**THE CYCLOPS.**

The hero Odysseus was about to sail home to Greece, after the great city of Troy had been taken, having wandered farthest and suffered most of all in the long Trojan war.

He was well-nigh the last to sail, for he had tarried many days to do homage to Agamemnon, lord of all the Greeks. Twelve ships he had with him, twelve that he had brought to Troy, and in each there were some fifty men, being scarce half of those that had sailed with them in the old days, so many valiant heroes slept the last sleep on the plain and on the seashore, slain in battle or by the shafts of Apollo.

In the morning Odysseus, who was always fond of adventure and would know of every land to which he came what manner of men it sheltered, took one of his twelve ships and bade the sailors row to land. There was a great hill sloping to the shore, and there rose up, here and there, a smoke from the caves where the Cyclopes lived apart, holding no converse with men. They were a rude and savage folk, each ruling his own household without taking thought of his neighbour.

Very close to the shore was one of these caves, very huge and deep, with a hedge of laurel hiding the opening and a wall of rough stone shaded by tall oaks and pines. Odysseus selected the twelve bravest men from his crew and bade the rest remain behind to guard the ship while he went to see what manner of dwelling it was and who abode there. He had his sword by his side and on his shoulder a mighty skin of the juice of grapes, sweet smelling and strong, with which he might win the heart of some fierce savage, should he chance to meet such.

So they entered the cave, and judged that it was the dwelling of some rich and skilful shepherd, for within there were pens for young sheep and goats, divided according to their age, and there were baskets full of cheeses, and full milk pails ranged along the wall. But the Cyclops, himself, was away in the pastures. Then the companions of Odysseus besought him to depart, but he would not, for he wished to see what manner of host this strange shepherd might be. And truly he saw to his cost!

It was evening when the Cyclops came home, a mighty giant, twenty feet or more tall. He carried a vast bundle of pine logs on his back for his fire, and threw them down outside the cave with a great crash. He drove the flocks inside and closed the entrance with a huge rock which twenty wagons and more could not have borne. Then he milked the ewes and goats, and half of the milk he curdled for cheese and half he set ready for himself when he should be hungry. Last, he kindled a fire with the pine logs and the flame lighted up all the cave, showing him Odysseus and his comrades.

"Who are you?" cried the Cyclops. "Are you traders, or pirates?"

"We are no pirates, mighty sir, but Greeks, sailing back from Troy. And we beg hospitality of you in the name of Jupiter who rewards or punishes the host according as he is hospitable or not."

"Then," said the giant, "it is idle to talk to me of Jupiter and the gods. We Cyclops take no account of gods, holding ourselves to be much better and stronger than they." Without more ado, he caught up two of the men, and devoured them with huge draughts of milk between, leaving not even a morsel or one of their bones. And when the giant had ended his meal, he lay down among his sheep and fell asleep.

Odysseus would have liked to slay the Cyclops where he lay, but he remembered that, were he to do this, his comrades would perish miserably. How could he move away the great rock that lay against the door of the cave? So they waited until morning. And the monster rose, seized two more men and devoured them for his meal. Then he went to the pastures, but put a great rock on the mouth of the cave just as a man puts down the lid on his quiver of arrows.

All that day the wise Odysseus was thinking what he might best do to save himself and his companions, and the end of his thinking was this. There was a mighty pole in the cave, green wood of an olive tree as big as a ship's mast, which the giant proposed to use as a walking staff. Odysseus broke off a fathom's length of this and his companions pointed it and hardened it in the fire. Then they hid it away.

At evening the giant came back, drove his flocks into the cave, fastened the door and made his cruel feast as before. Then Odysseus came forward with the skin of crushed grapes in his hand and said:

"Drink, Cyclops, now that you have feasted. Drink and see what a strange draught we had in our ship."

"Give me more," he demanded. "In good truth this is a strange draught. We, too, have vines but they do not yield any juices like this, which indeed must be such as the gods drink."

Then Odysseus gave him the skin again and he drank from it. Three times he gave it to him and three times the giant drank, not knowing how it would work on his brain. At last he fell into a deep slumber. Odysseus told his men to be of good courage for the time of their deliverance was come.

They thrust the olive stick into the fire until, green as it was, it was ready to burst into flame and they thrust it into the monster's eye, for he had but one eye set in the middle of his great forehead, and made him sightless.

Then the Cyclops leaped up and bore away the stake and cried aloud so that all the Cyclopes who lived on the mountain side heard him and came down, crowding about the entrance to his cave. The Cyclops rolled away the great stone from the door of the cave and came out in the midst of the other giants stretching out his hands to try and gather his sheep together. And Odysseus wondered how he and his men would be able to escape.

At last he lighted on a good device. The Cyclops had driven the rams with the other ship into the cave and they were huge and strong. Odysseus fastened his comrades underneath the rams, tying them with osier twigs of which the giant made his bed. There was one mighty ram, far larger than all the others, and to this Odysseus clung, grasping the fleece tight with both hands. So they waited in the recesses of the cave for morning. And when the morning came, the rams rushed out to pasture as the giant sat in the door, feeling the back of each as it went by, but never touching the man who was bound underneath each. With them Odysseus escaped.

When they were out of reach of the giant, Odysseus loosed his hold of the rams and then unbound his comrades. They hastened to their ship, climbed in, and smote the sea with their oars, laying to right lustily that they might the sooner escape from this accursed land. But when they had rowed a hundred yards or so, the Cyclops heard them. He broke off the top of a great hill, a mighty rock, and hurled it where he heard the sound of the oars. It fell right in front of the ship's bow and washed the ship back to the shore again. But Odysseus seized a long pole with both hands and pushed the ship from the land and bade his comrades ply their oars softly, nodding with his head, for he was too wise to speak, lest the Cyclops should know where they were. Then they rowed with all their might and main.

They had gone twice as far as before, when Odysseus' pride became so great that he could no longer contain himself. He stood up in the boat and called out.

"Hear, Cyclops. If any man asks who destroyed your power for evil, say it was the warrior Odysseus, dwelling in Ithaca."

The giant heard and he lifted up his hands and spoke to Neptune, the god of the sea, who was the father of the Cyclopes. "Hear me, Neptune, if I am indeed your son and you are my father. May this Odysseus never reach his home; or, if the Fates have ordered that he shall reach it, may he come alone, with all his comrades lost."

And as the Cyclops ended this wicked prayer, he hurled another mighty rock which almost lighted on the rudder's end, yet missed it as if by a hair's breadth. So Odysseus escaped and all his comrades with him, and they came to the island of the wild goats where they found the rest of their men who had waited long for them in sore fear lest they had perished. And they went home in triumph to Greece.