nestor and the rest, whom I left behind me on my way home.

“‘Tis a grievous story that thou requirest of me,’ said Proteus, ‘and thou shalt have little joy in the hearing. Many have been taken and many left. Two only perished in returning, and one is still living, a prisoner of the sea. Ajax has paid his debt to Athene, whose shrine he polluted; and this was the manner of his death: when his vessel was shattered by that great tempest, he himself escaped to a rock, for Poseidon came to his aid. But even the peril which he had just escaped could not subdue his haughtiness and his pride, and he uttered an impious vaunt, boasting that in despite of heaven he had escaped a watery grave. Then Poseidon was wroth, and smote the rock with his trident, and that half of the rock on which Ajax was sitting fell into the sea, bearing him with it. So he died, when he had drunk the brine.

“Now harden thy heart, and learn how thy brother Agamemnon fell. After a long and stormy voyage he at length brought his shattered vessels safe into harbour, and set foot on his native soil at Argos. With tears of joy and thankfulness he fell on his knees and kissed the sod, trusting that now his sorrows were passed. Now there was a watchman whom AEGisthus had posted on a high place commanding the sea to look out for Agamemnon’s return. A whole year he watched, for he had been promised a great reward. And when he saw the king’s face he went with all speed to tell his master. Forthwith AEGisthus prepared an ambush of twenty armed men; these he kept in hiding at the back of the hall, while he ordered his servants to prepare a great banquet. Then



he went to meet Agamemnon with horses and with chariots, and brought him to his house, and made good cheer. And when he had feasted him he smote and slew him, as a man slaughters an ox in his stall.'



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“At that tale of horror I fell upon the sand, weeping bitterly, for I had no desire to live any longer or look on the light of the sun. Long I lay mourning, as one who had lost all hope, but at last Proteus checked the torrent of my passion, and bade me take thought of my own homecoming. ‘This is no time,’ he said, ‘to melt away in womanish grief. Haste thee to take vengeance, if so be that Orestes hath not forestalled thee, and slain his father’s murderer.’

“Somewhat comforted by these words, I took courage to ask who was the man of whom he had spoken as a prisoner of the sea. ‘It is the son of Laertes,’ answered Proteus, ‘Odysseus, whose home is in Ithaca. I myself saw him on an island, in the house of the nymph Calypso; and sore he wept because he could not leave the goddess, who holds him in thrall, and will not suffer him to return to his country.’

“Lastly, he told me concerning my own fate. ‘Thou, Menelaus,’ he said, ‘art exempt from the common lot of men, because thou art the husband of Helen, and she is a daughter of Zeus. Therefore it is not appointed for thee to die, but when thine hour is come the gods shall convey thee to the Elysian fields, where dwell the elect spirits in everlasting blessedness. There falls not snow nor rain, there blows no rude blast, but the fresh cool breath of the west comes softly from Ocean to refresh them that dwell in that happy clime.’”

Thus happily ended the story of the Spartan prince’s wanderings. And when he had finished, he pressed Telemachus to prolong his visit; but that prudent youth declined the invitation, pleading the necessity of a speedy return to Ithaca, that he might keep an eye on the doings of the suitors. Menelaus was compelled to allow the justice of his plea, and accordingly all things were made ready for a speedy departure.

III

We must now return to Ithaca, and see what reception was preparing for Telemachus when he came back from his adventurous journey. Two or three days after he left Ithaca the suitors were gathered before the doors of Odysseus, playing at quoits, or hurling their javelins at a mark. Presently a young noble came up to the group, and addressing Antinous, who was watching the sport, asked him if he had heard aught of Telemachus. “I would fain know how long he is like to be absent from Ithaca,” he said; “for he has borrowed my ship, and I have need of her. Know ye when he is to return from Pylos?”

Antinous heard him with amazement; for neither he nor any other of the suitors knew that Telemachus had sailed from Ithaca, supposing him to be absent on his farm. So he questioned the youth closely as to the time and manner of that voyage, how the crew was composed, and whether the vessel was lent willingly, or taken by force. “Of my own free will I lent her,” answered the lad, “why should I not help him in his need? As to



the crew, they were all picked men, and well born; and the captain was Mentor, or some god in his likeness; for I saw Mentor yesterday in the town, and not a ship has touched at Ithaca since they sailed.”



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When he who had lent the ship was departed the suitors left their sports, and drawing close together began to converse in low tones. They were full of anger against Telemachus because of this journey, which gave the lie to their malicious prophecies, and was not without prospect of danger to themselves. Accordingly Antinous found ready hearers when he stood up and spoke as follows:—"This forward boy must be put down, or he will mar our wooing. It is a great deed which he has done, and he will not stop here, unless we find means to cut short his adventures. Now hear what I advise: let us man a ship and moor her in the narrow sea between Ithaca and Samos, and lie in wait for him there. This cruise of his is like to cost him dear."

The plan was highly approved, and the whole body rose and entered the house together, resolved to act at once on the advice of Antinous. Before long news of their wicked designs came to the ears of Penelope, who was still ignorant of her son's departure; for Eurycleia had kept her counsel well. The evil tidings were brought by Medon, a servant in the house of Odysseus, who had overheard the suitors plotting together, while he stood concealed behind a buttress of the courtyard fence. Without delay he went in search of Penelope, whom he found sitting with her handmaids in her chamber. As soon as he appeared on the threshold Penelope looked at him reproachfully, and said: "What message bringest thou from thy fair masters? Is it their pleasure that my maidens should leave their tasks and spread the board for them? Out on your feasting and your wooing! May this be the last morsel that ye ever taste! Ungrateful men, have ye forgotten all the good deeds that were wrought here by the hands of Odysseus, and all the kindness that ye received from him? Yes, all is forgotten; ye have no thought in your hearts but to grow fat at his cost, and devour his living."

"Alas! lady," answered Medon, "would that this were the worst! But I am the bearer of heavier news than this. Telemachus has sailed to Pylos, to inquire concerning his father, and the suitors have plotted to slay him on his way home." Having delivered his message, Medon left the chamber, and the door was shut.

Long Penelope sat without a word, struck dumb by this cruel blow. Then, as if seized by a sudden thought, she rose from her seat, and took two paces towards the door. But her strength failing her she tottered backward, and sank down upon the ground, leaning against the wall. Her handmaids gathered round her, and would have lifted her up, but she waved them off and at last gave utterance to her feelings in wailing and broken tones:

"Woeful beyond the lot of all women on earth is my portion! First, I lost my lion-hearted lord, rich in every excellent gift, a hero among heroes; and now the powers of the air^[1] have carried off my child, my well-beloved, without one word of farewell. Hearts of stone, why did ye not tell me of his going? Had I known his purpose I would have prevailed on him to stay, or he must have left me dead in these halls. Go, one of you, and call Dolius, the keeper of my garden and orchard, and send him to tell all to



Laertes, if haply he may devise some way to turn the hearts of the people, and save his race from being utterly cut off.”



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[Footnote 1: Demons, to whom sudden disappearance was attributed.]

“Sweet lady,” answered Eurycleia, who was sitting among the women, “I will tell thee all the truth, and then thou shalt slay me, if it be thy will. I was privy to this journey, and Telemachus made me swear a solemn oath not to reveal it to thee until twelve days were passed, or thou hadst heard of it from others. For he feared that thou wouldst waste thy fair cheeks with weeping. But be not cast down; I am sure that the gods hate not so utterly the house of Odysseus, nor purpose to destroy it altogether. Vex not the old man Laertes in his sorrow, but go wash thyself, put on clean raiment, and go up and pray to Athene in thy upper chamber to guard and keep thy son from harm.”

Then Penelope was comforted, and dried her tears, and went up with her handmaids to the upper chamber. There she made her offering before the shrine of Athene, and lifted up her voice in prayer: “Daughter of Zeus, stern warrior maiden, if ever my lord Odysseus offered acceptable sacrifice to thee, remember now his service, save my son, and let not the wooers work evil against him.” When her prayer was ended the women joined their voices with hers, and called again and again on the awful name of Athene. After that they left her, and she sank down on a couch, exhausted by her emotions, and full of anxious thought. At length she ceased her weary tossing, and fell into a quiet and refreshing sleep.

Athene had heard her prayer, and being full of pity for the sorely tried lady she resolved to find means to soothe her troubled spirit. So she made a phantom, like in form and in feature to Iphthime, a sister of Penelope, who lived with her husband in distant Pherae. And the phantom came to the house of Penelope, and entering her chamber by the keyhole, stood by her bedside and spake to her thus: “Sorrow not at all, nor vex thy soul for the sake of Telemachus. The gods love thy son, and will bring him safe home.”

Then wise Penelope made answer, slumbering right sweetly at the gates of dreams: “Dear sister, what has brought thee hither from thy far distant home? Thou biddest me take comfort, but my heart is torn with fear and grief for my brave lord, and yet more for Telemachus, who is encompassed with perils by sea and by land.” “Fear nothing,” answered the dim phantom. “He has a mighty helper by his side, even Pallas Athene, who sent me hither to strengthen and console thee.” With that the ghostly visitor vanished as it came, and left Penelope much cheered by the clear vision which had brought her words of healing at the blackest hour of the night.

Meanwhile Antinous had taken steps to carry out his villainous design. At nightfall he went down to the sea with twenty picked men, boarded the vessel which had been prepared for their use, and sailed out to a little island which lies in the middle of the strait between Samos and Ithaca. There they anchored in a sheltered bay, and waited for the coming of Telemachus.



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Odysseus and Calypso

I

We have waited long for the appearance of Odysseus, and at last he is about to enter the scene, which he will never leave again until the final act of the great drama is played out. Hitherto he has been pursued by the malice of Poseidon, who wrecked his fleet, drowned all his men, and kept him confined for seven years in Calypso's island, in vengeance for the blinding of his son Polyphemus.

But now the prayers of Athene have prevailed, and Hermes, the messenger of the gods, is on his way from Olympus, bearing a peremptory summons to Calypso to let Odysseus depart. Shod with his golden, winged sandals, which bear him, swift as the wind, over moist and dry, and holding in his hand his magic wand, Hermes skimmed like a seagull over the blue waters of the AEGæan, until he came to that far distant isle. Arrived there, he went straight to the great cavern where Calypso dwelt; and he found her there, walking about her room, weaving with a golden shuttle, and singing sweetly at her work. A great fire was blazing on the hearth, sending forth a sweet odour of cedar and sandal-wood. Round about the cavern grew a little wood of blossoming trees, "alder and poplar tall, and cypress sweet of smell"; and there owls and hawks and cormorants built their nests. Over the threshold was trained a wide-branching vine, with many a purple cluster and wealth of rustling leaves. Four springs of clear water welled up before the cave, and wandered down to the meadows where the violet and parsley grew. It was a choice and cool retreat, meet dwelling for a lovely nymph.

Calypso greeted her visitor kindly, bade him be seated, and set nectar and ambrosia before him. And when he had refreshed himself, he told his message. "I bear the commands of Zeus," he said, "and to do his high will have I travelled this long and weary way. It is said that thou keepest with thee a man of many woes, who has suffered more than any of those who fought at Troy. Him thou art commanded to send away from thee with all speed; for it is not destined for him to end his days here, but the hour has come when he must go back to his home and country, Zeus has spoken, and thou must obey."

This was bitter news to Calypso, for she loved Odysseus, and would have made him immortal, that he might abide with her for ever. She wrung her hands, and said in a mournful voice: "Now I know of a truth that the gods are a jealous race, and will not suffer one of their kind to wed with a mortal mate. Therefore Orion fell by the unseen arrows of Artemis, when fair Aurora chose him for her lord; and therefore Zeus slew Iasion with his lightning, because he was loved of Demeter. Is not Odysseus mine? Did I not save him and cherish him when he was flung naked and helpless on these shores? But since no other deity may evade or frustrate the will of Zeus, let him go, and I will show him how he may reach his own country without scathe."



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When he had heard Calypso's answer, Hermes took leave of her, and returned to Olympus, and the nymph went down to the part of the shore where she knew Odysseus was accustomed to sit. There he would remain all day, gazing tearfully over the barren waste of waters, and wearing out his soul with ceaseless lamentation. For he had long grown weary of his soft slavery in Calypso's cave, and yearned with exceeding great desire for the familiar hills of Ithaca, so rugged, but so dear. And there Calypso found him now, sitting on a rock with dejected mien. She sat down at his side, and said: "A truce to thy complaints, thou man of woes! Thou hast thy wish; I will let thee go with all good-will, and I will show thee how to build a broad raft, which shall bear thee across the misty deep. I will victual her with corn and wine, and clothe thee in new garments, and send a breeze behind thee to waft thee safe. Thus am I commanded by the gods, whose dwelling is in the wide heaven, and their will I do. Up now and fell me yon tall trees for timber to make the raft."

Odysseus was by nature a very shrewd and cautious man, and he feared that Calypso was contriving some mischief against him, in revenge for his coldness. He looked at her doubtfully, and answered: "I fear thee, nymph, and I mistrust thy purpose. How shall a man cross this dreadful gulf, where no ship is ever seen, on a raft? And though that were possible, I will never leave thee against thy will. Swear to me now that thou intendest me no harm."

Calypso smiled at his suspicions, and patted him on the shoulder as she answered: "Thou art a sad rogue, and very deep of wit, as anyone may see by these words of thine. Now hear me swear: Witness, thou earth, and the wide heaven above us, and the dark waterfall of Styx, the greatest and most awful thing by which a god may swear, that I intend no ill, but only good, to this man."

Having sworn that oath Calypso rose, and bidding Odysseus follow led the way to her cave. There she set meat before him, such as mortal men eat, and wine to drink; but she herself was served by her handmaids with immortal food, and nectar, the wine of the gods. When they had supped, Calypso looked at Odysseus and said: "And wilt thou indeed leave me, thou strange man? Am I not tall and fair, and worthy to be called a daughter of heaven? And is thy Penelope so rare a dame, that thou preferrest her to me! Ah! if thou knewest all the toils which await thee before thou reachest thy home, and all the perils prepared for thee there, thou wouldst renounce thy purpose, and dwell for ever with me. Nevertheless go, if go thou must, and my blessing go with thee."

Her words were kind, but some anger lurked in her tone, which Odysseus hastened to appease. "Fair goddess," he answered, "be not wroth with me. I know that thou art more lovely far than my wife Penelope; for thou art divine, and she is but a mortal woman. Nevertheless I long day and night to see her face, and to sit beneath the shadow of my own roof-tree. And if I be stricken again by the hand of Heaven on the purple sea, I will bear it, for I have a very patient heart. Long have I toiled, and much have I suffered, amid waves and wars. If more remains, I will endure that also."



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II

At early dawn, when the eastern wave was just silvered by the dim light, Calypso roused Odysseus, and equipped him for the task of the day. First she gave him a weighty two-edged axe, well balanced on its haft of olive-wood, and an adze, freshly ground; then she showed him where the tall trees grew, and bade him fall to work with the axe. Twenty great trees fell beneath his sturdy strokes, and he trimmed the trunks with the axe, and stripped off the bark. Meanwhile Calypso had brought him an augur, and he bored the timbers, and fitted them together, and fastened them with bolts and cross-pieces. So the raft grew under his hands, broad as the floor of a stout merchantship. And he fenced her with bulwarks, piling up blocks of wood to steady them. Last of all he made mast and sail and rigging; and when all was ready he thrust the frail vessel with rollers and levers down to the sea.

Four times the sun had risen and set before his labour was ended; and on the fifth day Calypso brought him provisions for the voyage, a great goatskin bottle full of water, and a smaller one of wine, and a sack of corn, with other choice viands as a relish to his bread.

A joyful man was Odysseus when he spread his sail, and took his place at the helm, and waved a last farewell to his gentle friend. A fair breeze wafted him swiftly from the shore, and ere long that lovely island, at once his home and his prison for seven long years, became a mere shadow in the distance. All night he sat sleepless, tiller in hand, watching the pilot stars, the Pleiades, and Boötes, and the Bear, named also the Wain, which turns on one spot, and watches Orion, and never dips into the ocean stream. For the goddess Calypso had bidden him keep that star on the left hand as he sailed the seas. Thus he voyaged for seventeen days, and on the eighteenth he saw afar off, dimly outlined, a range of hills, rising, like the back of a shield, above the horizon's verge.

Now Poseidon, his great enemy, had been absent for many days on a far journey, and thus had taken no part in the council at Olympus when Zeus had issued his order for the release of Odysseus. Just at this time he was on his way back to Olympus, and caught sight of the bold voyager steering towards the nearest land. "Ha! art thou there?" said the implacable god, shaking his head; "and have the other powers plotted against me in my absence, to frustrate my just anger? Thy wanderings are well-nigh over, poor wretch! But thou shalt taste once more of my vengeance, before thou reachest yonder shore."



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So saying the lord of ocean took his trident and stirred up the deep; and the clouds came trooping at his call, covering the sky with a black curtain. Soon a great tempest broke loose, blowing in violent and fitful blasts from all the four quarters of heaven. Then pale fear got hold of Odysseus, as he saw the great curling billows heaving round his frail craft. "Woe is me!" he cried, "when shall my troubles have an end? Surely the goddess spoke truth, when she foretold me that I should perish amid the waves, and never see my home again. Here I lie helpless, given over to destruction, the sport of all the winds of heaven. Happy, thrice happy, were my comrades who fell fighting bravely and found honourable burial in the soil of Troy! Would that I had died on that great day when the battle raged fiercest over the body of Pelides; then should I have found death with honour, but now I am doomed to a miserable and dishonoured end."

The words were hardly uttered when a huge toppling wave struck the raft with tremendous force, carrying away mast and sail, and hurling Odysseus into the sea. Deep down he sank, and the waters darkened over his head, for he was encumbered by the weight of his clothes. At last he rose to the surface, gasping, and spitting out the brine, and though sore spent, he swam towards the raft, and hauled himself on board. There he sat clinging to the dismasted and rudderless vessel, which was tossed to and fro from wave to wave, as the winds of autumn sport with the light thistledown and drive it hither and thither.

But help was at hand. There was a certain ocean nymph, named Ino, daughter of Cadmus, who had once been a mortal woman, but now was numbered among the immortal powers. She saw and pitied Odysseus, and boarding the raft addressed him in this wise: "Poor man, why is Poseidon so wroth with thee that he maltreats thee thus? Yet shall he not destroy thee, for all his malice. Only do as I bid thee, and thou shalt get safely to land: take this veil, and when thou hast stripped off thy garments, bind it across thy breast. Then leave the raft to its fate, and swim manfully to land; and when thou art safe fling the veil back into the sea, and go thy way."

So saying the goddess sank beneath the waves, leaving Odysseus with her veil in his hand. But that cautious veteran did not at once act on her advice, for he feared that some treachery was intended against him. He resolved therefore to remain on the raft as long as her timbers held together, and only to have recourse to the veil in the last extremity.

He had just taken this prudent resolution, when another wave, more huge than the last, thundered down on the raft, scattering her timbers, as the wind scatters a heap of chaff. Odysseus clung fast to one beam and, mounting it, sat astride as on a horse, until he had stripped off his clothes. Then he bound the veil round him, flung himself head foremost into the billows, and swam lustily towards land.



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The storm was now subsiding, and a steady breeze succeeded, blowing from the north, which helped that much-tried hero in his struggle for life. Yet for two days and two nights he battled with the waves, and when day broke on the third day he found himself close under a frowning wall of cliffs, at whose foot the sea was breaking with a noise like thunder. Odysseus ceased swimming, and trod the water, looking anxiously round for an opening in the cliffs where he might land. While he hesitated, a great foaming wave came rushing landward, threatening to sweep him against that rugged shore; but Odysseus saw his danger in time, and succeeded in gaining a rocky mass which stood above the surface just before him, and clutching it with hands and knees, contrived to keep his hold until the huge billow was past. In another moment he was caught by the recoil of the wave, and flung back into the boiling surf, with fingers torn and bleeding. With desperate exertions he fought his way out into the comparatively calm water, outside the line of breakers, and swam parallel to the shore, until he saw with delight a sheltered inlet, whence a river flowed into the sea. Murmuring a prayer to the god of the river he steered for land, and a few strokes brought him to a smooth sandy beach, where he lay for a long time without sense or motion. All his flesh was swollen by his long immersion in the water, the skin was stripped from his hands, and when his breath came back to him he felt as weak as a child. Then a deadly nausea came over him, and the water which he had swallowed gushed up through his mouth and nostrils. Somewhat relieved by this, he rose to his feet, and tottering to the river's brink loosed the veil from his waist, and dropped it into the flowing water. For he remembered the request of Ino, to whom he owed his life.

He had indeed escaped the sea; but his position seemed almost hopeless. There he lay, naked, and more dead than alive, without food or shelter, in a strange land, without a sign of human habitation in view. Crawling painfully to a bed of rushes he lay down and considered what was best for him to do. He could not remain where he was, for it was an exposed place, with no protection from the dew, and open to the chill breeze from the river, which blows at early dawn. A few hours of such a vigil would certainly kill him in his exhausted state. If, on the other hand, he sought the shelter of the woods, he feared that he would fall a prey to some prowling beast.

At last he determined to face the less certain peril, and made his way into a thicket not far from the river side. Searching for a place where he might lie he soon came upon two dense bushes of olive, whose leaves and branches were so closely interwoven that they formed a sort of natural arbour, impenetrable by sun, or rain, or wind. "In good time!" murmured Odysseus, as he crept beneath that green roof, and scooped out a deep bed for himself in the fallen leaves. There he lay down, and piled the leaves high over him. And as a careful housewife in some remote farmhouse, where there are no neighbours near, covers up a burning brand among the ashes, so that it may last all night, and preserve the seed of fire; so lay Odysseus, nursing the spark of life, in his deep bed of leaves. And soon he forgot all his troubles in a deep and dreamless sleep.



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Odysseus among the Phaeacians

I

The land on which Odysseus had thus been cast like a piece of broken wreckage was called Phaeacia, and derived its name from the Phaeacians, a race of famous mariners, who had settled there some fifty years before, having been driven from their former seat by the Cyclopes, a savage tribe, who dwelt on their borders. The Phaeacians were an unwarlike people, and being in no condition to resist the fierce assaults of these lawless neighbours, they abandoned their homes and built a new city on a little peninsula, connected with the mainland by a narrow isthmus. Defended by strong walls they were now safe against all attacks, and they soon grew rich and prosperous in the exercise of a thriving trade.

At this time the king of the Phaeacians was Alcinous, who had a fair daughter, named Nausicaae. On the night when Odysseus lay couched in his bed of leaves Nausicaae was sleeping in her bower, and with her were two handmaids, whose beds were set on either side of the door. And in a dream she seemed to hear one of her girlish friends, the daughter of a neighbouring house, speaking to her thus: "Nausicaae, why art thou grown so careless as to suffer all the raiment in thy father's house to remain unwashen, when thy bridal day is so near? Wouldst thou be wedded in soiled attire, and have all thy friends clad unseemly, to put thee to shame? These are a woman's cares, by which she wins a good report among men, and gladdens her mother's heart. Arise, therefore, at break of day, and beg thy father to let harness the mules to the wain, that thou mayest take the linen to the place of washing, far away by the river's side. I will go with thee, and help thee in the work."

So dreamed Nausicaae, and so spake the vision. But the voice which seemed the voice of her friend came from no mortal lips; it was Athene herself who had visited the maiden's bower, in her care for Odysseus, that he might get safe conduct to the city of the Phaeacians. And when she had done her errand the goddess went back to Olympus, where is the steadfast, everlasting seat of the blessed gods, not shaken of any wind, nor wet with rain, nor chilled by snow, but steeped for ever in cloudless, sunny air. There the gods abide for ever and take their delight.

Nausicaae rose betimes, with her mind full of the dream, and went down to the hall, where she found her mother sitting by the hearth with her women, spinning the bright sea-purple thread. Inquiring for her father she learnt that he had but that moment gone forth to attend the council of elders, and hastening after him she found him before the doors of the house.

"Father," she said, "may I have the waggon to take the household raiment to the place of washing? Thou thyself hast ever need of clean garments when thou goest to the

council, and my brothers will reproach me if they lack clean raiment when they go to the dance.”



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Thus spake the maiden, being ashamed to make mention of her own marriage. But Alcinous knew, and smiled to himself, as he ordered his thralls to prepare the waggon. So when they had harnessed the mules, Nausicaae and her handmaids brought the soiled garments, and bestowed them behind the seat. And her mother brought a basket with food for the midday meal and oil for her daughter and the other maidens when they took their bath. Then they took their seats, Nausicaae grasped the reins, and they went off at a sharp trot towards the riverside.

After a pleasant drive, they came to the place where stood a row of cisterns on the river's bank. There they unharnessed the mules, and left them to crop the sweet clover in the water-meadows. Then they unloaded the waggon, threw the garments into washing-troughs, and trod them with their feet until they were thoroughly cleansed, and having wrung them out, they spread them on the white pebbly beach to dry. While the garments were bleaching in the wholesome sun and air, they took their bath, and afterwards sat down to the midday meal. When that was ended, they threw off their veils, and stood up to play at ball.

It was a pretty and graceful sight; they were all comely maidens, glowing with youth and health. Their sport was accompanied by dance and song, and as they chased the flying ball, keeping time with hand and foot and voice, they seemed like a choir of mountain nymphs, led by Artemis, when she goes forth to the chase, in the wild valleys of Arcady or Lacedaemon. Tallest and fairest of them all was Nausicaae, who led the sport, moving like a queen among her vassals.

Presently they grew tired of their sport, and Nausicaae flung the ball for the last time to one of her handmaids. The girl missed the ball, and it fell into the middle of the river, whereupon the whole company set up a sharp cry. The sound came to the ears of Odysseus, and woke him from his long slumber. He sat up in his bed of leaves and communed with himself: "Behold I hear the shrill cry of women, or perhaps of the nymphs who haunt this wild place. Now may I learn of what sort are the natives of this land, whether they be fierce and inhospitable, or gentle and kind to strangers." Plucking a leafy bough, and holding it before him to cover himself, he stepped forth from the thicket, and came in sight of that gentle company. Grim and dreadful he looked, like a hungry lion, buffeted by rain and wind, who goes forth in a tempest to seek his prey; for he was haggard with long fasting, and sore disfigured by his battle with the sea; his eyes glared with famine, and his hair and beard hung ragged and unkempt about his face. At this fearful apparition the maidens fled shrieking along the river bank, all but Nausicaae, who stood her ground, and gazed fearlessly, though in wonder, while Odysseus came slowly forward. When he was still some way off he stopped, fearing to offend her delicacy if he came nearer. Then with a gesture of entreaty he began to speak, and Nausicaae knew at once that it was no common man who stood before her.



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“Have pity on me, O queen!” he began, in soft and insinuating tones. “Art thou a goddess, or a mortal woman? If thou art a goddess, thou seemest to me most like to Artemis, daughter of great Zeus, both in face, and in stature, and in form. But if thou art mortal, then thrice blessed are thy father and mother, and thrice blessed thy brethren, and their spirits are refreshed because of thee, when thou goest, a very rose of beauty, to the dance. Happy the man who wins thee for his bride! Never yet have I seen the like of thee among all the children of men. Only once have I beheld aught to compare unto thee, a young palm-tree which I saw growing tall and straight by the altar of Apollo at Delos. I saw it, and was amazed, for it was wondrous fair; and even so is my soul filled with wonder and dread when I look upon thy face, so that I am afraid to draw near unto thee, though sore is my need. Yesterday I was flung naked on thy coast, after a voyage of twenty days. Many things have I suffered, and more, I ween, remains for me in store; for I am a man of many woes. Have compassion on me, dread lady! I am thy suppliant, and to thee first I address my prayer. Show me the way to the city, and give me a cloth to wrap round me, that I may go among the people without shame. And may the gods give thee all, whatsoever thy heart desireth, a husband and a home, and happy wedded love, shedding warmth in thine house, and a strong defence against all ills from without, but above all a sacred treasure in thy husband’s heart, and in thine.”

“Whatever be thy misfortunes,” answered Nausicaae, “I am sure they are not the fruit of thine own folly or wickedness. And since thou art come as a suppliant to this land of ours, thou shalt want nothing, whether it be raiment, or aught else that befits thy state. I will show thee our city, and tell thee the name of the people. Know that thou hast come to the country of the Phaeacians, whose ruler and king is Alcinous, and I am his daughter.”

Then she called to her handmaids, who were looking on, half frightened, half curious, from behind rocks and trees, a long way off, ready to resume their flight at the slightest alarm: “Come hither, and fear not the man; neither he nor any other shall ever come to this land with thoughts of harm; for we are very dear to the immortal gods. Far away we dwell amidst the rolling seas, remote from the haunts of men. But this is some hapless wanderer, driven by chance to our shores, and we must cherish him, for from Zeus come all strangers and beggars, and a little gift is a great thing to them. Take the stranger to a sheltered place, where he may wash and dress him, and give him wherewithal to clothe himself, and after that, meat and drink.”

When they heard the words of their mistress the girls came stealing timidly back, one by one. And they gave Odysseus clean raiment, and when he had washed and clothed himself, he came back to the place where Nausicaae was waiting. Wonderful was the change which had been made in his appearance by the refreshing bath and fitting apparel. Instead of the squalid, battered wretch who had begged for countenance and shelter, Nausicaae saw before her a stalwart, stately man, broad-shouldered, and deep of chest, with dark clustering hair and beard, like the curling hyacinth, and an air of majesty and command.



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“Hear me, friends,” whispered Nausicaae, as she saw him coming, “methinks some god hath wrought a miracle on this man, who but now was so hideous to behold. Would that we might prevail with him to make his abode among us! She would be a proud maiden who should wed with such as him. Now give the stranger food and drink.” And they did so, and Odysseus ate and drank with keen appetite, having tasted nothing for many days. While he was eating, the maidens folded the garments and placed them in the waggon, and when he had finished, Nausicaae mounted the waggon, and bidding him and the handmaids follow on foot started the mules and drove slowly towards the city. When they reached the cultivated lands outside the walls she drew up, and addressed Odysseus thus: “Stranger, I may not go with thee further, for I fear the envious tongues of the citizens, who will point the finger at us and say: ‘See what a tall and handsome stranger Nausicaae hath brought with her!—some seafaring man whom she hath brought with her to be her husband, since she despises the men of her own nation.’ And this will be a reproach unto me. Therefore wait thou awhile, and do as I bid thee. Not far from here is a temple and grove of Athene, a fair coppice of poplar-trees, and a spring of clear water. Go thou thither, and wait until we have time to reach my father’s house, then rise and go into the city and inquire for the dwelling of Alcinous. A little child could show thee the way, for there is none like it in all the city.”

[Illustration: Odysseus and Nausicaae]

So saying, Nausicaae drove on, leaving Odysseus where he was. He soon found the temple, and going in knelt down and prayed to the goddess to continue her favour. When he thought that Nausicaae had had time to reach home, he rose and went into the city. The road lay along a narrow causeway, which connected the city with the mainland, and on either side was a sheltered haven, with ships drawn up on the beach. Passing through the gates he came next to the place of assembly, in front of a temple of Poseidon, with a circle of massive stones bedded deeply in the earth. Wherever he looked he saw signs of a busy seafaring people—masts, and oars, and great coils of rope—and his ears were filled with the sound of saw and hammer from the shipwrights’ yards.

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As he stood thus gazing about him, he saw a young maiden coming towards him, carrying a pitcher. He inquired of her the way to the house of Alcinous, and she bade him follow her, as she was going that way. “My father’s house,” she said, “is close to the house which thou seekest. But thou art a stranger, I perceive, and not of this land; walk therefore warily, and regard no man, for the Phaeacians love not the face of the stranger, nor are they given to hospitality. Their home is the deep, and their ships are as swift as a bird—swift as a thought—for they are the favourites of Poseidon.”



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So saying, the maiden led the way swiftly, and Odysseus followed, keeping close behind. He remarked with wonder that though the streets were full of people, so that they had to walk carefully, and thread their way through the crowd, none seemed to notice him or his companion, or gave any sign of being conscious of their presence. The truth was that the supposed maiden was none other than his patron goddess Athene, who so ordered it that he was invisible to all eyes but hers.

As they went, his companion entertained him with an account of the family history of the Phaeacian king, Alcinous, whose father, Nausithous, was the son of Poseidon. Alcinous married Arete, who was related to him by blood, and was honoured exceedingly by her husband and by all the Phaeacians. "She is the idol of her household," continued the maiden, "and all eyes follow her with love and reverence when she goes through the town. So high is her character that even men consult her in their differences, and defer to her judgment. If thou canst enlist her on thy side, thou wilt soon obtain the safe conduct which thou desirest, and reach thy home in safety and honour."

They had now reached a large enclosed piece of land, surrounded by a tall fence, above which appeared the boughs of goodly trees, laden with their burden of fruit. "Here is the garden of Alcinous," whispered the maiden, "and yonder is the gate. Enter boldly in, and seek out the queen, who is now sitting at meat with her husband's guests. Make thy petition to her, for if her heart incline unto thee all will be well."

With that word she vanished from his sight, and left him standing at the gates of Alcinous. Wondering greatly he entered the garden, and gazed about him. So fair a sight had never met his eyes. Fruit-trees without number stood ranged in ordered rows, pear-trees, and pomegranates, and rosy apples, the luscious fig, and olives in their bloom. Their fruit never failed, summer or winter, all the year round. There blows the warm west wind without ceasing, nursing the tender blossom, and mellowing the swelling fruit. He saw pears and figs hanging on the trees in every stage of growth. Another part of the enclosure was set apart for the cultivation of the vine; and here also the same wonder was to be seen, springtime and summer dancing hand-in-hand, and yellow autumn treading close in their footsteps. Side by side hung the ripe, purple cluster, the crude grape just turning from green to red, and tiny green bunches lately formed from the blossom. There the labour of the vintagers never ceased, and the winepress overflowed without end.

Between the rows of fruit-trees were garden-beds, in which grew all manner of flowers and useful herbs; and the whole was watered by a perennial stream, divided into channels which brought the water to every part of the garden.



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Turning with a sigh from that paradise of colour and perfume, Odysseus passed on to the house, and stood for a while, scanning that stately structure. His eyes were almost blinded by the light which flashed from the outer walls, which were built of solid brass, with a coping of blue steel. The doors were of gold, with silver lintel and doorposts, and brazen threshold. Then he entered the hall, still unseen of all eyes; and here new wonders awaited him. Within the doorway on either side sat dogs wrought in silver and gold, living creatures, that know neither age nor death, which Hephaestus, the divine artificer, made, in the wisdom of his heart, to guard the house of the prince Alcinous day and night. At intervals stood figures of youths fashioned in gold, with torches in their hands, which at night-time shed a blaze of light throughout the hall. And all round the walls were set rows of seats, covered with richly woven cloths, the work of women's hands. There sat the noble chieftains of Phaeacia, feasting on the bounty of their king.

Far within, visible through a wide-opened door, was seen another chamber, where a troop of domestics were busy at their tasks. Some were grinding the yellow grain in hand-mills, others were walking to and fro at the loom, and others sat plying distaff and spindle, nodding their heads like poplars waving in the wind. Very choice was the fabric woven in that chamber, for the women of Phaeacia were famed beyond all others for their skill in weaving, even as the men surpassed all the world in seamanship.

Such were the glories of the house of Alcinous, and when Odysseus had gazed his fill he began to think of the purpose for which he had come. The feasters were just pouring a libation to Hermes, to be followed by a parting cup, before they went home. At that very moment their eyes were opened, and they saw Odysseus kneeling at the feet of Arete, and heard him utter these words:

“Great queen, daughter of a race divine, behold me, a toil-worn wanderer, who hath come hither to implore thy grace. Intercede for me, I pray thee, with thy husband, that he may send me speedily to my native land: and may it be well with thee, and with all this fair company, and with the children who come after thee.”

Thereupon he sat down by the hearth in the ashes near the fire; and for awhile not a word was spoken, but all sat gazing at him in wonder. At last an aged Phaeacian broke the silence, and said, looking at Alcinous: “My prince, it becomes thee not to suffer this stranger to sit on the ground in the ashes. Behold, we are all waiting for thee to speak and declare thy will. Give this poor man thy hand, and set him on a seat, that he may know that his prayer is granted. And let them give him to eat, and fill a bowl for a libation to Zeus, in whose care are all suppliants.”

Alcinous rose in response to the words of the elder, who was famed among the Phaeacians for his eloquence and wisdom, and taking Odysseus by the hand raised him from his abject posture, and seated him by his side. Food and drink were placed before him, and while he was eating, Alcinous ordered a bowl to be filled for a libation to Zeus, the god of hospitality. The wine was served out to the guests, the libations were

poured, and then Alcinous began to speak again, unfolding his purpose towards Odysseus.



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“Here me, ye princes of Phaeacia. Go ye now to your rest, and to-morrow we will call an assembly of all the elders, and make a great feast and sacrifice, and after that we will take counsel how we may best send the stranger on his way. Safe and sound we will bring him to his native land, but after that he must take up his portion, according as the Fates have ordained for him, and spun the thread of his life, rough or smooth, from the hour when his mother bare him. I speak as supposing our guest to be a man; but if he be a god, come down from heaven, then I fear that the gods are devising some snare against us. For never has it been their wont to appear among us in disguise, but at sacrifice and at feast they freely consort with us in their own shape, seeing that we are of their own kin.”

“Alcinous,” answered Odysseus, “let not this fear trouble thee. I am no god, as thou mayest see right well. If ye know any man conspicuous for the burden of sorrow which he bears, ye may learn my lot from his. But none, methinks, can equal the sum of what I have endured by the ordinance of heaven. Care sits by my side day and night, but within me is a monitor whose voice I must obey, even my hungry belly, that calls aloud to be filled, and will not let me alone to chew the cud of bitter thought. Shameless he is, and clamorous exceedingly. Therefore let me sup and question me no further to-night; but rouse thee betimes to-morrow, and send me with all speed to my native land. Let me once see my possessions, and my household, and my stately home, and then I will close mine eyes in peace.”

A murmur of approval went round the hall as Odysseus ended his speech. One by one the guests took leave of Alcinous, and he and his hosts sat awhile conversing together, while the servants were removing the remnants of the feast, and setting the house in order for the night. Arete was the first to speak, for she recognised the garments which Odysseus was wearing as the work of her own hands. “Friend,” said she, “let me ask thee one question. How camest thou by this raiment? For surely thou hast not brought it with thee in thy voyage across the deep. Say who thou art and whence thou comest.”

Thus challenged Odysseus told her all the story of his shipwreck on the island of Calypso, of his long sojourn there, of his voyage on the raft, his second shipwreck, and his landing on the coast of Phaeacia. Concluding he touched feelingly on his meeting with Nausicaae, and the kindness, courtesy, and modesty of her behaviour. “Never saw I such grace and prudence,” he added, “in one so young and so lovely.”

“Yet in this she did not well,” replied Alcinous, “that she brought thee not straightway to this house, but suffered thee to find thy way alone.”

“Nay, blame her not,” answered Odysseus, “she bade me come hither with herself and the maidens, but I feared to offend thee, and chose to come alone.”



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“Think not that I am so hasty, or given to causeless anger,” said Alcinous; “excess in all things is evil.”[1] Then he looked earnestly at Odysseus, and continued, after a pause: “I would to heaven that thy thoughts were as mine; then wouldst thou abide for ever in this land, and take my daughter to wife, and I would give thee house and lands. But I see that thou art steadfastly purposed to leave us; and none shall detain thee against thy will. To-morrow thou shalt go. I will appoint a ship and a crew, and they shall bear thee sleeping to thine own land, yea though it be more distant than far Euboea, which lies, as I am told, in the uttermost parts of the earth. Yet the Phaeacians went thither in their ships, and returned on the same day. They have no equals, as thou shalt soon learn, in seamanship, and no ships in all the world are like mine.”

[Footnote 1: *Nothing too much*, the corner-stone of Greek morality.]

After some further talk they parted for the night, and Odysseus, after all his hardships, was right glad to lay him down in the soft bed prepared for him in the gallery before the house. But before he closed his eyes he muttered a prayer to Zeus that Alcinous might abide by his promise, and send him safely home.

III

Next day was appointed for a great feast in the palace of Alcinous, to which all the chief men of Phaeacia were invited, and when Odysseus returned to the house, after some hours spent in a visit to the town, he found the courts and galleries thronged with a great company. The preparations for the banquet were on a heroic scale: twelve sheep, eight fat swine, and two oxen, the choicest of the herd, were slaughtered, and a goodly row of casks, filled with the finest vintages, gave further token that Alcinous was no niggardly host.

“Come,” said Alcinous, meeting Odysseus at the gate. “The guests are seated, and all is ready. Trouble not thyself as to the manner of thy home-coming; that is cared for already, and the ship lies at her moorings. But to-day is a day of good cheer, when thou shalt learn how gay and joyous a life the Phaeacians live.”

As he spoke, they entered the banquet hall, and Odysseus sat down by the side of Alcinous. Rich and dainty was the fare, and many times the great wine-bowls were filled and emptied; for the Phaeacians were a luxurious race, much given to the pleasures of the table. Among the guests Odysseus was especially struck by one venerable figure, who sat by himself against a pillar, on which hung a harp within reach of his hands. Odysseus noticed that he ate slowly and deliberately, and seemed to feel for the cup when he wished to drink, “It is Demodocus, the blind harper,” whispered Alcinous. “We shall presently have a taste of his quality. He is a rare minstrel.”



Accordingly, when the last course was removed, the harp was placed in the singer's hands, and after striking a deep chord he began to sing, choosing for his theme a famous tale of Troy, which told how Achilles and Odysseus quarrelled at a banquet, and reviled each other with bitter words, and how Agamemnon rejoiced in spirit because of the strife; for he had heard an oracle from Apollo, foretelling that when the noblest of the Greeks fell out Troy's end would be near at hand.



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Odysseus listened, and a flood of emotion filled his mind, so sad were the memories recalled by the minstrel's lay. Of all his gallant peers, for ten years his companions in many a joyful feast, and many a high adventure, how many were left? And he, among the last of the survivors, was now growing old, after twenty years of war and wandering, far from his wife and home. He was now, indeed, on the eve of his return; but at what a price had it been won! And who could tell what heavy trials awaited him when once more he set foot on his native soil? Was it not but too probable that he would find his house made desolate, Telemachus dead, and Penelope wedded to another?

Overpowered by these gloomy forebodings, he covered his face, and wept aloud. When Demodocus paused in his singing he wiped away his tears, and poured a drink-offering from his cup; but every time the minstrel resumed his lay a new fit of weeping succeeded. At last, Alcinous, who had hitherto been totally absorbed in that rare minstrelsy, observed his guest's emotion, and partly divining the cause came to his relief. "How say ye, fair sirs?" he said, rising and addressing the company. "Shall we go forth for awhile, and show the stranger that we have other and manlier pastimes, now that we have eaten and drunken, and cheered our souls with song? Let him not say of us when he goes home that we sit all day by the wine-cup, but let him learn that the Phaeacians surpass all mankind in boxing, and in wrestling, and in leaping, and in the speed of their feet."

So saying he rose from his seat and led the way to the place of assembly. Crowds soon flocked to see the friendly trial of strength and skill. The first event was the foot race, and this was followed by matches of wrestling, boxing, leaping, and throwing the weight. Odysseus stood watching the Phaeacians at their sports, and thinking of the mighty feats which he had witnessed and shared at the funeral games of Patroclus. Presently he felt a hand on his shoulder, and heard himself challenged by a young Phaeacian, whose name was Euryalus, in these terms: "Why so gloomy, father? Away with care! All is ready for thy departure, and thou shalt soon be home again. But come, give us a proof of thy manhood, if thou knowest aught of games of skill. Thou seemest a stout fellow, and I doubt not that thou wilt acquit thee well."

"Friend," answered Odysseus, "mock me not. Thou seest how broken I am, and worn by my long battle with the sea; and care sits heavy on my heart, forbidding me to think of the things which thou namest."

"Nay," said Euryalus, with a scornful laugh, "I see that I was mistaken in thee. Thou art plainly no athlete, but some cunning merchant, with thy head full of thy cargo, and fingers only skilled in counting thy gains."



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Then Odysseus bent his brows, and answered with a stern look: "Friend, thou art over-saucy of thy tongue. But so it ever is; the gods dispense their gifts with sparing hand, and give not all excellence to the same man. One man is mean of aspect, but heaven's grace descends upon his lips, so that men look upon him with delight while he discourses smoothly with a winning modesty. He is the observed of all observers, and when he walks through the town all eyes follow him as if he were a god. Another again is glorious, like a very god, in the splendour of his face and form, but no grace attends upon his speech. Even so thou art conspicuous for thy beauty, as though the hand of a god had fashioned thee, but in understanding thou art naught. Thou hast stung me by thy unseemly words; I am not ignorant of manly sports, as thou sayest, but I tell thee that I was among the foremost as long as I trusted in my youth and in the might of my hands. But now I am sore spent with woe and pain, for many things have I suffered in battles by land, and buffeting with the sea. Nevertheless, broken as I am, I will give proof of my strength, for thou hast provoked me bitterly by thy wanton words."

Thereupon, without waiting to throw off his cloak, he sprang into the arena, and caught up a massy disc of iron, far heavier than those with which the Phaeacians had been throwing. Poising it lightly, with one hand he flung it, as one who flings a ball. The Phaeacians sank back in dismay as they saw the huge mass flying high over their heads, and when it fell all rushed to the spot to mark the distance. There it lay, far beyond the longest cast of the native athletes, and Odysseus pointed to it, and said: "Reach that mark, my young masters, if ye can! And if any among you have a mind to try a match with me in boxing or in wrestling, or in the foot race, they shall have their will; only with the sons of Alcinous I will not strive, for he is my host, and it were not fitting or prudent to challenge them. Whatever a man can do with his hands I can do: I can send an arrow sure and strong, and strike down my foe, and herein can no archer surpass me, save one only, Philoctetes, who bare the bow of Hercules; and I can fling a javelin farther than another man can shoot an arrow. Only in speed of foot I fear that some of you may surpass me; for my knees are yet weak from long fasting and fighting with the waves."

Not one of the Phaeacians took up the challenge, but all sat mute, gazing in wonder and awe at this strange man, who had just given such signal proof of the power of his arm. At last Alcinous answered and said: "Stranger, none here can take thy words amiss, for, as thou sayest, thou hast been bitterly provoked. But hear me now in turn, and push not thy quarrel further, but rest satisfied with the proof of thy prowess which thou hast given. I will speak to thee frankly, that thou mayest know what manner of men the Phaeacians are. We are not mighty men



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of valour, like thee, yet we too have our own peculiar excellence. We are good runners, and none can approach us in all that belongs to the mariner's art. But at home we live softly, loving the banquet, and music and dancing, clean raiment, warm baths, and long repose." Then turning to his attendants he added: "Go, some of you, and bring hither the harper Demodocus, and clear a space for the dancers, that our guest may see something of the native sports of Phaeacia."

Then those whose business it was chose a fair level space for the dance, and when Demodocus arrived he took his harp and struck up a lively measure. A fair troop of boys stood in a circle around him, and the dance began. Alcinous had not overrated the skill of his people in this graceful pastime, and Odysseus was filled with wonder as he watched the intricate yet ordered movements of the youthful troop.

When the dance was ended, Demodocus sang a soft lay of love, and after that the two most skilful dancers, one of whom was Laodamas, a son of Alcinous, stood up to dance a reel together. One of them held a crimson ball, and, keeping time to the music flung it high into the air; while the other leaped high from the ground, and caught the ball as it fell. Then they flung the ball with lightning rapidity from hand to hand, so that it seemed a mere streak of crimson shooting backward and forward; and all the time the dance went gaily on, while the whole company of the Phaeacians kept up a merry din, beating time to the music with their feet.

"Of a truth," said Odysseus, addressing Alcinous, "thou hast not boasted for naught; never saw I such dancing in all my long travels." A proud man was Alcinous to hear such praise from such a man, and he was not slow to testify his gratitude. "Hear me," he said, "ye princes of Phaeacia! Methinks our guest is a man of exceeding shrewd wit. Let us bestow on him a parting gift, that he may remember us, and rejoice in spirit when he thinks of his sojourn in Phaeacia. Thirteen there are, of whom I am one, who sit in high places, and are notable men in the land; let each of us give him a change of raiment and a talent of gold. And Euryalus shall crave pardon of him for his ill-chosen words, and appease him with a gift."

The generous proposal was well received, and each of the twelve nobles sent his body-servant to fetch the gifts. Euryalus also was prompt to make his peace with Odysseus. He presented him with a fine sword of tempered bronze, with silver hilt, and scabbard of ivory. "Behold my peace-offering," he said, "and take my goodwill with the gift. Forget my foolish words, and think of me kindly when thou art safe among thine own people."

Odysseus acknowledged the courtesy of Euryalus in becoming terms, and then the whole company rose and went back to the palace of Alcinous, where they found the gifts for Odysseus all set in order against his departure. Then Alcinous brought a golden goblet, beautifully fashioned, and richly chased, and bade Arete bring a coffer to

hold the gifts. The coffer was displayed, and was in itself a gift of no mean value, being a choice piece of work.



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“Now bid thy handmaids prepare a bath for our guest,” said Alcinous to his wife, and “Receive this as a memorial of me,” he added, placing the goblet in Odysseus’ hands, “that thou mayest remember me all the days of thy life, when thou pourest libations to Zeus and the other deathless gods.”

Arete gave the order as required, and while the bath was preparing she arranged all the gifts in the coffer. Then closing the lid she said to Odysseus: “Make all fast with thine own hands, that none may meddle with thy goods as thou liest asleep on thy passage across the sea.” Odysseus made fast the cord, securing it with an intricate and cunning knot, which he had learnt from the great sorceress Circe; and when he had finished he was summoned by the eldest of the handmaids to the bath. When he had bathed and put on fresh raiment he came back to the dining-hall; and as he entered he saw Nausicaae leaning against a pillar. Sweet was the maiden’s face, and kind her eyes, as she gazed with innocent admiration on the stately figure of her father’s guest. “Farewell, my friend,” said she, “and when thou arrivest home think sometimes of her to whom thou owest thy life.”

“Fair daughter of Alcinous,” answered Odysseus, “if that day ever comes—if I ever see my home again, by favour of Zeus, the lord of Hera—be assured that I shall remember thee in my prayers, as long as this life which thou hast given me shall last.” And so he parted from the maiden, and she went back to her mother’s bower.

Odysseus again received a place of honour by the side of Alcinous, and a goodly portion of meat was set before him. Looking round the circle of guests he saw Demodocus, the blind harper, sitting in their midst, and wishing to show him honour, he cut off a choice piece from the flesh which had been set before him, and bade a servant carry it to the bard, and greet him in the giver’s name. The servant did as he was bidden, and Demodocus received the portion of honour with becoming gratitude.

When the banquet was drawing towards its close Odysseus approached the minstrel, and after praising his former lay, which told of the disastrous homeward voyage of the Greeks, he begged him to sing the Lay of the Wooden Horse, the device by which Troy was taken. Demodocus complied, and taking his harp began to chant that famous lay, which told how the Greeks burnt their tents and sailed away, leaving the wooden monster behind them, how the Trojans dragged the horse into the city, and how the fatal engine sent forth its burden of armed men in the night. The name of Odysseus, the arch-plotter, occurred again and again as the tale went on; and once more Odysseus was moved to tears by the memories which the words of the bard awakened.



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Alcinous observed his emotion, and called to Demodocus to cease his song. "We vex our guest," he said, "for whose sake we are gathered here. Doubtless the minstrel has touched some hidden spring of sorrow. But come now," he continued, addressing Odysseus, "we have honoured thee exceedingly, and given thee of our best. Wilt thou not repay us by telling something of thyself? Let us hear thy name, and say of what land and of what city thou art, that our ships may know whither to steer their course. For know that we mariners of Phaeacia need no pilots nor rudders, but our ships by their own instinct take us to whatsoever place we would visit, gliding like phantoms, invisible, swift as thought. Nor has any vessel from our ports ever suffered shipwreck or harm.

"Thou likewise hast been a great traveller, and seen many lands and nations, both such as are wild and fierce and such as are gentle and of godly mind. Tell us then the tale of thy wanderings, and say why thou weepst ever at the name of Troy."

All the guests bent forward with eager faces, and strained their ears to catch Odysseus' answer; for there was something mysterious about this strange guest, something which marked him as a man of no common stamp, and their curiosity, which had hitherto been held in check by the laws of courtesy, was now set free from all restraint by the frank question of Alcinous.

"Illustrious prince," answered Odysseus, after a moment's pause, "methinks it were best to sit silent and listen to the sweet voice of the harper; for what better thing has life to offer than a full cup and brave minstrelsy heard at the quiet hour of eventide? But if thou must needs hear a tale of sorrow it is not for me to deny thee. First of all I will tell thee my name. I am Odysseus, son of Laertes, and my name is in all men's mouths because of my deep wit and manifold wiles, yea, the renown thereof reaches even unto heaven. My home is the sunny isle of Ithaca, last in a line of islands lying in the western sea. It is a rugged land, but a nurse of gallant sons; and sweet, ah! very sweet, is the name of home. Never hath my heart been turned from that dear spot, no, not by all the loveliness of Calypso, nor by all the witchery of Circe, but ever I remained faithful to the one lodestar of my life."

Here Odysseus began the wondrous story of his wanderings, which kept his hearers spellbound until far into the night.

The Wanderings of Odysseus

I

After leaving Troy, Odysseus first sailed to the coast of Thrace, and collected a rich booty in a sudden raid on the district. But while his men lingered to enjoy the first-fruits of their spoil, the wild tribes of the neighbourhood rallied their forces, and falling upon

the invaders, while they were engaged in a drunken revel, drove them with great slaughter to their ships. No sooner had they put to sea



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than a wild tempest came down upon them from the north, and drove them to seek shelter again on the mainland, where they lay for two days and nights in constant dread of another attack from the injured Thracians. On the third day they set sail again and got as far as Malea, the southernmost headland of Greece. Here they were again driven from their course, and after nine days' tossing on the waves they reached the land of the Lotus-Eaters.

When his men had refreshed themselves, Odysseus sent three of their number to explore the country and learn the manners of the inhabitants. Presently these three came to the dwellings of the Lotus-Eaters, who received them kindly and gave them to eat of the lotus-plant. With the first taste of that magic food the men forgot the purpose for which they had been sent, forgot their friends and their home, and had no desire left in life but to remain there all their days and feast with the Lotus-Eaters. In this state they were found by Odysseus, who compelled them by force, though they wept and complained bitterly, to return to their ships. There he bound them fast under the benches, and bade the rest take to their oars and fly from that seductive clime, lest others should fall under the same fatal spell.

II

Thence they came to the land of the Cyclopes, a rude and monstrous tribe, but favoured of the immortal gods, by whose bounty they live. They toil not, neither do they sow, nor till the ground, but the earth of herself brings forth for them a bountiful living, wheat and barley, and huge swelling clusters of the grape. Naught know they of law or civil life, but each lives in his cave on the wild mountain-side, dwelling apart, careless of his neighbours, with his wife and children.

It was a dark, cloudy night, and a thick mist overspread the sea, when suddenly Odysseus heard the booming of breakers on a rocky shore. Before an order could be given, or any measure taken for the safety of the ships, the little fleet was caught by a strong landward current, and whirled pell-mell through a narrow passage between the cliffs into a land-locked harbour. Drawing their breath with relief at their wonderful escape, they beached their vessels on the level sand and lay down to wait for the day.

In the morning they found that they had been driven to the landward shore of a long island, which formed a natural breakwater to a spacious bay, with a narrow entrance at either end. The island was thickly covered with woods, giving shelter to a multitude of wild goats, its only inhabitants. For the Cyclopes have no ships, so that the goats were left in undisturbed possession, though the place was well suited for human habitation, with a deep, rich soil, and plentiful springs of water.



The first care of Odysseus was to supply the crews of his vessels, which were twelve in number, with fresh meat. Armed with bows and spears, he and a picked body of men scoured the woods in search of game. They soon obtained a plentiful booty, and nine goats were assigned to each vessel, with ten for that of Odysseus. So all that day till the setting of the sun they sat and feasted on fat venison and drank of the wine which they had taken in their raid on the Thracians.



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Early next morning Odysseus manned his own galley, and set forth to explore the mainland, leaving the rest of the crews to await his return on the island. As they drew near the opposite shore of the bay, the mariners came in view of a gigantic cavern overshadowed by laurel-trees. Round the front of the cavern was a wide court-yard rudely fenced with huge blocks of stone and unhewn trunks of trees.

Having moored his vessel in a sheltered place, Odysseus chose twelve of his men to accompany him on his perilous adventure, and charging the others to keep close, and not stir from the ship, he prepared for his visit to the Cyclops, who dwelt apart from his brethren in the cavern. Amongst the spoils obtained in Thrace was a small store of peculiarly rich and generous wine, which had been given him by a priest of Apollo whom he had protected, with his wife and child, while his men were pillaging the town. Twelve jars of this precious vintage the priest brought forth from a secret hiding-place, known only to himself and his wife and one trusty servant. So potent was the wine that it needed but one measure of it to twenty of water to make a fragrant and comfortable drink, from which few could refrain. Odysseus now filled a great goatskin bottle with this wine, and carried it with him. And well it was for him that he did so.

During the day the Cyclops was abroad, watching his flocks as they grazed on the mountain pastures; so that when Odysseus and his men came to the cavern, they had ample time to look about them. The courtyard was fenced off into pens, well stocked with ewes and she-goats, with their young—huge beasts, rivalling in stature their gigantic shepherd. Within the cavern was a sort of dairy, with great piles of cheeses, and vessels brimming with whey.

“Quick now,” whispered one of the men to Odysseus. “Let us take of the cheeses, and drive off the best of the lambs and kids to the ship before the Cyclops returns; for methinks he will give us but sorry welcome if he finds us here.” “Nay,” answered Odysseus, “I will wait for the master, that I may see him face to face. It may be that he will bestow on me some gift, such as strangers receive from their hosts.” So they remained, and having kindled a fire they prepared savoury meat, and ate of the cheeses which they found in the cave. Then they waited, until the lengthening shadows showed that evening was drawing near.

While they sat thus, conversing in low tones, and casting fearful glances towards the cavern’s mouth, all at once they heard a sound like the trampling of many feet, accompanied by loud bleatings, which were answered by the ewes and she-goats in the courtyard. Then a vast shadow darkened the cavern’s entrance, and in came Polyphemus, driving his flock before him. At the sight of that fearful monster, huge as a mountain, with one vast red eye glaring in the middle of his forehead, Odysseus and his comrades fled in terror



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to the darkest corner of the cave. The Cyclops bore in one hand a mighty log for his evening fire. Flinging it down with a crash that awakened all the echoes of the cavern, he closed the entrance with an immense mass of stone, which served as a door. Then he sat down and began to milk the ewes and she-goats. Half of the milk he curdled for cheese, and half he kept for drinking. So when he had strained off the whey, and pressed the curds into wicker-baskets, he kindled a fire, and as the flame blazed up, illumining every corner of the cavern, he caught sight of the intruders, and with a voice which sounded like the roaring of a torrent cried out: "Who are ye that have come to the cave of Polyphemus, and what would ye have of him?"

When he heard that appalling voice, and looked at that horrible face, fitfully lighted up by the blaze of the fire, Odysseus felt his heart stand still with terror. Nevertheless he manned himself to answer, and spake boldly thus: "We are Greeks, driven from our course in our voyage from Troy, and brought by the winds and waves to these shores. And we are they who have served Agamemnon, son of Atreus, whose fame now fills the whole earth; so mighty was the city which he overthrew, with all the host within her. And now we have come to kneel at thy feet and beseech thee of thy favour to bestow on us some gift such as strangers receive. Have pity on us, great and mighty as thou art, and forget not that Zeus hath the stranger and the suppliant in his keeping."

But there was no sign of pity or mercy in the Cyclops' face as he made answer: "Thou art full simple, my friend, or unversed in the ways of this land, if thou thinkest that I and my brethren care aught for Zeus or any other god. Nay, we are mightier far than they, and if thou seekest aught of me thou must seek it of my favour, and not of my fears. But tell me truly, where didst thou moor thy vessel on thy landing? Lies she near at hand, or on a distant part of the coast?"

Odysseus easily divined the purpose of Polyphemus in putting this question, and answered accordingly: "My ship was wrecked on a distant part of your coast, dashed all to pieces against the rocks; and I and these twelve escaped by swimming."

Polyphemus made no reply, but sprang up and seized two of the men, grasping them easily together in one hand, and dashed their brains out against the rocky ground. Then he cut them in pieces and made his supper on them. Fearful it was to see him as he ate, crunching up flesh and bones and marrow all together, like a ravening lion. When he had devoured the last morsel he took a deep draught of milk, and lay down on the cavern floor among his flocks to sleep.

As soon as the heavy breathing of Polyphemus showed that he was fast asleep, Odysseus crept from his corner, resolved to slay the cannibal giant on the spot. He had already drawn his sword, when a sudden thought made him pause. If he killed Polyphemus, how was he to escape from the cavern? The entrance was blocked by



that ponderous stone, which a hundred men could not have moved; and he and his men must in that case perish miserably of hunger and thirst. Restrained by this reflection, he put up his sword, and went back to his companions to wait for day.



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Polyphemus rose early, and after milking his flocks he laid hold of two more of the miserable captives, butchered them in the same manner, and made his breakfast on their warm, quivering bodies. Then he drove forth his sheep and goats, pushing aside the door of rock, and set it back in its place, as a man sets the lid on a quiver. They heard his wild cries, as he called to his flocks, and their loud bleatings as he drove them out to pasture; then the sounds grew fainter and fainter, and silence settled on the vast, shadowy cave.

Forthwith Odysseus began to devise means to escape from that murderous den, and avenge the slaughter of his friends. As he peered about in the twilight, he caught sight of a mighty stake of green olive-wood, tall and stout as the mast of a twenty-oared galley,[1] which had been cut by the Cyclops for a staff, and laid aside to season. Odysseus cut off about a fathom's length, and with the help of his comrades made it round and smooth, and tapered it off at one end to a point. Then he hardened the sharp end in the fire, and when it was ready he hid the rude weapon away under a pile of refuse. Of the twelve who had followed him from the ship, there only remained eight; four of these were chosen by lot to aid him in his plan of vengeance; and Odysseus noted with satisfaction that they were the stoutest and bravest of the company. All being now ready, they sat down to wait for the return of Polyphemus.

[Footnote 1: Imitated, with characteristic amplification, by Milton, "Paradise Lost," i. 292 (Satan's spear).]

The setting sun was pouring his level rays through the chinks of the doorway when they heard the ponderous tread of the Cyclops approaching. This time he drove the whole of his flocks into the cave, leaving the courtyard empty. Having milked the herd, he laid hands on two of Odysseus' comrades, and slaughtered and devoured them as before. The moment had now come for Odysseus to carry out his design. So he filled a wooden bowl with unmixed wine, and drawing near to Polyphemus addressed him thus:

"Take, Polyphemus, and drink of this wine, now that thou hast eaten of human flesh. I warrant that thou hast never tasted such a choice vintage as this, and I brought it as a gift to thy divinity, that thou mightest have pity, and let me go in peace. Little did I dream to find thee so cruel and so wild. Who in all the world will ever draw near to thee again, after the hideous deeds which thou hast wrought?"

Polyphemus took the cup and drained it to the bottom. Then he rolled his great eye with ecstasy, as the last drop trickled down his monstrous gullet, and holding out the cup said with a sort of growling good humour: "Give me to drink again, and make haste and tell me thy name, that I may bestow on thee a gift of hospitality to gladden thy heart. I and my brethren have wine in plenty, for the earth gives us of her abundance, and the soft rain of heaven swells the grape to ripeness; but this is a drink divine, fit for the banquets of Olympus."



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Again the cup was filled, and yet a third time; and Polyphemus drank out every drop. Before long his great head began to droop, and his eye blinked mistily, like the red sun looming through a fog. Seeing that the good wine was doing its work, Odysseus lost no time in telling his name. "Thou askest how I am called," he said in cozening tones, "and thou shalt hear, that I may receive the gift which thou hast promised me. My name is Noman; so call me my father and my mother, and all my friends." When he heard that, Polyphemus "grinned horribly a ghastly smile," and answered: "This shall be thy gift: I will eat thee last of all, for the sake of thy good wine."

With that he sank down backward on the floor, and lay like a leviathan, with his head lolling sideways, and his mouth gaping, buried in drunken sleep.

"Now is our time!" whispered Odysseus, and taking the sharpened stake from its hiding place he thrust the point into the glowing embers of the fire. As soon as he saw that the weapon was red hot and about to burst into flame, he took it up, and gave it to his men. Then, breathing a prayer to Heaven for strength and courage, they stole softly to the place where the Cyclops lay. Odysseus clambered up to the forehead of the Cyclops, holding on by his hair, and while the others pressed the glowing point of the ponderous stake into the monster's eye he whirled it round by means of a thong, as men turn an auger to bore a ship's timber. The point hissed and sputtered as it sank deep into the pulpy substance of the eye, and there was an acrid smell of burning flesh, while the great shaggy eyebrow took fire, and cracked like a burning bush. "It is a fine tempering bath for this good spear of ours," muttered Odysseus, as he worked away at the strap. "Temper it well—Polyphemus shall have it as a parting gift"

At first the Cyclops writhed and groaned in his sleep; then with a roar as of a hundred lions he awoke, and started up to a sitting posture, scattering his puny tormentors, who fled in wild haste, and hid themselves in the angle of a projecting rock. Polyphemus rose slowly to his feet, tore the stake from the empty eye-socket, and flung it from him, still uttering his fearful cries. His brethren heard him, and quitting their caverns, came flocking round his gate, to see what had befallen. "What ails thee, Polyphemus," they asked, "that thou makest this dreadful din, murdering our sleep? Is anyone stealing thy sheep or thy goats? Or seeks anyone to slay thee by force or by guile?"

"Friends," answered the afflicted giant, "Noman is slaying me by guile, neither by force."

"Go to," replied his brethren, "if no man is using thee spitefully, why callest thou to us? Thou art stricken, it seems, with some sore disease: pray, then, to thy father Poseidon, and cumber us no more." So away they went, growling at their broken sleep, and left their blinded brother to roar alone.



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Meanwhile Odysseus had been hard at work, taking measures to escape with his comrades from the cave. Among the flocks of Polyphemus were several big rams, with fleeces of remarkable thickness and beauty. Of these he took three at a time, and lashed them together, side by side, with osiers, which served Polyphemus for a bed. Each middle ram bore one of the men firmly bound with osiers under his belly; while the two outside rams served to conceal that living burden. Last of all Odysseus provided for his own safety. There was one monster ram, the leader of the flock, with a grand fleece which trailed on the ground, like the leaves of the weeping ash. Him Odysseus reserved for himself, and creeping under his belly hauled himself up until he was entirely hidden by the drooping fleece, and so hung on steadfastly, waiting for the day.

At last the weary vigil was over, the huge stone portal was rolled aside, and the male sheep and goats went forth to pasture, while the females remained in their pens, bleating and in pain, for they were swollen with milk, and there was none to relieve them. As the rams went past Polyphemus felt their backs, to see if the men were there; but the simple monster never thought of feeling under their bellies. Last in the train came the big ram, with Odysseus clinging underneath. Then said Polyphemus, as his great hands passed over his back: "Dear ram, why art thou the last to leave the cave? Thou wast never wont to be a sluggard, but ever thou tookest the lead, walking with long strides, whether thou wast cropping the tender, flowering grass, or going down to the waterside, or returning at even to the fold. Surely thou art heavy with sorrow for thy master's eye, which the villain Noman and his pitiful mates have blinded. Would that thou hadst a voice, to tell me where he is skulking from my fury! Then would I pour forth his brains like water on the ground, and lighten my heart of the woe which hath been brought upon me by the hands of this nithering[1] Noman."

[Footnote 1: See Scott, "Ivanhoe."]

So saying he let the ram go, and as soon as he was clear of the courtyard Odysseus dropped to the ground, and ran to loose his comrades. With all speed they made their way down to the ship, driving the rams before them, with many a fearful backward glance. Right glad were their friends to see them again, though their faces fell when they saw their numbers reduced by half. But there was no time for regrets, for Polyphemus was already close upon them, groping his way painfully from rock to rock. So they flung the sheep on board, shoved off the vessel, and took to their oars. While they were still within earshot Odysseus bade his men cease rowing, and standing up in the stern called aloud to the Cyclops in mocking tones: "How likest thou my gift for thy hospitality, my gentle host? Methinks thou art paid in full, and canst not complain that I have not given thee good measure."



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When he heard that, Polyphemus bellowed with rage, and tearing up a great boulder from the side of the cliff he flung it with mighty force in the direction of the voice. It fell into the sea right in front of the ship, and raised a billow which washed her back to the shore. Odysseus pushed her off with a long pole, and signalled to his men to give way. They rowed for dear life, and had attained twice the former distance from the shore when Odysseus stopped them again, though they besought him earnestly to forego his rash purpose, and to refrain from provoking Polyphemus more. But he, being exceeding wroth for the murder of his men, would not be persuaded; and lifting up his voice he spake again: "Cyclops, if anyone ask thee to whom thou owest the loss of thine eye, say that it was Odysseus, the son of Laertes, who reft thee of sight, and his home is in rocky Ithaca."

[Illustration: Odysseus and Polyphemus]

Now it happened that many a year back Polyphemus had heard a prophecy, foretelling that he should one day be blinded by a certain Odysseus. So when he heard that name he was stricken to the very heart, and cried aloud: "This, then, is the fulfilment of the oracle! Verily I thought that some tall and proper man would come hither to assail me, but now I have been outwitted, made drunk, and blinded, by this little, paltry wretch." After a pause he spoke again, thinking to fight that man of many wiles with his own weapons. "Come hither, Odysseus," he said, softening his big voice as well as he could, "that I may entertain thee with loving-kindness; and afterwards I will pray to Poseidon, whose son I am, to send a fair breeze for thy homeward voyage. And he also shall heal my hurt, and give me back my sight."

Odysseus laughed aloud at the poor monster's simplicity, whereupon Polyphemus lifted up his hands to heaven, and prayed to his sire, the lord Poseidon: "Hear me, thou who holdest the earth in thine arms, if I am indeed thy son. Grant me that Odysseus may never reach his home, or if that is fixed beyond repeal, let him come home in evil plight, with the loss of all his men, on a strange ship, to a house of woe." [1]

[Footnote 1: Compare Dido's curse ("Stories from the Aeneid," p. 84).]

Such was the curse of Polyphemus, to be fulfilled, as we shall see, to the letter. And having uttered it he flung another rock, which fell just short of the vessel's stern, and raised a wave which washed her towards the island. Soon they reached the harbour where the rest of the fleet lay moored. Joyful were the greetings of their comrades, who had given them up for lost; and a merry feast they made on the flesh of the fat sheep, though their mirth was checkered by sadness when they thought of the brave six who had come to so horrible an end in the Cyclops' cave.



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After leaving the land of the Cyclopes they came next to the AEolian island, where dwelt AEolus with his wife and twelve sons and daughters. The island floated on the sea, and all around it tall cliffs ran sheer down to the water, crowned on their summit by a wall of brass. Here they remained a whole month, and were hospitably entertained by AEolus, revelling in the abundance of his wealthy house, and whiling away the time with music, and dance, and song, and brave stories of the Trojan war. And when they departed he gave Odysseus a leathern bag, tied with a silver cord, in which were confined all the winds that blow, except only the good west wind, which he left free to blow behind them and speed them on their way.

So for nine days and nights they sailed without let or hindrance, and on the tenth they came in sight of Ithaca, which they approached so near that they saw the smoke and flame of the beacon-fires along the coast. Odysseus was worn out with watching, for during all the voyage he had not closed his eyes, but had sat the whole time with his hand on the sheet, and suffered no one to relieve him. But now within sight of his native land he sank down in utter weariness, and fell into a deep sleep.

That fatal moment of weakness led to a long train of disasters. His men had long gazed with curious and jealous eyes at the mysterious wallet, which they supposed to be full of gold and silver. As long as Odysseus was on his guard they durst not give utterance to their thoughts; but when they saw him overtaken by slumber they began to murmur among themselves. And thus they spake one to another: "Behold how this man is honoured and beloved whithersoever he goes! He left Troy-land laden with booty, and thereto hath AEolus added this rich treasure, while we must come home with empty hands. Go to, let us have sight of all this gold and silver."

So waking folly prevailed over slumbering prudence. In a moment the silver cord was loosened, and all the boisterous winds rushed forth and bore them weeping and wailing far from their native land. Roused by the tumult of the tempest, and the despairing cries of his men, Odysseus sprang up, just in time to see the last glimpse of the hills of Ithaca as they melted in the distance. His first impulse was to fling himself into the sea and perish; but mastering his frenzy he covered his face, and sat down in speechless misery, while the winds bore them swiftly back to the isle of AEolus.

With a heavy heart Odysseus went up to the house where he had been received so kindly, and told his sorrowful tale. "Pity my weakness," he pleaded, "and let me not suffer for the sins of my men." But AEolus was not to be moved. "Begone," he said sternly, "quit this island at once, thou caitiff! Heaven hath set the seal of its hatred upon thee, and I may not give countenance to such as thou. Out of my sight!" he thundered, and Odysseus crept sadly back to his ship.



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Then for six days they voyaged on, toiling continually at the oar, for now there was no favourable wind to waft them on. They were almost dead with fatigue when they sighted land on the seventh day, and came to anchor in a sheltered bay, surrounded on all sides by towering cliffs, with a narrow entrance, guarded by a tall spire of rock on either side. The place was called Laestrygonia, and the nights in that country are so short that the shepherd as he drives home his flocks at sundown meets his fellow-toiler on his way to the pasture.

The cautious Odysseus moored his ship close to the entrance of the harbour, while all the others came to anchor at the head of the bay under the shadow of the cliffs; for there was not a wave, not a ripple, in that sheltered spot, but the water slumbered, as in a mountain tarn. Having secured his vessel, by making fast her cable to the rocks, he scaled the cliff with a few of his men, and seeing smoke rising in the distance he sent three scouts to explore the country, meantime going back to his ship to await their return.

Sooner than he expected he saw two of the men descending the cliff in headlong haste, and as they drew near he could read on their white, terror-stricken faces what sort of news they had to bring. Their report was as dismal as their looks. When they left the coast they struck into a level road cut through the forest, and presently came to a spring on the outskirts of a town. Here they met a maiden, drawing water at the well, who told them that she was the daughter of Antiphates, king of that country, and offered to conduct them to her father's house. They went with her, and when she had brought them home she left them to summon her father.

"As soon as we caught sight of him," continued he who was telling the story, "we were stricken with terror, for he was of monstrous stature and hideous to behold. One of us he seized, and rent him in pieces on the spot; but we two fled for our lives. There is no time to lose. The town is in uproar, and before long the whole cannibal tribe will be upon us."

Hardly had he finished when a multitude of these huge savages was seen rushing along the edge of the cliffs which overlooked the harbour. Arming themselves with great rocks, they began to bombard the ships which had taken the inside station; and a dreadful din arose of shattered timbers, mingled with the cries of dying men. Not one ship escaped destruction, and when that part of their work was ended the barbarians swarmed down the cliffs, speared the floating corpses, and dragged them to land for a cannibal feast.

All this time Odysseus and his crew had been helpless spectators of this scene of massacre. But when they saw that all was over they cut their cable, and taking to their oars rowed with might and main until a wide space of open water divided them from that ill-fated shore, where all their friends had found a grave.

IV



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Of the thirteen vessels with which Odysseus sailed from Troy only one was now left. Weary and broken in spirit they voyaged on over the waste of waters; and when, after two or three days' sail, they landed on a low-lying coast, they lay down for two days and two nights, like men whose last hope in life was gone. On the third morning Odysseus roused himself, and ascending a rising ground saw to his dismay that they had landed on a small island. On all sides stretched the boundless sea, without a trace of land on the whole horizon.

As he was descending the hill he heard a rustling in a neighbouring thicket, and a tall stag with branching antlers stepped forth, and began to make his way down to a little stream which skirted the foot of the hill. From the high ground on which he stood Odysseus had a full view of the beast's broad back, and taking steady aim he flung his spear and pierced him through the spine. Odysseus' eyes glistened when he saw the splendid quarry at his feet, for never had he seen so fine a buck. Not without effort he took the carcass on his back, and bore it down to his ship, where he found his men still lying listlessly where he had left them. "Courage, comrades," he cried, as he flung his heavy burden on the sand. "We shall not die before our day, and while we have life we must eat and drink. Better a full sorrow than a fasting."^[1] So they ate and drank, and made good cheer.

[Footnote 1: See the whole incident imitated in Virgil ("Stories from the Aeneid," p. 49).]

Next day Odysseus divided his whole crew into two companies, two and twenty each, with himself as captain of one division, and Eurylochus, his faithful squire, in command of the other. Then he drew lots with Eurylochus to determine which of the two should undertake the perilous duty of exploring the island. The lot fell upon Eurylochus, and he at once set forth with his party, pursued by the prayers and tears of those who remained behind.

Passing the low hills which skirted the coast, they struck into a forest path, and presently came to an open glade, in the midst of which stood a fair stone dwelling. And as they came and drew nigh unto the house they saw a strange sight: before the doors stalked and glared a multitude of wolves and lions, and other beasts of prey, and when they saw the men these fearful creatures came fawning round them, like hounds welcoming their master, and did them no harm.

Quaking with wonder and fear, they came and stood on the threshold, through which they caught sight of a young and lovely dame, pacing to and fro about her loom, and weaving a wondrous web, fair and large, such as the daughters of the gods are wont to weave. And as she plied her task, she sang to herself in a low and thrilling voice, sad and sweet as the notes of the Aeolian harp. Presently she turned her face to the doorway, and saw the men standing without. With a bright smile she came forward, and bade them enter; and they all went in, save only Eurylochus, who was older than the rest, and liked not the look in that fair lady's eyes.



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“Welcome, fair youths,” she said, “to the halls of Circe, daughter of the sun. Sit ye down, while I prepare you a posset to slake your thirst on this hot day.” So they sat down, and Circe took wine, and grated cheese, and honey, and barley-meal, and mixed them in a bowl, muttering strange words, and adding a single drop from a little phial which she took from a secret cupboard. Then she gave them to drink, touching them, as she did so, with a wand; and no sooner had they tasted than their form and countenance was changed into the likeness of swine, though they kept the mind and feelings of men. Circe now drove them all together into a sty, and flung down beechmast, and acorns, and cornel berries, for them to eat.

It was drawing towards noon when Odysseus saw a solitary figure descending the slope which led down to the beach. “Eurylochus!” he cried, recognising the familiar features of his squire. “Why comest thou alone?” For some time Eurylochus was unable to utter a word; at last he spoke, in a broken and altered voice, while his face was blanched with deadly terror. “They are gone,” he faltered—“spirited away—vanished without a sign. The place is haunted: let us away!”

Without a word, Odysseus caught up his sword and bow, and ordered Eurylochus to show him the way to the place where he had lost his men. But Eurylochus clung to his knees, and besought him to remain, and prepare for instant flight. Seeing him to be unnerved by terror, Odysseus bade him stay by the ship, and he himself set out alone to learn the secrets of this mysterious island.

Just before coming within sight of Circe’s palace, he saw, standing in his path, a fair and comely youth, who greeted him kindly, and took him by the hand. There was something more than human beauty in the face of this stranger, and his words showed more than human knowledge of Odysseus and his affairs; for indeed he was no other than Hermes, the messenger of the gods, sent down from heaven to aid Odysseus in this strait. “Son of Laertes,” he said, “why goest thou thus unwarily, even as a silly bird into the net of the fowler? Pause awhile, or, instead of setting free thy men, thou wilt become even as they are.” So saying he stooped down, and with careful hands tore up a little plant which was growing at their feet; the flower of it was white as milk, and the root was black. “Take this plant,” he said, giving it to Odysseus. “It is the magic herb, Moly, and no human hand may pluck it; having this, thou mayest defy all the spells of Circe. And when thou comest to the house of that fair witch, she will offer thee a potion, mixed with baneful drugs: drink thou thereof, for it shall do thee no harm. But when she smites thee with her wand draw thou thy sword and make as though thou wouldst slay her; and she will be filled with fear, for none ever resisted her power before. Then do thou compel her to swear a great oath that she will devise no further ill against thee.” As the last words were uttered Hermes vanished, leaving Odysseus standing with the plant in his hand.

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[Illustration: Circe]

And as the god had spoken, even so it came to pass. Circe welcomed Odysseus with the same treacherous smile, gave him to drink of the same cup, and struck him with her wand in the same manner; but when she saw him standing, unchanged and unmoved, threatening her with drawn sword, she feared exceedingly, and falling at his feet spake thus in pitiful tones: "Who art thou, that thou yieldest not to the power of my drugs, which never mortal resisted before? Art thou that Odysseus of whom Hermes spake, telling me that he should come hither on his voyage from Troy? Put up thy sword, and thou shalt be my guest to-night, and for many days to come."

"No guest will I be of thine," answered Odysseus sternly, "unless thou wilt swear a great oath to do me no hurt. Before that I will not trust thee, or receive aught at thy hands. Hast thou not turned my men into swine, and didst thou not seek even now to put thy wicked spells upon me?"

Then Circe took the oath that was required of her, and thus secured Odysseus consented to remain. Forthwith his beautiful hostess summoned her handmaids, sweet nymphs of rivers, and woods, and springs, and bade them make all things ready to entertain the wanderer. With white feet tripping nimbly, and many a curious glance at the majestic stranger, the maidens hastened to obey her command. And soon the tables, which were all of silver, were set forth with golden vessels, the chairs spread with purple tapestries, and the rich red wine mingled in a silver bowl. Others prepared a bath for Odysseus, and when he had bathed, more than mortal health and vigour seemed to enter his limbs, such virtue had Circe shed into the water.

After that they sat down to meat; but Odysseus, whose mind was full of his comrades, left every dish untasted, and sat without uttering a word. When she observed it, Circe rallied him for his sullenness: "Art thou afraid to eat?" she said, smiling: "have I not sworn to do thee no harm? Ah! thou art thinking of thy friends. Come, then, and I will restore them to thee." So she brought him to the sty where they were confined together, and opening the gate drove them all forth, a herd of bristly swine. Then she anointed them one by one with another drug; and instantly the bristles fell away from them, and they became men again, only younger and fairer to behold than they were before. With tears of joy they embraced Odysseus, and the whole place rang with their happy greetings, so that even Circe was moved by the tender scene.

When they had grown calmer she bade Odysseus go down to the sea, and bring back all the rest of his company to take up their abode in her house. Being now quite reassured as to her purpose, he hesitated not to obey, and went down alone to carry the message from Circe. Arrived at the ship he was hailed by his comrades as one returned from the dead; but putting aside their eager questions he told them to beach the vessel, stow away all her tackle, and follow him to the house of Circe, where they would find all their fellows feasting and making merry.



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Much cheered by his words the men set to work with willing hands, and before an hour had passed the whole company was reunited under Circe's hospitable roof. The dreaded witch had laid aside all her terrors, and now appeared only in the character of a kind and generous hostess, whose sole care was for the comfort and welfare of her guests. Days lengthened into weeks, and weeks into months, and still they lingered on in that luxurious clime, as if there were no such place as Ithaca, and no wide waste of sea to be crossed.

At last, when they had lived a whole year on the island, Odysseus' men began to grow weary of their long inaction, and begged their leader to obtain Circe's permission to depart. Not without some misgivings, Odysseus preferred his request. "Deem me not ungrateful," he said, "if my heart turns ever to my wife and home. I am but a mortal man, with human needs and frailties, and no fit mate for a goddess like thee. And my men weary me with their importunity, when thou art not near."

Circe heard him graciously, knowing well that they must part. "I will not keep thee," she said, "against thy will. But a long journey lies before thee, even to the very ends of the earth, and not until that is past canst thou set thy sail for home. To the halls of Hades thou must go, and consult the spirit of Theban Teiresias, who alone among all the dead hath an understanding heart, while the rest are but flitting shadows. Now hearken, and I will tell thee all that thou must do. When thou leavest these shores thou shalt sail ever southward, until thou hast reached the farther side of the River Oceanus, and come to the shadowy grove which stands at the confines of the realm of Persephone. There thou shalt land with thy company, and dig a trench a cubit in length and breadth, and pour about it a libation of mead and water and wine; and after that thou shalt offer a sacrifice of black sheep, in such wise that the blood thereof shall flow into the trench and fill it. Thither will flock the whole multitude of departed spirits, to drink of the blood; but do thou draw thy sword, and hold it over the trench, nor suffer any of the other spirits to draw near until thou hast seen Teiresias and hearkened to his lore."

All that night Odysseus remained in deep conference with Circe, and as soon as day dawned he went to rouse his men who were sleeping in the outer chamber. "Up, comrades!" he cried, "all is prepared, and we must embark without delay." His loud summons proved fatal to one of the company, a certain Elpenor, the youngest of them all, who, the night before, had lain down to sleep on the housetop, for the sake of the coolness, being heated with wine. Roused suddenly by the voice of Odysseus, he staggered to his feet, and, still half asleep, stumbled over the parapet in his haste, and fell headlong from the roof.

In the hurry of their departure the body was left where it lay, and Odysseus, when they reached the ship, did not notice his absence. They found that Circe had been there before them, and left the victims for sacrifice bound to the vessel's side. She herself was nowhere to be seen, and so without another word of farewell they launched their galley and put out into the deep.



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The Visit to Hades

I

A clear, strong wind came down from the north, sent by the favour of the mighty enchantress Circe, and over the trackless sea they sped, where never furrow of mortal ship was seen before. After a long day's sail they came to the farther shore of the ocean stream, which surrounds the earth as with a girdle. There is the abode of the people called the Cimmerians, wrapped in shadow and mist; for never doth the sun look down upon them with his rays, neither when he climbs the starry sky, nor yet when he goeth down unto the place of his rest. And thus they dwell miserably under the curse of perpetual night.

As they peered through the gloom they saw what seemed a grove of dusky trees, in shape like the poplar and willow, fringing the shore. "It is the sign which Circe gave me," whispered Odysseus to his awestruck comrades; "we are at the very gates of Hades." Landing in silence, they carried the victims for sacrifice to the verge of the grove, and Odysseus with his sword dug a trench, a cubit in length and breadth, and poured about it a libation of mead and water and wine. Then the sheep were slaughtered, and the trench was filled to the brim with their blood. When the solemn rite was ended, Odysseus called in a loud voice to the spirits of the dead, and waited in breathless expectation with his men.

Presently a rustling sound was heard, like the sound of the autumn wind in the dry leaves of the forest; it grew louder and louder, and out of the gloom the ghosts came flocking, youths and maidens cut off in their bloom, old men with all their burden of sorrow, and warriors slain in battle, still wearing the bloodstained armour.[1] With a wild unearthly cry they came crowding to the trench, eager to drink of the blood. But Odysseus, though quaking with fear, stood his ground firmly, and held his drawn sword over the trench to keep off the multitude, until he had seen and spoken with Teiresias.

[Footnote 1: Compare "Stories from the Aeneid," p. 119.]

Among the hosts of spirits there was one who lingered near the trench, and seemed by his beseeching gestures and earnest looks to desire speech with Odysseus. When his first fears were over Odysseus recognised the features of Elpenor, who had come to an untimely end on the morning of their journey, and whose body still lay unburied in the house of Circe. Registering a mental vow to perform all due rites to that poor spirit on his homeward voyage, Odysseus warned him back, and stood waiting for the coming of the seer.



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At last came one with tottering footsteps, leaning on a golden sceptre, and halted on the farther edge of the trench. It seemed a very aged man, with flowing white beard, and sightless eyes; and Odysseus knew by these signs that he was in the presence of Teiresias, the famous prophet of Thebes, who alone among departed spirits preserves his understanding, while the rest are flitting phantoms, with no sense at all. "What wouldst thou of me, Odysseus, son of Laertes," said the spectre in faltering tones, "and wherefore hast thou left the glad light of day to visit this drear and joyless realm of the dead? Draw back from the trench, and put up thy sword in its sheath, that I may drink of the blood and tell thee all that thou wouldst know."

Thereupon Odysseus fell back, and sheathed his sword; and Teiresias, when he had drunk of the blood, spoke again in firmer and clearer tones: "Thou art fain to hear of thy home-coming, illustrious hero; but thy path to Ithaca shall be beset with sorrows, because of the wrath of Poseidon, whose son, Polyphemus, thou hast blinded. Nevertheless thou and all thy company shall return safe to Ithaca, if only ye leave untouched the sacred flocks and herds of Helios,[1] when ye come to the island of Thrinacia. But if harm befall them at your hands, from that hour thy ship and all her crew are doomed and forfeit to destruction: and though thou thyself escape, yet thou shalt return after many days, in evil plight, to a house of woe.[2] And now learn how thou mayest at last appease the anger of the god who pursues thee with his vengeance. When thou art once more master in thine own house thou shalt go on a far journey, carrying with thee an oar of thy vessel, until thou comest to a people that dwell far from the sea, and know naught of ships or the mariner's art. And there shalt meet thee by the way a man who shall say that thou bearest a winnowing shovel[3] on thy shoulder; and this shall be a sign unto thee, whereby thou shalt know that thou hast reached the end of thy journey. Then plant thy oar in the ground, and offer sacrifice to Poseidon. This shall be the end of thy toils, and death shall come softly upon thee where thou dwellest in a green old age among thy happy people."

[Footnote 1: The sun god.]

[Footnote 2: The very words of Polyphemus, p. 93.]

[Footnote 3: The oar.]

When he had thus spoken Teiresias vanished into the darkness; and one by one the spirits came up to the trench, as Odysseus suffered them, and having drunk of the blood obtained strength to speak and answer his questions. First among them was the spirit of his mother, Anticleia, daughter of Autolycus, who had been hovering near during his conference with Teiresias. When she had drunk she said: "Whence comest thou, my son? Art thou still wandering on thy long voyage from Troy, or hast thou been in Ithaca, and seen thy wife?"



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“Nay, mother,” answered Odysseus, “I am wandering still, still treading the path of woe, since the day when I followed Agamemnon to Troy. But tell me now, and answer me truly, what was the manner of thy death? Came it slowly, by long disease, or did Artemis lay thee low in a moment with a painless arrow from her bow?[1] And tell me of my father and my son whom I left in Ithaca; do they still hold my possessions, or hath some other thrust them with violence from my seat? Tell me also of Penelope, my wedded wife, whether she abides steadfast and guards my goods, or whether she is gone to cheer some other man’s heart.”

[Footnote 1: Sudden death was ascribed to Artemis or Apollo.]

“Steadfast indeed she is,” replied Anticleia, “and wondrous patient of heart; all her thoughts are ever of thee. No one has yet usurped thy place in Ithaca, but Telemachus still reaps thy fields and sits down to meat with the noblest in the land. As to thy father, he comes no more to the town, but dwells continually on his farm. He lives not delicately, as princes use, but is clad in sorry raiment, and sleeps in the winter among the ashes of the hearth with his thralls, and in summer on a bed of dry leaves in his vineyard. There he lies forsaken, heavy with years and sorrows, mourning for thee. And in such wise also death came upon me, neither by wasting sickness nor by the gentle shafts of Artemis, but my sore longing for thee, Odysseus, and for thy sweet counsels, at last broke my heart.”

A flood of tenderness overpowered Odysseus at these sad words, and he sprang forward with arms outstretched to clasp his mother to his breast. Thrice he essayed to embrace her, and thrice his arms closed on emptiness,[1] while that ghostly presence still flitted before him like a shadow or a dream. “O my mother,” cried Odysseus in deep distress, “why dost thou mock me thus? Come to my heart, dear mother; let me hold thee in mine arms once more, and mingle my tears with thine. Or art thou but the shadow of a shade, a phantom sent by Persephone to deceive me?”

[Footnote 1: Compare “Stories from the Aeneid,” p. 24.]

“Persephone deceives thee not,” answered the ghost, “but this is the fashion of mortals when they die. Flesh and bone and sinew are consumed by the might of fire, but the spirit takes flight and hovers ever like a winged dream. But make haste and get thee back to the daylight, and keep all that thou hast seen in memory that thou mayest tell it to thy wife.”

When the spirit of Anticleia was gone, a shadowy throng pressed forward to the trench, all the ghosts of noble dames, wives and daughters of princes. And Odysseus kept his place, sword in hand, suffering them only to drink one by one, that he might question them and learn their story. There he saw Alcmena, the mother of Hercules, and Leda, to whose twin sons, Castor and Pollux, a strange destiny was allotted; for after their death they rose to life again on alternate days,



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one lying in the tomb, while the other walked the earth as a living man. There too was Iphimedeia, mother of the giants Otus and Ephialtes, who at nine years of age were nine fathoms in height and nine cubits in breadth. Haughty were they, and presumptuous in their youth; for they made war on the gods, and piled Ossa on Olympus, and Pelion on Ossa, that they might scale the sky. But they perished in their impiety, shot down by the bolts of Apollo's golden bow. Last came Eriphyle, the false wife, who sold her husband's life for a glittering bribe.

That dream of fair women melted away and another ghostly band succeeded, the souls of great captains and mighty men of war. Foremost among these was seen one of regal port, around whom was gathered a choice company of veteran warriors, all gored and gashed with recent wounds. He who seemed their leader stretched out his hands towards Odysseus with a piteous gesture, and tears such as spirits weep^[1] gushed from his eyes. Instantly Odysseus recognised in that stricken spirit his great commander Agamemnon, once the proud captain of a thousand ships, now wandering, forlorn and feeble, with all his glory faded.

[Footnote 1: "Tears such as *angels* weep," Milton, "Paradise Lost," i. 619.]

"Royal son of Atreus," he said, in a voice broken with weeping, "is it here that I find thee, great chieftain of the embattled Greeks? Say, how comest thou hither, and what arm aimed the stroke which laid thee low?" "Not in honour's field did I fall," answered Agamemnon, "nor yet amid the waves. It was a traitor's hand that cut me off, the hand of AEGISTHUS, and the guile of my accursed wife. He feasted me at his board, and slaughtered me as one slaughters a stalled ox; and all my company fell with me in that den of butchery. It was pitiful to see all that brave band of veterans writhing in their death agony among the tables loaded with good cheer, and goblets brimming with wine. But that which gave me my sorest pang was the dying shriek of Cassandra, daughter of Priam, who was struck down at my side by the dagger of Clytaemnestra. Then the murderess turned away and left me with staring eyes and mouth gaping in death. For naught is so vile, naught so cruel, as a woman who hath hardened her heart to tread the path of crime. Even so did she break her marriage vows, and afterwards slew the husband of her youth. I thought to have found far other welcome when I passed under the shadow of mine own roof-tree. But this demon-wife imagined evil against me, and brought infamy on the very name of woman."

"Strange ordinance of Zeus!" said Odysseus musingly, "which hath turned the choicest blessing of man's life, the love of woman, into the bitterest of curses for thee and for thy house. Yea, and upon all the land of Hellas hath woe been brought by the deed of a woman—Helen, thy brother's wife."



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“Ay, trust them not,” replied Agamemnon bitterly, “Never give thy heart into a woman’s keeping; she will rifle thy very soul’s flower, and then laugh thee to scorn. But why do I speak thus to thee? Thou hast indeed a treasure in thy wife; no wiser head, no truer heart, than hers. Happy art thou, and sweet the refuge which is prepared for thee after all thy toils, Well I remember the day when we set sail from Greece, and how fondly thou spakest of her, thy young bride, with her babe at her breast. Now he will be a tall youth, and with what joy will he look into the eyes of his father, whom he was then too young to know!”

After that Odysseus was silent, his mind full of sweet and anxious thoughts. Meanwhile other familiar forms had drawn near, the spirits of warriors renowned, whose very names were as a battle-cry when they dwelt on earth: Achilles, Patroclus, and Antilochus, and farther off, looming dimly in the darkness, the gigantic shade of Ajax. Achilles was the first to speak. “Son of Laertes,” he said, “thou man of daring, hast thou reached the limit of thy rashness, or wilt thou go yet further? Are there no perils left for thee in the land of the living that thou must invade the very realm of Hades, the sunless haunts of the dead?”

“I came to inquire of Teiresias,” answered Odysseus, “concerning my return to Ithaca. All my life I am a bonds slave to toil and woe; but thou, Achilles, wast happy in thy life, honoured as a god by all the sons of Hellas; and now thou art happy, even in death, for honour waits on thy footsteps still.”

“Tell me not of comfort in death,” replied Achilles. “Rather would I breathe the air of heaven, yea, though I were thrall to a man of little substance, than reign as king over all the shades of the dead. But give me some news of my son, Neoptolemus. Came he to fight with the Trojans after I was gone, and did he acquit him well? And knowest thou aught of my father, Peleus? Lives he still in honour and comfort among my people, or has he been driven into beggary by violent men, now that he is old and I am not near to aid him? Oh, for an hour of life, with such might as was mine when I fought in the van for Greece? Then should they pay a bitter reckoning, whosoever they be that wrong him and keep him from his own.”

“Of Peleus,” answered Odysseus, “I have heard nothing, but of thy son, Neoptolemus, I can tell thee much, for I myself brought him from Scyros to fight in Helen’s cause, and thereafter my eye was ever upon him, to mark how he bore himself. In council none could vie with him, save only Nestor and myself; ne’er saw I so rare a wit in so young a head. And when the Greeks were arrayed in battle against the Trojans he was never seen to hang back, but fought ever in the van among the foremost champions, like a mighty man of war. Nor was it only in the clamour and heat of war that he proved his mettle; for in that perilous hour when we lay ambushed in the wooden horse, when the stoutest hearts among us quailed, he never changed colour, but sat fingering his spear and sword, waiting for the signal to go forth to the assault. And after we had sacked the

lofty towers of Troy he received a goodly portion of the spoil, and a special prize of honour, and so departed, untouched by point or blade, to his father's house."



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When he heard these brave tidings of his son, Achilles rejoiced in spirit, and strode with lofty gait along the plain of asphodel.

So one by one the spirits came up, and inquired of Odysseus of their dear ones at home. Only the soul of Ajax, son of Telamon, stood sullenly aloof; for between him and Odysseus there was an old quarrel. After the death of Achilles a dispute arose among the surviving chieftains for the possession of his armour. It was decided to refer the matter to the Trojan captives in the camp, and they were asked who of all the Greeks had done them most harm. They answered in favour of Odysseus, who accordingly received the armour. Thereupon Ajax fell into a frenzy of rage, and slew himself. When Odysseus saw him, and marked his unforgiving mood, he was filled with remorse and pity, and strove to soften his resentment with gentle words. "Ah! son of Telamon," he said, "canst thou not forgive me, even here? Sorely the Argives mourned thee, and heavy was the loss brought on them by thy rash act. Thou wast a very tower of strength to the host, and we wept for thee as for a second Achilles. Draw near, great prince, subdue thy haughty spirit, and speak to me as thou wast wont to speak before the will of heaven set enmity between us."

Thus earnestly Odysseus pleaded, but there was no reply, and the angry spirit passed away into the gloom of Erebus.[1]

[Footnote 1: Compare the silence of Dido, "Stories from the Aeneid," p. 123.]

II

Odysseus still lingered, hoping yet to have speech with other souls of heroes who had once rivalled him in valour and wisdom while they dwelt in the flesh. But he was destined to see another and more awful vision. Suddenly the pall of darkness which shrouded the secrets of the nether abyss was lifted, and the whole realm of Hades was exposed to view. There he saw the place of torment, where great malefactors atone for their crime, and Minos, the infernal judge, sitting at the gates, passing sentence, and giving judgment among the shades. Within appeared the gigantic form of Tityos, stretched at full length along the ground, and two vultures sat ever at his side, tearing his liver. This was his punishment for violence offered to Leto, the mother of Apollo and Artemis. Not far from him appeared Tantalus, plunged up to the neck in a cool stream; the water lapped against his chin, but he had not power to drink it, though he was tormented with a burning thirst. As often as he stooped to drink, the water was swallowed up, and the earth lay dry as the desert sand at his feet. And nodding boughs of trees drooped, heavy with delicious fruit, over his head; but when he put forth his hand to pluck the fruit, a furious gust of wind swept it away far beyond his reach. And yet another famous criminal he saw, Sisyphus, the most cunning and most covetous of the sons of men. He was toiling painfully up a steep mountain's side, heaving a weighty stone before him, and straining with hands and feet to push it to the summit. But every

time he approached the top, the stone slipped through his hands, and thundered and smoked down the mountain's side till it reached the plain.



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Other wonders and terrors might still have been revealed, but as that hardy watcher stood at his post a great tumult and commotion arose in that populous city of the dead, and the whole multitude of its ghostly denizens came rushing towards the trench, as if resolved to expel the daring intruder. Odysseus' heart failed him when he saw the air thick with hovering spectres, who glared with dreadful eyes, and filled the air with the sound of their unearthly voices. Turning his back on that place of horror he made his way slowly towards the shore, where he found his men anxiously awaiting him.

The Sirens; Scylla and Charybdis; Thrinacia

I

Following the same course as on his outward voyage, Odysseus put in again at the island of Circe, where his first duty was to bury the body of the young Elpenor, whose ghost he had seen in an attitude of mute reproach at the threshold of Hades. They were again received with all hospitality by Circe.

After the evening meal Circe drew Odysseus apart, and questioned him on all that he had seen and heard on that strange journey, from which he had returned, as she said, like one ransomed from death. And when he had told his story she instructed him as to the course which he had to steer on leaving the island, and warned him against the manifold perils of the voyage.

"First," said she, "thou wilt come to the rocks of the Sirens, maidens of no mortal race, who beguile the ears of all that hear them. Woe to him who draws near to listen to their song! He shall never see the faces of his wife and children again, or feel their arms about his neck, but there he shall perish, and there his bones shall rot. Therefore take heed, and when thou drawest near the place stop the ears of thy men with wax, and bid them bind thee fast with cords, that thou mayest hear the song of the Sirens. And when that seducing melody fills thine ears, thou wilt beg and implore thy comrades to set thee free, that thou mayest draw near and have speech of the Sirens. Then let them bind thee more firmly to the mast, and take to their oars, and fly the enchanted rocks.

"This peril past, thou hast the choice of two different routes. One of these will bring thee to the Wandering Isles, which stand, front to front, with steep slippery sides of rock, running sheer down to the sea. Between them lies a narrow way, which is the very gate of death. For if aught living attempts to pass between, those rocky jaws close upon it and grind it to powder. Only the doves which bear ambrosia to Father Zeus can pass that awful strait, and one of these pays toll with her life as she passes, but Zeus sends another to fill her place. And one ship sailed safely through, even the famous *Argo* when she bore Jason and his crew on their voyage from the land of Aëetes. All others

when they essayed the task perished, and were brought to naught in a whirlwind of foam and fire.



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“But if thou takest the other way thou wilt come to another strait, guarded day and night by two sleepless sentinels, Scylla and Charybdis. On one side thereof towers a lofty peak, shrouded, even in the noon of summer, in clouds and thick darkness. No mortal man could climb that steep and slippery rock, not though he had twenty hands and twenty feet; for the side is smooth as polished marble, and in the midst of the cliff is a shadowy cave overlooking the track by which thou must guide thy ship, Odysseus. Deep down it goes into the heart of the mountain, so that a man in his lusty prime could not shoot an arrow from his ship to the bottom of that yawning pit. In the cave dwells Scylla, and yelps without ceasing. Her voice is thin and shrill, like the cry of a hound newly littered, but she herself is a monster horrible to behold, so that neither man nor god could face her without affright. Twelve feet hath she, and six necks of prodigious length, and on each neck a fearful head, whose ravening jaws are armed with triple rows of teeth. As far as her waist she is hidden in the hollow cave, but she thrusts out her serpent necks from the abyss, and fishes in the waters for dolphins and sea-dogs and other creatures whose pasture is the sea. On every ship that passes her den she levies a tribute of six of her crew.

“On the other side of the strait thou wilt see a second rock, lying flat and low, about a bowshot from the first. There stands a great fig-tree, thick with leaves, and under it sits Charybdis, sucking down the water, and belching it up again three times a day. Beware that thou approach not when she sucks down the water, for then none could save thee from destruction, no, not Poseidon himself. Rather steer thy galley past Scylla’s cave, for it is better to lose six of thy men than to lose them all.

“Next thou shalt come to the island of Thrinacia, where graze the oxen of Helios and his goodly sheep—seven herds of oxen, and as many fair flocks of sheep, and fifty in each flock and herd. They are not born, neither do they die, and two goddesses have charge of them, fair-haired nymphs, the daughters of Helios. Take heed that thou harm not the sacred beasts, that it may be well with thee, and that thou and thy company may come safely home.”

II

Once more they were afloat, and the brave little vessel bounded gaily over the waves, her canvas bellying in the wind. For some hours they sailed on thus, and Odysseus recited to his men all that he had heard from Circe. Then suddenly the wind dropped, and the sail hung idly to the mast. Having furled and stowed the sail, they took to their oars, while the sea went down, and at last sunk to a level calm. In the distance a low-lying coast appeared, which Odysseus knew to be the island of the Sirens, Forthwith he began to make his preparations to meet the danger which lay before them. Taking a ball of wax he

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cut it into small pieces, and having worked each piece in his hand until it was soft and plastic he carefully stopped the ears of all his men with the wax. Then two of the crew, to whom he had already given his orders, bound him hand and foot to the mast of the vessel. All being ready, they rowed forward until they came within full view of the island. And there, in a low-lying meadow hard by the sea, sat the Sirens; lovely they were of aspect, and gracious of mien; but all around them were piled the bones of men who had fallen victims to their wicked wit,[1] fleshless ribs, from which the skin still hung in yellow shreds, and grinning skulls, gazing with eyeless sockets at the sea.

[Footnote 1: Shakespeare, "Hamlet."]

As the ship drew near, the whole choir lifted up their voices and began to sing a sweet and piercing strain, which thrilled the very marrow of Odysseus as he listened. The winds hovered near on flagging wing, the sea lay locked in deep repose, and all nature paused with attentive ear, to catch the SONG OF THE SIRENS.

"Mighty warrior, sage renowned,
Turn, O turn thy bark this way!
Rest upon this holy ground,
Listen to the Sirens' lay.
Never yet was seaman found
Passing our enchanted bay,
But he paused, and left our bound
Filled with wisdom from his stay.
All we know, whatever befell
On the tented fields of Troy,
All the lore that Time can tell,
All the mystic fount of joy."

It was a strain cunningly calculated to flatter a deep, subtle spirit like that of Odysseus. To know all! to read all secrets, and unravel the tangled skein of human destiny! What a bribe was this to this restless and eager mind! Then the voices of the witch-women were so liquid, and the music so lovely, that they took the very air with ravishment, and melted the hearer's soul within him. Odysseus struggled to break his bonds, and nodded to his men to come and loose him. But they, who had been warned of this very thing, rose up and bound him with fresh cords. Then they grasped their oars again, the water roared under their sturdy strokes, and soon they were out of hearing of that seductive melody.

They had not long lost sight of the Sirens' Rocks when they heard the booming of breakers, which warned them that the fearful strait between Scylla and Charybdis was close at hand. A strong current caught the galley and whirled her with appalling



swiftness towards the point of danger. The water boiled and eddied around them, and the blinding spray was dashed into their faces. Then a sudden panic came upon the crew, so that they dropped their oars, and sat helpless and unnerved, expecting instant death. In this emergency, Odysseus summoned up all his courage, and strode up and down between the benches, exhorting, entreating, and calling each man by name. "Why sit ye thus," he cried, "huddled together like sheep? Row, men, row for your lives! And thou, helmsman, steer straight for the passage, lest we fall into a direr strait, and be crushed between the Wandering Rocks. We have faced a worse peril than this, when we were penned together in the Cyclops' cave; and we shall escape this time also, if only ye will keep a stout heart."



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Circe had cautioned Odysseus on no account to attempt resistance when he approached the cave of Scylla; nevertheless, he put on his armour, and took his stand on the prow of the vessel, holding in each hand a lance.

So on they sped, steering close to the tall cliff under which Scylla lay hid, and gazing fearfully at the boiling whirlpool on the other side. Just as they passed, a huge column of water shot into the air, belched up from the vast maw of Charybdis, and the galley was half swamped under a fountain of falling water. When that ended, a black yawning chasm appeared, the very throat, as it seemed, of Charybdis, into which the water rushed in a roaring torrent.

Odysseus was gazing intently at this wondrous sight when he heard a sharp cry, and, looking back he saw six of his men, the stoutest of the crew, dangling high in the air, firmly clutched in the six sharklike jaws of Scylla. There they hung for a moment, like fishes just caught by the angler's hook; the next instant they were dragged into the black mouth of the cavern, calling with their last breath on their leader's name. This was the most pitiful thing that Odysseus had ever beheld, in all his long years of travel on the sea.

III

The last trial was now at hand, and if they could stand this final test a happy home-coming was promised to them all. By next day's dawn they ran down to the fair isle of Helios, and as they drew near they heard the lowing of oxen and the bleating of sheep. Then Odysseus remembered the warnings of Circe and Teiresias, and sought to persuade his men to sail past the island and fly from the reach of temptation. But they murmured against him, and Eurylochus, his lieutenant, gave voice to their feelings thus: "Thou man of iron, thou hast no pity on us, but thinkest that we are all as hardy and as strong as thou art. Hungry and weary as we are, wouldst thou have us turn away from this fair isle, where we could prepare a comfortable meal, and take refreshing sleep? Shall we add the horrors of night to the horrors of the sea, and confront the demons of storm that haunt the caverns of darkness? Nay, suffer us to abide here to-night, and to-morrow we will hoist sail again."

Odysseus saw by the looks of his men that it would be useless to strain his authority, and so he gave way, though with sore reluctance, only exacting a solemn oath from the whole company that they would keep their hands off the cattle of Helios. When each in turn had taken the oath they landed on the shore of a sheltered bay, and encamped by a fair spring of fresh water.

During the night it began to blow hard, and early next morning, as the weather was still stormy and the wind contrary, they hauled up their galley and bestowed her in a roomy

cave, beyond the reach of wind and water. Odysseus repeated his warnings, and the crew then dispersed, to while away the time until the weather should mend.



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For a whole month they had nothing but contrary gales from the south and east, and long before that time had run out they had come to the end of their store of provisions. For some time they contrived to live on the fish which they caught by angling from the rocks, though this was but poor fare for the robust appetites of those heroic days.

All this time Odysseus kept a careful watch over the movements of his men, fearing that they might be driven by hunger to break the oath which they had taken. But one morning he wandered away to a distant part of the island, that he might spend an hour in solitary prayer and meditation. Having found a secluded spot, he washed his hands, and prayed earnestly to the gods for succour: and when he had prayed, heaven so ordered it that he fell into a deep sleep.

Then the demon of mischief entered into the heart of Eurylochus, a factious knave, who had more than once thwarted the counsels of Odysseus. "Comrades," he said, "let us make an end of this misery. Death in any shape is loathly to us poor mortals, but death by hunger is the most hideous of all. Come, let us take the choicest of the herds of Helios, and feast upon them, after sacrifice to the gods. When we return to Ithaca we will build a temple to Helios, and appease him with rich offerings. And even though he choose to wreck our ship and drown us all, I would rather swallow the brine, and so make an end, than waste away by inches on a desert island."

The famishing sailors lent a ready ear to his words, and having picked out the fattest of the oxen they slaughtered them and offered sacrifice, plucking the leaves of an oak as a substitute for the barley-meal for sprinkling between the horns of the victims, and pouring libations of water instead of wine. When the vain rite was finished, they spitted slices of the meat, and roasted them over the glowing embers.

Meanwhile Odysseus had awakened from his sleep, and made his way, not without forebodings of ill, back to the camp. As he approached, the steam of roasting meat was borne to his nostrils. "Woe is me!" he cried, "the deed is done! What a price must we now pay for one hour of sleep."

Vengeance, indeed, was already prepared. Helios received prompt news of the sacrilege from one of the nymphs who had charge of his flocks and herds, and hastened to Olympus to demand speedy punishment for the transgressors, vowing that if they escaped he would leave the earth in darkness and carry the lamp of day to the nether world. Zeus promised that the retribution should be swift and complete, and Helios thereupon returned immediately to his daily round, knowing full well that the father of gods would keep his word.

When Odysseus entered the camp he rebuked his men bitterly for their impiety. But no words, and no repentance, could now repair the mischief; the cattle were slain, and in that very hour dire portents occurred, to show them the enormity of their crime. A

strange moaning sound, like the lowing of kine, came from the meat on the spits, and the hides of the slaughtered beasts crawled and writhed.



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In spite of these dreadful omens they continued for six days to feast upon the herds of Helios. On the seventh day the wind blew fair, and they launched their vessel and continued their voyage. The last vestige of the island had hardly been lost to view when the sky became black with clouds, and a violent squall struck the ship, snapping her mast, which fell upon the helmsman, and dashed out his brains. A moment after, a deafening peal of thunder broke overhead, and the avenging bolt of Zeus fell upon the ship, scattering her timbers, and strewing the charred carcasses of the crew upon the waves.

Odysseus alone escaped with his life from that tremendous stroke, and clinging to a spar floated all day, until he came in sight of the strait between Scylla and Charybdis. By the favour of heaven he was once more preserved from this great peril, and on the tenth day after the loss of his vessel he was thrown ashore by the waves on the island of Calypso.

Odysseus lands in Ithaca

I

The last farewell has been spoken, the good ship is loosed from her moorings, and Alcinous is standing on the quay, surrounded by the nobles of Phaeacia, to bid his illustrious guest god-speed. The picked crew bend to their oars, and the galley leaps forward, like a mettled steed who knows his master's voice. The setting sun is just gilding the towers of the city as they cross the harbour bar. Swift as a falcon the magic vessel skims over the swelling waters, and the toil-worn hero lays him down to rest on a soft couch prepared for him in the stern. Then a deep and deathlike sleep falls upon him, and he lies breathing gently as an infant, while the soft southern breeze plays with his dark clustering hair.

There is a certain haven in the island of Ithaca, protected by two lofty headlands, leaving a narrow passage between them. Within, the water is so still that ships lie there without moorings, safe and motionless. At the head of the haven is a long-leaved olive-tree, overshadowing a cool and pleasant cave, sacred to the "Nymphs called Naiads, of the running brooks."^[1] Inside the cave are bowls and pitchers of stone, and great stone looms, at which the Naiads weave their fine fabrics of sea-purple dye. It is a favourite haunt of the honey-bee, whose murmurs mingled with the splashing of perennial springs make drowsy music in the place. There are two gates to the cavern, one towards the north, where mortal feet may pass, and the other on the south side, which none may enter save the gods alone.

[Footnote 1: Shakespeare, "Tempest."]



The day-star was gazing on that still, glassy mere as the Phaeacians steered between the sentinel cliffs and drove their galley ashore in front of the cave. They lifted Odysseus, still sleeping, from the stern, and laid him down gently, couch and all, on the sand. Then they brought all the rich gifts, and set them down by the root of the olive-tree, out of the reach of any chance wayfarer; and having bestowed all safely they launched their ship, and started on their voyage home.



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But they were destined to pay dear for their good service to the stranger. Poseidon marked their course with a jealous eye, and he went to his brother, Zeus, and thus preferred his complaint: "Behold now this man hath reached home in safety and honour, and brought the oath to naught which I swear against him, when I vowed that he should return to Ithaca in evil plight! Is my power to be defied, and my worship slighted, by these Phaeacians, who are of mine own race?"

"Thine honour is in thine own hands," answered Zeus. "Assert thy power, lift up thy hand and strike, that all men may fear to infringe thy privilege as lord of the sea."

Having thus obtained his brother's consent, Poseidon went and took his stand by the harbour mouth at Phaeacia, and as soon as the vessel drew near he smote her with his hand, and turned her with all her crew into a rock, which remains there, rooted in the sea, unto this day.

II

Twilight had not yielded to day when Odysseus awoke from his trancelike sleep, and gazed in bewilderment around him. His senses had not yet fully come back to him, and after his twenty years' absence he knew not where he was. All seemed strange—the winding paths, the harbour, the cliffs, and the very trees. With a cry of dismay he sprang to his feet, and cried aloud: "Good lack, what land have I come to now, and who be they that dwell there? Are they savage and rude, or gentle and hospitable to strangers?" Then his eye fell on the gifts which had been brought with him from Phaeacia. What was he to do with all this wealth? "Now this is a sorry trick which the Phaeacians have played me," he muttered again, "to carry me to a strange land, when they had promised to convey me safe to Ithaca."

So unworthily did Odysseus deem of his benefactors that he fell to counting his goods, for fear lest they should have carried off a portion of the gifts while he slept. He found the tale complete, and when he had finished counting them he wandered disconsolate along the sand, mourning for the country which he thought still far away. As he went thus, with heavy steps and downcast eyes, a shadow fell across his path, and looking up he saw a fair youth, clad and armed like a young prince, who stood before him and smiled in his face with kindly eyes. Glad to meet anyone of so friendly an aspect, Odysseus greeted him, asked for his countenance and protection, and inquired the name of the country.

"Either thou art simple," answered the youth, "or thy home is far away, if thou knowest not this land. It is a place not unknown to fame, but named with honour wherever mortal speech is heard. Rugged indeed it is, and unfit for horses and for chariots, but rich in corn and wine, and blessed by the soft rain of heaven. On its green pastures roam countless flocks and herds, and streams pour their abundance from its forest-clad

hills. Therefore the name of Ithaca is spoken far and wide, and hath reached even to the distant land of Troy.”

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The wanderer's heart burned within him when he heard his dear native island described with such loving praise. But dissembling his joy he set his nimble wits to work, and began to spin a fine fiction for the stranger's ear. "I have heard of Ithaca," he said, "as thou sayest, even in Troy, where I fought under Idomeneus, King of Crete. And now I am an exile, flying from the vengeance of Idomeneus, whose son, Orsilochus, I slew, because he sought to deprive me of my share in the Trojan spoil. For he bore a grudge against me, because I would not pay court to his father at Troy, but made a party of my own, and fought for my own hand. For him I laid an ambush, and slew him in a secret place, under cover of night. Then I fled down to the sea, and bribed the crew of a Phoenician ship to carry me and my goods to Pylos. But the storm wind drove them out of their course, and they put in here for shelter. Sore battered and weary we landed here, having hardly escaped with our lives; and while I slept they brought my goods ashore, and sailed away for Sidon, leaving me alone with my sorrow."

Intent on his tale, Odysseus had not noticed the sudden change which had come over his hearer; for his eyes had been turned away, as he strove to spell out the features of the country, which still seemed unfamiliar. Now he looked round again, and instead of that dainty youth he saw a stately female form, tall and fair, in aspect like the mighty goddess Athene. And in truth it was the daughter of Zeus herself who answered him, smiling and touching him with a playful gesture. "Thou naughty rogue!" she said, "wilt thou never forget thy cunning shifts, wherein none can surpass thee, no, not the gods themselves? Yea, thou hast a knavish wit, and no man can equal thee in craft, as no god can rival me. Yet for all thy skill thou knewest me not for Pallas Athene, who is ever near thee in all thy trials, and made thee dear to all the Phaeacians. And now am I come to help thee hide thy goods, and weave a plot to ensnare the foes who beset thy house. Thou hast still much to endure, before thy final triumph, and thou must enter thy halls as a stranger, and suffer many things by the hands of violent men."

"It is hard, O goddess," answered Odysseus, "for a mortal man to know thee, keen though he be of wit; for thou appearest in a hundred shapes. Yet well I know that thou wast kind to me in days of old, when I fought with the Greeks at Troy. But since that time I have never seen thee, in all my wanderings and perils, save once in Phaeacia. Now tell me truly, I implore thee, what is this place where I am wandering? Thou saidst 'twas Ithaca, but in that I think thou speakest falsely, with intent to deceive me; or is this indeed my native land?"



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“Ever the same Odysseus as of old,” said Athene, smiling again, “cautious and wary, and hard to convince. Verily thou art a man after mine own heart, and therefore can I never leave thee or forsake thee in all thy cares. Any other man would have rushed to embrace his wife, after so many years of wandering; but thou must needs prove her and make trial of her constancy, before thou takest her to thy heart. And if thou wouldst know why I held aloof from thee so long, it was because of Poseidon, my father’s brother, who ever pursued thee with his ire. Yet I knew that thou wouldst return at last, and have waited patiently for that hour, And now I will open thine eyes, that thou mayest know the land of thy birth.”

As she spoke she touched his eyes, and a mist seemed to fall away from them, so that he recognised every feature of the place, the slopes of Neritus, waving with forest trees, the spreading olive-tree, the harbour, and the cavern where he had many a time sacrificed to the nymphs. Then Odysseus rejoiced in spirit, and kneeling down he kissed his native soil, and put up a prayer to the guardian deities of the place: “Greeting, lovely Naiads, maiden daughters of Zeus! Ne’er hoped I to see your faces again, Give ear unto my prayer, and if I live and prosper by the favour of Athene I will pay you rich offerings, as I was wont to do.”

“Doubt not my good-will,” said Athene, when he had finished; “that is assured thee. But it is time to secure these goods of thine in a safe hiding-place. After that we will advise what is next to be done.”

With that she dived into the cave, closely followed by Odysseus, and showed him where he best might conceal his treasure. When all was safely bestowed, she set a great stone in the mouth of the cavern, and sat down at the foot of the olive-tree, motioning Odysseus to take his place at her side. “Now mark my words,” began Athene, “thou hast a heavy task before thee, to purge thy house of the shameless crew who for three years past have held the mastery there, and sought to tempt thy wife from her loyalty to thee. All this time she has been putting them off with promises which she has no mind to fulfil.”

“Tis well,” answered Odysseus, “that thou hast warned me; else had I fallen in my own hall, even as Agamemnon fell. But come, contrive some cunning device, whereby I may avenge me, and be thou at my side to aid me, that my heart fail me not. Pour into me the same might and the same valour as when we sacked Priam’s royal citadel; then should I fear nothing, though I fought single-handed against three hundred men.”



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“I will not fail thee, of that be sure,” replied Athene, “when the time comes to enter on that task. They shall pay full dear for thy substance which they devour, even with their very blood and brains, which shall be shed upon the ground like water. But thou must not appear among them in this fashion. I will give thee a disguise which none can penetrate, not even Penelope herself. And when thou leavest this place, go first to the swineherd, who abides ever by his charge, faithful to thee and to thy house. Thou wilt find him sitting by the swine on their feeding ground, near Raven’s Rock and the fountain Arethusa, where there is abundance of acorns and fair water. Remain there and inquire of him concerning all things, while I go to Sparta to summon Telemachus, thy son, who went to visit Menelaus to ask news of thee.”

“Why didst thou permit him to go on a vain errand?” asked Odysseus. “Was it that he might suffer as I have suffered, in wandering o’er the deep, while others devour his living?”

“Be not over anxious for him,” answered Athene; “I myself sent him on that quest, that he might win a good name among men. And now he sits secure in the wealthy house of Menelaus, dwelling in luxury and honour. The wooers have laid an ambush against his return; but all their malice shall be brought to naught.”

It was now time for Odysseus to start on his way to the swineherd. But first he had to submit to a strange transformation. Athene touched him with a rod which she was carrying, and instantly the flesh shrivelled on his limbs, the clustering locks fell away from his head, and the keen, piercing glance of his eyes was quenched. He who a moment before had been a mighty man in his prime was now become a wrinkled, aged beggar, clad in miserable, grimy rags, with a staff, and a tattered scrip, hanging by a cord from his shoulder. For a cloak she gave him an old deer’s hide, from which all the hair was gone. Thus totally disguised, he parted from the goddess, and started inland, following a rugged mountain path, while Athene went to summon Telemachus from Sparta.

Odysseus and Eumaeus

I

The office of swineherd was a position of great trust and importance among the patriarchal chieftains of Homeric Greece. The principal diet was the flesh of swine and oxen, and these animals formed the chief part of their wealth. Eumaeus, the chief swineherd of Odysseus, lived apart in a lonely place among the hills, where he had enclosed a wide space of ground with a stone fence defended at the top with brambles, and in front by a palisade of oak. Within the fence were twelve styes, and in each stye were fifty sows with their young. The boars had their quarters outside the enclosure,

and their number had been greatly diminished by the constant demand for hog's flesh among the suitors. Still, they reached the formidable total of three hundred and fifty—a noisy and ravenous multitude.



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It was no light task to provide shelter for nearly a thousand swine, with their young; yet Eumaeus had undertaken this duty during his master's long absence, without the knowledge of Laertes or Penelope. And here he was sitting, on this sunny morning, cutting up a well-tanned ox-hide to make straps for sandals, while four dogs, large and fierce as wolves, prowled near at hand. Three of his helpers were gone with the swine to their feeding ground, and the fourth had been sent to the town with a fat hog for the wooers.

Suddenly the dogs rushed forward, baying furiously, and an old man in tattered raiment appeared at the gate of the courtyard. It would have gone hard with the stranger if Eumaeus had not promptly come to the rescue, and driven the dogs off with a volley of stones. "Old man," said Eumaeus, as the dogs slunk away yelping, "it was well that I was near, or thou hadst surely been torn to pieces, and brought shame on me. I have trouble enough without that. Here I sit, fattening my master's swine for other men's tables, while he wanders, perchance, among strangers, in poverty and want. But come into my hut, and when thou hast comforted thy soul with meat and wine thou shalt tell thy tale of sorrow."

Odysseus (for he it was, though sorely disfigured) followed Eumaeus into the hut, and sat down on a shaggy goatskin, which the swineherd spread for him on a heap of brushwood. "Heaven bless thee," he said, when he was seated, "for this kindly welcome!" "I do but my duty," answered Eumaeus. "The stranger and the beggar are sacred, by law divine. 'Tis but little that I can do, who serve young and haughty masters, in the absence of my true lord, who would have rewarded me nobly, and given me a plot of ground and a wife, had he been here to see how Heaven blesses the work of my hands. But he is gone to swell the host of those who fell in Helen's cause. Cursed be she, and all her race, for she hath robbed me of the kindest master that ever man served."

In the midst of his sorrow, Eumaeus forgot not his duties as host. Going out he took two young swine, slaughtered and dressed them, and set the flesh, all smoking on the spits, before Odysseus. Then he mixed wine in a bowl of ivy wood, and sitting down opposite to his guest bade him eat and drink.

"'Tis but poor fare which I have to offer you," he said. "The best of the herd ever goes to the young lords who are wooing my mistress. Their wantonness and riot calls aloud to Heaven for vengeance. They are worse than the wildest band of robbers that ever lived by open pillage and violence. Such waste of good meat and wine was never seen before. For a wealthy man was Odysseus, and his flocks and herds still range over all the hills of Ithaca. And from every flock the fattest and the choicest is driven off day by day to feed their dainty mouths."

Odysseus fell to with keen appetite, for he had eaten nothing since he left Phaeacia. And when he had satisfied his hunger he pledged Eumaeus in a full cup, and led him on



to discourse on his favourite theme—the virtues and the sorrows of his lord. “Tell me more,” he said, “of thy master. Who knows but that I may have met him in my travels, for I have wandered in many lands.”



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“Old man,” answered Eumaeus, “I see thy bent. Thou wouldst forge some glozing tale to beguile the ears of that poor stricken lady, Penelope. Many a beggar has come to her doors crammed full of lies to amuse her widowed heart; and she listens, and doubts, and weeps. And thou too, methinks, hast a like fertile fancy; for hunger and want are rare inventors. But save thy wits for a better purpose; thou canst not bring him back to life, or clothe with warm flesh his bones, long since picked clean by carrion birds or ravenous fish. He is lost for ever, and sorrow is the portion of us who remain, but especially of me, for he was dearer to me than father and mother, dearer than my native land.”

“Friend,” said Odysseus, “thou hast misjudged me sorely, in thinking me one of those greedy mendicants who tell lies for the sake of meat and drink. Believe me or not, I will say what is in my heart, and when my words are proved true by the event I will claim my reward. Odysseus is near at hand, and ere many days have passed he shall be seen in Ithaca, and take vengeance on those who oppress his wife and son. I swear it by this table at which I have eaten, and by the hearth of Odysseus, and by Zeus, the god of hospitality.”

Eumaeus remained totally unconvinced by this solemn assertion. “Talk no more of him,” he said with emotion, “it cuts me to the heart to hear his very name. Would that it might be as thou sayest!—but ’tis an idle dream. Peace be unto his ashes! And may the gods at least preserve unto us his son, Telemachus, who lately departed on a witless errand, led thereto, as I think, by some malign deity who hates the house of Odysseus. But no more of this! Tell me rather of thyself, who and whence thou art, and how thou camest to Ithaca.”

Eumaeus had not extolled the fertile invention of Odysseus for nothing. Forthwith he began a wondrous tale of adventure, a little epic in itself, with some points of resemblance to his own true story. “I am a native of Crete,” he began, “and the son of a wealthy man. When my father died I received but a scanty portion of his goods. Nevertheless, because of my valour and the might of my hands, I won a noble and wealthy lady for my wife. Thou wouldst not deem, perhaps, to see me now, that I was once a mighty man of war; yet even in the stubble we may judge what the wheat has been. From my youth up I lived amidst the clash of shield and spear, and loved battle and ambush, siege and foray. But I cared not for plodding industry, which gives increase unto a house, and fills it with the bright faces of children. Such I was as Heaven made me, a man of war and blood.



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“Before the sons of Greece went up to Troy I was nine times chosen captain of an armed band to make war in the land of strangers, and came back laden with booty, so that my name was known and dreaded in Crete. And when the summons went round in all the coasts of Greece to follow the banner of Agamemnon, who but I was chosen by the common voice to share the command with Idomeneus? I was fain to renounce that hard and perilous service, but it might not be; so for nine years I fought at Troy, and after our return to Crete I abode but one month with my wife and children, for at the end of that time my spirit called me to Egypt. I manned nine ships, and on the fifth day the north wind brought me safe with all my company to the land of Nile.

“Then I sent out a few chosen men to explore the country, and kept myself close with the rest of my force until they should bring back their report. But my scouts forgot their duty, and carried away by lust of plunder began to harry and ravage the fields of the Egyptians. Quickly the hue and cry went round, and an armed multitude, both horse and foot, came suddenly upon us, breathing fury and vengeance. We could make no stand against such a host, and all my comrades were speedily slain or taken captive. When I saw that all was lost I threw away helmet and shield, dropped my spear, and falling on my knees before the chief captain of the Egyptians begged him to spare my life. He heard my petition, set me on his chariot, and brought me to his home. There I remained seven years and gathered much wealth; for I had found favour in the eyes of the Egyptians, and they gave me freely of their possessions.

“In the eighth year there came a certain Phoenician to Egypt, a crafty and covetous rogue, and he persuaded me to go with him to Phoenicia. So I went, and abode with him a whole year, and when the spring came round again I sailed with him to Africa, whither he was bound with a freight of merchandise. His purpose was to sell me in Africa as a slave for a great price; but Zeus willed it otherwise, for as we sailed southwards from Crete a great storm arose, and the ship went down with all her men, while I escaped by clinging to the mast, and after nine days was carried by the winds and the waves to Thesprotia, where I was kindly entreated by the king of that country.

“There I had news of Odysseus, who had touched at that coast on his voyage to Ithaca, and stayed as a guest in that same house. This I heard from the king’s own lips, and he showed me all the treasure which Odysseus had left in his charge, while he himself went on a journey to Dodona, to inquire of the oracle concerning the manner of his return. Thou wouldst wonder to behold all the wealth which thy lord had gathered, an exceeding great store.



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“Odysseus himself I saw not; for it chanced that a ship was sailing for Dulichium, and the king commended me to her captain, bidding him carry me thither with all care and tenderness. Now this man was a villain, and he devised evil against me; for when we left the coast of Thesprotia, he stripped me of the raiment which the king had given me, clothed me in these rags, and bound me with cords, intending to sell me as a slave. In the evening he landed in Ithaca, leaving me, bound as I was, in the ship. But I broke my bonds, and escaped by swimming to another part of the coast, where I lay all night in a thicket. In the morning they sought me with great outcry, but found me not; and after awhile they sailed away. When they were gone I arose, and was led by Heaven’s hand to thy doors.”

The swineherd listened attentively to the well-imagined tale, and when it was ended he said: “Hapless man, thou hast been the very sport of Destiny, and my heart is big when I think of thy wanderings and thy woes. But as touching Odysseus, that part of thy story likes me not; methinks ’tis a cunning invention to flatter my ears. Long ago I was deceived by a false report, brought hither by a wandering exile like thee, who said that he had seen Odysseus repairing his ships in Crete, and bade us look for his coming in the autumn of that year. Since then I have closed my ears against all such rumours, and therefore I say, tell me no more of him, for I cannot and will not believe but that he is dead.”

II

Evening was now coming on, and it was time for the herdsmen to return with their charge from the feeding-ground. Presently, with huge commotion, and multitudinous din, the swine were driven home and penned in their styes. Then Eumaeus called to his helpers, and bade them bring the best of the herd to make savoury meat for his guest “Spare not,” he said, “to bring the fattest and choicest of them all, for why should we be careful, when strangers devour our labour?” So they brought a hog of five years old, exceeding fat, and having slaughtered it they offered sacrifice, not forgetting a prayer for the return of Odysseus. When all rites of religion were duly paid, they roasted the flesh, and served it on wooden platters. Odysseus was honoured by Eumaeus with a choice portion of the loin.

When they had finished, night came on, dark and stormy, with furious gusts of rain and wind. Just as they were about to retire to rest, Odysseus, who seldom spoke without a purpose, turned to his kind host and said: “Eumaeus, the good wine has loosened my tongue, and moved me to tell thee a story of long ago, when these withered limbs were in their lusty prime, and my heart burned with the fire of youth. Then I was chosen with Menelaus and Odysseus to lead an ambush under the walls of Troy. With a picked company we took up our position in a marshy place, and lay down in our armour among the rushes. It



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was a bitter night, with snow and frost, and our shields were soon coated with ice. Now it chanced that I had left my cloak in the camp, and while the others lay warm in their thick woollen mantles, I was perishing with cold. At last I could bear it no longer, so I nudged Odysseus, who was lying next to me, with my elbow, and said to him: 'Son of Laertes, the cold is killing me. I came in my folly without a cloak, and I can never hold out until dawn in this cruel frost.' And he, ever ready of wit as he was, instantly contrived means to relieve me. Whispering to me to keep counsel he rose on his elbow, and called to the others, saying: 'Comrades, I have been warned in a dream that our numbers are too weak for the task which has been laid upon us. Will not one of you run down to the camp, and ask Agamemnon to send us further succour?'

"Thereupon one of our men arose, and flinging off his cloak ran off to carry the message to Agamemnon. And I lay wrapped in the garment, warm and safe, until the dawn. Ah! those were brave days; what changes have I seen since then!"

"I read thy meaning," said Eumaeus; "and as a reward for thy good story thou shalt sleep in comfort to-night. But to-morrow thou must make shift to wear thine own rags again, for I am but ill furnished with changes of raiment. When Telemachus returns he will supply all thy wants, and send thee whithersoever thou art minded to go."

So saying he drew a truckle-bed close to the fire, and heaped it with the skins of sheep and goats. There Odysseus lay down to rest, and Eumaeus threw over him a stout mantle of his own. All the other herdsmen slept in the hut; but Eumaeus, ever watchful for his master's property, went out, armed to the teeth, to pass the night among the swine, under the shelter of a hollow rock, which kept off the cold north wind. And Odysseus was glad when he saw that good servant so faithful to his trust.

The Return of Telemachus

I

While these important events were happening in Ithaca, Telemachus was living as an honoured guest in the house of Menelaus. One night, while he lay between sleeping and waking, full of anxious thought, Athene appeared to him in her own person, and addressed him thus: "Thou lingerest too long here, Telemachus. It is time for thee to return and keep an eye on thy goods, lest thou be stripped of all in thy absence. Thy mother's kinsmen are urgent with her to wed Eurymachus, the wealthiest of the wooers; and, if she yield, it may be that she will take of thy heritage to increase the house of the man who wins her. Therefore make haste and get thee home, that thou mayest be at hand to defend thy rights. Know also that the wooers are lying in wait for thee in the strait between Ithaca and Samos, with intent to slay thee; take heed then that thou shun



that passage, and sail home by another way. And when thou art come to Ithaca, go straight to the dwelling of Eumæus, and send him down to Penelope with news of thy return.”



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Such a message, brought by such a messenger, was not to be neglected. Telemachus at once roused Pisistratus, the son of Nestor, who was sleeping near, and declared his intention of starting at once; but when Pisistratus pointed out how displeasing such conduct would be to their princely host he consented to wait till morning.

Accordingly, when day was come, he went to Menelaus, and asked leave to depart at once. Menelaus consented, only insisting that he should remain for the morning meal. While this was preparing, the generous prince went to his treasure chamber, and returned laden with a splendid silver bowl, the work of Phoenician artists, which he had received when he visited the King of Sidon on his voyage from Troy. And Helen brought an embroidered robe, the work of her own fair hands, as a wedding gift for his future bride.

As soon as they had eaten they mounted the chariot, and drove slowly through the outer gate of the courtyard, Menelaus and Helen following on foot. Here they drew up to say farewell, and Menelaus pledged them in a bowl of wine, wishing them god-speed. "And forget not," he added, "to greet Nestor for me when ye come to Pylos, for he was ever gentle to me as a father when we sojourned in the land of Troy."

"I will not forget to carry thy message," answered Telemachus; "would that I were as sure to see my father when I come to Ithaca, that I might tell him of thy noble hospitality, and show him thy gifts."

Hardly had the words been uttered when a clamour of voices was heard, and a crowd of men and women ran past, pursuing with loud cries an eagle, which had just seized a great white goose from the courtyard, and was carrying her off in his talons. Straight over the chariot he flew, and with a scream of triumph sped away to the mountains with his booty. "Consider now, my prince," said Pisistratus, "whether this omen was sent to us or to thee."

Menelaus, who was somewhat slow of wit, paused to deliberate; but before he could frame an answer, the quick brain of Helen was ready with an interpretation. "The eagle is thy father, Odysseus," she said to Telemachus, "and the meaning of the omen is that he is already in Ithaca, or close at hand, bringing death and doom to his foes."

Thus encouraged by fair portents, they took leave of their kind hosts, and started on their way to Pylos, where they arrived on the following day. As they drew near to the house of Nestor, Telemachus begged his friend to drive straight down to the sea. "For I know," he said, "that thy father will constrain me to abide with him, and will take no denial; and I wish to embark for Ithaca without further delay." Pisistratus agreed, and avoiding the house of Nestor they passed on to the place where the ship lay moored.



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Having summoned his crew, Telemachus was preparing to embark, when a man armed and equipped as a traveller approached the vessel, and inquired who he was and whither he was bound. Having received an answer, he requested Telemachus to carry him to Ithaca. "My name," he said, "is Theoclymenus, and I am descended from Melampus, the famous seer, from whom I have inherited the prophetic gift. I am an exile from my native land of Argos, for I have slain a man of my own tribe, and am flying from the avenger of blood. Set me, I pray thee, on thy ship, and take me with you, for sore is my need."

"Heaven forbid," answered Telemachus, "that I should deny thee, seeing that thy very life is at stake. Make haste, and come on board"; and he made room for the stranger to sit by him in the stern of the vessel.

After a quick and prosperous voyage they sighted the coast of Ithaca, and landed on a deserted part of the coast within easy reach of the swineherd's dwelling. Here Telemachus dismissed his company, bidding them take the galley round to the harbour of Ithaca, and promising to reward them for their good service. He was just about to depart when Theoclymenus detained him and asked where he was to find shelter. Telemachus answered in some embarrassment. "'Twere no friendly act," he said, "to send thee to my house, for my mother lives apart in her own chamber and sees no man, and I fear lest thou suffer some harm from the lawless men who riot in my halls. Therefore I advise thee to go to Eurymachus, who is now the most powerful man in Ithaca, and hopes to sit in my father's seat; but perchance Zeus will send him another issue of his wooing."

Just as he spoke a rushing of wings was heard on the right, and they saw a falcon passing close at hand with a dove clutched in his talons, and tearing his prey so that the feathers fluttered down at their feet. Then Theoclymenus, who was deeply skilled in augury, drew Telemachus apart and said: "It is a manifest sign of victory to thee and to thy house." "May Heaven fulfil thy prophecy," answered Telemachus, "and if thy words prove true I will load thee with benefits, and give thee cause to bless this hour." Being now convinced that he had found a friend, he called Peiraeus, in whom he had full confidence, and bade him take Theoclymenus under his care until he himself returned to the town. Peiraeus readily undertook the charge, and this point being settled they thrust out from the shore and rowed away in the direction of the harbour, while Telemachus strode off with rapid footsteps along the path which led to the swineherd's hut.

II

On the evening before the arrival of Telemachus Odysseus was sitting after supper with Eumaeus and the other herdsmen, and wishing to learn the purpose of Eumaeus towards him he said: "I will no longer be a burden to thee and thy fellows. To-morrow I



will go to the town and beg my living, if thou wilt send one of thy men to show me the way. Perchance also I might visit the house of Odysseus, and have speech with Penelope. And it may be that the wooers will take me into their service, for I would have thee know that by favour of Hermes I am right skilful of my hands, and no one can match me in laying a fire and cleaving dry logs, in carving and roasting meat, and in pouring of wine.”



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But this proposal found no favour with the honest swineherd. "Who put such a thought," he asked, "into thy mind? Serve with the wooers! They would put a speedy end to thy service, and pay thee thy wages in blood. Those who wait upon them are of a different sort from thee—gay striplings, daintily clad, with glossy hair and comely faces. Remain with us until Telemachus comes home; thou art no burden either to me or to my men."

"Be it so, then," answered Odysseus, "and may Heaven requite thee for thy goodness to a poor homeless outcast, who wanders in misery, driven by hunger from door to door! And since I am still to be thy guest, tell me something of thy master's mother, and of the father whom he left behind when he went to the wars. Do they still live, or have they gone to their rest?"

"This also thou shalt know," replied Eumaeus. "Laertes his father still lives, though sore stricken with years and sorrows; for his son's long absence and his wife's miserable end have brought him to the verge of the grave. She died long ago, and by such a death as I pray may never come to anyone who is dear to me—she, my kind mistress, who brought me up with her youngest daughter, and hardly loved me less. As long as she lived I would often go down to the house, and she ever entertained me kindly, and gave me something to carry back with me to my dwelling on the land. Full well she knew how to sweeten the lot of a thrall with pleasant words, and little acts of tenderness and love. But now I seldom leave my charge, for since the wooers brought this curse upon my master's house Penelope hides her face from us, and has no comfort for us either in word or deed."

Odysseus listened with deep interest, and when Eumaeus paused he expressed a desire to hear the story of his life. "How was it," he asked, "that already in early childhood thou wast cast on the mercy of strangers? Wast thou taken captive in war, or did robbers seize thee as thou satst watching sheep on the lonely hills, and sell thee into bondage?"

"Fill thy cup," answered Eumaeus, "we will pledge each other in a hearty draught, and then thou shalt hear my tale. The nights are long at this season, and we shall have time enough to sleep when I have done. Fate has dealt hardly with me, even as with thee; and we can find some comfort in telling over our sorrows to each other.

"There is a certain island called Syria, lying north of Ortygia, not very large or populous, but a good land, rich in pasture, with waving cornfields and goodly vineyards. There famine never comes, nor sickness, but all the people reach a good old age, and then die by the painless shafts of Artemis or of Apollo. There are two cities which divide the territory equally between them; and there was one king over both, my father, Ctesius, son of Ormenus.



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“When I was still very young there came to the island a Phoenician ship, laden with trinkets for barter. Now in my father’s house was a Phoenician woman, tall and fair, and skilled in needlework. She was my nurse, and I was wont to run about the town with her. One day, as she was washing clothes not far from the ship, she was recognised by a Phoenician sailor as being of his own race, and he inquired how she came to the island. She answered that she was a native of Sidon, and a rich man’s daughter, stolen from her home by pirates, and sold across the seas. ‘And hast thou a mind to see thy native land again?’ asked the fellow. ‘Thy father and mother still live and prosper’; for she had told him that her father’s name was Arybas. ‘I will go with you,’ answered the woman, ‘if ye will swear an oath to carry me home unharmed.’ They all swore to do as she said, and after that she instructed them how to proceed. ‘Keep close counsel,’ she said, ‘and let none of you seem to know me when ye meet me in the street, nor yet by the well, lest anyone tell it to my master; for if he suspects that aught is amiss it will be the ruin of us all. Lose no time in selling your wares, and when the ship is freighted for her homeward voyage let one of you come up to the house and give me a sign. I will not come empty-handed, but will bring with me vessels of gold to pay for my passage. Furthermore, I have charge of my master’s child, a knowing little lad; and, if it be possible, I will bring him with me, that ye may sell him for a great price.’

“The bargain was struck, and the woman departed. Then for a whole year they remained among us and traded; at last, when they had sold out all their goods, and stowed their cargo, they sent up a man to my father’s house, to warn the woman that the time was come. He brought with him a necklace of gold and amber, a thing of most rare device; and while my mother and her women were handling it, and bargaining for the price, the fellow made a sign to my nurse. When he was gone she took me by the hand and led me with her into the courtyard before the house. There she found tables set with vessels of gold, where my father had been dining with his guests. They had now gone forth to attend the council, and the place was deserted; so she caught up three goblets and hid them in her bosom. Then with one rapid glance round, to make sure that she was not observed, she hastened down to the spot where the Phoenician ship lay moored; and I, poor child, followed her, fearing nothing.

“Evening was coming on as we reached the shore, and the crew were sitting ready at their oars, only waiting for our arrival. They took us on board, rowed their galley into open water, and, a strong breeze springing up from the land, they hoisted sail, and were soon beyond the reach of pursuit. On the seventh day of the voyage the hand of vengeance fell upon the woman, and she was struck dead by an invisible blow. They flung her body to the fishes, and soon after we landed in Ithaca, where they sold me as a slave to Laertes.”



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"Twas a sad fate for one of thy tender years," remarked Odysseus, when Eumaeus had finished his story. "Nevertheless thou wast happy to find such a master—happier far than I, who am still a vagabond and a wanderer in my old age."

The Meeting of Telemachus and Odysseus

I

Early next day Eumaeus and Odysseus were preparing their morning meal, when they heard the sound of footsteps approaching the hut. The hounds pricked up their ears at the sound, and ran fawning round the new-comer, who was evidently well known to them. Odysseus called to Eumaeus, who was busy drawing wine, and said: "Some friend of thine is coming; for the dogs fawn upon him, and bark not."

Even as he spoke, a tall figure appeared in the open doorway, and his own dear son stood before him. Eumaeus sprang up amazed, and let fall the pitcher into which he had been drawing the wine. Then with a cry of joy he ran to greet his young lord, kissed his hands and his face, and wept over him. Even as a father yearns over his only son, just returned from abroad after a ten years' absence, so Eumaeus yearned over Telemachus, and hailed him as one returned from the dead. "Thou art come, Telemachus," he faltered at last, when his emotion suffered him to speak, "thou art come back again, dear as mine own life! Ne'er thought I to see thee again, after thou wast gone to Pylos. Sit thee down, that I may feast mine eyes upon thee; seldom dost thou come this way, but abidest in the house, to watch the wasteful deeds of the wooers."

Odysseus, in his character of beggar, rose respectfully from his seat, to make room for the young prince, but Telemachus motioned him to resume his place, and sat down himself on a heap of brushwood, on which the swineherd had spread a fleece. While Eumaeus was bringing bread and meat, and filling the cups with wine, Telemachus questioned him as to his mother, and learnt that no change had occurred in her relation to the wooers since he left Ithaca. Breakfast being over, Eumaeus, in answer to his inquiry, told him the story of the supposed stranger. "I have done what I could for him," he added, when he had repeated what he had heard from Odysseus. "Now I deliver him unto thee, to do with him as thou wilt; all his hopes are in thy grace."

"What can I do?" answered Telemachus, in perplexity. "Thou knowest that I am not master in my own house, and my mother is torn between two purposes: whether to wait still in patience for her lord's coming, or to choose a new husband from the noblest of the suitors. Neither she nor I can give protection to such a guest as this. Therefore I will bestow upon him a new cloak and doublet, with sandals for his feet, and arm him with a good sword, and send him whithersoever he chooses to go. Or if thou art willing,



thou canst keep him here with thee, and I will send down food and raiment for him, that he may not be a burden to thee and thy men. But I will not allow him to go among the woovers, and suffer ill-treatment which I have no power to prevent.”



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Odysseus, who had not seen his son since he was an infant, desired to learn something more of his mind and character; and in order to draw him into further speech he asked, with an air of indignation, who the wooers were, and how it was that he submitted to their violence. "Is the public voice against thee," he asked, "or art thou at feud with thy brethren, so that they will not help thee? If I were in thy place I would fall upon them singlehanded, for it were better to die once for all than tamely to submit to such outrage."

"Behold I will tell thee all the truth," answered Telemachus. "'Tis neither by the consent of the people nor by the ill-will of my brethren, that this evil hath come upon me. But Heaven hath ordained that the honours and the burden of our house should ever rest upon one alone. Laertes, my grandsire, was an only son, and Odysseus was the sole issue of his marriage; and even so I am the only child of Odysseus. Therefore I sit helpless and alone, at the mercy of this ruffian band. But enough of this! We have no hope left, save in the justice of Heaven." Then he turned to Eumaeus, and said: "Make haste now, go down to the house, and tell Penelope that I have come back safe from Pylos. Let none else hear it, but come back hither at once, when thou hast delivered thy message, and I will wait here until thy return."

"Shall I not go to Laertes, and tell him also?" asked the swineherd. "Since the day of thy departure he has tasted neither meat nor drink, but sits alone in his sorrow, and will not be comforted."

"My mother can send a handmaid to inform him," answered Telemachus. "But as for thee, see that thou return here straightway, and lose no time."

II

Soon after the departure of Eumaeus, Odysseus and Telemachus were sitting before the door of the hut, each lost in his own thoughts, when their attention was attracted by the strange behaviour of the dogs. These animals, which had been lying basking in the sun, all at once started up with a stifled cry, and ran whining, with every sign of terror, to a distant corner of the courtyard. "What ails the hounds?" said Telemachus, looking up in surprise. But Odysseus was not long before he saw the cause of their alarm: standing at the outer gate was a tall female figure, of majestic countenance, and more than mortal beauty. Telemachus saw her not, but Odysseus instantly knew who she was, and, obeying a gesture of her hand, he rose from his seat and went out through the gate. She led him to a place where they were out of hearing, and then said: "It is time for thee to reveal thyself to thy son, that together ye may contrive destruction for the wooers. When the hour of reckoning comes, I shall be near to aid you." Thereupon she touched him with her wand, and in a moment he was once more the old Odysseus, still in the full vigour of his manhood, dark and sunburnt, with thick black hair and curling beard. His rags also had been replaced by fair clean raiment; and thus completely

transformed he went back to the hut to reveal himself to Telemachus. Athene, having done her part, had forthwith disappeared.



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Fear came upon Telemachus, and he marvelled exceedingly, when the real Odysseus appeared before him. "Who art thou," he asked, "that comest back in a moment thus wondrously transfigured? If thou be a god, as methinks thou art, let me find favour in thy sight, and we will honour thee with rich offerings of gold, and with humble prayers."

"No god am I," answered Odysseus, "but thine own dear father, for whose sake thou hast suffered so long with groanings and tears."

With that he kissed him, and giving vent to the tenderness which he had hitherto restrained he lifted up his voice and wept. But Telemachus could not yet believe that it was indeed his father whom he saw before him. "It cannot be," he said, drawing back in affright. "It is mere magic and glamour practised against me by some hostile power, to mock my sorrow. No being of flesh and blood could work such a change upon himself. A moment since thou wast an old man in sordid raiment, and now thou art like unto the sons of heaven."

"Forbear!" said Odysseus, "no more amazement! I am thy father, and no other; if not, thou shalt never see him more. Much have I suffered, and wandered far, and now in the twentieth year I am come back to my native land. This change at which thou marvellest is no work of mine, but was wrought by Athene, daughter of Zeus. The gods can deal with us as they will, both for our glory and for our shame."

Then Telemachus was convinced, and fell into his father's arms, and they wept long and sore over each other, for joy and grief are near neighbours. Presently they grew calmer, and Odysseus, in answer to his son's inquiry, told how the Phaeacians had conveyed him to Ithaca, and of all the treasures which he had brought with him.

"But now we must speak of a sterner task," said Odysseus, when his story was ended. "Tell me now the number of the wooers, that I may know how many and what manner of men they be, and thereafter contrive how we may best assail them, whether by ourselves or with others to help us."

"Father," answered Telemachus, "I knew thy high renown, as a warrior mighty in word and deed. But I fear me greatly that this task is too hard for us; how shall two men prevail against so many? Listen now and I will tell thee their number. From Dulichium are two and fifty, with six men-servants, from Same twenty-four, from Zacynthus twenty, and from Ithaca itself twelve, all proper men and tall. If we twain fall upon such a host, we may find the work of vengeance a bitter morsel, and our bane. It were better, then, to look for some other help."

"Helpers we shall find, and stout ones too," said Odysseus. "What sayest thou to Athene and her father, Zeus? Is their aid enough or shall we look for more?"

“Mighty indeed are the champions thou namest,” replied Telemachus, “though throned far remote among the clouds; supreme are they in sovereignty, both on earth and in heaven.”



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“Thou sayest well,” answered Odysseus; “and ere long the wooers shall feel their might. Now learn further what thou must do. To-morrow thou shalt go up to the house, and join the company of the wooers, and afterwards the swineherd will bring me thither in the disguise of a beggar old and miserable. If the wooers use me despitefully seek not to prevent it, but let thy heart endure, even though they beat me, or drag me by the feet through the doors. Thou mayest reprove them gently, and bid them cease from their wantonness, but they will not heed thee for their lives are forfeit already. Mark further, and take heed what I say. When the time to strike is come I will give thee a signal, and, forthwith, thou shalt remove all the weapons from the halls, and make excuse to the wooers, saying that thou art bestowing them in a safe place, out of reach of the smoke. Leave only two swords and two shields and two spears, as weapons for ourselves. But above all I charge thee to let none know of my coming—neither Laertes, nor Eumaeus, nor Penelope herself. Alone we must work, and watch the temper of the thralls, to see if there be any on our side.”

III

Meanwhile the faithful swineherd made all haste to carry his message to Penelope. Just as he was approaching the house, he met one of the crew of Telemachus' ship coming up from the harbour on the same errand. So they went together, and while Eumaeus conveyed the tidings privately to Penelope, he who was sent from the ship delivered his report in the hearing of the whole household.

Great was the dismay of the suitors when they learnt that their foul plot had been frustrated. One by one they stole out of the house to a secret place of meeting; and when they were all assembled they began to devise what was next to be done. While they were debating they were joined by Antinous and the crew of the ship which had been lying in wait for Telemachus in the strait. Always the foremost in violent counsels, Antinous breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the young prince. “The boy only escaped us by a miracle,” he said. “All day long we had sentinels on all the heights commanding the sea, and at night we patrolled the waters in our ship. Yet for all our vigilance he has slipped through our hands. But I will not be baffled thus,” he added, stamping with fury. “This wretched boy must die, or we shall never accomplish our purpose. Let us make haste and slay him before he comes back to the town, or he will call a meeting of the people and proclaim to all Ithaca that we sought to slay him, and failed. Then the whole city will rise against us, and we shall have to fly for our lives.”

Then another of the wooers rose up and rebuked Antinous for his bloodthirsty counsels. This man's name was Amphinomus, and he was the chief among the wooers who came from Dulichium. More than any of the other suitors he found favour with Penelope, for he was a prudent man and a just, and his voice was pleasant to her ear. “Remember,” he said, “that Telemachus is of royal race; and it is a dreadful thing to shed the blood of

kings. I will have no hand in such an act, without sure and manifest sign that it is the will of Zeus.”



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The speech of Amphinomus was received with a murmur of applause; for most of the wooers were averse to the violent measures proposed by Antinous. So they arose, and returned to the house.

Penelope had heard of their plotting from the herald, Medon, and obeying a sudden impulse she came down from her chamber, and standing in the doorway began to upbraid Antinous for his wicked purpose. "Thou hast the name of a wise and eloquent man," she said, "but thy fame is better than thy deeds. Wretch, why dost thou lay snares against the life of my son? Hast thou never heard how thy father came to this house, flying from the wrath of the Ithacans, who would have slain him, because he had joined the Taphian pirates in a raid on the Thesprotians, who were our allies? But Odysseus stood between him and their fury, and saved his life. A fair return thou art making for that good service, devouring his substance, paying court to his wife, and compassing the death of his son."

Antinous sat biting his lips, and made no answer; but Eurymachus, a subtler villain, smooth and specious, but all the more dangerous, spoke for him, and said: "Sage daughter of Icarius, fear nothing for thy son Telemachus, for while I live no man shall offer him violence. By this sword I swear it, and I care not who hears me, the man who seeks to harm him shall die by my hand. I at least have not forgotten the loving-kindness of thy lord, Odysseus, on whose knees I have often sat, and taken food and drink from his hand. Therefore I love Telemachus as a brother, and I swear to thee that none of the wooers shall do him any harm."

The Home-coming of Odysseus

I

When Eumaeus came back from his errand, Odysseus, who in the meantime had resumed his disguise, was helping Telemachus to prepare the evening meal. Telemachus questioned him about the ship which the wooers had sent out to waylay him on his return from Pylos, but Eumaeus had been in such haste to get back to his farm that he had not stopped to inquire about the matter. "But thus much I can tell thee," he said: "as I was crossing the hill which overlooks the town I saw a galley, bristling with spear and helm, entering the harbour; and I believe that this was the ship of which thou speakest"

"No doubt of it," answered Telemachus, with a significant glance at his father. Then they all fell to their suppers with hearty appetite, and soon afterwards retired to rest.

The first chill of dawn was still in the air when Telemachus roused the swineherd, and announced his intention of proceeding at once to the town. "I know," he said, "that my mother will have no peace until she sees me with her own eyes. Now as to this



stranger, I charge thee to take him with thee into the town, that he may beg his bread from house to house. Burdened as I am already, and full of care, I cannot provide for him. If he thinks it hard, all the worse for him.”



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"Thou sayest well," answered Odysseus; "I have no mind to remain here. I am too old to take orders from a master, and it is better to beg my living in the town than in the fields. Therefore I will go, when I have warmed me at the fire, and the sun is up; for I am ill equipped to face the frosts of morning."

Away went Telemachus, covering the ground with rapid strides, his mind occupied all the way with thoughts of vengeance against the wooers. The first who saw him when he crossed the threshold of his home was his old nurse, Eurycleia, who was just then spreading fleeces on the seats in the great hall. With a cry of joy she ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and all the faithful handmaids of Penelope crowded round to welcome their young master home. The sound of their voices reached the ears of Penelope, and with swift steps she came gliding into the hall, fair as Artemis, or golden Aphrodite. When she saw Telemachus she flung her arms round his neck and covered his face with kisses. "Welcome," she sobbed, "Telemachus, my heart's darling, restored to me beyond all hope! Say, hast thou brought any news of thy father?"

But Telemachus was too full of the stern task which lay before him to leave room for softer emotions. Gently extricating himself from his mother's embrace he said: "Dear mother, thou shalt hear all in due season; at present I have other work to do. Go thou to thy chamber, and put on clean raiment, and when thou hast purified thyself pray to all the immortal gods to hasten the day of atonement for those who have wronged our house. I will return presently, when I have done my business in the town."

The gentle Penelope went to do her son's bidding, and Telemachus started for the town, with two hounds following close at his heels. He seemed taller and manlier after his short absence, and many an eye followed him with wonder as he passed through the streets. Presently he came to the place where the wooers were assembled, and they came crowding about him with false words of welcome. But he turned his back on them with scorn, and seeing a little group of his father's friends, among whom were Mentor and the aged Halitherses, he went and sat down among them. While they were questioning him about his travels, Peiraeus came up, bringing with him the seer, Theoclymenus, whom Telemachus had left in his charge the day before. "I restore to thee thy guest," said Peiraeus, "who has been entertained in all honour at my house; and if thou wilt send thy handmaids, I will deliver unto them the treasure which thou hast brought with thee from Pylos."

"I thank thee," answered Telemachus; "Theoclymenus shall go with me; but as to the treasure, do thou keep it for me until these evil days are passed. If aught untoward befall me, I had rather it remained with thee than that it should fall into the hands of the wooers."



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Having taken leave of his friends, he returned to the house, taking Theoclymenus with him. And when they had bathed and put on fresh raiment, they sat down to meat. The meal proceeded in silence, and at last Penelope, who was sitting near, busy with her distaff, and longing impatiently to hear her son's news, said in a tone of displeasure: "Hast thou no word for thy mother, Telemachus? Or art thou keeping thy tidings until the wooers return? Surely I thought in this rare interval of quiet to hear how thou hast fared and what thou hast learnt on this journey. But if thou hast naught to tell me, I will go to my widowed bed, and weep away the hours until dawn."

Roused from his reverie by his mother's reproaches, Telemachus gave a brief account of his visit to Nestor and Menelaus, and of what they had told him. Penelope was musing on her son's report, when Theoclymenus, the second-sighted man, started up from his seat, and cried: "I see him, I see him! He is landed in Ithaca, he is coming hither, he is here! Woe unto the suitors! Their hour is at hand, and not one of them shall escape."

Penelope had heard such prophecies too often to pay much heed to the seer's vision. "Ah! my friend," she said, with a sad smile, "I can but pray that thy words will be fulfilled; if ever they are, it shall be a happy day for thee."

At this moment the wooers came trooping in, filling the house with riot and uproar; and there was an end of all quiet converse for that day.

II

It was past noon before Odysseus and Eumaeus set out for the town; for Eumaeus had conceived a great liking for his guest, and listened with delight to his wonderful tales of adventure. "Come," he said at last, when Odysseus had finished one of his long stories. "It is time to be going, though I would willingly have kept thee here. But my young lord has spoken and we must obey." "Lead on," said Odysseus, "I know what thou wouldst say; but first give me a staff to lean on, for I heard thee say that the path was rough."

So saying he threw his tattered wallet over his shoulder, and taking a stout staff, which Eumaeus offered him, started with his friend across the hills. After a toilsome walk they reached the top of the hill which overlooked the town, and descending the slope they came to a copious spring of water, well fenced with stones, and shaded by a grove of alders. The water descended into a basin from the face of a rock in a cool and copious stream; and on either side stood an altar to the nymphs. "It is the common fountain of the townspeople," explained Eumaeus. "The altars and the basin which receives the water are the work of our ancient kings."



Odysseus paused a moment, lost in the memories which were awakened by that familiar scene. But his reverie was rudely interrupted. While he stood gazing at the fountain, he heard a rude voice hailing them from the road, and looking round he saw a man leading a pair of fine goats towards the town. It was Melanthius, his own goatherd, who was bringing the best of his flock to make savoury meat for the wooers.



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“Here are two birds of a feather!” shouted the fellow, in jeering tones—“that wretched swineherd, and a ravenous beggar. A fine guest thou art bringing to our young masters, and a fair welcome, without doubt, they will give him. Were it not better that I took him with me to my farm? He could sweep out the pens, and gather green shoots for the kids; and we would give him whey to drink, and put some flesh on these shrunk shanks^[1] of his. But the lazy knave will do no work; he would rather rub his shoulders against every door-post, begging for broken meat. Broken bones will be his portion, if the wooers see him near the house of Odysseus.”

[Footnote 1: “A world too wide for his shrunk shanks,”—Shakespeare: “As You Like It.”]

While he uttered these taunts Melanthius had gradually come close to Odysseus, and with the last word he lifted up his foot and kicked him with all his force on the hip. Odysseus stood like a rock, and stirred not an inch from his ground; his first impulse was to seize the ruffian by the ankles, and dash out his brains on the road; but he checked himself with a great effort, and said not a word.

But Eumaeus rebuked the goatherd, and invoked the vengeance of heaven against him. “Would that our noble master were here!” he cried, “he would soon make an end of thee, thou braggart! Unfaithful herdsman, that rovest ever about the town, leaving thy flock to underlings!”

“Go to, thou dog!” retorted Melanthius, with a savage laugh. “Wilt thou be ever harping on that string? Thy noble master is dust long ago, and I would that Telemachus were lying with him. As for thee, I will one day cast thee bound into a ship, and sell thee across the seas for a great price.”

With that he left them, and stepped briskly out towards the house, while Odysseus and Eumaeus followed more slowly. Presently they came to an extensive enclosure, standing conspicuously on a high level plateau overlooking the town. Behind the fence towered the roof of a great timber house. They passed through the outer gates, and as they entered the courtyard they heard the sounds of a harp, and the steam of roast flesh was borne to their nostrils.

“Take heed now,” said Eumaeus, lowering his voice, as they approached the door of the house. “I will go in first, and do thou follow me close, lest anyone find thee outside and do thee some hurt.”

“Fear nothing for me,” answered Odysseus, “I am no stranger to blows, for I have been sore buffeted on land and sea. The belly is a stern taskmaster, which compels us to face both wounds and death.”



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So saying he stepped aside to let Eumaeus pass, then checked him with a hasty exclamation; for he had seen something which sent a pang of sorrow to his heart. Heaped up against the wall by the doorway was a great pile of refuse, left there until the thralls should carry it away and lay it on the fields; and there, grievously neglected, and almost blind with age, lay a great gaunt hound, to all seeming more dead than alive. What was the emotion of Odysseus when he recognised in that poor creature his old favourite, Argus, whom he had reared with his own hand, and trained to the chase, in the old days before he sailed to Troy! As he stooped down with a caressing gesture the hound feebly raised his head; a strange light came into his eyes, he drooped his ears, and wagged his tail, but was too weak to stir from the place where he lay. Odysseus brushed away a tear, and said to Eumaeus: "'Tis strange that so fine a hound should lie thus uncared for in his old age. Or do his looks belie his qualities? Handsome he must have been, as I can see still; but perhaps his beauty was all he had to boast of."

"He was my master's favourite hound," answered Eumaeus, "and there was none swifter or keener of scent in all the land. Formerly the young men would take him with them to hunt the wild goat or the hare or the deer; but now that he is sore stricken with years not one of the women will bring him a morsel to eat, or a little water to drink. So it ever is when the master is absent; for a slave has no conscience when his owner's eye is not upon him."

When Eumaeus had entered the house, Odysseus lingered awhile, gazing sadly at the faithful Argus. The old hound raised himself, and struggled painfully to drag himself to his master's feet; but the effort was too much for him, and he sank back on his sorry bed, and breathed his last.

With a heavy heart Odysseus turned away, and passing into the hall sat down on the threshold and laid his scrip beside him. Telemachus was the first to notice him, and calling the swineherd, who was sitting near, he gave him a loaf of bread and a good handful of meat, and bade him carry it to the beggar. "And tell him to go round and beg of all the wooers," he said: "want and modesty agree ill together." Eumaeus brought the gift and the message, which Odysseus received with a blessing on the giver. And when he had eaten he rose and went round the hall, begging of the wooers. All gave him something until he came to Antinous, who stared at him insolently and asked who he was.

"I saw the fellow," answered Melanthius, "a little while ago. Eumaeus brought him hither, but who he is I know not."

"Ah! thou rogue," said Antinous to the swineherd, "we know thy ways! Why didst thou bring this caitiff to the town? Are there not beggars enough here already to mar our pleasure when we sit down to meat? 'Tis nought to thee, it seems, that these palmer-worms come swarming round the house to devour thy master's living."



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[Illustration: The Return of Odysseus]

“He is no guest of my inviting,” answered Eumaeus. “I would not invite to this house any wandering stranger, unless he were a prophet, or leech, or shipwright, or minstrel; and he is none of these. But thou art ever hard on the servants of Odysseus, and especially on me; yet I care not, so long as I satisfy Penelope and my young lord, Telemachus.”

“Eumaeus, thou art overbold of speech,” said Telemachus; then turning to Antinous he added: “I thank thee for thy fatherly care, but we are not so poor that we need to drive the stranger from our doors—heaven forbid! Give him something; ’tis I that bid thee: but thou art ever better at taking than at giving.”

“I will give him something, thou malapert boy,” answered Antinous, grinding his teeth with rage, “something which will keep him from the house for three months to come.” As he spoke he thrust forward a heavy footstool from under the table, and placed it ready at hand.

Meanwhile, Odysseus, having filled his wallet, was preparing to return to his place on the threshold. But first he came to Antinous, and addressed to him a long harangue in the common style of the professional beggar, who had seen better days and been brought to want by the malice of fortune. He concluded with a fragment of the story which he had already told to Eumaeus.

Antinous heard him to the end with ill-disguised impatience, and then broke out in angry tones: “Who brought this wretched fellow here to vex us? Stand off from my table, thou shameless varlet! Egypt, sayest thou? I will send thee to Egypt, and with a vengeance, too! It is a shame to see how they have squandered good meat on a dog like thee”; and he pointed to the wallet, now filled with the cheap bounty of the wooers.

Odysseus drew back and made for the door, saying as he went: “Of a truth, I wonder to find so princely a presence wedded to so mean a temper.”

When he heard that Antinous began to curse and to swear, and lifting the footstool he hurled it with all his force at the retreating figure of Odysseus. It struck him on the shoulder, with a crash that vibrated through the hall; but Odysseus heeded it not, but passed on without a pause or a stumble to his place on the threshold. When he was seated he complained loudly of the brutal conduct of Antinous. “Accursed be he,” he said, “who lifts up his hand against a helpless beggar; may Heaven requite him for this foul deed!”

“Thou hadst best be quiet,” said Antinous, “or we will drag thee by the heels through the hall, until we have stripped the flesh off thy bones.”



But this was too much even for the wooers. “Antinous,” said one of them, “it was ill done of thee to strike the hapless wanderer. Take heed that thou bring not a curse upon thyself, if there be gods in heaven to see such deeds. And what if a god should visit this house in some strange disguise, to make trial of our hearts? It were no new thing.”



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A chill seemed to have fallen on the company after this shameful incident. The wooers had ceased their clamour, and sat talking in low tones together; Odysseus and Telemachus sat silent in their places, brooding gloomily on the outrage; Antinous alone remained unmoved, being hardened, within and without, against all reproach.

When Penelope, who was sitting among her maidens in her chamber, heard how the stranger had been ill-treated, she cried: "So may Apollo smite thee, Antinous, thou godless man!" "Ay," said Eurycleia, "if prayers could slay them, not one of these men would see to-morrow's dawn."

"Go, one of you," said Penelope, "and bring hither the swineherd. I would fain speak with this stranger; who knows but he may have somewhat to tell me of Odysseus, my lord?" Eumaeus was summoned, and having heard the desire of Penelope, he answered: "My queen, there is a rare pleasure awaiting thee. This man hath a tongue to charm thy very soul. Three days and nights he abode with me, and all that time he kept us spellbound by the tale of his adventures. It was as if we were listening to the lay of some rare minstrel, a god-gifted man, who sways all hearts as he will by the magic of his voice. And he brings sure tidings of Odysseus too, if we may believe what he says."

"Call him hither," answered Penelope, "that he may speak to me face to face. If his news be true, we may yet see the day when these men shall pay a heavy price for their plunder of our house."

As she spoke, a loud sneeze was heard in the room below. "It was my son," said Penelope, laughing, "I know it by the sound; and it is a sign that my words will be fulfilled. Make haste now, and bring the stranger to me."

Eumaeus went, and presently returned with a message from the supposed beggar, to say that he feared fresh violence from the wooers, if he left his place by the door and passed through them again. The truth was that Odysseus feared recognition if he appeared before his wife in broad daylight; so he affected to complain of the indifference of Telemachus, who had allowed the savage deed of Antinous to go unpunished, and begged permission to wait until the evening, when the wooers would be gone home, and he could tell his story unmolested.

"He says well," answered Penelope, when she had heard the message. "And he seems to be a man of sense. We will wait until evening, as he desires."

The day was waning when Eumaeus returned to the hall, and the wooers had already begun their evening pastimes. The swineherd went up to Telemachus, and said to him in a low tone: "It is time for me to return to my farm, that I may give an eye to the things which I have in charge. I leave thee to look to the house, and all that it contains; but above all be careful of thyself, for there are many here who wish thee ill."

The Beggar Irus



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Just after Eumaeus had left, a huge, ungainly fellow came slouching up to the place where Odysseus was sitting, and eyed him with a look of great disfavour. He was the town beggar, known far and wide in Ithaca as the greediest and laziest knave in the whole island. His real name was Arnaeus, but from being employed to run errands about the place he had received the nickname of Irus. Highly indignant at finding his rights usurped by a new-comer, and thinking to find in that battered old man an easy victim, he began to rate his supposed rival in a big, blustering voice: "Give place, old man, to thy betters, and force me not to use my hands upon thee. Begone, and that quickly, or it shall be the worse for thee; out of the way, I say!"

With a stern look Odysseus answered him, and said: "What possesses thee, fellow, that thou seekest a quarrel with me? Thou art, as I perceive, a beggar like me, and I grudge thee not anything which thou mayest receive in the way of alms from those who sit here. There is room on this threshold for us both. But I warn thee not to provoke me to blows, for old as I am I will set a mark upon thee which thou wilt carry to thy death."

Trusting in his size, and encouraged by the nods and winks of the wooers who sat near, Irus was only too ready to take up the challenge. "Hark to the old starveling cur!" he shouted. "How glib of tongue he is, like any scolding hag! Get thee to thy fists then, since thou wilt have it so, and I will knock all thy teeth out, if thou hast any left"; and he thrust Odysseus with his foot.

All the wooers now came running up, and crowded round the exasperated beggars, hoping to see fine sport. Antinous took the lead, such a scene being exactly to his taste. "Here is matter for mirth," he cried, laughing, "for many a day. Make a ring quickly, and let them fight it out."

In the courtyard there was a red smouldering fire, on which two huge sausages were roasting, a sort of haggis made by filling the belly of a goat with fat and blood. It was determined to give one of these messes to the winner in the fight; and he also was henceforth to have the sole right to receive the broken meats at the wooers' feasts.

Odysseus now pretended to draw back, as if he feared an encounter with a man younger than himself; but at last he consented to the match, on condition that the wooers would swear an oath not to strike him a foul blow while he was fighting with Irus. To this they all agreed, and forthwith Odysseus stripped to the waist, and girded his rags about his loins. By some strange magic his limbs seemed to have filled out; and when the wooers saw his mighty chest and broad shoulders they cried out in amazement "Methinks Irus will pay dearly for his ire,"[1] said one. "Look what a brawny thigh the old carle shows under his rags!"

[Footnote 1: The pun is an attempt to reproduce a similar word-play in the original.]



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Irus himself was not less astonished than dismayed, so that they were obliged to use force to make him face his opponent; and as he stood there quaking with fear Antinous reviled him bitterly, and threatened, if he were defeated, to carry him to the mainland, and hand him over to a robber chieftain, nicknamed the Mutilator, and notorious for his cruelties. "He will carve thee into collops and fling them to his dogs," said the ferocious prince.

Little encouraged, as may be supposed, this prospect, Irus in his despair aimed a blow at Odysseus, and struck him on the right shoulder. Then Odysseus, who had resolved to put forth but half his force, lest he should betray himself to the wooers, struck the wretched man under the ear. There was a crash of broken bones, and down went Irus in the dust, spitting blood, and beating the ground with his heels. The wooers hailed his fall with shouts of laughter, and Odysseus, seizing the prostrate beggar by the foot, dragged him through the courtyard gate, and propped him against the wall. "Sit there," he said, placing his staff in his hand, "and keep off dogs and swine. Methinks thou hast had enough of playing the tyrant among strangers and beggars."

When he returned to his place on the threshold he found the wooers in high good humour at the defeat of Irus. "May heaven fulfil all thy heart's desire!" cried one who sat near, "seeing that thou hast rid us of that hungry, brawling rogue." His words had a meaning which he little guessed, and Odysseus rejoiced when he heard them. Then Antinous brought the pudding, all steaming from the fire, and set it by him; and Amphinomus gave him two loaves, and filled a cup with wine. "Hail, old friend!" he said, offering the cup, "and mayest thou live to see happier days."

This Amphinomus differed in character from the other suitors, being a prudent and fair-minded man. Odysseus knew him and his father well, and being willing to save him, if possible, he looked earnestly at him, and said: "Amphinomus, thou seemest to be a man of understanding, and therefore I will give thee a word of warning. Hark, in thine ear! Quit this company at once! The day of doom is very near to them all, and I would not that thou shouldst perish with them."

These words, spoken in a low and solemn tone, so that none besides might hear, sent a chill to the heart of Amphinomus. Slowly and sadly he went back to his seat, his mind full of dark foreboding. Nevertheless, he did not profit by the warning; for he had thrown in his lot with that guilty band, and had to drink of the same cup.

Penelope and the Wooers

I

"How slowly move the hours," said Penelope to Eurycleia, yawning and then laughing in sheer vacancy of spirit. "How would it be if I showed myself to the wooers? I hate

them, it is true, but it would serve to pass the time, and I could caution my son not to be so familiar with these treacherous friends.”



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“Do so, my child,” answered Eurycleia, “but first wash and anoint thyself, and go not among them with this tear-stained face. And waste not thy life in perpetual mourning; think what a comfort thou hast in thy son.”

“Speak not to me of such vanities,” answered Penelope; “why should I wish to preserve this poor remnant of my beauty? Foul or fair, what matters it in my widowed state? But send two of my handmaids hither to attend me, for it is not seemly that I should go alone among the men.”

While the nurse was gone to fetch the maidens, a sudden drowsiness overpowered Penelope, and she sank back in her chair, subdued by a short but trancelike sleep. And while she slumbered, invisible hands were busy with her person, washing away all the stains which sorrow had left on her face, and shedding upon her immortal loveliness, such as clothes the Queen of Love herself, when she joins the sister Graces in the dance. The voices of the women entering her chamber roused her from that strange sleep, and sitting up she rubbed her cheeks and said: “Wondrous soft was the slumber which overtook me in my sorrow! Would that it were death which had come upon me with like softness, that I might no longer waste away in mourning for the excellence of my dear, dear lord!”

Thereupon she arose, and descending the stairs stood in the open doorway of the hall, with a handmaid on either side. A murmur of surprise and admiration went round the whole company, for never had she seemed so wondrous fair. Turning to Telemachus she said: “My son, with grief I perceive that thy understanding increaseth not with thy growth, but rather becometh less. Who would think, seeing thee thus tall and comely, like a prince’s true son, that thou wouldst suffer such deeds to be wrought upon the stranger within thy gates? What if he had come by his death through this violence? What shame and infamy to thee!”

“Mother,” answered Telemachus, “thou hast some reason for thine anger. Howbeit, I have a man’s wit, and am not, as thou sayest, more foolish than a child. But what can one do against so many? And as to this stranger, thou wouldst know that thy fears are idle, if thou couldst see Irus as he now sits at the gate, rolling his head like a drunkard, with no strength to stand on his feet or stir from his place. Would that all the wooers were in the same plight!”

While Telemachus was defending himself, Eurymachus had been gazing with bold eyes on that fair lady; and now he addressed her with smooth words of flattery: “Daughter of Icarus, sage Penelope, if all the Greeks could behold thee as now thou art, this house would not contain the multitude of thy wooers. Thou surpassesst all the daughters of men in beauty, and in stature, and in thy even-balanced wit”



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“Eurymachus,” answered Penelope, “all the bloom of my womanhood was blighted on the evil day when the Greeks embarked for Troy, and Odysseus, my lord, went with them. But now I am like some poor hunted creature, hard beset by the hounds of fate. Well I remember my husband’s parting words. Holding my right hand he said: ‘Dear wife, I am going into the midst of perils, and it may be that we shall never see each other again. Be thou but faithful to thy trust, and remember whose daughter thou art; and when thou seest thy son with a beard on his cheeks, thou art free to marry whom thou wilt.’ Such were his words, and now they shall shortly be fulfilled. I see the day approaching which shall make me another man’s wife; better for me if I were the bride of death! For who ever beheld such wooing as yours? ’Twas ever the custom among those who sought the daughter of a wealthy house in marriage to bring with them their own sheep and oxen to make good cheer for the friends of the bride; but ye sit here as unbidden guests, and devour my living.”

Odysseus smiled to himself with pleasure when he heard this artful speech of Penelope, for he perceived her intention, which was to draw gifts from the wooers, and raise their hopes by the prospect of her approaching marriage. And the artifice was successful, for the wooers, following the lead of Antinous and Eurymachus, at once despatched their servants to bring the bride gifts from their houses. Antinous gave a splendid embroidered robe, with twelve golden clasps, Eurymachus a necklace of amber and gold, and Eurydamas a pair of jewelled earrings. These and other costly offerings were brought to Penelope in her chamber.

II

When evening came on, the wooers ordered three braziers to be set up in the hall, to give them light as they sat at their pastimes. The braziers were fed with dry chips of pine-wood, and the maid-servants relieved each other from time to time in the duty of keeping up the fires. Presently Odysseus drew near to the handmaids, and said: “Go ye and attend the queen in her chamber, I will serve the fires, and give light to the company. Yea, though they sit here all night they shall not tire me out, for I am a much-enduring man.”

The women laughed, and glanced at one another; and one of them, whose name was Melantho, spoke bitterly to Odysseus, and reviled him, saying: “Thou wretched old man, why goest thou not to find a bed in the smithy, or wherever else thou canst, instead of loitering here, and vexing us with thy prate? Either thou hast drunk a cup too much, or else thou art stricken in thy wits. Get thee gone, lest a stronger than Irus lay his hand upon thee and break thy bones.”

“Now will I go straightway to Telemachus,” answered Odysseus fiercely, “yonder where he sits, and tell him what thou sayest, thou vixen, that he may hew thee in pieces on the spot.”



So menacing were his looks and his tones that the women fled quaking from the hall and left him to tend the fires. So there he stood in view of the whole company, to their eyes a poor outcast, intent on his menial task; but thoughts other than of the fires filled his heart.



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As he stooped over one of the braziers and stirred the fuel into a blaze, Eurymachus noticed the red gleam which was reflected from the smooth, bald crown of the supposed beggar. "Look!" he cried, laughing and pointing at Odysseus, "surely this man is a favourite of heaven; for see how the light shines like a crown of glory on his hairless pate!"

Then he called to Odysseus, and said: "How sayest thou, friend, wilt thou be my thrall, and work on my farm among the hills for a fixed wage? Thy business would be to repair the stone fences and work on the plantation; thou wouldst have a whole coat to thy back, and shoes to thy feet, and thy penny fee, and bread to eat all the year round. But I can read thine answer in thy face: thou wouldst rather crouch and whine for bread than do aught useful to earn thy living."

"Eurymachus," answered Odysseus firmly, "I would that I could prove my manhood against thine in any trial of strength and endurance. Let it be a match of mowing, in a rich meadow-land, on the longest day in spring, and let us ply the scythe together, fasting, from dawn till eve. Or give me a stout pair of oxen, mighty beasts, equal in strength, and both well filled with fodder, and set me to plough a field of four acres, of rich, deep soil—then wouldst thou see if I could drive a straight furrow. Or stand by my side on the perilous edge of battle, with equal arms, and try whether I would flinch sooner than thou. A great man and a mighty thou seemest to thyself, having never learnt what true manhood is. Poor windy braggart, if Odysseus set foot in this house again, the doors would seem too narrow to thee in thy haste to escape."

"Thou saucy knave!" cried Eurymachus, incensed by this daring speech, "I will teach thee respect for thy betters"; and seizing a footstool he prepared to hurl it at the offender's head. But Odysseus sprang aside and ran to Amphinomus for protection; the heavy missile flew hurtling through the air, and struck one of the servants, who was just crossing the room, on the arm. Down went the man with a cry of pain, and the wooers raised an uproar throughout the hall. "A murrain on this begging loon!" exclaimed one. "Why came he hither to bring strife among us?"

"Ye are mad, my masters!" said Telemachus, raising his voice; "verily ye are flown with insolence and wine.[1] Ye had better go home and sleep off your liquor before worse comes of it."

[Footnote 1: Milton, "Paradise Lost," i. 502.]

The wooers were indeed in a dangerous mood, and they began to finger their weapons, and utter fierce threats against Telemachus. But Amphinomus interposed, and by exerting all his influence induced them to forgo their murderous purpose and disperse quietly to their homes.

Odysseus and Penelope



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As soon as the house was quiet, Telemachus, obeying a sign from his father, prepared to convey the weapons which hung about the hall to an inner chamber, out of the reach of the wooers. First he ordered Eurycleia to keep the women out of the way, and having barred the doors leading to the inner apartments, he took down helmet and spear and shield from the walls, and carried them, with his father's help, to the upper room. When this important task was performed he withdrew for the night, and Odysseus was left alone in the hall to await the coming of Penelope.

Presently the doors were opened, and by the flickering light of the braziers Odysseus, for the first time after twenty years, saw the face of his wife. Lovely indeed she seemed in his eyes, not less than when he wedded her in her maiden bloom. Her handmaids brought a chair of silver and ivory, a work of most rare device, and set it by the fire with a soft fleece upon it. Penelope took the seat prepared for her and gazed curiously at the stranger, who sat crouched in the shadow of a pillar, avoiding her eye. Meanwhile the women were bustling about the hall, removing the remains of the feast, and heaping fresh fuel on the fires. Among them was Melantho, who had spoken so roughly to Odysseus an hour or two before. When she saw Odysseus she began railing at him again, and rudely bade him begone. Penelope soon reduced her to silence, and then calling Eurycleia she bade her place a seat for the stranger.

"Now tell me," began Penelope, when the chair had been brought, "who art thou, and of what country? And who were thy father and mother?"

"Ah! lady," answered Odysseus, "I beseech thee, question me not as to my country and my friends, lest thou open anew the fountain of my grief. It is not seemly to sit weeping and wailing in a stranger's house; and I fear that thou wilt say that my tears are the tears of drunkenness."

Penelope pressed him for an answer. "Thou surely art of some country," she said, smiling; "or art thou one of those of whom old stories tell, born of stocks and stones?"

"Since thou urgest it so strongly," replied Odysseus, "I cannot deny thee. In the broad realm of Crete there is a certain city, Cnosus by name; there reigned Minos, and begat Deucalion, my famous sire. To Deucalion two sons were born, Idomeneus the elder, and myself, whom he named Aethon. When war arose between the Greeks and Trojans, Idomeneus sailed to fight for the sons of Atreus, and I was left behind in my father's house. Then it was that I saw Odysseus, who was driven by stress of weather to seek shelter on our coasts. When he had anchored his ships in the harbour, he came up to the town and inquired for Idomeneus, whom he said was his friend, honoured and beloved; but we told him that Idomeneus had departed ten days before. Then I received him in my house, and feasted him and all his company for twelve days; for all that time the north wind blew, so that a man could not stand up against it. On the thirteenth day the wind ceased and they put out to sea."



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Penelope's tears flowed fast as she listened to that cunning fiction, which seemed to bring her husband before her eyes. Odysseus watched her, with eyes set like horn or iron, as she sat before him sobbing and rocking herself to and fro; but his heart grew big within him, and he could hardly keep back his own tears. At length she grew calmer, and wishing to try him, asked him this searching question: "If thou didst indeed entertain my husband in thy house, tell me what manner of man he was, and what garments he had on, and who they were that attended him."

"It is hard," answered Odysseus, "to tell thee of what thou askest, after twenty years; nevertheless I will attempt to call up his image from the past. He wore a purple woollen cloak, of two folds, and it was held by a golden brooch with a double clasp; and on the brooch was fashioned a hound, holding in his jaws a fawn; and so skilfully was it wrought that the figures seemed to live, the fawn struggling to escape, and the hound clenching his fangs to hold him—so rare a piece it was. Under his cloak, Odysseus wore a close-fitting tunic, which glistened like the peel of a dried onion; for very soft and fine was the texture. I cannot tell whether these were the garments which he had on when he left you; it may be that they were a gift received on his voyage, for he had many friends. Even so I gave him a sword of bronze and a mantle, and a fringed tunic, when I bade him adieu. Further, I would have thee know that he had a squire with him, somewhat older than himself, a round-shouldered man, dark of complexion, and with curling hair. His name was Eurybates, and Odysseus held him in high regard."

What were the emotions of Penelope, when she heard the raiment and ornaments which her husband was wearing the last time she saw him thus described down to the minutest detail! For a long time she remained silent, overpowered by her feelings; and when she spoke again there was a ring of sincere warmth and friendliness in her voice. "I pitied thee before," she said, "seeing thee thus forlorn, but now thou shalt be my dear and honoured guest, for I know that thou hast spoken the truth. These garments, and the golden brooch, were a gift from my own hands to my dear lord. Alas! I shall never see him again. Cursed be the day that parted me from him, and sent him to the land of Troy, that name abhorred of my soul!"

"Lady," answered Odysseus, "no one could blame thee, or say that thou sorrowest beyond measure, for such a husband as thine. He was indeed a man of rare and god-like gifts. Nevertheless be comforted; for ere many days are passed thou wilt see him here, safe and sound, and loaded with the wealth which he has gathered in his wanderings." Then he went on to repeat the story which he had already told to Eumaeus, with some further facts, drawn from his own experience in the last ten years; and concluded with this solemn adjuration: "Witness, this hearth of Odysseus, to which I am come, and witness Zeus, the supreme lord of heaven, if I lie! Ere yonder moon hath waned, Odysseus will be sitting under this roof."



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Penelope shook her head sadly, as she replied: "It will be a happy day for thee, if thy prophecy is confirmed by the event. But what am I saying? 'Tis an empty dream. But come, let the maidens prepare a bath for thee, and afterwards them shalt sleep sound in a soft, warm bed. Well hast thou deserved to receive all honour and worship at my hands, and woe unto him that shall seek to harm thee! I will put a speedy end to his wooing. For what wilt thou say of me, when thou art wandering in distant lands, if I suffer thee to abide here thus poorly clad, unwashed, and uncared for? Few and evil are the days of our life; and the best we can do is to win a good name by our gentle deeds while we live, and leave a fair memory behind us when we die."

"I doubt not thy goodness," replied Odysseus; "but I have long been a stranger to the comforts of which thou speakest, and they suit not my forlorn and desolate state. Nor would I that any of thy handmaids should wash my feet, and mock my infirmities; but if thou hast here an aged house-dame, like unto me in years and in sorrows, I grudge not that such a one should wait upon me."

"Thou speakest as a prudent man," said Penelope, "and I have such an aged dame as thou describest among my household. She was the first who took my ill-fated husband in her arms when his mother bare him, and she nursed him tenderly and well. She shall wash thy feet, old though she be, and feeble." Then she called Eurycleia, who was sitting near, and said to her: "Come hither, nurse, and wash the stranger's feet. Who knows but thy master is now in like evil case, grown old before his time through care and misery?"

When she heard that, the old woman lifted up her voice and wept: "Odysseus," she cried, "child of my sorrow, what have I not borne for thee! Pious thou wast, and righteous in all thy dealings, yet Zeus hath chosen thee out from among all men to be the object of his hate. Yea, and perchance even now he is mocked in the house of strangers, as these women were lately mocking thee. Yea, I will wash thee, as Penelope bids me, and for thy sake also, for my heart is moved with pity because of thy woes."

With such speed as her years allowed, the dame went and fetched warm water, and a vessel for washing the feet. She set them down in front of Odysseus, and before she began her task, stood for some time peering curiously into his face. "Hear me, friend," she said, after a while, "of all the strangers that ever entered these doors, ne'er saw I one so like unto Odysseus as thou art, in form, and in voice, and in feet."

"So said everyone who saw us together," answered Odysseus. But her words filled him with alarm, and recalled to his mind an old scar, just above the knee, caused by a wound which he had received from a wild boar while hunting in his boyhood in the valleys of Parnassus, during a visit to Autolycus, Penelope's father. If his old nurse should discover the scar she would be certain to recognise him, and the consequences of the premature discovery might be fatal. However, he had now no excuse for

declining the bath, so he drew back his chair into the shadow, still hoping to escape detection.



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But Eurycleia, whose suspicions were already aroused, was not thus to be evaded. As she handled the limb her fingers felt the well-known mark, and she let the foot fall with a loud cry. The vessel was overset, and the water ran over the floor. Half laughing and half weeping, the old woman fell upon his neck. "Thou art Odysseus, dear child!" she cried, "and yet I knew thee not till I had touched thee with my hands."

[Illustration: Odysseus and Eurycleia]

During all this scene Penelope had been sitting like one in a dream, lost in the memories awakened by the supposed beggar's story. The nurse now turned to rouse her from her reverie, and tell her the joyful news; but Odysseus, seeing her intention, pressed a heavy hand on her mouth, and, drawing her down to him with the other, said in a fierce whisper: "Peace, woman, or I will slay thee! Wouldst thou destroy him whom thou hast nursed at thine own breast?"

Eurycleia had now recovered from the shock of that sudden recognition. "Fear me not," she said, "I will be as secret as the grave. But see, the water is all spilt; I go to fetch more." And so with a grave face, but a heart bounding with delight, the faithful old creature brought a fresh supply of water, and proceeded with the task of washing her master's feet.

When he resumed his place by the fire, he found Penelope in a soft and pensive mood, and dwelling, as was her wont, on the sorrows of her widowed state. "Friend," she said, with a gentle sigh, "I will not keep thee much longer from thy rest, for the hour approaches which brings sweet oblivion to careworn hearts—all save mine. For the night brings me no respite from my woes, but rather increases them. When the day's duties are over, and all the house is still, I lie tossing ceaselessly, torn by conflicting doubts and fears. E'en as the wakeful bird sits darkling all night long, and pours her endless plaint, now low and mellow, now piercing high and shrill, so wavers my spirit in its purpose, and threads the unending maze of thought. Sweet home of my wedded joy, must I leave thee, and all the faces which I love so well, and the great possessions which he gave into my keeping? Shall I become a byword among the people, as false to the memory of my true lord? Yet how can I face the reproaches of my son, who since he is come to manhood grows more impatient day by day, seeing the waste of his wealth, of which I am the cause?"

"But I wished to ask thee concerning a dream which I had last night. There are twenty geese which I keep about the house, and I take pleasure in seeing them crop the grain from the water trough. In my dream I saw a great eagle swoop down from the mountains and slay them all, breaking their necks, There they lay dead in one heap; and I made loud lament for the slaying of my geese, so that the women gathered round me to comfort me. But the eagle descended again, and alighted on a jutting beam of the roof, and thus spake unto me with a human voice: 'Take comfort, daughter of Icarus; no dream is this, but a waking vision, which shall surely be fulfilled. The geese



are the woers, and I the eagle am thy husband, who will shortly come and give them to their doom.' Even as he said this I awoke, and going to the window I saw the geese by the door, cropping the grain from the trough, as is their wont."



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“Lady,” answered Odysseus, “there is but one interpretation of thy dream, and thy husband declared it with his own voice. Death looms near at hand for the wooers, and not one of them shall escape.”

But Penelope shook her head. “It is ill trusting in dreams,” she said, “and hard to discern the false from the true. There are two gates from which flitting dreams are sent to men: one is of horn, and the other of ivory: and the dreams which pass through the ivory gate are sent to beguile, while those which come from the gate of horn are a true message to him who sees them. And my dream, I believe, was sent me from the gate of ivory. Yea, the day is approaching, the hateful day, which shall part me for ever from the house of Odysseus; and this shall be the manner of the trial whereby I will prove which of the wooers is to win me: I will set up twelve axes, like the trestles on which the keel of a ship is laid, in the hall, and he who can send an arrow through the line of double axeheads from the further end of the hall shall win me for his bride. This device I learnt from Odysseus, who was wont thus to prove his skill in archery. Then farewell my home, the house of my lord, the home of my love, so fair, so full of plenty, which will haunt me in my dreams even unto life’s end.”

“Tis well-imagined, this trial of the wooers,” answered Odysseus, “and I counsel thee to put them to the proof without delay; for I am sure that Odysseus will return here again before ever one of these men shall string his bow and shoot an arrow through the line of axes.”

“Well, my friend,” said Penelope, “I will now bid thee good-night, though gladly would I sit here till to-morrow’s dawn, and let thee discourse to enchant mine ear. But there is a time for all things, and I would not rob thee of thy needful rest. Therefore I will go and lay my head on my uneasy pillow, and the women shall lay a bed for thee here, or where thou chooseth.”

The End draws near; Signs and Wonders

True to his character as a wandering beggar, Odysseus lay down to rest on a pile of sheepskins in the portico of the house. His mind was full of the events of the day, and of the terrible task which he had to perform on the morrow. When he thought of all the insults which had been heaped upon him in his own house, he ground his teeth with rage, and muttered bitter curses against the wooers. As if on purpose to provoke him further, just at this moment Melantho, and several of the other women, who slept in the town, came forth from the house, and passed by him with shrill laughter and merry gibes. Then his heart growled within him, even as a mother-hound growls over her whelps when she sees a stranger approaching, and in a sudden impulse of fury he started up to slay those faithless women on the spot; but repressing his mad purpose he smote his breast and rebuked his fiery spirit. Had he not borne even worse than this on the day when the Cyclops devoured his comrades in the cave?



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When anger and shame had had their turn, other and more pressing anxieties came crowding upon him, banishing sleep from his eyelids. How was he with such help as Telemachus could give him to overpower and slay a hundred men in the prime of their youth and strength? It seemed an impossible feat, and his heart quaked within him as he counted those fearful odds.

At last sleep came upon him unawares, and in a dream he saw his divine friend and helper, Athene, standing by him, robed in awful beauty. "Where is thy faith?" she asked, in sweet and solemn tones. "Dost thou doubt my power to help thee? Know this, that with me at thy side thou couldst rout and slay a thousand armed men. Sleep on, then, and vex thyself no more; in a few short hours all thy trials shall be passed, and thou shalt rest in triumph under thine own roof-tree." Then she touched his brow with her finger, and departed; and after that he slept on soundly until dawn.

In the first grey light of morning he awoke, roused by a sound as of one wailing within the house. He sat up in his bed and listened: it was the voice of Penelope, his wife; for she too had had her dreams, sweet, indeed, while they lasted, but bitter to her waking memory. She thought that her husband came to her, in all the glory of his manhood, even as when he set out for Troy, and put his arms about her, and kissed her tenderly. Therefore she wept and wailed, thinking that it was another false vision, sent by some hostile deity to mock her widowhood.

What a sound was that for the lonely watcher before the house! "Patience, fond, sad heart!" he murmured to himself, "this very night thou shalt hold me in thine arms, and sob out thy sorrows on my breast." With that he rose to his feet, and lifting up his hands to heaven put up a prayer to Zeus: "Dread sire of gods, if with good will ye have brought me thus far, after so many perils by land and by water, send me a sign from heaven, and reveal unto me your purpose by the lips of one of those that be within the house."

A loud peal of thunder was heard in answer to his prayer; and a second sign was sent by the voice of a woman in the house. She was one of twelve maid-servants, whose duty it was to grind wheat and barley for the daily supply of bread. The others had finished their task, but she, being old and weak, was still toiling at her mill. When she heard the thunder she stopped for a moment, and thus uttered her complaint: "Thunder in a clear sky! That bodes ill to some that be here. Heaven grant that it may be to the wooers, for whom day by day I suffer this cruel toil, making meal for them! May this be the very last time that they sit down to meat in this house!" So saying, she returned to her labour, and Odysseus rejoiced at the double sign which had been vouchsafed to him.



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By this time the whole household was afoot, and a score of busy hands were at work, under the direction of Eurycleia, preparing for the coming of the wooers. For it was a general holiday, being the festival of Apollo, and the guests were expected earlier than usual. Some went to the public fountain to fetch water, some swept and sprinkled the floor, and some sponged the tables and scoured the drinking vessels. Presently the herdsmen came in, driving before them the beasts for sacrifice; and of these the first to arrive was Eumaeus, who brought three fat hogs as his part of the daily tribute. Leaving his charge to grub about in the courtyard, he came up to Odysseus, and inquired how he had fared among the wooers on the previous day. "I fared ill," answered Odysseus, "and ill fare the villains who deal thus with the stranger under another man's roof!"

A rude voice here broke in upon him, and Melanthius the goatherd thrust himself between them, jostling Odysseus, and reviling him in brutal terms, "What, still loitering here, thou vagabond? Wilt thou go begging at other men's tables, or art thou waiting to taste of my fists?" Odysseus deigned no reply, but shook his head, biding his time.

Another herdsman now entered the courtyard; this was Philoetius, who had charge of the herds of Odysseus on the mainland. He brought a heifer and two or three fat goats, having crossed over to Ithaca by the ferry. When he saw Odysseus he took Eumaeus aside, and inquired who he was. "He is of kingly aspect," remarked the new-comer, "in spite of his wretched garb. But even kings may come to beggary, if it be Heaven's will."

Having heard from Eumaeus what he had to tell, Philoetius approached Odysseus, and taking his right hand greeted him kindly, saying: "Welcome, old friend, for my master's sake! E'en such, methinks, is his case, if he still lives and looks upon the daylight. Ah! what a thought is that! It brings the sweat of agony to my brow when I think that even now he may be wandering in rags from door to door, begging for a morsel of bread, while his flocks and herds roam in thousands on the hills. What shall I do? It is not to be borne that all this wealth should increase and multiply, to feed the mouths of thieves and rogues. Often have I resolved to drive off my cattle into a far country, and no longer to abet these men in their riotous living; but my duty to Telemachus, and the hope that even now my lord may return, still hold me back."

Perceiving the neatherd to be loyal and staunch, Odysseus resolved to take him partly into his confidence, and answered accordingly: "Thy hope is nearer to fulfilment than thou thinkest. Hear me swear, by the hearth of Odysseus, and by the board at which I have fed, that before thou leavest Ithaca thou shalt see thy master with thine own eyes—thou shalt see him slaying the wooers who play the master here."

"Would that I might live to behold that day!" cried Philoetius. "May I never eat bread again, if the wooers felt not the might of my hands." Eumaeus also declared himself ready to risk all by the side of Odysseus.



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While they were thus conversing, the whole body of the wooers came thronging into the house, and the daily banquet began. At the inner end of the hall, commanding the door which led to the women's quarters, was a sort of platform or dais of stone, raised to some height above the general level of the floor, and facing the main entrance. Here Telemachus, as giver of the feast, was seated; and while the servants were handing round the dishes he called Odysseus from his place by the door, and made him sit down by his side. "Sit down here," he said, "and eat and drink thy fill. And you, sirs," he added, addressing the wooers, "keep a guard on your hands and your tongues. This is no tavern, but my own house, and I will not suffer my guest to be wronged by word or deed under my roof."

This bold speech passed for the present unchallenged, though many a threatening look was directed at the young prince. By order of Telemachus, Odysseus received an equal portion with the other guests, and the banquet proceeded. Presently a new instance of the wooers' brutality was given, as if they were resolved to keep the edge of his anger fresh and keen. The author of this outrage was Ctesippus, a wealthy lord of Same. Taking up a bullock's foot from a basket, in which the refuse of the meal was thrown, he made this merry jest: "The stranger has received an equal share of our meat, as is but right; for who would wish to stint a guest of Telemachus? And now I will make him a present over and above, that he may bestow somewhat on the bathwoman, or some other of the servants." Suiting the action to the word he hurled the missile with savage force at Odysseus; but he, ever on the alert, avoided it by bowing his head, and it struck the wall with a crash.

"Ctesippus," said Telemachus sternly, "it is well for thee that thou hast missed, else thou hadst died by my hand. Is it not enough that ye slaughter my cattle and pour out my wine like water, but must I sit here day after day while ye fill my house with riot and injury and outrage?"

The wooers sat silent, being somewhat abashed by the just rebuke; and after a long pause, one of them, whose name was Agelaus, answered mildly: "Telemachus says well, for indeed he hath been sorely provoked. Let there be an end of these mad doings, which it is a shame to see. And if Telemachus will be advised by me he will urge his mother to make choice of a husband, that he may henceforth dwell unmolested in his father's house. Why will she delay us further? Surely by this time she must have given up all hope of ever seeing Odysseus again."

"Now by the woes of my father!" answered Telemachus, "I hinder her not from wedding whom she pleases; nay, I bid her do so, and offer bridal gifts besides. But I cannot drive her by force from my doors."

His words had a strange effect on the wooers: with one accord they broke out into a yelling peal of laughter, like women in a hysteric fit, while their eyes were filled with

tears. And, more awful still! their meat dropped blood as they conveyed it to their lips, and an unearthly wailing was heard, like the cry of a spirit in torment.



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Among those present was Theoclymenus, the man of second sight, and in that very hour the vision came upon him, and he cried aloud from the place where he sat: "Woe unto you, ye doomed and miserable men! Thick darkness is wrapped about you, the darkness of the grave! All the air is loud with wailing, and your cheeks are wet with tears. See, see! the walls and the rafters are sprinkled with blood, and the porch and the courtyard are thronged with ghosts, hurrying downward to the nether pit; and the sun has died out of heaven, and all the house lies in darkness and the shadow of death."

But the wooers had now recovered from their strange fit, and they laughed gaily at the terrible warning of the seer. "Poor man!" said Eurymachus, "he has left his wits at home. Go, someone, and show him the way to the town, if he finds it so dark here."

"I need no guide," answered Theoclymenus, "I have eyes and ears, and feet, and a steady brain, so that I shall not go astray. Farewell, unhappy men! Your hour of grace is past." And forthwith he arose and went his way to the town.

When he was gone the wooers began jeering at Telemachus, and taunted him with the behaviour of his guests. "Thou hast a rare taste," said one, "in the choice of thy company! First, this filthy beggar that cumbers the ground with his greedy carcass, and after him comes the mad prophet, and screams like a raven over our meat"

One meaning glance passed between Telemachus and his father; the day was drawing on, and they cared not now to bandy words with the wooers. And so the merry feast came to an end with jesting, and mirth, and laughter; and after a few short hours they were to sit down to supper—such a supper as they had never tasted before, with a hero and a goddess to spread the board.

The Bow of Odysseus

I

The time had now arrived for the great trial of strength and skill of which Penelope had spoken, and which was to decide deeper and deadlier issues than those of marriage. Among the treasures which Odysseus had left behind him was a famous bow, which he had received as a gift from Iphitus, son of Eurytus, whom he met in his youth during a visit to Messene. He who strung this bow, and shot an arrow through a line of axes set up in the hall, was to be rewarded by the hand of Penelope.

"Mother, it is time!" whispered Telemachus, soon after the departure of Theoclymenus. Obeying the signal, Penelope, who had been sitting in the hall listening to the talk of the wooers, left her place, and ascending a steep staircase made her way to the store-room, which was situated at the farther end of the house. In her hand she carried a

brazen key with a handle of ivory; and when she came to the door, she loosened the strap which served to draw the bolt from the outside, and inserting the key drew



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back the bolt. The double doors flew open with a crash, and the treasury with all its wealth was revealed. Great coffer of cedar-wood lined the walls, filled with fine raiment, which her own hands had wrought. It was a cool and quiet retreat, dimly lighted, remote from all rude sounds, full of fragrant odours, and fit to guard the possessions of a prince. And there, hanging from a pin, and heedfully wrapped in its case, was seen the fatal bow. She took it down, and, sitting on one of the coffer, laid it on her knees, and gazed on it fondly with her eyes full of tears. How often had she seen it in the hands of Odysseus, when he went forth at sunrise to hunt the hare and the deer! How often had she taken it from him when he came back at evening loaded with the spoils of the chase! And now a keen shaft from this very bow was to cut the last tender chord of memory, and make her another man's wife!

With a heavy heart she took the bow with its quiver in her hands, and descending the staircase re-entered the hall, followed by her maidens, who carried a chest containing the axes.

"Behold the bow, fair sirs!" she said to the wooers, "and behold me, the prize for this fine feat of archery!" Therewith she gave the bow to Eumaeus, who received it with tears; and Philoetius wept likewise when he saw the treasured weapon of his lord. These signs of emotion stirred the anger of Antinous, who rebuked the herdsmen fiercely. "Peace, fools!" he cried. "Peace, miserable churls! Why pierce ye the heart of the lady with your howlings? Has she not grief enough already? Go forth, and howl with the dogs outside, and we will make trial of the bow; yet me thinks it will be long ere anyone here shall string it"

"Anyone save thyself, thou wouldst say!" rejoined Telemachus with a loud laugh. Then, seeing his mother regarding him with gentle reproach, he added: "Tis strange that I should feel so gay and light of heart at the moment when I am about to lose my mother. Zeus, methinks, has turned my brain, and made me laugh when I should weep. But come, ye bold wooers, which of you will be the first to enter the lists for this matchless prize, a lady without peer in all the land of Hellas? Why sit ye thus silent? Must I show you the way? So be it, then; and if I can bend the bow, and shoot an arrow straight, the prize shall be mine, and my mother shall abide here in her widowed state."

So saying he sprang up, flung off his cloak, and laid aside his sword. And first he made a long shallow trench in the floor of the hall, and set up the axes with their double heads in a straight line, stamping down the earth about the handles to make all firm. Then he took the bow from Eumaeus; it was a weighty and powerful weapon, fashioned from the horns of an ibex, which were firmly riveted into a massive bridge, and great force was required to string it. Telemachus set the end against the floor, and strove with all his might to drive the string into its socket. Three times he tried, and failed; but the fourth time, making a great effort, he was on the point of succeeding, when his father nodded



to him to desist. "Plague on it!" cried Telemachus, laying the bow aside with an air of vexation, "must I be called a poltroon all my life, or is it that I have not yet attained the full measure of my strength? Let the others now take their turn."



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Then one by one the wooers rose up, in the order in which they sat, and tried to bend the bow. The first to essay it was Leiodes, a soothsayer, and a man of gentle and godly mind. But he was a soft liver, unpractised in all manly pastimes, and the bow was like iron in his white, womanish hands. "I fear that this bow will make an end of many a bold spirit," he said, little guessing how true his words were to prove; "for better it were to die than to go away beaten and broken men, after all the long years of our wooing."

"Fie on thee!" cried Antinous, "thinkest thou that there are no better men here than thou art? Doubt not that one of those present shall bend the bow and win the lady." Then he called Melanthius, and bade him light a fire, and bring a ball of lard to anoint the bow and make it easier to bend. The lard was brought, and the wooers sat in turn by the fire, rubbing and anointing the bow, but all to no purpose. Only Antinous and Eurymachus still held back, each in the full assurance that he, and none other, had strength to bend the bow.

II

Odysseus sat watching the wooers from his place at the upper end of the hall, and his heart misgave him when he thought of the appalling task which he had undertaken. He had acquitted himself like a hero in many a hard-fought field, but never in all his life had he faced such odds as these. While he thus mused, and weighed the chances in his mind, he saw Eumaeus and Philoetius leave the hall together, and pass out through the courtyard gate. Then a sudden thought struck him, and muttering to himself, "I must risk it," he rose and followed the two men. He found them talking together outside the courtyard fence, and in order to make trial of their temper he addressed them in these cautious terms: "Tell me truly, good friends, which side would ye take, if by some miracle Odysseus suddenly appeared in this house? Would ye be for the wooers or for him?"

Eumaeus and Philoetius with one voice protested that they were ready to hazard their lives for the rights of their master, whereupon Odysseus hesitated no longer, but answered: "The miracle has been wrought; I am he! After twenty years of toil and wandering Heaven hath brought me home. I have watched ye both, and I know that ye alone among all the thralls remain true to me. Only continue steadfast for this day, and your reward is assured. I will build houses for ye both, close to my own, and ye shall dwell there with your wives, as my friends and neighbours, equals in honour with Telemachus, my son."



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The swineherd and neatherd listened with amazement, willing to believe, but still half in doubt; but when Odysseus showed them the scar, which they had seen many a time before, they were convinced, and embraced their old master with tears and cries of joy. Having allowed them some moments to indulge their feelings, Odysseus checked them with a warning gesture. "Take heed to yourselves," he said, "or your cries will betray us. And now mark what I shall tell you. I will go back to the house first, and do ye two follow me one by one. To thee, Philoetius, I give charge to make fast the gate of the courtyard, with bolt, and with bar, and with cord. And thou, Eumaeus, when the time comes, shalt bring the bow and place it in my hands, whether the wooers cry out on thee or not; and when thou hast given me the bow, go straightway and command the women to make fast the doors of their apartments, and remain quiet by their work until I have finished what I have to do."

At the moment when Odysseus returned to his place in the hall, Eurymachus was just making a last attempt to bend the bow. "Out on it!" he cried, finding all his efforts of no avail. "It is a shame to think how far beneath Odysseus we all are in the strength of our hands; 'tis this that stings me, much more than the loss of the lady."

"Thou mistakest the cause," answered Antinous. "This day is the holy feast of the divine archer, Apollo, and doubtless he is jealous because we try our skill in his own art on his sacred day. Let us leave the axes where they stand, and try our fortune again tomorrow."

The proposal was received with general applause, and forthwith the whole company called loud for wine, and began drinking heavily to drown their disappointment. Odysseus watched the progress of the revel with grim satisfaction, and when the flushed faces and thick talk of the wooers showed that they were far gone in drunkenness he asked, with an air of deep humility, to be allowed to try his hand at stringing the bow. His request was greeted with a loud cry of contempt and indignation from all the wooers; and Antinous especially was highly incensed, threatening him with dire pains and penalties for his presumption. Hereupon Penelope interposed, and rebuked Antinous for his violence. "Why should not the stranger try his skill with the rest?" asked she. "Thinkest thou that the poor man will win me for his wife if he succeeds? Sure I am that he is not so foolish as to entertain such a thought."

"'Tis not for that," said Eurymachus, answering her. "He cannot be so mad as that. But what a shame to all this noble company if a houseless beggar should accomplish a feat which none of us was able to perform."

"Talk not of shame," replied Penelope with scorn. "Are ye not covered with shame already, by your foul deeds done in this house in the absence of its lord? Give him the bow, I say! And if he string it, by Apollo's grace, I will clothe him in a new cloak and doublet, and give him a sharp javelin, to keep off dogs and men, and a two-edged

sword, and sandals for his feet, and give him safe conduct to whatsoever place he desires to reach.”



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The decisive moment was at hand, and Telemachus saw the necessity of removing his mother from the scene of the approaching conflict. "Mother," he said in a tone of authority, "leave these things to me; I am master here. Evening draws on, and it is time for thee to retire."

When Penelope had withdrawn, Eumaeus took the bow, and was about to carry it to Odysseus, but paused half-way, in doubt and alarm, for a perfect storm of threats and abuse assailed his ears. "Halt, thou dog! Put down the bow! Art thou tired of thy life?" Appalled by the menacing cries of the wooers, the swineherd stood hesitating; but Telemachus raised his voice, and commanded him instantly to deliver the bow to Odysseus. "I will teach thee," he said, "who is thy master; thou shalt carry the marks of my hands to thy farm, if thou do not as I tell thee. Would that I could as easily drive the whole of this drunken rout from my doors!"

"Well bragged, Sir Valiant!" cried Antinous; and all the wooers laughed boisterously when they heard him. Seizing his opportunity while their attention was thus diverted, Eumaeus came and placed the bow in the hands of Odysseus; then, calling Eurycleia, he bade her make fast the door of the women's apartments. Meanwhile Philoetius secured the gates of the courtyard, and returning to his place sat watching the movements of Odysseus. With anxious eye the hero scrutinised the great weapon, turning it this way and that, to see if it had been injured by worms or natural decay. To his great joy he found that it was sound and untouched. Then, easily as a minstrel fastens a new cord to a lyre, without effort he strung the bow, and bending it made the string twang loud and clear, like the shrill voice of the swallow.

A hundred mocking eyes and sneering faces had been turned towards him, as he sat fingering the bow and weighing it in his hands; but pale grew those faces now, and blank was that gaze. To add to their terror, at this moment a loud peal of thunder shook the house. Filled with high courage by the happy omen, Odysseus took an arrow, and, fitting it to the string, sent it with sure aim from the place where he sat along the whole line of axeheads, from the first to the last.

"Telemachus," he said, "thy guest hath not shamed thee. My hand is firm, and mine eye is true, poor worn-out wanderer though I be. Now let us give these fair guests their supper, and afterwards entertain them with music and with dancing, which are the fit accompaniment of a feast."

Then he beckoned to his son to draw near; and Telemachus made haste, and came and stood by his father's side, armed with sword and lance.



The Slaying of the Wooers

I

Stripping off his rags, and girding them round his waist, Odysseus took the quiver, and poured out all the arrows on the ground at his feet. "Now guide my hand, Apollo," he cried, "and make sure mine aim, for this time I will shoot at a mark which never man hit before."



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Therewith he bent his bow again, and pointed the arrow at Antinous, who just at that moment was raising a full goblet of wine to his lips. Little thought that proud and insolent man, as the wine gleamed red before him, that he had tasted his last morsel, and drunk his last drop. He was in the prime of his manhood, surrounded by his friends, and in the midst of a joyous revel; who would dream of death and doom in such an hour? Yet at that very instant he felt a sharp, sudden pang, and fell back in his seat, pierced through the throat by the arrow of Odysseus. The blood poured from his nostrils, he let fall the cup, and spurning the table with his feet in his agony he overset it, and the bread and meat were scattered on the floor.

Then arose a wild clamour and uproar among the wooers, and starting from their seats they sought eagerly for the weapons which were wont to hang along the walls; but not a spear, not a shield, was to be seen. Finding themselves thus baffled, they turned furiously on Odysseus, shouting, "Down with the knave!" "Hew him in pieces!" "Fling his carcass to the vultures!" As yet they had not recognised him, and they thought that he had slain Antinous by mischance.

They were soon undeceived. "Ye dogs!" he cried, in a terrible voice, "long have ye made my house into a den of thieves, thinking that I had died long ago in a distant land. Ye have devoured my living, and wooed my wife, and mishandled my servants, having no fear of god or man before your eyes. But now are ye all fallen into the pit which ye have digged, and are fast bound in the bonds of death."

Like beaten hounds, that dastardly crew cowered before the man whom they had wronged, and every heart quaked with fear. Presently Eurymachus stood forward, and tried to make terms for them all. "If thou be indeed Odysseus," he said, "thou speakest justly concerning the evil doings of the wooers. And there lies the cause of the mischief, Antinous, struck down by thy righteous hand. He it was who sought to slay Telemachus, that he might usurp thy place, and make himself king in Ithaca. But now that he is gone to his own place, let us, the rest, find favour in thy sight. And as for thy possessions which have been wasted, we will pay thee back out of our own goods, as much as thou shalt require."

But there were no signs of relenting on that stern, set face. "Talk not to me of payment," he answered, with a brow as black as night; "ye shall pay me with your lives, every one of you. Fight, if ye will, or die like sheep. Not one of you shall escape."

Thus driven to extremity, Eurymachus drew his sword and shouting to the others to follow his example he picked up a table to serve him as a shield, and raising his war-cry rushed at Odysseus. In the midst of his onset an arrow struck him in the liver, and he fell doubled-up over a table, smiting the floor with his forehead. Then he rolled over with a groan, and his eyes grew dim in death.



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Before Odysseus could fix another arrow to the string, Amphinomus was upon him, with sword uplifted to slay him. Telemachus saw his father's peril, and thrust Amphinomus in the back with his spear. The fall of their leaders arrested the advance of the wooers, and they drew back in a body to the lower end of the hall. Leaving the spear in the body of the fallen man, Telemachus ran to fetch armour for himself and Odysseus, and the two herdsmen. Quickly he brought shields and helmets and lances for the four, and they arrayed themselves and took their stand together on the platform.

While these preparations were in progress, Odysseus continued showering his arrows among the huddled troop of terrified men; and at every shot one of the wooers fell. At last Melanthius, the goatherd, made a desperate effort to save his party. Assisted by several of the wooers, he climbed up the wall of the banquet-room, and made his exit through the open timbers at the top into a narrow passage which gave access to the inner part of the house. Presently he returned, laden with spears and shields and helmets, which he had found in the chamber where they had been stored away by Telemachus.

What was the dismay of Odysseus when he saw his enemies arming themselves with spear and shield, and brandishing long lances in their hands! "Telemachus!" he cried, "we are betrayed! The women have sold us to the wooers." "Alas! I have erred," answered Telemachus, "for I left the door of the armoury open, and one of them has observed it."

While they thus debated, Eumaeus saw the goatherd making his way out of the hall again by the same exit. "It is the traitor Melanthius," he whispered; "now have we need of prompt action, or we are all undone."

Odysseus had now recovered his courage, and he issued his orders without losing another moment. "Go thou with the neatherd," he said to Eumaeus, "and seize that villain before he has time to return. Bind him hand and foot, and come back with all speed to the hall"

At the side of the hall, close to the platform where Odysseus and his party were stationed, there was a door leading into the passage already mentioned. Through this the two men passed, and made their way stealthily to the armoury. There they waited on either side of the door for Melanthius, whom they heard moving within. Before long he came out, bearing in one hand a helmet, and in the other an old battered shield, once the property of Laertes. Together they fell upon him, dragged him down by the hair, and having bound him tight with a long cord they hauled him up to a beam of the roof and left him hanging. "Long and sweet be thy slumbers, goatherd!" said Eumaeus as he contemplated his work, "thou hast a soft bed, such as thou lovest. Rest there till the morning light shall call thee to make breakfast for the wooers."



When they returned to the hall they found that a new ally had joined their party, in the person of Mentor, the old friend of Odysseus. No one saw when he came thither; but there he was, and right glad they were to see him. Very different were the feelings of the wooers when they saw their enemies thus reinforced, and one of them, named Agelaus, cried out upon Mentor, and threatened him, saying: "Give place, rash man, or thou wilt bring destruction on thyself and all thy house."



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When he heard that, Mentor was wroth, and rebuked Odysseus as slow of hand and cold of heart. "Why standest thou idle?" he cried. "Get thee to thy weapons, and finish the work which thou hast to do, if thou art verily that Odysseus who wrought such havoc among the Trojans in the nine years' war."

With these words the supposed Mentor vanished as mysteriously as he had appeared, and a little swallow was seen darting hither and thither among the smoke-blackened beams of the roof.

The woers understood not in whose presence they had been, and, thinking that Mentor had fled before their threats, they took courage again, and prepared to make a fresh assault. Agelaus now took the lead, and at his command six of them advanced and hurled their spears. But they were all dazed with drink, and weakened by long habits of loose indulgence, and not one of their weapons took effect.

"Now hurl ye your spears!" shouted Odysseus, and the four lances flew, and four woers bit the dust. At the next discharge from the woers Telemachus received a slight wound on the wrist, and Eumaeus was similarly injured on the shoulder by the spear of the brutal Ctesippus. A moment after Ctesippus himself was struck down by the lance of Philoetius, who mocked him as he fell saying: "There is for the ox-foot which thou didst lately bestow on Odysseus, thou noisy railer!"

And so the great fight went on, and at every cast of the spear Odysseus and his men added another to the list of the slain. Seeing their numbers dwindling fast, the wretched remnant of the woers lost heart altogether and huddled together like sheep at the end of the hall. To complete their discomfiture a terrible voice was suddenly heard in the air, and a gleam as from a bright shield was seen high up among the rafters. "Tis Athene herself come to our aid!" cried Odysseus; "advance, and make an end of them. Athene is on our side!" Forthwith they all sprang down from the platform and charged the woers, of whom some dozen still remained alive. What followed was not a battle, but a massacre. Like a drove of kine plunging frantically over a field, tortured by the sting of the hovering gadfly—like a flock of small birds scattered by the sudden swoop of a falcon—the panic-stricken woers fled hither and thither through the hall, seeking shelter behind pillars and under tables from the blows which rained upon them. But vain was their flight. In a very short time the last of that guilty band was sent to his account, and the great act of vengeance was completed.

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Like a lion fresh from the slaughter stood Odysseus, leaning on his spear, and covered with blood from head to foot. As he glared round him to see if any of his foes were still alive, his eye fell on Phemius, the minstrel, who was crouching in a corner near the side door, and clinging in terror to his harp. Seeing the stern gaze of Odysseus fixed upon him Phemius sprang forward, with a sudden impulse, and threw himself at the conqueror's feet, "Pity me, Odysseus," he cried, "and spare me! Thy days will be darkened by remorse if thou slay the sweet minstrel whom gods and men revere. I am no common school-taught bard, who sings what he has learned by rote; but in mine own heart is a sweet fountain of melody, which shall be shed like the dew from heaven on thy fame, and keep it green for ever. Therefore stay thy hand, and harm me not. Telemachus, thy son, knows that it was not of mine own will, nor for greed of gain, that I sang among the wooers, but they compelled me by force, being so many, and all stronger than I."

Thus appealed to, Telemachus readily confirmed what the minstrel had said, which was indeed the literal truth. Then he thought of the trusty Medon, who had been kind to him when a child, and remained loyal to the last to him and Penelope. "I trust he has not been slain among the wooers," he said. "Medon, if thou art still alive, come forth and fear nothing."

When he heard that, Medon, who had been huddled in a heap behind a chair, covered with a freshly-flayed ox-hide, flung off his covering, and came running to Telemachus. The poor man was still half-mad with terror. "Here I am!" he gasped, with staring eyes, "speak to thy father, that he slay me not in his rage and his fury,"

Odysseus smiled grimly at the poor serving-man, and bade him be of good cheer. "Live," he said, "thou and the minstrel, that ye may know, and tell it also to others, how much better are good deeds than evil. Now go ye forth and wait in the courtyard until I have finished what remains to be done." So forth they went, and sat down by the altar of Zeus, glancing fearfully about them, as if expecting every moment to be their last.

As soon as they were gone Odysseus walked slowly up and down the hall to see if any of the wooers still survived. But there was no sound or motion, save the tread of his own feet, to break the awful stillness in that chamber of death. There they lay, stark and silent, heap upon heap, like a great draught of fishes which have been hauled to shore in a drag-net, and have gasped out their lives on the beach. Having assured himself that he had not done the work negligently, he bade Telemachus summon the nurse, Eurycleia. Telemachus obeyed, and going to the door of the women's apartments, he smote upon it, and called aloud to the nurse. A moment after the bolts were drawn back, and Eurycleia entered the hall. When she saw Odysseus standing among the heaps of slain wooers, she opened her mouth to utter a cry of triumph, but Odysseus checked her, saying: "Hold thy peace, dame, and give not voice to thy joy: it is an impious thing to exult over the dead. They are the victims of heaven's righteous law,

and I was but the instrument of divine vengeance. Tell me now which of the women in the house have dishonoured me, and which of them be blameless.”



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“Behold I will tell thee all the truth,” answered the nurse; “fifty women there are in all in thy house, that card the wool and bear the yoke of bondage. And of these twelve have been faithless, honouring neither me nor Penelope, their mistress. But now let me go and tell the news to thy wife, who all this time has been lying in a deep sleep.”

“Rouse her not yet,” said Odysseus, “but go quickly and send those guilty women hither.”

While Eurycleia was gone to summon the maid-servants, Telemachus and the two herdsmen began, by the command of Odysseus, to set the hall in order, and wash away the traces of slaughter. Presently, with loud weeping and lamentation, the wretched women entered, and were compelled to assist in the horrid task. The bodies of the slain were carried out, and laid in order along the wall of the courtyard. Then they washed and scoured the tables, and scraped the floor with spades; and when all was ready Odysseus bade his son and the two others to drive the women forth, and slay them with the edge of the sword. So these three drove them into a corner of the courtyard, and Eumaeus and Philoetius drew their swords to slay them. But Telemachus held them back saying: “Let them die in shame, even as they have lived.” So they took a long ship’s cable, which was lying in an outhouse, and stretched it across an angle of the wall; to this they attached twelve nooses, and left the women hanging there by the neck until they were dead.

A horrid death was reserved for the traitor Melanthius. Dragging him out into the courtyard, they cut off his nose and ears, and his hands and feet, and so left him to die.

After that they washed themselves and went back to the hall. Then Odysseus bade Eurycleia kindle a fire, and bring sulphur to purify the chamber. And having thoroughly cleansed the house from the fumes of slaughter, he sat down to wait for the coming of his wife.

Odysseus and Penelope

I

Her face beaming with joy, and her feet stumbling over one another in their haste, Eurycleia ascended to the chamber where Penelope lay sleeping. “Awake, Penelope, awake!” she cried, standing by the bedside; “come and see with thine own eyes the fulfilment of all thy hopes. Odysseus has come home at last, and all the wooers lie slain by his hand!”

“Thou art mad, nurse,” answered Penelope pettishly, turning in her bed and rubbing her eyes; “why mockest thou me in my sorrow with thy folly? and why hast thou disturbed me in the sweetest sleep that ever I had since the fatal, the accursed day when my lord



sailed for Troy? But for thy years and thy faithful service I would have paid thee unkindly for this wanton insult”

“Heaven forbid that I should mock or insult thee, dear child!” cried the nurse, her eyes filling with tears. “I have told thee naught but the truth. The stranger whom we thought a beggar was Odysseus himself. Telemachus knew this all the time, but kept it from thee by the command of his father.”



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“May the gods ever bless thee for these tidings!” said Penelope, springing from the couch, and throwing her arms round the nurse’s neck. “But tell me truly, how did he with his single hand gain the mastery over such a multitude?”

“I saw not how it was done,” answered Eurycleia. “I heard but the groans of the men as they were stricken, for I was shut up with the handmaids in the women’s chamber. When it was over, he called me, and I found him standing among the slain, like a lion by his prey. It was a sight to gladden thy heart.”

But Penelope’s first impulse of joyful surprise had passed, and a cold fit of doubt and distrust succeeded, “It cannot be!” she murmured; “some god has taken the likeness of my husband, and slain the wooers.” Even when Eurycleia told her how she had discovered the scar, while washing the feet of Odysseus, she remained unshaken in her unbelief. “The counsels of the gods,” she said, “are beyond our knowing, and they can take upon them disguises too deep for a poor woman’s wit. But come, let us go and see the slaughtered wooers, and their slayer, whoever he be.”

II

Odysseus was sitting bowed over the fire, which shone redly on his face, as he leaned his head upon his hand. He was still clothed in his beggar’s rags, and strangely disfigured by the magic power of Athene; while the red stains of slaughter, which still lay thick upon him, served to render his disguise yet deeper. Small wonder then that Penelope hesitated long to acknowledge him for her husband, as she sat some way off scanning his features with timid yet attentive gaze, like one who strives to decipher a blurred and blotted manuscript. More than once she started up, as if about to fall upon his neck; then the gleam which had lighted up her face died away, her arms drooped listlessly at her side, and she remained motionless and cold.

When this had lasted for some time, Telemachus, who was present, rebuked his mother in angry terms, saying: “Fie upon thee, my mother! hast thou no heart at all? Why holdest thou thus aloof from my father, who has come back to thee after twenty years of suffering and toil? But ’twas ever thus with thee—thou art harder than stone.”

“My child,” answered Penelope, “I am sore amazed; I cannot speak, or ask any question, or look him in the face. But if this man be indeed my husband, he knows how to convince me, and scatter all my doubts to the winds, for there are secrets between us whereof no one knoweth, save only ourselves.”

Odysseus smiled at his wife’s caution. “Not in vain,” he thought, “is she known to all the world as the prudent Penelope.” Then, in order to give her time, he turned to Telemachus and said: “Come not between my wife and me, Telemachus; we shall know each other in due season. I have another charge for thee, and do thou mark heedfully



what I shall say. We have slain the noblest in the land, not one, but many, who leave a host of friends to take up their cause: how then shall we escape the blood feud? We had best look to it warily and well.”



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“Father,” answered Telemachus, “thou hast the name of wise, beyond all living men. Be it thine, therefore, to declare thy counsel, and I will follow it, to the utmost stretch of my power.”

“Thus, then, shalt thou do,” said Odysseus: “let all the household put on clean raiment, and bid the minstrel take his harp and make sweet music for the festal dance. Then foot it merrily, everyone, that all they who pass by the house may think that ye are keeping the marriage feast. In this wise the rumour of the wooers’ death shall not reach the town until we have had time to collect our men and prepare for our defence.”

Telemachus went forthwith to carry out his father’s orders. The whole household, men and women, arrayed themselves in festal attire, and soon the hall echoed to the throbbing notes of the lyre, and the loud patter of the dancers’ feet. And those who heard it from without said to one another: “So the long wooing of our queen has come to an end at last! Fickle woman, that could not endure unto the end, and keep faith with the husband of her youth!”

III

After giving his orders to Telemachus, Odysseus had retired to refresh himself with the bath, and put on fresh raiment, while Penelope remained seated in her former place. After an interval of some length he re-entered the hall, and sat down face to face with his wife. But what miracle was this? The haggard, timeworn beggar was gone, and in his place sat her husband, as she had known him in the days of old, with the added dignity which he had gained by twenty years of strenuous life. But the frost which had lain upon her spirit during her long period of weary waiting was not easily to be broken, and still she doubted. After a long silence Odysseus spoke, and now for the first time his tones had a ring of reproach: “Still not a word for thy husband, who has come back to thee after twenty years? Surely the very demon of unbelief possesses thee!” Even then Penelope made no answer, for she was waiting to put the final test, and at length Odysseus gave her the opportunity. “Go, Eurycleia,” he said, “and prepare a bed for me; I will leave this iron-hearted wife and go to my rest.”

“Ay, do so,” said Penelope, “take the bed from the chamber which he built with his own hands, and lay it in another room, that he may slumber there.” This she said to prove him, for the bed and the chamber had a secret history, known only to herself and her husband and the faithful nurse.

Odysseus rose bravely to the test: whether divining his wife’s purpose or not, he exclaimed, with an air of surprise and indignation: “Lady, what meanest thou by this order? Who hath moved my bed from its place? He must be of more than mortal skill who could remove it, for it was fashioned in wondrous wise, and with my own hands I

wrought it, to be a sign and a secret between thee and me. And this was the manner of the work. Within the



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courtyard there grew an olive-tree, a fair tree and a large, with a world of green leaves, and a stem like a stout pillar. Round this I built the walls of the chamber with close-fitting stones, and roofed it over, and hung the door on its hinges. Then I went to work on the tree, lopping off the boughs, and smoothing the trunk with the adze, so as to fashion it into a bedpost, and beginning from this I made the frame of a bed, and decorated it with gold and silver and ivory, and over the frame I stretched broad bands of ox-hide, stained with bright purple. This I tell thee as a sign by which thou mayest know me.”

The last shadow was now removed, and before Odysseus had well ended what he was saying Penelope sprang towards him, threw her arms round his neck, and covered his face with kisses. “Be not angry with me, my dear lord,” she murmured tenderly, “because I held back so long, and gave thee not loving welcome, as I do now. Thou art very wise, and knowest the dangers which beset a lonely woman who is over hasty to believe when a stranger comes and calls himself her husband. Many there be that lie in wait to lay snares for a weak and loving heart. But now I know thee for mine own dear love, and now is the winter of my widowhood made glorious summer, since I have seen thy face again.”

So they sat locked in each other’s arms, that valiant, long-suffering man, and his faithful wife, two brave and patient souls, parted so long, and tried so hard, but now united once more in wedded love and bliss. The hours went by unheeded, and day would have overtaken them in that trance of delight, had not Athene marked them with pity from her heavenly seat, and stayed the steeds of the morning in the east, and prolonged the reign of night, that the joy of that first meeting might not be broken until they had tasted all its honey to the lees.

Conclusion

I

Early next day Odysseus rose and donned his armour, and having charged Penelope to keep close in her chamber, and admit no one into the house, he set forth to visit Laertes on his farm, attended by Telemachus and the two faithful herdsmen, all armed to the teeth. Arrived at the farmhouse he left his companions there, bidding them prepare the morning meal, and went out alone to find his father. Passing through the courtyard gate, he entered a large plot of ground, planted by Laertes as a garden and orchard; and there he found the old man, who was digging about the roots of a young tree. With strange emotions Odysseus noted every detail of his dress and figure—the soiled and tattered coat, the gaiters of clouted leather, the old gauntlets on his hands, and the

goatskin cap. He who had once been the wealthiest prince in Ithaca had now the appearance of an ancient serving-man, broken down with years and toil.



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But in the midst of his sorrow a freakish whim came into the head of Odysseus, characteristic of his subtle and tortuous nature. Approaching his father, who was still stooping over his work, he said to him in a disguised voice: "Old man, I perceive that thou art well skilled in the gardener's art: never saw I a garden better tended—not a tree, not a shrub, but bears witness to thy fostering care. And be not wroth with me if I say that is a wonder to see the keeper of so fair a garden himself so squalid and unkempt. Surely he whom thou servest must be an ungrateful master. Tell me his name, if thou wilt, and answer me truly if this be indeed the land of Ithaca to which I am come, as I heard from a man whom I met by the way. He seemed a churlish fellow, and would not stay to answer my questions; for I was fain to ask him concerning a friend whom I once entertained in my house, a native of Ithaca, as he told me, and a son of one Laertes. Many days he dwelt with me, eating and drinking of the best, and I sent him away laden with rich gifts, gold and silver, and costly raiment."

"Friend," answered Laertes, shedding tears, "to Ithaca indeed art thou come, but he of whom thou askest is no longer here. In vain were thy gifts bestowed, for he who would have repaid thee richly for all thy kindness hath perished long ago, and his bones lie bleaching on the bare earth, or at the bottom of the sea. Tell me, how long is it since thou didst receive him, and who art thou, and where is thy home?"

"I am a man of Alybas," replied Odysseus, "the son of Apeidas the son of Polypemon, and Eperitus is my name; and it is now five years since Odysseus departed from my home. Fair omens attended him on his starting, and we parted in high hopes that we should meet again in his own land."

At these words of Odysseus the poor old man was overwhelmed with sorrow, and he heaped dust upon his grey head, groaning in bitterness of spirit. Odysseus was moved with pity at the sight of his distress, and thinking that he had now tried him enough, he revealed himself, pointing as proofs to the scar above his knee, and to certain trees which Laertes had allowed him to call his own when he walked with him, hand-in-hand, as a little child, through the garden.

The sudden shock of joyful recognition was too much for the old man, and he fell fainting into his son's arms. When he was somewhat recovered they went back together towards the house, and on the way Odysseus spoke of the slaying of the wooers, and of the danger which threatened him from the vengeance of their friends.

II

Meanwhile the news of the wooers' violent death had spread like wildfire through the island, and their kinsmen went with loud clamour to the house of Odysseus to carry away the dead bodies. When this was done they gathered together at the place of

assembly to devise some plan of vengeance; and Eupeithes, the father of Antinous, made violent outcry against Odysseus for his great act of savage justice.



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While they were debating, Medon and Phemius appeared on the scene, and described the manner in which the wooers had met their end. “The hand of Heaven,” said Medon, “was made manifest in the deed. I myself saw Athene leading the onset, and your sons were laid low like ripe sheaves before the sickle.” This report chilled their courage not a little; and Halitherses, seeing the effect produced, exerted all his eloquence to put an end to the blood feud. Nevertheless more than half of those present persisted in their purpose, and donning their armour went forth from the town to meet the party of Odysseus.

The encounter took place in front of the farmhouse, where Odysseus and the others had just taken their morning meal. Laertes, who seemed to have recovered all the vigour of his youth, led the attack, and by a well-aimed cast of his lance struck down Eupheithes, the leader of the opposing party. This success was followed up by a vigorous charge, in the midst of which a supernatural voice was heard in the air, striking terror into the assailants of Odysseus, who turned and fled in wild panic towards the town. They were hotly pursued, and not a man would have been left alive had not Zeus himself interposed to stay the slaughter. By his command Athene acted as mediator between Odysseus and the kinsmen of the wooers, and an oath of amnesty was taken on both sides, confirmed with solemn prayer and sacrifice.

PRONOUNCING LIST OF NAMES

[Transcriber’s note: The original list contains characters that are not found in normal ASCII, indicating the long or short stress to be put on the vowels. These are rendered below by the characters in [square brackets], thus: A “)” indicates a short vowel, and a “=” indicates a long. So “hay” would be rendered as “h[=a]” and “aha” would be “[)a]h[)a]” and so on.]

Achilles ([)a]kil’ez)
 AEetes ([=e]-[=e]’-tez)
 AEgaean ([=e]g[=e]’an)
 AEgisthus ([=e]gis’tus)
 AEgyptus ([=e]gyp’tus)
 AEolus ([=e]’[)o]lus)
 AEthon ([=e]’thon)
 Agamemnon ([)a]g[)a]m[)e]m’non)
 Agelaus ([)a]g[)e]l[=a]’us)
 Ajax ([=a]’jax)
 Alcinous (als[)i]n’-[)o]-us)
 Alcmene (alkm[=e]’n[=e])
 Alybas ([=a]’[)i]bas)
 Amphinomus (amph[)i]n’[)o]mus)
 Anticleia (ant[)i]kl[=i]’a)



Antilochus (ant[i]l[o]chus)
Antiphates (ant[i]ph[at]=e]z)
Antinous (ant[i]n[o]us)
Antiphus (an[t]i]fus)
Apheidas ([a]f[=i]'das)
Aphrodite ([a]fr[o]d[=i]'t[=e])
Arcady (ar[c]a]d[i])
Arete ([=a]r[=e]'t[=e])
Arethusa ([a]r[e]thy[=u]'s[a])
Arnaeus (arn[=e]'us)
Artemis (ar[t]e]mis)
Arybas ([a]'ribas)
Athene ([a]th[=e]'n[=e])
Atreus ([=a]'tr[=u]s)
Aurora ([=o]r[=o]'r[a])

Booetes (b)o][=o]'t[=e]z)



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Calypso (k[ə]l[ɪ]p[ə]s[ə])
Cassandra (kassan'dr[ə])
Charybdis (k[ə]r[ɪ]b[ɪ]s[ə])
Cimmerians (sɪm[ɪ]r[ɪ]j[ə]ns)
Circe (sɪr[ɪ]s[ə])
Clytaemnestra (kl[ɪ]t[ɪ]m[ɛ]n[ɛ]s'tr[ə])
Cnosus (kn[ɒ]s[ə])
Ctesippus (kt[ɛ]s[ɪ]p[ə]s)
Ctesius (kt[ɛ]s[ɪ]s[ə])
Cyclopes (s[ɪ]k[l]o[ʊ]p[ə])
Cyclops (s[ɪ]k[l]o[ʊ]p[ə])

Deiphobus (d[ɛ]f[ɪ]o[ʊ]b[ə]s)
Delos (d[ɛ]l[ə]s)
Demeter (d[ɛ]m[ɛ]t[ɪ]r)
Demodocus (d[ɛ]m[ɒ]d[ə]o[ʊ]s)
Deucalion (d[ɛ]k[ə]l[ɪ]o[n])
Diomedes (d[ɪ]o[ʊ]m[ɛ]d[ɪ]s)
Dodona (d[ɒ]n[ə])
Dolius (d[ɒ]l[ɪ]o[ʊ]s)
Dulichium (dy[ʊ]l[ɪ]k[ɪ]o[ʊ]m)

Eidothea ([ɛ]d[ɪ]o[ʊ]t[ɪ]e[ə])
Elis ([ɛ]l[ɪ]s)
Elpenor ([ɛ]l[ɪ]p[ɛ]n[ɔ]r)
Eperitus ([ɛ]p[ɛ]r[ɪ]t[ɪ]s)
Ephialtes ([ɛ]f[ɪ]j[ə]l[ɪ]t[ɪ]s)
Ephyra ([ɛ]f[ɪ]r[ə])
Eriphyle ([ɛ]r[ɪ]f[ɪ]l[ɪ])
Euboea (y[ʊ]b[ɔ]e[ə])
Eumaeus (y[ʊ]m[ɛ]o[ʊ]s)
Eupeithes (y[ʊ]p[ɛ]i[θ]i[θ]i[θ]i[θ])
Eurymachus (y[ʊ]r[ɪ]m[ə]k[ə]s)
Eurynomus (y[ʊ]r[ɪ]n[ɒ]m[ə]s)
Eurycleia (y[ʊ]r[ɪ]k[ɪ]l[ɪ]e[ə])
Euryalus (y[ʊ]r[ɪ]j[ə]l[ɪ]o[ʊ]s)
Eurylochus (y[ʊ]r[ɪ]l[ɒ]k[ə]s)
Eurydamas (y[ʊ]r[ɪ]d[ə]m[ə]s)
Eurytus (y[ʊ]r[ɪ]t[ɪ]s)

Hades (h[æ]d[ɛ]s)
Halitherses (h[æ]l[ɪ]θ[ɪ]r[ɪ]s[ɪ]s)
Helios (h[ɛ]l[ɪ]o[ʊ]s)
Hephaestus (h[ɛ]f[ɛ]s[təs])



Hera (h[=e]'r[]a])

Hercules (her'c[]u]l[=e]z)

Hermes (her'm[=e]z)

Iasion ([=i][])a]s[])i]on)

Icarius ([=i]k[])a]r[])i]us)

Idomeneus ([=i]d[=o]m'[])e]ny[=u]s)

Ino ([=i]'n[])o])

Iphimedeia (if[])i]m[])e]d[=i]'[])a])

Iphitus (if'[])i]tus)

Iphthime (ifth[=i]'m[=e])

Irus ([=i]'rus)

Ithaca ([i]th'[])a]c[])a])

Lacedaemon ([l]a]s[])e]d[=e]'mon)

Laertes ([l[=a][])e]r't[=e]z)

Laestrygonia ([l[=e]str]i]g[])o]'n[])i][])a])

Leda ([l[=e]'d[])a])

Leiodes ([l[=i][])o]'d[=e]z)

Lesbos ([l]e]z'bos)

Leto ([l[=e]'t[=o])

Malea (m[])a]l'[])e][])a])

Medon (med'on)

Melampus (m[])e]lam'pus)

Melanthius (m[])e]lan'th[])i]us)

Melantho (m[])e]lan'th[=o])

Menelaus (m[])e]n[])e]l[=a]'us)

Mentes (men'tez)

Mentor (men't[=o]r)

Messene (mess[=e]'n[=e])

Minos (m[=i]'nos)

Mycenae (m[=i]s[=e]'n[=e])

Nausicaa (naus[])i]k'[])a]-[])a])

Neleus (n[=e]'ly[=u]s)

Neoptolemus (neopt[])o]l'[])e]mus)

Neritus (n[=e]'r[])i]tus)

Nestor (n[])e]s't[=o]r)

Oceanus (os[=e]'anus)

Odysseus (odis'y[=u]s)

Orestes ([o]r[])e]s't[=e]z)

Orion ([=o]r[=i]'on)

Ormenius (orm[])e]n'[])i]us)

Orsilochus (ors[])i]l'[])o]kus)



Ortygia (ort]ij]g]i]a])
Otus (]o]tus)



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Patroclus (p[ə]tr[ɔ]oʹklus)
 Peiraeus (p[ɪ]r[ɛ]ʹus)
 Peleus (p[ɛ]ʹly[us])
 Pelides (p[ɛ]l[ɪ]d[ɛ]z)
 Pelion (p[ɛ]ʹl[ɪ]on)
 Penelope (p[ɛ]n[ɛ]l[ɔ]p[ɛ])
 Persephone (p[ɛ]r[ɛ]f[ɔ]n[ɛ])
 Pharos (f[ɑ]ʹros)
 Phaeacia (f[ɛ]ʹ[ɑ]si[ɑ])
 Phemius (f[ɛ]ʹm[ɪ]us)
 Pherae (f[ɛ]ʹr[ɛ])
 Philoctetes (f[ɪ]l[ɔ]kt[ɛ]ʹt[ɛ]z)
 Philoetius (f[ɪ]l[ɛ]ʹt[ɪ]us)
 Pisistratus (p[ɪ]s[ɪ]s[tr]aʹtus)
 Pleiades (pl[ɪ]ʹad[ɛ]z)
 Polycaste (p[ɔ]l[ɪ]k[ɑ]sʹt[ɛ])
 Polydamna (p[ɔ]l[ɪ]d[ɑ]m[ɑ]na)
 Polypemon (p[ɔ]l[ɪ]p[ɛ]ʹmon)
 Polyphemus (p[ɔ]l[ɪ]f[ɛ]ʹmus)
 Poseidon (p[ɔ]s[ɪ]ʹdon)
 Proteus (pr[ɔ]ʹty[us])
 Pylos (p[ɪ]ʹlos)

Same (s[ɑ]ʹm[ɛ])
 Scylla (sil[ɪ]ʹl[ɑ])
 Scyros (sk[ɪ]ʹros)
 Sirens (s[ɪ]ʹrens)
 Sisyphus (s[ɪ]s[ɪ]f[us])
 Sunium (sy[us]ʹn[ɪ]um)

Tantalus (tan[ɑ]ʹl[us])
 Teiresias (t[ɪ]r[ɛ]ʹs[ɪ]as)
 Telamon (t[ɛ]l[ɑ]m[ɔ]n)
 Telemachus (t[ɛ]l[ɛ]m[ɑ]k[us])
 Tenedos (t[ɛ]n[ɛ]ʹdos)
 Theoclymenus (th[ɛ]l[ɔ]kly[us]ʹm[ɛ]nus)
 Thesprotia (th[ɛ]spr[ɔ]ʹt[ɪ]a)
 Thon (th[ɔ]n)
 Tityos (t[ɪ]t[ɪ]ʹos)
 Tyndareus (tin[ɑ]ʹd[ɑ]ry[us])

Zacynthus (z[ɑ]k[ɪ]n[us])
 Zeus (zy[us])