

BOOK XIX.

ARGUMENT.

THE RECONCILIATION OF ACHILLES AND AGAMEMNON.

Thetis brings to her son the armour made by Vulcan. She preserves the body of his friend from corruption, and commands him to assemble the army, to declare his resentment at an end. Agamemnon and Achilles are solemnly reconciled: the speeches, presents, and ceremonies on that occasion.

Achilles is with great difficulty persuaded to refrain from the battle till the troops have refreshed themselves by the advice of Ulysses. The presents are conveyed to the tent of Achilles, where Briseis laments over the body of Patroclus. The hero obstinately refuses all repast, and gives himself up to lamentations for his friend. Minerva descends to strengthen him, by the order of Jupiter. He arms for the fight: his appearance described. He addresses himself to his horses, and reproaches them with the death of Patroclus. One of them is miraculously endued with voice, and inspired to prophesy his fate: but the hero, not astonished by that prodigy, rushes with fury to the combat.

The thirteenth day. The scene is on the sea-shore.

Soon as Aurora heaved her Orient head
Above the waves, that blush'd with early red,

(With new-born day to gladden mortal sight,
And gild the courts of heaven with sacred light,)
The immortal arms the goddess-mother bears
Swift to her son: her son she finds in tears
Stretch'd o'er Patroclus' corse; while all the rest
Their sovereign's sorrows in their own express'd.
A ray divine her heavenly presence shed,
And thus, his hand soft touching, Thetis said:

"Suppress, my son, this rage of grief, and know
It was not man, but heaven, that gave the blow;
Behold what arms by Vulcan are bestow'd,
Arms worthy thee, or fit to grace a god."

Then drops the radiant burden on the ground;
Clang the strong arms, and ring the shores around;
Back shrink the Myrmidons with dread surprise,
And from the broad effulgence turn their eyes.
Unmoved the hero kindles at the show,
And feels with rage divine his bosom glow;
From his fierce eyeballs living flames expire,
And flash incessant like a stream of fire:
He turns the radiant gift: and feeds his mind
On all the immortal artist had design'd.

"Goddess! (he cried,) these glorious arms, that shine

With matchless art, confess the hand divine.
Now to the bloody battle let me bend:
But ah! the relics of my slaughter'd friend!
In those wide wounds through which his spirit fled,
Shall flies, and worms obscene, pollute the dead?"

"That unavailing care be laid aside,
(The azure goddess to her son replied,)
Whole years untouch'd, uninjured shall remain,
Fresh as in life, the carcase of the slain.
But go, Achilles, as affairs require,
Before the Grecian peers renounce thine ire:
Then uncontroll'd in boundless war engage,
And heaven with strength supply the mighty rage!"

Then in the nostrils of the slain she pour'd
Nectareous drops, and rich ambrosia shower'd
O'er all the corse. The flies forbid their prey,
Untouch'd it rests, and sacred from decay.
Achilles to the strand obedient went:
The shores resounded with the voice he sent.
The heroes heard, and all the naval train
That tend the ships, or guide them o'er the main,
Alarm'd, transported, at the well-known sound,
Frequent and full, the great assembly crown'd;
Studious to see the terror of the plain,

Long lost to battle, shine in arms again.
Tydides and Ulysses first appear,
Lame with their wounds, and leaning on the spear;
These on the sacred seats of council placed,
The king of men, Atrides, came the last:
He too sore wounded by Agenor's son.
Achilles (rising in the midst) begun:

"O monarch! better far had been the fate
Of thee, of me, of all the Grecian state,
If (ere the day when by mad passion sway'd,
Rash we contended for the black-eyed maid)
Preventing Dian had despatch'd her dart,
And shot the shining mischief to the heart!
Then many a hero had not press'd the shore,
Nor Troy's glad fields been fatten'd with our gore.
Long, long shall Greece the woes we caused bewail,
And sad posterity repeat the tale.
But this, no more the subject of debate,
Is past, forgotten, and resign'd to fate.
Why should, alas, a mortal man, as I,
Burn with a fury that can never die?
Here then my anger ends: let war succeed,
And even as Greece has bled, let Ilion bleed.
Now call the hosts, and try if in our sight
Troy yet shall dare to camp a second night!

I deem, their mightiest, when this arm he knows,
Shall 'scape with transport, and with joy repose."

He said: his finish'd wrath with loud acclaim
The Greeks accept, and shout Pelides' name.
When thus, not rising from his lofty throne,
In state unmoved, the king of men begun:

"Hear me, ye sons of Greece! with silence hear!
And grant your monarch an impartial ear:
Awhile your loud, untimely joy suspend,
And let your rash, injurious clamours end:
Unruly murmurs, or ill-timed applause,
Wrong the best speaker, and the justest cause.
Nor charge on me, ye Greeks, the dire debate:
Know, angry Jove, and all-compelling Fate,
With fell Erinnyes, urged my wrath that day
When from Achilles' arms I forced the prey.
What then could I against the will of heaven?
Not by myself, but vengeful Ate driven;
She, Jove's dread daughter, fated to infest
The race of mortals, enter'd in my breast.
Not on the ground that haughty fury treads,
But prints her lofty footsteps on the heads
Of mighty men; inflicting as she goes
Long-festering wounds, inextricable woes!

Of old, she stalk'd amid the bright abodes;
And Jove himself, the sire of men and gods,
The world's great ruler, felt her venom'd dart;
Deceived by Juno's wiles, and female art:
For when Alcmena's nine long months were run,
And Jove expected his immortal son,
To gods and goddesses the unruly joy
He show'd, and vaunted of his matchless boy:
'From us, (he said) this day an infant springs,
Fated to rule, and born a king of kings.'
Saturnia ask'd an oath, to vouch the truth,
And fix dominion on the favour'd youth.
The Thunderer, unsuspecting of the fraud,
Pronounced those solemn words that bind a god.
The joyful goddess, from Olympus' height,
Swift to Achaian Argos bent her flight:
Scarce seven moons gone, lay Sthenelus's wife;
She push'd her lingering infant into life:
Her charms Alcmena's coming labours stay,
And stop the babe, just issuing to the day.
Then bids Saturnius bear his oath in mind;
'A youth (said she) of Jove's immortal kind
Is this day born: from Sthenelus he springs,
And claims thy promise to be king of kings.'
Grief seized the Thunderer, by his oath engaged;
Stung to the soul, he sorrow'd, and he raged.

From his ambrosial head, where perch'd she sate,
He snatch'd the fury-goddess of debate,
The dread, the irrevocable oath he swore,
The immortal seats should ne'er behold her more;
And whirl'd her headlong down, for ever driven
From bright Olympus and the starry heaven:
Thence on the nether world the fury fell;
Ordain'd with man's contentious race to dwell.
Full oft the god his son's hard toils bemoan'd,
Cursed the dire fury, and in secret groan'd.(258)
Even thus, like Jove himself, was I misled,
While raging Hector heap'd our camps with dead.
What can the errors of my rage atone?
My martial troops, my treasures are thy own:
This instant from the navy shall be sent
Whate'er Ulysses promised at thy tent:
But thou! appeased, propitious to our prayer,
Resume thy arms, and shine again in war."

" O king of nations! whose superior sway
(Returns Achilles) all our hosts obey!
To keep or send the presents, be thy care;
To us, 'tis equal: all we ask is war.
While yet we talk, or but an instant shun
The fight, our glorious work remains undone.
Let every Greek, who sees my spear confound

The Trojan ranks, and deal destruction round,
With emulation, what I act survey,
And learn from thence the business of the day.

The son of Peleus thus; and thus replies
The great in councils, Ithacus the wise:
"Though, godlike, thou art by no toils oppress'd,
At least our armies claim repast and rest:
Long and laborious must the combat be,
When by the gods inspired, and led by thee.
Strength is derived from spirits and from blood,
And those augment by generous wine and food:
What boastful son of war, without that stay,
Can last a hero through a single day?
Courage may prompt; but, ebbing out his strength,
Mere unsupported man must yield at length;
Shrunk with dry famine, and with toils declined,
The drooping body will desert the mind:
But built anew with strength-conferring fare,
With limbs and soul untamed, he tires a war.
Dismiss the people, then, and give command.
With strong repast to hearten every band;
But let the presents to Achilles made,
In full assembly of all Greece be laid.
The king of men shall rise in public sight,
And solemn swear (observant of the rite)

That, spotless, as she came, the maid removes,
Pure from his arms, and guiltless of his loves.
That done, a sumptuous banquet shall be made,
And the full price of injured honour paid.
Stretch not henceforth, O prince.! thy sovereign might
Beyond the bounds of reason and of right;
'Tis the chief praise that e'er to kings belong'd,
To right with justice whom with power they wrong'd."

To him the monarch: "Just is thy decree,
Thy words give joy, and wisdom breathes in thee.
Each due atonement gladly I prepare;
And heaven regard me as I justly swear!
Here then awhile let Greece assembled stay,
Nor great Achilles grudge this short delay.
Till from the fleet our presents be convey'd,
And Jove attesting, the firm compact made.
A train of noble youths the charge shall bear;
These to select, Ulysses, be thy care:
In order rank'd let all our gifts appear,
And the fair train of captives close the rear:
Talthybius shall the victim boar convey,
Sacred to Jove, and yon bright orb of day."

"For this (the stern Æacides replies)
Some less important season may suffice,

When the stern fury of the war is o'er,
And wrath, extinguish'd, burns my breast no more.
By Hector slain, their faces to the sky,
All grim with gaping wounds, our heroes lie:
Those call to war! and might my voice incite,
Now, now, this instant, shall commence the fight:
Then, when the day's complete, let generous bowls,
And copious banquets, glad your weary souls.
Let not my palate know the taste of food,
Till my insatiate rage be cloy'd with blood:
Pale lies my friend, with wounds disfigured o'er,
And his cold feet are pointed to the door.
Revenge is all my soul! no meaner care,
Interest, or thought, has room to harbour there;
Destruction be my feast, and mortal wounds,
And scenes of blood, and agonizing sounds."

"O first of Greeks, (Ulysses thus rejoin'd,)
The best and bravest of the warrior kind!
Thy praise it is in dreadful camps to shine,
But old experience and calm wisdom mine.
Then hear my counsel, and to reason yield,
The bravest soon are satiate of the field;
Though vast the heaps that strow the crimson plain,
The bloody harvest brings but little gain:
The scale of conquest ever wavering lies,

Great Jove but turns it, and the victor dies!
The great, the bold, by thousands daily fall,
And endless were the grief, to weep for all.
Eternal sorrows what avails to shed?
Greece honours not with solemn fasts the dead:
Enough, when death demands the brave, to pay
The tribute of a melancholy day.
One chief with patience to the grave resign'd,
Our care devolves on others left behind.
Let generous food supplies of strength produce,
Let rising spirits flow from sprightly juice,
Let their warm heads with scenes of battle glow,
And pour new furies on the feebler foe.
Yet a short interval, and none shall dare
Expect a second summons to the war;
Who waits for that, the dire effects shall find,
If trembling in the ships he lags behind.
Embodied, to the battle let us bend,
And all at once on haughty Troy descend."

And now the delegates Ulysses sent,
To bear the presents from the royal tent:
The sons of Nestor, Phyleus' valiant heir,
Thias and Merion, thunderbolts of war,
With Lycomedes of Creiontian strain,
And Melanippus, form'd the chosen train.

Swift as the word was given, the youths obey'd:
Twice ten bright vases in the midst they laid;
A row of six fair tripods then succeeds;
And twice the number of high-bounding steeds:
Seven captives next a lovely line compose;
The eighth Briseis, like the blooming rose,
Closed the bright band: great Ithacus, before,
First of the train, the golden talents bore:
The rest in public view the chiefs dispose,
A splendid scene! then Agamemnon rose:
The boar Talthybius held: the Grecian lord
Drew the broad cutlass sheath'd beside his sword:
The stubborn bristles from the victim's brow
He crops, and offering meditates his vow.
His hands uplifted to the attesting skies,
On heaven's broad marble roof were fixed his eyes.
The solemn words a deep attention draw,
And Greece around sat thrill'd with sacred awe.

"Witness thou first! thou greatest power above,
All-good, all-wise, and all-surveying Jove!
And mother-earth, and heaven's revolving light,
And ye, fell furies of the realms of night,
Who rule the dead, and horrid woes prepare
For perjured kings, and all who falsely swear!
The black-eyed maid inviolate removes,

Pure and unconscious of my manly loves.
If this be false, heaven all its vengeance shed,
And levell'd thunder strike my guilty head!"

With that, his weapon deep inflicts the wound;
The bleeding savage tumbles to the ground;
The sacred herald rolls the victim slain
(A feast for fish) into the foaming main.

Then thus Achilles: "Hear, ye Greeks! and know
Whate'er we feel, 'tis Jove inflicts the woe;
Not else Atrides could our rage inflame,
Nor from my arms, unwilling, force the dame.
'Twas Jove's high will alone, o'erruling all,
That doom'd our strife, and doom'd the Greeks to fall.
Go then, ye chiefs! indulge the genial rite;
Achilles waits ye, and expects the fight."

The speedy council at his word adjourn'd:
To their black vessels all the Greeks return'd.
Achilles sought his tent. His train before
March'd onward, bending with the gifts they bore.
Those in the tents the squires industrious spread:
The foaming coursers to the stalls they led;
To their new seats the female captives move
Briseis, radiant as the queen of love,

Slow as she pass'd, beheld with sad survey
Where, gash'd with cruel wounds, Patroclus lay.
Prone on the body fell the heavenly fair,
Beat her sad breast, and tore her golden hair;
All beautiful in grief, her humid eyes
Shining with tears she lifts, and thus she cries:

"Ah, youth for ever dear, for ever kind,
Once tender friend of my distracted mind!
I left thee fresh in life, in beauty gay;
Now find thee cold, inanimated clay!
What woes my wretched race of life attend!
Sorrows on sorrows, never doom'd to end!
The first loved consort of my virgin bed
Before these eyes in fatal battle bled:
My three brave brothers in one mournful day
All trod the dark, irremeable way:
Thy friendly hand uprear'd me from the plain,
And dried my sorrows for a husband slain;
Achilles' care you promised I should prove,
The first, the dearest partner of his love;
That rites divine should ratify the band,
And make me empress in his native land.
Accept these grateful tears! for thee they flow,
For thee, that ever felt another's woe!"

Her sister captives echoed groan for groan,
Nor mourn'd Patroclus' fortunes, but their own.
The leaders press'd the chief on every side;
Unmoved he heard them, and with sighs denied.

"If yet Achilles have a friend, whose care
Is bent to please him, this request forbear;
Till yonder sun descend, ah, let me pay
To grief and anguish one abstemious day."

He spoke, and from the warriors turn'd his face:
Yet still the brother-kings of Atreus' race,
Nestor, Idomeneus, Ulysses sage,
And Phoenix, strive to calm his grief and rage:
His rage they calm not, nor his grief control;
He groans, he raves, he sorrows from his soul.

"Thou too, Patroclus! (thus his heart he vents)
Once spread the inviting banquet in our tents:
Thy sweet society, thy winning care,
Once stay'd Achilles, rushing to the war.
But now, alas! to death's cold arms resign'd,
What banquet but revenge can glad my mind?
What greater sorrow could afflict my breast,
What more if hoary Peleus were deceased?
Who now, perhaps, in Phthia dreads to hear

His son's sad fate, and drops a tender tear.
What more, should Neoptolemus the brave,
My only offspring, sink into the grave?
If yet that offspring lives; (I distant far,
Of all neglectful, wage a hateful war.)
I could not this, this cruel stroke attend;
Fate claim'd Achilles, but might spare his friend.
I hoped Patroclus might survive, to rear
My tender orphan with a parent's care,
From Scyros' isle conduct him o'er the main,
And glad his eyes with his paternal reign,
The lofty palace, and the large domain.
For Peleus breathes no more the vital air;
Or drags a wretched life of age and care,
But till the news of my sad fate invades
His hastening soul, and sinks him to the shades."

Sighing he said: his grief the heroes join'd,
Each stole a tear for what he left behind.
Their mingled grief the sire of heaven survey'd,
And thus with pity to his blue-eyed maid:

"Is then Achilles now no more thy care,
And dost thou thus desert the great in war?
Lo, where yon sails their canvas wings extend,
All comfortless he sits, and wails his friend:

Ere thirst and want his forces have oppress'd,
Haste and infuse ambrosia in his breast."

He spoke; and sudden, at the word of Jove,
Shot the descending goddess from above.
So swift through ether the shrill harpy springs,
The wide air floating to her ample wings,
To great Achilles she her flight address'd,
And pour'd divine ambrosia in his breast,(259)
With nectar sweet, (refection of the gods!)
Then, swift ascending, sought the bright abodes.

Now issued from the ships the warrior-train,
And like a deluge pour'd upon the plain.
As when the piercing blasts of Boreas blow,
And scatter o'er the fields the driving snow;
From dusky clouds the fleecy winter flies,
Whose dazzling lustre whitens all the skies:
So helms succeeding helms, so shields from shields,
Catch the quick beams, and brighten all the fields;
Broad glittering breastplates, spears with pointed rays,
Mix in one stream, reflecting blaze on blaze;
Thick beats the centre as the coursers bound;
With splendour flame the skies, and laugh the fields around,

Full in the midst, high-towering o'er the rest,

His limbs in arms divine Achilles dress'd;
Arms which the father of the fire bestow'd,
Forged on the eternal anvils of the god.
Grief and revenge his furious heart inspire,
His glowing eyeballs roll with living fire;
He grinds his teeth, and furious with delay
O'erlooks the embattled host, and hopes the bloody day.

The silver cuishes first his thighs infold;
Then o'er his breast was braced the hollow gold;
The brazen sword a various baldric tied,
That, starr'd with gems, hung glittering at his side;
And, like the moon, the broad refulgent shield
Blazed with long rays, and gleam'd athwart the field.

So to night-wandering sailors, pale with fears,
Wide o'er the watery waste, a light appears,
Which on the far-seen mountain blazing high,
Streams from some lonely watch-tower to the sky:
With mournful eyes they gaze, and gaze again;
Loud howls the storm, and drives them o'er the main.

Next, his high head the helmet graced; behind
The sweepy crest hung floating in the wind:
Like the red star, that from his flaming hair
Shakes down diseases, pestilence, and war;

So stream'd the golden honours from his head,
Trembled the sparkling plumes, and the loose glories shed.
The chief beholds himself with wondering eyes;
His arms he poises, and his motions tries;
Buoy'd by some inward force, he seems to swim,
And feels a pinion lifting every limb.

And now he shakes his great paternal spear,
Ponderous and huge, which not a Greek could rear,
From Pelion's cloudy top an ash entire
Old Chiron fell'd, and shaped it for his sire;
A spear which stern Achilles only wields,
The death of heroes, and the dread of fields.

Automedon and Alcimus prepare
The immortal coursers, and the radiant car;
(The silver traces sweeping at their side;)
Their fiery mouths resplendent bridles tied;
The ivory-studded reins, return'd behind,
Waved o'er their backs, and to the chariot join'd.
The charioteer then whirl'd the lash around,
And swift ascended at one active bound.
All bright in heavenly arms, above his squire
Achilles mounts, and sets the field on fire;
Not brighter Phoebus in the ethereal way
Flames from his chariot, and restores the day.

High o'er the host, all terrible he stands,
And thunders to his steeds these dread commands:

"Xanthus and Balius! of Podarges' strain,
(Unless ye boast that heavenly race in vain,)
Be swift, be mindful of the load ye bear,
And learn to make your master more your care:
Through falling squadrons bear my slaughtering sword,
Nor, as ye left Patroclus, leave your lord."

The generous Xanthus, as the words he said,
Seem'd sensible of woe, and droop'd his head:
Trembling he stood before the golden wain,
And bow'd to dust the honours of his mane.
When, strange to tell! (so Juno will'd) he broke
Eternal silence, and portentous spoke.
"Achilles! yes! this day at least we bear
Thy rage in safety through the files of war:
But come it will, the fatal time must come,
Not ours the fault, but God decrees thy doom.
Not through our crime, or slowness in the course,
Fell thy Patroclus, but by heavenly force;
The bright far-shooting god who gilds the day
(Confess'd we saw him) tore his arms away.
No--could our swiftness o'er the winds prevail,
Or beat the pinions of the western gale,

All were in vain--the Fates thy death demand,
Due to a mortal and immortal hand."

Then ceased for ever, by the Furies tied,
His fateful voice. The intrepid chief replied
With unabated rage--"So let it be!
Portents and prodigies are lost on me.
I know my fate: to die, to see no more
My much-loved parents, and my native shore--
Enough--when heaven ordains, I sink in night:
Now perish Troy!" He said, and rush'd to fight.