
BOOK I

What Went On in the House of Odysseus

THIS IS THE STORY OF A MAN, ONE WHO WAS NEVER AT a loss. He had travelled far in the world, after the sack of Troy, the virgin fortress; he saw many cities of men, and learnt their mind; he endured many troubles and hardships in the struggle to save his own life and to bring back his men safe to their homes. He did his best, but he could not save his companions. For they perished by their own madness, because they killed and ate the cattle of Hyperion the Sun-god, and the god took care that they should never see home again.

At the time when I begin, all the others who had not been killed in the war were at home, safe from the perils of battle and sea: but he was alone, longing to get home to his wife. He was kept prisoner by a witch, Calypso, a radiant creature, and herself one of the great family of gods, who wanted him to stay in her cave and be her husband. Well then, the seasons went rolling by, and when the year came, in which by the thread that fate spins for every man he was to return home to Ithaca, he had not yet got free of his troubles and come back to his own people. The gods were all sorry for him, except Poseidon, god of the sea, who bore a lasting grudge against him all the time until he returned.

But it happened that Poseidon went for a visit a long way off, to the Ethiopians; who live at the ends of the earth, some near the sunrise, some near the sunset. There he expected a fine sacrifice of bulls and goats, and there he was, feasting and enjoying himself mightily; but the other gods were all gathered in the palace of Olympian Zeus.

Then the Father of gods and men made them a speech; for his heart was angry against a man, Aigisthos, and Agamemnon's son Orestês, as you know, had just killed the man. So he spoke to the company as follows:

"Upon my word, just see how mortal men always put the blame on us gods! We are the source of evil, so they say—when they have only their own madness to thank if their miseries are worse than they ought to be. Look here, now: Aigisthos has done what he ought not to have done. Took Agamemnon's wedded wife for himself, killed Agamemnon when he came home, though he knew quite well it would be his own ruin! We gave him fair warning, sent our special messenger Hermês, and told him not to kill the man or to make love to his wife; their son Orestês would punish him, when he grew up and wanted his own dominions. Hermês told him plainly, but he could do nothing with Aigisthos, although it was for his own good. Now he has paid the debt in one lump sum."

Then up spoke Athena, with her bright eyes glinting:

"Cronidês our Father, King of Kings and Lord of Lords! I have nothing to say for Aigisthos, he richly deserved his ruin. So perish any one else who does a thing like that! But what about that clever Odysseus? I am anxious about him, poor fellow, kept from his friends all this while, in trouble and sorrow, in that island covered with trees, and nothing but the waves all round it, in the very middle of the sea! It is the home of one of ourselves, the daughter of Atlas, you remember, that creature of mischief, who knows all the depths of the sea; you know, he holds up the pillars which keep earth and heaven apart. It is his daughter who keeps the wretched man a prisoner. She is always coaxing him with soft deceitful words to forget Ithaca; but Odysseus would be happy to see as much as the smoke leaping up from his native land, and then to die. And you cannot spare him a thought, Olympian. Don't you owe him something for all those sacrifices which he used to offer in their camp on the plain of Troy? Why have you such an odd grudge against him, Zeus?"

Then Zeus Cloudgatherer answered:

"My child, what a word to let out between your teeth! How could I forget that fine fellow Odysseus, after all! He is almost one of us. Wise beyond mortal men, ready beyond all to offer sacrifice to the lords of the broad heavens. But Poseidon Earthholder bears him unrelenting hatred, because of the Cyclops whose eye he put out; I mean Polyphemos, who has our blood in his veins, the most powerful of all the Cyclopians.

"Thoösa was his mother, the daughter of Phorcys prince of the barren brine; Poseidon possessed her in a hollow cave. Ever since then, Poseidon has kept the man wandering about, although he does not kill him outright. Come now, let us all try to think how we can persuade Poseidon to abate his anger and let him go home to his native land. Surely he will not be able to stand out against all the immortals, and keep up a quarrel all by himself!"

Then Athena said:

"Cronidês our Father, King of Kings and Lord of Lords! If all the gods now agree that Odysseus shall return to his own home, then let us dispatch our messenger Hermês Argeiphontês to the island of Ogygia; and let him announce forthwith to the nymph our unchangeable will, that Odysseus, after all he has patiently endured, shall return home. And I will myself go to Ithaca, to put heart into his son and make him do something. He shall call the people to a meeting, and speak his mind to all the would-be bridegrooms who have been butchering his sheep and his cattle in heaps. And I will send him to Sparta and to sandy Pylos to inquire about his beloved father, if he can hear that he is on his way home. That will be some credit to him in the world."

So saying, she fastened under her feet those fine shoes, imperishable shoes of gold, which used to carry her over moist and dry to the ends of the earth, quick as the blowing of the breeze; down she went shooting from the peaks of Olympos, and stood in the town of Ithaca against the outer gates of Odysseus upon the threshold of the courtyard. In her hand she held a spear of bronze, and she took the form of a family friend, Mentês, the chief man of the Taphians.

THE ODYSSEY

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So there she found those high and mighty gallants. Just then they were amusing themselves with a game of draughts in front of the door, sitting on the skins of the cattle which they had killed themselves; and their orderlies and servants were all busy, some mixing wine and water in the great bowls, some wiping up the tables with oozing sponges and laying the dishes, some serving the meat, and there was plenty of it.

Telemachos saw the visitor long before the others. He was a fine-looking boy; and he sat there among the intruders in deep distress, with his heart full of his noble father. He wondered if his father would suddenly appear and make a clean sweep of them all, and take his own honourable place again, and manage his property.

These were his thoughts as he sat among them, and saw some one at the door. He went straight to the porch, indignant to think that a visitor should be left standing at the door. He took the visitor's right hand, and relieved him of the spear, and spoke to him in words that wing like arrows to the mark:

"Good day to you, sir. You will be welcome in our house. Refresh yourself, and after you have eaten and drunk you shall say what you have come for."

So saying, he led the stranger in. Then as soon as they were within the lofty hall he carried the spear to a tall pillar, and set it in a polished spear-stand in which other spears were standing: the spears of Odysseus, that patient man, a whole lot of them. Then he led his visitor to a seat and bade him be seated. He threw a rug over it, a beautiful rug, an artist's work; and there was a footstool ready at his feet. Beside him he placed an armchair of carven work, apart from the rest of the company; for he did not wish the visitor to be disgusted by the noise, and to lose all relish for his food as he found himself amongst a rabble of bullies. He wanted also to ask about his lost father. A servant brought the hand-wash for the visitor, and poured it over his hands from a jug all made of fine gold into a silver basin. He drew up to the seat a polished table, a comely maid brought in the vittles and put them on the table—all sorts of things, she did not spare her store; the carver added plates of all sorts

of meat, and set beside them cups of gold; an orderly kept their cups filled with wine.

In came the gallants, full of pride. They flung themselves down at once into chairs or settles, one after another, and the orderlies poured water over their hands, while the women piled up heaps of rolls in the baskets, and the boys filled the mixing-bowls with drink to the brim. Then they put out their hands to take the good things that lay ready. At last, when they had eaten and drunk till they wanted no more, their fancies turned to other things, singing and dancing: for these are the graces of a feast. An orderly brought a beautiful harp, and put it in the hands of Phemios, who used to sing for them because he could not help it. So he struck up a prelude for his song. Then Telemachos spoke to Mentês, who was really Athena, and he brought his head close, that the others might not hear;

“Kind sir, will you think me rude if I say something to you? You see what these fellows care about, music and song—easy enough, when some one else pays for the food they eat, a man whose white bones are lying on the ground and rotting in the rain, no doubt, or rolling about in the salt sea. That man! if they only caught sight of him here in Ithaca once more, they would gladly give a fortune of gold for a light pair of heels! But he is dead and gone in this miserable way, and there is no comfort for us, even if there are people in the world who say he will come back. No, the day of his return will never dawn.

“Well now, please tell me this: I want to know all about you. Who are you, where do you come from? Where is your country, what is your family? What ship carried you here? I don’t suppose you walked all the way! How was it those sailors brought you to Ithaca? Who did they say they were? And another thing I want you to tell me: Is it your first visit, or are you a friend of our family? For a great many other men used to come to our place, since that man also was a traveller in the world.”

Athena answered him, with her bright eyes glinting:

“Very well, I will tell you all about it. My name is

Mentês; I am the son of a clever father, Anchialos, and I rule over a nation of seamen, the Taphians. I have come here now with ship and crew, voyaging over the dark face of the sea to places where they speak other languages than ours; just now to Temesê for bronze, and I have a cargo of shining steel. My ship came to land some way from your town, and she lies in the harbour of Rheithron, under woody Neïon. Let me say that we are family friends from long ago, if you will only go and ask that fine old gentleman Laërtês; they say he does not come to town any more, but keeps far away in the country in a miserable plight, with one servant, an old woman who gives him something to eat and drink when his poor limbs are tired out with stumbling over the slopes of his vine-plot. And now here I am. They did say he was come home from his travels—your father I mean, but I suppose the gods have put something in his way. I tell you he is not dead yet, that grand man Odysseus, but he is still alive—a prisoner somewhere in the broad sea, in an island amid the waters; and dangerous men hold him fast, savages, who are keeping him no doubt against his will.

“Well, now, I will play the prophet, and tell you what is in the mind of the immortals, and what I think will come to pass; although I am no prophet really, and I do not know much about the meaning of birds. I tell you he will not long be absent from his dear native land, not if chains of iron hold him fast. He will find a way to get back, for he is never at a loss.

“Come now, please tell me this; I want to know all about *you*. Are you really his son—a boy as big as you the son of Odysseus? You seem terribly like him, that head and those fine eyes of yours—I can see him now! for we used to meet ever so often in the old days, before he embarked for Troy, when so many of the best men of the nation sailed away in that fleet. Since then I have not seen Odysseus, and he has not seen me.”

The boy answered politely:

“Very well, sir, I will tell you all about it. My mother says I am his son, but I don’t know myself; I never heard of any one who did know whose son he was. I only wish

my father had been a man who lived to grow old upon his own rich acres! But now!—there never was mortal man more unlucky than the man whom they call my father, since you ask me the question.”

Then Athena said, with her bright eyes glinting:

“I tell you one thing: the breed will not be inglorious in time to come, when you are what I see and your mother is Penelopeia; thank God for that. But come now, please tell me this. Feasting—company—what does it all mean? What has it to do with you? Banquet or wedding? It is clear that this is no bring-what-you-like picnic! It seems to me they are making themselves very much at home. Lords of all they survey! It is enough to make a man angry to see all this rough behaviour, if he had any decent feeling.”

The boy answered once more:

“Sir, since you ask me the question, this house might have been wealthy and beyond reproach, so long as that man was at home; but now the gods have willed otherwise. They have chosen to send trouble upon us. That man they have picked out of all the men in the world, and they have made him vanish out of our sight. If he were dead, it would not hurt me so much; if he had fallen before Troy among his comrades, or if he had died in the arms of his friends, after he had wound up the war. Then the whole nation would have built him a barrow, and he would have won a great name for his son as well in days to come. But now, there is not a word of him. The birds of prey have made him their prey; he is gone from sight, gone from hearing, and left anguish and lamentation for me.

“And that man is not all I have to mourn and lament, since the gods have sent other sorrows to trouble me, in this way: All the great men who rule in the islands, in Dulichion, and Samê, and woody Zacynthos, and all those who are lords in rocky Ithaca, one and all they want to marry my mother, and here they are, wasting our wealth. She hates the thought of it, but she neither denies nor dares to make an end of the matter, while they eat me out of house and home. Like enough they will tear me to pieces myself as well.”

"Insufferable!" was the thought of Pallas Athena; and she said, "What a shame! It's clear you do need Odysseus to lay hands on these heartless men who pester his wife! And he is so far away! If only he would come at this moment, and stand right in the doorway of this hall, with helmet and shield and a couple of spears; looking as he did when I first set eyes upon him in our house, while he drank his wine and enjoyed himself, on his way back from Ephyra, from the house of Ilos Mermeridês! He had been all that way in a fast ship, Odysseus I mean; he was looking for a deadly poison to smear on the barbs of his arrows. The man would not give him any, for fear of the everlasting gods; but my father did give him some, for he was terribly fond of him. May he be like what he was then when he comes upon these rioters! Quick death would be theirs, one and all! They would be sorry they ever wanted to marry! Ah, well, of course all that lies on the knees of the gods—whether he will come back or not, and punish them in his own house. But you had better think how to get them out of the place, that is my advice.

"Look here now, just listen to me. To-morrow call together all the great men of the nation to a meeting, make them a speech, protest before all the gods. Tell the intruders to make themselves scarce and go home, and your mother—if she has a mind to marry again, let her first go back to her father's house; he is a man of influence, they will arrange the marriage, and see that the bridegroom makes a handsome provision for her, such as a beloved daughter ought to have.

"My advice to you is this, if you will let me advise you. Get the best ship you can find, put twenty oarsmen aboard, go and find out about your father and why he is so long away. Perhaps some one may tell you, or you may hear some rumour that God will send, which is often the best way for people to get news.

"First go to Pylos, and ask that noble prince Nestor; then to Sparta and Menelaos (good old red-head!), for he was the last to come home of all the army. Then, if you hear that your father is alive, and on his way back, for all your wearing and tearing you can bear up for

another year. But if you hear that he is dead and no longer in this world, come back yourself to your own home, and build him a barrow, and do the funeral honours in handsome style, as you ought, and give away your mother to some husband.

“When at last all this is finished and done, collect your wits and make a good plan to kill these hangers-on, either by craft or by open fight. Indeed, you ought not to play about in the nursery any longer; your childhood’s days are done. Haven’t you heard what a great name Orestês made for himself in the world, the fine young fellow, when he killed the traitor Aigisthos who had murdered his famous father? You, too, my dear boy, big and handsome as I see you now, you too be strong, that you may have a good name on the lips of men for many generations.

“Now I will go back to my ship and my crew, for they will be tired of waiting for me. It is your own business, so don’t forget what I say.”

Telemachos answered with his usual good manners:

“Sir, I thank you for your kindness; you might be a father speaking to his own son, and I will not forget one word of what you say. But do stay a little, even if you are in a hurry. Let me offer you a bath, rest and refresh yourself, and take back to your ship a gift from me—something precious, a real good thing, to be an heirloom, from me, such as a friend gives to a friend.”

Then the goddess Athena answered:

“Don’t keep me longer, I want to be off. As to any gift which your kind heart bids you offer, when I come back you may give it me to take home. If you choose me a good one, you shall have as good in return.”

When Athena had said this, away she went like a bird, up through the luffer in the roof. In the spirit of the boy she left courage and confidence, and he thought of his father even more than before. He understood what it all meant, and he was amazed; for he believed her to be a god. At once he went back to that rough crew, looking more like a god than a man himself.

He found the minstrel singing to them in fine style, while they sat all round in silence, listening. He sang of

the lamentable return of the Achaians from Troy which Pallas Athena had laid upon them.

In the upper chamber the wonderful sounds fell on the ears of Penelopeia the daughter of Icaros, the wise and faithful wife. She came down the high staircase out of her room; but not alone, two waiting-women went with her. And when this lovely creature came amongst the men who would have her for a wife, she stood by the doorpost of the great hall, with its massive walls, and drew the soft veil over her cheeks. There she stood, with one honest waiting-woman on each side. Tears were in her eyes, as she spoke to the singer of that divine song:

“Phemios, you know many other songs fit to charm the ear, great deeds of men and gods, which singers are used to noise abroad. Sing one of those to the company, and let them drink their wine in silence; but make an end to this piteous song, which tears the heart-strings in my breast, since I beyond all have had to suffer grief intolerable. So dear is he that I long for and never forget—my husband, whose fame is known over the length and breadth of the land.”

Telemachos answered her with good sense: “My dear mother, why won't you let the worthy minstrel entertain us as he likes? Don't blame the minstrel, blame Zeus, who makes men work hard for their living, and then gives them just what he chooses for each! As for the minstrel, there is no harm in his singing the bad luck of the Danaäns; the song people praise is always the latest thing. You should brace up your heart and mind to listen. Odysseus was not the only one who never saw the day of return from Troy; many other good fellows were lost too. Go to your room and see about your own business, loom and distaff, and keep the servants to their work; talking is always the man's part, and mine in particular, for the man rules the house.”

She was astonished to hear him, and went back to her room, but she noticed how sensibly her son had spoken. When she was upstairs with the servants she wept for Odysseus her beloved husband, until Athena laid sweet sleep upon her eyelids.

But the pretenders made quite an uproar in the shad-

owy hall, and each one might be heard praying loudly that she might share his bed. Then Telemachos made them a speech:

“Gentlemen, you pretend to marry my mother, but you are behaving in a most outrageous fashion. For this once, let us eat and drink and be merry, but let there be no shouting, for it’s a fine thing to hear a man sing when he has a heavenly voice like this. Then to-morrow let us hold session in the market-place, for I wish to tell you in plain words that you must go from my house. Lay your dinners elsewhere, and eat your own food in your own houses, change and change about.—Well, if you think it meet and right to consume one man’s goods without paying, carve away. I will appeal to the everlasting gods, and see if Zeus may one day grant me vengeance! There would be no ransom then: in this house you should perish!”

As he said this they all bit their lips; they were surprised to hear how boldly Telemachos spoke.

Antinoös rose to answer him—his father was the soft-spoken Eupheithês:

“Why, Telemachos, you must have gone to school with the gods! They have taught you their fine rhetoric and bold style! I do hope Cronion will never make you king in our island of Ithaca, to sit in the seat of your fathers!”

Telemachos took him up neatly, and said:

“I dare say it might annoy you, Antinoös, but I should be glad to accept the gift. Do you think it the worst thing in the world to be a king? It is not a bad thing at all. He gets plenty of wealth, he is highly honoured. But of course there are other kings in our nation, not a few in this island young and old, and one of them might perhaps have the place of that great man Odysseus as he is dead. But then I will at least be master of my own house and my own servants, which my great father won for me.”

Now Eurymachos o’ Polybos answered him:

“Telemachos, it lies on the knees of the gods, you may be quite sure, who is to be king over the people in our island of Ithaca; but your property I hope you may

keep for yourself and be master in your own house. I pray that no man may ever come to force you against your will, and rob you of your property, so long as Ithaca is a place to live in.

"But I do beg you, my good sir, tell me about that stranger, where the man came from, what country he claims, where he was born, who in the world he is. Does he bring a rumour of your father's return? Did some private business send him here like this? How he jumped up! Gone in a moment, and did not wait for us to make his acquaintance! Certainly he did not look a bad sort of fellow."

Telemachos answered him:

"Eurymachos, I am sure my father will never see home again. I believe no rumours any more, wherever they come from; I take no notice of any divinations, if my mother calls in a diviner and asks him questions. That is an old family friend from Taphos; he says he is Mentês, the son of a clever father Anchialos, and prince of the seafaring Taphians." That is what he said, but in his heart he knew the immortal goddess.

So they turned to dancing and joyous singing, and made merry. They were still at it when the darkness of evening came on them; then off they went, each to his home and bed.

And Telemachos went up to bed in his room, which was built high up over the wide courtyard, with a view all round, and his heart was full of thoughts. To light him on the way a faithful old servant carried a blazing torch. She was Eurycleia, daughter of Ops Peisenoridês; Laërtês had bought her long ago at his own cost, when she was in her first youth, and he gave twenty oxen for her. He treated her as well as he did his own faithful wife; but he did not lie with her, for he wanted to avoid any quarrel with his wife.

This was the woman who carried the torch for Telemachos; she loved him more than any other of the household, and she had been his nurse when he was a little tot. He opened the door of the handsome room and sat down on the bed, and stript off his soft shirt, which he gave into the wise old woman's hands. She

folded it up and smoothed it out, and hung it on a peg beside the bed-frame, and left the room, pulling the door to by the silver crow's-beak, and ran home the bolt by pulling the strap.* There all night long, covered up with a soft fleece of wool, he thought over the journey which Athena had told him to go.

BOOK II

How the Council Met in the Market-place of Ithaca; and What Came of It

DAWN CAME, SHOWING HER ROSY FINGERS THROUGH the early mists, and Telemachos leapt out of bed. He dressed himself, slung a sharp sword over his shoulder, strapped a stout pair of boots on his lissom feet, and came forth from his chamber like a young god. He called the criers at once, and told them to use their good lungs in summoning the people to Council.

The criers did their part, and the people came. As soon as they were assembled, he went down to the Council himself, with a strong spear in his hand, and a couple of dogs for company, which danced round him as he walked. He was full of enchanting grace, and the people stared at him in admiration. Not for nothing Athena was his friend.

He took his seat in his father's place, and the reverend seniors made room.

The first speaker was Aigyptios, a great gentleman,

*The bolt was inside, with a strap fastened to the end, which passed through a hole to the outside; pull the strap and the bolt runs home inside. The door-handle is the crow's-beak; the islanders still use the term crow (koráki) for a drop-catch at the top of a casement window.

bent with age and full of ripe wisdom. He also had lost a son, who had sailed with Prince Odysseus in the fleet to Ilios, Antiphos the lancer; the savage Cyclops had killed him in the cave, in fact he was the monster's last supper. Three other sons the old man had. One of them, Eurynomos, was among the wooers, and two kept their father's farms; but he could not forget the other, whom he mourned unceasingly, and now there were tears in his eyes for his son's sake as he began to speak:

"Listen to me, men of Ithaca, for I have something to say to you. There has been no session of our Council since the time when Prince Odysseus sailed with the fleet: and now who has summoned us? Is it a young man or one of the elders? Was it some private need that moved him? Or has he news of some threatening raid, and now wishes to report what he was the first to hear? Or is there some other public matter which he wishes to bring before us? He has done well, I think, and deserves our thanks. I pray Zeus may grant him that blessing which his heart desires."

These words seemed a good omen to Telemachos, and encouraged him. He made no delay, for he was eager to speak, so he stood up before the Council. The speaker's staff was put in his hand by Peisenor, the public crier. Then Telemachos first addressed himself to the old Councillor:

"The man you call for is not far away, reverend Sir, who summoned the people together, as you shall soon know—I am that man, and I am in great trouble of my own. There is no news of a threatening raid to report; I have no advantage of you there, and there is no other public matter which I wish to bring before you. This is my own private need, trouble which has fallen upon my house—two troubles, indeed: first, I have lost a good father, who once was king over you that are present here, and he was like a kind father to you; and now again there is something much worse, which I tell you will soon utterly tear to pieces my whole house, and destroy my whole living. My mother is besieged by those who would marry her against her will, own sons to those men who are chief among you here; they will not go

near her father's house, and lay a formal proposal before Icarious—the thought makes them shiver!—for then he might collect the bridal gifts for his daughter, and give her to the man of his choice, the one he likes best. No! it is our house they visit regularly every day, kill our cattle and sheep and fat goats, hold high revel and drink my sparkling wine, quite reckless: that is the way it all goes. For there is no man at the head, no one like Odysseus, to drive this curse from the house. You see, we are not able to drive it away ourselves. Sorry champions we shall prove, if we try; we have little skill for the combat.

“Indeed I would defend myself if I had the strength! What they have done is quite intolerable, there is no decent excuse for the ruin they have made of my house. *You* ought to be ashamed in your own hearts, you ought to think what others will say about it, our neighbours, who live all round us; you should fear the wrath of the gods, who may be provoked by such wickedness to turn upon you. I appeal to Olympian Zeus, and Themis, who dissolves the parliaments of men, and summons them! Let me be, my friends! leave me alone to be worn out by my bitter sorrow—unless I must suppose that my father Odysseus, my good father, was a cruel man and ill-treated the nation, and that is why you are cruel and ill-treat me, out of revenge—why you encourage these men.

“I should like it better if *you* would eat up my treasures and my flocks. If *you* would eat them up, perhaps there might be some redress. Then we might go round the town, dunning you, imploring, demanding our goods again, till you should give all back. But now! I am helpless, all I can do is to suffer the humiliations which you heap upon me!”

He spoke angrily, and now he dropt down the staff on the ground and burst into tears. All the people were sorry for him, and they all sat silent, not one had the heart to say an unkind word in reply; only Antinoös answered and said:

“You are a boaster, Telemachos, and you don't know how to keep your temper! What a speech! Cry shame on us, fasten the blame on us, that's what you want to do! Blame us indeed! Your own mother is at fault. You

cannot find fault with *us* for paying court to your mother. She is a clever piece indeed! It is three years already, and the fourth will soon go by, since she has been deluding the wits of the whole nation. Hopes for all, promises for every man by special messenger—and what she means is something quite different. Here is the latest trick which came out of her meditations.

“She set up a great warp on her loom in the mansion, and wove away, fine work and wide across, and this is what she told us: ‘Young men who seek my hand, now that Odysseus is dead I know you are in a hurry for marriage; but wait until I finish this cloth, for I don’t want to waste all the thread I have spun. It is a shroud for my lord Laërtês, against the time when all-destroying fate shall carry him away in dolorous death. I should not like the women of our nation to cry scandal, if he should lie without a winding-sheet when he had great possessions.’

“That is what she said, and we swallowed our pride, and consented. There she was all day long, working away at the great web; but at night she used to unravel it by torchlight. So for three years she deluded the whole nation, and they believed her. But the seasons passed on, and the fourth year began, and a time came when one of her women told us, one who knew the secret; we caught her unravelling that fine web! So she had to finish it, because she must, not because she would.

“And as for you, this is the answer of those who pay court to your mother, a plain answer to you and to all the nation: Send your mother out of the house, tell her to marry whichever her father says, whichever she likes herself; but if she will go on and on teasing the young men of our nation—with her head full of pride to think how Athena has been generous to her beyond all others, given her skill in beautiful work, and good intelligence, and cleverness such as never was heard of, even in the old stories—those women of our nation who lived long ago, with their lovely hair, Tyro, Alcmenê, Mycenê with her fine coronals—not one of them had the clever wits of Penelopeia: but this clever turn was a wicked trick. To put it plainly, we will go on eating up your living

and substance just so long as God allows her to keep the mind she has now. She is making a great name for herself, but for you—good-bye to a great fortune! As for us, we will not go to our lands or anywhere else, before she marries whoever may please her best out of the nation!”

The boy stood up to him, and said:

“Antinoös, it is impossible for me to turn out of doors the mother who bore me and brought me up; my father is somewhere in the world, alive or dead, and it is a hard thing for me to pay back all that dowry to Icarios, if I send away my mother of my own will. Her father will be bad enough, but heaven will send me worse, for my mother will call down the dread Avengers upon me, if she leaves home; and men will reproach me—so I will never say that word. And if your own minds have any fear of such a reproach, go out of my house, get your dinners elsewhere, eat your own food turn by turn in your own houses. But if you think it meet and right to consume one man’s goods without paying, carve away; I will appeal to the everlasting gods, and see whether Zeus may not one day grant me vengeance. There would be no ransom then, in that house you should perish!”

So spoke Telemachos: and Zeus, whose eye can see what is far off, sent him a pair of eagles, flying from a lofty mountainpeak. On they flew down the wind awhile, side by side, soaring on wide-stretched sails; but when they came right over the place of debate, they took a turn round; then hovering with quick-beating wings they stared down on the heads of all, with death in their eyes; and tearing at their cheeks and necks with their talons, away they darted to the east across the houses of the town. The people were amazed, when they saw this sight with their own eyes; and they pondered in their hearts what was to come of it.

Then up and spoke a noble old man, Halithersês Mastoridês; for there was no man of his day who came near him in the knowledge of birds or in telling what omens meant. He spoke to them in this fashion, out of an honest heart:

“Hear me now, men of Ithaca, for I have something

to say. I speak especially to those who would wed, for upon them a great woe is rolling; Odysseus will not long keep away from his friends, but I think he is already near, planting the seed of death and destruction for all these men. Trouble there will be also for many others of us who live in the island of Ithaca. But let us consider in good time how we can stop these men; or let them stop themselves—indeed, the sooner the better. I am no novice in prophecy, that is something I understand. As for that man, I declare that all has been fulfilled as I told him, when our people embarked for Ilios and with them went Odysseus, the man who is ready for anything and everything. I said he would have many troubles, and lose all his companions, and after twenty long years, unknown, he would come home again: and see now, all is being fulfilled.”

Then another man got up, Eurymachos, and he said:

“Off with you, old man, go home and prophesy to your children, or they may come to grief sometime! In this matter I am a better prophet than you are. Any number of birds are flying about under the sun, and not all of them are birds of omen. At any rate, Odysseus is dead, far away from this place, and I wish you had died with him! Then you would not be here making a long speech as God’s mouthpiece; you would not unleash this angry Telemachos! No doubt you expect to find something from him when you get home, if he doesn’t forget it. But I tell you this, and I will do it too: he is a young man, and you are full of antediluvian wisdom, but if you cajole him and inflame his passions, he shall be the first to suffer.

“As for you, sir, there will be damages which you will be sorry to pay; a heavy burden shall be yours. For Telemachos, this is my advice which I give before you all: Let him tell his mother to go home to her father’s house; they will arrange a marriage, and collect the bridal gifts, plenty of them, as many as there ought to be for a beloved daughter. For I do not think the young men will cease their importunate wooing until that is done, since we fear no one in any case—not Telemachos, certainly, for all his flood of words, and we care nothing

for your prognostications, respected sir; they will come to nothing, and only make you more of a nuisance than you were. Yes, his wealth shall be wasted and consumed, and there shall be no retribution, as long as that woman keeps putting off her wedding and wasting our time! Here we are, waiting day after day, rivals for a great prize, never look at another woman, when you would expect each man to go a-wooing for himself!"

But Telemachos still kept his wits about him, and he replied:

"Eurymachos, and all you other gentlemen who pay court to my mother, I make no more appeal to you, I have no more to say: for now the gods know, and all the nation.—But I beg you to lend me a swift ship and twenty men, to carry me there and back. For I am going to Sparta and sandy Pylos, to find out about my father and why he is so long away; perhaps some one may tell me, or I may hear some rumour that God will send, which is often the best way for people to get news. Then if I hear that my father is alive and on his way back, for all my wearing and tearing I can bear up for another year; but if I hear he is dead, and no longer in the world, I will come back to my own home and build him a barrow, and do the funeral honours in handsome style, as I ought, and give away my mother to another husband."

He said his say and sat down; then up rose Mentor, friend and comrade of the excellent Odysseus, to whom Odysseus had entrusted his whole house when he sailed away; they were to obey the old man, and he was to keep all safe. This is what he said, and very good sense it was:

"Listen to me, men of Ithaca, and hear what I have to say. Let no man henceforth take the trouble to be kind and gentle, no sceptred prince; let none try to be fair and right, but let him be always harsh and do what he ought not to do: since no one remembers the noble Odysseus, not one out of all the people he ruled like a kind father. I do not grudge at the proud men who pay their court, if they act with violence in the mischievous bodgery of their minds: they stake their own heads when they devour the house of Odysseus with violence, and

think he will never come back. But now it is you, the others, who make me ashamed; how you all sit mum, when you ought to denounce them and hold back a few young men when you are many."

Leocritos Euënoridês answered him:

"Mentor, you mischief-maker, you madman! What a thing to say! drive them on to stop us! One against many is done, a many's too many for one; in fights for a supper! Why, even Odysseus himself, if he came back to Ithaca and found a sturdy company feasting in his own house, and thought of driving them out of hall—his wife would have little satisfaction, however much she may have missed him, but then and there he would die an ugly death, if he's one against many! What you say is all wrong. Come now, men, make yourselves scarce, away to your lands every one. As for this fellow, Mentor shall help him with his voyage, and Halithersês, since they have been friends of the family for ages. But I think he will have to sit here for a good long time and wait for his news in Ithaca; he will never bring off that voyage."

With these words he broke up the assembly forthwith. They all made themselves scarce and went each to his own house, and the pretenders went back to the house of Odysseus.

But Telemachos went by himself to the seashore. There he washed his hands in the grey brine, and offered a prayer to Athena:

"Hear me, thou who yesterday didst come a god into our house, who didst bid me take ship over the misty sea, and inquire if my father is coming home, and why he is so long away: all this the people prevent, but most of all my mother's wooers, men full of wicked pride!"

Such was his prayer; and Athena came to his side, like Mentor in shape and voice; she spoke to him, and the words were plain and pointed:

"You will not lack either courage or sense in the future, Telemachos, for we can see now that there is a drop in you of your father's fine spirit. What a man he was to make good both deed and word! I tell you your journey shall not be hindered or stopped. But if you are not his son and Penelopeia's, then I do not expect you

to succeed in what you wish to do. Few sons, let me tell you, are like their fathers; most are worse, a few are better. But since you will lack neither courage nor sense in the future, and since the mind of Odysseus has not wholly failed in you, there is hope for the future, and I tell you that you will succeed.

“Think no more now of the plots and plans of those who woo your mother, for there is neither sense nor justice in them. They know nothing of the death and destruction which is near them, so that in one day they shall all perish. But the journey which you desire shall not be long delayed, when you have with you such an old friend of your father as I am; for I will provide a swift ship and go with you myself. You must just go home, and mingle with the company; get provisions ready, and put them all up in vessels, wine in jars, and barley-meal, which is the marrow of men, in strong skins; I will go at once and collect volunteers among the people. There are many ships in the island of Ithaca, both new and old; I will look round and find you the best, and we will make all ready and launch her upon the broad sea.”

So spoke Athena daughter of Zeus; and Telemachos did not stay long after he heard what the goddess said. He set out for the house, with a heavy heart; and he found the proud pretenders there, skinning goats and singeing fat pigs in the courtyard. Antinoös laughed, and made straight for Telemachos and grasped his hand, and called him by name, and said:

“You are a boaster, Telemachos, and you don’t know how to keep your temper! Do not trouble your head about plots and plans, but just go on eating and drinking as usual. Our people will manage all you want, I am sure, a ship and the best crew to be found; they will give you a quick passage to sandy Pylos, if you want to hear news of your father.”

Telemachos pulled his hand from the hand of Antinoös, and said:

“Antinoös, with your friends rioting all round it is impossible to enjoy a meal in peace and quiet. Is it not enough, men, that you have been carving up a good

portion of my possessions all this time, while I was still a boy? But now you see I am grown up, and I hear every one talking about it, and so I find things out; now I feel my own strength, and I mean to do my best to bring retribution upon you when I come back from Pylos, or now in this country! I mean to go, and no one shall prevent me, even if I must go as a passenger, since I am not to have my own ship and crew: I suppose that suited you better."

When he said this the others mocked and jeered at him, and you might hear one of the young bullies saying, "Clear enough, Telemachos has murder in his mind! He will bring help from Pylos, or may be from Sparta, since he is so terribly set on it. Or perhaps he wants to go as far as Ephyra, to bring some deadly poison from that rich land, and put it in the cup, and kill us all."

Another of the young bullies would say, "Ah, but who knows? Once aboard ship he may be carried far from his friends, and perish just like Odysseus! That would double our trouble, for we should have to divide all his goods among us! But we would give the house to his mother, for herself and the man who would marry her."

So much for them. But Telemachos went down to his father's storehouse, a room lofty and wide where heaps of gold and bronze were kept, with clothes in coffer and plenty of fragrant oil: jars of delicious old wine stood there, full of that divine drink without a drop of water; there they stood in rows along the wall, ready for Odysseus when he should come home again after all his troubles. The place was closed in by double doors, right and tight. The housekeeper was on the spot day and night, and she took care of everything; and a very clever woman she was, Eurycleia the daughter of Ops Peisenoridês. Telemachos called her to the storehouse, and said:

"Come, Nanny, draw me some kegs of this fine wine, the nicest you have, next to that which you keep so carefully for your noble master, unhappy man! all ready in case he should come from somewhere or other, if he can get clear of death and ruin.—Fill me a dozen, and put a stopper on each. And a few skinfuls of barley-meal, good skins properly stitched, twenty measures of

good barley-meal ground in the millstones. Keep this to yourself, and let all the stuff be put ready together. This evening I mean to fetch it away as soon as mother has gone upstairs to bed. For I am off to Sparta and sandy Pylos, to see if I can hear any news of my father."

When he said this, his dear old nurse cried aloud in distress, and said in her downright way:

"Eh, what on earth put that into thi head, love? Why wilt thou go to foreign parts, and thou an only son, and reet well loved? He's dead, far away from home, my blessed Odysseus, in some foreign land! Aye, and if thou goes, they'll up and plot mischief against thou by and by, to murder thee by some trick, and all that's here they will share among 'em. Stay thee where thou bist, sit down on thi property; what's the sense of wandren over the barren sea and maybe happenen an accident?"

Telemachos only said, "Cheer up, Nanny, this is God's will, let me tell you. Now promise me on your oath not to say a word to mother for ten or twelve days, unless she asks herself and hears I have gone, or you'll have her crying and spoiling her pretty skin!"

When he said that, she took her oath; and this done with all due solemnity, she wasted no time—drew off the wine into kegs, packed the barley-meal in the skins right and tight; then Telemachos went off and joined the roysterers.

Meanwhile the goddess Athena was doing the rest. She took on the form of Telemachos, and tramped the length and breadth of the city, took aside each of the men and told her tale, then directed them to meet in the evening beside the cutter. The boat itself she begged of Noëmon, the sturdy son of Phronios, and he agreed with all his heart.

The sun went down, and the streets were all darkened. Then Athena ran the boat down into the sea, and put in all the gear that ships carry for sailing and rowing; she moored her at the harbour point, and the crew assembled, fine young fellows all, and she set them each to work.

But she had something else to do. She made her way to the house of Odysseus, and there she distilled sweet

sleep upon them all, and dazed them as they drank, until they let the cups drop out of their hands. So they got up and went to find sleep, dispersing all over the city, for they did not sit long after sleep fell on their eyelids. Then Athena called out Telemachos in front of the great hall, taking the shape and voice of Mentor, and said to him:

“Telemachos, your men are all ready and furnished cap-a-pie, sitting at the oars, waiting for you to start. Come, let us go, and waste no time about it.”

With these words she led the way briskly, and he followed in her footsteps. And when they came to the ship and the seaside, there he found the bushy-headed boys on the beach, and he spoke to them, full of dignity and strength:

“This way, friends, let us fetch the provisions; they are all ready and waiting in the house. My mother knows nothing about it, nor any of the servants, but only one single soul has heard our plan.”

So he led the way, and they went with him. They carried all the stuff down to the ship and put it on board, as Telemachos told them to do. Telemachos himself went on board following Athena; she took her seat on the poop, and he sat beside her. The others cast off the hawsers, and themselves came on board and sat down on the benches. Athena with her bright eyes glinting sent them a following wind, right from the west, piping over the purple sea. Then Telemachos called to the men, and told them to put a hand to the tackling. They lifted the mast and steept it in its hollow box, made it fast with the forestays, hauled up the white sail by its ropes of twisted leather. The wind blew full into the bellying sail, and the dark wave boomed about the stem of the ship as she went; so on she sped shouldering the swell, travelling steadily on her way. When they had made snug all the tackle about the ship, they set before them brimming bowls of wine, and poured libations to the gods immortal and everlasting, but most of all to the bright-eyed daughter of Zeus. So all night long and in the dawning the ship cut her way.