

The Odyssey

The Odyssey of Homer

Translated from Greek into English prose in 1879 by S.H. Butcher and Andrew Lang.

Book I

In a Council of the Gods, Poseidon absent, Pallas procureth an order for the restitution of Odysseus; and appearing to his son Telemachus, in human shape, adviseth him to complain of the Wooers before the Council of the people, and then go to Pylos and Sparta to inquire about his father.

Tell me, Muse, of that man, so ready at need, who wandered far and wide, after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy, and many were the men whose towns he saw and whose mind he learnt, yea, and many the woes he suffered in his heart upon the deep, striving to win his own life and the return of his company. Nay, but even so he saved not his company, though he desired it sore. For through the blindness of their own hearts they perished, fools, who devoured the oxen of Helios Hyperion: but the god took from them their day of returning. Of these things, goddess, daughter of Zeus, whencesoever thou hast heard thereof, declare thou even unto us.

Now all the rest, as many as fled from sheer destruction, were at home, and had escaped both war and sea, but Odysseus only, craving for his wife and for his homeward path, the lady nymph Calypso held, that fair goddess, in her hollow caves, longing to have him for her lord. But when now the year had come in the courses of the seasons, wherein the gods had ordained that he should return home to Ithaca, not even there was he quit of labours, not even among his own; but all the gods had pity on him save Poseidon, who raged continually against godlike Odysseus, till he came to his own country. Howbeit Poseidon had now departed for the distant Ethiopians, the Ethiopians that are sundered in twain, the uttermost of men, abiding some where Hyperion sinks and some where he rises. There he looked to receive his hecatomb of bulls and rams, there he made merry sitting at the feast, but the other gods were gathered in the halls of Olympian Zeus. Then among them the father of gods and men began to speak, for he bethought him

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in his heart of noble Aegisthus, whom the son of Agamemnon, far-famed Orestes, slew. Thinking upon him he spake out among the Immortals:

'Lo you now, how vainly mortal men do blame the gods! For of us they say comes evil, whereas they even of themselves, through the blindness of their own hearts, have sorrows beyond that which is ordained. Even as of late Aegisthus, beyond that which was ordained, took to him the wedded wife of the son of Atreus, and killed her lord on his return, and that with sheer doom before his eyes, since we had warned him by the embassy of Hermes the keen-sighted, the slayer of Argos, that he should neither kill the man, nor woo his wife. For the son of Atreus shall be avenged at the hand of Orestes, so soon as he shall come to man's estate and long for his own country. So spake Hermes, yet he prevailed not on the heart of Aegisthus, for all his good will; but now hath he paid one price for all.'

And the goddess, grey-eyed Athene, answered him, saying: 'O father, our father Cronides, throned in the highest; that man assuredly lies in a death that is his due; so perish likewise all who work such deeds! But my heart is rent for wise Odysseus, that hapless one, who far from his friends this long while suffereth affliction in a seagirt isle, where is the navel of the sea, a woodland isle, and therein a goddess hath her habitation, the daughter of the wizard Atlas, who knows the depths of every sea, and himself upholds the tall pillars which keep earth and sky asunder. His daughter it is that holds the hapless man in sorrow: and ever with soft and guileful tales she is wooing him to forgetfulness of Ithaca. But Odysseus yearning to see if it were but the smoke leap upwards from his own land, hath a desire to die. As for thee, thine heart regardeth it not at all, Olympian! What! did not Odysseus by the ships of the Argives make thee free offering of sacrifice in the wide Trojan land? Wherefore wast thou then so wroth with him, O Zeus?'

And Zeus the cloud-gatherer answered her, and said, 'My child, what word hath escaped the door of thy lips? Yea, how should I forget divine Odysseus, who in understanding is beyond mortals and beyond all men hath done sacrifice to

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the deathless gods, who keep the wide heaven? Nay, but it is Poseidon, the girdler of the earth, that hath been wroth continually with quenchless anger for the Cyclops' sake whom he blinded of his eye, even godlike Polyphemus whose power is mightiest amongst all the Cyclopes. His mother was the nymph Thoösa, daughter of Phorcys, lord of the unharvested sea, and in the hollow caves she lay with Poseidon. From that day forth Poseidon the earth-shaker doth not indeed slay Odysseus, but driveth him wandering from his own country. But come, let us here one and all take good counsel as touching his returning, that he may be got home; so shall Poseidon let go his displeasure, for he will in no wise be able to strive alone against all, in despite of all the deathless gods.'

Then the goddess, grey-eyed Athene, answered him, and said: 'O father, our father Cronides, throned in the highest, if indeed this thing is now well pleasing to the blessed gods, that wise Odysseus should return to his own home, let us then speed Hermes the Messenger, the slayer of Argos, to the island of Ogygia. There with all speed let him declare to the lady of the braided tresses our unerring counsel, even the return of the patient Odysseus, that so he may come to his home. But as for me I will go to Ithaca that I may rouse his son yet the more, planting might in his heart, to call an assembly of the long-haired Achaeans and speak out to all the wooers who slaughter continually the sheep of his thronging flocks, and his kine with trailing feet and shambling gait. And I will guide him to Sparta and to sandy Pylos to seek tidings of his dear father's return, if peradventure he may hear thereof and that so he may be had in good report among men.'

She spake and bound beneath her feet her lovely golden sandals that wax not old, and bare her alike over the wet sea and over the limitless land, swift as the breath of the wind. And she seized her doughty spear, shod with sharp bronze, weighty and huge and strong, wherewith she quells the ranks of heroes with whomsoever she is wroth, the daughter of the mighty sire. Then from the heights of Olympus she came glancing down, and she stood in the land of Ithaca, at the entry of the gate of Odysseus, on the threshold of the courtyard, holding in her hand the spear

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of bronze, in the semblance of a stranger, Menes the captain of the Taphians. And there she found the lordly wooers: now they were taking their pleasure at draughts in front of the doors, sitting on hides of oxen, which themselves had slain. And of the henchmen and the ready squires, some were mixing for them wine and water in bowls, and some again were washing the tables with porous sponges and were setting them forth, and others were carving flesh in plenty.

And godlike Telemachus was far the first to descry her, for he was sitting with a heavy heart among the wooers dreaming on his good father, if haply he might come somewhence, and make a scattering of the wooers there throughout the palace, and himself get honour and bear rule among his own possessions. Thinking thereupon, as he sat among wooers, he saw Athene--and he went straight to the outer porch, for he thought it blame in his heart that a stranger should stand long at the gates: and halting nigh her he clasped her right hand and took from her the spear of bronze, and uttered his voice and spake unto her winged words:

'Hail, stranger, with us thou shalt be kindly entreated, and thereafter, when thou hast tasted meat, thou shalt tell us that whereof thou hast need.'

Therewith he led the way, and Pallas Athene followed. And when they were now within the lofty house, he set her spear that he bore against a tall pillar, within the polished spear-stand, where stood many spears besides, even those of Odysseus of the hardy heart; and he led the goddess and seated her on a goodly carven chair, and spread a linen cloth thereunder, and beneath was a footstool for the feet. For himself he placed an inlaid seat hard by, apart from the company of the wooers, lest the stranger should be disquieted by the noise and should have a loathing for the meal, being come among overweening men, and also that he might ask him about his father that was gone from his home.

Then a handmaid bare water for the washing of hands in a goodly golden ewer, and poured it forth over a silver basin to wash withal, and drew to their side a polished table. And a grave dame bare wheaten bread and set it by them, and

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laid on the board many dainties, giving freely of such things as she had by her. And a carver lifted and placed by them platters of divers kinds of flesh, and nigh them he set golden bowls, and a henchman walked to and fro pouring out to them the wine.

Then in came the lordly wooers; and they sat them down in rows on chairs, and on high seats, and henchmen poured water on their hands, and maidservants piled wheaten bread by them in baskets, and pages crowned the bowls with drink; and they stretched forth their hands upon the good cheer spread before them. Now when the wooers had put from them the desire of meat and drink, they minded them of other things, even of the song and dance: for these are the crown of the feast. And a henchman placed a beauteous lyre in the hands of Phemius, who was minstrel to the wooers despite his will. Yea and as he touched the lyre he lifted up his voice in sweet songs.

But Telemachus spake unto grey-eyed Athene, holding his head close to her that those others might not hear: 'Dear stranger, wilt thou of a truth be wroth at the word that I shall say? Yonder men verily care for such things as these, the lyre and song, lightly, as they that devour the livelihood of another without atonement, of that man whose white bones, it may be, lie wasting in the rain upon the mainland, or the billow rolls them in the brine. Were but these men to see him returned to Ithaca, they all would pray rather for greater speed of foot than for gain of gold and raiment. But now he hath perished, even so, an evil doom, and for us is no comfort, no, not though any of earthly men should say that he will come again. Gone is the day of his returning! But come declare me this, and tell me all plainly: Who art thou of the sons of men, and whence? Where is thy city, where are they that begat thee? Say, on what manner of ship didst thou come, and how did sailors bring thee to Ithaca, and who did they avow themselves to be, for in no wise do I deem that thou camest hither by land. And herein tell me true, that I may know for a surety whether thou art a newcomer, or whether thou art a guest of the house, seeing that many were the strangers that came to our home, for that *he* too had voyaged much among men.'

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Then the goddess, grey-eyed Athene, answered him: 'Yea now, I will plainly tell thee all. I avow me to be Mentès, son of wise Anchialus, and I bear rule among the Taphians, lovers of the oar. And now am I come to shore, as thou seest, with ship and crew, sailing over the wine-dark sea, unto men of strange speech, even to Temesa, in quest of copper, and my cargo is shining iron. And there my ship is lying toward the upland, away from the city, in the harbour of Rheithron beneath wooded Neïon: and we declare ourselves to be friends one of the other, and of houses friendly, from of old. Nay, if thou wouldest be assured, go ask the old man, the hero Laertes, who they say no more comes to the city, but far away toward the upland suffers affliction, with an ancient woman for his handmaid, who sets by him meat and drink, whensoever weariness takes hold of his limbs, as he creeps along the knoll of his vineyard plot. And now am I come; for verily they said that *he*, thy father, was among his people; but lo, the gods withhold him from his way. For goodly Odysseus hath not yet perished on the earth; but still, methinks, he lives and is kept on the wide deep in a sea-girt isle, and hard men constrain him, wild folk that hold him, it may be, sore against his will. But now of a truth will I utter my word of prophecy, as the Immortals bring it into my heart and as I deem it will be accomplished, though no soothsayer am I, nor skilled in the signs of birds. Henceforth indeed for no long while shall he be far from his own dear country, not though bonds of iron bind him; he will advise him of a way to return, for he is a man of many devices. But come, declare me this, and tell me all plainly, whether indeed, so tall as thou art, thou art sprung from the loins of Odysseus. Thy head surely and thy beauteous eyes are wondrous like to his, since full many a time have we held converse together ere he embarked for Troy, whither the others, aye the bravest of the Argives, went in hollow ships. From that day forth neither have I seen Odysseus, nor he me.'

Then wise Telemachus answered her, and said: 'Yea, sir, now will I plainly tell thee all. My mother verily saith that I am his; for myself I know not, for never man yet knew of himself his own descent. O that I had been the son of some blessed man, whom old age overtook among his own possessions! But now of him that is the most hapless of

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mortal men, his son they say that I am, since thou dost question me hereof.'

Then the goddess, grey-eyed Athene, spake unto him, and said: 'Surely no nameless lineage have the gods ordained for thee in days to come, since Penelope bore thee so goodly a man. But come, declare me this, and tell it all plainly. What feast, nay, what rout is this? What hast thou to do therewith? Is it a clan drinking, or a wedding feast, for here we have no banquet where each man brings his share? In such wise, flown with insolence, do they seem to me to revel wantonly through the house: and well might any man be wroth to see so many deeds of shame, whatso wise man came among them.'

Then wise Telemachus answered her, and said: 'Sir, forasmuch as thou questionest me of these things and inquirest thereof, our house was once like to have been rich and honourable, while yet that man was among his people. But now the gods willed it otherwise, in evil purpose, who have made him pass utterly out of sight as no man ever before. Truly I would not even for his death make so great sorrow, had he fallen among his fellows in the land of the Trojans, or in the arms of his friends when he had wound up the clew of war. Then would the whole Achaean host have builded him a barrow, and even for his son would he have won great glory in the after days. But now the spirits of the storm have swept him away inglorious. He is gone, lost to sight and hearsay, but for me hath he left anguish and lamentation; nor henceforth is it for him alone that I mourn and weep, since the gods have wrought for me other sore distress. For all the noblest that are princes in the isles, in Dulichium and Same and wooded Zacynthus, and as many as lord it in rocky Ithaca, all these woo my mother and waste my house. But as for her she neither refuseth the hated bridal, nor hath the heart to make an end: so they devour and minish my house, and ere long will they make havoc likewise of myself.'

Then in heavy displeasure spake unto him Pallas Athene: 'God help thee! thou art surely sore in need of Odysseus that is afar, to stretch forth his hands upon the shameless wooers. If he could but come now and stand at the entering

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in of the gate, with helmet and shield and lances twain, as mighty a man as when first I marked him in our house drinking and making merry what time he came up out of Ephyra from Ilus son of Mermerus! For even thither had Odysseus gone on his swift ship to seek a deadly drug, that he might have wherewithal to smear his bronze-shod arrows: but Ilus would in no wise give it him, for he had in awe the everliving gods. But my father gave it him, for he bare him wondrous love. O that Odysseus might in such strength consort with the wooers: so should they all have swift fate and bitter wedlock! Howbeit these things surely lie on the knees of the gods, whether he shall return or not, and take vengeance in his halls. But I charge thee to take counsel how thou mayest thrust forth the wooers from the hall. Come now, mark and take heed unto my words. On the morrow call the Achaean lords to the assembly, and declare thy saying to all, and take the gods to witness. As for the wooers bid them scatter them each one to his own, and for thy mother, if her heart is moved to marriage, let her go back to the hall of that mighty man her father, and her kinsfolk will furnish a wedding feast, and array the gifts of wooing exceeding many, all that should go back with a daughter dearly beloved. And to thyself I will give a word of wise counsel, if perchance thou wilt hearken. Fit out a ship, the best thou hast, with twenty oarsmen, and go to inquire concerning thy father that is long afar, if perchance any man shall tell thee aught, or if thou mayest hear the voice from Zeus, which chiefly brings tidings to men. Get thee first to Pylos and inquire of goodly Nestor, and from thence to Sparta to Menelaus of the fair hair, for he came home the last of the mail-coated Achaeans. If thou shalt hear news of the life and the returning of thy father, then verily thou mayest endure the wasting for yet a year. But if thou shalt hear that he is dead and gone, return then to thine own dear country and pile his mound, and over it pay burial rites, full many as is due, and give thy mother to a husband. But when thou hast done this and made an end, thereafter take counsel in thy mind and heart, how thou mayest slay the wooers in thy halls, whether by guile or openly; for thou shouldest not carry childish thoughts, being no longer of years thereto. Or hast thou not heard what renown the goodly Orestes gat him among all men in that he slew the slayer of his father, guileful Aegisthus,

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who killed his famous sire? And thou, too, my friend, for I see that thou art very comely and tall, be valiant, that even men unborn may praise thee. But I will now go down to the swift ship and to my men, who methinks chafe much at tarrying for me; and do thou thyself take heed and give ear unto my words.'

Then wise Telemachus answered her, saying: 'Sir, verily thou speakest these things out of a friendly heart, as a father to his son, and never will I forget them. But now I pray thee abide here, though eager to be gone, to the end that after thou hast bathed and had all thy heart's desire, thou mayest wend to the ship joyful in spirit, with a costly gift and very goodly, to be an heirloom of my giving, such as dear friends give to friends.'

Then the goddess, grey-eyed Athene, answered him: 'Hold me now no longer, that am eager for the way. But whatsoever gift thine heart shall bid thee give me, when I am on my way back let it be mine to carry home: bear from thy stores a gift right goodly, and it shall bring thee the worth thereof in return.'

So spake she and departed, the grey-eyed Athene, and like an eagle of the sea she flew away, but in his spirit she planted might and courage, and put him in mind of his father yet more than heretofore. And he marked the thing and was amazed, for he deemed that it was a god; and anon he went among the wooers, a godlike man.

Now the renowned minstrel was singing to the wooers, and they sat listening in silence; and his song was of the pitiful return of the Achaeans, that Pallas Athene laid on them as they came forth from Troy. And from her upper chamber the daughter of Icarius, wise Penelope, caught the glorious strain, and she went down the high stairs from her chamber, not alone, for two of her handmaids bare her company. Now when the fair lady had come unto the wooers, she stood by the pillar of the well-built roof holding glistening tire before her face; and a faithful maiden stood on either side her. Then she fell a-weeping, and spake unto the divine minstrel:

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'Phemius, since thou knowest many other charms for mortals, deeds of men and gods, which bards rehearse, some one of these do thou sing as thou sittest by them, and let them drink their wine in silence; but cease from this pitiful strain, that ever wastes my heart within my breast, since to me above all women hath come a sorrow comfortless. So dear a head do I long for in constant memory, namely, that man whose fame is noised abroad from Hellas to mid Argos.'

Then wise Telemachus answered her, and said: 'O my mother, why then dost thou grudge the sweet minstrel to gladden us as his spirit moves him? It is not minstrels who are in fault, but Zeus, methinks, is in fault, who gives to men, that live by bread, to each one as he will. As for him it is no blame if he sings the ill-faring of the Danaans; for men always prize that song the most, which rings newest in their ears. But let thy heart and mind endure to listen, for not Odysseus only lost in Troy the day of his returning, but many another likewise perished. Howbeit go to thy chamber and mind thine own housewiferies, the loom and distaff, and bid thy handmaids ply their tasks. But speech shall be for men, for all, but for me in chief; for mine is the lordship in the house.'

Then in amaze she went back to her chamber, for she laid up the wise saying of her son in her heart. She ascended to her upper chamber with the women her handmaids, and then was bewailing Odysseus, her dear lord, till grey-eyed Athene cast sweet sleep upon her eyelids.

Now the wooers clamoured throughout the shadowy halls, and each one uttered a prayer to be her bedfellow. And wise Telemachus first spake among them:

'Wooers of my mother, men despiteful out of measure, let us feast now and make merry and let there be no brawling; for, lo, it is a good thing to list to a minstrel such as him, like to the gods in voice. But in the morning let us all go to the assembly and sit us down, that I may declare my saying outright, to wit that ye leave these halls: and busy yourselves with other feasts, eating your own substance, going in turn from house to house. But if ye deem this a likelier and a better thing, that one man's goods should

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perish without atonement, then waste ye as ye will; and I will call upon the everlasting gods, if haply Zeus may grant that acts of recompense be made: so should ye hereafter perish within the halls without atonement.'

So spake he, and all that heard him bit their lips and marvelled at Telemachus, in that he spake boldly.

Then Antinous, son of Eupheithes, answered him: 'Telemachus, in very truth the gods themselves instruct thee to be proud of speech and boldly to harangue. Never may Cronion make thee king in seagirt Ithaca, which thing is of inheritance thy right!'

Then wise Telemachus answered him, and said: 'Antinous, wilt thou indeed be wroth at the word that I shall say? Yea, at the hand of Zeus would I be fain to take even this thing upon me. Sayest thou that this is the worst hap that can befall a man? Nay, verily, it is no ill thing to be a king: the house of such an one quickly waxeth rich and himself is held in greater honour. Howsoever there are many other kings of the Achaeans in seagirt Ithaca, kings young and old; some one of them shall surely have this kingship since goodly Odysseus is dead. But as for me, I will be lord of our own house and thralls, that goodly Odysseus gat me with his spear.'

Then Eurymachus, son of Polybus, answered him, saying: 'Telemachus, on the knees of the gods it surely lies, what man is to be king over the Achaeans in seagirt Ithaca. But mayest thou keep thine own possessions and be lord in thine own house! Never may that man come, who shall wrest from thee thy substance violently in thine own despite, while Ithaca yet stands. But I would ask thee, friend, concerning the stranger--whence he is, and of what land he avows him to be? Where are his kin and his native fields? Doth he bear some tidings of thy father on his road, or cometh he thus to speed some matter of his own? In such wise did he start up, and lo, he was gone, nor tarried he that we should know him;--and yet he seemed no mean man to look upon.'

Then wise Telemachus answered him, and said: 'Eurymachus,

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surely the day of my father's returning hath gone by. Therefore no more do I put faith in tidings, whencesoever they may come, neither have I regard unto any divination, whereof my mother may inquire at the lips of a diviner, when she hath bidden him to the hall. But as for that man, he is a friend of my house from Taphos, and he avows him to be Mentos, son of wise Anchialus, and he hath lordship among the Taphians, lovers of the oar.'

So spake Telemachus, but in his heart he knew the deathless goddess. Now the wooers turned them to the dance and the delightful song, and made merry, and waited till evening should come on. And as they made merry, dusk evening came upon them. Then they went each one to his own house to lie down to rest.

But Telemachus, where his chamber was builded high up in the fair court, in a place with wide prospect, thither betook him to his bed, pondering many thoughts in his mind; and with him went trusty Eurycleia, and bare for him torches burning. She was the daughter of Ops, son of Peisenor, and Laertes bought her on a time with his wealth, while as yet she was in her first youth, and gave for her the worth of twenty oxen. And he honoured her even as he honoured his dear wife in the halls, but he never lay with her, for he shunned the wrath of his lady. She went with Telemachus and bare for him the burning torches: and of all the women of the household she loved him most, and she had nursed him when a little one. Then he opened the doors of the well-builded chamber and sat down on the bed and took off his soft doublet, and put it in the wise old woman's hands. So she folded the doublet and smoothed it, and hung it on a pin by the jointed bedstead, and went forth on her way from the room, and pulled to the door with the silver handle, and drew home the bar with the thong. There, all night through, wrapped in a fleece of wool, he meditated in his heart upon the journey that Athene had showed him.