

Book 9

The Cyclops

Paragraphs 16-21



16. As soon as Dawn appeared, fresh and rosy-fingered, I assembled my company and spoke to them. “My good friends,” I said, “for the time being stay here, while I go in my ship with my crew to find out what kind of men are over there, and whether they are aggressive savages with no sense of right or wrong or hospitable and god-fearing people.”
17. ‘Then I climbed into my ship and told my men to follow me and loose the hawsers. They came on board at once, took their places at the oars and all together struck the white surf with the blades. It was no great distance to the mainland. As we approached its nearest point, we made out a cave close to the sea, with a high entrance overhung by laurels. Here large flocks of sheep and goats were penned at night, and round the mouth a yard had been built with a great wall of quarried stones and tall pines and high-branched oaks. It was the den of a giant, who pastured his flocks alone, a long way away from anyone else, and had no truck with others of his kind but lived aloof in his own lawless way. And what a formidable monster he was! He was quite unlike any man who eats bread, more like some wooded peak in the high hills, standing out alone apart from the others.
18. At this point, I told the rest of my loyal companions to stay there on guard by the ship, but I myself picked out the twelve best men in the company and advanced. I took with me in a goatskin some dark and mellow wine which had been given to me by Maronson of Euanthes, the priest of Apollo, the tutelary god of Ismarus, because we had protected him and his child and wife out of respect for his office. He lived in a wooded grove sacred to Phoebus Apollo. This man had given me some fine presents: seven talents of wrought gold, with a mixing-bowl of solid silver, and he drew off for me a dozen jars of mellow unmixed wine as well. It was a wonderful drink. It had been kept secret from all his serving-men and maids, in fact from everyone in the house but himself, his good wife and a housekeeper. To drink this red and honeyed vintage, he would pour one cupful of wine into twenty of water, and the bouquet that rose

from the bowl was pure heaven - those were occasions when abstinence could have no charms.

19. 'Well, I filled a big goatskin with this wine and also took some food in a bag with me; for I had an instant foreboding that we were going to find ourselves face to face with some barbarous being of colossal strength and ferocity, uncivilized and unprincipled. It took us very little time to reach the cave, but we did not find its owner at home: he was tending his fat sheep in the pastures. So we went inside and looked in amazement at everything. There were baskets laden with cheeses, and the folds were thronged with lambs and kids, each group - the spring ones, the summer ones, and the new-born ones - being separately penned. All his well-made vessels, the pails and bowls he used for milking, were swimming with whey.
20. 'To start with my men begged me to let them take away some of the cheeses, then come back, drive the kids and lambs quickly out of the pens down to the good ship, and so set sail across the salt water. But though it would have been far better so, I was not to be persuaded. I wished to see the owner of the cave and had hopes of some friendly gifts from my host. But when he did appear, my men were not going to find him a very likeable character.
21. 'We lit a fire, made an offering to the gods, helped ourselves to some of the cheeses, and when we had eaten, sat down in the cave to await his arrival. At last he came up, shepherding his flocks and carrying a huge bundle of dry wood to burn at supper-time. With a great crash he threw this down inside the cavern, giving us such a fright that we hastily retreated to an inner recess. Meanwhile he drove some of his fat flock into the wider part of the cave - all the ones he was milking - the rams and he-goats he left out of doors in the walled yard. He then picked up a huge stone, with which he closed the entrance. It was a mighty slab; twenty-two four-wheeled waggons could not shift such a massive stone from the entrance, such was the monstrous size of the rock with which he closed the cave. Next he sat down to milk his ewes and his bleating goats, which he did methodically, putting her young to each mother as he finished. He then curdled half the white milk, collected the whey, and stored it in wicker cheese-baskets; the remainder he left standing in pails, so that it would be handy at supper-time when he wanted a drink. When he had efficiently finished all his tasks, he re-lit the fire and spied us.

Glossary

adze—tool used for cutting and shaping wood

agonies—sufferings

all-compelling—irresistible

ambrosia—food of the gods

boring—drilling

cudgelling—beating

cunning—slyly intelligent

dregs—solid remains found in the bottom of some drinks

exquisite—intense

frenzied—wildly excited

fuddled—confused

groped—felt blindly

inspired—excited

morsels—bits of food

mortal—deadly

nectar—drink of the gods

notion—idea

peril—danger

quench—cool hot metal

shriek—high-pitched cry

stupor—confused state

toppled—fell

treachery—betrayal through trickiness

tremendous—extraordinary

vintage—wine

vomited—threw up