"Unhappy man, who at thy birth wast appointed twice to die! others shall die once; but thou, besides that death that remains for thee, common to all men, hast in thy lifetime visited the shades of death. Thee Scylla, thee Charybdis, expect. Thee the deathful Sirens lie in wait for, that taint the minds of whoever listen to them with their sweet singing. Whosoever shall but hear the call of any Siren, he will so despise both wife and children through their sorceries that the stream of his affection never again shall set homewards, nor shall he take joy in wife or children thereafter, or they in him."

With these prophetic greetings great Circe met Ulysses on his return. He besought her to instruct him in the nature of the Sirens, and by what method their baneful allurements were to be resisted.

"They are sisters three," she replied, "that sit in a mead (by which your ship must needs pass) circled with dead men's bones. These are the bones of men whom they have slain, after with fawning invitements they have enticed them into their fen. Yet such is the celestial harmony of their voice accompanying the persuasive magic of their words, that, knowing this, you shall not be able to withstand their enticements. Therefore, when you are to sail by them, you shall stop the ears of your companions with wax, that they may hear no note of that dangerous music; but for yourself, that you may hear, and yet live, give them strict command to bind you hand and foot to the mast, and in no case to set you free, till you are out of the danger of the temptation, though you should entreat it, and implore it ever so much, but to bind you rather the more for your requesting to be loosed. So shall you escape that snare."

Ulysses then prayed her that she would inform him what Scylla and Charybdis were, which she had taught him by name to fear. She replied: "Sailing from Aeaea to Trinacria, you must pass at an equal distance between two fatal rocks. Incline never so little either to the one side or the other, and your ship must meet with certain destruction. No vessel ever yet tried that pass without being lost but the Argo, which owed her safety to the sacred freight she bore, the fleece of the golden-backed ram, which could not perish. The biggest of these rocks which you shall come to, Scylla hath in charge. There in a deep whirlpool at the foot of the rock the abhorred monster shrouds her face; who if she were to show her full form, no eye of man or god could endure the sight: thence she stretches out all her six long necks, peering and diving to suck up fish, dolphins, dog-fish, and whales, whole ships, and their men, whatever comes within her raging gulf. The other rock is lesser, and of less ominous aspect; but there dreadful Charybdis sits, supping the black deeps. Thrice a day she drinks her pits dry, and thrice a day again she belches them all up; but when she is drinking, come not nigh, for, being once caught, the force of Neptune cannot redeem you from her swallow. Better trust to Scylla, for she will but have for her six necks six men: Charybdis in her insatiate draught will ask all."

Then Ulysses inquired, in case he should escape Charybdis, whether he might not assail that other monster with his
sword; to which she replied that he must not think that he had an enemy subject to death, or wounds, to contend with, for Scylla could never die. Therefore, his best safety was in flight, and to invoke none of the gods but Gratis, who is Scylla's mother, and might perhaps forbid her daughter to devour them. For his conduct after he arrived at Trinacria she referred him to the admonitions which had been given him by Tiresias.

Ulysses having communicated her instructions, as far as related to the Sirens, to his companions, who had not been present at that interview—but concealing from them the rest, as he had done the terrible predictions of Tiresias, that they might not be deterred by fear from pursuing their voyage—the time for departure being come, they set their sails, and took a final leave of great Circe; who by her art calmed the heavens, and gave them smooth seas, and a right forewind (the seaman's friend) to bear them on their way to Ithaca.

They had not sailed past a hundred leagues before the breeze which Circe had lent them suddenly stopped. It was stricken dead. All the sea lay in prostrate slumber. Not a gasp of air could be felt. The ship stood still. Ulysses guessed that the island of the Sirens was not far off, and that they had charmed the air so with their devilish singing. Therefore he made him cakes of wax, as Circe had instructed him, and stopped the ears of his men with them; then causing himself to be bound hand and foot, he commanded the rowers to ply their oars and row as fast as speed could carry them past that fatal shore. They soon came within sight of the Sirens, who sang in Ulysses's hearing:

"Come here, thou, worthy of a world of praise,
That dost so high the Grecian glory raise,
Ulysses' stay thy ship, and that song hear
That none pass'd ever, but it bent his ear,
But left him ravish'd, and instructed more
By us than any ever heard before.
For we know all things, whatsoever were
In wide Troy labor'd, whatsoever there
The Grecians and the Trojans both sustain'd,
By those high issues that the gods ordain'd;
And whatsoever all the earth can show
To inform a knowledge of desert, we know.

These were the words, but the celestial harmony of the voices which sang them no tongue can describe: it took the ear of Ulysses with ravishment. He would have broken his bonds to rush after them; and threatened, wept, sued, entreated, commanded, crying out with tears and passionate imprecations, conjuring his men by all the ties of perils past which they had endured in common, by fellowship and love, and the authority which he retained among them, to let him loose; but at no rate would they obey him. And still the Sirens sang. Ulysses made signs, motions, gestures, promising mountains of gold if they would set him free; but their oars only moved faster. And still the Sirens sang. And still the more he adjured them to set him free, the faster with cords and ropes they bound him; till they were quite out of hearing of the Sirens' notes, whose effect great Circe had so truly predicted. And well she might speak of them, for often she has joined her own enchanting voice to theirs, while she has sat in the flowery meads, mingled with the Sirens and the Water Nymphs, gathering their potent herbs and drugs of magic quality: their singing altogether has made the gods stoop, and "heaven drowsy with the harmony."

Escaped that peril, they had not sailed yet a hundred leagues farther, when they heard a roar afar off, which Ulysses knew to be the barking of Scylla's dogs, which surround her waist, and bark incessantly. Coming nearer they beheld a smoke ascend, with a horrid murmur, which arose from that other whirlpool, to which they made nigher approaches than to Scylla. Through the furious eddy, which is in that place, the ship stood still as a stone, for there was no man to lend his hand to an oar, the dismal roar of Scylla's dogs at a distance, and the nearer clamours of Charybdis, where everything made an echo, quite taking from them the power of exertion. Ulysses went up and down encouraging his men, one by one, giving them good words, telling them that they were in greater perils when they were blocked up in the Cyclop's cave, yet, Heaven assisting his counsels, he had delivered them out of that extremity. That he could not
believe but they remembered it; and wished them to give the same trust to the same care which he had now for their welfare. That they must exert all the strength and wit which they had, and try if Jove would not grant them an escape even out of this peril. In particular, he cheered up the pilot who sat at the helm, and told him that he must show more firmness than other men, as he had more trust committed to him, and had the sole management by his skill of the vessel in which all their safeties were embarked. That a rock lay hid within those boiling whirlpools which he saw, on the outside of which he must steer, if he would avoid his own destruction and the destruction of them all.

They heard him, and like men took to the oars; but little knew what opposite danger, in shunning that rock, they must be thrown upon. For Ulysses had concealed from them the wounds, never to be healed, which Scylla was to open: their terror would else have robbed them all of all care to steer or move an oar, and have made them hide under the hatches, for fear of seeing her, where he and they must have died an idle death. But even then he forgot the precautions which Circe had given him to prevent harm to his person, who had willed him not to arm, or show himself once to Scylla; but disdaining not to venture life for his brave companions, he could not contain, but armed in all points, and taking a lance in either hand, he went up to the fore-deck, and looked when Scylla would appear.

She did not show herself as yet, and still the vessel steered closer by her rock, as it sought to shun that other more dreaded; for they saw how horribly Charybdis' black throat drew into her all the whirling deep, which she disgorged again, that all about her boiled like a kettle, and the rock roared with troubled waters; which when she supped in again, all the bottom turned up, and disclosed far under shore the swart sands naked, whose whole stern sight frayed the startled blood from their faces, and made Ulysses turn to view the wonder of whirlpools. Which when Scylla saw, from out her black den she darted out her six long necks, and swooped up as many of his friends: whose cries Ulysses heard, and saw them too late, with their heels turned up, and their hands thrown to him for succour, who had been their help in all extremities, but could not deliver them now; and he heard them shriek out, as she tore them, and to the last they continued to throw their hands out to him for sweet life. In all his sufferings he never had beheld a sight so full of miseries.

Escaped from Scylla and Charybdis, but with a diminished crew, Ulysses and the sad remains of his followers reached the Trinacrian shore. Here landing, he beheld oxen grazing of such surpassing size and beauty that, both from them and from the shape of the Island (having three promontories jutting into the sea), he judged rightly that he was come to the Triangular island and the oxen of the Sun, of which Tiresias had forewarned him.

So great was his terror lest through his own fault, or that of his men, any violence or profanation should be offered to the holy oxen, that even then, tired as they were with the perils and fatigues of the day past, and unable to stir an oar, or use any exertion, and though night was fast coming on, he would have had them re-embark immediately, and make the best of their way from that dangerous station; but his men with one voice resolutely opposed it, and even the too cautious Eurylochus himself withstood the proposal; so much did the temptation of a little ease and refreshment (ease tenfold sweet after such labours) prevail over the sagest counsels, and the apprehension of certain evil outweigh the prospect of contingent danger. They expostulated that the nerves of Ulysses seemed to be made of steel, and his limbs not liable to lassitude like other men's; that waking or sleeping seemed indifferent to him; but that they were men, not gods, and felt the common appetites for food and sleep. That in the night-time all the winds most destructive to ships are generated. That black night still required to be served with meat, and sleep, and quiet havens, and ease. That the best sacrifice to the sea was in the morning. With such sailor-like sayings and mutinous arguments, which the majority have always ready to justify disobedience to their betters, they forced Ulysses to comply with their requisition, and against his will to take up his night-quarters on shore. But he first exacted from them an oath that they would neither maim nor kill any of the cattle which they saw grazing, but content themselves with the ship's food; for the
god who owned those cattle sees and hears all.

They faithfully obeyed, and remained in that good mind for a month, during which they were confined to that station by contrary winds, till all the wine and the bread were gone which they had brought with them. When their victuals were gone, necessity compelled them to stray in quest of whatever fish or fowl they could snare, which that coast did not yield in any great abundance. Then Ulysses prayed to all the gods that dwelt in bountiful heaven, that they would be pleased to yield them some means to stay their hunger without having recourse to profane and forbidden violations; but the ears of heaven seemed to be shut, or some god incensed plotted his ruin; for at midday, when he should chiefly have been vigilant and watchful to prevent mischief, a deep sleep fell upon the eyes of Ulysses, during which he lay totally insensible of all that passed in the world, and what his friends or what his enemies might do for his welfare or destruction. Then Eurylochus took his advantage. He was the man of most authority with them after Ulysses. He represented to them all the misery of their condition; how that every death is hateful and grievous to mortality, but that of all deaths famine is attended with the most painful, loathsome, and humiliating circumstances; that the subsistence which they could hope to draw from fowling or fishing was too precarious to be depended upon; that there did not seem to be any chance of the winds changing to favour their escape, but that they must inevitably stay there and perish, if they let an irrational superstition deter them from the means which nature offered to their hands; that Ulysses might be deceived in his belief that these oxen had any sacred qualities above other oxen; and even admitting that they were the property of the god of the Sun, as he said they were, the Sun did neither eat nor drink, and the gods were best served not by a scrupulous conscience, but by a thankful heart, which took freely what they as freely offered: with these and such like persuasions he prevailed on his half-famished and half-mutinous companions to begin the impious violation of their oath by the slaughter of seven of the fairest of these oxen which were grazing. Part they roasted and eat, and part they offered in sacrifice to the gods, particularly to Apollo, god of the Sun, vowing to build a temple to his godhead when they should arrive in Ithaca, and deck it with magnificent and numerous gifts. Vain men! and superstition worse than that which they so lately derided! to imagine that prospective penitence can excuse a present violation of duty, and that the pure natures of the heavenly powers will admit of compromise or dispensation for sin.

But to their feast they fell, dividing the roasted portions of the flesh, savoury and pleasant meat to them, but a sad sight to the eyes, and a savour of death in the nostrils, of the waking Ulysses, who just woke in time to witness, but not soon enough to prevent, their rash and sacrilegious banquet. He had scarce time to ask what great mischief was this which they had done unto him; when behold, a prodigy! the ox-hides which they had stripped began to creep as if they had life; and the roasted flesh bellowed as the ox used to do when he was living. The hair of Ulysses stood up on end with affright at these omens; but his companions, like men whom the gods had infatuated to their destruction, persisted in their horrible banquet.

The Sun from his burning chariot saw how Ulysses's men had slain his oxen, and he cried to his father Jove, "Revenge me upon these impious men who have slain my oxen, which it did me good to look upon when I walked my heavenly round. In all my daily course I never saw such bright and beautiful creatures as those my oxen were." The father promised that ample retribution should be taken of those accursed men: which was fulfilled shortly after, when they took their leaves of the fatal island.

Six days they feasted in spite of the signs of heaven, and on the seventh, the wind changing, they set their sails and left the island; and their hearts were cheerful with the banquets they had held; all but the heart of Ulysses, which sank within him, as with wet eyes he beheld his friends, and gave them for lost, as men devoted to divine vengeance. Which soon overtook them; for they had not gone many leagues before a dreadful tempest arose, which burst their cables; down came their mast, crushing the skull of the pilot in its fall; off he fell from the stern into the water, and the bark wanting his management drove along at the wind's mercy; thunders roared, and terrible lightnings of Jove came down; first a bolt struck Eurylochus, then another, and then another, till all the crew were killed, and their bodies swam about like sea-mews; and the ship was split in pieces. Only Ulysses survived; and he had no hope of safety but in tying himself to the mast, where he sat riding upon the waves, like one that in no extremity would yield to fortune. Nine days was he floating about with all the motions of the sea, with no other support than the slender mast under him, till the tenth night cast him, all spent and weary with toil, upon the friendly shores of the island Ogygia.