

The Cyclops and Aeolus¹ by Charles Lamb

After they coasted the entire night by unknown and out-of-the-way shores, Odysseus and his crew came by daybreak to the land where the Cyclops dwell. The Cyclopes were giant shepherds that did not plant or plough, but despite their lack of toil, the earth yields for them rich wheat and barley and grapes. They do not have bread or wine and do not know how to farm, nor do they care to know. They live each man to himself, without law or government, or anything like a state or kingdom. Their dwellings are in caves on the steep heads of mountains. Every man rules his household by his own whim, or not at all. Their wives and children are as lawless as themselves, none caring for others, but each doing as he or she thinks is good. They have no ships or boats or craftsmen to make them. They have no trade or commerce, or desire to visit other shores. Yet they have convenient places for harbors and for shipping and it was here that Odysseus with a chosen party of twelve followers landed to discover what sort of men lived there and to know whether they were friendly to strangers or totally wild and savage.

The first sign of habitation which they came to was a giant's cave. It was very primitive but its size showed how large the owner must be. The pillars which supported it were the bodies of huge rudely cut oaks or pines and all about showed marks of strength rather than skill in whoever built it.

When he entered the cave, Odysseus admired the primitive furniture and simple structure of the place and was curious to see what kind of tenant would dwell in such a place. He brought with him a present of Greek wine which he had stored in twelve great casks in his ship. He thought that gifts would have more success in getting hospitality from his host than strength would in forcing it. The wine had a delicious fragrance and was strong, too, and no one ever drank it without diluting it with twenty parts water.

Taking with them a goatskin bottle full of this precious liquor, they went into the recesses of the cave. Here they entertained themselves a whole day by beholding the curiosities inside. There was the giant's kitchen, where the flesh of sheep and goats lay strewed. There was a dairy where goat milk stood ranged in troughs and pails. And there were pens where the giant kept his live animals, which he drove forth to pasture with him when he went out in the morning.

¹ From *The Adventures of Odysseus*

While they were feasting their eyes on these strange things, their ears were suddenly deafened by a noise like the falling of a house. It was the owner of the cave, who had been abroad all day, as his custom was, feeding his flock in the mountains, and now was driving them home in the evening from pasture. He threw down a pile of firewood that he had been gathering for suppertime before the mouth of the cave. This had caused the crash that they heard.

The Grecians hid themselves in the far crannies of the cave when they saw the uncouth monster. It was Polyphemus, the largest and most savage of the Cyclops, who boasted that he was the son of Neptune. He looked more like a mountain crag than a man. And to match his brutal body, he had a brutish mind.

The giant drove his flock—all that gave milk—to the interior of the cave, but left the rams and the he-goats outside. Then taking up a stone so massive that twenty oxen could not have moved it, he placed it at the mouth of the cave to secure the entrance, and sat down to milk his ewes and his goats. When he finished, he kindled a fire, and throwing his great eye round the cave (for the Cyclops have no more than one eye, which was placed in the middle of their forehead), by the glimmering light he noticed some of Odysseus' men.

“Ho! Guests, what are you? Merchants or wandering thieves?” he bellowed out in a voice which took from them all power of reply, it was so astounding.

Only Odysseus got up the courage to answer, and said that they had come neither for plunder nor trade, but were Grecians who had lost their way returning from Troy. This famous city, he said, they had sacked and leveled to the ground under the leadership of Agamemnon, the renowned son of Atreus. Yet now they threw themselves humbly before his feet, whom they acknowledged to be mightier than they, and begged him to observe the rites of hospitality, as Zeus was the avenger of wrongs done to strangers, and would fiercely resent any injury which they might suffer.

“Fool!” said the Cyclops, “to come so far here to preach the fear of the gods to me. We Cyclops don't care for your Zeus, whom you say was nursed by a goat, nor any of your other gods. We are stronger than they are, and dare to invite an open battle with Zeus himself, though you and all your people join with him.”

The Cyclops then asked them to tell him where their ship was and whether they had any companions. But Odysseus was cautious and said that they had no ship or companions, but were unfortunate men. The sea had split their ship in pieces, dashed them upon his coast, and they alone had escaped.

The Cyclops said nothing, but gripped two of those nearest to him as if they had been no more than children and dashed their brains out against the earth. Shocking to relate, he tore their limbs to pieces, and ate them yet warm and trembling, making a lion's meal of them, lapping the blood, for the Cyclops are man-eaters, and thought that human flesh was a delicacy far above goat's or kid's. Few men approach their coast because of their horrible customs, except some stragglers, or now and then a shipwrecked mariner.

At a sight so horrid, Odysseus and his men went almost mad. When the Cyclops made an end of his wicked supper, and drained a draft of goat's milk down his huge throat, he lay down and slept among his goats. Odysseus then drew his sword, and half meant to thrust it with all his might in at the bosom of the sleeping monster. But wiser thoughts restrained him, and if they had not, he and his crew without help would have perished there, as no one except Polyphemus himself could remove the mass of stone which he had placed to secure the entrance. So they were constrained to stay all that night in fear.

When day came, the Cyclops awoke. He kindled a fire, made his breakfast of two other of his unfortunate prisoners, then milked his goats as he was used to doing. When he had finished eating the prisoners, he pushed aside the vast stone and let out his flock, and shut it again, with as much ease as a man opens and shuts the door of a house. He then drove them before him to the mountains with whistlings as sharp as winds in storms.

The Cyclops acted as if Odysseus had as much strength or cunning as a newborn babe. But when Odysseus was left alone with what remained of his men, whom the Cyclops had not yet devoured, he showed how far manly wisdom excels brutish force. He took a stake as long and thick as a mast from the wood pile which the Cyclops had stored for his fire. He then sharpened and hardened it in the fire and chose four men and told them what to do with it. He went through his instructions several times to be sure that they knew exactly what to do.

When the evening came, the Cyclops drove his sheep home. As it happened, though, he drove the males of his flock, contrary to his custom, along with the ewes into the pens. Then shutting the stone of the cave, he began his horrible supper. When he had eaten two more of the Grecians, Odysseus waxed bold and took a bowl of Greek wine, and merrily dared the Cyclops to drink it.

"Cyclops," he said, "take a bowl of wine from the hand of your guest. It may serve to digest the man's flesh that you have eaten, and show what drink

our ship held before it went down. All I ask in return, if you find it good, is to be allowed to leave whole.”

The brute took the bottle and drank the wine, and so enjoyed the taste of it, which was new to him, that he swilled the contents, and begged for more, and asked Odysseus to tell him his name, that he might give a gift to him. The Cyclops, Odysseus said, had grapes, but this rich juice, he swore, was simply from the gods. Again he poured out more wine into the bottle, and the fool drank it as fast as he poured it out, and again he asked his name. Odysseus slyly replied, “My name is Noman. My kindred and friends in my own country call me Noman.”

“Then,” said the Cyclops, “this is the kindness I will show you, Noman. I will eat you the last of all your friends.” He had hardly expressed his savage kindness, when the fumes of the strong wine overcame him, and he reeled down on the floor and sank into a deep sleep.

Odysseus watched his time, while the monster lay insensible, and when he had stirred up his men, they placed the sharp end of the stake in the fire till it was heated red hot. With difficulty the four men bored the sharp end of the huge stake, which they had heated red-hot, right into the eye of the drunken cannibal. Odysseus helped to thrust it in with all his might, and worked hard to get it in still farther and farther, almost as men bore holes into wood with an auger, till at last the scalded blood gushed out, and the eyeball smoked, and the strings of the eye cracked as the burning stake broke in it. The eye hissed as hot iron hisses when it is plunged into water.

Waking, the Cyclops roared with the pain so loudly that all the cavern broke into claps like thunder. They fled, and dispersed into the corners of the cave. He plucked the burning stake from his eye and hurled the wood madly about the cave. Then he cried out mightily for his Cyclopes brethren that dwelt nearby in caverns on hills. They heard the terrible shout and came flocking from all parts to ask, “What is wrong with Polyphemus?” and “Why is he disturbing our sleep with such horrid noises in the night? Did some mortal frighten him? Is someone killing him?”

Polyphemus answered from within his cave that “Noman has hurt me. Noman is killing me. Noman is with me in the cave.”

They replied, “If no man has hurt you, and no man is with you, then you are alone, and the evil that has come on you is from the hand of Heaven, which no one can resist or help.” So they left him and went their way, thinking that some disease troubled him.

Blind and ready to split with the anguish of the pain, he went groaning up and down in the dark to find the doorway. When he found it, he removed the stone and sat in the threshold, feeling if he could lay hold on any man going out with the sheep, which, as the day was now dawning, were beginning to go out to their accustomed pastures.

But Odysseus, whose first scheme had succeeded so well with the Cyclops, was not going to be caught so easily. He furiously pondered his predicament until at last he came up with this remedy. He made knots of the osier twigs on which the Cyclops commonly slept and tied the fattest and fleeciest of the rams together with them, three in a row, and under the belly of the middle ram he tied a man, and himself last, wrapping himself fast with both his hands in the rich wool of one, the fairest of the flock.

And now the sheep began to leave. The males went first, the females, un milked, stood by, bleating and requiring the hand of their shepherd in vain to milk them, their full bags sore with being unemptied. But the giant was much more sore with the loss of his sight. Still, as the males passed, he felt their backs, never dreaming that they carried his enemies under their bellies. So they passed on till the last ram came with Odysseus underneath. The giant stopped the ram and felt him. His hand once brushed Odysseus hair, but he did not know it. He chided the ram for being last, and spoke to it as if it understood him. He asked the ram if it did not wish that its master had his eye again, which that hateful Noman with his execrable rout had put out when they felled him with wine. He wanted the ram to tell him where his enemy lurked in the cave, that he might dash his brains and strew them about, to ease his heart of that tormenting revenge which rankled in it. After a deal of such foolish talk to the beast, he let it go.

When Odysseus found himself free, he let go of his hold, and helped in disengaging his friends. They carried off the rams that they had befriended to the ships. Their companions welcomed them with tears in their eyes, as men escaped from death. They plied their oars and set their sails, and when they got as far off from shore as a voice could reach, Odysseus cried out to the Cyclops, "Cyclops, you should not have eaten your guests. By my hand, Zeus has repaid your hospitality."

The Cyclops heard, and came forth enraged. In his anger, he plucked a fragment of a rock and threw it with blind fury at the ships. It narrowly escaped hitting the ship in which Odysseus sat, but when it fell, it raised so fierce a wave that it carried the ship back till it almost touched the shore.

“Cyclops,” said Odysseus, “if any ask you who gave you that ugly blemish in your eye, say it was Odysseus, son of Laertes. I am called the king of Ithaca, the waster of cities.”

Then they set sail, and beat the old sea, and they went out with a forward gale. They were very sad for their lost men, yet glad to have escaped at any rate, till they came to the isle where Aeolus reigned, who is god of the winds.

Here Odysseus and his men were courteously received by the monarch, who showed him his twelve children who rule over the twelve winds. They stayed a month and feasted with him, and at the end of the month they left with many presents. At parting the king gave Odysseus a curious gift. It was an ox’s hide, which contained all the winds except the western wind which he left to blow on their sails and waft them gently home to Ithaca. This bag was bound in a glittering silver band, so tight that no wind could escape. Odysseus hung it up at the mast. His companions had no idea what was inside the hide, but guessed that the monarch had given their captain some precious treasure of gold or silver.

They sailed smoothly for nine days, favored by the western wind, and by the tenth they approached so near as to notice lights kindled on the shores of their country. Odysseus, however, was overcome with fatigue from watching the helm, and fell asleep. The mariners then seized their opportunity. One of them said to the rest, “A fine time this leader of ours has. Wherever he goes he is sure of getting presents, and we come away empty-handed. See what King Aeolus has given him—store no doubt of gold and silver.” A word was enough to those greedy wretches, who quick as thought, untied the bag, and instead of gold, out rushed all the winds with a mighty noise.

The noise woke Odysseus, who saw their mistake, but too late. The ship was driving with all the winds back far from Ithaca, far as to the island of Aeolus from which they had parted. It took them only one hour to travel the distance of what took them nine days.

Aeolus was angry to see him return in that manner and said, “Odysseus, what brought you back? Did you get tired of your country so quickly? Didn’t you like our present? We thought we had given you a royal passport.”

Odysseus answered, “My men have done this mischief to me. They did it while I slept.”

“Wretch!” said Aeolus, “Go, away from our shores. It is not fitting for us to convoy men whom the gods hate and want to perish.”

They sailed out, but with far different hopes than when they left the same harbor the first time with the winds confined in the ox’s hide. Only the west

wind played on their sails to waft them to Ithaca. They were now the game of every gale that blew, and gave up hope of ever seeing home again. Odysseus' covetous mariners were cured of their greed for gold, and would not have touched it if it had lain in countless heaps before them.

The Minotaur
by Nathaniel Hawthorne

In the old city of Troezene, at the foot of a lofty mountain, there lived, a very long time ago, a little boy named Theseus. His grandfather, King Pittheus, was the sovereign of that country, and was reckoned a very wise man, so that Theseus, being brought up in the royal palace, and being naturally a bright lad, could hardly fail of profiting by the old king's instructions. His mother's name was Aethra. As for his father, the boy had never seen him. But, from his earliest remembrance, Aethra used to go with little Theseus into a wood, and sit down on a moss-grown rock, which was deeply sunken into the earth. Here she often talked with her son about his father, and said that he was called Aegeus, and that he was a great king, and ruled over Attica, and dwelt at Athens, which was as famous a city as any in the world. Theseus was very fond of hearing about King Aegeus, and often asked his good mother Aethra why he did not come and live with them at Troezene.

"Ah, my dear son," answered Aethra, with a sigh, "a monarch has his people to take care of. The men and women over whom he rules are in the place of children to him, and he can seldom spare time to love his own children as other parents do. Your father will never be able to leave his kingdom for the sake of seeing his little boy."

"I see," said the boy. "But why can't I go to this famous city of Athens and tell King Aegeus that I am his son?"

"That may happen by and by," said Aethra. "Be patient, and we shall see. You are not yet big and strong enough to set out on such an errand."

"And how soon shall I be strong enough?" Theseus persisted in inquiring.

"You are but a tiny boy as yet," replied his mother. "See if you can lift this rock on which we are sitting."

The little fellow had a great opinion of his own strength. So, grasping the rough protuberances of the rock, he tugged and toiled amain, and got himself quite out of breath, without being able to stir the heavy stone. It seemed to be rooted into the ground. No wonder he could not move it; for it would have taken all the force of a very strong man to lift it out of its earthy bed.

His mother stood looking on, with a sad kind of a smile on her lips and in her eyes, to see the zealous and yet puny efforts of her little boy. She could not help being sorrowful at finding him already so impatient to begin his adventures in the world.

“You see how it is, my dear Theseus,” said she. “You must possess far more strength than now before I can trust you to go to Athens, and tell King Aegeus that you are his son. But when you can lift this rock, and show me what is hidden beneath it, I promise you my permission to depart.”

Often and often, after this, did Theseus ask his mother whether it was yet time for him to go to Athens, and still his mother pointed to the rock, and told him that, for years to come, he could not be strong enough to move it. And again and again the rosy-cheeked and curly-headed boy would tug and strain at the huge mass of stone, striving, child as he was, to do what a giant could hardly have done without taking both of his great hands to the task. Meanwhile the rock seemed to be sinking farther and farther into the ground. The moss grew over it thicker and thicker, until at last it looked almost like a soft green seat, with only a few gray knobs of granite peeping out. The overhanging trees, also, shed their brown leaves on it, as often as the autumn came, and at its base grew ferns and wild flowers, some of which crept quite over its surface. To all appearance, the rock was as firmly fastened as any other portion of the earth’s substance.

But, difficult as the matter looked, Theseus was now growing up to be such a vigorous youth, that, in his own opinion, the time would quickly come when he might hope to get the upper hand of this ponderous lump of stone.

“Mother, I do believe it has started!” cried he, after one of his attempts. “The earth around it is certainly a little cracked!”

“No, no, child!” his mother hastily answered. “It is not possible you can have moved it, such a boy as you still are!”

Nor would she be convinced, although Theseus showed her the place where he fancied that the stem of a flower had been partly uprooted by the movement of the rock. But Aethra sighed, and looked disquieted; for, no doubt, she began to be conscious that her son was no longer a child, and that, in a little while hence, she must send him forth among the perils and troubles of the world.

It was not more than a year afterwards when they were again sitting on the moss-covered stone. Aethra had once more told him the oft-repeated story of his father, and how gladly he would receive Theseus at his stately palace, and how he would present him to his courtiers and the people, and tell them that here was the heir of his dominions. The eyes of Theseus glowed with enthusiasm, and he would hardly sit still to hear his mother speak.

“Dear mother Aethra,” he exclaimed, “I never felt half so strong as now! I am no longer a child, nor a boy, nor a mere youth! I feel myself a man! It is now time to make one earnest trial to remove the stone.”

“Ah, my dearest Theseus,” replied his mother “not yet! not yet!”

“Yes, mother,” said he, resolutely, “the time has come!”

Then Theseus bent himself in good earnest to the task, and strained every sinew, with manly strength and resolution. He put his whole brave heart into the effort. He wrestled with the big and sluggish stone, as if it had been a living enemy. He heaved, he lifted, he resolved now to succeed, or else to perish there, and let the rock be his monument forever! Aethra stood gazing at him, and clasped her hands, partly with a mother’s pride, and partly with a mother’s sorrow. The great rock stirred! Yes, it was raised slowly from the bedded moss and earth, uprooting the shrubs and flowers along with it, and was turned on its side. Theseus had conquered!

While taking breath, he looked joyfully at his mother, and she smiled upon him through her tears.

“Yes, Theseus,” she said, “the time has come, and you must stay no longer at my side! See what King Aegeus, your royal father, left for you beneath the stone, when he lifted it in his mighty arms, and laid it on the spot whence you have now removed it.”

Theseus looked, and saw that the rock had been placed over another slab of stone, containing a cavity within it; so that it somewhat resembled a roughly-made chest or coffer, of which the upper mass had served as the lid. Within the cavity lay a sword, with a golden hilt, and a pair of sandals.

“That was your father’s sword,” said Aethra, “and those were his sandals. When he went to be king of Athens, he bade me treat you as a child until you should prove yourself a man by lifting this heavy stone. That task being accomplished, you are to put on his sandals, in order to follow in your father’s footsteps, and to gird on his sword, so that you may fight giants and dragons, as King Aegeus did in his youth.”

“I will set out for Athens this very day!” cried Theseus.

But his mother persuaded him to stay a day or two longer, while she got ready some necessary articles for his journey. When his grandfather, the wise King Pittheus, heard that Theseus intended to present himself at his father’s palace, he earnestly advised him to get on board of a vessel, and go by sea; because he might thus arrive within fifteen miles of Athens, without either fatigue or danger.

“The roads are very bad by land,” said the venerable king; “and they are terribly infested with robbers and monsters. A mere lad, like Theseus, is not fit to be trusted on such a perilous journey, all by himself. No, no; let him go by sea.”

But when Theseus heard of robbers and monsters, he pricked up his ears, and was so much the more eager to take the road along which they were to be met with. On the third day, therefore, he bade a respectful farewell to his grandfather, thanking him for all his kindness, and, after affectionately embracing his mother, he set forth with a good many of her tears glistening on his cheeks, and some, if the truth must be told, that had gushed out of his own eyes. But he let the sun and wind dry them, and walked stoutly on, playing with the golden hilt of his sword, and taking very manly strides in his father's sandals.

I cannot stop to tell you hardly any of the adventures that befell Theseus on the road to Athens. It is enough to say, that he quite cleared that part of the country of the robbers about whom King Pittheus had been so much alarmed. One of these bad people was named Procrustes. He was indeed a terrible fellow, and had an ugly way of making fun of the poor travelers who happened to fall into his clutches. In his cavern he had a bed, on which, with great pretense of hospitality, he invited his guests to lie down. But, if they happened to be shorter than the bed, this wicked villain stretched them out by main force; or, if they were too tall, he lopped off their heads or feet, and laughed at what he had done, as an excellent joke. Thus, however weary a man might be, he never liked to lie in the bed of Procrustes. Another of these robbers, named Scinis, must likewise have been a very great scoundrel. He was in the habit of flinging his victims off a high cliff into the sea. In order to give him exactly his deserts, Theseus tossed him off the very same place. But if you will believe me, the sea would not pollute itself by receiving such a bad person into its bosom; neither would the earth, having once got rid of him, consent to take him back; so that, between the cliff and the sea, Scinis stuck fast in the air, which was forced to bear the burden of his naughtiness.

After these memorable deeds, Theseus heard of an enormous sow, which ran wild, and was the terror of all the farmers round about. As he did not consider himself above doing any good thing that came in his way, he killed this monstrous creature, and gave the carcass to the poor people for bacon. The great sow had been an awful beast, while ramping about the woods and fields, but was a pleasant object enough when cut up into joints, and smoking on I know not how many dinner tables.

Thus, by the time he reached his journey's end, Theseus had done many valiant feats with his father's golden-hilted sword, and had gained the renown of being one of the bravest young men of the day. His fame traveled faster than he did, and reached Athens before him. As he entered the city, he heard the

inhabitants talking at the street corners, and saying that Hercules was brave, and Jason too, and Castor and Pollux likewise, but that Theseus, the son of their own king, would turn out as great a hero as the best of them. Theseus took longer strides on hearing this, and fancied himself sure of a magnificent reception at his father's court, since he came there with Fame to blow her trumpet before him, and cry to King Aegeus, "Behold your son!"

He little suspected, innocent youth that he was, that here, in this very Athens, where his father reigned, a greater danger awaited him than any which he had encountered on the road. Yet this was the truth. You must understand that the father of Theseus, though not very old in years, was almost worn out with the cares of government, and had thus grown aged before his time. His nephews, not expecting him to live a very great while, intended to get all the power of the kingdom into their own hands. But when they heard that Theseus had arrived in Athens, and learned what a gallant young man he was, they saw that he would not be at all the kind of a person to let them steal away his father's crown and scepter, which ought to be his own by right of inheritance. Thus these bad-hearted nephews of King Aegeus, who were the own cousins of Theseus, at once became his enemies. A still more dangerous enemy was Medea, the wicked enchantress; for she was now the king's wife, and wanted to give the kingdom to her son Medus, instead of letting it be given to the son of Aethra, whom she hated.

It so happened that the king's nephews met Theseus, and found out who he was, just as he reached the entrance of the royal palace. With all their evil designs against him, they pretended to be their cousin's best friends, and expressed great joy at making his acquaintance. They proposed to him that he should come into the king's presence as a stranger, in order to try whether Aegeus would discover in the young man's features any likeness either to himself or his mother Aethra, and thus recognize him for a son. Theseus consented; for he fancied that his father would know him in a moment, by the love that was in his heart. But, while he waited at the door, the nephews ran and told King Aegeus that a young man had arrived in Athens, who, to their certain knowledge, intended to put him to death, and get possession of his royal crown.

"And he is now waiting for admission to your majesty's presence," added they.

"Aha!" cried the old king, on hearing this. "Why, he must be a very wicked young fellow indeed! Pray, what would you advise me to do with him?"

In reply to this question, the wicked Medea put in her word. As I have already told you, she was a famous enchantress. According to some stories, she was in the habit of boiling old people in a large caldron, under pretense of making them young again. But King Aegeus, I suppose, did not fancy such an uncomfortable way of growing young, or perhaps was contented to be old, and therefore would never let himself be popped into the caldron. If there were time to spare from more important matters, I should be glad to tell you of Medea's fiery chariot, drawn by winged dragons, in which the enchantress used often to take an airing among the clouds. This chariot, in fact, was the vehicle that first brought her to Athens, where she had done nothing but mischief ever since her arrival. But these and many other wonders must be left untold. It is enough to say, that Medea, amongst a thousand other bad things, knew how to prepare a poison, that was instantly fatal to whomsoever might so much as touch it with his lips.

So, when the king asked what he should do with Theseus, this naughty woman had an answer ready at her tongue's end.

"Leave that to me, please your majesty," she replied. "Only admit this evil-minded young man to your presence, treat him civilly, and invite him to drink a goblet of wine. Your majesty is well aware that I sometimes amuse myself by distilling very powerful medicines. Here is one of them in this small phial. As to what it is made of, that is one of my secrets of state. Do but let me put a single drop into the goblet, and let the young man taste it. I will answer for it, he shall quite lay aside the bad designs with which he comes here."

As she said this, Medea smiled. But, for all her smiling face, she meant nothing less than to poison the poor innocent Theseus, before his father's eyes. And King Aegeus, like most other kings, thought any punishment mild enough for a person who was accused of plotting against his life. He therefore made little or no objection to Medea's scheme, and as soon as the poisonous wine was ready, gave orders that the young stranger should be admitted into his presence.

The goblet was set on a table beside the king's throne, and a fly, meaning just to sip a little from the brim, immediately tumbled into it, dead. Observing this, Medea looked round at the nephews, and smiled again.

When Theseus was ushered into the royal apartment, the only object that he seemed to behold was the white-bearded old king. There he sat on his magnificent throne, a dazzling crown on his head, and a scepter in his hand. His aspect was stately and majestic, although his years and infirmities weighed heavily on him, as if each year were a lump of lead, and each infirmity a

ponderous stone, and all were bundled up together, and laid on his weary shoulders. The tears both of joy and sorrow sprang into the young man's eyes; for he thought how sad it was to see his dear father so infirm, and how sweet it would be to support him with his own youthful strength, and to cheer him up with the alacrity of his loving spirit. When a son takes a father into his warm heart it renews the old man's youth in a better way than by the heat of Medea's magic caldron. And this was what Theseus resolved to do. He could scarcely wait to see whether King Aegeus would recognize him, so eager was he to throw himself into his arms.

Advancing to the foot of the throne, he attempted to make a little speech, which he had been thinking about, as he came up the stairs. But he was almost choked by a great many tender feelings that gushed out of his heart and swelled into his throat, all struggling to find utterance together. And therefore, unless he could have laid his full, over-brimming heart into the king's hand, poor Theseus knew not what to do or say. The cunning Medea observed what was passing in the young man's mind. She was more wicked at that moment than ever she had been before; for (and it makes me tremble to tell you of it) she did her worst to turn all this unspeakable love with which Theseus was agitated to his own ruin and destruction.

"Does your majesty see his confusion?" she whispered in the king's ear. "He is so conscious of guilt, that he trembles and cannot speak. The wretch lives too long! Quick! offer him the wine!"

Now King Aegeus had been gazing earnestly at the young stranger, as he drew near the throne. There was something, he knew not what, either in his white brow, or in the fine expression of his mouth, or in his beautiful and tender eyes, that made him indistinctly feel as if he had seen this youth before; as if, indeed, he had trotted him on his knee when a baby, and had beheld him growing to be a stalwart man, while he himself grew old. But Medea guessed how the king felt, and would not suffer him to yield to these natural sensibilities; although they were the voice of his deepest heart, telling him as plainly as it could speak, that here was our dear son, and Aethra's son, coming to claim him for a father. The enchantress again whispered in the king's ear, and compelled him, by her witchcraft, to see everything under a false aspect.

He made up his mind, therefore, to let Theseus drink off the poisoned wine.

"Young man," said he, "you are welcome! I am proud to show hospitality to so heroic a youth. Do me the favor to drink the contents of this goblet. It is

brimming over, as you see, with delicious wine, such as I bestow only on those who are worthy of it! None is more worthy to quaff it than yourself!”

So saying, King Aegeus took the golden goblet from the table, and was about to offer it to Theseus. But, partly through his infirmities, and partly because it seemed so sad a thing to take away this young man’s life. however wicked he might be, and partly, no doubt, because his heart was wiser than his head, and quaked within him at the thought of what he was going to do—for all these reasons, the king’s hand trembled so much that a great deal of the wine slopped over. In order to strengthen his purpose, and fearing lest the whole of the precious poison should be wasted, one of his nephews now whispered to him:

“Has your Majesty any doubt of this stranger’s guilt? This is the very sword with which he meant to slay you. How sharp, and bright, and terrible it is! Quick!—let him taste the wine; or perhaps he may do the deed even yet.”

At these words, Aegeus drove every thought and feeling out of his breast, except the one idea of how justly the young man deserved to be put to death. He sat erect on his throne, and held out the goblet of wine with a steady hand, and bent on Theseus a frown of kingly severity; for, after all, he had too noble a spirit to murder even a treacherous enemy with a deceitful smile on his face.

“Drink!” said he, in the stern tone with which he was wont to condemn a criminal to be beheaded. “You have well deserved of me such wine as this!”

Theseus held out his hand to take the wine. But, before he touched it, King Aegeus trembled again. His eyes had fallen on the gold-hilted sword that hung at the young man’s side. He drew back the goblet.

“That sword!” he exclaimed: “how came you by it?”

“It was my father’s sword,” replied Theseus, with a tremulous voice. “These were his sandals. My dear mother (her name is Aethra) told me his story while I was yet a little child. But it is only a month since I grew strong enough to lift the heavy stone, and take the sword and sandals from beneath it, and come to Athens to seek my father.”

“My son! my son!” cried King Aegeus, flinging away the fatal goblet, and tottering down from the throne to fall into the arms of Theseus. “Yes, these are Aethra’s eyes. It is my son.”

I have quite forgotten what became of the king’s nephews. But when the wicked Medea saw this new turn of affairs, she hurried out of the room, and going to her private chamber, lost no time to setting her enchantments to work. In a few moments, she heard a great noise of hissing snakes outside of the chamber window, and behold! there was her fiery chariot, and four huge

winged serpents, wriggling and twisting in the air, flourishing their tails higher than the top of the palace, and all ready to set off on an aerial journey. Medea staid only long enough to take her son with her, and to steal the crown jewels, together with the king's best robes, and whatever other valuable things she could lay hands on, and getting into the chariot, she whipped up the snakes, and ascended high over the city.

The king, hearing the hiss of the serpents, scrambled as fast as he could to the window, and bawled out to the abominable enchantress never to come back. The whole people of Athens, too, who had run out of doors to see this wonderful spectacle, set up a shout of joy at the prospect of getting rid of her. Medea, almost bursting with rage, uttered precisely such a hiss as one of her own snakes, only ten times more venomous and spiteful, and glaring fiercely out of the blaze of the chariot, she shook her hands over the multitude below, as if she were scattering a million of curses among them. In so doing, however, she unintentionally let fall about five hundred diamonds of the first water, together with a thousand great pearls, and two thousand emeralds, rubies, sapphires, opals, and topazes, to which she had helped herself out of the king's strong box. All these came pelting down, like a shower of many-colored hailstones, on the heads of grown people and children, who forthwith gathered them up, and carried them back to the palace. But King Aegeus told them that they were welcome to the whole, and to twice as many more, if he had them, for the sake of his delight at finding his son, and losing the wicked Medea. And, indeed, if you had seen how hateful was her last look, as the flaming chariot flew upward, you would not have wondered that both king and people should think her departure a good riddance.

And now Prince Theseus was taken into great favor by his royal father. The old king was never weary of having him sit beside him on his throne (which was quite wide enough for two), and of hearing him tell about his dear mother, and his childhood, and his many boyish efforts to lift the ponderous stone. Theseus, however, was much too brave and active a young man to be willing to spend all his time in relating things which had already happened. His ambition was to perform other and more heroic deeds, which should be better worth telling in prose and verse. Nor had he been long in Athens before he caught and chained a terrible mad bull, and made a public show of him, greatly to the wonder and admiration of good King Aegeus and his subjects. But pretty soon, he undertook an affair that made all his foregone adventures seem like mere boy's play. The occasion of it was as follows:

One morning, when Prince Theseus awoke, he fancied that he must have had a very sorrowful dream, and that it was still running in his mind, even now that his eyes were opened. For it appeared as if the air was full of a melancholy wail, and when he listened more attentively, he could hear sobs, and groans, and screams of woe, mingled with deep, quiet sighs, which came from the king's palace, and from the streets, and from the temples, and from every habitation in the city. And all these mournful noises, issuing out of thousands of separate hearts, united themselves into one great sound of affliction, which had startled Theseus from slumber. He put on his clothes as quickly as he could (not forgetting his sandals and gold-hilted sword), and, hastening to the king, inquired what it all meant.

"Alas! my son," said King Aegeus, heaving a long sigh, "here is a very lamentable matter in hand! This is the most woful anniversary in the whole year. It is the day when we annually draw lots to see which of the youths and maids of Athens shall go to be devoured by the horrible Minotaur!"

"The Minotaur!" exclaimed Prince Theseus, and like a brave young prince as he was, he put his hand to the hilt of his sword. "What kind of a monster may that be? Is it not possible, at the risk of one's life, to slay him?"

But King Aegeus shook his venerable head, and to convince Theseus that it was quite a hopeless case, he gave him an explanation of the whole affair. It seems that in the island of Crete there lived a certain dreadful monster, called a Minotaur, which was shaped partly like a man and partly like a bull, and was altogether such a hideous sort of a creature that it is really disagreeable to think of him. If he were suffered to exist at all, it should have been on some desert island, or in the duskiness of some deep cavern, where nobody would ever be tormented by his abominable aspect. But King Minos, who reigned over Crete, laid out a vast deal of money in building a habitation for the Minotaur, and took great care of his health and comfort, merely for mischief's sake. A few years before this time, there had been a war between the city of Athens and the island of Crete, in which the Athenians were beaten, and compelled to beg for peace. No peace could they obtain, however, except on condition that they should send seven young men and seven maidens, every year, to be devoured by the pet monster of the cruel King Minos. For three years past, this grievous calamity had been borne. And the sobs, and groans, and shrieks, with which the city was now filled, were caused by the people's woe, because the fatal day had come again, when the fourteen victims were to be chosen by lot, and the old people feared lest their sons or daughters might be taken, and the youths

and damsels dreaded lest they themselves might be destined to glut the ravenous maw of that detestable man-brute.

But when Theseus heard the story, he straightened himself up, so that he seemed taller than ever before, and as for his face it was indignant, spiteful, bold, tender, and compassionate, all in one look.

“Let the people of Athens this year draw lots for only six young men, instead of seven,” said he, “I will myself be the seventh, and let the Minotaur devour me if he can!”

“O my dear son,” cried King Aegeus, “why should you expose yourself to this horrible fate? You are a royal prince, and have a right to hold yourself above the destinies of common men.”

“It is because I am a prince, your son, and the rightful heir of your kingdom, that I freely take on me the calamity of your subjects,” answered Theseus, “And you, my father, being king over these people, and answerable to Heaven for their welfare, are bound to sacrifice what is dearest to you, rather than that the son or daughter of the poorest citizen should come to any harm.”

The old king shed tears, and besought Theseus not to leave him desolate in his old age, more especially as he had but just begun to know the happiness of possessing a good and valiant son. Theseus, however, felt that he was in the right, and therefore would not give up his resolution. But he assured his father that he did not intend to be eaten up, unresistingly, like a sheep, and that, if the Minotaur devoured him, it should not be without a battle for his dinner. And finally, since he could not help it, King Aegeus consented to let him go. So a vessel was got ready, and rigged with black sails, and Theseus, with six other young men, and seven tender and beautiful damsels, came down to the harbor to embark. A sorrowful multitude accompanied them to the shore. There was the poor old king, too, leaning on his son’s arm, and looking as if his single heart held all the grief of Athens.

Just as Prince Theseus was going on board, his father bethought himself of one last word to say.

“My beloved son,” said he, grasping the Prince’s hand, “you observe that the sails of this vessel are black; as indeed they ought to be, since it goes on a voyage of sorrow and despair. Now, being weighed down with infirmities, I know not whether I can survive till the vessel shall return. But, as long as I do live, I shall creep daily to the top of yonder cliff, to watch if there be a sail on the sea. And, dearest Theseus, if by some happy chance, you should escape the jaws of the Minotaur, then tear down those dismal sails, and hoist others that shall be bright as the sunshine. Beholding them on the horizon, myself and all

the people will know that you are coming back victorious, and will welcome you with such a festal uproar as Athens never heard before.”

Theseus promised that he would do so. Then going on board, the mariners trimmed the vessel's black sails to the wind, which blew faintly off the shore, being pretty much made up of the sighs that everybody kept pouring forth on this melancholy occasion. But by and by, when they had got fairly out to sea, there came a stiff breeze from the north-west, and drove them along as merrily over the white-capped waves as if they had been going on the most delightful errand imaginable. And though it was a sad business enough, I rather question whether fourteen young people, without any old persons to keep them in order, could continue to spend the whole time of the voyage in being miserable. There had been some few dances on the undulating deck, I suspect, and some hearty bursts of laughter, and other such unseasonable merriment among the victims, before the high blue mountains of Crete began to show themselves among the far-off clouds. That sight, to be sure, made them all very grave again.

Theseus stood among the sailors, gazing eagerly towards the land; although, as yet, it seemed hardly more substantial than the clouds, amidst which the mountains were looming up. Once or twice, he fancied that he saw a glare of some bright object, a long way off, flinging a gleam across the waves.

“Did you see that flash of light?” he inquired of the master of the vessel.

“No, prince. But I have seen it before,” answered the master. “It came from Talus, I suppose.”

As the breeze came fresher just then, the master was busy with trimming his sails, and had no more time to answer questions. But while the vessel flew faster and faster towards Crete, Theseus was astonished to behold a human figure, gigantic in size, which appeared to be striding, with a measured movement, along the margin of the island. It stepped from cliff to cliff, and sometimes from one headland to another, while the sea foamed and thundered on the shore beneath, and dashed its jets of spray over the giant's feet. What was still more remarkable, whenever the sun shone on this huge figure, it flickered and glimmered; its vast countenance, too, had a metallic luster, and threw great flashes of splendor through the air. The folds of its garments, moreover, instead of waving in the wind, fell heavily over its limbs, as if woven of some kind of metal.

The nigher the vessel came, the more Theseus wondered what this immense giant could be, and whether it actually had life or no. For, though it walked, and made other lifelike motions, there yet was a kind of jerk in its gait,

which, together with its brazen aspect, caused the young prince to suspect that it was no true giant, but only a wonderful piece of machinery. The figure looked all the more terrible because it carried an enormous brass club on its shoulder.

“What is this wonder?” Theseus asked of the master of the vessel, who was now at leisure to answer him.

“It is Talus, the Man of Brass,” said the master.

“And is he a live giant, or a brazen image?” asked Theseus.

“That, truly,” replied the master, “is the point which has always perplexed me. Some say, indeed, that this Talus was hammered out for King Minos by Vulcan himself, the most skillful of all workers in metal. But who ever saw a brazen image that had sense enough to walk round an island three times a day, as this giant walks round the island of Crete, challenging every vessel that comes nigh the shore? And, on the other hand, what living thing, unless his sinews were made of brass, would not be weary of marching eighteen hundred miles in the twenty-four hours, as Talus does, without ever sitting down to rest? He is a puzzler, take him how you will.”

Still the vessel went bounding onward. Now Theseus could hear the brazen clangor of the giant’s footsteps, as he trod heavily on the sea-beaten rocks, some of which were seen to crack and crumble into the foaming waves beneath his weight. As they approached the entrance of the port, the giant straddled clear across it, with a foot firmly planted on each headland, and uplifting his club to such a height that its butt-end was hidden in the cloud, he stood in that formidable posture, with the sun gleaming all over his metallic surface. There seemed nothing else to be expected but that, the next moment, he would fetch his great club down, slam bang, and smash the vessel into a thousand pieces, without heeding how many innocent people he might destroy. There is seldom any mercy in a giant, you know, and quite as little in a piece of brass clockwork. But just when Theseus and his companions thought the blow was coming, the brazen lips unclosed themselves, and the figure spoke.

“Where do you come from, strangers?”

And when the ringing voice ceased, there was just such a reverberation as you may have heard within a great church bell, for a moment or two after the stroke of the hammer.

“From Athens!” shouted the master in reply.

“On what errand?” thundered the Man of Brass.

And he whirled his club aloft more threateningly than ever, as if he were about to smite them with a thunder-stroke right amidships, because Athens, so little while ago, had been at war with Crete.

“We bring the seven youths and the seven maidens,” answered the master, “to be devoured by the Minotaur!”

“Pass!” cried the brazen giant.

That one loud word rolled all about the sky, while again there was a booming reverberation within the figure’s breast. The vessel glided between the headlands of the port, and the giant resumed his march. In a few moments, this wondrous sentinel was far away, flashing in the distant sunshine, and revolving with immense strides round the island of Crete, as it was his never-ceasing task to do.

No sooner had they entered the harbor than a party of the guards of King Minos came down to the water side, and took charge of the fourteen young men and damsels. Surrounded by these armed warriors, Prince Theseus and his companions were led to the king’s palace, and ushered into his presence. Now, Minos was a stern and pitiless king. If the figure that guarded Crete was made of brass, then the monarch, who ruled over it, might be thought to have a still harder metal in his breast, and might have been called a man of iron. He bent his shaggy brows upon the poor Athenian victims. Any other mortal, beholding their fresh and tender beauty, and their innocent looks, would have felt himself sitting on thorns until he had made every soul of them happy by bidding them go free as the summer wind. But this immitigable Minos cared only to examine whether they were plump enough to satisfy the Minotaur’s appetite. For my part, I wish he himself had been the only victim. The monster would have found him a pretty tough one.

One after another, King Minos called these pale, frightened youths and sobbing maidens to his footstool, gave them each a poke in the ribs with his scepter (to try whether they were in good flesh or no), and dismissed them with a nod to his guards. But when his eyes rested on Theseus, the king looked at him more attentively, because his face was calm and brave.

“Young man,” asked he, with his stern voice, “are you not appalled at the certainty of being devoured by this terrible Minotaur?”

“I have offered my life in a good cause,” answered Theseus, “and therefore I give it freely and gladly. But you, King Minos, aren’t you yourself appalled, who, year after year, have perpetrated this dreadful wrong, by giving seven innocent youths and as many maidens to be devoured by a monster? Don’t you tremble, wicked king, to turn your eyes inward on your own heart? Sitting

there on your golden throne, and in your robes of majesty, I tell you to your face, King Minos, you are a more hideous monster than the Minotaur himself!”

“Aha! do you think me so?” cried the king, laughing in his cruel way. “Tomorrow, at breakfast time, you will have an opportunity of judging which is the greater monster, the Minotaur or the king! Take them away, guards, and let this free-spoken youth be the Minotaur’s first morsel.”

Near the king’s throne (though I had no time to tell you so before) stood his daughter Ariadne. She was a beautiful and tender-hearted maiden, and looked at these poor doomed captives with very different feelings from those of the iron-breasted King Minos. She really wept indeed, at the idea of how much human happiness would be needlessly thrown away by giving so many young people in the first bloom and rose blossom of their lives, to be eaten up by a creature who, no doubt, would have preferred a fat ox, or even a large pig, to the plumpest of them. And when she beheld the brave, spirited figure of Prince Theseus bearing himself so calmly in his terrible peril, she grew a hundred times more pitiful than before. As the guards were taking him away, she flung herself at the king’s feet, and begged him to set all the captives free, and especially this one young man.

“Peace, foolish girl!” answered King Minos.

“What have you to do with an affair like this? It is a matter of state policy, and therefore quite beyond your weak comprehension. Go water your flowers, and think no more of these Athenian caitiffs, whom the Minotaur shall as certainly eat up for breakfast as I will eat a partridge for my supper.”

So saying, the king looked cruel enough to devour Theseus and all the rest of the captives himself, had there been no Minotaur to save him the trouble. As he would hear not another word in their favor, the prisoners were now led away, and clapped into a dungeon, where the jailer advised them to go to sleep as soon as possible, because the Minotaur was in the habit of calling for breakfast early. The seven maidens and six of the young men soon sobbed themselves to slumber. But Theseus was not like them. He felt conscious that he was wiser, and braver, and stronger than his companions, and that therefore he had the responsibility of all their lives on him, and must consider whether there was no way to save them, even in this last extremity. So he kept himself awake, and paced to and fro across the gloomy dungeon in which they were shut up.

Just before midnight, the door was softly unbarred, and the gentle Ariadne showed herself, with a torch in her hand.

“Are you awake, Prince Theseus?” she whispered.

“Yes,” answered Theseus. “With so little time to live, I do not choose to waste any of it in sleep.”

“Then follow me,” said Ariadne, “and tread softly.”

What had become of the jailer and the guards, Theseus never knew. But, however that might be, Ariadne opened all the doors, and led him forth from the darksome prison into the pleasant moonlight.

“Theseus,” said the maiden, “you can now get on board your vessel, and sail away for Athens.”

“No,” answered the young man; “I will never leave Crete unless I can first slay the Minotaur, and save my poor companions, and deliver Athens from this cruel tribute.”

“I knew that this would be your resolution,” said Ariadne. “Come, then, with me, brave Theseus. Here is your own sword, which the guards deprived you of. You will need it. Use it well.”

Then she led Theseus along by the hand until they came to a dark, shadowy grove, where the moonlight wasted itself on the tops of the trees, without shedding hardly so much as a glimmering beam on their pathway. After going a good way through this obscurity, they reached a high marble wall, which was overgrown with creeping plants, that made it shaggy with their verdure. The wall seemed to have no door, nor any windows, but rose up, lofty, and massive, and mysterious, and was neither to be climbed, nor, as far as Theseus could perceive, to be passed through. Nevertheless, Ariadne did but press one of her soft little fingers against a particular block of marble and, though it looked as solid as any other part of the wall, it yielded to her touch, disclosing an entrance just wide enough to admit them. They crept through and the marble stone swung back into its place.

“We are now,” said Ariadne, “in the famous labyrinth which Daedalus built before he made himself a pair of wings, and flew away from our island like a bird. That Daedalus was a very cunning workman. But of all his artful contrivances, this labyrinth is the most wondrous. Were we to take but a few steps from the doorway, we might wander about all our lifetime, and never find it again. Yet in the very center of this labyrinth is the Minotaur. And, Theseus, you must go there to seek him.”

“But how shall I ever find him,” asked Theseus, “if the labyrinth so bewilders me as you say it will?”

Just as he spoke, they heard a rough and very disagreeable roar, which greatly resembled the lowing of a fierce bull, but yet had some sort of sound

like the human voice. Theseus even fancied a rude articulation in it, as if the creature that uttered it were trying to shape his hoarse breath into words. It was at some distance, however, and he really could not tell whether it sounded most like a bull's roar or a man's harsh voice.

"That is the Minotaur's noise," whispered Ariadne, closely grasping the hand of Theseus, and pressing one of her own hands to her heart, which was all in a tremble. "You must follow that sound through the windings of the labyrinth, and, by and by, you will find him. Wait! Take the end of this silken string. I will hold the other end. And then, if you win the victory, it will lead you again to this spot. Farewell, brave Theseus."

So the young man took the end of the silken string in his left hand, and his gold-hilted sword, ready drawn from its scabbard, in the other, and trod boldly into the inscrutable labyrinth. How this labyrinth was built is more than I can tell you. But so cunningly contrived a maze was never seen in the world, before nor since. There can be nothing else so intricate, unless it were the brain of a man like Daedalus, who planned it, or the heart of any ordinary man; which last, to be sure, is ten times as great a mystery as the labyrinth of Crete. Theseus had not taken five steps before he lost sight of Ariadne, and in five more his head was growing dizzy. But still he went on, now creeping through a low arch, now ascending a flight of steps, now in one crooked passage and now in another, with here a door opening before him, and there one banging behind, until it really seemed as if the walls spun round, and whirled him round along with them. And all the while, through these hollow avenues, now nearer, now farther off again, resounded the cry of the Minotaur, and the sound was so fierce, so cruel, so ugly, so like a bull's roar, and withal so like a human voice, and yet like neither of them, that the brave heart of Theseus grew sterner and angrier at every step; for he felt it an insult to the moon and sky, and to our affectionate and simple Mother Earth, that such a monster should have the audacity to exist.

As he passed onward, the clouds gathered over the moon, and the labyrinth grew so dusky that Theseus could no longer discern the bewildering path through which he was passing. He would have left quite lost, and utterly hopeless of ever again walking in a straight path, if, every little while, he had not been conscious of a gentle twitch at the silken cord. Then he knew that the tender-hearted Ariadne was still holding the other end, and that she was fearing for him, and hoping for him, and giving him just as much of her sympathy as if she were close by his side. Oh, indeed, I can assure you, there was a vast deal of human sympathy running along that slender thread of silk. But still he

followed the dreadful roar of the Minotaur, which now grew louder and louder, and finally so very loud that Theseus fully expected to come close upon him, at every new zigzag and wriggle of the path. And at last, in an open space, at the very center of the labyrinth, he did discern the hideous creature.

Sure enough, what an ugly monster it was! Only his horned head belonged to a bull. Yet, somehow or other, he looked like a bull all over, preposterously waddling on his hind legs; or, if you happened to view him in another way, he seemed wholly a man, and all the more monstrous for being so. And there he was, the wretched thing, with no society, no companion, no kind of a mate, living only to do mischief, and incapable of knowing what affection means. Theseus hated him, and shuddered at him, and yet could not but be sensible of some sort of pity, and all the more, the uglier and more detestable the creature was. For he kept striding to and fro, in a solitary frenzy of rage, continually emitting a hoarse roar, which was oddly mixed up with half-shaped words, and, after listening a while, Theseus understood that the Minotaur was saying to himself how miserable he was, and how hungry, and how he hated everybody, and how he longed to eat up the human race alive.

Ah! the bull-headed villain! And oh, my good little people, you will perhaps see, one of these days, as I do now, that every human being who suffers any thing evil to get into his nature, or to remain there, is a kind of Minotaur, an enemy of his fellow-creatures, and separated from all good companionship, as this poor monster was.

Was Theseus afraid? By no means, my dear readers. What! a hero like Theseus afraid? Even if the Minotaur had twenty bull-heads instead of one, he would not have been afraid. Bold as he was, however, I rather fancy that it strengthened his valiant heart, just at this crisis, to feel a tremulous twitch at the silken cord, which he was still holding in his left hand. It was as if Ariadne were giving him all her might and courage, and much as he already had, and little as she had to give, it made his own seem twice as much. And to confess the honest truth, he needed the whole, for now the Minotaur, turning suddenly about, caught sight of Theseus, and instantly lowered his horribly sharp horns, exactly as a mad bull does when he means to rush against an enemy. At the same time, he belched forth a tremendous roar, in which there was something like the words of human language, but all disjointed and shaken to pieces by passing through the gullet of a miserably enraged brute.

Theseus could only guess what the creature intended to say, and that rather by his gestures than his words, for the Minotaur's horns were sharper than his wits, and of a great deal more service to him than his tongue. But probably this

was the sense of what he uttered: "Ah, wretch of a human being! I'll stick my horns through you, and toss you fifty feet high, and eat you up the moment you come down."

"Come on, then, and try it!" was all that Theseus deigned to reply, for he was far too magnanimous to assault his enemy with insolent language.

Without more words on either side, there ensued the most awful fight between Theseus and the Minotaur that ever happened beneath the sun or moon. I really don't know how it might have turned out, if the monster, in his first headlong rush against Theseus, had not missed him, by a hair's breadth, and broken one of his horns short off against the stone wall. On this mishap, he bellowed so intolerably that a part of the labyrinth tumbled down, and all the inhabitants of Crete mistook the noise for an uncommonly heavy thunder storm. Smarting with the pain, he galloped around the open space in so ridiculous a way that Theseus laughed at it, long afterwards, though not precisely at the moment. After this, the two antagonists stood valiantly up to one another, and fought, sword to horn, for a long while. At last, the Minotaur made a run at Theseus, grazed his left side with his horn, and flung him down, and thinking that he had stabbed him to the heart, he cut a great caper in the air, opened his bull mouth from ear to ear, and prepared to snap his head off. But Theseus by this time had leaped up, and caught the monster off his guard. Fetching a sword stroke at him with all his force, he hit him fair upon the neck, and made his bull head skip six yards from his human body, which fell down flat on the ground.

So now the battle was ended. Immediately the moon shone out as brightly as if all the troubles of the world, and all the wickedness and the ugliness that infest human life, were past and gone forever. And Theseus, as he leaned on his sword, taking breath, felt another twitch of the silken cord, as all through the terrible encounter, he had held it fast in his left hand. Eager to let Ariadne know of his success, he followed the guidance of the thread, and soon found himself at the entrance of the labyrinth.

"You have slain the monster," cried Ariadne, clasping her hands.

"Thanks to you, dear Ariadne," answered Theseus, "I return victorious."

"Then," said Ariadne, "we must quickly summon your friends, and get them and yourself on board the vessel before dawn. If morning finds you here, my father will avenge the Minotaur."

To make my story short, the poor captives were awakened, and, hardly knowing whether it was not a joyful dream, were told of what Theseus had done, and that they must set sail for Athens before daybreak. Hastening down

to the vessel, they all climbed on board, except Prince Theseus, who lingered behind them on the strand, holding Ariadne's hand clasped in his own.

"Dear maiden," said he, "you will surely go with us. You are too gentle and sweet a child for such an iron-hearted father as King Minos. He cares no more for you than a granite rock cares for the little flower that grows in one of its crevices. But my father, King Aegeus, and my dear mother, Aethra, and all the fathers and mothers in Athens, and all the sons and daughters too, will love and honor you as their benefactress. Come with us, then, for King Minos will be very angry when he knows what you have done."

Now, some low-minded people, who pretend to tell the story of Theseus and Ariadne, have the face to say that this royal and honorable maiden did really flee away, under cover of the night, with the young stranger whose life she had preserved. They say, too, that Prince Theseus (who would have died sooner than wrong the meanest creature in the world) ungratefully deserted Ariadne, on a solitary island, where the vessel touched on its voyage to Athens. But, had the noble Theseus heard these falsehoods, he would have served their slanderous authors as he served the Minotaur! Here is what Ariadne answered, when the brave prince of Athens besought her to accompany him:

"No, Theseus," the maiden said, pressing his hand, and then drawing back a step or two, "I cannot go with you. My father is old, and has nobody but myself to love him. Hard as you think his heart is, it would break to lose me. At first, King Minos will be angry. But he will soon forgive his only child, and, by and by, he will rejoice, I know, that no more youths and maidens must come from Athens to be devoured by the Minotaur. I have saved you, Theseus, as much for my father's sake as for your own. Farewell! Heaven bless you!"

All this was so true, and so maiden-like, and was spoken with so sweet a dignity, that Theseus would have blushed to urge her any longer. Nothing remained for him, therefore, but to bid Ariadne an affectionate farewell, and to go on board the vessel, and set sail.

In a few moments the white foam was boiling up before their prow, as Prince Theseus and his companions sailed out of the harbor, with a whistling breeze behind them. Talus, the brazen giant, on his never-ceasing sentinel's march, happened to be approaching that part of the coast, and they saw him, by the glimmering of the moonbeams on his polished surface, while he was yet a great way off. As the figure moved like clockwork, however, and could neither hasten his enormous strides nor retard them, he arrived at the port when they were just beyond the reach of his club. Nevertheless, straddling from headland to headland, as his custom was, Talus attempted to strike a

blow at the vessel, and, overreaching himself, tumbled at full length into the sea, which splashed high over his gigantic shape, as when an iceberg turns a somerset. There he lies yet, and whoever desires to enrich himself by means of brass had better go there with a diving bell, and fish up Talus.

On the homeward voyage, the fourteen youths and damsels were in excellent spirits, as you will easily suppose. They spent most of their time in dancing, unless when the sidelong breeze made the deck slope too much. In due season, they came within sight of the coast of Attica, which was their native country. But here, I am grieved to tell you, happened a sad misfortune.

You will remember (what Theseus unfortunately forgot) that his father, King Aegeus, had enjoined it upon him to hoist sunshiny sails, instead of black ones, in case he should overcome the Minotaur, and return victorious. In the joy of their success, however, and amidst the sports, dancing, and other merriment, with which these young folks wore away the time, they never once thought whether their sails were black, white, or rainbow colored, and, indeed, left it entirely to the mariners whether they had any sails at all. Thus the vessel returned, like a raven, with the same sable wings that had wafted her away. But poor King Aegeus, day after day, infirm as he was, had climbed to the summit of a cliff that overhung the sea, and there sat watching for Prince Theseus, homeward bound, and no sooner did he behold the fatal blackness of the sails, than he concluded that his dear son, whom he loved so much, and felt so proud of, had been eaten by the Minotaur. He could not bear the thought of living any longer. He first flung his crown and scepter into the sea (useless baubles that they were to him now), and then stooped forward, and fell headlong over the cliff, and there he drowned, poor soul, in the waves that foamed at its base!

This was melancholy news for Prince Theseus, who, when he stepped ashore, found himself king of all the country, whether he would or no, and such a turn of fortune was enough to make any young man feel very much out of spirits. However, he sent for his dear mother to Athens, and, by taking her advice in matters of state, became a very excellent monarch, and was greatly beloved by his people.