

BOOK XVIII.

ARGUMENT.

THE GRIEF OF ACHILLES, AND NEW ARMOUR MADE HIM BY VULCAN.

The news of the death of Patroclus is brought to Achilles by Antilochus. Thetis, hearing his lamentations, comes with all her sea-nymphs to comfort him. The speeches of the mother and son on this occasion. Iris appears to Achilles by the command of Juno, and orders him to show himself at the head of the intrenchments. The sight of him turns the fortunes of the day, and the body of Patroclus is carried off by the Greeks. The Trojans call a council, where Hector and Polydamas disagree in their opinions: but the advice of the former prevails, to remain encamped in the field. The grief of Achilles over the body of Patroclus.

Thetis goes to the palace of Vulcan to obtain new arms for her son. The description of the wonderful works of Vulcan: and, lastly, that noble one of the shield of Achilles.

The latter part of the nine-and-twentieth day, and the night ensuing, take up this book: the scene is at Achilles' tent on the sea-shore, from whence it changes to the palace of Vulcan.

Thus like the rage of fire the combat burns,(250)

And now it rises, now it sinks by turns.
Meanwhile, where Hellespont's broad waters flow,
Stood Nestor's son, the messenger of woe:
There sat Achilles, shaded by his sails,
On hoisted yards extended to the gales;
Pensive he sat; for all that fate design'd
Rose in sad prospect to his boding mind.
Thus to his soul he said: "Ah! what constrains
The Greeks, late victors, now to quit the plains?
Is this the day, which heaven so long ago
Ordain'd, to sink me with the weight of woe?
(So Thetis warn'd;) when by a Trojan hand
The bravest of the Myrmidonian band
Should lose the light! Fulfilled is that decree;
Fallen is the warrior, and Patroclus he!
In vain I charged him soon to quit the plain,
And warn'd to shun Hectorean force in vain!"

Thus while he thinks, Antilochus appears,
And tells the melancholy tale with tears.
"Sad tidings, son of Peleus! thou must hear;
And wretched I, the unwilling messenger!
Dead is Patroclus! For his corpse they fight;
His naked corpse: his arms are Hector's right."

A sudden horror shot through all the chief,

And wrapp'd his senses in the cloud of grief;
Cast on the ground, with furious hands he spread
The scorching ashes o'er his graceful head;
His purple garments, and his golden hairs,
Those he deforms with dust, and these he tears;
On the hard soil his groaning breast he threw,
And roll'd and grovell'd, as to earth he grew.
The virgin captives, with disorder'd charms,
(Won by his own, or by Patroclus' arms,)
Rush'd from their tents with cries; and gathering round,
Beat their white breasts, and fainted on the ground:
While Nestor's son sustains a manlier part,
And mourns the warrior with a warrior's heart;
Hangs on his arms, amidst his frantic woe,
And oft prevents the meditated blow.

Far in the deep abysses of the main,(251)
With hoary Nereus, and the watery train,
The mother-goddess from her crystal throne
Heard his loud cries, and answer'd groan for groan.
The circling Nereids with their mistress weep,
And all the sea-green sisters of the deep.
Thalia, Glauce (every watery name),
Nesaea mild, and silver Spio came:
Cymothoe and Cymodoce were nigh,
And the blue languish of soft Alia's eye.

Their locks Actaea and Limnoria rear,
Then Proto, Doris, Panope appear,
Thoa, Pherusa, Doto, Melita;
Agave gentle, and Amphithoe gay:
Next Callianira, Callianassa show
Their sister looks; Dexamene the slow,
And swift Dynamene, now cut the tides:
Iaera now the verdant wave divides:
Nemertes with Apseudes lifts the head,
Bright Galatea quits her pearly bed;
These Orythia, Clymene, attend,
Maera, Amphinome, the train extend;
And black Janira, and Janassa fair,
And Amatheia with her amber hair.
All these, and all that deep in ocean held
Their sacred seats, the glimmering grotto fill'd;
Each beat her ivory breast with silent woe,
Till Thetis' sorrows thus began to flow:

"Hear me, and judge, ye sisters of the main!
How just a cause has Thetis to complain!
How wretched, were I mortal, were my fate!
How more than wretched in the immortal state!
Sprung from my bed a godlike hero came,
The bravest far that ever bore the name;
Like some fair olive, by my careful hand

He grew, he flourish'd and adorn'd the land
To Troy I sent him: but the fates ordain
He never, never must return again.
So short a space the light of heaven to view,
So short, alas! and fill'd with anguish too!
Hear how his sorrows echo through the shore!
I cannot ease them, but I must deplore;
I go at least to bear a tender part,
And mourn my loved-one with a mother's heart."

She said, and left the caverns of the main,
All bathed in tears; the melancholy train
Attend her way. Wide-opening part the tides,
While the long pomp the silver wave divides.
Approaching now, they touch'd the Trojan land;
Then, two by two, ascended up the strand.
The immortal mother, standing close beside
Her mournful offspring, to his sighs replied;
Along the coast their mingled clamours ran,
And thus the silver-footed dame began:

"Why mourns my son? thy late preferr'd request
The god has granted, and the Greeks distress'd:
Why mourns my son? thy anguish let me share,
Reveal the cause, and trust a parent's care."

He, deeply groaning--"To this cureless grief,
Not even the Thunderer's favour brings relief.
Patroclus--Ah!--say, goddess, can I boast
A pleasure now? revenge itself is lost;
Patroclus, loved of all my martial train,
Beyond mankind, beyond myself is slain!
Lost are those arms the gods themselves bestow'd
On Peleus; Hector bears the glorious load.
Cursed be that day, when all the powers above
Thy charms submitted to a mortal love:
O hadst thou still, a sister of the main,
Pursued the pleasures of the watery reign:
And happier Peleus, less ambitious, led
A mortal beauty to his equal bed!
Ere the sad fruit of thy unhappy womb
Had caused such sorrows past, and woes to come.
For soon, alas! that wretched offspring slain,
New woes, new sorrows, shall create again.
'Tis not in fate the alternate now to give;
Patroclus dead, Achilles hates to live.
Let me revenge it on proud Hector's heart,
Let his last spirit smoke upon my dart;
On these conditions will I breathe: till then,
I blush to walk among the race of men."

A flood of tears, at this, the goddess shed:

"Ah then, I see thee dying, see thee dead!
When Hector falls, thou diest."--"Let Hector die,
And let me fall! (Achilles made reply)
Far lies Patroclus from his native plain!
He fell, and falling, wish'd my aid in vain.
Ah then, since from this miserable day
I cast all hope of my return away;
Since, unrevenged, a hundred ghosts demand
The fate of Hector from Achilles' hand;
Since here, for brutal courage far renown'd,
I live an idle burden to the ground,
(Others in council famed for nobler skill,
More useful to preserve, than I to kill,)
Let me--But oh! ye gracious powers above!
Wrath and revenge from men and gods remove:
Far, far too dear to every mortal breast,
Sweet to the soul, as honey to the taste:
Gathering like vapours of a noxious kind
From fiery blood, and darkening all the mind.
Me Agamemnon urged to deadly hate;
'Tis past--I quell it; I resign to fate.
Yes--I will meet the murderer of my friend;
Or (if the gods ordain it) meet my end.
The stroke of fate the strongest cannot shun:
The great Alcides, Jove's unequall'd son,
To Juno's hate, at length resign'd his breath,

And sunk the victim of all-conquering death.
So shall Achilles fall! stretch'd pale and dead,
No more the Grecian hope, or Trojan dread!
Let me, this instant, rush into the fields,
And reap what glory life's short harvest yields.
Shall I not force some widow'd dame to tear
With frantic hands her long dishevell'd hair?
Shall I not force her breast to heave with sighs,
And the soft tears to trickle from her eyes?
Yes, I shall give the fair those mournful charms--
In vain you hold me--Hence! my arms! my arms!--
Soon shall the sanguine torrent spread so wide,
That all shall know Achilles swells the tide."

"My son (coerulean Thetis made reply,
To fate submitting with a secret sigh,
The host to succour, and thy friends to save,
Is worthy thee; the duty of the brave.
But canst thou, naked, issue to the plains?
Thy radiant arms the Trojan foe detains.
Insulting Hector bears the spoils on high,
But vainly glories, for his fate is nigh.
Yet, yet awhile thy generous ardour stay;
Assured, I meet thee at the dawn of day,
Charged with refulgent arms (a glorious load),
Vulcanian arms, the labour of a god."

Then turning to the daughters of the main,
The goddess thus dismiss'd her azure train:

"Ye sister Nereids! to your deeps descend;
Haste, and our father's sacred seat attend;
I go to find the architect divine,
Where vast Olympus' starry summits shine:
So tell our hoary sire"--This charge she gave:
The sea-green sisters plunge beneath the wave:
Thetis once more ascends the bless'd abodes,
And treads the brazen threshold of the gods.

And now the Greeks from furious Hector's force,
Urge to broad Hellespont their headlong course;
Nor yet their chiefs Patroclus' body bore
Safe through the tempest to the tented shore.
The horse, the foot, with equal fury join'd,
Pour'd on the rear, and thunder'd close behind:
And like a flame through fields of ripen'd corn,
The rage of Hector o'er the ranks was borne.
Thrice the slain hero by the foot he drew;
Thrice to the skies the Trojan clamours flew:
As oft the Ajaces his assault sustain;
But check'd, he turns; repuls'd, attacks again.
With fiercer shouts his lingering troops he fires,

Nor yields a step, nor from his post retires:
So watchful shepherds strive to force, in vain,
The hungry lion from a carcase slain.
Even yet Patroclus had he borne away,
And all the glories of the extended day,
Had not high Juno from the realms of air,
Secret, despatch'd her trusty messenger.
The various goddess of the showery bow,
Shot in a whirlwind to the shore below;
To great Achilles at his ships she came,
And thus began the many-colour'd dame:

"Rise, son of Peleus! rise, divinely brave!
Assist the combat, and Patroclus save:
For him the slaughter to the fleet they spread,
And fall by mutual wounds around the dead.
To drag him back to Troy the foe contends:
Nor with his death the rage of Hector ends:
A prey to dogs he dooms the corse to lie,
And marks the place to fix his head on high.
Rise, and prevent (if yet you think of fame)
Thy friend's disgrace, thy own eternal shame!"

"Who sends thee, goddess, from the ethereal skies?"
Achilles thus. And Iris thus replies:

"I come, Pelides! from the queen of Jove,
The immortal empress of the realms above;
Unknown to him who sits remote on high,
Unknown to all the synod of the sky."

"Thou comest in vain (he cries, with fury warm'd);
Arms I have none, and can I fight unarm'd?
Unwilling as I am, of force I stay,
Till Thetis bring me at the dawn of day
Vulcanian arms: what other can I wield,
Except the mighty Telamonian shield?
That, in my friend's defence, has Ajax spread,
While his strong lance around him heaps the dead:
The gallant chief defends Menoetius' son,
And does what his Achilles should have done."

"Thy want of arms (said Iris) well we know;
But though unarm'd, yet clad in terrors, go!
Let but Achilles o'er yon trench appear,
Proud Troy shall tremble, and consent to fear;
Greece from one glance of that tremendous eye
Shall take new courage, and disdain to fly."

She spoke, and pass'd in air. The hero rose:
Her aegis Pallas o'er his shoulder throws;
Around his brows a golden cloud she spread;
A stream of glory flamed above his head.

As when from some beleaguer'd town arise
The smokes, high curling to the shaded skies;
(Seen from some island, o'er the main afar,
When men distress'd hang out the sign of war;)
Soon as the sun in ocean hides his rays,
Thick on the hills the flaming beacons blaze;
With long-projected beams the seas are bright,
And heaven's high arch reflects the ruddy light:
So from Achilles' head the splendours rise,
Reflecting blaze on blaze against the skies.
Forth march'd the chief, and distant from the crowd,
High on the rampart raised his voice aloud;
With her own shout Minerva swells the sound;
Troy starts astonish'd, and the shores rebound.
As the loud trumpet's brazen mouth from far
With shrilling clangour sounds the alarm of war,
Struck from the walls, the echoes float on high,
And the round bulwarks and thick towers reply;
So high his brazen voice the hero rear'd:
Hosts dropp'd their arms, and trembled as they heard:
And back the chariots roll, and coursers bound,
And steeds and men lie mingled on the ground.
Aghast they see the living lightnings play,
And turn their eyeballs from the flashing ray.
Thrice from the trench his dreadful voice he raised,
And thrice they fled, confounded and amazed.

Twelve in the tumult wedged, untimely rush'd
On their own spears, by their own chariots crush'd:
While, shielded from the darts, the Greeks obtain
The long-contended carcase of the slain.

A lofty bier the breathless warrior bears:
Around, his sad companions melt in tears.
But chief Achilles, bending down his head,
Pours unavailing sorrows o'er the dead,
Whom late triumphant, with his steeds and car,
He sent refulgent to the field of war;
(Unhappy change!) now senseless, pale, he found,
Stretch'd forth, and gash'd with many a gaping wound.

Meantime, unwearied with his heavenly way,
In ocean's waves the unwilling light of day
Quench'd his red orb, at Juno's high command,
And from their labours eased the Achaian band.
The frighted Trojans (panting from the war,
Their steeds unharness'd from the weary car)
A sudden council call'd: each chief appear'd
In haste, and standing; for to sit they fear'd.
'Twas now no season for prolong'd debate;
They saw Achilles, and in him their fate.
Silent they stood: Polydamas at last,
Skill'd to discern the future by the past,

The son of Panthus, thus express'd his fears
(The friend of Hector, and of equal years;
The self-same night to both a being gave,
One wise in council, one in action brave):

"In free debate, my friends, your sentence speak;
For me, I move, before the morning break,
To raise our camp: too dangerous here our post,
Far from Troy walls, and on a naked coast.
I deem'd not Greece so dreadful, while engaged
In mutual feuds her king and hero raged;
Then, while we hoped our armies might prevail
We boldly camp'd beside a thousand sail.
I dread Pelides now: his rage of mind
Not long continues to the shores confined,
Nor to the fields, where long in equal fray
Contending nations won and lost the day;
For Troy, for Troy, shall henceforth be the strife,
And the hard contest not for fame, but life.
Haste then to Ilion, while the favouring night
Detains these terrors, keeps that arm from fight.
If but the morrow's sun behold us here,
That arm, those terrors, we shall feel, not fear;
And hearts that now disdain, shall leap with joy,
If heaven permit them then to enter Troy.
Let not my fatal prophecy be true,

Nor what I tremble but to think, ensue.
Whatever be our fate, yet let us try
What force of thought and reason can supply;
Let us on counsel for our guard depend;
The town her gates and bulwarks shall defend.
When morning dawns, our well-appointed powers,
Array'd in arms, shall line the lofty towers.
Let the fierce hero, then, when fury calls,
Vent his mad vengeance on our rocky walls,
Or fetch a thousand circles round the plain,
Till his spent coursers seek the fleet again:
So may his rage be tired, and labour'd down!
And dogs shall tear him ere he sack the town."

"Return! (said Hector, fired with stern disdain)
What! coop whole armies in our walls again?
Was't not enough, ye valiant warriors, say,
Nine years imprison'd in those towers ye lay?
Wide o'er the world was Ilion famed of old
For brass exhaustless, and for mines of gold:
But while inglorious in her walls we stay'd,
Sunk were her treasures, and her stores decay'd;
The Phrygians now her scatter'd spoils enjoy,
And proud Maeonia wastes the fruits of Troy.
Great Jove at length my arms to conquest calls,
And shuts the Grecians in their wooden walls,

Darest thou dispirit whom the gods incite?
Flies any Trojan? I shall stop his flight.
To better counsel then attention lend;
Take due refreshment, and the watch attend.
If there be one whose riches cost him care,
Forth let him bring them for the troops to share;
'Tis better generously bestow'd on those,
Than left the plunder of our country's foes.
Soon as the morn the purple orient warms,
Fierce on yon navy will we pour our arms.
If great Achilles rise in all his might,
His be the danger: I shall stand the fight.
Honour, ye gods! or let me gain or give;
And live he glorious, whosoe'er shall live!
Mars is our common lord, alike to all;
And oft the victor triumphs, but to fall."

The shouting host in loud applauses join'd;
So Pallas robb'd the many of their mind;
To their own sense condemn'd, and left to choose
The worst advice, the better to refuse.

While the long night extends her sable reign,
Around Patroclus mourn'd the Grecian train.
Stern in superior grief Pelides stood;
Those slaughtering arms, so used to bathe in blood,

Now clasp his clay-cold limbs: then gushing start
The tears, and sighs burst from his swelling heart.
The lion thus, with dreadful anguish stung,
Roars through the desert, and demands his young;
When the grim savage, to his rifled den
Too late returning, snuffs the track of men,
And o'er the vales and o'er the forest bounds;
His clamorous grief the bellowing wood resounds.
So grieves Achilles; and, impetuous, vents
To all his Myrmidons his loud laments.

"In what vain promise, gods! did I engage,
When to console Menoetius' feeble age,
I vowed his much-loved offspring to restore,
Charged with rich spoils, to fair Opuntia's shore?(252)
But mighty Jove cuts short, with just disdain,
The long, long views of poor designing man!
One fate the warrior and the friend shall strike,
And Troy's black sands must drink our blood alike:
Me too a wretched mother shall deplore,
An aged father never see me more!
Yet, my Patroclus! yet a space I stay,
Then swift pursue thee on the darksome way.
Ere thy dear relics in the grave are laid,
Shall Hector's head be offer'd to thy shade;
That, with his arms, shall hang before thy shrine;

And twelve, the noblest of the Trojan line,
Sacred to vengeance, by this hand expire;
Their lives effused around thy flaming pyre.
Thus let me lie till then! thus, closely press'd,
Bathe thy cold face, and sob upon thy breast!
While Trojan captives here thy mourners stay,
Weep all the night and murmur all the day:
Spoils of my arms, and thine; when, wasting wide,
Our swords kept time, and conquer'd side by side."

He spoke, and bade the sad attendants round
Cleanse the pale corse, and wash each honour'd wound.
A massy caldron of stupendous frame
They brought, and placed it o'er the rising flame:
Then heap'd the lighted wood; the flame divides
Beneath the vase, and climbs around the sides:
In its wide womb they pour the rushing stream;
The boiling water bubbles to the brim.
The body then they bathe with pious toil,
Embalm the wounds, anoint the limbs with oil,
High on a bed of state extended laid,
And decent cover'd with a linen shade;
Last o'er the dead the milk-white veil they threw;
That done, their sorrows and their sighs renew.

Meanwhile to Juno, in the realms above,

(His wife and sister,) spoke almighty Jove.

"At last thy will prevails: great Peleus' son

Rises in arms: such grace thy Greeks have won.

Say (for I know not), is their race divine,

And thou the mother of that martial line?"

"What words are these? (the imperial dame replies,

While anger flash'd from her majestic eyes)

Succour like this a mortal arm might lend,

And such success mere human wit attend:

And shall not I, the second power above,

Heaven's queen, and consort of the thundering Jove,

Say, shall not I one nation's fate command,

Not wreak my vengeance on one guilty land?"

So they. Meanwhile the silver-footed dame

Reach'd the Vulcanian dome, eternal frame!

High-eminent amid the works divine,

Where heaven's far-beaming brazen mansions shine.

There the lame architect the goddess found,

Obscure in smoke, his forges flaming round,

While bathed in sweat from fire to fire he flew;

And puffing loud, the roaring billows blew.

That day no common task his labour claim'd:

Full twenty tripods for his hall he framed,

That placed on living wheels of massy gold,

(Wondrous to tell,) instinct with spirit roll'd
From place to place, around the bless'd abodes
Self-moved, obedient to the beck of gods:
For their fair handles now, o'erwrought with flowers,
In moulds prepared, the glowing ore he pours.
Just as responsive to his thought the frame
Stood prompt to move, the azure goddess came:
Charis, his spouse, a grace divinely fair,
(With purple fillets round her braided hair,)
Observed her entering; her soft hand she press'd,
And, smiling, thus the watery queen address'd:

"What, goddess! this unusual favour draws?
All hail, and welcome! whatsoever the cause;
Till now a stranger, in a happy hour
Approach, and taste the dainties of the bower."

High on a throne, with stars of silver graced,
And various artifice, the queen she placed;
A footstool at her feet: then calling, said,
"Vulcan, draw near, 'tis Thetis asks your aid."
"Thetis (replied the god) our powers may claim,
An ever-dear, an ever-honour'd name!
When my proud mother hurl'd me from the sky,
(My awkward form, it seems, displeas'd her eye,)
She, and Eurynome, my griefs redress'd,

And soft received me on their silver breast.
Even then these arts employ'd my infant thought:
Chains, bracelets, pendants, all their toys, I wrought.
Nine years kept secret in the dark abode,
Secure I lay, conceal'd from man and god:
Deep in a cavern'd rock my days were led;
The rushing ocean murmur'd o'er my head.
Now, since her presence glads our mansion, say,
For such desert what service can I pay?
Vouchsafe, O Thetis! at our board to share
The genial rites, and hospitable fare;
While I the labours of the forge forego,
And bid the roaring bellows cease to blow."

Then from his anvil the lame artist rose;
Wide with distorted legs oblique he goes,
And stills the bellows, and (in order laid)
Locks in their chests his instruments of trade.
Then with a sponge the sooty workman dress'd
His brawny arms embrown'd, and hairy breast.
With his huge sceptre graced, and red attire,
Came halting forth the sovereign of the fire:
The monarch's steps two female forms uphold,
That moved and breathed in animated gold;
To whom was voice, and sense, and science given
Of works divine (such wonders are in heaven!)

On these supported, with unequal gait,
He reach'd the throne where pensive Thetis sate;
There placed beside her on the shining frame,
He thus address'd the silver-footed dame:

"Thee, welcome, goddess! what occasion calls
(So long a stranger) to these honour'd walls?
'Tis thine, fair Thetis, the command to lay,
And Vulcan's joy and duty to obey."

To whom the mournful mother thus replies:
(The crystal drops stood trembling in her eyes:)
"O Vulcan! say, was ever breast divine
So pierced with sorrows, so o'erwhelm'd as mine?
Of all the goddesses, did Jove prepare
For Thetis only such a weight of care?
I, only I, of all the watery race
By force subjected to a man's embrace,
Who, sinking now with age and sorrow, pays
The mighty fine imposed on length of days.
Sprung from my bed, a godlike hero came,
The bravest sure that ever bore the name;
Like some fair plant beneath my careful hand
He grew, he flourish'd, and he graced the land:
To Troy I sent him! but his native shore
Never, ah never, shall receive him more;

(Even while he lives, he wastes with secret woe;)
Nor I, a goddess, can retard the blow!
Robb'd of the prize the Grecian suffrage gave,
The king of nations forced his royal slave:
For this he grieved; and, till the Greeks oppress'd
Required his arm, he sorrow'd unredress'd.
Large gifts they promise, and their elders send;
In vain--he arms not, but permits his friend
His arms, his steeds, his forces to employ:
He marches, combats, almost conquers Troy:
Then slain by Phoebus (Hector had the name)
At once resigns his armour, life, and fame.
But thou, in pity, by my prayer be won:
Grace with immortal arms this short-lived son,
And to the field in martial pomp restore,
To shine with glory, till he shines no more!"

To her the artist-god: "Thy griefs resign,
Secure, what Vulcan can, is ever thine.
O could I hide him from the Fates, as well,
Or with these hands the cruel stroke repel,
As I shall forge most envied arms, the gaze
Of wondering ages, and the world's amaze!"

Thus having said, the father of the fires
To the black labours of his forge retires.

Soon as he bade them blow, the bellows turn'd
Their iron mouths; and where the furnace burn'd,
Resounding breathed: at once the blast expires,
And twenty forges catch at once the fires;
Just as the god directs, now loud, now low,
They raise a tempest, or they gently blow;
In hissing flames huge silver bars are roll'd,
And stubborn brass, and tin, and solid gold;
Before, deep fix'd, the eternal anvils stand;
The ponderous hammer loads his better hand,
His left with tongs turns the vex'd metal round,
And thick, strong strokes, the doubling vaults rebound.

Then first he form'd the immense and solid shield;
Rich various artifice emblaz'd the field;
Its utmost verge a threefold circle bound;(253)
A silver chain suspends the massy round;
Five ample plates the broad expanse compose,
And godlike labours on the surface rose.
There shone the image of the master-mind:
There earth, there heaven, there ocean he design'd;
The unwearied sun, the moon completely round;
The starry lights that heaven's high convex crown'd;
The Pleiads, Hyads, with the northern team;
And great Orion's more refulgent beam;
To which, around the axle of the sky,

The Bear, revolving, points his golden eye,
Still shines exalted on the ethereal plain,
Nor bathes his blazing forehead in the main.

Two cities radiant on the shield appear,
The image one of peace, and one of war.
Here sacred pomp and genial feast delight,
And solemn dance, and hymeneal rite;
Along the street the new-made brides are led,
With torches flaming, to the nuptial bed:
The youthful dancers in a circle bound
To the soft flute, and cithern's silver sound:
Through the fair streets the matrons in a row
Stand in their porches, and enjoy the show.

There in the forum swarm a numerous train;
The subject of debate, a townsman slain:
One pleads the fine discharged, which one denied,
And bade the public and the laws decide:
The witness is produced on either hand:
For this, or that, the partial people stand:
The appointed heralds still the noisy bands,
And form a ring, with sceptres in their hands:
On seats of stone, within the sacred place,(254)
The reverend elders nodded o'er the case;
Alternate, each the attesting sceptre took,

And rising solemn, each his sentence spoke
Two golden talents lay amidst, in sight,
The prize of him who best adjudged the right.

Another part (a prospect differing far)(255)
Glow'd with refulgent arms, and horrid war.
Two mighty hosts a leaguer'd town embrace,
And one would pillage, one would burn the place.
Meantime the townsmen, arm'd with silent care,
A secret ambush on the foe prepare:
Their wives, their children, and the watchful band
Of trembling parents, on the turrets stand.
They march; by Pallas and by Mars made bold:
Gold were the gods, their radiant garments gold,
And gold their armour: these the squadron led,
August, divine, superior by the head!
A place for ambush fit they found, and stood,
Cover'd with shields, beside a silver flood.
Two spies at distance lurk, and watchful seem
If sheep or oxen seek the winding stream.
Soon the white flocks proceeded o'er the plains,
And steers slow-moving, and two shepherd swains;
Behind them piping on their reeds they go,
Nor fear an ambush, nor suspect a foe.
In arms the glittering squadron rising round
Rush sudden; hills of slaughter heap the ground;

Whole flocks and herds lie bleeding on the plains,
And, all amidst them, dead, the shepherd swains!
The bellowing oxen the besiegers hear;
They rise, take horse, approach, and meet the war,
They fight, they fall, beside the silver flood;
The waving silver seem'd to blush with blood.
There Tumult, there Contention stood confess'd;
One rear'd a dagger at a captive's breast;
One held a living foe, that freshly bled
With new-made wounds; another dragg'd a dead;
Now here, now there, the carcasses they tore:
Fate stalk'd amidst them, grim with human gore.
And the whole war came out, and met the eye;
And each bold figure seem'd to live or die.

A field deep furrow'd next the god design'd,(256)
The third time labour'd by the sweating hind;
The shining shares full many ploughmen guide,
And turn their crooked yokes on every side.
Still as at either end they wheel around,
The master meets them with his goblet crown'd;
The hearty draught rewards, renews their toil,
Then back the turning ploughshares cleave the soil:
Behind, the rising earth in ridges roll'd;
And sable look'd, though form'd of molten gold.

Another field rose high with waving grain;
With bended sickles stand the reaper train:
Here stretched in ranks the levell'd swarths are found,
Sheaves heap'd on sheaves here thicken up the ground.
With sweeping stroke the mowers strow the lands;
The gatherers follow, and collect in bands;
And last the children, in whose arms are borne
(Too short to gripe them) the brown sheaves of corn.
The rustic monarch of the field descries,
With silent glee, the heaps around him rise.
A ready banquet on the turf is laid,
Beneath an ample oak's expanded shade.
The victim ox the sturdy youth prepare;
The reaper's due repast, the woman's care.

Next, ripe in yellow gold, a vineyard shines,
Bent with the ponderous harvest of its vines;
A deeper dye the dangling clusters show,
And curl'd on silver props, in order glow:
A darker metal mix'd intrench'd the place;
And pales of glittering tin the inclosure grace.
To this, one pathway gently winding leads,
Where march a train with baskets on their heads,
(Fair maids and blooming youths,) that smiling bear
The purple product of the autumnal year.
To these a youth awakes the warbling strings,

Whose tender lay the fate of Linus sings;
In measured dance behind him move the train,
Tune soft the voice, and answer to the strain.

Here herds of oxen march, erect and bold,
Rear high their horns, and seem to low in gold,
And speed to meadows on whose sounding shores
A rapid torrent through the rushes roars:
Four golden herdsmen as their guardians stand,
And nine sour dogs complete the rustic band.
Two lions rushing from the wood appear'd;
And seized a bull, the master of the herd:
He roar'd: in vain the dogs, the men withstood;
They tore his flesh, and drank his sable blood.
The dogs (oft cheer'd in vain) desert the prey,
Dread the grim terrors, and at distance bay.

Next this, the eye the art of Vulcan leads
Deep through fair forests, and a length of meads,
And stalls, and folds, and scatter'd cots between;
And fleecy flocks, that whiten all the scene.

A figured dance succeeds; such once was seen
In lofty Gnossus for the Cretan queen,
Form'd by Daedalean art; a comely band
Of youths and maidens, bounding hand in hand.

The maids in soft simars of linen dress'd;
The youths all graceful in the glossy vest:
Of those the locks with flowery wreath inroll'd;
Of these the sides adorn'd with swords of gold,
That glittering gay, from silver belts depend.
Now all at once they rise, at once descend,
With well-taught feet: now shape in oblique ways,
Confusedly regular, the moving maze:
Now forth at once, too swift for sight, they spring,
And undistinguish'd blend the flying ring:
So whirls a wheel, in giddy circle toss'd,
And, rapid as it runs, the single spokes are lost.
The gazing multitudes admire around:
Two active tumblers in the centre bound;
Now high, now low, their pliant limbs they bend:
And general songs the sprightly revel end.

Thus the broad shield complete the artist crown'd
With his last hand, and pour'd the ocean round:
In living silver seem'd the waves to roll,
And beat the buckler's verge, and bound the whole.

This done, whate'er a warrior's use requires
He forged; the cuirass that outshone the fires,
The greaves of ductile tin, the helm impress'd
With various sculpture, and the golden crest.

At Thetis' feet the finished labour lay:
She, as a falcon cuts the aerial way,
Swift from Olympus' snowy summit flies,
And bears the blazing present through the skies.(257)