

BOOK XVI.

ARGUMENT.

THE DISCOVERY OF ULYSSES TO TELEMACHUS.

Telemachus arriving at the lodge of Eumaeus, sends him to carry Penelope the news of his return. Minerva appearing to Ulysses, commands him to discover himself to his son. The princes, who had lain in ambush to intercept Telemachus in his way, their project being defeated, return to Ithaca.

Soon as the morning blush'd along the plains,  
Ulysses, and the monarch of the swains,  
Awake the sleeping fires, their meals prepare,  
And forth to pasture send the bristly care.  
The prince's near approach the dogs descry,  
And fawning round his feet confess their joy.  
Their gentle blandishment the king survey'd,  
Heard his resounding step, and instant said:

"Some well-known friend, Eumaeus, bends this way;  
His steps I hear; the dogs familiar play."

While yet he spoke, the prince advancing drew  
Nigh to the lodge, and now appear'd in view.  
Transported from his seat Eumaeus sprung,  
Dropp'd the full bowl, and round his bosom hung;  
Kissing his cheek, his hand, while from his eye  
The tears rain'd copious in a shower of joy,  
As some fond sire who ten long winters grieves,  
From foreign climes an only son receives  
(Child of his age), with strong paternal joy,  
Forward he springs, and clasps the favourite boy:  
So round the youth his arms Eumaeus spread,  
As if the grave had given him from the dead.

"And is it thou? my ever-dear delight!  
Oh, art thou come to bless my longing sight?  
Never, I never hoped to view this day,  
When o'er the waves you plough'd the desperate way.  
Enter, my child! Beyond my hopes restored,  
Oh give these eyes to feast upon their lord.  
Enter, oh seldom seen! for lawless powers  
Too much detain thee from these sylvan bowers,"  
The prince replied: "Eumaeus, I obey;  
To seek thee, friend, I hither took my way.  
But say, if in the court the queen reside  
Severely chaste, or if commenced a bride?"

Thus he; and thus the monarch of the swains:

"Severely chaste Penelope remains;

But, lost to every joy, she wastes the day

In tedious cares, and weeps the night away."

He ended, and (receiving as they pass

The javelin pointed with a star of brass),

They reach'd the dome; the dome with marble shined.

His seat Ulysses to the prince resign'd.

"Not so (exclaims the prince with decent grace)

For me, this house shall find an humbler place:

To usurp the honours due to silver hairs

And reverend strangers modest youth forbears."

Instant the swain the spoils of beasts supplies,

And bids the rural throne with osiers rise.

There sate the prince: the feast Eumaeus spread,

And heap'd the shining canisters with bread.

Thick o'er the board the plenteous viands lay,

The frugal remnants of the former day.

Then in a bowl he tempers generous wines,

Around whose verge a mimic ivy twines.

And now, the rage of thirst and hunger fled,

Thus young Ulysses to Eumaeus said:

"Whence, father, from what shore this stranger, say?

What vessel bore him o'er the watery way?

To human step our land impervious lies,  
And round the coast circumfluent oceans rise."

The swain returns: "A tale of sorrows hear:  
In spacious Crete he drew his natal air;  
Long doom'd to wander o'er the land and main,  
For Heaven has wove his thread of life with pain.  
Half breathless 'scaping to the land he flew  
From Thesprot mariners, a murderous crew.  
To thee, my son, the suppliant I resign;  
I gave him my protection, grant him thine."

"Hard task (he cries) thy virtue gives thy friend,  
Willing to aid, unable to defend.  
Can strangers safely in the court reside,  
'Midst the swell'd insolence of lust and pride?  
E'en I unsafe: the queen in doubt to wed,  
Or pay due honours to the nuptial bed.  
Perhaps she weds regardless of her fame,  
Deaf to the mighty Ulyssean name.  
However, stranger! from our grace receive  
Such honours as befit a prince to give;  
Sandals, a sword and robes, respect to prove,  
And safe to sail with ornaments of love.  
Till then, thy guest amid the rural train,  
Far from the court, from danger far, detain.

'Tis mine with food the hungry to supply,  
And clothe the naked from the inclement sky.  
Here dwell in safety from the suitors' wrongs,  
And the rude insults of ungovern'd tongues.  
For should'st thou suffer, powerless to relieve,  
I must behold it, and can only grieve.  
The brave, encompass'd by an hostile train,  
O'erpower'd by numbers, is but brave in vain."

To whom, while anger in his bosom glows,  
With warmth replies the man of mighty woes:  
"Since audience mild is deign'd, permit my tongue  
At once to pity and resent thy wrong.  
My heart weeps blood to see a soul so brave  
Live to base insolence or power a slave,  
But tell me, dost thou, prince, dost thou behold,  
And hear their midnight revels uncontroll'd?  
Say, do thy subjects in bold faction rise,  
Or priests in fabled oracles advise?  
Or are thy brothers, who should aid thy power,  
Turn'd mean deserters in the needful hour?  
Oh that I were from great Ulysses sprung,  
Or that these wither'd nerves like thine were strung,  
Or, heavens! might he return! (and soon appear  
He shall, I trust; a hero scorns despair:)  
Might he return, I yield my life a prey

To my worst foe, if that avenging day  
Be not their last: but should I lose my life,  
Oppress'd by numbers in the glorious strife,  
I chose the nobler part, and yield my breath,  
Rather than bear dishonor, worse than death;  
Than see the hand of violence invade  
The reverend stranger and the spotless maid;  
Than see the wealth of kings consumed in waste,  
The drunkard's revel, and the gluttons' feast."

Thus he, with anger flashing from his eye;  
Sincere the youthful hero made reply:  
"Nor leagued in factious arms my subjects rise,  
Nor priests in fabled oracles advise;  
Nor are my brothers, who should aid my power,  
Turn'd mean deserters in the needful hour.  
Ah me! I boast no brother; heaven's dread King  
Gives from our stock an only branch to spring:  
Alone Laertes reign'd Arcesius' heir,  
Alone Ulysses drew the vital air,  
And I alone the bed connubial graced,  
An unblest'd offspring of a sire unblest'd!  
Each neighbouring realm, conducive to our woe,  
Sends forth her peers, and every peer a foe:  
The court proud Samos and Dulichium fills,  
And lofty Zacynth crown'd with shady hills.

E'en Ithaca and all her lords invade  
The imperial sceptre, and the regal bed:  
The queen, averse to love, yet awed by power,  
Seems half to yield, yet flies the bridal hour:  
Meantime their licence uncontroll'd I bear;  
E'en now they envy me the vital air:  
But Heaven will sure revenge, and gods there are.

"But go Eumaeus! to the queen impart  
Our safe return, and ease a mother's heart.  
Yet secret go; for numerous are my foes,  
And here at least I may in peace repose."

To whom the swain: "I hear and I obey:  
But old Laertes weeps his life away,  
And deems thee lost: shall I speed employ  
To bless his age: a messenger of joy?  
The mournful hour that tore his son away  
Sent the sad sire in solitude to stray;  
Yet busied with his slaves, to ease his woe,  
He dress'd the vine, and bade the garden blow,  
Nor food nor wine refused; but since the day  
That you to Pylos plough'd the watery way,  
Nor wine nor food he tastes; but, sunk in woes,  
Wild springs the vine, no more the garden blows,  
Shut from the walks of men, to pleasure lost,

Pensive and pale he wanders half a ghost."

"Wretched old man! (with tears the prince returns)

Yet cease to go--what man so blest but mourns?

Were every wish indulged by favouring skies,

This hour should give Ulysses to my eyes.

But to the queen with speed dispatchful bear,

Our safe return, and back with speed repair;

And let some handmaid of her train resort

To good Laertes in his rural court."

While yet he spoke, impatient of delay,

He braced his sandals on, and strode away:

Then from the heavens the martial goddess flies

Through the wild fields of air, and cleaves the skies:

In form, a virgin in soft beauty's bloom,

Skill'd in the illustrious labours of the loom.

Alone to Ithaca she stood display'd,

But unapparent as a viewless shade

Escaped Telemachus (the powers above,

Seen or unseen, o'er earth at pleasure move):

The dogs intelligent confess'd the tread

Of power divine, and howling, trembling, fled.

The goddess, beckoning, waves her deathless hands:

Dauntless the king before the goddess stands:

"Then why (she said), O favour'd of the skies!  
Why to thy godlike son this long disguise?  
Stand forth reveal'd; with him thy cares employ  
Against thy foes; be valiant and destroy!  
Lo! I descend in that avenging hour,  
To combat by thy side, thy guardian power."

She said, and o'er him waves her wand of gold  
Imperial robes his manly limbs infold;  
At once with grace divine his frame improves;  
At once with majesty enlarged he moves:  
Youth flush'd his reddening cheek, and from his brows  
A length of hair in sable ringlets flows;  
His blackening chin receives a deeper shade;  
Then from his eyes upsprung the warrior-maid.

The hero reascends: the prince o'erawed  
Scarce lifts his eyes, and bows as to a god,  
Then with surprise (surprise chastised by fears):  
"How art thou changed! (he cried)--a god appears!  
Far other vests thy limbs majestic grace,  
Far other glories lighten from thy face!  
If heaven be thy abode, with pious care,  
Lo! I the ready sacrifice prepare:  
Lo! gifts of labour'd gold adorn thy shrine,  
To win thy grace: O save us, power divine!"

"Few are my days (Ulysses made reply),  
Nor I, alas! descendant of the sky.  
I am thy father. O my son! my son!  
That father, for whose sake thy days have run  
One scene of woe! to endless cares consign'd,  
And outraged by the wrongs of base mankind."

Then, rushing to his arms, he kiss'd his boy  
With the strong raptures of a parent's joy.  
Tears bathe his cheek, and tears the ground bedew:  
He strain'd him close, as to his breast he grew.  
"Ah me! (exclaims the prince with fond desire)  
Thou art not--no, thou canst not be my sire.  
Heaven such illusion only can impose,  
By the false joy to aggravate my woes.  
Who but a god can change the general doom,  
And give to wither'd age a youthful bloom!  
Late, worn with years, in weeds obscene you trod;  
Now, clothed in majesty, you move a god!"

"Forbear (he cried,) for Heaven reserve that name;  
Give to thy father but a father's claim;  
Other Ulysses shalt thou never see,  
I am Ulysses, I, my son, am he.  
Twice ten sad years o'er earth and ocean toss'd,

'Tis given at length to view my native coast.  
Pallas, unconquer'd maid, my frame surrounds  
With grace divine: her power admits no bounds;  
She o'er my limbs old age and wrinkles shed;  
Now strong as youth, magnificent I tread.  
The gods with ease frail man depress or raise,  
Exalt the lowly, or the proud debase."

He spoke and sate. The prince with transport flew,  
Hung round his neck, while tears his cheek bedew;  
Nor less the father pour'd a social flood;  
They wept abundant, and they wept aloud.  
As the bold eagle with fierce sorrow stung,  
Or parent vulture, mourns her ravish'd young;  
They cry, they scream, their unfledged brood a prey  
To some rude churl, and borne by stealth away:  
So they aloud: and tears in tides had run,  
Their grief unfinish'd with the setting sun;  
But checking the full torrent in its flow,  
The prince thus interrupts the solemn woe.  
"What ship transported thee, O father, say;  
And what bless'd hands have oar'd thee on the way?"

"All, all (Ulysses instant made reply),  
I tell thee all, my child, my only joy!  
Phaeacians bore me to the port assign'd,

A nation ever to the stranger kind;  
Wrapp'd in the embrace of sleep, the faithful train  
O'er seas convey'd me to my native reign:  
Embroider'd vestures, gold, and brass, are laid  
Conceal'd in caverns in the sylvan shade.  
Hither, intent the rival rout to slay,  
And plan the scene of death, I bend my way;  
So Pallas wills--but thou, my son, explain  
The names and numbers of the audacious train;  
'Tis mine to judge if better to employ  
Assistant force, or singly to destroy."

"O'er earth (returns the prince) resounds thy name,  
Thy well-tried wisdom, and thy martial fame,  
Yet at thy words I start, in wonder lost;  
Can we engage, not decades but an host?  
Can we alone in furious battle stand,  
Against that numerous and determined band?  
Hear then their numbers; from Dulichium came  
Twice twenty-six, all peers of mighty name.  
Six are their menial train: twice twelve the boast  
Of Samos; twenty from Zacynthus' coast:  
And twelve our country's pride; to these belong  
Medon and Phemius, skill'd in heavenly song.  
Two sewers from day to day the revels wait,  
Exact of taste, and serve the feast in state.

With such a foe the unequal fight to try,  
Were by false courage unrevenged to die.  
Then what assistant powers you boast relate,  
Ere yet we mingle in the stern debate."

"Mark well my voice, (Ulysses straight replies:)  
What need of aids, if favour'd by the skies?  
If shielded to the dreadful fight we move,  
By mighty Pallas, and by thundering Jove?"

"Sufficient they (Telemachus rejoin'd)  
Against the banded powers of all mankind:  
They, high enthroned above the rolling clouds,  
Wither the strength of man, and awe the gods."

"Such aids expect (he cries,) when strong in might  
We rise terrific to the task of fight.  
But thou, when morn salutes the aerial plain,  
The court revisit and the lawless train:  
Me thither in disguise Eumaeus leads,  
An aged mendicant in tatter'd weeds.  
There, if base scorn insult my reverend age,  
Bear it, my son! repress thy rising rage.  
If outraged, cease that outrage to repel;  
Bear it, my son! howe'er thy heart rebel.  
Yet strive by prayer and counsel to restrain

Their lawless insults, though thou strive in vain:  
For wicked ears are deaf to wisdom's call,  
And vengeance strikes whom Heaven has doom'd to fall.  
Once more attend: when she whose power inspires  
The thinking mind, my soul to vengeance fires,  
I give the sign: that instant, from beneath,  
Aloft convey the instruments of death,  
Armour and arms; and, if mistrust arise,  
Thus veil the truth in plausible disguise:

"These glittering weapons, ere he sail'd to Troy,  
Ulysses view'd with stern heroic joy:  
Then, beaming o'er the illumined wall they shone;  
Now dust dishonours, all their lustre gone.  
I bear them hence (so Jove my soul inspires),  
From the pollution of the fuming fires;  
Lest when the bowl inflames, in vengeful mood  
Ye rush to arms, and stain the feast with blood:  
Oft ready swords in luckless hour incite  
The hand of wrath, and arm it for the fight.'

"Such be the plea, and by the plea deceive:  
For Jove infatuates all, and all believe.  
Yet leave for each of us a sword to wield,  
A pointed javelin, and a fenceful shield.  
But by my blood that in thy bosom glows,

By that regard a son his father owes;  
The secret, that thy father lives, retain  
Lock'd in thy bosom from the household train;  
Hide it from all; e'en from Eumaeus hide,  
From my dear father, and my dearer bride.  
One care remains, to note the loyal few  
Whose faith yet lasts among the menial crew;  
And noting, ere we rise in vengeance, prove  
Who love his prince; for sure you merit love."

To whom the youth: "To emulate, I aim,  
The brave and wise, and my great father's fame.  
But reconsider, since the wisest err,  
Vengeance resolved, 'tis dangerous to defer.  
What length of time must we consume in vain,  
Too curious to explore the menial train!  
While the proud foes, industrious to destroy  
Thy wealth, in riot the delay enjoy.  
Suffice it in this exigence alone  
To mark the damsels that attend the throne:  
Dispersed the youth reside; their faith to prove  
Jove grants henceforth, if thou hast spoke from Jove."

While in debate they waste the hours away,  
The associates of the prince repass'd the bay:  
With speed they guide the vessel to the shores;

With speed debarking land the naval stores:  
Then, faithful to their charge, to Clytius bear,  
And trust the presents to his friendly care.  
Swift to the queen a herald flies to impart  
Her son's return, and ease a parent's heart:  
Lest a sad prey to ever-musing cares,  
Pale grief destroy what time awhile forbears.  
The incautious herald with impatience burns,  
And cries aloud, "Thy son, O queen, returns;"  
Eumaeus sage approach'd the imperial throne,  
And breathed his mandate to her ear alone,  
Then measured back the way. The suitor band,  
Stung to the soul, abash'd, confounded, stand;  
And issuing from the dome, before the gate,  
With clouded looks, a pale assembly sate.

At length Eurymachus: "Our hopes are vain;  
Telemachus in triumph sails the main.  
Haste, rear the mast, the swelling shroud display;  
Haste, to our ambush'd friends the news convey!"

Scarce had he spake, when, turning to the strand,  
Amphinomos survey'd the associate band;  
Full to the bay within the winding shores  
With gather'd sails they stood, and lifted oars.  
"O friends!" he cried, elate with rising joy,

"See to the port secure the vessel fly!  
Some god has told them, or themselves survey  
The bark escaped; and measure back their way."

Swift at the word descending to the shores,  
They moor the vessel and unlade the stores:  
Then, moving from the strand, apart they sate,  
And full and frequent form'd a dire debate.

"Lives then the boy? he lives (Antinous cries),  
The care of gods and favourite of the skies.  
All night we watch'd, till with her orient wheels  
Aurora flamed above the eastern hills,  
And from the lofty brow of rocks by day  
Took in the ocean with a broad survey  
Yet safe he sails; the powers celestial give  
To shun the hidden snares of death, and live.  
But die he shall, and thus condemn'd to bleed,  
Be now the scene of instant death decreed.  
Hope ye success? undaunted crush the foe.  
Is he not wise? know this, and strike the blow.  
Wait ye, till he to arms in council draws  
The Greeks, averse too justly to our cause?  
Strike, ere, the states convened, the foe betray  
Our murderous ambush on the watery way.  
Or choose ye vagrant from their rage to fly,

Outcasts of earth, to breathe an unknown sky?  
The brave prevent misfortune; then be brave,  
And bury future danger in his grave.  
Returns he? ambush'd we'll his walk invade,  
Or where he hides in solitude and shade;  
And give the palace to the queen a dower,  
Or him she blesses in the bridal hour.  
But if submissive you resign the sway,  
Slaves to a boy, go, flatter and obey.  
Retire we instant to our native reign,  
Nor be the wealth of kings consumed in vain;  
Then wed whom choice approves: the queen be given  
To some blest prince, the prince decreed by Heaven."

Abash'd, the suitor train his voice attends;  
Till from his throne Amphinomus ascends,  
Who o'er Dulichium stretch'd his spacious reign,  
A land of plenty, bless'd with every grain:  
Chief of the numbers who the queen address'd,  
And though displeasing, yet displeasing least.  
Soft were his words; his actions wisdom sway'd;  
Graceful awhile he paused, then mildly said:

"O friends, forbear! and be the thought withstood:  
'Tis horrible to shed imperial blood!  
Consult we first the all-seeing powers above,

And the sure oracles of righteous Jove.  
If they assent, e'en by this hand he dies;  
If they forbid, I war not with the skies."

He said: the rival train his voice approved,  
And rising instant to the palace moved.  
Arrived, with wild tumultuous noise they sate,  
Recumbent on the shining thrones of state.

The Medon, conscious of their dire debates,  
The murderous counsel to the queen relates.  
Touch'd at the dreadful story, she descends:  
Her hasty steps a damsel train attends.  
Full where the dome its shining valves expands,  
Sudden before the rival powers she stands;  
And, veiling, decent, with a modest shade  
Her cheek, indignant to Antinous said:

"O void of faith! of all bad men the worst!  
Renown'd for wisdom, by the abuse accursed!  
Mistaking fame proclaims thy generous mind:  
Thy deeds denote thee of the basest kind.  
Wretch! to destroy a prince that friendship gives,  
While in his guest his murderer he receives;  
Nor dread superior Jove, to whom belong  
The cause of suppliants, and revenge of wrong.

Hast thou forgot, ungrateful as thou art,  
Who saved thy father with a friendly part?  
Lawless he ravaged with his martial powers  
The Taphian pirates on Thesprotia's shores;  
Enraged, his life, his treasures they demand;  
Ulysses saved him from the avenger's hand.  
And would'st thou evil for his good repay?  
His bed dishonour, and his house betray?  
Afflict his queen, and with a murderous hand  
Destroy his heir!--but cease, 'tis I command."

"Far hence those fears (Eurymachus replied,)  
O prudent princess! bid thy soul confide.  
Breathes there a man who dares that hero slay,  
While I behold the golden light of day?  
No: by the righteous powers of heaven I swear,  
His blood in vengeance smokes upon my spear.  
Ulysses, when my infant days I led,  
With wine sufficed me, and with dainties fed:  
My generous soul abhors the ungrateful part,  
And my friend's son lives nearest to my heart.  
Then fear no mortal arm; if Heaven destroy,  
We must resign: for man is born to die."

Thus smooth he ended, yet his death conspired:  
Then sorrowing, with sad step the queen retired,

With streaming eyes, all comfortless deplored,  
Touch'd with the dear remembrance of her lord:  
Nor ceased till Pallas bids her sorrows fly,  
And in soft slumber seal'd her flowing eye.

And now Eumaeus, at the evening hour,  
Came late, returning to his sylvan bower.  
Ulysses and his son had dress'd with art  
A yearling boar, and gave the gods their part.  
Holy repast! That instant from the skies  
The martial goddess to Ulysses flies:  
She waves her golden wand, and reassumes  
From every feature every grace that blooms;  
At once his vestures change; at once she sheds  
Age o'er his limbs, that tremble as he treads:  
Lest to the queen the swain with transport fly,  
Unable to contain the unruly joy;  
When near he drew, the prince breaks forth: "Proclaim  
What tidings, friend? what speaks the voice of fame?  
Say, if the suitors measure back the main,  
Or still in ambush thirst for blood in vain?"

"Whether (he cries) they measure back the flood,  
Or still in ambush thirst in vain for blood,  
Escaped my care: where lawless suitors sway,  
Thy mandate borne my soul disdain'd to stay.

But from the Hermaean height I cast a view,  
Where to the port a bark high-bounding flew;  
Her freight a shining band: with martial air  
Each poised his shield, and each advanced his spear;  
And, if aright these searching eyes survey,  
The eluded suitors stem the watery way."

The prince, well pleased to disappoint their wiles,  
Steals on his sire a glance, and secret smiles.  
And now, a short repast prepared, they fed  
Till the keen rage of craving hunger fled:  
Then to repose withdrawn, apart they lay,  
And in soft sleep forgot the cares of day.