

## BOOK XXIII.

### ARGUMENT.

#### FUNERAL GAMES IN HONOUR OF PATROCLUS.(280)

Achilles and the Myrmidons do honours to the body of Patroclus. After the funeral feast he retires to the sea-shore, where, falling asleep, the ghost of his friend appears to him, and demands the rites of burial; the next morning the soldiers are sent with mules and waggons to fetch wood for the pyre. The funeral procession, and the offering their hair to the dead. Achilles sacrifices several animals, and lastly twelve Trojan captives, at the pile; then sets fire to it. He pays libations to the Winds, which (at the instance of Iris) rise, and raise the flames. When the pile has burned all night, they gather the bones, place them in an urn of gold, and raise the tomb. Achilles institutes the funeral games: the chariot-race, the fight of the caestus, the wrestling, the foot-race, the single combat, the discus, the shooting with arrows, the darting the javelin: the various descriptions of which, and the various success of the several antagonists, make the greatest part of the book.

In this book ends the thirtieth day. The night following, the ghost of Patroclus appears to Achilles: the one-and-thirtieth day is employed in felling the timber for the pile: the two-and-thirtieth in burning it; and the three-and-thirtieth in the games. The scene is generally on the

sea-shore.

Thus humbled in the dust, the pensive train  
Through the sad city mourn'd her hero slain.  
The body soil'd with dust, and black with gore,  
Lies on broad Hellespont's resounding shore.  
The Grecians seek their ships, and clear the strand,  
All, but the martial Myrmidonian band:  
These yet assembled great Achilles holds,  
And the stern purpose of his mind unfolds:

"Not yet, my brave companions of the war,  
Release your smoking coursers from the car;  
But, with his chariot each in order led,  
Perform due honours to Patroclus dead.  
Ere yet from rest or food we seek relief,  
Some rites remain, to glut our rage of grief."

The troops obey'd; and thrice in order led(281)  
(Achilles first) their coursers round the dead;  
And thrice their sorrows and laments renew;  
Tears bathe their arms, and tears the sands bedew.  
For such a warrior Thetis aids their woe,  
Melts their strong hearts, and bids their eyes to flow.  
But chief, Pelides: thick-succeeding sighs  
Burst from his heart, and torrents from his eyes:

His slaughtering hands, yet red with blood, he laid  
On his dead friend's cold breast, and thus he said:

"All hail, Patroclus! let thy honour'd ghost  
Hear, and rejoice on Pluto's dreary coast;  
Behold! Achilles' promise is complete;  
The bloody Hector stretch'd before thy feet.  
Lo! to the dogs his carcase I resign;  
And twelve sad victims, of the Trojan line,  
Sacred to vengeance, instant shall expire;  
Their lives effused around thy funeral pyre."

Gloomy he said, and (horrible to view)  
Before the bier the bleeding Hector threw,  
Prone on the dust. The Myrmidons around  
Unbraced their armour, and the steeds unbound.  
All to Achilles' sable ship repair,  
Frequent and full, the genial feast to share.  
Now from the well-fed swine black smokes aspire,  
The bristly victims hissing o'er the fire:  
The huge ox bellowing falls; with feebler cries  
Expires the goat; the sheep in silence dies.  
Around the hero's prostrate body flow'd,  
In one promiscuous stream, the reeking blood.  
And now a band of Argive monarchs brings  
The glorious victor to the king of kings.

From his dead friend the pensive warrior went,  
With steps unwilling, to the regal tent.  
The attending heralds, as by office bound,  
With kindled flames the tripod-vase surround:  
To cleanse his conquering hands from hostile gore,  
They urged in vain; the chief refused, and swore:(282)

"No drop shall touch me, by almighty Jove!  
The first and greatest of the gods above!  
Till on the pyre I place thee; till I rear  
The grassy mound, and clip thy sacred hair.  
Some ease at least those pious rites may give,  
And soothe my sorrows, while I bear to live.  
Howe'er, reluctant as I am, I stay  
And share your feast; but with the dawn of day,  
(O king of men!) it claims thy royal care,  
That Greece the warrior's funeral pile prepare,  
And bid the forests fall: (such rites are paid  
To heroes slumbering in eternal shade:)  
Then, when his earthly part shall mount in fire,  
Let the leagued squadrons to their posts retire."

He spoke: they hear him, and the word obey;  
The rage of hunger and of thirst allay,  
Then ease in sleep the labours of the day.  
But great Pelides, stretch'd along the shore,

Where, dash'd on rocks, the broken billows roar,  
Lies inly groaning; while on either hand  
The martial Myrmidons confusedly stand.  
Along the grass his languid members fall,  
Tired with his chase around the Trojan wall;  
Hush'd by the murmurs of the rolling deep,  
At length he sinks in the soft arms of sleep.  
When lo! the shade, before his closing eyes,  
Of sad Patroclus rose, or seem'd to rise:  
In the same robe he living wore, he came:  
In stature, voice, and pleasing look, the same.  
The form familiar hover'd o'er his head,  
"And sleeps Achilles? (thus the phantom said:)  
Sleeps my Achilles, his Patroclus dead?  
Living, I seem'd his dearest, tenderest care,  
But now forgot, I wander in the air.  
Let my pale corse the rites of burial know,  
And give me entrance in the realms below:  
Till then the spirit finds no resting-place,  
But here and there the unbodied spectres chase  
The vagrant dead around the dark abode,  
Forbid to cross the irremeable flood.  
Now give thy hand; for to the farther shore  
When once we pass, the soul returns no more:  
When once the last funereal flames ascend,  
No more shall meet Achilles and his friend;

No more our thoughts to those we loved make known;  
Or quit the dearest, to converse alone.  
Me fate has sever'd from the sons of earth,  
The fate fore-doom'd that waited from my birth:  
Thee too it waits; before the Trojan wall  
Even great and godlike thou art doom'd to fall.  
Hear then; and as in fate and love we join,  
Ah suffer that my bones may rest with thine!  
Together have we lived; together bred,  
One house received us, and one table fed;  
That golden urn, thy goddess-mother gave,  
May mix our ashes in one common grave."

"And is it thou? (he answers) To my sight(283)  
Once more return'st thou from the realms of night?  
O more than brother! Think each office paid,  
Whate'er can rest a discontented shade;  
But grant one last embrace, unhappy boy!  
Afford at least that melancholy joy."

He said, and with his longing arms essay'd  
In vain to grasp the visionary shade!  
Like a thin smoke he sees the spirit fly,(284)  
And hears a feeble, lamentable cry.  
Confused he wakes; amazement breaks the bands  
Of golden sleep, and starting from the sands,

Pensive he muses with uplifted hands:

"'Tis true, 'tis certain; man, though dead, retains  
Part of himself; the immortal mind remains:  
The form subsists without the body's aid,  
Aerial semblance, and an empty shade!  
This night my friend, so late in battle lost,  
Stood at my side, a pensive, plaintive ghost:  
Even now familiar, as in life, he came;  
Alas! how different! yet how like the same!"

Thus while he spoke, each eye grew big with tears:  
And now the rosy-finger'd morn appears,  
Shows every mournful face with tears o'erspread,  
And glares on the pale visage of the dead.  
But Agamemnon, as the rites demand,  
With mules and waggons sends a chosen band  
To load the timber, and the pile to rear;  
A charge consign'd to Merion's faithful care.  
With proper instruments they take the road,  
Axes to cut, and ropes to sling the load.  
First march the heavy mules, securely slow,  
O'er hills, o'er dales, o'er crags, o'er rocks they go:(285)  
Jumping, high o'er the shrubs of the rough ground,  
Rattle the clattering cars, and the shock'd axles bound  
But when arrived at Ida's spreading woods,(286)

(Fair Ida, water'd with descending floods,)  
Loud sounds the axe, redoubling strokes on strokes;  
On all sides round the forest hurls her oaks  
Headlong. Deep echoing groan the thickets brown;  
Then rustling, crackling, crashing, thunder down.  
The wood the Grecians cleave, prepared to burn;  
And the slow mules the same rough road return  
The sturdy woodmen equal burdens bore  
(Such charge was given them) to the sandy shore;  
There on the spot which great Achilles show'd,  
They eased their shoulders, and disposed the load;  
Circling around the place, where times to come  
Shall view Patroclus' and Achilles' tomb.  
The hero bids his martial troops appear  
High on their cars in all the pomp of war;  
Each in refulgent arms his limbs attires,  
All mount their chariots, combatants and squires.  
The chariots first proceed, a shining train;  
Then clouds of foot that smoke along the plain;  
Next these the melancholy band appear;  
Amidst, lay dead Patroclus on the bier;  
O'er all the corse their scattered locks they throw;  
Achilles next, oppress'd with mighty woe,  
Supporting with his hands the hero's head,  
Bends o'er the extended body of the dead.  
Patroclus decent on the appointed ground

They place, and heap the sylvan pile around.  
But great Achilles stands apart in prayer,  
And from his head divides the yellow hair;  
Those curling locks which from his youth he vow'd,(287)  
And sacred grew, to Sperchius' honour'd flood:  
Then sighing, to the deep his locks he cast,  
And roll'd his eyes around the watery waste:

"Sperchius! whose waves in mazy errors lost  
Delightful roll along my native coast!  
To whom we vainly vow'd, at our return,  
These locks to fall, and hecatombs to burn:  
Full fifty rams to bleed in sacrifice,  
Where to the day thy silver fountains rise,  
And where in shade of consecrated bowers  
Thy altars stand, perfumed with native flowers!  
So vow'd my father, but he vow'd in vain;  
No more Achilles sees his native plain;  
In that vain hope these hairs no longer grow,  
Patroclus bears them to the shades below."

Thus o'er Patroclus while the hero pray'd,  
On his cold hand the sacred lock he laid.  
Once more afresh the Grecian sorrows flow:  
And now the sun had set upon their woe;  
But to the king of men thus spoke the chief:

"Enough, Atrides! give the troops relief:  
Permit the mourning legions to retire,  
And let the chiefs alone attend the pyre;  
The pious care be ours, the dead to burn--"  
He said: the people to their ships return:  
While those deputed to inter the slain  
Heap with a rising pyramid the plain.(288)  
A hundred foot in length, a hundred wide,  
The growing structure spreads on every side;  
High on the top the manly corse they lay,  
And well-fed sheep and sable oxen slay:  
Achilles covered with their fat the dead,  
And the piled victims round the body spread;  
Then jars of honey, and of fragrant oil,  
Suspend around, low-bending o'er the pile.  
Four sprightly coursers, with a deadly groan  
Pour forth their lives, and on the pyre are thrown.  
Of nine large dogs, domestic at his board,  
Fall two, selected to attend their lord,  
Then last of all, and horrible to tell,  
Sad sacrifice! twelve Trojan captives fell.(289)  
On these the rage of fire victorious preys,  
Involves and joins them in one common blaze.  
Smear'd with the bloody rites, he stands on high,  
And calls the spirit with a dreadful cry:(290)

"All hail, Patroclus! let thy vengeful ghost  
Hear, and exult, on Pluto's dreary coast.  
Behold Achilles' promise fully paid,  
Twelve Trojan heroes offer'd to thy shade;  
But heavier fates on Hector's corse attend,  
Saved from the flames, for hungry dogs to rend."

So spake he, threatening: but the gods made vain  
His threat, and guard inviolate the slain:  
Celestial Venus hover'd o'er his head,  
And roseate unguents, heavenly fragrance! shed:  
She watch'd him all the night and all the day,  
And drove the bloodhounds from their destined prey.  
Nor sacred Phoebus less employ'd his care;  
He pour'd around a veil of gather'd air,  
And kept the nerves undried, the flesh entire,  
Against the solar beam and Sirian fire.

Nor yet the pile, where dead Patroclus lies,  
Smokes, nor as yet the sullen flames arise;  
But, fast beside, Achilles stood in prayer,  
Invoked the gods whose spirit moves the air,  
And victims promised, and libations cast,  
To gentle Zephyr and the Boreal blast:  
He call'd the aerial powers, along the skies  
To breathe, and whisper to the fires to rise.

The winged Iris heard the hero's call,  
And instant hasten'd to their airy hall,  
Where in old Zephyr's open courts on high,  
Sat all the blustering brethren of the sky.  
She shone amidst them, on her painted bow;  
The rocky pavement glitter'd with the show.  
All from the banquet rise, and each invites  
The various goddess to partake the rites.  
"Not so (the dame replied), I haste to go  
To sacred Ocean, and the floods below:  
Even now our solemn hecatombs attend,  
And heaven is feasting on the world's green end  
With righteous Ethiops (uncorrupted train!)  
Far on the extremest limits of the main.  
But Peleus' son entreats, with sacrifice,  
The western spirit, and the north, to rise!  
Let on Patroclus' pile your blast be driven,  
And bear the blazing honours high to heaven."

Swift as the word she vanish'd from their view;  
Swift as the word the winds tumultuous flew;  
Forth burst the stormy band with thundering roar,  
And heaps on heaps the clouds are toss'd before.  
To the wide main then stooping from the skies,  
The heaving deeps in watery mountains rise:  
Troy feels the blast along her shaking walls,

Till on the pile the gather'd tempest falls.  
The structure crackles in the roaring fires,  
And all the night the plenteous flame aspires.  
All night Achilles hails Patroclus' soul,  
With large libations from the golden bowl.  
As a poor father, helpless and undone,  
Mourns o'er the ashes of an only son,  
Takes a sad pleasure the last bones to burn,  
And pours in tears, ere yet they close the urn:  
So stay'd Achilles, circling round the shore,  
So watch'd the flames, till now they flame no more.  
'Twas when, emerging through the shades of night.  
The morning planet told the approach of light;  
And, fast behind, Aurora's warmer ray  
O'er the broad ocean pour'd the golden day:  
Then sank the blaze, the pile no longer burn'd,  
And to their caves the whistling winds return'd:  
Across the Thracian seas their course they bore;  
The ruffled seas beneath their passage roar.

Then parting from the pile he ceased to weep,  
And sank to quiet in the embrace of sleep,  
Exhausted with his grief: meanwhile the crowd  
Of thronging Grecians round Achilles stood;  
The tumult waked him: from his eyes he shook  
Unwilling slumber, and the chiefs bespoke:

"Ye kings and princes of the Achaian name!  
First let us quench the yet remaining flame  
With sable wine; then, as the rites direct,  
The hero's bones with careful view select:  
(Apart, and easy to be known they lie  
Amidst the heap, and obvious to the eye:  
The rest around the margin will be seen  
Promiscuous, steeds and immolated men:)  
These wrapp'd in double cauls of fat, prepare;  
And in the golden vase dispose with care;  
There let them rest with decent honour laid,  
Till I shall follow to the infernal shade.  
Meantime erect the tomb with pious hands,  
A common structure on the humble sands:  
Hereafter Greece some nobler work may raise,  
And late posterity record our praise!"

The Greeks obey; where yet the embers glow,  
Wide o'er the pile the sable wine they throw,  
And deep subsides the ashy heap below.  
Next the white bones his sad companions place,  
With tears collected, in the golden vase.  
The sacred relics to the tent they bore;  
The urn a veil of linen covered o'er.  
That done, they bid the sepulchre aspire,

And cast the deep foundations round the pyre;  
High in the midst they heap the swelling bed  
Of rising earth, memorial of the dead.

The swarming populace the chief detains,  
And leads amidst a wide extent of plains;  
There placed them round: then from the ships proceeds  
A train of oxen, mules, and stately steeds,  
Vases and tripods (for the funeral games),  
Resplendent brass, and more resplendent dames.  
First stood the prizes to reward the force  
Of rapid racers in the dusty course:  
A woman for the first, in beauty's bloom,  
Skill'd in the needle, and the labouring loom;  
And a large vase, where two bright handles rise,  
Of twenty measures its capacious size.  
The second victor claims a mare unbroke,  
Big with a mule, unknowing of the yoke:  
The third, a charger yet untouch'd by flame;  
Four ample measures held the shining frame:  
Two golden talents for the fourth were placed:  
An ample double bowl contents the last.  
These in fair order ranged upon the plain,  
The hero, rising, thus address'd the train:

"Behold the prizes, valiant Greeks! decreed

To the brave rulers of the racing steed;  
Prizes which none beside ourself could gain,  
Should our immortal coursers take the plain;  
(A race unrivall'd, which from ocean's god  
Peleus received, and on his son bestow'd.)  
But this no time our vigour to display;  
Nor suit, with them, the games of this sad day:  
Lost is Patroclus now, that wont to deck  
Their flowing manes, and sleek their glossy neck.  
Sad, as they shared in human grief, they stand,  
And trail those graceful honours on the sand!  
Let others for the noble task prepare,  
Who trust the courser and the flying car."

Fired at his word the rival racers rise;  
But far the first Eumelus hopes the prize,  
Famed though Pieria for the fleetest breed,  
And skill'd to manage the high-bounding steed.  
With equal ardour bold Tydides swell'd,  
The steeds of Tros beneath his yoke compell'd  
(Which late obey'd the Dardan chiefs command,  
When scarce a god redeem'd him from his hand).  
Then Menelaus his Podargus brings,  
And the famed courser of the king of kings:  
Whom rich Echepolus (more rich than brave),  
To 'scape the wars, to Agamemnon gave,

(Æthe her name) at home to end his days;  
Base wealth preferring to eternal praise.  
Next him Antilochus demands the course  
With beating heart, and cheers his Pylia horse.  
Experienced Nestor gives his son the reins,  
Directs his judgment, and his heat restrains;  
Nor idly warns the hoary sire, nor hears  
The prudent son with unattending ears.

"My son! though youthful ardour fire thy breast,  
The gods have loved thee, and with arts have bless'd;  
Neptune and Jove on thee conferr'd the skill  
Swift round the goal to turn the flying wheel.  
To guide thy conduct little precept needs;  
But slow, and past their vigour, are my steeds.  
Fear not thy rivals, though for swiftness known;  
Compare those rivals' judgment and thy own:  
It is not strength, but art, obtains the prize,  
And to be swift is less than to be wise.  
'Tis more by art than force of numerous strokes  
The dexterous woodman shapes the stubborn oaks;  
By art the pilot, through the boiling deep  
And howling tempest, steers the fearless ship;  
And 'tis the artist wins the glorious course;  
Not those who trust in chariots and in horse.  
In vain, unskilful to the goal they strive,

And short, or wide, the ungovern'd courser drive:  
While with sure skill, though with inferior steeds,  
The knowing racer to his end proceeds;  
Fix'd on the goal his eye foreruns the course,  
His hand unerring steers the steady horse,  
And now contracts, or now extends the rein,  
Observing still the foremost on the plain.  
Mark then the goal, 'tis easy to be found;  
Yon aged trunk, a cubit from the ground;  
Of some once stately oak the last remains,  
Or hardy fir, unperish'd with the rains:  
Inclosed with stones, conspicuous from afar;  
And round, a circle for the wheeling car.  
(Some tomb perhaps of old, the dead to grace;  
Or then, as now, the limit of a race.)  
Bear close to this, and warily proceed,  
A little bending to the left-hand steed;  
But urge the right, and give him all the reins;  
While thy strict hand his fellow's head restrains,  
And turns him short; till, doubling as they roll,  
The wheel's round naves appear to brush the goal.  
Yet (not to break the car, or lame the horse)  
Clear of the stony heap direct the course;  
Lest through incaution failing, thou mayst be  
A joy to others, a reproach to me.  
So shalt thou pass the goal, secure of mind,

And leave unskilful swiftness far behind:  
Though thy fierce rival drove the matchless steed  
Which bore Adrastus, of celestial breed;  
Or the famed race, through all the regions known,  
That whirl'd the car of proud Laomedon."

Thus (nought unsaid) the much-advising sage  
Concludes; then sat, stiff with unwieldy age.  
Next bold Meriones was seen to rise,  
The last, but not least ardent for the prize.  
They mount their seats; the lots their place dispose  
(Roll'd in his helmet, these Achilles throws).  
Young Nestor leads the race: Eumelus then;  
And next the brother of the king of men:  
Thy lot, Meriones, the fourth was cast;  
And, far the bravest, Diomed, was last.  
They stand in order, an impatient train:  
Pelides points the barrier on the plain,  
And sends before old Phoenix to the place,  
To mark the racers, and to judge the race.  
At once the coursers from the barrier bound;  
The lifted scourges all at once resound;  
Their heart, their eyes, their voice, they send before;  
And up the champaign thunder from the shore:  
Thick, where they drive, the dusty clouds arise,  
And the lost courser in the whirlwind flies;

Loose on their shoulders the long manes reclined,  
Float in their speed, and dance upon the wind:  
The smoking chariots, rapid as they bound,  
Now seem to touch the sky, and now the ground.  
While hot for fame, and conquest all their care,  
(Each o'er his flying courser hung in air,)  
Erect with ardour, poised upon the rein,  
They pant, they stretch, they shout along the plain.  
Now (the last compass fetch'd around the goal)  
At the near prize each gathers all his soul,  
Each burns with double hope, with double pain,  
Tears up the shore, and thunders toward the main.  
First flew Eumelus on Pheretian steeds;  
With those of Tros bold Diomed succeeds:  
Close on Eumelus' back they puff the wind,  
And seem just mounting on his car behind;  
Full on his neck he feels the sultry breeze,  
And, hovering o'er, their stretching shadows sees.  
Then had he lost, or left a doubtful prize;  
But angry Phoebus to Tydides flies,  
Strikes from his hand the scourge, and renders vain  
His matchless horses' labour on the plain.  
Rage fills his eye with anguish, to survey  
Snatch'd from his hope the glories of the day.  
The fraud celestial Pallas sees with pain,  
Springs to her knight, and gives the scourge again,

And fills his steeds with vigour. At a stroke  
She breaks his rival's chariot from the yoke:  
No more their way the startled horses held;  
The car reversed came rattling on the field;  
Shot headlong from his seat, beside the wheel,  
Prone on the dust the unhappy master fell;  
His batter'd face and elbows strike the ground;  
Nose, mouth, and front, one undistinguish'd wound:  
Grief stops his voice, a torrent drowns his eyes:  
Before him far the glad Tydides flies;  
Minerva's spirit drives his matchless pace,  
And crowns him victor of the labour'd race.

The next, though distant, Menelaus succeeds;  
While thus young Nestor animates his steeds:  
"Now, now, my generous pair, exert your force;  
Not that we hope to match Tydides' horse,  
Since great Minerva wings their rapid way,  
And gives their lord the honours of the day;  
But reach Atrides! shall his mare outgo  
Your swiftness? vanquish'd by a female foe?  
Through your neglect, if lagging on the plain  
The last ignoble gift be all we gain,  
No more shall Nestor's hand your food supply,  
The old man's fury rises, and ye die.  
Haste then: yon narrow road, before our sight,

Presents the occasion, could we use it right."

Thus he. The coursers at their master's threat  
With quicker steps the sounding champaign beat.  
And now Antilochus with nice survey  
Observes the compass of the hollow way.  
'Twas where, by force of wintry torrents torn,  
Fast by the road a precipice was worn:  
Here, where but one could pass, to shun the throng  
The Spartan hero's chariot smoked along.  
Close up the venturous youth resolves to keep,  
Still edging near, and bears him toward the steep.  
Atrides, trembling, casts his eye below,  
And wonders at the rashness of his foe.  
"Hold, stay your steeds--What madness thus to ride  
This narrow way! take larger field (he cried),  
Or both must fall."--Atrides cried in vain;  
He flies more fast, and throws up all the rein.  
Far as an able arm the disk can send,  
When youthful rivals their full force extend,  
So far, Antilochus! thy chariot flew  
Before the king: he, cautious, backward drew  
His horse compell'd; foreboding in his fears  
The rattling ruin of the clashing cars,  
The floundering coursers rolling on the plain,  
And conquest lost through frantic haste to gain.

But thus upbraids his rival as he flies:  
"Go, furious youth! ungenerous and unwise!  
Go, but expect not I'll the prize resign;  
Add perjury to fraud, and make it thine--"  
Then to his steeds with all his force he cries,  
"Be swift, be vigorous, and regain the prize!  
Your rivals, destitute of youthful force,  
With fainting knees shall labour in the course,  
And yield the glory yours."--The steeds obey;  
Already at their heels they wing their way,  
And seem already to retrieve the day.

Meantime the Grecians in a ring beheld  
The coursers bounding o'er the dusty field.  
The first who mark'd them was the Cretan king;  
High on a rising ground, above the ring,  
The monarch sat: from whence with sure survey  
He well observed the chief who led the way,  
And heard from far his animating cries,  
And saw the foremost steed with sharpen'd eyes;  
On whose broad front a blaze of shining white,  
Like the full moon, stood obvious to the sight.  
He saw; and rising, to the Greeks begun:  
"Are yonder horse discern'd by me alone?  
Or can ye, all, another chief survey,  
And other steeds than lately led the way?"

Those, though the swiftest, by some god withheld,  
Lie sure disabled in the middle field:  
For, since the goal they doubled, round the plain  
I search to find them, but I search in vain.  
Perchance the reins forsook the driver's hand,  
And, turn'd too short, he tumbled on the strand,  
Shot from the chariot; while his coursers stray  
With frantic fury from the destined way.  
Rise then some other, and inform my sight,  
For these dim eyes, perhaps, discern not right;  
Yet sure he seems, to judge by shape and air,  
The great Ætolian chief, renown'd in war."

"Old man! (Oileus rashly thus replies)  
Thy tongue too hastily confers the prize;  
Of those who view the course, nor sharpest eyed,  
Nor youngest, yet the readiest to decide.  
Eumelus' steeds, high bounding in the chase,  
Still, as at first, unrivall'd lead the race:  
I well discern him, as he shakes the rein,  
And hear his shouts victorious o'er the plain."

Thus he. Idomeneus, incensed, rejoin'd:  
"Barbarous of words! and arrogant of mind!  
Contentious prince, of all the Greeks beside  
The last in merit, as the first in pride!

To vile reproach what answer can we make?  
A goblet or a tripod let us stake,  
And be the king the judge. The most unwise  
Will learn their rashness, when they pay the price."

He said: and Ajax, by mad passion borne,  
Stern had replied; fierce scorn enhancing scorn  
To fell extremes. But Thetis' godlike son  
Awful amidst them rose, and thus begun:

"Forbear, ye chiefs! reproachful to contend;  
Much would ye blame, should others thus offend:  
And lo! the approaching steeds your contest end."  
No sooner had he spoke, but thundering near,  
Drives, through a stream of dust, the charioteer.  
High o'er his head the circling lash he wields:  
His bounding horses scarcely touch the fields:  
His car amidst the dusty whirlwind roll'd,  
Bright with the mingled blaze of tin and gold,  
Refulgent through the cloud: no eye could find  
The track his flying wheels had left behind:  
And the fierce coursers urged their rapid pace  
So swift, it seem'd a flight, and not a race.  
Now victor at the goal Tydides stands,  
Quits his bright car, and springs upon the sands;  
From the hot steeds the sweaty torrents stream;

The well-plied whip is hung athwart the beam:  
With joy brave Sthenelus receives the prize,  
The tripod-vase, and dame with radiant eyes:  
These to the ships his train triumphant leads,  
The chief himself unyokes the panting steeds.

Young Nestor follows (who by art, not force,  
O'erpass'd Atrides) second in the course.  
Behind, Atrides urged the race, more near  
Than to the courser in his swift career  
The following car, just touching with his heel  
And brushing with his tail the whirling wheel:  
Such, and so narrow now the space between  
The rivals, late so distant on the green;  
So soon swift Æthe her lost ground regain'd,  
One length, one moment, had the race obtain'd.

Merion pursued, at greater distance still,  
With tardier coursers, and inferior skill.  
Last came, Admetus! thy unhappy son;  
Slow dragged the steeds his batter'd chariot on:  
Achilles saw, and pitying thus begun:

"Behold! the man whose matchless art surpass'd  
The sons of Greece! the ablest, yet the last!  
Fortune denies, but justice bids us pay

(Since great Tydides bears the first away)  
To him the second honours of the day."

The Greeks consent with loud-applauding cries,  
And then Eumelus had received the prize,  
But youthful Nestor, jealous of his fame,  
The award opposes, and asserts his claim.  
"Think not (he cries) I tamely will resign,  
O Peleus' son! the mare so justly mine.  
What if the gods, the skilful to confound,  
Have thrown the horse and horseman to the ground?  
Perhaps he sought not heaven by sacrifice,  
And vows omitted forfeited the prize.  
If yet (distinction to thy friend to show,  
And please a soul desirous to bestow)  
Some gift must grace Eumelus, view thy store  
Of beauteous handmaids, steeds, and shining ore;  
An ample present let him thence receive,  
And Greece shall praise thy generous thirst to give.  
But this my prize I never shall forego;  
This, who but touches, warriors! is my foe."

Thus spake the youth; nor did his words offend;  
Pleased with the well-turn'd flattery of a friend,  
Achilles smiled: "The gift proposed (he cried),  
Antilochus! we shall ourself provide.

With plates of brass the corslet cover'd o'er,  
(The same renown'd Asteropaeus wore,) Whose glittering margins raised with silver shine,  
(No vulgar gift,) Eumelus! shall be thine."

He said: Automedon at his command  
The corslet brought, and gave it to his hand.  
Distinguish'd by his friend, his bosom glows  
With generous joy: then Menelaus rose;  
The herald placed the sceptre in his hands,  
And still'd the clamour of the shouting bands.  
Not without cause incensed at Nestor's son,  
And inly grieving, thus the king begun:

"The praise of wisdom, in thy youth obtain'd,  
An act so rash, Antilochus! has stain'd.  
Robb'd of my glory and my just reward,  
To you, O Grecians! be my wrong declared:  
So not a leader shall our conduct blame,  
Or judge me envious of a rival's fame.  
But shall not we, ourselves, the truth maintain?  
What needs appealing in a fact so plain?  
What Greek shall blame me, if I bid thee rise,  
And vindicate by oath th' ill-gotten prize?  
Rise if thou darest, before thy chariot stand,  
The driving scourge high-lifted in thy hand;

And touch thy steeds, and swear thy whole intent  
Was but to conquer, not to circumvent.  
Swear by that god whose liquid arms surround  
The globe, and whose dread earthquakes heave the ground!"

The prudent chief with calm attention heard;  
Then mildly thus: "Excuse, if youth have err'd;  
Superior as thou art, forgive the offence,  
Nor I thy equal, or in years, or sense.  
Thou know'st the errors of unripen'd age,  
Weak are its counsels, headlong is its rage.  
The prize I quit, if thou thy wrath resign;  
The mare, or aught thou ask'st, be freely thine  
Ere I become (from thy dear friendship torn)  
Hateful to thee, and to the gods forsworn."

So spoke Antilochus; and at the word  
The mare contested to the king restored.  
Joy swells his soul: as when the vernal grain  
Lifts the green ear above the springing plain,  
The fields their vegetable life renew,  
And laugh and glitter with the morning dew;  
Such joy the Spartan's shining face o'erspread,  
And lifted his gay heart, while thus he said:

"Still may our souls, O generous youth! agree

'Tis now Atrides' turn to yield to thee.  
Rash heat perhaps a moment might control,  
Not break, the settled temper of thy soul.  
Not but (my friend) 'tis still the wiser way  
To waive contention with superior sway;  
For ah! how few, who should like thee offend,  
Like thee, have talents to regain the friend!  
To plead indulgence, and thy fault atone,  
Suffice thy father's merit and thy own:  
Generous alike, for me, the sire and son  
Have greatly suffer'd, and have greatly done.  
I yield; that all may know, my soul can bend,  
Nor is my pride preferr'd before my friend."

He said; and pleased his passion to command,  
Resign'd the courser to Noemon's hand,  
Friend of the youthful chief: himself content,  
The shining charger to his vessel sent.  
The golden talents Merion next obtain'd;  
The fifth reward, the double bowl, remain'd.  
Achilles this to reverend Nestor bears.  
And thus the purpose of his gift declares:  
"Accept thou this, O sacred sire! (he said)  
In dear memorial of Patroclus dead;  
Dead and for ever lost Patroclus lies,  
For ever snatch'd from our desiring eyes!

Take thou this token of a grateful heart,  
Though 'tis not thine to hurl the distant dart,  
The quoit to toss, the ponderous mace to wield,  
Or urge the race, or wrestle on the field:  
Thy pristine vigour age has overthrown,  
But left the glory of the past thy own."

He said, and placed the goblet at his side;  
With joy the venerable king replied:

"Wisely and well, my son, thy words have proved  
A senior honour'd, and a friend beloved!  
Too true it is, deserted of my strength,  
These wither'd arms and limbs have fail'd at length.  
Oh! had I now that force I felt of yore,  
Known through Buprasium and the Pylian shore!  
Victorious then in every solemn game,  
Ordain'd to Amarynces' mighty name;  
The brave Epeians gave my glory way,  
Ætolians, Pylians, all resign'd the day.  
I quell'd Clytomedes in fights of hand,  
And backward hurl'd Ancaeus on the sand,  
Surpass'd Iphyclus in the swift career,  
Phyleus and Polydorus with the spear.  
The sons of Actor won the prize of horse,  
But won by numbers, not by art or force:

For the famed twins, impatient to survey  
Prize after prize by Nestor borne away,  
Sprung to their car; and with united pains  
One lash'd the coursers, while one ruled the reins.  
Such once I was! Now to these tasks succeeds  
A younger race, that emulate our deeds:  
I yield, alas! (to age who must not yield?)  
Though once the foremost hero of the field.  
Go thou, my son! by generous friendship led,  
With martial honours decorate the dead:  
While pleased I take the gift thy hands present,  
(Pledge of benevolence, and kind intent,)  
Rejoiced, of all the numerous Greeks, to see  
Not one but honours sacred age and me:  
Those due distinctions thou so well canst pay,  
May the just gods return another day!"

Proud of the gift, thus spake the full of days:  
Achilles heard him, prouder of the praise.

The prizes next are order'd to the field,  
For the bold champions who the caestus wield.  
A stately mule, as yet by toils unbroke,  
Of six years' age, unconscious of the yoke,  
Is to the circus led, and firmly bound;  
Next stands a goblet, massy, large, and round.

Achilles rising, thus: "Let Greece excite  
Two heroes equal to this hardy fight;  
Who dare the foe with lifted arms provoke,  
And rush beneath the long-descending stroke.  
On whom Apollo shall the palm bestow,  
And whom the Greeks supreme by conquest know,  
This mule his dauntless labours shall repay,  
The vanquish'd bear the massy bowl away."

This dreadful combat great Epeus chose;(291)  
High o'er the crowd, enormous bulk! he rose,  
And seized the beast, and thus began to say:  
"Stand forth some man, to bear the bowl away!  
(Price of his ruin: for who dares deny  
This mule my right; the undoubted victor I)  
Others, 'tis own'd, in fields of battle shine,  
But the first honours of this fight are mine;  
For who excels in all? Then let my foe  
Draw near, but first his certain fortune know;  
Secure this hand shall his whole frame confound,  
Mash all his bones, and all his body pound:  
So let his friends be nigh, a needful train,  
To heave the batter'd carcase off the plain."

The giant spoke; and in a stupid gaze  
The host beheld him, silent with amaze!

'Twas thou, Euryalus! who durst aspire  
To meet his might, and emulate thy sire,  
The great Mecistheus; who in days of yore  
In Theban games the noblest trophy bore,  
(The games ordain'd dead OEdipus to grace,)  
And singly vanquish the Cadmean race.  
Him great Tydides urges to contend,  
Warm with the hopes of conquest for his friend;  
Officious with the cincture girds him round;  
And to his wrist the gloves of death are bound.  
Amid the circle now each champion stands,  
And poises high in air his iron hands;  
With clashing gauntlets now they fiercely close,  
Their crackling jaws re-echo to the blows,  
And painful sweat from all their members flows.  
At length Epeus dealt a weighty blow  
Full on the cheek of his unwary foe;  
Beneath that ponderous arm's resistless sway  
Down dropp'd he, nerveless, and extended lay.  
As a large fish, when winds and waters roar,  
By some huge billow dash'd against the shore,  
Lies panting; not less batter'd with his wound,  
The bleeding hero pants upon the ground.  
To rear his fallen foe, the victor lends,  
Scornful, his hand; and gives him to his friends;  
Whose arms support him, reeling through the throng,

And dragging his disabled legs along;  
Nodding, his head hangs down his shoulder o'er;  
His mouth and nostrils pour the clotted gore;(292)  
Wrapp'd round in mists he lies, and lost to thought;  
His friends receive the bowl, too dearly bought.

The third bold game Achilles next demands,  
And calls the wrestlers to the level sands:  
A massy tripod for the victor lies,  
Of twice six oxen its reputed price;  
And next, the loser's spirits to restore,  
A female captive, valued but at four.  
Scarce did the chief the vigorous strife prop  
When tower-like Ajax and Ulysses rose.  
Amid the ring each nervous rival stands,  
Embracing rigid with implicit hands.  
Close lock'd above, their heads and arms are mix'd:  
Below, their planted feet at distance fix'd;  
Like two strong rafters which the builder forms,  
Proof to the wintry winds and howling storms,  
Their tops connected, but at wider space  
Fix'd on the centre stands their solid base.  
Now to the grasp each manly body bends;  
The humid sweat from every pore descends;  
Their bones resound with blows: sides, shoulders, thighs  
Swell to each gripe, and bloody tumours rise.

Nor could Ulysses, for his art renown'd,  
O'erturn the strength of Ajax on the ground;  
Nor could the strength of Ajax overthrow  
The watchful caution of his artful foe.  
While the long strife even tired the lookers on,  
Thus to Ulysses spoke great Telamon:  
"Or let me lift thee, chief, or lift thou me:  
Prove we our force, and Jove the rest decree."

He said; and, straining, heaved him off the ground  
With matchless strength; that time Ulysses found  
The strength to evade, and where the nerves combine  
His ankle struck: the giant fell supine;  
Ulysses, following, on his bosom lies;  
Shouts of applause run rattling through the skies.  
Ajax to lift Ulysses next essays;  
He barely stirr'd him, but he could not raise:  
His knee lock'd fast, the foe's attempt denied;  
And grappling close, they tumbled side by side.  
Defiled with honourable dust they roll,  
Still breathing strife, and unsubdued of soul:  
Again they rage, again to combat rise;  
When great Achilles thus divides the prize:  
  
"Your noble vigour, O my friends, restrain;  
Nor weary out your generous strength in vain.

Ye both have won: let others who excel,  
Now prove that prowess you have proved so well."

The hero's words the willing chiefs obey,  
From their tired bodies wipe the dust away,  
And, clothed anew, the following games survey.

And now succeed the gifts ordain'd to grace  
The youths contending in the rapid race:  
A silver urn that full six measures held,  
By none in weight or workmanship excell'd:  
Sidonian artists taught the frame to shine,  
Elaborate, with artifice divine;  
Whence Tyrian sailors did the prize transport,  
And gave to Thoas at the Lemnian port:  
From him descended, good Eunaeus heir'd  
The glorious gift; and, for Lycaon spared,  
To brave Patroclus gave the rich reward:  
Now, the same hero's funeral rites to grace,  
It stands the prize of swiftness in the race.  
A well-fed ox was for the second placed;  
And half a talent must content the last.  
Achilles rising then bespoke the train:  
"Who hope the palm of swiftness to obtain,  
Stand forth, and bear these prizes from the plain."

The hero said, and starting from his place,  
Oilean Ajax rises to the race;  
Ulysses next; and he whose speed surpass'd  
His youthful equals, Nestor's son, the last.  
Ranged in a line the ready racers stand;  
Pelides points the barrier with his hand;  
All start at once; Oileus led the race;  
The next Ulysses, measuring pace with pace;  
Behind him, diligently close, he sped,  
As closely following as the running thread  
The spindle follows, and displays the charms  
Of the fair spinster's breast and moving arms:  
Graceful in motion thus, his foe he plies,  
And treads each footstep ere the dust can rise;  
His glowing breath upon his shoulders plays:  
The admiring Greeks loud acclamations raise:  
To him they give their wishes, hearts, and eyes,  
And send their souls before him as he flies.  
Now three times turn'd in prospect of the goal,  
The panting chief to Pallas lifts his soul:  
"Assist, O goddess!" thus in thought he pray'd!  
And present at his thought descends the maid.  
Buoy'd by her heavenly force, he seems to swim,  
And feels a pinion lifting every limb.  
All fierce, and ready now the prize to gain,  
Unhappy Ajax stumbles on the plain

(O'erturn'd by Pallas), where the slippery shore  
Was clogg'd with slimy dung and mingled gore.  
(The self-same place beside Patroclus' pyre,  
Where late the slaughter'd victims fed the fire.)  
Besmear'd with filth, and blotted o'er with clay,  
Obscene to sight, the rueful racer lay;  
The well-fed bull (the second prize) he shared,  
And left the urn Ulysses' rich reward.  
Then, grasping by the horn the mighty beast,  
The baffled hero thus the Greeks address'd:

"Accursed fate! the conquest I forego;  
A mortal I, a goddess was my foe;  
She urged her favourite on the rapid way,  
And Pallas, not Ulysses, won the day."

Thus sourly wail'd he, sputtering dirt and gore;  
A burst of laughter echoed through the shore.  
Antilochus, more humorous than the rest,  
Takes the last prize, and takes it with a jest:

"Why with our wiser elders should we strive?  
The gods still love them, and they always thrive.  
Ye see, to Ajax I must yield the prize:  
He to Ulysses, still more aged and wise;  
(A green old age unconscious of decays,

That proves the hero born in better days!  
Behold his vigour in this active race!  
Achilles only boasts a swifter pace:  
For who can match Achilles? He who can,  
Must yet be more than hero, more than man."

The effect succeeds the speech. Pelides cries,  
"Thy artful praise deserves a better prize.  
Nor Greece in vain shall hear thy friend extoll'd;  
Receive a talent of the purest gold."  
The youth departs content. The host admire  
The son of Nestor, worthy of his sire.

Next these a buckler, spear, and helm, he brings;  
Cast on the plain, the brazen burden rings:  
Arms which of late divine Sarpedon wore,  
And great Patroclus in short triumph bore.  
"Stand forth the bravest of our host! (he cries)  
Whoever dares deserve so rich a prize,  
Now grace the lists before our army's sight,  
And sheathed in steel, provoke his foe to fight.  
Who first the jointed armour shall explore,  
And stain his rival's mail with issuing gore,  
The sword Asteropaeus possess'd of old,  
(A Thracian blade, distinct with studs of gold,)  
Shall pay the stroke, and grace the striker's side:

These arms in common let the chiefs divide:  
For each brave champion, when the combat ends,  
A sumptuous banquet at our tents attends."

Fierce at the word uprose great Tydeus' son,  
And the huge bulk of Ajax Telamon.  
Clad in refulgent steel, on either hand,  
The dreadful chiefs amid the circle stand;  
Louring they meet, tremendous to the sight;  
Each Argive bosom beats with fierce delight.  
Opposed in arms not long they idly stood,  
But thrice they closed, and thrice the charge renew'd.  
A furious pass the spear of Ajax made  
Through the broad shield, but at the corslet stay'd.  
Not thus the foe: his javelin aim'd above  
The buckler's margin, at the neck he drove.  
But Greece, now trembling for her hero's life,  
Bade share the honours, and surcease the strife.  
Yet still the victor's due Tydides gains,  
With him the sword and studded belt remains.

Then hurl'd the hero, thundering on the ground,  
A mass of iron (an enormous round),  
Whose weight and size the circling Greeks admire,  
Rude from the furnace, and but shaped by fire.  
This mighty quoit Action wont to rear,

And from his whirling arm dismiss in air;  
The giant by Achilles slain, he stow'd  
Among his spoils this memorable load.  
For this, he bids those nervous artists vie,  
That teach the disk to sound along the sky.  
"Let him, whose might can hurl this bowl, arise;  
Who farthest hurls it, take it as his prize;  
If he be one enrich'd with large domain  
Of downs for flocks, and arable for grain,  
Small stock of iron needs that man provide;  
His hinds and swains whole years shall be supplied  
From hence; nor ask the neighbouring city's aid  
For ploughshares, wheels, and all the rural trade."

Stern Polypoetes stepp'd before the throng,  
And great Leonteus, more than mortal strong;  
Whose force with rival forces to oppose,  
Uprose great Ajax; up Epeus rose.  
Each stood in order: first Epeus threw;  
High o'er the wondering crowds the whirling circle flew.  
Leonteus next a little space surpass'd;  
And third, the strength of godlike Ajax cast.  
O'er both their marks it flew; till fiercely flung  
From Polypoetes' arm the discus sung:  
Far as a swain his whirling sheephook throws,  
That distant falls among the grazing cows,

So past them all the rapid circle flies:  
His friends, while loud applauses shake the skies,  
With force conjoin'd heave off the weighty prize.

Those, who in skilful archery contend,  
He next invites the twanging bow to bend;  
And twice ten axes casts amidst the round,  
Ten double-edged, and ten that singly wound  
The mast, which late a first-rate galley bore,  
The hero fixes in the sandy shore;  
To the tall top a milk-white dove they tie,  
The trembling mark at which their arrows fly.

"Whose weapon strikes yon fluttering bird, shall bear  
These two-edged axes, terrible in war;  
The single, he whose shaft divides the cord."  
He said: experienced Merion took the word;  
And skilful Teucer: in the helm they threw  
Their lots inscribed, and forth the latter flew.  
Swift from the string the sounding arrow flies;  
But flies unblest! No grateful sacrifice,  
No firstling lambs, unheedful! didst thou vow  
To Phoebus, patron of the shaft and bow.  
For this, thy well-aim'd arrow turn'd aside,  
Err'd from the dove, yet cut the cord that tied:  
Adown the mainmast fell the parted string,

And the free bird to heaven displays her wing:  
Sea, shores, and skies, with loud applause resound,  
And Merion eager meditates the wound:  
He takes the bow, directs the shaft above,  
And following with his eye the soaring dove,  
Implores the god to speed it through the skies,  
With vows of firstling lambs, and grateful sacrific  
The dove, in airy circles as she wheels,  
Amid the clouds the piercing arrow feels;  
Quite through and through the point its passage found,  
And at his feet fell bloody to the ground.  
The wounded bird, ere yet she breathed her last,  
With flagging wings alighted on the mast,  
A moment hung, and spread her pinions there,  
Then sudden dropp'd, and left her life in air.  
From the pleased crowd new peals of thunder rise,  
And to the ships brave Merion bears the prize.

To close the funeral games, Achilles last  
A massy spear amid the circle placed,  
And ample charger of unsullied frame,  
With flowers high-wrought, not blacken'd yet by flame.  
For these he bids the heroes prove their art,  
Whose dexterous skill directs the flying dart.  
Here too great Merion hopes the noble prize;  
Nor here disdain'd the king of men to rise.

With joy Pelides saw the honour paid,  
Rose to the monarch, and respectful said:

"Thee first in virtue, as in power supreme,  
O king of nations! all thy Greeks proclaim;  
In every martial game thy worth attest,  
And know thee both their greatest and their best.  
Take then the prize, but let brave Merion bear  
This beamy javelin in thy brother's war."

Pleased from the hero's lips his praise to hear,  
The king to Merion gives the brazen spear:  
But, set apart for sacred use, commands  
The glittering charger to Talthybius' hands.