

BOOK XII.

ARGUMENT.

THE BATTLE AT THE GRECIAN WALL.

The Greeks having retired into their intrenchments, Hector attempts to force them; but it proving impossible to pass the ditch, Polydamas advises to quit their chariots, and manage the attack on foot. The Trojans follow his counsel; and having divided their army into five bodies of foot, begin the assault. But upon the signal of an eagle with a serpent in his talons, which appeared on the left hand of the Trojans, Polydamas endeavours to withdraw them again. This Hector opposes, and continues the attack; in which, after many actions, Sarpedon makes the first breach in the wall. Hector also, casting a stone of vast size, forces open one of the gates, and enters at the head of his troops, who victoriously pursue the Grecians even to their ships.

While thus the hero's pious cares attend
The cure and safety of his wounded friend,
Trojans and Greeks with clashing shields engage,
And mutual deaths are dealt with mutual rage.
Nor long the trench or lofty walls oppose;
With gods averse the ill-fated works arose;
Their powers neglected, and no victim slain,

The walls were raised, the trenches sunk in vain.

Without the gods, how short a period stands
The proudest monument of mortal hands!
This stood while Hector and Achilles raged.
While sacred Troy the warring hosts engaged;
But when her sons were slain, her city burn'd,
And what survived of Greece to Greece return'd;
Then Neptune and Apollo shook the shore,
Then Ida's summits pour'd their watery store;
Rhesus and Rhodius then unite their rills,
Caresus roaring down the stony hills,
Æsepus, Granicus, with mingled force,
And Xanthus foaming from his fruitful source;
And gulfy Simois, rolling to the main(224)
Helmets, and shields, and godlike heroes slain:
These, turn'd by Phoebus from their wonted ways,
Deluged the rampire nine continual days;
The weight of waters saps the yielding wall,
And to the sea the floating bulwarks fall.
Incessant cataracts the Thunderer pours,
And half the skies descend in sluicy showers.
The god of ocean, marching stern before,
With his huge trident wounds the trembling shore,
Vast stones and piles from their foundation heaves,
And whelms the smoky ruin in the waves.

Now smooth'd with sand, and levell'd by the flood,
No fragment tells where once the wonder stood;
In their old bounds the rivers roll again,
Shine 'twixt the hills, or wander o'er the plain.(225)

But this the gods in later times perform;
As yet the bulwark stood, and braved the storm;
The strokes yet echoed of contending powers;
War thunder'd at the gates, and blood distain'd the towers.
Smote by the arm of Jove with dire dismay,
Close by their hollow ships the Grecians lay:
Hector's approach in every wind they hear,
And Hector's fury every moment fear.
He, like a whirlwind, toss'd the scattering throng,
Mingled the troops, and drove the field along.
So 'midst the dogs and hunters' daring bands,
Fierce of his might, a boar or lion stands;
Arm'd foes around a dreadful circle form,
And hissing javelins rain an iron storm:
His powers untamed, their bold assault defy,
And where he turns the rout disperse or die:
He foams, he glares, he bounds against them all,
And if he falls, his courage makes him fall.
With equal rage encompass'd Hector glows;
Exhorts his armies, and the trenches shows.
The panting steeds impatient fury breathe,

And snort and tremble at the gulf beneath;
Just at the brink they neigh, and paw the ground,
And the turf trembles, and the skies resound.
Eager they view'd the prospect dark and deep,
Vast was the leap, and headlong hung the steep;
The bottom bare, (a formidable show!)
And bristled thick with sharpen'd stakes below.
The foot alone this strong defence could force,
And try the pass impervious to the horse.
This saw Polydamas; who, wisely brave,
Restrain'd great Hector, and this counsel gave:

"O thou, bold leader of the Trojan bands!
And you, confederate chiefs from foreign lands!
What entrance here can cumbrous chariots find,
The stakes beneath, the Grecian walls behind?
No pass through those, without a thousand wounds,
No space for combat in yon narrow bounds.
Proud of the favours mighty Jove has shown,
On certain dangers we too rashly run:
If 'tis will our haughty foes to tame,
Oh may this instant end the Grecian name!
Here, far from Argos, let their heroes fall,
And one great day destroy and bury all!
But should they turn, and here oppress our train,
What hopes, what methods of retreat remain?

Wedge'd in the trench, by our own troops confused,
In one promiscuous carnage crush'd and bruised,
All Troy must perish, if their arms prevail,
Nor shall a Trojan live to tell the tale.
Hear then, ye warriors! and obey with speed;
Back from the trenches let your steeds be led;
Then all alighting, wedge'd in firm array,
Proceed on foot, and Hector lead the way.
So Greece shall stoop before our conquering power,
And this (if Jove consent) her fatal hour."

This counsel pleased: the godlike Hector sprung
Swift from his seat; his clanging armour rung.
The chief's example follow'd by his train,
Each quits his car, and issues on the plain,
By orders strict the charioteers enjoin'd
Compel the coursers to their ranks behind.
The forces part in five distinguish'd bands,
And all obey their several chiefs' commands.
The best and bravest in the first conspire,
Pant for the fight, and threat the fleet with fire:
Great Hector glorious in the van of these,
Polydamas, and brave Cebriones.
Before the next the graceful Paris shines,
And bold Alcathous, and Agenor joins.
The sons of Priam with the third appear,

Deiphobus, and Helenas the seer;
In arms with these the mighty Asius stood,
Who drew from Hyrtacus his noble blood,
And whom Arisba's yellow coursers bore,
The coursers fed on Selle's winding shore.
Antenor's sons the fourth battalion guide,
And great Æneas, born on fountful Ide.
Divine Sarpedon the last band obey'd,
Whom Glaucus and Asteropaeus aid.
Next him, the bravest, at their army's head,
But he more brave than all the hosts he led.

Now with compacted shields in close array,
The moving legions speed their headlong way:
Already in their hopes they fire the fleet,
And see the Grecians gasping at their feet.

While every Trojan thus, and every aid,
The advice of wise Polydamas obey'd,
Asius alone, confiding in his car,
His vaunted coursers urged to meet the war.
Unhappy hero! and advised in vain;
Those wheels returning ne'er shall mark the plain;
No more those coursers with triumphant joy
Restore their master to the gates of Troy!
Black death attends behind the Grecian wall,

And great Idomeneus shall boast thy fall!
Fierce to the left he drives, where from the plain
The flying Grecians strove their ships to gain;
Swift through the wall their horse and chariots pass'd,
The gates half-open'd to receive the last.
Thither, exulting in his force, he flies:
His following host with clamours rend the skies:
To plunge the Grecians headlong in the main,
Such their proud hopes; but all their hopes were vain!

To guard the gates, two mighty chiefs attend,
Who from the Lapiths' warlike race descend;
This Polypoetes, great Perithous' heir,
And that Leonteus, like the god of war.
As two tall oaks, before the wall they rise;
Their roots in earth, their heads amidst the skies:
Whose spreading arms with leafy honours crown'd,
Forbid the tempest, and protect the ground;
High on the hills appears their stately form,
And their deep roots for ever brave the storm.
So graceful these, and so the shock they stand
Of raging Asius, and his furious band.
Orestes, Acamas, in front appear,
And OEnomaus and Thoon close the rear:
In vain their clamours shake the ambient fields,
In vain around them beat their hollow shields;

The fearless brothers on the Grecians call,
To guard their navies, and defend the wall.
Even when they saw Troy's sable troops impend,
And Greece tumultuous from her towers descend,
Forth from the portals rush'd the intrepid pair,
Opposed their breasts, and stood themselves the war.
So two wild boars spring furious from their den,
Roused with the cries of dogs and voice of men;
On every side the crackling trees they tear,
And root the shrubs, and lay the forest bare;
They gnash their tusks, with fire their eye-balls roll,
Till some wide wound lets out their mighty soul.
Around their heads the whistling javelins sung,
With sounding strokes their brazen targets rung;
Fierce was the fight, while yet the Grecian powers
Maintain'd the walls, and mann'd the lofty towers:
To save their fleet their last efforts they try,
And stones and darts in mingled tempests fly.

As when sharp Boreas blows abroad, and brings
The dreary winter on his frozen wings;
Beneath the low-hung clouds the sheets of snow
Descend, and whiten all the fields below:
So fast the darts on either army pour,
So down the rampires rolls the rocky shower:
Heavy, and thick, resound the batter'd shields,

And the deaf echo rattles round the fields.

With shame repulsed, with grief and fury driven,

The frantic Asius thus accuses Heaven:

"In powers immortal who shall now believe?

Can those too flatter, and can Jove deceive?

What man could doubt but Troy's victorious power

Should humble Greece, and this her fatal hour?

But like when wasps from hollow crannies drive,

To guard the entrance of their common hive,

Darkening the rock, while with unwearied wings

They strike the assailants, and infix their stings;

A race determined, that to death contend:

So fierce these Greeks their last retreats defend.

Gods! shall two warriors only guard their gates,

Repel an army, and defraud the fates?"

These empty accents mingled with the wind,

Nor moved great Jove's unalterable mind;

To godlike Hector and his matchless might

Was owed the glory of the destined fight.

Like deeds of arms through all the forts were tried,

And all the gates sustain'd an equal tide;

Through the long walls the stony showers were heard,

The blaze of flames, the flash of arms appear'd.

The spirit of a god my breast inspire,

To raise each act to life, and sing with fire!
While Greece unconquer'd kept alive the war,
Secure of death, confiding in despair;
And all her guardian gods, in deep dismay,
With unassisting arms deplored the day.

Even yet the dauntless Lapithae maintain
The dreadful pass, and round them heap the slain.
First Damasus, by Polypoetes' steel,
Pierced through his helmet's brazen visor, fell;
The weapon drank the mingled brains and gore!
The warrior sinks, tremendous now no more!
Next Ormenus and Pylon yield their breath:
Nor less Leonteus strews the field with death;
First through the belt Hippomachus he gored,
Then sudden waved his unresisted sword:
Antiphates, as through the ranks he broke,
The falchion struck, and fate pursued the stroke:
Iamenus, Orestes, Menon, bled;
And round him rose a monument of dead.
Meantime, the bravest of the Trojan crew,
Bold Hector and Polydamas, pursue;
Fierce with impatience on the works to fall,
And wrap in rolling flames the fleet and wall.
These on the farther bank now stood and gazed,
By Heaven alarm'd, by prodigies amazed:

A signal omen stopp'd the passing host,
Their martial fury in their wonder lost.
Jove's bird on sounding pinions beat the skies;
A bleeding serpent of enormous size,
His talons truss'd; alive, and curling round,
He stung the bird, whose throat received the wound:
Mad with the smart, he drops the fatal prey,
In airy circles wings his painful way,
Floats on the winds, and rends the heaven with cries:
Amidst the host the fallen serpent lies.
They, pale with terror, mark its spires unroll'd,
And Jove's portent with beating hearts behold.
Then first Polydamas the silence broke,
Long weigh'd the signal, and to Hector spoke:

"How oft, my brother, thy reproach I bear,
For words well meant, and sentiments sincere?
True to those counsels which I judge the best,
I tell the faithful dictates of my breast.
To speak his thoughts is every freeman's right,
In peace, in war, in council, and in fight;
And all I move, deferring to thy sway,
But tends to raise that power which I obey.
Then hear my words, nor may my words be vain!
Seek not this day the Grecian ships to gain;
For sure, to warn us, Jove his omen sent,

And thus my mind explains its clear event:
The victor eagle, whose sinister flight
Retards our host, and fills our hearts with fright,
Dismiss'd his conquest in the middle skies,
Allow'd to seize, but not possess the prize;
Thus, though we gird with fires the Grecian fleet,
Though these proud bulwarks tumble at our feet,
Toils unforeseen, and fiercer, are decreed;
More woes shall follow, and more heroes bleed.
So bodes my soul, and bids me thus advise;
For thus a skilful seer would read the skies."

To him then Hector with disdain return'd:
(Fierce as he spoke, his eyes with fury burn'd:)
"Are these the faithful counsels of thy tongue?
Thy will is partial, not thy reason wrong:
Or if the purpose of thy heart thou vent,
Sure heaven resumes the little sense it lent.
What coward counsels would thy madness move
Against the word, the will reveal'd of Jove?
The leading sign, the irrevocable nod,
And happy thunders of the favouring god,
These shall I slight, and guide my wavering mind
By wandering birds that flit with every wind?
Ye vagrants of the sky! your wings extend,
Or where the suns arise, or where descend;

To right, to left, unheeded take your way,
While I the dictates of high heaven obey.
Without a sign his sword the brave man draws,
And asks no omen but his country's cause.
But why should'st thou suspect the war's success?
None fears it more, as none promotes it less:
Though all our chiefs amidst yon ships expire,
Trust thy own cowardice to escape their fire.
Troy and her sons may find a general grave,
But thou canst live, for thou canst be a slave.
Yet should the fears that wary mind suggests
Spread their cold poison through our soldiers' breasts,
My javelin can revenge so base a part,
And free the soul that quivers in thy heart."

Furious he spoke, and, rushing to the wall,
Calls on his host; his host obey the call;
With ardour follow where their leader flies:
Redoubling clamours thunder in the skies.
Jove breathes a whirlwind from the hills of Ide,
And drifts of dust the clouded navy hide;
He fills the Greeks with terror and dismay,
And gives great Hector the predestined day.
Strong in themselves, but stronger in his aid,
Close to the works their rigid siege they laid.
In vain the mounds and massy beams defend,

While these they undermine, and those they rend;
Upheaved the piles that prop the solid wall;
And heaps on heaps the smoky ruins fall.
Greece on her ramparts stands the fierce alarms;
The crowded bulwarks blaze with waving arms,
Shield touching shield, a long refulgent row;
Whence hissing darts, incessant, rain below.
The bold Ajaces fly from tower to tower,
And rouse, with flame divine, the Grecian power.
The generous impulse every Greek obeys;
Threats urge the fearful; and the valiant, praise.

"Fellows in arms! whose deeds are known to fame,
And you, whose ardour hopes an equal name!
Since not alike endued with force or art;
Behold a day when each may act his part!
A day to fire the brave, and warm the cold,
To gain new glories, or augment the old.
Urge those who stand, and those who faint, excite;
Drown Hector's vaunts in loud exhortations of fight;
Conquest, not safety, fill the thoughts of all;
Seek not your fleet, but sally from the wall;
So Jove once more may drive their routed train,
And Troy lie trembling in her walls again."

Their ardour kindles all the Grecian powers;

And now the stones descend in heavier showers.
As when high Jove his sharp artillery forms,
And opes his cloudy magazine of storms;
In winter's bleak un comfortable reign,
A snowy inundation hides the plain;
He stills the winds, and bids the skies to sleep;
Then pours the silent tempest thick and deep;
And first the mountain-tops are cover'd o'er,
Then the green fields, and then the sandy shore;
Bent with the weight, the nodding woods are seen,
And one bright waste hides all the works of men:
The circling seas, alone absorbing all,
Drink the dissolving fleeces as they fall:
So from each side increased the stony rain,
And the white ruin rises o'er the plain.

Thus godlike Hector and his troops contend
To force the ramparts, and the gates to rend:
Nor Troy could conquer, nor the Greeks would yield,
Till great Sarpedon tower'd amid the field;
For mighty Jove inspired with martial flame
His matchless son, and urged him on to fame.
In arms he shines, conspicuous from afar,
And bears aloft his ample shield in air;
Within whose orb the thick bull-hides were roll'd,
Ponderous with brass, and bound with ductile gold:

And while two pointed javelins arm his hands,
Majestic moves along, and leads his Lycian bands.

So press'd with hunger, from the mountain's brow
Descends a lion on the flocks below;
So stalks the lordly savage o'er the plain,
In sullen majesty, and stern disdain:
In vain loud mastiffs bay him from afar,
And shepherds gall him with an iron war;
Regardless, furious, he pursues his way;
He foams, he roars, he rends the panting prey.

Resolved alike, divine Sarpedon glows
With generous rage that drives him on the foes.
He views the towers, and meditates their fall,
To sure destruction dooms the aspiring wall;
Then casting on his friend an ardent look,
Fired with the thirst of glory, thus he spoke:

"Why boast we, Glaucus! our extended reign,(226)
Where Xanthus' streams enrich the Lycian plain,
Our numerous herds that range the fruitful field,
And hills where vines their purple harvest yield,
Our foaming bowls with purer nectar crown'd,
Our feasts enhanced with music's sprightly sound?
Why on those shores are we with joy survey'd,

Admired as heroes, and as gods obey'd,
Unless great acts superior merit prove,
And vindicate the bounteous powers above?
'Tis ours, the dignity they give to grace;
The first in valour, as the first in place;
That when with wondering eyes our martial bands
Behold our deeds transcending our commands,
Such, they may cry, deserve the sovereign state,
Whom those that envy dare not imitate!
Could all our care elude the gloomy grave,
Which claims no less the fearful and the brave,
For lust of fame I should not vainly dare
In fighting fields, nor urge thy soul to war.
But since, alas! ignoble age must come,
Disease, and death's inexorable doom
The life, which others pay, let us bestow,
And give to fame what we to nature owe;
Brave though we fall, and honour'd if we live,
Or let us glory gain, or glory give!"

He said; his words the listening chief inspire
With equal warmth, and rouse the warrior's fire;
The troops pursue their leaders with delight,
Rush to the foe, and claim the promised fight.
Menestheus from on high the storm beheld
Threatening the fort, and blackening in the field:

Around the walls he gazed, to view from far
What aid appear'd to avert the approaching war,
And saw where Teucer with the Ajaces stood,
Of fight insatiate, prodigal of blood.
In vain he calls; the din of helms and shields
Rings to the skies, and echoes through the fields,
The brazen hinges fly, the walls resound,
Heaven trembles, roar the mountains, thunders all the ground
Then thus to Thoos: "Hence with speed (he said),
And urge the bold Ajaces to our aid;
Their strength, united, best may help to bear
The bloody labours of the doubtful war:
Hither the Lycian princes bend their course,
The best and bravest of the hostile force.
But if too fiercely there the foes contend,
Let Telamon, at least, our towers defend,
And Teucer haste with his unerring bow
To share the danger, and repel the foe."

Swift, at the word, the herald speeds along
The lofty ramparts, through the martial throng,
And finds the heroes bathed in sweat and gore,
Opposed in combat on the dusty shore.
"Ye valiant leaders of our warlike bands!
Your aid (said Thoos) Peteus' son demands;
Your strength, united, best may help to bear

The bloody labours of the doubtful war:
Thither the Lycian princes bend their course,
The best and bravest of the hostile force.
But if too fiercely, here, the foes contend,
At least, let Telamon those towers defend,
And Teucer haste with his unerring bow
To share the danger, and repel the foe."

Straight to the fort great Ajax turn'd his care,
And thus bespoke his brothers of the war:
"Now, valiant Lycomedes! exert your might,
And, brave Oileus, prove your force in fight;
To you I trust the fortune of the field,
Till by this arm the foe shall be repell'd:
That done, expect me to complete the day
Then with his sevenfold shield he strode away.
With equal steps bold Teucer press'd the shore,
Whose fatal bow the strong Pandion bore.

High on the walls appear'd the Lycian powers,
Like some black tempest gathering round the towers:
The Greeks, oppress'd, their utmost force unite,
Prepared to labour in the unequal fight:
The war renews, mix'd shouts and groans arise;
Tumultuous clamour mounts, and thickens in the skies.
Fierce Ajax first the advancing host invades,

And sends the brave Epicles to the shades,
Sarpedon's friend. Across the warrior's way,
Rent from the walls, a rocky fragment lay;
In modern ages not the strongest swain
Could heave the unwieldy burden from the plain:
He poised, and swung it round; then toss'd on high,
It flew with force, and labour'd up the sky;
Full on the Lycian's helmet thundering down,
The ponderous ruin crush'd his batter'd crown.
As skilful divers from some airy steep
Headlong descend, and shoot into the deep,
So falls Epicles; then in groans expires,
And murmuring to the shades the soul retires.

While to the ramparts daring Glaucus drew,
From Teucer's hand a winged arrow flew;
The bearded shaft the destined passage found,
And on his naked arm inflicts a wound.
The chief, who fear'd some foe's insulting boast
Might stop the progress of his warlike host,
Conceal'd the wound, and, leaping from his height
Retired reluctant from the unfinish'd fight.
Divine Sarpedon with regret beheld
Disabled Glaucus slowly quit the field;
His beating breast with generous ardour glows,
He springs to fight, and flies upon the foes.

Alcmaon first was doom'd his force to feel;
Deep in his breast he plunged the pointed steel;
Then from the yawning wound with fury tore
The spear, pursued by gushing streams of gore:
Down sinks the warrior with a thundering sound,
His brazen armour rings against the ground.

Swift to the battlement the victor flies,
Tugs with full force, and every nerve applies:
It shakes; the ponderous stones disjointed yield;
The rolling ruins smoke along the field.
A mighty breach appears; the walls lie bare;
And, like a deluge, rushes in the war.
At once bold Teucer draws the twanging bow,
And Ajax sends his javelin at the foe;
Fix'd in his belt the feather'd weapon stood,
And through his buckler drove the trembling wood;
But Jove was present in the dire debate,
To shield his offspring, and avert his fate.
The prince gave back, not meditating flight,
But urging vengeance, and severer fight;
Then raised with hope, and fired with glory's charms,
His fainting squadrons to new fury warms.
"O where, ye Lycians, is the strength you boast?
Your former fame and ancient virtue lost!
The breach lies open, but your chief in vain

Attempts alone the guarded pass to gain:
Unite, and soon that hostile fleet shall fall:
The force of powerful union conquers all."

This just rebuke inflamed the Lycian crew;
They join, they thicken, and the assault renew:
Unmoved the embodied Greeks their fury dare,
And fix'd support the weight of all the war;
Nor could the Greeks repel the Lycian powers,
Nor the bold Lycians force the Grecian towers.
As on the confines of adjoining grounds,
Two stubborn swains with blows dispute their bounds;
They tug, they sweat; but neither gain, nor yield,
One foot, one inch, of the contended field;
Thus obstinate to death, they fight, they fall;
Nor these can keep, nor those can win the wall.
Their manly breasts are pierced with many a wound,
Loud strokes are heard, and rattling arms resound;
The copious slaughter covers all the shore,
And the high ramparts drip with human gore.

As when two scales are charged with doubtful loads,
From side to side the trembling balance nods,
(While some laborious matron, just and poor,
With nice exactness weighs her woolly store,)
Till poised aloft, the resting beam suspends

Each equal weight; nor this, nor that, descends:(227)
So stood the war, till Hector's matchless might,
With fates prevailing, turn'd the scale of fight.
Fierce as a whirlwind up the walls he flies,
And fires his host with loud repeated cries.
"Advance, ye Trojans! lend your valiant hands,
Haste to the fleet, and toss the blazing brands!"
They hear, they run; and, gathering at his call,
Raise scaling engines, and ascend the wall:
Around the works a wood of glittering spears
Shoots up, and all the rising host appears.
A ponderous stone bold Hector heaved to throw,
Pointed above, and rough and gross below:
Not two strong men the enormous weight could raise,
Such men as live in these degenerate days:
Yet this, as easy as a swain could bear
The snowy fleece, he toss'd, and shook in air;
For Jove upheld, and lighten'd of its load
The unwieldy rock, the labour of a god.
Thus arm'd, before the folded gates he came,
Of massy substance, and stupendous frame;
With iron bars and brazen hinges strong,
On lofty beams of solid timber hung:
Then thundering through the planks with forceful sway,
Drives the sharp rock; the solid beams give way,
The folds are shatter'd; from the crackling door

Leap the resounding bars, the flying hinges roar.
Now rushing in, the furious chief appears,
Gloomy as night! and shakes two shining spears:(228)
A dreadful gleam from his bright armour came,
And from his eye-balls flash'd the living flame.
He moves a god, resistless in his course,
And seems a match for more than mortal force.
Then pouring after, through the gaping space,
A tide of Trojans flows, and fills the place;
The Greeks behold, they tremble, and they fly;
The shore is heap'd with death, and tumult rends the sky.