

## BOOK IX.

### ARGUMENT.

#### THE EMBASSY TO ACHILLES.

Agamemnon, after the last day's defeat, proposes to the Greeks to quit the siege, and return to their country. Diomed opposes this, and Nestor seconds him, praising his wisdom and resolution. He orders the guard to be strengthened, and a council summoned to deliberate what measures are to be followed in this emergency. Agamemnon pursues this advice, and Nestor further prevails upon him to send ambassadors to Achilles, in order to move him to a reconciliation. Ulysses and Ajax are made choice of, who are accompanied by old Phoenix. They make, each of them, very moving and pressing speeches, but are rejected with roughness by Achilles, who notwithstanding retains Phoenix in his tent. The ambassadors return unsuccessfully to the camp, and the troops betake themselves to sleep.

This book, and the next following, take up the space of one night, which is the twenty-seventh from the beginning of the poem. The scene lies on the sea-shore, the station of the Grecian ships.

Thus joyful Troy maintain'd the watch of night;  
While fear, pale comrade of inglorious flight,(199)  
And heaven-bred horror, on the Grecian part,

Sat on each face, and sadden'd every heart.  
As from its cloudy dungeon issuing forth,  
A double tempest of the west and north  
Swells o'er the sea, from Thracia's frozen shore,  
Heaps waves on waves, and bids the Ægean roar:  
This way and that the boiling deeps are toss'd:  
Such various passions urged the troubled host,  
Great Agamemnon grieved above the rest;  
Superior sorrows swell'd his royal breast;  
Himself his orders to the heralds bears,  
To bid to council all the Grecian peers,  
But bid in whispers: these surround their chief,  
In solemn sadness and majestic grief.  
The king amidst the mournful circle rose:  
Down his wan cheek a briny torrent flows.  
So silent fountains, from a rock's tall head,  
In sable streams soft-trickling waters shed.  
With more than vulgar grief he stood oppress'd;  
Words, mix'd with sighs, thus bursting from his breast:

"Ye sons of Greece! partake your leader's care;  
Fellows in arms and princes of the war!  
Of partial Jove too justly we complain,  
And heavenly oracles believed in vain.  
A safe return was promised to our toils,  
With conquest honour'd and enrich'd with spoils:

Now shameful flight alone can save the host;  
Our wealth, our people, and our glory lost.  
So Jove decrees, almighty lord of all!  
Jove, at whose nod whole empires rise or fall,  
Who shakes the feeble props of human trust,  
And towers and armies humbles to the dust.  
Haste then, for ever quit these fatal fields,  
Haste to the joys our native country yields;  
Spread all your canvas, all your oars employ,  
Nor hope the fall of heaven-defended Troy."

He said: deep silence held the Grecian band;  
Silent, unmov'd in dire dismay they stand;  
A pensive scene! till Tydeus' warlike son  
Roll'd on the king his eyes, and thus begun:  
"When kings advise us to renounce our fame,  
First let him speak who first has suffer'd shame.  
If I oppose thee, prince! thy wrath withhold,  
The laws of council bid my tongue be bold.  
Thou first, and thou alone, in fields of fight,  
Durst brand my courage, and defame my might:  
Nor from a friend the unkind reproach appear'd,  
The Greeks stood witness, all our army heard.  
The gods, O chief! from whom our honours spring,  
The gods have made thee but by halves a king:  
They gave thee sceptres, and a wide command;

They gave dominion o'er the seas and land;  
The noblest power that might the world control  
They gave thee not--a brave and virtuous soul.  
Is this a general's voice, that would suggest  
Fears like his own to every Grecian breast?  
Confiding in our want of worth, he stands;  
And if we fly, 'tis what our king commands.  
Go thou, inglorious! from the embattled plain;  
Ships thou hast store, and nearest to the main;  
A noble care the Grecians shall employ,  
To combat, conquer, and extirpate Troy.  
Here Greece shall stay; or, if all Greece retire,  
Myself shall stay, till Troy or I expire;  
Myself, and Sthenelus, will fight for fame;  
God bade us fight, and 'twas with God we came."

He ceased; the Greeks loud acclamations raise,  
And voice to voice resounds Tydides' praise.  
Wise Nestor then his reverend figure rear'd;  
He spoke: the host in still attention heard:(200)

"O truly great! in whom the gods have join'd  
Such strength of body with such force of mind:  
In conduct, as in courage, you excel,  
Still first to act what you advise so well.  
These wholesome counsels which thy wisdom moves,

Applauding Greece with common voice approves.  
Kings thou canst blame; a bold but prudent youth:  
And blame even kings with praise, because with truth.  
And yet those years that since thy birth have run  
Would hardly style thee Nestor's youngest son.  
Then let me add what yet remains behind,  
A thought unfinish'd in that generous mind;  
Age bids me speak! nor shall the advice I bring  
Distaste the people, or offend the king:

"Cursed is the man, and void of law and right,  
Unworthy property, unworthy light,  
Unfit for public rule, or private care,  
That wretch, that monster, who delights in war;  
Whose lust is murder, and whose horrid joy,  
To tear his country, and his kind destroy!  
This night, refresh and fortify thy train;  
Between the trench and wall let guards remain:  
Be that the duty of the young and bold;  
But thou, O king, to council call the old;  
Great is thy sway, and weighty are thy cares;  
Thy high commands must spirit all our wars.  
With Thracian wines recruit thy honour'd guests,  
For happy counsels flow from sober feasts.  
Wise, weighty counsels aid a state distress'd,  
And such a monarch as can choose the best.

See what a blaze from hostile tents aspires,  
How near our fleet approach the Trojan fires!  
Who can, unmoved, behold the dreadful light?  
What eye beholds them, and can close to-night?  
This dreadful interval determines all;  
To-morrow, Troy must flame, or Greece must fall."

Thus spoke the hoary sage: the rest obey;  
Swift through the gates the guards direct their way.  
His son was first to pass the lofty mound,  
The generous Thrasymed, in arms renown'd:  
Next him, Ascalaphus, Ialmen, stood,  
The double offspring of the warrior-god:  
Deipyrus, Aphareus, Merion join,  
And Lycomed of Creon's noble line.  
Seven were the leaders of the nightly bands,  
And each bold chief a hundred spears commands.  
The fires they light, to short repasts they fall,  
Some line the trench, and others man the wall.

The king of men, on public counsels bent,  
Convened the princes in his ample tent,  
Each seized a portion of the kingly feast,  
But stay'd his hand when thirst and hunger ceased.  
Then Nestor spoke, for wisdom long approved,  
And slowly rising, thus the council moved.

"Monarch of nations! whose superior sway  
Assembled states, and lords of earth obey,  
The laws and sceptres to thy hand are given,  
And millions own the care of thee and Heaven.  
O king! the counsels of my age attend;  
With thee my cares begin, with thee must end.  
Thee, prince! it fits alike to speak and hear,  
Pronounce with judgment, with regard give ear,  
To see no wholesome motion be withstood,  
And ratify the best for public good.  
Nor, though a meaner give advice, repine,  
But follow it, and make the wisdom thine.  
Hear then a thought, not now conceived in haste,  
At once my present judgment and my past.  
When from Pelides' tent you forced the maid,  
I first opposed, and faithful, durst dissuade;  
But bold of soul, when headlong fury fired,  
You wronged the man, by men and gods admired:  
Now seek some means his fatal wrath to end,  
With prayers to move him, or with gifts to bend."

To whom the king. "With justice hast thou shown  
A prince's faults, and I with reason own.  
That happy man, whom Jove still honours most,  
Is more than armies, and himself a host.

Bless'd in his love, this wondrous hero stands;  
Heaven fights his war, and humbles all our bands.  
Fain would my heart, which err'd through frantic rage,  
The wrathful chief and angry gods assuage.  
If gifts immense his mighty soul can bow,(201)  
Hear, all ye Greeks, and witness what I vow.  
Ten weighty talents of the purest gold,  
And twice ten vases of refulgent mould:  
Seven sacred tripods, whose unsullied frame  
Yet knows no office, nor has felt the flame;  
Twelve steeds unmatch'd in fleetness and in force,  
And still victorious in the dusty course;  
(Rich were the man whose ample stores exceed  
The prizes purchased by their winged speed;)  
Seven lovely captives of the Lesbian line,  
Skill'd in each art, unmatch'd in form divine,  
The same I chose for more than vulgar charms,  
When Lesbos sank beneath the hero's arms:  
All these, to buy his friendship, shall be paid,  
And join'd with these the long-contested maid;  
With all her charms, Briseis I resign,  
And solemn swear those charms were never mine;  
Untouch'd she stay'd, uninjured she removes,  
Pure from my arms, and guiltless of my loves,(202)  
These instant shall be his; and if the powers  
Give to our arms proud Ilion's hostile towers,



Then shall he store (when Greece the spoil divides)  
With gold and brass his loaded navy's sides:  
Besides, full twenty nymphs of Trojan race  
With copious love shall crown his warm embrace,  
Such as himself will choose; who yield to none,  
Or yield to Helen's heavenly charms alone.  
Yet hear me further: when our wars are o'er,  
If safe we land on Argos' fruitful shore,  
There shall he live my son, our honours share,  
And with Orestes' self divide my care.  
Yet more--three daughters in my court are bred,  
And each well worthy of a royal bed;  
Laodice and Iphigenia fair,(203)  
And bright Chrysothemis with golden hair;  
Her let him choose whom most his eyes approve,  
I ask no presents, no reward for love:  
Myself will give the dower; so vast a store  
As never father gave a child before.  
Seven ample cities shall confess his sway,  
Him Enope, and Pherae him obey,  
Cardamyle with ample turrets crown'd,  
And sacred Pedasus for vines renown'd;  
Æpea fair, the pastures Hira yields,  
And rich Antheia with her flowery fields:(204)  
The whole extent to Pylos' sandy plain,  
Along the verdant margin of the main

There heifers graze, and labouring oxen toil;  
Bold are the men, and generous is the soil;  
There shall he reign, with power and justice crown'd,  
And rule the tributary realms around.  
All this I give, his vengeance to control,  
And sure all this may move his mighty soul.  
Pluto, the grisly god, who never spares,  
Who feels no mercy, and who hears no prayers,  
Lives dark and dreadful in deep hell's abodes,  
And mortals hate him, as the worst of gods  
Great though he be, it fits him to obey,  
Since more than his my years, and more my sway."

The monarch thus. The reverend Nestor then:

"Great Agamemnon! glorious king of men!  
Such are thy offers as a prince may take,  
And such as fits a generous king to make.  
Let chosen delegates this hour be sent  
(Myself will name them) to Pelides' tent.  
Let Phoenix lead, revered for hoary age,  
Great Ajax next, and Ithacus the sage.  
Yet more to sanctify the word you send,  
Let Hodus and Eurybates attend.  
Now pray to Jove to grant what Greece demands;  
Pray in deep silence,(205) and with purest hands."(206)

He said; and all approved. The heralds bring  
The cleansing water from the living spring.  
The youth with wine the sacred goblets crown'd,  
And large libations drench'd the sands around.  
The rite perform'd, the chiefs their thirst allay,  
Then from the royal tent they take their way;  
Wise Nestor turns on each his careful eye,  
Forbids to offend, instructs them to apply;  
Much he advised them all, Ulysses most,  
To deprecate the chief, and save the host.  
Through the still night they march, and hear the roar  
Of murmuring billows on the sounding shore.  
To Neptune, ruler of the seas profound,  
Whose liquid arms the mighty globe surround,  
They pour forth vows, their embassy to bless,  
And calm the rage of stern Æacides.  
And now, arrived, where on the sandy bay  
The Myrmidonian tents and vessels lay;  
Amused at ease, the godlike man they found,  
Pleased with the solemn harp's harmonious sound.  
(The well wrought harp from conquered Thebae came;  
Of polish'd silver was its costly frame.)  
With this he soothes his angry soul, and sings  
The immortal deeds of heroes and of kings.  
Patroclus only of the royal train,  
Placed in his tent, attends the lofty strain:

Full opposite he sat, and listen'd long,  
In silence waiting till he ceased the song.  
Unseen the Grecian embassy proceeds  
To his high tent; the great Ulysses leads.  
Achilles starting, as the chiefs he spied,  
Leap'd from his seat, and laid the harp aside.  
With like surprise arose Menoetius' son:  
Pelides grasp'd their hands, and thus begun:

"Princes, all hail! whatever brought you here.  
Or strong necessity, or urgent fear;  
Welcome, though Greeks! for not as foes ye came;  
To me more dear than all that bear the name."

With that, the chiefs beneath his roof he led,  
And placed in seats with purple carpets spread.  
Then thus--"Patroclus, crown a larger bowl,  
Mix purer wine, and open every soul.  
Of all the warriors yonder host can send,  
Thy friend most honours these, and these thy friend."

He said: Patroclus o'er the blazing fire  
Heaps in a brazen vase three chins entire:  
The brazen vase Automedon sustains,  
Which flesh of porker, sheep, and goat contains.  
Achilles at the genial feast presides,

The parts transfixes, and with skill divides.  
Meanwhile Patroclus sweats, the fire to raise;  
The tent is brighten'd with the rising blaze:  
Then, when the languid flames at length subside,  
He strows a bed of glowing embers wide,  
Above the coals the smoking fragments turns  
And sprinkles sacred salt from lifted urns;  
With bread the glittering canisters they load,  
Which round the board Menoetius' son bestow'd;  
Himself, opposed to Ulysses full in sight,  
Each portion parts, and orders every rite.  
The first fat offering to the immortals due,  
Amidst the greedy flames Patroclus threw;  
Then each, indulging in the social feast,  
His thirst and hunger soberly repress'd.  
That done, to Phoenix Ajax gave the sign:  
Not unperceived; Ulysses crown'd with wine  
The foaming bowl, and instant thus began,  
His speech addressing to the godlike man.

"Health to Achilles! happy are thy guests!  
Not those more honour'd whom Atrides feasts:  
Though generous plenty crown thy loaded boards,  
That, Agamemnon's regal tent affords;  
But greater cares sit heavy on our souls,  
Nor eased by banquets or by flowing bowls.

What scenes of slaughter in yon fields appear!  
The dead we mourn, and for the living fear;  
Greece on the brink of fate all doubtful stands,  
And owns no help but from thy saving hands:  
Troy and her aids for ready vengeance call;  
Their threatening tents already shade our wall:  
Hear how with shouts their conquest they proclaim,  
And point at every ship their vengeful flame!  
For them the father of the gods declares,  
Theirs are his omens, and his thunder theirs.  
See, full of Jove, avenging Hector rise!  
See! heaven and earth the raging chief defies;  
What fury in his breast, what lightning in his eyes!  
He waits but for the morn, to sink in flame  
The ships, the Greeks, and all the Grecian name.  
Heavens! how my country's woes distract my mind,  
Lest Fate accomplish all his rage design'd!  
And must we, gods! our heads inglorious lay  
In Trojan dust, and this the fatal day?  
Return, Achilles: oh return, though late,  
To save thy Greeks, and stop the course of Fate;  
If in that heart or grief or courage lies,  
Rise to redeem; ah, yet to conquer, rise!  
The day may come, when, all our warriors slain,  
That heart shall melt, that courage rise in vain:  
Regard in time, O prince divinely brave!

Those wholesome counsels which thy father gave.  
When Peleus in his aged arms embraced  
His parting son, these accents were his last:

"My child! with strength, with glory, and success,  
Thy arms may Juno and Minerva bless!  
Trust that to Heaven: but thou, thy cares engage  
To calm thy passions, and subdue thy rage:  
From gentler manners let thy glory grow,  
And shun contention, the sure source of woe;  
That young and old may in thy praise combine,  
The virtues of humanity be thine--'  
This now-despised advice thy father gave;  
Ah! check thy anger; and be truly brave.  
If thou wilt yield to great Atrides' prayers,  
Gifts worthy thee his royal hand prepares;  
If not--but hear me, while I number o'er  
The proffer'd presents, an exhaustless store.  
Ten weighty talents of the purest gold,  
And twice ten vases of refulgent mould;  
Seven sacred tripods, whose unsullied frame  
Yet knows no office, nor has felt the flame;  
Twelve steeds unmatched in fleetness and in force,  
And still victorious in the dusty course;  
(Rich were the man, whose ample stores exceed  
The prizes purchased by their winged speed;)

Seven lovely captives of the Lesbian line,  
Skill'd in each art, unmatch'd in form divine,  
The same he chose for more than vulgar charms,  
When Lesbos sank beneath thy conquering arms.  
All these, to buy thy friendship shall be paid,  
And, join'd with these, the long-contested maid;  
With all her charms, Briseis he'll resign,  
And solemn swear those charms were only thine;  
Untouch'd she stay'd, uninjured she removes,  
Pure from his arms, and guiltless of his loves.  
These instant shall be thine; and if the powers  
Give to our arms proud Ilion's hostile towers,  
Then shalt thou store (when Greece the spoil divides)  
With gold and brass thy loaded navy's sides.  
Besides, full twenty nymphs of Trojan race  
With copious love shall crown thy warm embrace;  
Such as thyself shall chose; who yield to none,  
Or yield to Helen's heavenly charms alone.  
Yet hear me further: when our wars are o'er,  
If safe we land on Argos' fruitful shore,  
There shalt thou live his son, his honour share,  
And with Orestes' self divide his care.  
Yet more--three daughters in his court are bred,  
And each well worthy of a royal bed:  
Laodice and Iphigenia fair,  
And bright Chrysothemis with golden hair:



Her shalt thou wed whom most thy eyes approve;  
He asks no presents, no reward for love:  
Himself will give the dower; so vast a store  
As never father gave a child before.  
Seven ample cities shall confess thy sway,  
The Enope and Pherae thee obey,  
Cardamyle with ample turrets crown'd,  
And sacred Pedasus, for vines renown'd:  
Æpea fair, the pastures Hira yields,  
And rich Antheia with her flowery fields;  
The whole extent to Pylos' sandy plain,  
Along the verdant margin of the main.  
There heifers graze, and labouring oxen toil;  
Bold are the men, and generous is the soil.  
There shalt thou reign, with power and justice crown'd,  
And rule the tributary realms around.  
Such are the proffers which this day we bring,  
Such the repentance of a suppliant king.  
But if all this, relentless, thou disdain,  
If honour and if interest plead in vain,  
Yet some redress to suppliant Greece afford,  
And be, amongst her guardian gods, adored.  
If no regard thy suffering country claim,  
Hear thy own glory, and the voice of fame:  
For now that chief, whose unresisted ire  
Made nations tremble, and whole hosts retire,

Proud Hector, now, the unequal fight demands,  
And only triumphs to deserve thy hands."

Then thus the goddess-born: "Ulysses, hear  
A faithful speech, that knows nor art nor fear;  
What in my secret soul is understood,  
My tongue shall utter, and my deeds make good.  
Let Greece then know, my purpose I retain:  
Nor with new treaties vex my peace in vain.  
Who dares think one thing, and another tell,  
My heart detests him as the gates of hell.

"Then thus in short my fix'd resolves attend,  
Which nor Atrides nor his Greeks can bend;  
Long toils, long perils in their cause I bore,  
But now the unfruitful glories charm no more.  
Fight or not fight, a like reward we claim,  
The wretch and hero find their prize the same.  
Alike regretted in the dust he lies,  
Who yields ignobly, or who bravely dies.  
Of all my dangers, all my glorious pains,  
A life of labours, lo! what fruit remains?  
As the bold bird her helpless young attends,  
From danger guards them, and from want defends;  
In search of prey she wings the spacious air,  
And with the untasted food supplies her care:

For thankless Greece such hardships have I braved,  
Her wives, her infants, by my labours saved;  
Long sleepless nights in heavy arms I stood,  
And sweat laborious days in dust and blood.  
I sack'd twelve ample cities on the main,(207)  
And twelve lay smoking on the Trojan plain:  
Then at Atrides' haughty feet were laid  
The wealth I gathered, and the spoils I made.  
Your mighty monarch these in peace possess'd;  
Some few my soldiers had, himself the rest.  
Some present, too, to every prince was paid;  
And every prince enjoys the gift he made:  
I only must refund, of all his train;  
See what pre-eminence our merits gain!  
My spoil alone his greedy soul delights:  
My spouse alone must bless his lustful nights:  
The woman, let him (as he may) enjoy;  
But what's the quarrel, then, of Greece to Troy?  
What to these shores the assembled nations draws,  
What calls for vengeance but a woman's cause?  
Are fair endowments and a beauteous face  
Beloved by none but those of Atreus' race?  
The wife whom choice and passion doth approve,  
Sure every wise and worthy man will love.  
Nor did my fair one less distinction claim;  
Slave as she was, my soul adored the dame.

Wrong'd in my love, all proffers I disdain;  
Deceived for once, I trust not kings again.  
Ye have my answer--what remains to do,  
Your king, Ulysses, may consult with you.  
What needs he the defence this arm can make?  
Has he not walls no human force can shake?  
Has he not fenced his guarded navy round  
With piles, with ramparts, and a trench profound?  
And will not these (the wonders he has done)  
Repel the rage of Priam's single son?  
There was a time ('twas when for Greece I fought)  
When Hector's prowess no such wonders wrought;  
He kept the verge of Troy, nor dared to wait  
Achilles' fury at the Scaean gate;  
He tried it once, and scarce was saved by fate.  
But now those ancient enmities are o'er;  
To-morrow we the favouring gods implore;  
Then shall you see our parting vessels crown'd,  
And hear with oars the Hellespont resound.  
The third day hence shall Pthia greet our sails,(208)  
If mighty Neptune send propitious gales;  
Pthia to her Achilles shall restore  
The wealth he left for this detested shore:  
Thither the spoils of this long war shall pass,  
The ruddy gold, the steel, and shining brass:  
My beauteous captives thither I'll convey,

And all that rests of my unravish'd prey.  
One only valued gift your tyrant gave,  
And that resumed--the fair Lyrnessian slave.  
Then tell him: loud, that all the Greeks may hear,  
And learn to scorn the wretch they basely fear;  
(For arm'd in impudence, mankind he braves,  
And meditates new cheats on all his slaves;  
Though shameless as he is, to face these eyes  
Is what he dares not: if he dares he dies;)  
Tell him, all terms, all commerce I decline,  
Nor share his council, nor his battle join;  
For once deceiv'd, was his; but twice were mine,  
No--let the stupid prince, whom Jove deprives  
Of sense and justice, run where frenzy drives;  
His gifts are hateful: kings of such a kind  
Stand but as slaves before a noble mind,  
Not though he proffer'd all himself possess'd,  
And all his rapine could from others wrest:  
Not all the golden tides of wealth that crown  
The many-peopled Orchomenian town;(209)  
Not all proud Thebes' unrivall'd walls contain,  
The world's great empress on the Egyptian plain  
(That spreads her conquests o'er a thousand states,  
And pours her heroes through a hundred gates,  
Two hundred horsemen and two hundred cars  
From each wide portal issuing to the wars);(210)

Though bribes were heap'd on bribes, in number more  
Than dust in fields, or sands along the shore;  
Should all these offers for my friendship call,  
'Tis he that offers, and I scorn them all.  
Atrides' daughter never shall be led  
(An ill-match'd consort) to Achilles' bed;  
Like golden Venus though she charm'd the heart,  
And vied with Pallas in the works of art;  
Some greater Greek let those high nuptials grace,  
I hate alliance with a tyrant's race.  
If heaven restore me to my realms with life,  
The reverend Peleus shall elect my wife;  
Thessalian nymphs there are of form divine,  
And kings that sue to mix their blood with mine.  
Bless'd in kind love, my years shall glide away,  
Content with just hereditary sway;  
There, deaf for ever to the martial strife,  
Enjoy the dear prerogative of life.  
Life is not to be bought with heaps of gold.  
Not all Apollo's Pythian treasures hold,  
Or Troy once held, in peace and pride of sway,  
Can bribe the poor possession of a day!  
Lost herds and treasures we by arms regain,  
And steeds unrivall'd on the dusty plain:  
But from our lips the vital spirit fled,  
Returns no more to wake the silent dead.

My fates long since by Thetis were disclosed,  
And each alternate, life or fame, proposed;  
Here, if I stay, before the Trojan town,  
Short is my date, but deathless my renown:  
If I return, I quit immortal praise  
For years on years, and long-extended days.  
Convinced, though late, I find my fond mistake,  
And warn the Greeks the wiser choice to make;  
To quit these shores, their native seats enjoy,  
Nor hope the fall of heaven-defended Troy.  
Jove's arm display'd asserts her from the skies!  
Her hearts are strengthen'd, and her glories rise.  
Go then to Greece, report our fix'd design;  
Bid all your counsels, all your armies join,  
Let all your forces, all your arts conspire,  
To save the ships, the troops, the chiefs, from fire.  
One stratagem has fail'd, and others will:  
Ye find, Achilles is unconquer'd still.  
Go then--digest my message as ye may--  
But here this night let reverend Phoenix stay:  
His tedious toils and hoary hairs demand  
A peaceful death in Pthia's friendly land.  
But whether he remain or sail with me,  
His age be sacred, and his will be free."

The son of Peleus ceased: the chiefs around

In silence wrapt, in consternation drown'd,  
Attend the stern reply. Then Phoenix rose;  
(Down his white beard a stream of sorrow flows;)   
And while the fate of suffering Greece he mourn'd,  
With accent weak these tender words return'd.

"Divine Achilles! wilt thou then retire,  
And leave our hosts in blood, our fleets on fire?  
If wrath so dreadful fill thy ruthless mind,  
How shall thy friend, thy Phoenix, stay behind?  
The royal Peleus, when from Pthia's coast  
He sent thee early to the Achaian host;  
Thy youth as then in sage debates unskill'd,  
And new to perils of the direful field:  
He bade me teach thee all the ways of war,  
To shine in councils, and in camps to dare.  
Never, ah, never let me leave thy side!  
No time shall part us, and no fate divide,  
Not though the god, that breathed my life, restore  
The bloom I boasted, and the port I bore,  
When Greece of old beheld my youthful flames  
(Delightful Greece, the land of lovely dames),  
My father faithless to my mother's arms,  
Old as he was, adored a stranger's charms.  
I tried what youth could do (at her desire)  
To win the damsel, and prevent my sire.



My sire with curses loads my hated head,  
And cries, 'Ye furies! barren be his bed.'  
Infernal Jove, the vengeful fiends below,  
And ruthless Proserpine, confirm'd his vow.  
Despair and grief distract my labouring mind!  
Gods! what a crime my impious heart design'd!  
I thought (but some kind god that thought suppress'd)  
To plunge the poniard in my father's breast;  
Then meditate my flight: my friends in vain  
With prayers entreat me, and with force detain.  
On fat of rams, black bulls, and brawny swine,  
They daily feast, with draughts of fragrant wine;  
Strong guards they placed, and watch'd nine nights entire;  
The roofs and porches flamed with constant fire.  
The tenth, I forced the gates, unseen of all:  
And, favour'd by the night, o'erleap'd the wall,  
My travels thence through spacious Greece extend;  
In Phthia's court at last my labours end.  
Your sire received me, as his son caress'd,  
With gifts enrich'd, and with possessions bless'd.  
The strong Dolopians thenceforth own'd my reign,  
And all the coast that runs along the main.  
By love to thee his bounties I repaid,  
And early wisdom to thy soul convey'd:  
Great as thou art, my lessons made thee brave:  
A child I took thee, but a hero gave.

Thy infant breast a like affection show'd;  
Still in my arms (an ever-pleasing load)  
Or at my knee, by Phoenix wouldst thou stand;  
No food was grateful but from Phoenix' hand.(211)  
I pass my watchings o'er thy helpless years,  
The tender labours, the compliant cares,  
The gods (I thought) reversed their hard decree,  
And Phoenix felt a father's joys in thee:  
Thy growing virtues justified my cares,  
And promised comfort to my silver hairs.  
Now be thy rage, thy fatal rage, resign'd;  
A cruel heart ill suits a manly mind:  
The gods (the only great, and only wise)  
Are moved by offerings, vows, and sacrifice;  
Offending man their high compassion wins,  
And daily prayers atone for daily sins.  
Prayers are Jove's daughters, of celestial race,  
Lame are their feet, and wrinkled is their face;  
With humble mien, and with dejected eyes,  
Constant they follow, where injustice flies.  
Injustice swift, erect, and unconfined,  
Sweeps the wide earth, and tramples o'er mankind,  
While Prayers, to heal her wrongs, move slow behind.  
Who hears these daughters of almighty Jove,  
For him they mediate to the throne above  
When man rejects the humble suit they make,

The sire revenges for the daughters' sake;  
From Jove commission'd, fierce injustice then  
Descends to punish unrelenting men.  
O let not headlong passion bear the sway  
These reconciling goddesses obey  
Due honours to the seed of Jove belong,  
Due honours calm the fierce, and bend the strong.  
Were these not paid thee by the terms we bring,  
Were rage still harbour'd in the haughty king;  
Nor Greece nor all her fortunes should engage  
Thy friend to plead against so just a rage.  
But since what honour asks the general sends,  
And sends by those whom most thy heart commends;  
The best and noblest of the Grecian train;  
Permit not these to sue, and sue in vain!  
Let me (my son) an ancient fact unfold,  
A great example drawn from times of old;  
Hear what our fathers were, and what their praise,  
Who conquer'd their revenge in former days.

"Where Calydon on rocky mountains stands(212)  
Once fought the Ætolian and Curetian bands;  
To guard it those; to conquer, these advance;  
And mutual deaths were dealt with mutual chance.  
The silver Cynthia bade contention rise,  
In vengeance of neglected sacrifice;

On Oeneus fields she sent a monstrous boar,  
That level'd harvests, and whole forests tore:  
This beast (when many a chief his tusks had slain)  
Great Meleager stretch'd along the plain,  
Then, for his spoils, a new debate arose,  
The neighbour nations thence commencing foes.  
Strong as they were, the bold Curetes fail'd,  
While Meleager's thundering arm prevail'd:  
Till rage at length inflamed his lofty breast  
(For rage invades the wisest and the best).

"Cursed by Althaea, to his wrath he yields,  
And in his wife's embrace forgets the fields.  
(She from Marpessa sprung, divinely fair,  
And matchless Idas, more than man in war:  
The god of day adored the mother's charms;  
Against the god the father bent his arms:  
The afflicted pair, their sorrows to proclaim,  
From Cleopatra changed their daughter's name,  
And call'd Alcyone; a name to show  
The father's grief, the mourning mother's woe.)  
To her the chief retired from stern debate,  
But found no peace from fierce Althaea's hate:  
Althaea's hate the unhappy warrior drew,  
Whose luckless hand his royal uncle slew;  
She beat the ground, and call'd the powers beneath

On her own son to wreak her brother's death;  
Hell heard her curses from the realms profound,  
And the red fiends that walk the nightly round.  
In vain Ætolia her deliverer waits,  
War shakes her walls, and thunders at her gates.  
She sent ambassadors, a chosen band,  
Priests of the gods, and elders of the land;  
Besought the chief to save the sinking state:  
Their prayers were urgent, and their proffers great:  
(Full fifty acres of the richest ground,  
Half pasture green, and half with vineyards crown'd:)  
His suppliant father, aged OEneus, came;  
His sisters follow'd; even the vengeful dame,  
Althaea, sues; his friends before him fall:  
He stands relentless, and rejects them all.  
Meanwhile the victor's shouts ascend the skies;  
The walls are scaled; the rolling flames arise;  
At length his wife (a form divine) appears,  
With piercing cries, and supplicating tears;  
She paints the horrors of a conquer'd town,  
The heroes slain, the palaces o'erthrown,  
The matrons ravish'd, the whole race enslaved:  
The warrior heard, he vanquish'd, and he saved.  
The Ætolians, long disdain'd, now took their turn,  
And left the chief their broken faith to mourn.  
Learn hence, betimes to curb pernicious ire,

Nor stay till yonder fleets ascend in fire;  
Accept the presents; draw thy conquering sword;  
And be amongst our guardian gods adored."

Thus he: the stern Achilles thus replied:

"My second father, and my reverend guide:  
Thy friend, believe me, no such gifts demands,  
And asks no honours from a mortal's hands;  
Jove honours me, and favours my designs;  
His pleasure guides me, and his will confines;  
And here I stay (if such his high behest)  
While life's warm spirit beats within my breast.  
Yet hear one word, and lodge it in thy heart:  
No more molest me on Atrides' part:  
Is it for him these tears are taught to flow,  
For him these sorrows? for my mortal foe?  
A generous friendship no cold medium knows,  
Burns with one love, with one resentment glows;  
One should our interests and our passions be;  
My friend must hate the man that injures me.  
Do this, my Phoenix, 'tis a generous part;  
And share my realms, my honours, and my heart.  
Let these return: our voyage, or our stay,  
Rest undetermined till the dawning day."

He ceased; then order'd for the sage's bed

A warmer couch with numerous carpets spread.  
With that, stern Ajax his long silence broke,  
And thus, impatient, to Ulysses spoke:

"Hence let us go--why waste we time in vain?  
See what effect our low submissions gain!  
Liked or not liked, his words we must relate,  
The Greeks expect them, and our heroes wait.  
Proud as he is, that iron heart retains  
Its stubborn purpose, and his friends disdains.  
Stern and unpitying! if a brother bleed,  
On just atonement, we remit the deed;  
A sire the slaughter of his son forgives;  
The price of blood discharged, the murderer lives:  
The haughtiest hearts at length their rage resign,  
And gifts can conquer every soul but thine.(213)  
The gods that unrelenting breast have steel'd,  
And cursed thee with a mind that cannot yield.  
One woman-slave was ravish'd from thy arms:  
Lo, seven are offer'd, and of equal charms.  
Then hear, Achilles! be of better mind;  
Revere thy roof, and to thy guests be kind;  
And know the men of all the Grecian host,  
Who honour worth, and prize thy valour most."

"O soul of battles, and thy people's guide!

(To Ajax thus the first of Greeks replied)

Well hast thou spoke; but at the tyrant's name

My rage rekindles, and my soul's on flame:

'Tis just resentment, and becomes the brave:

Disgraced, dishonour'd, like the vilest slave!

Return, then, heroes! and our answer bear,

The glorious combat is no more my care;

Not till, amidst yon sinking navy slain,

The blood of Greeks shall dye the sable main;

Not till the flames, by Hector's fury thrown,

Consume your vessels, and approach my own;

Just there, the impetuous homicide shall stand,

There cease his battle, and there feel our hand."

This said, each prince a double goblet crown'd,

And cast a large libation on the ground;

Then to their vessels, through the gloomy shades,

The chiefs return; divine Ulysses leads.

Meantime Achilles' slaves prepared a bed,

With fleeces, carpets, and soft linen spread:

There, till the sacred morn restored the day,

In slumber sweet the reverend Phoenix lay.

But in his inner tent, an ampler space,

Achilles slept; and in his warm embrace

Fair Diomedes of the Lesbian race.

Last, for Patroclus was the couch prepared,



Whose nightly joys the beauteous Iphis shared;  
Achilles to his friend consign'd her charms  
When Scyros fell before his conquering arms.

And now the elected chiefs whom Greece had sent,  
Pass'd through the hosts, and reach'd the royal tent.  
Then rising all, with goblets in their hands,  
The peers and leaders of the Achaian bands  
Hail'd their return: Atrides first begun:

"Say what success? divine Laertes' son!  
Achilles' high resolves declare to all:  
"Returns the chief, or must our navy fall?"

"Great king of nations! (Ithacus replied)  
Fix'd is his wrath, unconquer'd is his pride;  
He slight's thy friendship, thy proposals scorns,  
And, thus implored, with fiercer fury burns.  
To save our army, and our fleets to free,  
Is not his care; but left to Greece and thee.  
Your eyes shall view, when morning paints the sky,  
Beneath his oars the whitening billows fly;  
Us too he bids our oars and sails employ,  
Nor hope the fall of heaven-protected Troy;  
For Jove o'ershades her with his arm divine,  
Inspires her war, and bids her glory shine.

Such was his word: what further he declared,  
These sacred heralds and great Ajax heard.  
But Phoenix in his tent the chief retains,  
Safe to transport him to his native plains  
When morning dawns; if other he decree,  
His age is sacred, and his choice is free."

Ulysses ceased: the great Achaian host,  
With sorrow seized, in consternation lost,  
Attend the stern reply. Tydides broke  
The general silence, and undaunted spoke.  
"Why should we gifts to proud Achilles send,  
Or strive with prayers his haughty soul to bend?  
His country's woes he glories to deride,  
And prayers will burst that swelling heart with pride.  
Be the fierce impulse of his rage obey'd,  
Our battles let him or desert or aid;  
Then let him arm when Jove or he think fit:  
That, to his madness, or to Heaven commit:  
What for ourselves we can, is always ours;  
This night, let due repast refresh our powers;  
(For strength consists in spirits and in blood,  
And those are owed to generous wine and food;)  
But when the rosy messenger of day  
Strikes the blue mountains with her golden ray,  
Ranged at the ships, let all our squadrons shine

In flaming arms, a long-extended line:  
In the dread front let great Atrides stand,  
The first in danger, as in high command."

Shouts of acclaim the listening heroes raise,  
Then each to Heaven the due libations pays;  
Till sleep, descending o'er the tents, bestows  
The grateful blessings of desired repose."(214)