

BOOK XVII.

ARGUMENT.

Telemachus returning to the city, relates to Penelope the sum of his travels. Ulysses is conducted by Eumaeus to the palace, where his old dog Argus acknowledges his master, after an absence of twenty years, and dies with joy. Eumaeus returns into the country, and Ulysses remains among the suitors, whose behaviour is described.

Soon as Aurora, daughter of the dawn,
Sprinkled with roseate light the dewy lawn,
In haste the prince arose, prepared to part;
His hand impatient grasps the pointed dart;
Fair on his feet the polish'd sandals shine,
And thus he greets the master of the swine:

"My friend, adieu! let this short stay suffice;
I haste to meet my mother's longing eyes,
And end her tears, her sorrows and her sighs.
But thou, attentive, what we order heed:
This hapless stranger to the city lead:
By public bounty let him there be fed,

And bless the hand that stretches forth the bread.
To wipe the tears from all afflicted eyes,
My will may covet, but my power denies.
If this raise anger in the stranger's thought,
The pain of anger punishes the fault:
The very truth I undisguised declare;
For what so easy as to be sincere?"

To this Ulysses: "What the prince requires
Of swift removal, seconds my desires.
To want like mine the peopled town can yield
More hopes of comfort than the lonely field:
Nor fits my age to till the labour'd lands,
Or stoop to tasks a rural lord demands.
Adieu! but since this ragged garb can bear
So ill the inclemencies of morning air,
A few hours' space permit me here to stay:
My steps Eumaeus shall to town convey,
With riper beams when Phoebus warms the day."

Thus he: nor aught Telemachus replied,
But left the mansion with a lofty stride:
Schemes of revenge his pondering breast elate,
Revolving deep the suitors' sudden fate,
Arriving now before the imperial hall,
He props his spear against the pillar'd wall;

Then like a lion o'er the threshold bounds;
The marble pavement with his steps resounds:
His eye first glanced where Euryclea spreads
With furry spoils of beasts the splendid beds:
She saw, she wept, she ran with eager pace,
And reach'd her master with a long embrace.
All crowded round, the family appears
With wild entrancement, and ecstatic tears.
Swift from above descends the royal fair
(Her beauteous cheeks the blush of Venus wear,
Chasten'd with coy Diana's pensive air);
Hangs o'er her son, in his embraces dies;
Rains kisses on his neck, his face, his eyes:
Few words she spoke, though much she had to say;
And scarce those few, for tears, could force their way.

"Light of my eyes: he comes! unhop'd-for joy!
Has Heaven from Pylos brought my lovely boy?
So snatch'd from all our cares!--Tell, hast thou known
Thy father's fate, and tell me all thy own."

"Oh dearest! most revered of womankind!
Cease with those tears to melt a manly mind
(Replied the prince); nor be our fates deplored,
From death and treason to thy arms restored.
Go bathe, and robed in white ascend the towers;

With all thy handmaids thank the immortal powers;
To every god vow hecatombs to bleed.
And call Jove's vengeance on their guilty deed.
While to the assembled council I repair:
A stranger sent by Heaven attends me there;
My new accepted guest I haste to find,
Now to Peiraeus' honour'd charge consign'd."

The matron heard, nor was his word in vain.
She bathed; and, robed in white, with all her train,
To every god vow'd hecatombs to bleed,
And call'd Jove's vengeance on the guilty deed,
Arm'd with his lance, the prince then pass'd the gate,
Two dogs behind, a faithful guard, await;
Pallas his form with grace divine improves:
The gazing crowd admires him as he moves.
Him, gathering round, the haughty suitors greet
With semblance fair, but inward deep deceit,
Their false addresses, generous, he denied.
Pass'd on, and sate by faithful Mentor's side;
With Antiphus, and Halitherses sage
(His father's counsellors, revered for age).
Of his own fortunes, and Ulysses' fame,
Much ask'd the seniors; till Peiraeus came.
The stranger-guest pursued him close behind;
Whom when Telemachus beheld, he join'd.

He (when Peiraeus ask'd for slaves to bring
The gifts and treasures of the Spartan king)
Thus thoughtful answer'd: "Those we shall not move,
Dark and unconscious of the will of Jove;
We know not yet the full event of all:
Stabb'd in his palace if your prince must fall,
Us, and our house, if treason must o'erthrow,
Better a friend possess them than a foe;
If death to these, and vengeance Heaven decree,
Riches are welcome then, not else, to me.
Till then retain the gifts."--The hero said,
And in his hand the willing stranger led.
Then disarray'd, the shining bath they sought
(With unguents smooth) of polish'd marble wrought:
Obedient handmaids with assistant toil
Supply the limpid wave, and fragrant oil:
Then o'er their limbs refulgent robes they threw,
And fresh from bathing to their seats withdrew.
The golden ewer a nymph attendant brings,
Replenish'd from the pure translucent springs;
With copious streams that golden ewer supplies
A silver layer of capacious size.
They wash: the table, in fair order spread,
Is piled with viands and the strength of bread.
Full opposite, before the folding gate,
The pensive mother sits in humble state;

Lowly she sate, and with dejected view
The fleecy threads her ivory fingers drew.
The prince and stranger shared the genial feast,
Till now the rage of thirst and hunger ceased.

When thus the queen: "My son! my only friend!
Say, to my mournful couch shall I ascend?
(The couch deserted now a length of years;
The couch for ever water'd with my tears;)
Say, wilt thou not (ere yet the suitor crew
Return, and riot shakes our walls anew),
Say, wilt thou not the least account afford?
The least glad tidings of my absent lord?"

To her the youth. "We reach'd the Pylia plains,
Where Nestor, shepherd of his people, reigns.
All arts of tenderness to him are known,
Kind to Ulysses' race as to his own;
No father with a fonder grasp of joy
Strains to his bosom his long-absent boy.
But all unknown, if yet Ulysses breathe,
Or glide a spectre in the realms beneath;
For farther search, his rapid steeds transport
My lengthen'd journey to the Spartan court.
There Argive Helen I beheld, whose charms
(So Heaven decreed) engaged the great in arms.

My cause of coming told, he thus rejoin'd;
And still his words live perfect in my mind:

"Heavens! would a soft, inglorious, dastard train
An absent hero's nuptial joys profane
So with her young, amid the woodland shades,
A timorous hind the lion's court invades,
Leaves in that fatal lair her tender fawns,
And climbs the cliffs, or feeds along the lawns;
Meantime returning, with remorseless sway
The monarch savage rends the panting prey:
With equal fury, and with equal fame,
Shall great Ulysses reassert his claim.
O Jove! supreme! whom men and gods revere;
And thou whose lustre gilds the rolling sphere!
With power congenial join'd, propitious aid
The chief adopted by the martial maid!
Such to our wish the warrior soon restore,
As when, contending on the Lesbian shore,
His prowess Philomelides confess'd,
And loud acclaiming Greeks the victor bless'd:
Then soon the invaders of his bed, and throne,
Their love presumptuous shall by death atone.
Now what you question of my ancient friend,
With truth I answer; thou the truth attend.
Learn what I heard the sea-born seer relate,

Whose eye can pierce the dark recess of fate
Sole in an isle, imprison'd by the main,
The sad survivor of his numerous train,
Ulysses lies; detain'd by magic charms,
And press'd unwilling in Calypso's arms.
No sailors there, no vessels to convey,
No oars to cut the immeasurable way.'
This told Atrides, and he told no more.
Then safe I voyaged to my native shore."

He ceased; nor made the pensive queen reply,
But droop'd her head, and drew a secret sigh.
When Theoclymenus the seer began:
"O suffering consort of the suffering man!
What human knowledge could, those kings might tell,
But I the secrets of high heaven reveal.
Before the first of gods be this declared,
Before the board whose blessings we have shared;
Witness the genial rites, and witness all
This house holds sacred in her ample wall!
E'en now, this instant, great Ulysses, laid
At rest, or wandering in his country's shade,
Their guilty deeds, in hearing, and in view,
Secret revolves; and plans the vengeance due.
Of this sure auguries the gods bestow'd,
When first our vessel anchor'd in your road."

"Succeed those omens, Heaven! (the queen rejoin'd)
So shall our bounties speak a grateful mind;
And every envied happiness attend
The man who calls Penelope his friend."
Thus communed they: while in the marble court
(Scene of their insolence) the lords resort:
Athwart the spacious square each tries his art,
To whirl the disk, or aim the missile dart.
Now did the hour of sweet repast arrive,
And from the field the victim flocks they drive:
Medon the herald (one who pleased them best,
And honour'd with a portion of their feast),
To bid the banquet, interrupts their play:
Swift to the hall they haste; aside they lay
Their garments, and succinct the victims slay.
Then sheep, and goats, and bristly porkers bled,
And the proud steer was o'er the marble spread.
While thus the copious banquet they provide,
Along the road, conversing side by side,
Proceed Ulysses and the faithful swain;
When thus Eumaeus, generous and humane:
"To town, observant of our lord's behest,
Now let us speed; my friend no more my guest!
Yet like myself I wish thee here preferr'd,
Guard of the flock, or keeper of the herd,
But much to raise my master's wrath I fear;

The wrath of princes ever is severe.
Then heed his will, and be our journey made
While the broad beams of Phoebus are display'd,
Or ere brown evening spreads her chilly shade."
"Just thy advice (the prudent chief rejoin'd),
And such as suits the dictate of my mind.
Lead on: but help me to some staff to stay
My feeble step, since rugged is the way."
Across his shoulders then the scrip he flung,
Wide-patch'd, and fasten'd by a twisted thong.
A staff Eumaeus gave. Along the way
Cheerly they fare: behind, the keepers stay:
These with their watchful dogs (a constant guard)
Supply his absence, and attend the herd.
And now his city strikes the monarch's eyes,
Alas! how changed! a man of miseries;
Propp'd on a staff, a beggar old and bare
In rags dishonest fluttering with the air!
Now pass'd the rugged road, they journey down
The cavern'd way descending to the town,
Where, from the rock, with liquid drops distils
A limpid fount; that spread in parting rills
Its current thence to serve the city brings;
An useful work, adorn'd by ancient kings.
Neritus, Ithacus, Polyctor, there,
In sculptured stone immortalized their care,

In marble urns received it from above,
And shaded with a green surrounding grove;
Where silver alders, in high arches twined,
Drink the cool stream, and tremble to the wind.
Beneath, sequester'd to the nymphs, is seen
A mossy altar, deep embower'd in green;
Where constant vows by travellers are paid,
And holy horrors solemnize the shade.

Here with his goats (not vow'd to sacred fame,
But pamper'd luxury) Melanthias came:
Two grooms attend him. With an envious look
He eyed the stranger, and imperious spoke:

"The good old proverb how this pair fulfill!
One rogue is usher to another still.
Heaven with a secret principle endued
Mankind, to seek their own similitude.
Where goes the swineherd with that ill-look'd guest?
That giant-glutton, dreadful at a feast!
Full many a post have those broad shoulders worn,
From every great man's gate repulsed with scorn:
To no brave prize aspired the worthless swain,
'Twas but for scraps he ask'd, and ask'd in vain.
To beg, than work, he better understands,
Or we perhaps might take him off thy hands.

For any office could the slave be good,
To cleanse the fold, or help the kids to food.
If any labour those big joints could learn,
Some whey, to wash his bowels, he might earn.
To cringe, to whine, his idle hands to spread,
Is all, by which that graceless maw is fed.
Yet hear me! if thy impudence but dare
Approach yon wall, I prophesy thy fare:
Dearly, full dearly, shalt thou buy thy bread
With many a footstool thundering at thy head."

He thus: nor insolent of word alone,
Spurn'd with his rustic heel his king unknown;
Spurn'd, but not moved: he like a pillar stood,
Nor stirr'd an inch, contemptuous, from the road:
Doubtful, or with his staff to strike him dead,
Or greet the pavement with his worthless head.
Short was that doubt; to quell his rage inured,
The hero stood self-conquer'd, and endured.
But hateful of the wretch, Eumaeus heaved
His hands obtesting, and this prayer conceived:
"Daughters of Jove! who from the ethereal bowers
Descend to swell the springs, and feed the flowers!
Nymphs of this fountain! to whose sacred names
Our rural victims mount in blazing flames!
To whom Ulysses' piety preferr'd

The yearly firstlings of his flock and herd;
Succeed my wish, your votary restore:
Oh, be some god his convoy to our shore!
Due pains shall punish then this slave's offence,
And humble all his airs of insolence,
Who, proudly stalking, leaves the herds at large,
Commences courtier, and neglects his charge."

"What mutters he? (Melanthius sharp rejoins;)
This crafty miscreant, big with dark designs?
The day shall come--nay, 'tis already near--
When, slave! to sell thee at a price too dear
Must be my care; and hence transport thee o'er,
A load and scandal to this happy shore.
Oh! that as surely great Apollo's dart,
Or some brave suitor's sword, might pierce the heart
Of the proud son; as that we stand this hour
In lasting safety from the father's power!"

So spoke the wretch, but, shunning farther fray,
Turn'd his proud step, and left them on their way.
Straight to the feastful palace he repair'd,
Familiar enter'd, and the banquet shared;
Beneath Eurymachus, his patron lord,
He took his place, and plenty heap'd the board.

Meantime they heard, soft circling in the sky
Sweet airs ascend, and heavenly minstrelsy
(For Phemius to the lyre attuned the strain):
Ulysses hearken'd, then address'd the swain:

"Well may this palace admiration claim,
Great and respondent to the master's fame!
Stage above stage the imperial structure stands,
Holds the chief honours, and the town commands:
High walls and battlements the courts inclose,
And the strong gates defy a host of foes.
Far other cares its dwellers now employ;
The throng'd assembly and the feast of joy:
I see the smokes of sacrifice aspire,
And hear (what graces every feast) the lyre."

Then thus Eumaeus: "Judge we which were best;
Amidst yon revellers a sudden guest
Choose you to mingle, while behind I stay?
Or I first entering introduce the way?
Wait for a space without, but wait not long;
This is the house of violence and wrong:
Some rude insult thy reverend age may bear;
For like their lawless lords the servants are."

"Just is, O friend! thy caution, and address'd

(Replied the chief, to no unheedful breast:)
The wrongs and injuries of base mankind
Fresh to my sense, and always in my mind.
The bravely-patient to no fortune yields:
On rolling oceans, and in fighting fields,
Storms have I pass'd, and many a stern debate;
And now in humbler scene submit to fate.
What cannot want? The best she will expose,
And I am learn'd in all her train of woes;
She fills with navies, hosts, and loud alarms,
The sea, the land, and shakes the world with arms!"

Thus, near the gates conferring as they drew,
Argus, the dog, his ancient master knew:
He not unconscious of the voice and tread,
Lifts to the sound his ear, and rears his head;
Bred by Ulysses, nourish'd at his board,
But, ah! not fated long to please his lord;
To him, his swiftness and his strength were vain;
The voice of glory call'd him o'er the main.
Till then in every sylvan chase renown'd,
With Argus, Argus, rung the woods around;
With him the youth pursued the goat or fawn,
Or traced the mazy leveret o'er the lawn.
Now left to man's ingratitude he lay,
Unhoused, neglected in the public way;

And where on heaps the rich manure was spread,
Obscene with reptiles, took his sordid bed.

He knew his lord; he knew, and strove to meet;
In vain he strove to crawl and kiss his feet;
Yet (all he could) his tail, his tears, his eyes,
Salute his master, and confess his joys.
Soft pity touch'd the mighty master's soul;
Adown his cheek a tear unbidden stole,
Stole unperceived: he turn'd his head and dried
The drop humane: then thus impassion'd cried:

"What noble beast in this abandon'd state
Lies here all helpless at Ulysses' gate?
His bulk and beauty speak no vulgar praise:
If, as he seems, he was in better days,
Some care his age deserves; or was he prized
For worthless beauty? therefore now despised;
Such dogs and men there are, mere things of state;
And always cherish'd by their friends, the great."

"Not Argus so, (Eumaeus thus rejoin'd,)
But served a master of a nobler kind,
Who, never, never shall behold him more!
Long, long since perish'd on a distant shore!
Oh had you seen him, vigorous, bold, and young,

Swift as a stag, and as a lion strong:
Him no fell savage on the plain withstood,
None 'scaped him bosom'd in the gloomy wood;
His eye how piercing, and his scent how true,
To wind the vapour on the tainted dew!
Such, when Ulysses left his natal coast:
Now years unnerve him, and his lord is lost!
The women keep the generous creature bare,
A sleek and idle race is all their care:
The master gone, the servants what restrains?
Or dwells humanity where riot reigns?
Jove fix'd it certain, that whatever day
Makes man a slave, takes half his worth away."

This said, the honest herdsman strode before;
The musing monarch pauses at the door:
The dog, whom Fate had granted to behold
His lord, when twenty tedious years had roll'd,
Takes a last look, and having seen him, dies;
So closed for ever faithful Argus' eyes!

And now Telemachus, the first of all,
Observed Eumaeus entering in the hall;
Distant he saw, across the shady dome;
Then gave a sign, and beckon'd him to come:
There stood an empty seat, where late was placed,

In order due, the steward of the feast,
(Who now was busied carving round the board,)
Eumaeus took, and placed it near his lord.
Before him instant was the banquet spread,
And the bright basket piled with loaves of bread.

Next came Ulysses lowly at the door,
A figure despicable, old, and poor.
In squalid vests, with many a gaping rent,
Propp'd on a staff, and trembling as he went.
Then, resting on the threshold of the gate,
Against a cypress pillar lean'd his weight
Smooth'd by the workman to a polish'd plane);
The thoughtful son beheld, and call'd his swain

"These viands, and this bread, Eumaeus! bear,
And let yon mendicant our plenty share:
And let him circle round the suitors' board,
And try the bounty of each gracious lord.
Bold let him ask, encouraged thus by me:
How ill, alas! do want and shame agree!"

His lord's command the faithful servant bears:
The seeming beggar answers with his prayers:
"Bless'd be Telemachus! in every deed
Inspire him. Jove! in every wish succeed!"

This said, the portion from his son convey'd
With smiles receiving on his scrip he laid.
Long has the minstrel swept the sounding wire,
He fed, and ceased when silence held the lyre.
Soon as the suitors from the banquet rose,
Minerva prompts the man of mighty woes
To tempt their bounties with a suppliant's art,
And learn the generous from the ignoble heart
(Not but his soul, resentful as humane,
Dooms to full vengeance all the offending train);
With speaking eyes, and voice of plaintive sound,
Humble he moves, imploring all around.
The proud feel pity, and relief bestow,
With such an image touch'd of human woe;
Inquiring all, their wonder they confess,
And eye the man, majestic in distress.

While thus they gaze and question with their eyes,
The bold Melanthius to their thought replies:
"My lords! this stranger of gigantic port
The good Eumaeus usher'd to your court.
Full well I mark'd the features of his face,
Though all unknown his clime, or noble race."

"And is this present, swineherd! of thy band?
Bring'st thou these vagrants to infest the land?"

(Returns Antinous with retorted eye)
Objects uncouth, to check the genial joy.
Enough of these our court already grace;
Of giant stomach, and of famish'd face.
Such guests Eumaeus to his country brings,
To share our feast, and lead the life of kings."

To whom the hospitable swain rejoins:
"Thy passion, prince, belies thy knowing mind.
Who calls, from distant nations to his own,
The poor, distinguish'd by their wants alone?
Round the wide world are sought those men divine
Who public structures raise, or who design;
Those to whose eyes the gods their ways reveal,
Or bless with salutary arts to heal;
But chief to poets such respect belongs,
By rival nations courted for their songs;
These states invite, and mighty kings admire,
Wide as the sun displays his vital fire.
It is not so with want! how few that feed
A wretch unhappy, merely for his need!
Unjust to me, and all that serve the state,
To love Ulysses is to raise thy hate.
For me, suffice the approbation won
Of my great mistress, and her godlike son."

To him Telemachus: "No more incense
The man by nature prone to insolence:
Injurious minds just answers but provoke"--
Then turning to Antinous, thus he spoke:
"Thanks to thy care! whose absolute command
Thus drives the stranger from our court and land.
Heaven bless its owner with a better mind!
From envy free, to charity inclined.
This both Penelope and I afford:
Then, prince! be bounteous of Ulysses' board.
To give another's is thy hand so slow?
So much more sweet to spoil than to bestow?"

"Whence, great Telemachus! this lofty strain?
(Antinous cries with insolent disdain):
Portions like mine if every suitor gave,
Our walls this twelvemonth should not see the slave."

He spoke, and lifting high above the board
His ponderous footstool, shook it at his lord.
The rest with equal hand conferr'd the bread:
He fill'd his scrip, and to the threshold sped;
But first before Antinous stopp'd, and said:
"Bestow, my friend! thou dost not seem the worst
Of all the Greeks, but prince-like and the first;
Then, as in dignity, be first in worth,

And I shall praise thee through the boundless earth.
Once I enjoy'd in luxury of state
Whate'er gives man the envied name of great;
Wealth, servants, friends, were mine in better days
And hospitality was then my praise;
In every sorrowing soul I pour'd delight,
And poverty stood smiling in my sight.
But Jove, all-governing, whose only will
Determines fate, and mingles good with ill,
Sent me (to punish my pursuit of gain)
With roving pirates o'er the Egyptian main
By Egypt's silver flood our ships we moor;
Our spies commission'd straight the coast explore;
But impotent of mind, the lawless will
The country ravage, and the natives kill.
The spreading clamour to their city flies,
And horse and foot in mingled tumults rise:
The reddening dawn reveals the hostile fields,
Horrid with bristly spears, and gleaming shields:
Jove thunder'd on their side: our guilty head
We turn'd to flight; the gathering vengeance spread
On all parts round, and heaps on heaps lay dead.
Some few the foe in servitude detain;
Death ill exchanged for bondage and for pain!
Unhappy me a Cyprian took aboard,
And gave to Dmetor, Cyprus' haughty lord:

Hither, to 'scape his chains, my course I steer,
Still cursed by Fortune, and insulted here!"

To whom Antinous thus his rage express'd:

"What god has plagued us with this gourmand guest?
Unless at distance, wretch! thou keep behind,
Another isle, than Cyprus more unkind,
Another Egypt shalt thou quickly find.
From all thou begg'st, a bold audacious slave;
Nor all can give so much as thou canst crave.
Nor wonder I, at such profusion shown;
Shameless they give, who give what's not their own."

The chief, retiring: "Souls, like that in thee,
Ill suits such forms of grace and dignity.
Nor will that hand to utmost need afford
The smallest portion of a wasteful board,
Whose luxury whole patrimonies sweeps,
Yet starving want, amidst the riot, weeps."

The haughty suitor with resentment burns,
And, sourly smiling, this reply returns:
"Take that, ere yet thou quit this princely throng;
And dumb for ever be thy slanderous tongue!"
He said, and high the whirling tripod flung.
His shoulder-blade received the ungentle shock;

He stood, and moved not, like a marble rock;
But shook his thoughtful head, nor more complain'd,
Sedate of soul, his character sustain'd,
And inly form'd revenge; then back withdrew:
Before his feet the well fill'd scrip he threw,
And thus with semblance mild address'd the crew:

"May what I speak your princely minds approve,
Ye peers and rivals in this noble love!
Not for the hurt I grieve, but for the cause.
If, when the sword our country's quarrel draws,
Or if, defending what is justly dear,
From Mars impartial some broad wound we bear,
The generous motive dignifies the scar.
But for mere want, how hard to suffer wrong!
Want brings enough of other ills along!
Yet, if injustice never be secure,
If fiends revenge, and gods assert the poor,
Death shall lay low the proud aggressor's head,
And make the dust Antinous' bridal bed."

"Peace, wretch! and eat thy bread without offence
(The suitor cried), or force shall drag thee hence,
Scourge through the public street, and cast thee there,
A mangled carcase for the hounds to tear."

His furious deed the general anger moved,
All, even the worst, condemn'd; and some reproved.
"Was ever chief for wars like these renown'd?
Ill fits the stranger and the poor to wound.
Unbless'd thy hand! if in this low disguise
Wander, perhaps, some inmate of the skies;
They (curious oft of mortal actions) deign
In forms like these to round the earth and main,
Just and unjust recording in their mind,
And with sure eyes inspecting all mankind."

Telemachus, absorb'd in thought severe,
Nourish'd deep anguish, though he shed no tear;
But the dark brow of silent sorrow shook:
While thus his mother to her virgins spoke:

"On him and his may the bright god of day
That base, inhospitable blow repay!"
The nurse replies: "If Jove receives my prayer,
Not one survives to breathe to-morrow's air."

"All, all are foes, and mischief is their end;
Antinous most to gloomy death a friend
(Replies the queen): the stranger begg'd their grace,
And melting pity soften'd every face;
From every other hand redress he found,

But fell Antinous answer'd with a wound."

Amidst her maids thus spoke the prudent queen,

Then bade Eumaeus call the pilgrim in.

"Much of the experienced man I long to hear,

If or his certain eye, or listening ear,

Have learn'd the fortunes of my wandering lord?"

Thus she, and good Eumaeus took the word:

"A private audience if thy grace impart,

The stranger's words may ease the royal heart.

His sacred eloquence in balm distils,

And the soothed heart with secret pleasure fills.

Three days have spent their beams, three nights have run

Their silent journey, since his tale begun,

Unfinish'd yet; and yet I thirst to hear!

As when some heaven-taught poet charms the ear

(Suspending sorrow with celestial strain

Breathed from the gods to soften human pain)

Time steals away with unregarded wing,

And the soul hears him, though he cease to sing

"Ulysses late he saw, on Cretan ground

(His fathers guest), for Minos' birth renown'd.

He now but waits the wind to waft him o'er,

With boundless treasure, from Thesprotia's shore."

To this the queen: "The wanderer let me hear,
While yon luxurious race indulge their cheer,
Devour the grazing ox, and browsing goat,
And turn my generous vintage down their throat.
For where's an arm, like thine, Ulysses! strong,
To curb wild riot, and to punish wrong?"

She spoke. Telemachus then sneezed aloud;
Constrain'd, his nostril echoed through the crowd.
The smiling queen the happy omen bless'd:

"So may these impious fall, by Fate oppress'd!"
Then to Eumaeus: "Bring the stranger, fly!
And if my questions meet a true reply,
Graced with a decent robe he shall retire,
A gift in season which his wants require."

Thus spoke Penelope. Eumaeus flies
In duteous haste, and to Ulysses cries:
"The queen invites thee, venerable guest!
A secret instinct moves her troubled breast,
Of her long absent lord from thee to gain
Some light, and soothe her soul's eternal pain.
If true, if faithful thou, her grateful mind
Of decent robes a present has design'd:
So finding favour in the royal eye,

Thy other wants her subjects shall supply."

"Fair truth alone (the patient man replied)

My words shall dictate, and my lips shall guide.

To him, to me, one common lot was given,

In equal woes, alas! involved by Heaven.

Much of his fates I know; but check'd by fear

I stand; the hand of violence is here:

Here boundless wrongs the starry skies invade,

And injured suppliants seek in vain for aid.

Let for a space the pensive queen attend,

Nor claim my story till the sun descend;

Then in such robes as suppliants may require,

Composed and cheerful by the genial fire,

When loud uproar and lawless riot cease,

Shall her pleased ear receive my words in peace."

Swift to the queen returns the gentle swain:

"And say (she cries), does fear or shame detain

The cautious stranger? With the begging kind

Shame suits but ill." Eumaeus thus rejoin'd:

"He only asks a more propitious hour,

And shuns (who would not?) wicked men in power;

At evening mild (meet season to confer)

By turns to question, and by turns to hear."

"Whoe'er this guest (the prudent queen replies)
His every step and every thought is wise.
For men like these on earth he shall not find
In all the miscreant race of human kind."
Thus she. Eumaeus all her words attends,
And, parting, to the suitor powers descends;
There seeks Telemachus, and thus apart
In whispers breathes the fondness of his heart:

"The time, my lord, invites me to repair
Hence to the lodge; my charge demands my care.
These sons of murder thirst thy life to take;
O guard it, guard it, for thy servant's sake!"

"Thanks to my friend (he cries): but now the hour
Of night draws on, go seek the rural bower:
But first refresh: and at the dawn of day
Hither a victim to the gods convey.
Our life to Heaven's immortal powers we trust,
Safe in their care, for Heaven protects the just."

Observant of his voice, Eumaeus sate
And fed recumbent on a chair of state.
Then instant rose, and as he moved along,
'Twas riot all amid the suitor throng,

They feast, they dance, and raise the mirthful song

Till now, declining towards the close of day,

The sun obliquely shot his dewy ray.