

CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS



---

The Tactics of Odysseus

Author(s): P. J. MacDonell

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 5, No. 14 (Feb., 1936), pp. 103-120

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#) on behalf of [The Classical Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/641317>

Accessed: 12/02/2013 17:34

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press and The Classical Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Greece & Rome*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# THE TACTICS OF ODYSSEUS

By SIR P. J. MACDONELL

ODYSSEUS had heard long ago from the shade of Tiresias that in Ithaca he would find insolent men devouring his goods and wooing his wife, and from the shade of Agamemnon that he should arrive there in secret; and now Athene, when she found him on that April morning wandering by the shore that he had forgotten, told him that for three years past the suitors had been lording it in his house, and she at once changed him to an old man in whom no one would recognize Odysseus, sacker of cities. He knew then of his enemies and had been given the advantages of disguise and secrecy and the possibility of surprise that would go with them.

Two days later Telemachus returned from Pylos and told him the number of the suitors, a hundred and eight, yet Odysseus decided that they two were to attack them without other assistance. For the present he would not disclose himself even to his host Eumaeus, a man detesting the suitors and devoted to him and his, since he must not forfeit aught of the advantages given him, even to gain another fighting man against such odds.

On one ally he did reckon, the goddess Athene. In his wanderings she had left him to fend for himself or be rescued, as in the shipwreck ten days before, by other powers, but she had specially come to meet him the morning he awoke in Ithaca and had said that she would be with him on the day when they would 'plaster the wa' with the horns' and blood of the suitors. Odysseus knew that as she had helped him to 'unloose the shining coronal of Troy', so now she would help him to destroy the suitors, and Telemachus, though no more assured of this now than he had been three weeks before at Nestor's, promised that there should be no failure on his part.

If what Odysseus required of Athene had been rescue from an enemy about to kill him, he might have hoped for some intervention by her outside the ordinary course of human experience, for in Homer the gods do at times intervene in this way to save from death some one not destined to die then, but since Odysseus intended himself to attack and kill, he knew that the help he would get would simply be the use of his own bodily powers to their fullest advantage. Miraculous help in attacking your enemy—help, that is, 'against reason and also against experience'—no one gets from the gods in Homer. Winged horses and winged sandals that will carry you through the air are things against

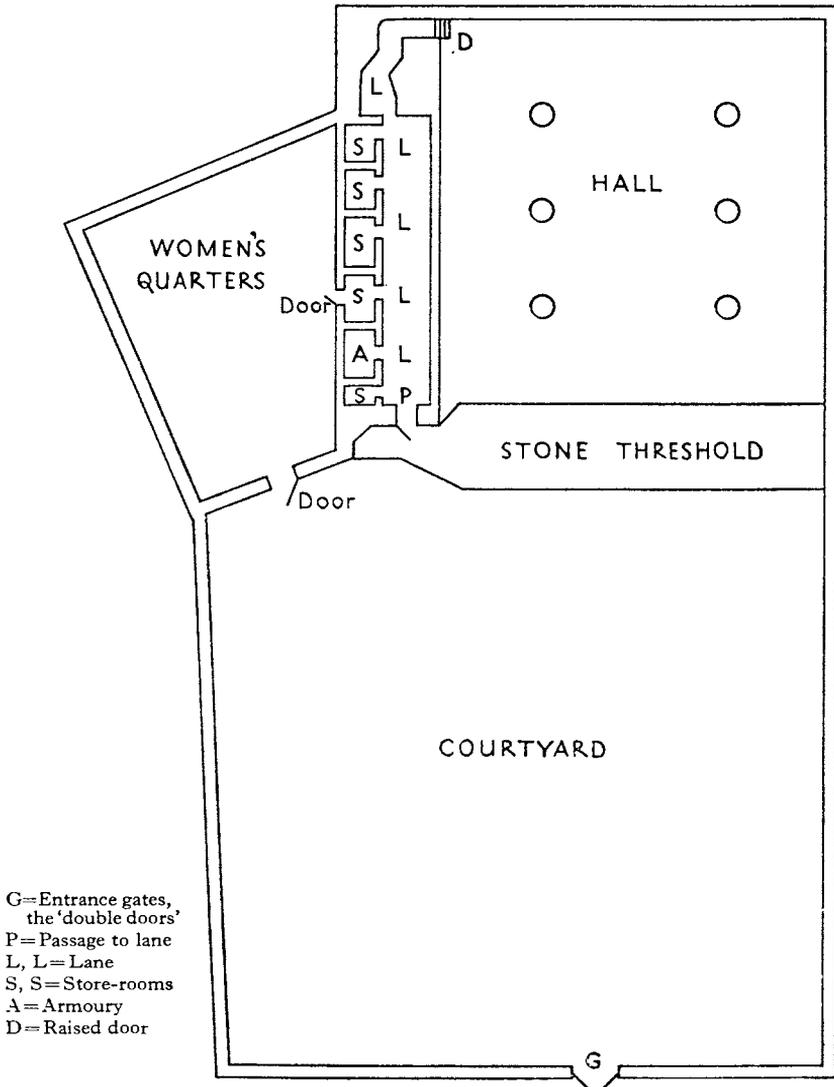
reason and against experience, and so is a head that turns those who look on it to stone. Now Homer tells of Bellerophon, and mentions Perseus, and also the Gorgon, and doubtless the miraculous incidents in those stories were known to him, but he does not mention them. The miraculous has small place either in the *Iliad* or—save for the fairy-land wanderings—in the *Odyssey*, and this is one of the things—there are others also—that place Homer apart. But that a man who can hit hard should hit his hardest with every blow, that a man who can shoot or throw straight, should shoot and throw straight each time, these things, though they do not happen to a man always or every day, are yet neither against reason nor against experience, and they, and the moral ascendancy that goes with them, are what the gods give to their favourites in Homer, but they give nothing more, nothing miraculous. This then is the nature of the help that Odysseus, and Telemachus with him, are to get from Athene on the day when they attack their enemies, the suitors.

Their strategic device was to be secrecy and the surprise it makes possible; this conditions every act and forbearance of Odysseus until the moment for the final action comes. Sometimes Homer says so in plain words, more often he leaves us to see this for ourselves.

The place where the suitors were to be fought and killed was the house of Odysseus. Since they were a swarm, giving no opening to be taken one by one, then they were to be destroyed as a swarm, and this must be in a four-square building where they would be a compact target and their numbers could be neutralized. Odysseus and his son knew the house and everything about it, and though some of its features are still uncertain—excavation may any day supply the missing knowledge—still sufficient of its plan becomes apparent if the *Odyssey* is read with care, and many of the difficulties have been removed by present-day scholars, using the evidence given by excavation.

The house, a complex of buildings, is described by Odysseus as he and Eumaeus approach it next day. He affects surprise at its spaciousness and says: 'there is building beyond building, and the court of the house is surrounded with a wall and battlements, and it has well-closed double doors'. There was a continuous wall round the house to which the double doors gave the only entrance and only exit, since the surrounding wall was evidently too high to be climbed. Inside the wall there was a courtyard, at the farther end of which was the men's hall, with the women's quarters to one side of it. At the entrance to the men's hall there was what is called the 'stone threshold'. It was of some width, wide enough anyway for men to move about on it and fight from it,

while in length it ran a considerable part, perhaps nearly the whole, of the front of the hall. The floor of the hall itself was at a lower level than that of the stone threshold—how much lower we are not told, but



appreciably lower since a man got from the floor to the threshold by a 'leap'. Any one standing on the stone threshold would command the length of the hall in front of and below where he was standing and would have the entrance doors at his back. In the body of the hall were the

tables and seats—'thrones'—at which the suitors, self-invited guests, sat at meat.

The men's hall and the women's quarters were separate blocks of building and between their extensions back from the courtyard there was a lane having on one side of it a row of store-rooms built against the side wall of the women's quarters. There were two ways into the lane, one of them from the stone threshold by a passage a few paces in length, secured by doors at its threshold end, and narrow enough for 'one stout man to hold it against a multitude', and this passage debouched on the lane with its line of store-rooms. The other way to it was from the hall itself, in the far corner of which there was what Homer calls a 'raised door'—possibly, as one critic suggests, a kind of buttery hatch<sup>1</sup>—through which you could go out into the lane which at this end may have curved and narrowed<sup>2</sup> so as to be in comparative darkness. The story of how this 'raised door' was used makes this plain enough; there were men on the stone threshold looking into the hall, yet some one got out by this door in its far corner undetected by them. The door was 'raised', you had to climb to it somehow, so it would hardly be a practicable way out for men in a panic, but it was in a dark corner, and a man from the farther end of the hall could go out by it, and along the store-rooms in the lane—'along that off-shoot of the hall of Odysseus'<sup>3</sup>—and get thence what he might want, weapons for instance, and going and returning he would not be seen from the stone threshold at the entrance to the hall.

One of the store-rooms in the lane had become an armoury for Odysseus the evening of the day he arrived at the house, called Telemachus to him when the suitors had left for their own quarters—they got food and drink at his expense but not lodging also—and said that they must remove from the hall the arms—helmets, shields, and spears—then hanging on its walls, so that when the moment for the surprise attack came, the suitors would find nothing on the walls either for defence or offence. They placed the arms in one of the store-rooms in the lane near its entrance and therefore near the stone threshold, so that from there to this store-room it would be a shorter journey—a few yards only—than for any one coming to it from the hall through the raised door in its far corner. One thing further must be noticed about the lane. Somewhere in the side wall of the women's quarters there was a door giving

<sup>1</sup> Professor Ernest Gardner, quoted by Mr. Guy Dickins in *J.H.S.*, vol. xxiii, p. 329.

<sup>2</sup> See Mr. Guy Dickins, *loc. cit.*, p. 333.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Shewan's interpretation of ἀνὰ ῥῶγας μεγάροιο, χ. 143.

access to it and, therefore, also to this store-room in it now become an armoury. In the event no one from the women's quarters does actually use this side door, but it was an additional factor in the problem before Odysseus, and, at one moment, an additional anxiety.

And now we see what an effective trap the hall can be made. If the main door from the women's quarters to the courtyard is closed by some one who can be trusted to keep it closed, and trusted to prevent any one opening the other door giving access to the lane and its store-rooms, that portion of the house will be cut off from the men's hall and there will be no interference from it or escape to it. If the 'double doors' at the entrance to the courtyard have been secured, then the whole house will have been isolated, and no interference or rescue from outside will be possible. A few resolute men standing armed on the stone threshold will have command of the hall itself and of the people in it, for these can only escape by a frontal rush up and over the stone threshold against men standing above them and holding them at vantage, and if, with the doors open, as they will be to give light and turning room to the men standing there, some of those in the hall charge through into the courtyard beyond, they will still have to get through the double doors in the courtyard wall before they are in safety and will, while fumbling with the fastenings, be a target for the missiles of the men standing on the threshold. If instead they go out of the hall through the raised door and along the lane to force the narrow passage at its farther end, hoping so to get to the stone threshold and to the courtyard beyond, then as they break through the doors of the passage they will, unready and in a cramped space, be struck down by any one awaiting them at its outlet, a place where 'one stout man can hold them all'. To get out of the hall they must pass the stone threshold, and will be at a disadvantage whether they attempt it by a frontal rush or by the lane ending in the narrow passage.

Such then was the house of Odysseus, the place where the suitors were to be destroyed. One of the weapons for destroying them would be the long, heavy, bronze-headed spear, adapted either for casting as a javelin or for thrusting with as a pike. The suitors would have each, or most of them, a short sword by his side, but so long as a man had a spear—to be accurate, two spears—he made light of any one armed merely with a sword. The Greek relied on the spear—in Homer's time he armed himself with two—and deemed it the superior and sufficient weapon. He carried a sword for use if he had lost his spears, or to finish off a beaten man. But save for the last struggle at Thermopylae—a very special case, desperate men against an enemy armed with short

spears—and one not very intelligible incident in Timoleon's victory at the Crimisis, there is no suggestion of the Greeks ever having thought that the shorter weapon had any chance against the longer one. Examples to the contrary, the Roman thrusting sword against the Macedonian pike, the sword-and-buckler of Gonzalvo's infantry at Cerignola, the broadswords of the Scottish Guard at Fornovo—to take a few random instances out of the many that suggest themselves—all belong to later times and the fighting preferences of other races. For fighting at a distance there was of course the bow; otherwise to the Greek the spear was the weapon.

How and when the attack was to be made was something Odysseus had to decide unaided. He could consult with Telemachus as long as they were staying with Eumaeus, but now that they had severally arrived at the house, full of the suitors and of others as well, this was not possible—indeed the only time they were alone together was while stowing away the arms. Odysseus had to preserve his one advantage, secrecy, so Telemachus always addressed him as the beggar vagrant he professed to be, and Odysseus before other people never spoke to Telemachus at all, not once, until he said the words that told him, but not the suitors, that the moment for action had come. But the lack of communication between them by words was made good by the closeness with which Telemachus watched everything that passed, and everything that Odysseus did or said or had to endure. Thus, when the opportunity did come, Telemachus was alert to take it.

Whatever plans Odysseus had made, and relying so largely on surprise he may well have left much to the inspiration of the moment, they were notably altered in his favour by what happened that same evening after he and Telemachus had put away the arms. Penelope came into the hall and talked to him, ignorant of who he was. She told him that her expedients for delay were at an end and that to-morrow she would bring down the bow of Odysseus and marry whichever of the suitors should string it the easiest and accomplish with it a particular feat of shooting. This feat is described, and remains a puzzle to commentators, but here it needs mention only as the occasion for Odysseus to get possession of an additional weapon, his bow. This bow had been given him when a young man by Iphitus who had met and taken a liking to him, and the bow of Iphitus was second only in value to that of Heracles himself. The bow of Iphitus was not a magical weapon, for Homer does not deal in magic, but in the hands of a competent man—and Odysseus with the bow was 'by-ordinar', he had had occasion to tell the Phaeacians this less than a week before—it could make good shooting. He urged Penelope

to put the suitors to this test at once, adding that Odysseus himself would be back before they would be able to string the bow and achieve the feat required of them. Clearly, Penelope, whether she knew it or not, was setting the suitors a difficult task and creating for herself further opportunities for holding them off. Odysseus knew then that tomorrow his bow would be in the hall and within his reach. Yet another thing had happened. The nurse Eurycleia had recognized him by the scar on his knee made by the boar of Parnassus long ago, but she had promised to keep this knowledge secret and Odysseus knew that he could trust her to do so; he knew also that there would now be some one to bar the doors of the women's quarters and so prevent interference from that direction.

The bow comes in for several reasons. First of all it was in the legend. Every one knew that Odysseus used the bow of Iphitus to destroy some of the suitors with, and Homer had to take the age-old story as it had come to him: his audience would never have tolerated his doing other wise. Further, the additional weapon made the fight of two—or to anticipate matters, of four—against one hundred and eight suitors, rather more feasible. But it is part of an indivisible whole of which the spear makes the other part. It too was in the legend *et pour cause*. Every one knew that there were a hundred and eight suitors, and knew also that no quiver was big enough to contain that number of arrows; the surplus must be destroyed by the other weapon, the spear.

Next day Penelope brought the bow down into the hall from an upstairs store-room of which she had the key. The suitors were in the hall at the forenoon meal, full of their accustomed insolence, one of them unsuccessfully exercising his wit at the expense of Odysseus, and there had just been an eclipse of the sun, that of 16 April, 1178 B.C., which passed over Ithaca about 11.40 a.m. that day. In the bygoing we may note modern astronomical calculations confirming tradition as to date, as archaeology has done as to that and other matters. The suitors had not spared Telemachus in their pleasantries, and he was sitting silent in the hall, looking from time to time at Odysseus on his stool just inside and below the threshold, waiting and watching for what was to happen next. At this moment Penelope brought the bow into the hall and made her offer, 'she would marry whichever of the suitors should with most ease string the bow and shoot through the appointed marks', and Eumaeus, just arrived from his stading, and Philoetius, of whom more presently, wept when for the first time after nearly twenty years they saw their master's bow brought out—and for such a purpose—and were rebuked by Antinous, the leader of the suitors, who told

them to go and weep in the courtyard outside if they could not behave themselves in the hall. They did go out into the courtyard and beyond it, with consequences fateful to Antinous and to his fellows. But Telemachus burst into a guffaw which must have made the suitors and every one else think him demented, as indeed he admits he is. 'So my faithful mother will marry another and go elsewhere! But I laugh in my silly heart. Come now, no excuses, here is the bow for you suitors to try', and he at once set up the marks which they were to shoot through, and then, to prove his strength, tried the bow and would have strung it, but caught Odysseus' eye in time and put it down again. But he saw and knew what was to happen, and Odysseus saw that he knew and that he was straining upon the start, in full understanding of what was to come. Not just yet though, for now the suitors tried one after another to string the bow and failed entirely. After the first failure they warmed the bow and smeared it with fat to make it more pliable, and still they failed to string it. But the bow was there with its quiver full of arrows ready for some one to use, and Odysseus determined that the time to use it was about come.

Eumaeus, as has been seen, had arrived again from the country, bringing swine for the suitors to sacrifice and feast on. Philoetius, the neatherd, had also arrived, ferried over from the mainland, where he kept herds of cattle for Odysseus if he should ever return. These two men were in the legend likewise; every one knew that the two kings, Odysseus and Telemachus, were helped in the fight by two faithful servants, and indeed how else could they have foiled the unfaithful servant Melanthius, who is as integral a part of the story as is Ganelon of the Song of Roland? The two *serviteurs très loyaux* are portrayed as quite distinct in character. Eumaeus is the slower though of deeper nature. Philoetius, quick of speech and quick at the uptake, had noticed at once the kingly traits of the old beggar as he supposed him to be and had greeted him with a welcome, 'perhaps Odysseus himself is even now wandering in such rags among strangers, oh that he would come and scatter the suitors', and Eumaeus had uttered the same prayer. This had determined Odysseus; he would make these men his fighting tail and give them what they most desired on earth, the chance of fighting alongside him as he destroyed the suitors. While these were taken up with the bow and their efforts to string it, Odysseus followed the two servants outside the courtyard and tested them finally: 'Suppose Odysseus were to come suddenly, what like would you be to help him?' Philoetius spoke first, a passionate imprecation that the gods would bring back Odysseus that he might give his strength and hands to help

him—you can see the man's clutched hands raised in impotent longing; he is a south European, remember—and Eumaeus followed him to the same effect. Then at last Odysseus disclosed himself, 'I am come, even I, after many labours, in the twentieth year', and the two servants, with eyes staring wider and rounder, realized that the ragged beggar, the mark for the insults and blows of the suitors, was—their lord Odysseus.

He gave them his orders at once: he will return to the hall first and they are to follow, singly, so as not to attract notice, and Eumaeus as soon as he has put the bow into his hands, is to tell the women to shut and bar the doors of their quarters and to remain within whatever groans or noise they may hear from the hall, and Philoetius is to make fast the double doors of the courtyard, thus closing that way of escape from within or of rescue from without. Then they returned to the hall where the suitors now gave over further attempt to string the bow, at least for that day, and Odysseus asked that the bow might be given to him to try. Antinous told him he must be drunk to suggest such a thing, and threatened to ship him off as a slave, and, when Penelope interposed, Eurymachus, the second in importance among the suitors, told her that it would be an abiding disgrace to them that a nameless beggar strung the bow which they her suitors were too feeble to string. Penelope gave him the answer his words asked for and said that the beggar should certainly be given the bow to try, but Telemachus had made up his mind that it was to get to Odysseus at once, and knew, therefore, that in a few moments the hall would be no place for a woman, so he told his mother that the bow was his affair and that she and her attendants had best return to the women's quarters; which they did. Eumaeus took up the bow to give it to Odysseus. For a moment he was deterred by a yell of disapproval from the suitors, but Telemachus told him to go on and threatened him if he did not, boastful threats which raised a laugh from the suitors, under cover of which Eumaeus put the bow into the hands of Odysseus. Then he called to Eurycleia the old nurse and bade her shut and bar the doors of the women's quarters, telling her that they were the orders of Telemachus since he knew that for him she would do anything, and she did what she was told without a word. The women's quarters, then, are closed and interference from them or escape to them is made impossible. Philoetius left the hall quietly and shut and fastened the double doors of the courtyard, so that end of the trap is made fast. Everything was now ready. Odysseus had got into his hands the bow and its full quiver. Telemachus was sitting at his place down in the hall and had by him a sword and the single spear that he had been carrying with him since he left his bed that morning.

Odysseus and the two servants sitting near him and watching him had no spears; still, these could any moment be obtained from the armoury, for this was only a short distance from the threshold just below which Odysseus and the two were sitting. It is well to notice the degree of understanding between these four men. Odysseus holds the thread of the matter in his hands; he sees that Telemachus knows what is coming and he has told the two servants, explicitly. He has not told them in so many words that Telemachus is in the secret, but what he has said to them implies that he is, and besides they would guess it—Eumaeus' words to Eurycleia showed that he did at any rate—neither of them is a fool, and they know that he would never disclose himself to them and not to Telemachus his son. Telemachus does not know, it would have been impossible to tell him, that the two servants are in the scheme, but he knows their hatred of the suitors and their devotion to Odysseus and himself, and knows therefore that if they see Odysseus strike, they will strike in without need of being told. The understanding between the four is ample to ensure concerted action, and of the men in the hall, the suitors, no one has an inkling of the identity of the beggar man, or that any one else has either. Odysseus has retained his one advantage, secrecy, up to the very moment of action.

But, to understand the whole situation, something must be said of the character and morale of the suitors themselves. They were insolent and hardy and as self-confident as disdain for others could make them. They had lain in wait to kill Telemachus as he returned from Pylos, and all were accessory to this plan. But there were some less hardy than the rest, and these had deprecated, at least till the gods should declare their will, a renewal of the plot to kill him. The omens of their approaching destruction, which grow ever more impressive as the story proceeds, would pass them unnoticed. Not quite all though. The man with the sight had told them that morning during the eclipse of the sun that they were already dead men, and though they laughed at him, they were not altogether happy over it: 'Why does Telemachus bring such kill-joy guests here, burdens of the earth?—sell them to the Sicels and so earn some money'. Immediately after had come their attempts to string the bow, leading to a *crise de nerfs*; they had scolded each other for failing to string it, and scolded the scolder for having spoken. For all their brazen words and deeds they were not comfortable, and they knew, though they would not have admitted it, that they were in the wrong and had done wrong—'the people do not love us', Antinous had said but two days before. When Odysseus strung the bow, they were dismayed, 'their flesh crept'. Their morale was not as good as they would

wish people to think, and if matters went badly with them, there might well be a panic for all their superior numbers, and Odysseus, experienced in every kind of fighting, knew this and reckoned with this as a condition of the task before him.

Having got the bow into his hands, he examined it carefully to see if it was still perfectly sound, and, finding it was, strung it without effort, to the consternation of the suitors. He took an arrow from the quiver, drew the bow, and, still sitting in his seat, shot the arrow through the marks that Telemachus had set up—a trial shot and clean, the equivalent of a bull's eye—and then said to him that it was 'time to serve these men their supper, now in the daylight'. Telemachus understood, slipped on his sword, picked up the spear<sup>1</sup> lying by his seat and stood ready. The moment had come, and Odysseus leapt on to the stone threshold with bow and quiver, strewed the arrows before his feet and, taking aim, shot Antinous through the throat and killed him. Antinous is the worst of the suitors but he is allowed to die easily, the arrow reaching him before he can know it is on its way. The suitors rose with a clamour and looked at the walls for shields and spears. Finding none they reviled the beggar, 'he has killed the finest fellow in Ithaca and vultures shall devour him', and at last Odysseus revealed himself—'Dogs, you have devoured my substance, and dishonoured my maidservants, and wooed my wife while I still lived, heedless of the judgement of the gods or the vengeance of men, but the cords of death are around you now.' The surprise was complete. Even after they had seen Antinous shot dead, they still thought it was only the stranger beggar who had shot him. Eurymachus, their next leader after the dead Antinous, was the only one able to speak: 'If indeed you are Odysseus, hold your hand, you have killed the one really guilty man. Spare your people, and we will compensate you twenty-fold for what we have wasted'—an attempt to put the blame on a man no longer able to defend himself which met with just the success it deserved. It is a tense moment. Odysseus is face to face with them and they know who he is. He has got his hour of vengeance at last, and he answers them in words that recall in purport and cadence the words of Achilles when he had *his* hour and rejected the offers of Agamemnon. It is a like situation, and some of the fire of the *Iliad* comes back to Homer in his old age, 'not if they give him all their ancestral wealth and other as well, not even then will he restrain his hands from slaughter till they have paid for all their insolence'. It is to be a fight *à outrance*.

Eurymachus was better than his words suggested and alone of all the

<sup>1</sup> Reading φ 434 κεκορυθμένον, Miss Stawell's certain emendation.

suitors showed leadership. 'From his vantage place Odysseus can shoot them all. They must draw their swords and turn up the tables as a protection against his arrows. Then they must rush on him in a body, and push him from the doors and the threshold, and out into the town to call people to the rescue.' Eurymachus could not know, and did not infer, that the double gates of the courtyard were fastened against exit by them or rescue from without, but his advice was sound, for their best hope lay in a combined rush on the man in the doorway. Eurymachus did his part, drawing his sword and charging Odysseus with a shout, but he charged alone. The rest hung back and an arrow hit him as he rushed forward. He writhed picturesquely for a few moments and then lay still.

An instant after, and just too late, Amphinomus also made a rush for the threshold, sword in hand. As he did so, he had to present his back to Telemachus standing down in the hall. In a moment Telemachus threw his spear and struck his man between the shoulder-blades so that he hit the floor full length. The incident well illustrates the Homeric estimate of spear against sword. Telemachus with a spear has Amphinomus with a sword at his mercy, but the moment he has thrown it, not having a second spear, he is himself no better off than any other of the suitors who may attack him with a sword. He leaves the spear sticking in the dead Amphinomus and does not dare bend down to draw it out. There it remains, for what we are told, to the end of the fight—no doubt it still furnishes material for critical ingenuity. In any case Amphinomus had fallen close to Odysseus and his end of the hall, and if Telemachus would not risk stooping to draw it out, still less would any of the suitors. But weapons were needed, for Odysseus' arrows would not last for ever, and Telemachus ran to his father on the threshold and said he would fetch them from the armoury; it was natural for him to speak first, conscious, from having just thrown his one spear, of his own unarmed condition. Odysseus told him to run and do so, and Telemachus went and was back quickly from the armoury—he was careless as well as quick, for he left the armoury door unfastened—with four helmets and shields and eight spears, two apiece for the whole party. He armed himself at once as did Eumæus and Philoetius, and they stood as a guard around Odysseus; with two spears apiece they were indifferent to the suitors and their swords.

Meanwhile Odysseus was shooting steadily into the crowd. Overturned tables may have given immunity to some of them, but to some only. Odysseus did not waste his shots; it was one arrow, one man, Homer tells us so explicitly, and they fell in heaps. If we knew the

content of the Homeric quiver, we could reconstruct the tactics of Odysseus to the last detail, for we should then know how many remained to be killed by him and his men with their spears after the arrows were exhausted. We are not told a detail with which the first audience of the *Odyssey* would be familiar, only that the quiver contained 'many' arrows, and that Eurymachus, with the exaggeration of fright, thought Odysseus might kill them 'all' with the arrows he had. Until excavation and new finds give, as they will some day, data from which the number of arrows in a Homeric quiver can be estimated, you can but guess. Are fifty arrows to the quiver an unreasonable guess? This anyway would mean about half the suitors being killed with the bow, leaving the other half for the spear fight which follows.

What were the suitors to do? There was no longer any question of a frontal rush on Odysseus and his men, no one had the resolution for that, but Agelaus, who took the lead from this time on, asked, could some one not go up to the raised door, and shout to the people, so that they might come to the rescue. Melanthius the goatherd, the treacherous servant who was assisting the suitors against his master, answered at once, showing the difficulties involved. 'Before shouting to the people you must get to the courtyard, running the gauntlet of the men at the doors, and to get even that far you must force the narrow passage from the lane, where one stout man can hold you all'—Odysseus, as his supply of arrows was running out, had stationed Eumaeus at the threshold end of the narrow passage and Melanthius would guess that there would be some one to guard it. But if escape and rescue were impossible, still they might try to cut their way out, and he would get them weapons from 'within', from the store-rooms, in one of which he guessed the weapons had been placed which till the night before had been hanging in the hall. So Melanthius made his way unobserved out of the hall by the raised door and passing along the lane came to the room with the arms in it, the door of which Telemachus in his hurry had left open a few minutes before. From there Melanthius took twelve helmets and shields and twelve spears, and returning the same way brought them to the suitors; he brought no more, obviously because he could carry no more: you only marvel he was able to carry so many. Twelve of the suitors armed themselves and for the moment Odysseus was perplexed: 'Some of the women have turned on us'—he remembers the side door from the women's quarters giving communication with the lane—'or perhaps it is Melanthius.' Telemachus admitted that he was to blame; he had left the door of the armoury open and one of their enemies had been quick enough to take advantage of this, and he

bade Eumaeus go and fasten the door of the armoury and tell them if he saw any one going to it, one of the women or Melanthius. The suitors, twelve of them with a spear apiece, were making no movement against the four men on the threshold with their eight spears, for Melanthius had just started by the same route as before for a second supply of arms, and until they got this they lacked courage to do anything. Eumaeus opened the doors of the passage and looking through into the lane beyond saw Melanthius going into the armoury. He turned to Odysseus and said, 'It is Melanthius as we thought; shall I kill him or shall I drag him here for you to give him his deserts?' Any anxiety Odysseus may have felt so long as he did not know how the suitors were getting arms, was gone now that he did: 'Telemachus and I will contain the suitors in the hall. Do you and Philoetius catch Melanthius and tie him up so that he may live for a while yet and suffer torment.'

Eumaeus and Philoetius went to the door of the armoury, waiting on either side of it. Melanthius came out with a helmet in one hand and an old worn shield of Laertes, Odysseus' father, in the other, and, as he did so, the two had him by the hair and flung him heavily to the ground. He would be stunned by the fall, and they had no difficulty in tying him up—it reads like a spider bundling up a fly—his hands and feet bound tight behind him, a rope round his body, and he himself hung up to a pillar close to the roof, and Eumaeus, the first to find speech for once since he had many insults from Melanthius to pay off, railed at his man: 'A soft bed for the night, and a grand view of the dawn next morning when you bring in your goats for the suitors' feasting', and they left him to his torment, making fast the door of the armoury and returning to Odysseus and Telemachus on the stone threshold.

Now the lists are set for the last scene in the fight. Twelve of the suitors have spears, but only one spear apiece, Odysseus and Telemachus and the two servants have two spears apiece, eight spears against twelve. The suitors had not dared to attack or make any movement, for they were awaiting the return of Melanthius with more weapons. Now they, 'many in number and fine fellows all', must have realized that something had happened to Melanthius. If any of them had an intention of going in search of more weapons—though there is nothing to suggest that they had the initiative necessary—this intention was effectually distracted by what happened next. But were there not other things that they could have attempted, could they not have rushed these four in a body, the twelve spears to be used as pikes, with the swords to help?

Clearly not, and for one sufficient reason, they lacked the courage and the spirit of self-sacrifice. From the moment Eurymachus and Amphinomus fell no one of them showed the smallest enterprise. The quick-witted slave Melanthius did, but none of the suitors. It is possible, however, that this is to be too hard on them, for it is like enough that such a rush *en masse* would have been ineffective. The height of the stone threshold gave the advantage to Odysseus and his men, and they would have had the suitors in the hall below almost as much at their mercy as Ajax with his long spear had the Trojans trying to set fire to the ship on which he stood. The spears are not to be used, then, as pikes but only as javelins in the normal way.

It is like two eighteenth-century lines of battle, at Fontenoy, at Quebec. Which will make the tactical mistake and 'fire first', and which will have the self-control to reserve fire? At this moment the goddess from the machine, Athene, comes on the scene to lead the suitors into this mistake, much as she had lured Hector to his death ten years before. She appears in the guise of Mentor, and Odysseus, knowing it is Athene, calls her to assist him, addressing her as Mentor. The suitors rail at Mentor, as they suppose him to be, and Agelaus tells him what they will do to him and his possessions and his sons and his daughters and his wife, once they have killed Odysseus and the others—a babble of words. Athene took no notice of him but taunted Odysseus with weakness and lack of courage: 'You were the man who fought at Troy and slew many and captured Troy by your counsel, and now you cannot even face these men in your own hall but must ask help of Mentor.' Considering the heap of bodies, each with an arrow in it shot by Odysseus, that was before the eyes of every one there, surely this is as grim a piece of irony as any even in Homer. But Athene, the better to enjoy the fight and the prowess of her protégé, changed herself into a swallow and flew up to the smoky rafters overhead. The suitors remarked that Mentor had departed; he could have come in through the entrance doors and could go out the same way, and this gave them just the false confidence they wanted. Agelaus spoke again: 'This man will now have to hold his hand. Mentor after idle words has departed and left them at the entrance doors, alone, deserted. Be sparing of the spears, only six must throw first, and if one of you can but hit Odysseus, the others with him will give no trouble.' The suitors did as they were told, six of them advanced and threw a spear apiece, and Athene, and their own excited nerves, made them miss, and the spears struck the door-post, the door, the wall, but no one of them the man it was meant for. Half the attacking power of the suitors, half their spears, had been wasted,

and they were now six spears to eight. Then Odysseus gave the word, 'It is a good target, this crowd of men who seek our lives', and each of the four aimed and threw, and killed his man. For the moment, though, Odysseus and the three were four spears to six. But if the suitors had been unsteady when making their own throw, they were now thoroughly frightened when they saw each of the four spears from Odysseus and his men reach its mark, for each felt he might be the next, and they all fell back hastily into the farther end of the hall. Odysseus and his men, he giving the sign and the other three following him instinctively, dashed forward, drew each his spear from the man he had slain, and were back again on their vantage ground, the stone threshold, before the suitors had time to recover. Once again it was eight spears to six only. For the last time the suitors threw, their last six spears. Telemachus and Eumaeus got a flesh wound apiece, but otherwise the result was the same as before; the spears stuck in door-post, door, wall, but not in any of the men they were meant to reach. Now it was eight spears to none. Why then did Odysseus and his men not go forward at once, and attack the unarmed mob at close quarters, using the spear no longer as a javelin but as a pike? Clearly because the suitors had not yet shown absolute panic and because something further was necessary to compel this. If with six spears still remaining they had fallen back when they saw four of their number go down, they would lose their last atom of courage when with no spears left, they saw yet another four bite the earth. As indeed it proved. Odysseus and his three threw yet once again, and again killed each his man; four more of the suitors were down. Poetically, this delay of the end is amply justified by the superb tirade of the quick-speaking Philoetius, when he rejoices over Ctesippus who that morning had flung an ox-foot at the beggar Odysseus, and now lay with Philoetius' spear through his body. But now Odysseus and his men charged forward. They had to, if only to recover the four spears just thrown, and so bring their weapons again to the full number of eight, but, besides this, they could see that the end had come, and they went in to close quarters. There Odysseus killed Agelaus, the one remaining leader of the suitors, and Telemachus thrust Leiocritus through below the ribs. We are left to guess what prey Eumaeus and Philoetius found, for at this moment Athene held aloft the terrifying aegis, the fear of death to all who see it, and 'their minds', says Homer, 'were distraught. They fled like cattle maddened by a gadfly, and the others pursued, as eagles fall with beak and claw on terrified small birds, catching and rending them so that there is no escape, and men rejoice at the sport. So they pursued the suitors and struck them down right

and left, and there was a hideous noise as their heads were struck, and the whole floor ran with blood.' The suitors were destroyed to the last man.

They would still have been nearly fifty in number, even if we suppose that the arrows had killed fifty of them, and most would have swords. Could they not have combined, several of them against one of the four, so that while he was killing one of them, the others could have attacked him in flank and rear? They could have done so, had they still possessed any self-sacrifice or courage, but they had none; the panic and terror were complete. As Odysseus and his men charged down the hall, some of the suitors might have slipped round them, and re-armed themselves with their own spears sticking in the door-way, but this again presupposes presence of mind, and they had none. There are many things you can imagine the suitors, or some of them, doing even at the last moment, but the panic fear of death had deprived them of all thought or power of action. History *does* record instances of large numbers allowing themselves to be routed, and even destroyed, by a handful of enemies, and there is nothing impossible, or miraculous, in Odysseus and his three destroying the suitors. An uneasy and precarious self-confidence to start with, the surprise attack, the nerve-shaking rain of arrows killing their best men, their one effort to get on equal terms foiled they could not tell how, their own complete failure with the spear against an enemy whose spear kills every time, and then panic and destruction; it is all perfectly natural, detail, sequence, and result.

The after-piece is no part of the fight—how Odysseus massacres one of the attendants and spares two others, how the wretched maid-servants who had consorted with the suitors are strung up 'like larks on a line', how Melanthius is brought out and killed with almost unimaginable cruelty, *maiore cruciatu*, these things need mention only as showing that in this part at any rate of his *Odyssey* Homer was using a story more primitive and savage than any he had used in the *Iliad*. But the tactics of Odysseus are clear throughout to any one reading the *Odyssey* with care. He had ready a real trap for men whose nerves and power of resistance he had correctly estimated. The bow comes to him unexpectedly, but to ask how he would have dealt with them wanting the bow would be like asking how Napoleon would have won Marengo without Marmont's guns; these things do come to the man of skill and resource. He uses the bow, a surprise attack, to kill off about half, as you suppose, of his enemies, and to shake still further the courage of the rest. He foils the one counter-attempt on their side, his resource and

confidence inspiring the men with him to be as cool and skilful as he is himself. He holds back his own spears till the suitors have wasted half of theirs. Then he gets home every time with his own missiles, and he charges the mob when the moment has come, and destroys it. Homer tells a story that is clear, intelligible, and consistent throughout.

COLOMBO, CEYLON.

### THE FROGS AT CAMBRIDGE

*The Frogs* of Aristophanes is to be produced in Greek at Cambridge by members of the University from March 3rd to 7th, 1936. The performance will be at the Arts Theatre, a new and up-to-date theatre entered from Peas Hill—about half a minute from King's Parade and the Market Place. The evening performances will be at 8.30, and there will be *three* matinées, on Tuesday the 3rd, Thursday the 5th, and Saturday the 7th, at 2.15. The producers will be the Provost of King's (Dr. J. T. Sheppard) and Mr. G. H. W. Rylands, who is well known for his productions of Shakespeare. New music has been specially composed by Mr. Walter Leigh, and will be under the direction of Mr. Bernhard Ord. For parties from schools and universities there will be reduced priced for the matinées at 3s. 6d. and 2s. 6d., and the usual arrangements for lunch, &c. (Particulars may be obtained from Mr. I. P. Wilkinson, King's College.) Otherwise tickets should be obtained on or after February 10th from the Box Office. All cheques should be made payable to The Arts Theatre, Cambridge.

Prices (last night excepted): Boxes (for 5) £2 2s.; Stalls and Dress Circle, 7s. 6d., 5s., 3s. 6d., 2s. 6d. Last night only: Boxes £2 10s.; Stalls, 10s. 6d., 7s. 6d., 5s.; Circle, 10s. 6d., 7s. 6d., 5s., 2s. 6d.

Copies of the acting version, with a new translation by D. W. Lucas and F. J. A. Cruso, may be obtained through all booksellers, or from the publishers, Messrs. Bowes and Bowes, Cambridge, price 3s.

### THE CLASSICAL ASSOCIATION OF SCOTLAND

It has been brought to our notice that in the list, in our last May number, of Societies and Libraries useful to the Classical Teacher, no mention was made of the Classical Association of Scotland. We greatly regret the omission, which arose because the list as originally compiled was intended for the use of English schools. The Society's address is

The Humanity Department,  
Edinburgh University;

and its Secretary is Mr. W. K. Smith.