

CLASSICS TO GO

HEROES OF THE OLDEN TIME

A STORY OF THE GOLDEN AGE

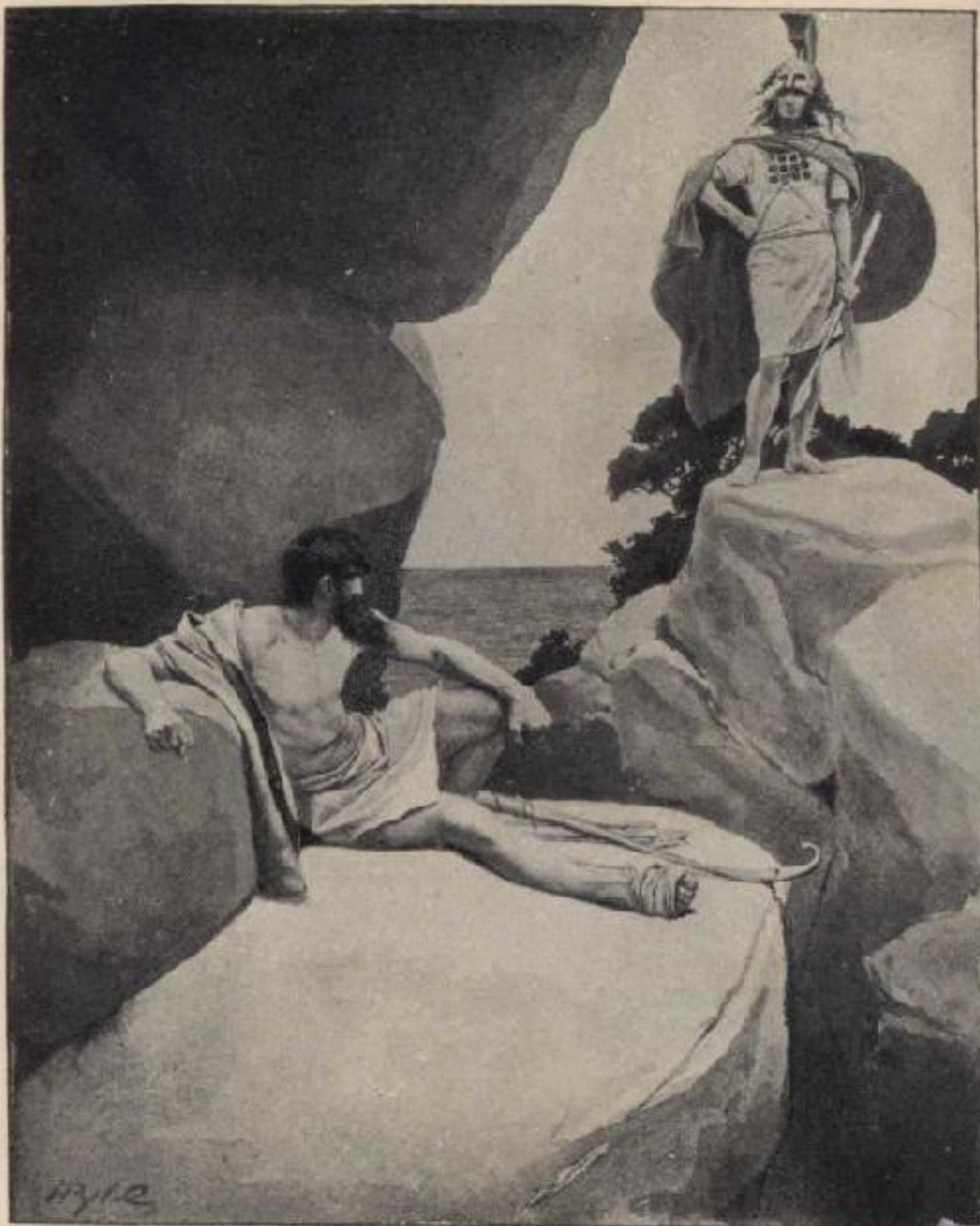


JAMES BALDWIN

Heroes Of The Olden Time

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PYRRHUS FINDS PHILOCTETES IN A CAVE.

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THE FORE WORD.

You have heard of Homer, and of the two wonderful poems, the Iliad and the Odyssey, which bear his name. No one knows whether these poems were composed by Homer, or whether they are the work of many different poets. And, in fact, it matters very little about their authorship. Everybody agrees that they are the grandest poems ever sung or written or read in this world; and yet, how few persons, comparatively, have read them, or know any thing about them except at second-hand! Homer commences his story, not at the beginning, but "in the midst of things;" hence, when one starts out to read the Iliad without having made some special preparation beforehand, he finds it hard to understand, and is tempted, in despair, to stop at the end of the first book. Many people are, therefore, content to admire the great masterpiece of poetry and story-telling simply because others admire it, and not because they have any personal acquaintance with it.

Now, it is not my purpose to give you a "simplified version" of the Iliad or the Odyssey. There are already many such versions; but the best way for you, or any one else, to read Homer, is *to read Homer*. If you do not understand Greek, you can read him in one of the many English translations. You will find much of the spirit of the original in the translations by Bryant, by Lord Derby, and by old George Chapman, as well as in the admirable prose rendering by Butcher and Lang; but you can get none of it in any so-called simplified version.

My object in writing this "Story of the Golden Age" has been to pave the way, if I dare say it, to an enjoyable reading of Homer, either in translations or in the original. I have taken the various legends relating to the causes of the Trojan war, and, by assuming certain privileges never yet denied to story-tellers, have woven all into one continuous narrative, ending where Homer's story begins. The hero of

the Odyssey--a character not always to be admired or commended--is my hero. And, in telling the story of his boyhood and youth, I have taken the opportunity to repeat, for your enjoyment, some of the most beautiful of the old Greek myths. If I have, now and then, given them a coloring slightly different from the original, you will remember that such is the right of the story-teller, the poet, and the artist. The essential features of the stories remain unchanged. I have, all along, drawn freely from the old tragedians, and now and then from Homer himself; nor have I thought it necessary in every instance to mention authorities, or to apologize for an occasional close imitation of some of the best translations. The pictures of old Greek life have, in the main, been derived from the Iliad and the Odyssey, and will, I hope, help you to a better understanding of those poems when you come to make acquaintance directly with them.

Should you become interested in the "Story of the Golden Age," as it is here related, do not be disappointed by its somewhat abrupt ending; for you will find it continued by the master-poet of all ages, in a manner both inimitable and unapproachable. If you are pleased with the discourse of the porter at the gate, how much greater shall be your delight when you stand in the palace of the king, and hearken to the song of the royal minstrel!

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ADVENTURE I.

A GLIMPSE OF THE WORLD.

To the simple-hearted folk who dwelt in that island three thousand years ago, there was never a sweeter spot than sea-girt Ithaca. Rocky and rugged though it may have seemed, yet it was indeed a smiling land embosomed in the laughing sea. There the air was always mild and pure, and balmy with the breath of blossoms; the sun looked kindly down from a cloudless sky, and storms seldom broke the quiet ripple of the waters which bathed the shores of that island home. On every side but one, the land rose straight up out of the deep sea to meet the feet of craggy hills and mountains crowned with woods. Between the heights were many narrow dells green with orchards; while the gentler slopes were covered with vineyards, and the steeps above them gave pasturage to flocks of long-wooled sheep and mountain-climbing goats.

On that side of the island which lay nearest the rising sun, there was a fine, deep harbor; for there the shore bent inward, and only a narrow neck of land lay between the eastern waters and the western sea. Close on either side of this harbor arose two mountains, Neritus and Nereius, which stood like giant watchmen overlooking land and sea and warding harm away; and on the neck, midway between these mountains, was the king's white palace, roomy and large, with blossoming orchards to the right and the left, and broad lawns in front, sloping down to the water's edge.

Here, many hundreds of years ago, lived Laertes--a man of simple habits, who thought his little island home a kingdom large enough, and never sighed for a greater. Not many men had seen so much of the world as he; for he had been to Colchis with Jason and the Argonauts, and his feet had trod the streets of every city in Hellas. Yet in all his wanderings he had seen no fairer land than rocky Ithaca. His eyes had been dazzled by the brightness of the Golden

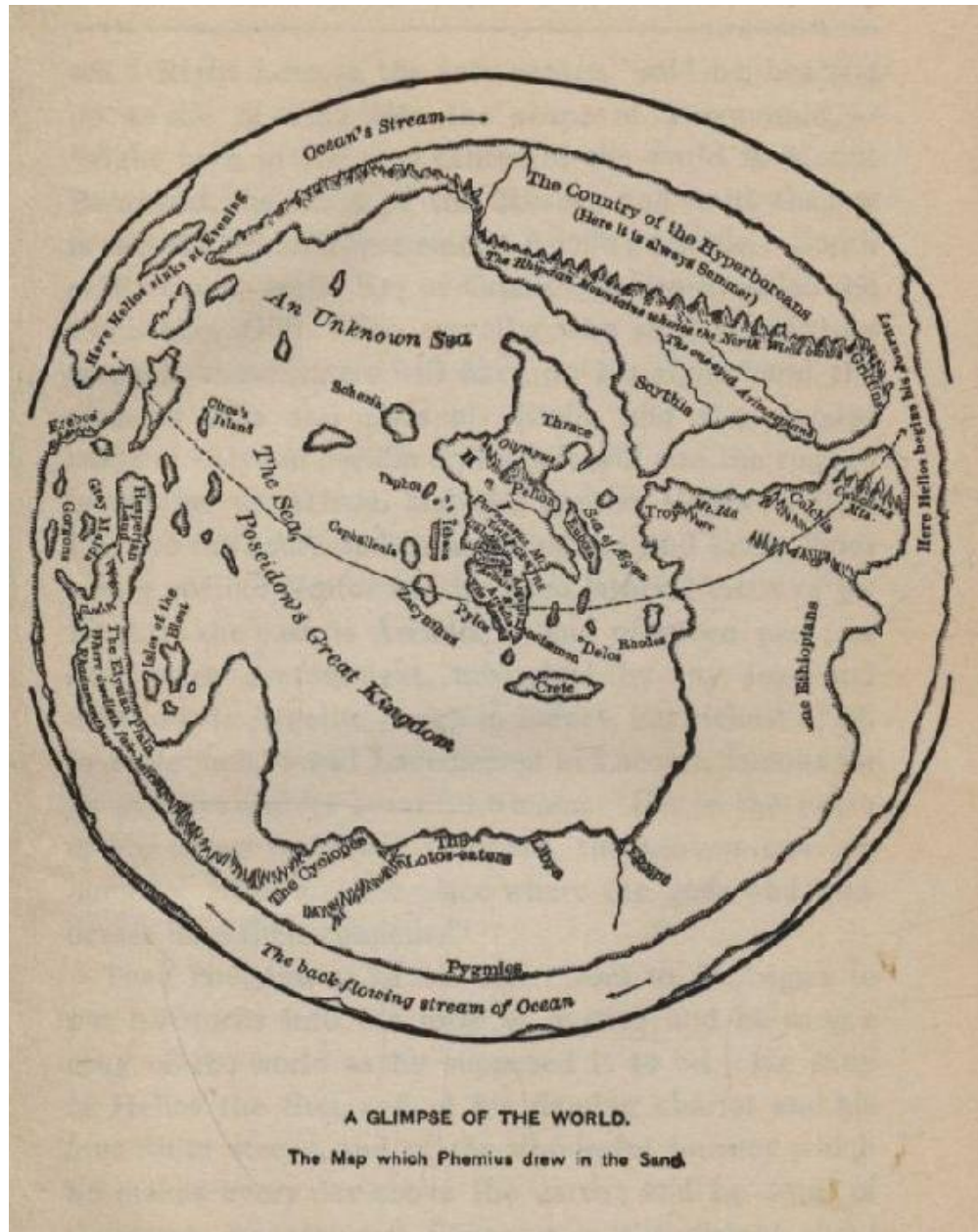
Fleece, and the kings of Argos and of Ilios had shown him the gold and gems of their treasure-houses. Yet what cared he for wealth other than that which his flocks and vineyards yielded him? There was hardly a day but that he might be seen in the fields guiding his plough, or training his vines, or in his orchards pruning his trees, or gathering the mellow fruit. He had all the good gifts of life that any man needs; and for them he never failed to thank the great Giver, nor to render praises to the powers above. His queen, fair Anticleia, daughter of the aged chief Autolycus, was a true housewife, overseeing the maidens at their tasks, busying herself with the distaff and the spindle, or plying the shuttle at the loom; and many were the garments, rich with finest needlework, which her own fair fingers had fashioned.

To Laertes and Anticleia one child had been born,--a son, who, they hoped, would live to bring renown to Ithaca. This boy, as he grew, became strong in body and mind far beyond his playfellows; and those who knew him wondered at the shrewdness of his speech no less than at the strength and suppleness of his limbs. And yet he was small of stature, and neither in face nor in figure was he adorned with any of Apollo's grace. On the day that he was twelve years old, he stood with his tutor, the bard Phemius, on the top of Mount Neritus; below him, spread out like a great map, lay what was to him the whole world. Northward, as far as his eyes could see, there were islands great and small; and among them Phemius pointed out Taphos, the home of a sea-faring race, where Anchialus, chief of warriors, ruled. Eastward were other isles, and the low-lying shores of Acarnania, so far away that they seemed mere lines of hazy green between the purple waters and the azure sky. Southward beyond Samos were the wooded heights of Zacynthus, and the sea-paths which led to Pylos and distant Crete. Westward was the great sea, stretching away and away to the region of the setting sun; the watery kingdom of Poseidon, full of strange beings and unknown

dangers,--a sea upon which none but the bravest mariners dared launch their ships.

The boy had often looked upon these scenes of beauty and mystery, but to-day his heart was stirred with an unwonted feeling of awe and of wonder at the greatness and grandeur of the world as it thus lay around him. Tears filled his eyes as he turned to his tutor. "How kind it was of the Being who made this pleasant earth, to set our own sunny Ithaca right in the centre of it, and to cover it all over with a blue dome like a tent! But tell me, do people live in all those lands that we see? I know that there are men dwelling in Zacynthus and in the little islands of the eastern sea; for their fishermen often come to Ithaca, and I have talked with them. And I have heard my father tell of his wonderful voyage to Colchis, which is in the region of the rising sun; and my mother often speaks of her old home in Parnassus, which also is far away towards the dawn. Is it true that there are men, women, and children, living in lands which we cannot see? and do the great powers above us care for them as for the good people of Ithaca? And is there anywhere another king so great as my father Laertes, or another kingdom so rich and happy as his?"

Then Phemius told the lad all about the land of the Hellenes beyond the narrow sea; and, in the sand at their feet, he drew with a stick a map of all the countries known to him.



A GLIMPSE OF THE WORLD.

The Map which Phemius drew in the Sand.

"We cannot see half of the world from this spot," said the bard, "neither is Ithaca the centre of it, as it seems to you. I will draw a picture of it here in the sand, and show you where lies every land and every sea. Right here in the

very centre," said he, heaping up a pile of sand into the shape of a mountain,--"right here in the very centre of the world is Mount Parnassus, the home of the Muses; and in its shadow is sacred Delphi, where stands Apollo's temple. South of Parnassus is the Bay of Crissa, sometimes called the Corinthian Gulf. The traveller who sails westwardly through those waters will have on his right hand the pleasant hills and dales of Ætolia and the wooded lands of Calydon; while on his left will rise the rugged mountains of Achaia, and the gentler slopes of Elis. Here to the south of Elis are Messene, and sandy Pylos where godlike Nestor and his aged father Neleus reign. Here, to the east, is Arcadia, a land of green pastures and sweet contentment, unwashed by any sea; and next to it is Argolis,--rich in horses, but richest of all in noble men,--and Lacedæmon in Laconia, famous for its warriors and its beautiful women. Far to the north of Parnassus is Mount Olympus, the heaven-towering home of Zeus, and the place where the gods and goddesses hold their councils."

Then Phemius, as he was often wont to do, began to put his words into the form of music; and he sang a song of the world as he supposed it to be. He sang of Helios the Sun, and of his flaming chariot and his four white steeds, and of the wonderful journey which he makes every day above the earth; and he sang of the snowy mountains of Caucasus in the distant east; and of the gardens of the Hesperides even farther to the westward; and of the land of the Hyperboreans, which lies beyond the northern mountains; and of the sunny climes where live the Ethiopians, the farthest distant of all earth's dwellers. Then he sang of the flowing stream of Ocean which encircles all lands in its embrace; and, lastly, of the Islands of the Blest, where fair-haired Rhadamanthus rules, and where there is neither snow nor beating rains, but everlasting spring, and breezes balmy with the breath of life.

"O Phemius!" cried the boy, as the bard laid aside his harp, "I never knew that the world was so large. Can it be that there are so many countries and so many strange people beneath the same sky?"

"Yes," answered Phemius, "the world is very broad, and our Ithaca is but one of the smallest of a thousand lands upon which Helios smiles, as he makes his daily journey through the skies. It is not given to one man to know all these lands; and happiest is he whose only care is for his home, deeming it the centre around which the world is built."

"If only the half of what you have told me be true," said the boy, "I cannot rest until I have seen some of those strange lands, and learned more about the wonderful beings which live in them. I cannot bear to think of being always shut up within the narrow bounds of little Ithaca."

"My dear boy," said Phemius, laughing, "your mind has been greatly changed within the past few moments. When we came here, a little while ago, you thought that Neritus was the grandest mountain in the world, and that Ithaca was the centre round which the earth was built. Then you were cheerful and contented; but now you are restless and unhappy, because you have learned of possibilities such as, hitherto, you had not dreamed about. Your eyes have been opened to see and to know the world as it is, and you are no longer satisfied with that which Ithaca can give you."

"But why did you not tell me these things before?" asked the boy.

"It was your mother's wish," answered the bard, "that you should not know them until to-day. Do you remember what day this is?"

"It is my twelfth birthday. And I remember, too, that there was a promise made to my grandfather, that when I was twelve years old I should visit him in his strong halls on Mount Parnassus. I mean to ask my mother about it at once."

And without waiting for another word from Phemius, the lad ran hurriedly down the steep pathway, and was soon at the foot of the mountain. Across the fields he hastened, and through the vineyards where the vines, trained by his father's own hand, were already hanging heavy with grapes. He found his mother in the inner hall, sitting before the hearth, and twisting from her distaff threads of bright sea-purple, while her maidens plied their tasks around her. He knelt upon the marble floor, and gently clasped his mother's knees.

"Mother," he said, "I come to ask a long-promised boon of you."

"What is it, my son?" asked the queen, laying aside her distaff. "If there be any thing in Ithaca that I can give you, you shall surely have it."

"I want nothing in Ithaca," answered the boy; "I want to see more of this great world than I ever yet have known. And now that I am twelve years old, you surely will not forget the promise, long since made, that I should spend the summer with my grandfather at Parnassus. Let me go very soon, I pray; for I tire of this narrow Ithaca."



ODYSSEUS AND HIS MOTHER.

The queen's eyes filled with tears as she answered, "You shall have your wish, my son. The promise given both to you and to my father must be fulfilled. For, when you were but a little babe, Autolycus came to Ithaca. And one evening, as he feasted at your father's table, your nurse, Dame

Eurycleia, brought you into the hall, and put you into his arms. 'Give this dear babe, O king, a name,' said she. 'He is thy daughter's son, the heir to Ithaca's rich realm; and we hope that he will live to make his name and thine remembered.'

"Then Autolycus smiled, and gently dandled you upon his knees. 'My daughter, and my daughter's lord,' said he, 'let this child's name be Odysseus; for he shall visit many lands and climes, and wander long upon the tossing sea. Yet wheresoever the Fates may drive him, his heart will ever turn to Ithaca his home. Call him by the name which I have given; and when his twelfth birthday shall have passed, send him to my strong halls in the shadow of Parnassus, where his mother in her girlhood dwelt. Then I will share my riches with him, and send him back to Ithaca rejoicing!' So spake my father, great Autolycus; and before we arose from that feast, we pledged our word that it should be with you even as he wished. And your name, Odysseus, has every day recalled to mind that feast and our binding words."

"Oh that I could go at once, dear mother!" said Odysseus, kissing her tears away. "I would come home again very soon. I would stay long enough to have the blessing of my kingly grandfather; I would climb Parnassus, and listen to the sweet music of the Muses; I would drink one draught from the Castalian spring of which you have so often told me; I would ramble one day among the groves and glens, that perchance I might catch a glimpse of Apollo or of his huntress sister Artemis; and then I would hasten back to Ithaca, and would never leave you again."

"My son," then said Laertes, who had come unheard into the hall, and had listened to the boy's earnest words,--"my son, you shall have your wish, for I know that the Fates have ordered it so. We have long looked forward to this day, and for weeks past we have been planning for your journey. My stanchest ship is ready to carry you over the sea, and needs only to be launched into the bay. Twelve strong oarsmen are

sitting now upon the beach, waiting for orders to embark. To-morrow, with the bard Phemius as your friend and guide, you may set forth on your voyage to Parnassus. Let us go down to the shore at once, and offer prayers to Poseidon, ruler of the sea, that he may grant you favoring winds and a happy voyage."

Odysseus kissed his mother again, and, turning, followed his father from the hall.

Then Anticleia rose, and bade the maidens hasten to make ready the evening meal; but she herself went weeping to her own chamber, there to choose the garments which her son should take with him upon his journey. Warm robes of wool, and a brodered tunic which she with her own hands had spun and woven, she folded and laid with care in a little wooden chest; and with them she placed many a little comfort, fruit and sweetmeats, such as she rightly deemed would please the lad. Then when she had closed the lid, she threw a strong cord around the chest, and tied it firmly down. This done, she raised her eyes towards heaven, and lifting up her hands, she prayed to Pallas Athené:--

"O queen of the air and sky, hearken to my prayer, and help me lay aside the doubting fears which creep into my mind, and cause these tears to flow. For now my boy, unused to hardships, and knowing nothing of the world, is to be sent forth on a long and dangerous voyage. I tremble lest evil overtake him; but more I fear, that, with the lawless men of my father's household, he shall forget his mother's teachings, and stray from the path of duty. Do thou, O queen, go with him as his guide and guard, keep him from harm, and bring him safe again to Ithaca and his loving mother's arms."

Meanwhile Laertes and the men of Ithaca stood upon the beach, and offered up two choice oxen to Poseidon, ruler of the sea; and they prayed him that he would vouchsafe favoring winds and quiet waters and a safe journey to the bold voyagers who to-morrow would launch their ship upon

the deep. And when the sun began to sink low down in the west, some sought their homes, and others went up to the king's white palace to tarry until after the evening meal.

Cheerful was the feast; and as the merry jest went round, no one seemed more free from care than King Laertes. And when all had eaten of the food, and had tasted of the red wine made from the king's own vintage, the bard Phemius arose, and tuned his harp, and sang many sweet and wonderful songs. He sang of the beginning of things; of the broad-breasted Earth, the mother of created beings; of the sky, and the sea, and the mountains; of the mighty race of Titans,--giants who once ruled the earth; of great Atlas, who holds the sky-dome upon his shoulders; of Cronos and old Oceanus; of the war which for ten years raged on Mount Olympus, until Zeus hurled his unfeeling father Cronos from the throne, and seized the sceptre for himself.

When Phemius ended his singing, the guests withdrew from the hall, and each went silently to his own home; and Odysseus, having kissed his dear father and mother, went thoughtfully to his sleeping-room high up above the great hall. With him went his nurse, Dame Eurycleia, carrying the torches. She had been a princess once; but hard fate and cruel war had overthrown her father's kingdom, and had sent her forth a captive and a slave. Laertes had bought her of her captors for a hundred oxen, and had given her a place of honor in his household next to Anticleia. She loved Odysseus as she would love her own dear child; for, since his birth, she had nursed and cared for him. She now, as was her wont, lighted him to his chamber; she laid back the soft coverings of his bed; she smoothed the fleeces, and hung his tunic within easy reach. Then with kind words of farewell for the night, she quietly withdrew, and closed the door, and pulled the thong outside which turned the fastening latch. Odysseus wrapped himself among the fleeces of his bed, and soon was lost in slumber.

ADVENTURE II.

A VOYAGE ON THE SEA.

Early the next morning, while yet the dawn was waiting for the sun, Odysseus arose and hastened to make ready for his journey. The little galley which was to carry him across the sea had been already launched, and was floating close to the shore; and the oarsmen stood upon the beach impatient to begin the voyage. The sea-stores, and the little chest in which the lad's wardrobe lay, were brought on board and placed beneath the rowers' benches. The old men of Ithaca, and the boys and the maidens, hurried down to the shore, that they might bid the voyagers God-speed. Odysseus, when all was ready, spoke a few last kind words to his mother and sage Laertes, and then with a swelling heart went up the vessel's side, and sat down in the stern. And Phemius the bard, holding his sweet-toned harp, followed him, and took his place in the prow. Then the sailors loosed the moorings, and went on board, and, sitting on the rowers' benches, wielded the long oars; and the little vessel, driven by their well-timed strokes, turned slowly about, and then glided smoothly across the bay; and the eyes of all on shore were wet with tears as they prayed the rulers of the air and the sea that the voyagers might reach their wished-for port in safety, and in due time come back unharmed to Ithaca.

No sooner had the vessel reached the open sea, than Pallas Athené sent after it a gentle west wind to urge it on its way. As the soft breeze, laden with the perfumes of blossoming orchards, stirred the water into rippling waves, Phemius bade the rowers lay aside their oars, and hoist the sail. They heeded his behest, and lifting high the slender mast, they bound it in its place; then they stretched aloft the broad white sail, and the west wind caught and filled it, and drove the little bark cheerily over the waves. And the grateful crew sat down upon the benches, and with Odysseus and Phemius the bard, they joined in offering

heartfelt thanks to Pallas Athené, who had so kindly prospered them. And by and by Phemius played soft melodies on his harp, such as the sea-nymphs liked to hear. And all that summer day the breezes whispered in the rigging, and the white waves danced in the vessel's wake, and the voyagers sped happily on their way.

In the afternoon, when they had begun somewhat to tire of the voyage, Phemius asked Odysseus what they should do to lighten the passing hours.

"Tell us some story of the olden time," said Odysseus. And the bard, who was never better pleased than when recounting some wonderful tale, sat down in the midships, where the oarsmen could readily hear him, and told the strange story of Phaethon, the rash son of Helios Hyperion.

"Among the immortals who give good gifts to men, there is no one more kind than Helios, the bestower of light and heat. Every morning when the Dawn with her rosy fingers illumines the eastern sky, good Helios rises from his golden couch, and from their pasture calls his milk-white steeds. By name he calls them,--

"Eos, Æthon, Bronté, Astrape!"

"Each hears his master's voice, and comes obedient. Then about their bright manes and his own yellow locks he twines wreaths of sweet-smelling flowers,--amaranths and daffodils and asphodels from the heavenly gardens. And the Hours come and harness the steeds to the burning sun-car, and put the reins into Helios Hyperion's hands. He mounts to his place, he speaks,--and the winged team soars upward into the morning air; and all earth's children awake, and give thanks to the ruler of the Sun for the new day which smiles down upon them.

"Hour after hour, with steady hand, Helios guides his steeds; and the flaming car is borne along the sun-road through the sky. And when the day's work is done, and sable night comes creeping over the earth, the steeds, the car, and the driver sink softly down to the western Ocean's

stream, where a golden vessel waits to bear them back again, swiftly and unseen, to the dwelling of the Sun in the east. There, under the home-roof, Helios greets his mother and his wife and his dear children; and there he rests until the Dawn again leaves old Ocean's bed, and blushing comes to bid him journey forth anew.

"One son had Helios, Phaethon the Gleaming, and among the children of men there was no one more fair. And the great heart of Helios beat with love for his earth-child, and he gave him rich gifts, and kept nothing from him.

"And Phaethon, as he grew up, became as proud as he was fair, and wherever he went he boasted of his kinship to the Sun; and men when they looked upon his matchless form and his radiant features believed his words, and honored him as the heir of Helios Hyperion. But one Epaphos, a son of Zeus, sneered.

"'Thou a child of Helios!' he said; 'what folly! Thou canst show nothing wherewith to prove thy kinship, save thy fair face and thy yellow hair; and there are many maidens in Hellas who have those, and are as beautiful as thou. Manly grace and handsome features are indeed the gifts of the gods; but it is by godlike deeds alone that one can prove his kinship to the immortals. While Helios Hyperion--thy father, as thou wouldst have it--guides his chariot above the clouds, and showers blessings upon the earth, what dost thou do? What, indeed, but dally with thy yellow locks, and gaze upon thy costly clothing, while all the time thy feet are in the dust, and the mire of the earth holds them fast? If thou hast kinship with the gods, prove it by doing the deeds of the gods! If thou art Helios Hyperion's son, guide for one day his chariot through the skies.'

"Thus spoke Epaphos. And the mind of Phaethon was filled with lofty dreams; and, turning away from the taunting tempter, he hastened to his father's house.

"Never-tiring Helios, with his steeds and car, had just finished the course of another day; and with words of