



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

THE STORY
OF THE ODYSSEY

Rev. Alfred J. Church

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

The Story of the Odyssey

REV ALFRED J. CHURCH



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INTRODUCTION

THREE THOUSAND years ago the world was still young. The western continent was a huge wilderness, and the greater part of Europe was inhabited by savage and wandering tribes. Only a few nations at the eastern end of the Mediterranean and in the neighbouring parts of Asia had learned to dwell in cities, to use a written language, to make laws for themselves, and to live in a more orderly fashion. Of these nations the most brilliant was that of the Greeks, who were destined in war, in learning, in government, and in the arts, to play a great part in the world, and to be the real founders of our modern civilization. While they were still a rude people, they had noble ideals of beauty and bravery, of duty and justice. Even before they had a written language, their singers had made songs about their heroes and their great deeds; and later these songs, which fathers had taught to children, and these children to their children, were brought together into two long and wonderful poems, which have ever since been the delight of the world, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

The *Iliad* is the story of the siege of Ilium, or Troy, on the western coast of Asia Minor. Paris, son of the king of Troy, had enticed Helen, the most beautiful of Grecian women, and the wife of a Grecian king, to leave her husband's home with him; and the kings and princes of the Greeks had gathered an army and a fleet and sailed across the Aegean Sea to rescue her. For ten years they strove to capture the city. According to the fine old legends, the gods themselves took a part in the war, some siding with the Greeks, and some with the Trojans. It was finally through Ulysses,

a famous Greek warrior, brave and fierce as well as wise and crafty, that the Greeks captured the city.

The second poem, the *Odyssey*, tells what befell Ulysses, or Odysseus, as the Greeks called him, on his homeward way. Sailing from Troy with his little fleet of ships, which were so small that they used oars as well as sails, he was destined to wander for ten years longer before he could return to his rocky island of Ithaca, on the west shore of Greece, and to his faithful wife, Penelope.

He had marvellous adventures, for the gods who had opposed the Greeks at Troy had plotted to bring him ill-fortune. Just as his ships were safely rounding the southern cape of Greece, a fierce storm took them out of their course, and bore them to many strange lands—lands of giants, man-eating monsters, and wondrous enchantments of which you will delight to read. Through countless perils the resolute wanderer forced his way, losing ship after ship from his little fleet, and companion after companion from his own band, until he reached home friendless and alone, and found his palace, his property, and his family all in the power of a band of greedy princes. These he overcame by his cunning and his strength, and his long trials were ended.

As you read these ancient tales, you must forget what knowledge you have of the world, and think of it as the Greeks did. It was only a little part of the world that they knew at all,—the eastern end of the Mediterranean,—but even that seemed to them a great and marvellous region. Beyond its borders were strange and mysterious lands, in which wonders of all kinds were found, and round all ran the great world-river, the encircling stream of Ocean.

In the mountains of Olympus, to the northward, lived the gods. There was Zeus, greatest of all, the god of thunder and the wide heavens; Hera, his wife; Apollo, the archer god; Athene, the wise and clever goddess; Poseidon, who ruled the sea; Aphrodite, the goddess of love; Hephaestus, the cunning workman; Ares, the god of war; Hermes, the swift messenger; and others still, whom

you will learn to know as you read. All these were worshipped by men with prayer and sacrifice; and, as in the early legends of many races, the gods often took the shape of men and women; they had their favourites and those whom they hated; and they ruled the fate of mortals as they chose.

If you let yourselves be beguiled into this old, simple way of regarding earth and heaven, you will not only love these ancient tales yourself, but you will see why, for century after century, they have been the longest loved and the best loved of all tales—beloved by old and young, by men and women and children. For they are hero-tales,—tales of war and adventure, tales of bravery and nobility, tales of the heroes that mankind, almost since the beginning of time, have looked to as ideals of wisdom and strength and beauty.

CHAPTER I THE COUNSEL¹ OF ATHENE².

WHEN THE great city of Troy had been taken, all the chiefs who had fought against it set sail for their homes. But there was wrath in heaven against them, so that they did not find a safe and happy return. For one was shipwrecked, and another was shamefully slain by his false wife in his palace, and others found all things at home troubled and changed, and were driven to seek new dwellings elsewhere; and some were driven far and wide about the world before they saw their native land again. Of all, the wise Ulysses³ was he that wandered farthest and suffered most, for when ten years had well-nigh passed, he was still far away from Ithaca⁴, his kingdom.

The gods were gathered in council in the hall of Olympus⁵, all but Poseidon,⁶ the god of the sea, for he had gone to feast with the Ethiopians. Now Poseidon was he who most hated Ulysses, and kept him from his home.

Then spake Athene among the immortal gods: "My heart is rent for Ulysses. Sore affliction doth he suffer in an island of the sea, where the daughter of Atlas keepeth him, seeking to make him forget his native land. And he yearns to see even the smoke rising up from the land of his birth, and is fain⁷ to die. And thou regardest it not at all. Did he not offer thee many sacrifices in the land of

1. counsel, advice.
2. A-the'-ne
3. U-lys'-ses
4. Ith'-a-ca.

5. O-lym'-pus.
6. Po-sei'-don.
7. is fain, wishes to

Troy? Wherefore hast thou such wrath against him?” To her Zeus, the father of the gods, made reply: “What is this that thou sayest, my daughter? It is Poseidon that hath great wrath against Ulysses, because he blinded his son Polyphemus⁸ the Cyclops.⁹ But come, let us take counsel together that he may return to his home, for Poseidon will not be able to contend against us all.”

Then said Athene: “If this be thy will, then let us speed Hermes¹⁰ the messenger to the island of Calypso¹¹, and let him declare to the goddess our purpose that Ulysses shall return to his home. And I will go to Ithaca, and stir up the spirit of his son Telemachus¹², that first he speak out his mind to the suitors of his mother who waste his substance,¹³ and next that he go to Sparta and to Pylos¹⁴, seeking tidings of his father. So shall the youth win good report among men.”

So she went to Ithaca, and there she took upon her the form of Mentès¹⁵, who was chief of the Taphians.¹⁶

Now there were gathered in the house of Ulysses many princes from the islands, suitors of the Queen Penelope¹⁷, for they said that Ulysses was dead, and that she should choose another husband. These were gathered together, and were sitting playing draughts¹⁸ and feasting. And Telemachus sat among them, vexed at heart, for they wasted his substance; neither was he master in his house. But when he saw the guest at the door, he rose from his place, and welcomed him, and made him sit down, and commanded that they should give him food and wine. And when he had ended his meal, Telemachus asked him his business.

Thereupon the false Mentès said: “My name is Mentès, and I am King of the Taphians, and I am sailing to Cyprus for copper, taking iron in exchange. Now I have been long time the friend of

8. Pol-y-phe'-mus.

9. Cy'-clops.

10. Her'-mes.

11. Ca-lyp'-so.

12. Te-lem'-a-chus.

13. substance, property.

14. Py'-los.

15. Men'-tes.

16. Ta'-phi-ans.

17. Pe-nel'-o- pe.

18. draughts, checkers.

this house, of thy father and thy father's father, and I came trusting to see thy father, for they told me that he was here. But now I see that some god hath hindered his return, for that he is yet alive I know full well. But tell me, who are these that I see? Is this the gathering of a clan, or a wedding feast?"

Telemachus made answer: "O sir, while my father was yet alive, our house was rich and honoured; but now that he is gone, things are not well with me. I would not grieve so much had he fallen in battle before Troy; for then the Greeks would have builded a great burial mound for him, and he would thus have won great renown, even for his son. But now the storms of the sea have swept him away, and I am left in sore distress. For these whom thou seest are the princes of the islands that come here to woo my mother. She neither refuseth nor accepteth; and meanwhile they sit here, and waste my substance."

Then said the false Mentos: "Now may the gods help thee! Thou art indeed in sore need of Ulysses. But now hearken to my counsel. First call an assembly of the people. Bid the suitors go back, each man to his home; and as for thy mother, if she be moved to wed, let her return to her father's house, that her kinsfolk may furnish a wedding feast, and prepare gifts such as a well-beloved daughter should have. Afterwards do thou fit up a ship with twenty oars, and go, inquire concerning thy father; perhaps some man may give thee tidings of him; or, may be, thou wilt hear a voice from Zeus concerning him. Go to Pylos first, and afterwards to Sparta, where Menelaus¹⁹ dwelleth, who of all the Greeks came back the last to his home. If thou shouldest hear that he is dead, then come back hither, and raise a mound for him, and give thy mother to a husband. And when thou hast made an end of all these things, then plan how thou mayest slay the suitors by force or craft, for it is time for thee to have the thoughts of a man."

Then said Telemachus: "Thou speakest these things out of a

19. Me-ne-la'-us.

friendly heart, as a father might speak to his son, nor will I ever forget them. But now, I pray thee, abide here for a space, that I may give thee a goodly gift, such as friends give to friends, to be an heirloom in thy house.”

But the false Mentès said, “Keep me no longer, for I am eager to depart; give me thy gift when I shall return.”

So the goddess departed; like to an eagle of the sea was she as she flew. And Telemachus knew her to be a goddess as she went.

Meanwhile Phemius²⁰ the minstrel sang to the suitors, and his song was of the unhappy return of the Greeks from Troy.

When Penelope heard the song, she came down from the upper chamber where she sat, and two handmaids bare her company. And when she came to where the suitors sat, she stood by the gate of the hall, holding her shining veil before her face. Then spake she to the minstrel, weeping, and said: “Phemius, thou knowest many songs concerning the deeds of gods and men; sing, therefore, one of these, and let the guests drink the wine in silence. But stay this pitiful strain, for it breaketh my heart to hear it. Surely, of all women I am the most unhappy, so famous was the husband for whom I mourn.”

But Telemachus made reply: “Why dost thou grudge the minstrel, my mother, to make us glad in such fashion as his spirit biddeth him? It is no blame to him that he singeth of the unhappy return of the Greeks, for men most prize the song that soundeth newest in their ears. Endure, therefore, to listen, for not Ulysses only missed his return, but many a famous chief besides. Go, then, to thy chamber, and mind thy household affairs, and bid thy handmaids ply their tasks. Speech belongeth unto men, and chiefly to me that am the master in this house.”

Then went she back to her chamber, for she was amazed at her son, with such authority did he speak. Then she bewailed her lord, till Athene sent down sleep upon her eyes.

20. Phē'-mi-us.

When she was gone, Telemachus spake to the suitors, saying: "Let us now feast and be merry, and let there be no brawling among us. It is a good thing to listen to a minstrel that hath a voice as the voice of a god. But in the morning let us go to the assembly, that I may declare my purpose, to wit, that ye leave this hall, and eat your own substance. But if ye deem it a better thing that ye should waste another man's goods, and make no recompense, then work your will. But certainly Zeus shall repay you."

So he spake, and they all marvelled that he used such boldness.

And Antinous²¹ answered: "Surely, Telemachus, it is by the bidding of the gods that thou speakest so boldly. Therefore I pray that Zeus may never make thee King in Ithaca."

Then said Telemachus: "It is no ill thing to be a king, for his house groweth rich, and he himself is honoured. But there are others in Ithaca, young and old, who may have the kingship, now that Ulysses is dead. Yet know that I will be lord of my own house and of the slaves which Ulysses won for himself with his own spear."

Thereupon spake Eurymachus²², saying: "It is with the gods to say who shall be King in Ithaca; but no man can deny that thou shouldest keep thine own goods and be lord in thine own house. Tell me, who is this stranger that came but just now to thy house? Did he bring tidings of thy father? Or came he on some matter of his own? In strange fashion did he depart, nor did he tarry that we might know him."

Telemachus made answer: "Verily, Eurymachus, the day of my father's return hath gone by forever. As for this stranger, he said that he was Mentès, King of the Taphians."

So spake Telemachus, but in his heart he knew that the stranger was Athene. Then the suitors turned them to the dance and to the song, making merry till the darkness fell. Then went they each to his own house to sleep.

21. An-ti'-no-us.

22. Eu-rym'-a-chus.

But Telemachus went to his chamber, pondering many things in his heart. And Eurycleia²³, who had nursed him when he was little, went with him, bearing torches in her hands. He opened the door of the chamber, and took off his doublet, and put it in the wise woman's hands. She folded it, and smoothed it, and hung it on a pin, and went forth from the room, and pulled to the door, and made it fast. And all the night Telemachus thought in his heart of the journey which Athene had showed him.

23. Eu-ry-clei'-a

CHAPTER II THE ASSEMBLY

WHEN THE morning came, Telemachus bade the heralds call the people to the assembly. So the heralds called them, and they came in haste. And when they were gathered together, he went his way to the place of meeting, holding in his hand a spear, and two dogs followed him. Then did Athene shed a marvellous grace upon him, so that all men wondered at him, as he sat him down in his father's place.

First spake Aegyptus²⁴, who was bowed with many years, and was very wise. Four sons he had. One had gone with Ulysses to Troy, and one was among the suitors of the Queen, and two abode with their father in the field. He said: "Hearken to me, men of Ithaca! Never hath an assembly been called in Ithaca since Ulysses departed. Who now hath called us together? If it be Telemachus, what doth he want? Hath he heard any tidings of the coming back of the host? He, methinks, is a true man. May Zeus be with him and grant him his heart's desire!"

So spake the old man, and Telemachus was glad at his speech. Then he rose up and said:—

"I have great trouble in my heart, men of Ithaca, for first my father, whom ye all loved, is dead; and next the princes of the islands come hither, making suit to my mother, but she waits ever for the return of her husband. And they devour all our substance; nor is Ulysses here to defend it, and I, in truth, am not able. And this is a grievous wrong, and not to be borne."

24. AE-gyp'-tus.

Then he dashed his sceptre on the ground, and sat down weeping. And Antinous, who was one of the suitors, rose up and said:—

“Nay, Telemachus, blame not us, but blame thy mother, who indeed is crafty above all women. For now this is the fourth year that we have come suing for her hand, and she has cheated us with hopes. Hear now this that she did. She set up a great web for weaving, and said to us: ‘Listen, ye that are my suitors. Hasten not my marriage till I finish this web to be a burial cloth for Laertes²⁵, the father of Ulysses, for indeed it would be foul shame if he who has won great possessions should lack this honour.’ So she spake, and for three years she cheated us, for what she wove in the day she unravelled at night. But when the fourth year was come, one of her maidens told us of the matter, and we came upon her by night and found her unravelling what she had woven in the day. Then did she finish it, much against her will. Send away, therefore, thy mother, and bid her marry whom she will. But till this be done we will not depart.”

Then answered Telemachus: “How can I send away against her will her who bare me and brought me up? I cannot do this thing.”

So he spake; and there came two eagles, which flew abreast till they came over the assembly. Then did they wheel in the air, and shook out from each many feathers, and tare each other, and so departed.

Then cried Alitherses²⁶, the prophet: “Beware, ye suitors, for great trouble is coming to you, and to others also. And as for Ulysses, I said when he went to Troy that he should return after twenty years; and so it shall be.”

And when the suitors would not listen, Telemachus said: “Give me a ship and twenty rowers, that I may go to Pylos and to Sparta; perhaps I may hear news of my father. And if I hear that he is dead, then will I come back hither and raise up a mound for him and give my mother to a husband.”

25. La-er'-tes.

26. A-li-ther'-ses.



PENELOPE SURPRISED BY THE SUITORS

Having thus spoken, he sat down, and Mentor²⁷, whom Ulysses, when he departed, set over his household, rose up in the midst, and spake, saying: “Now henceforth never let any king be kind and gentle in his heart or minded to work righteousness. Let him rather be a hard man and unrighteous. For now no man of all the people whose lord he was remembereth Ulysses. Yet he was gentle as a father. If the suitors are minded to do evil deeds, I hinder them not. They do them at the peril of their own heads. It is with the people that I am wroth, to see how they sit speechless, and cry not shame upon the suitors; and yet they are many in number, and the suitors are few.”

Then Leocritus²⁸, who was one of the suitors, answered: “Surely thy wits wander, O Mentor, that thou biddest the people put us down. Of a truth, if Ulysses himself should come back, and should seek to drive the suitors from the hall, it would fare ill with him. An evil fate would he meet, if he fought with them. As for the people, let them go to their own houses. Let Mentor speed the young man’s voyage, for he is a friend of his house. Yet I doubt whether he will ever accomplish it.”

So he spake, and the assembly was dismissed.

But Telemachus went apart to the shore of the sea, and he washed his hands in the water of the sea, and prayed to Athene, saying: “Hear me, thou who didst come yesterday to the house, and bid me take a ship, and sail across the sea, seeking tidings of my father! The people delay my purpose, and the suitors stir them up in the wickedness of their hearts.”

And while he prayed, Athene stood by him, like to Mentor in shape and speech. She spake, saying: “Thou art not without spirit, and art like to be a true son of Ulysses and Penelope. Therefore, I have good hopes that this journey of which thou speakest will not be in vain. But as for the suitors, think not of them, for they talk folly, and know not of the doom that is even now close upon

27. Men'-tor.

28. Le-oc'-ri-tus.

them. Go, therefore, and talk with the suitors as before, and get ready food for a journey, wine and meal. And I will gather men who will offer themselves freely for the journey, and I will find a ship also, the best in Ithaca.”

Then Telemachus returned to the house, and the suitors were flaying goats and singeing swine in the court. And Antinous caught him by the hand and said, “Eat and drink, Telemachus, and we will find a ship and rowers for thee, that thou mayest go where thou wilt, to inquire for thy father.”

But Telemachus answered: “Think ye that I will eat and drink with you, who so shamefully waste my substance? Be sure of this, that I will seek vengeance against you, and if ye deny me a ship, I will even go in another man’s.”

So he spake, and dragged his hand from the hand of Antinous.

And another of the suitors said, “Now will Telemachus go and seek help against us from Pylos or from Sparta, or may be he will put poison in our cups, and so destroy us.”

And another said: “Perchance he also will perish, as his father has perished. Then we should divide all his substance, but the house we should give to his mother and to her husband.”

So they spake, mocking him. But he went to the chamber of his father, in which were ranged many casks of old wine, and gold and bronze, and clothing and olive oil; and of these things the prudent Eurycleia, who was the keeper of the house, had care. To her he spake: “Mother, make ready for me twelve jars of wine, not of the best, but of that which is next to it, and twenty measures of barley-meal. At even will I take them, when my mother sleeps, for I go to Pylos and Sparta; perchance I may hear news of my father.”

But the old woman said, weeping: “What meanest thou, being an only son, thus to travel abroad? Wilt thou perish, as thy father has perished? For this evil brood of suitors will plot to slay thee and divide thy goods. Thou hadst better sit peaceably at home.”

Then Telemachus said: “’Tis at the bidding of the gods I go. Only

swear that thou wilt say naught to my mother till eleven or twelve days be past, unless, perchance, she should ask concerning me.”

And the old woman swore that it should be so. And Telemachus went again among the suitors. But Athene, meanwhile, taking his shape, had gathered together a crew, and also had borrowed a ship for the voyage. And, lest the suitors should hinder the thing, she caused a deep sleep to fall upon them, so that they slept where they sat. Then she came in the shape of Mentor to the palace, and called Telemachus forth, saying:

“The rowers are ready; let us go.”

Then Athene led the way, and they found the ship’s crew upon the shore. To them spake Telemachus, saying, “Come now, my friends, let us carry the food on board, for it is all in the chamber, and no one knoweth of the matter; neither my mother, nor any of the maidens, but one woman only.”

So they went to the house with him, and carried all the provision, and stowed it in the ship. Then Telemachus climbed the ship and sat down on the stern, and Athene sat by him.

And when he called to the crew, they made ready to depart. They raised the pine tree mast, and set it in the hole that was made for it, and they made it fast with stays. Then they hauled up the white sails with ropes of ox-hide. And the wind filled out the sail, and the water seethed about the stem of the ship, as she hasted through the water. And when all was made fast in the ship, then they mixed wine in the bowl, and poured out drink offerings to the gods, especially to Zeus.

So all the night, and till the dawn, the ship sped through the sea.