

BOOK XX.

ARGUMENT.

While Ulysses lies in the vestibule of the palace, he is witness to the disorders of the women. Minerva comforts him, and casts him asleep. At his waking he desires a favourable sign from Jupiter, which is granted. The feast of Apollo is celebrated by the people, and the suitors banquet in the palace. Telemachus exerts his authority amongst them; notwithstanding which, Ulysses is insulted by Caesippus, and the rest continue in their excesses. Strange prodigies are seen by Theoclymenus, the augur, who explains them to the destruction of the wooers.

An ample hide divine Ulysses spread.
And form'd of fleecy skins his humble bed
(The remnants of the spoil the suitor-crowd
In festival devour'd, and victims vow'd).
Then o'er the chief, Eurynome the chaste
With duteous care a downy carpet cast:
With dire revenge his thoughtful bosom glows,
And, ruminating wrath, he scorns repose.

As thus pavilion'd in the porch he lay,

Scenes of lewd loves his wakeful eyes survey,
Whilst to nocturnal joys impure repair,
With wanton glee, the prostituted fair.
His heart with rage this new dishonour stung,
Wavering his thoughts in dubious balance hung:
Or instant should he quench the guilty flame
With their own blood, and intercept the shame:
Or to their lust indulge a last embrace,
And let the peers consummate the disgrace
Round his swoln heart the murmurous fury rolls,
As o'er her young the mother-mastiff growls,
And bays the stranger groom: so wrath compress'd,
Recoiling, mutter'd thunder in his breast.
"Poor suffering heart! (he cried,) support the pain
Of wounded honour, and thy rage restrain.
Not fiercer woes thy fortitude could foil,
When the brave partners of thy ten years' toil
Dire Polypheme devour'd; I then was freed
By patient prudence from the death decreed."

Thus anchor'd safe on reason's peaceful coast,
Tempests of wrath his soul no longer toss'd;
Restless his body rolls, to rage resign'd
As one who long with pale-eyed famine pined,
The savoury cates on glowing embers cast
Incessant turns, impatient for repast

Ulysses so, from side to side-devolved,
In self-debate the suitor's doom resolved
When in the form of mortal nymph array'd,
From heaven descends the Jove-born martial maid;
And'hovering o'er his head in view confess'd,
The goddess thus her favourite care address'd:

"O thou, of mortals most inured to woes!
Why roll those eyes unfriended of repose?
Beneath thy palace-roof forget thy care;
Bless'd in thy queen! bless'd in thy blooming heir!
Whom, to the gods when suppliant fathers bow
They name the standard of their dearest vow."

"Just is thy kind reproach (the chief rejoin'd),
Deeds full of fate distract my various mind,
In contemplation wrapp'd. This hostile crew
What single arm hath prowess to subdue?
Or if, by Jove's and thy auxiliar aid,
They're doom'd to bleed; O say, celestial maid!
Where shall Ulysses shun, or how sustain
Nations embattled to revenge the slain?"

"Oh impotence of faith! (Minerva cries,
If man on frail unknowing man relies,
Doubt you the gods? Lo, Pallas' self descends,

Inspires thy counsels, and thy toils attends.
In me affianced, fortify thy breast,
Though myriads leagued thy rightful claim contest
My sure divinity shall bear the shield,
And edge thy sword to reap the glorious field.
Now, pay the debt to craving nature due,
Her faded powers with balmy rest renew."
She ceased, ambrosial slumbers seal his eyes;
Her care dissolves in visionary joys
The goddess, pleased, regains her natal skies.

Not so the queen; the downy bands of sleep
By grief relax'd she waked again to weep:
A gloomy pause ensued of dumb despair;
Then thus her fate invoked, with fervent prayer

"Diana! speed thy deathful ebon dart,
And cure the pangs of this convulsive heart.
Snatch me, ye whirlwinds! far from human race,
Toss'd through the void illimitable space
Or if dismounted from the rapid cloud,
Me with his whelming wave let Ocean shroud!
So, Pandarus, thy hopes, three orphan fair;
Were doom'd to wander through the devious air;
Thyself untimely, and thy consort died,
But four celestials both your cares supplied.

Venus in tender delicacy rears
With honey, milk, and wine their infant years;
Imperial Juno to their youth assigned
A form majestic, and sagacious mind;
With shapely growth Diana graced their bloom;
And Pallas taught the texture of the loom.
But whilst, to learn their lots in nuptial love,
Bright Cytherea sought the bower of Jove
(The God supreme, to whose eternal eye
The registers of fate expanded lie;
Wing'd Harpies snatch the unguarded charge away,
And to the Furies bore a grateful prey.
Be such my lot! Or thou, Diana, speed
Thy shaft, and send me joyful to the dead;
To seek my lord among the warrior train,
Ere second vows my bridal faith profane.
When woes the waking sense alone assail,
Whilst Night extends her soft oblivious veil,
Of other wretches' care the torture ends;
No truce the warfare of my heart suspends!
The night renews the day distracting theme,
And airy terrors sable every dream.
The last alone a kind illusion wrought,
And to my bed my loved Ulysses brought,
In manly bloom, and each majestic grace,
As when for Troy he left my fond embrace;

Such raptures in my beating bosom rise,
I deem it sure a vision of the skies."

Thus, whilst Aurora mounts her purple throne,
In audible laments she breathes her moan;
The sounds assault Ulysses' wakeful ear;
Misjudging of the cause, a sudden fear
Of his arrival known, the chief alarms;
He thinks the queen is rushing to his arms.
Upspringing from his couch, with active haste
The fleece and carpet in the dome he placed
(The hide, without, imbibed the morning air);
And thus the gods invoked with ardent prayer:

"Jove, and eternal thrones! with heaven to friend,
If the long series of my woes shall end;
Of human race now rising from repose,
Let one a blissful omen here disclose;
And, to confirm my faith, propitious Jove!
Vouchsafe the sanction of a sign above."

Whilst lowly thus the chief adoring bows,
The pitying god his guardian aid avows.
Loud from a sapphire sky his thunder sounds;
With springing hope the hero's heart rebounds.
Soon, with consummate joy to crown his prayer,

An omen'd voice invades his ravish'd ear.
Beneath a pile that close the dome adjoin'd,
Twelve female slaves the gift of Ceres grind;
Task'd for the royal board to bolt the bran
From the pure flour (the growth and strength of man)
Discharging to the day the labour due,
Now early to repose the rest withdrew;
One maid unequal to the task assign'd,
Still turn'd the toilsome mill with anxious mind;
And thus in bitterness of soul divined:

"Father of gods and men, whose thunders roll
O'er the cerulean vault, and shake the pole:
Whoe'er from Heaven has gain'd this rare ostent
(Of granted vows a certain signal sent),
In this blest moment of accepted prayer,
Piteous, regard a wretch consumed with care!
Instant, O Jove! confound the suitor-train,
For whom o'ertoil'd I grind the golden grain:
Far from this dome the lewd devourers cast,
And be this festival decreed their last!"

Big with their doom denounced in earth and sky,
Ulysses' heart dilates with secret joy.
Meantime the menial train with unctious wood
Heap'd high the genial hearth, Vulcanian food:

When, early dress'd, advanced the royal heir;
With manly grasp he waved a martial spear;
A radiant sabre graced his purple zone,
And on his foot the golden sandal shone.
His steps impetuous to the portal press'd;
And Euryclea thus he there address'd:

"Say thou to whom my youth its nurture owes,
Was care for due refection and repose
Bestow'd the stranger-guest? Or waits he grieved,
His age not honour'd, nor his wants relieved?
Promiscuous grace on all the queen confers
(In woes bewilder'd, oft the wisest errs).
The wordy vagrant to the dole aspires,
And modest worth with noble scorn retires."

She thus: "O cease that ever-honour'd name
To blemish now: it ill deserves your blame,
A bowl of generous wine sufficed the guest;
In vain the queen the night refection press'd;
Nor would he court repose in downy state,
Unbless'd, abandon'd to the rage of Fate!
A hide beneath the portico was spread,
And fleecy skins composed an humble bed;
A downy carpet cast with duteous care,
Secured him from the keen nocturnal air."

His cornel javelin poised with regal port,
To the sage Greeks convened in Themis' court,
Forth-issuing from the dome the prince repair'd;
Two dogs of chase, a lion-hearted guard,
Behind him sourly stalked. Without delay
The dame divides the labour of the day;
Thus urging to the toil the menial train;

"What marks of luxury the marble stain
Its wonted lustre let the floor regain;
The seats with purple clothe in order due;
And let the abstersive sponge the board renew;
Let some refresh the vase's sullied mould;
Some bid the goblets boast their native gold;
Some to the spring, with each a jar, repair,
And copious waters pure for bathing bear;
Dispatch! for soon the suitors will essay
The lunar feast-rites to the god of day."

She said: with duteous haste a bevy fair
Of twenty virgins to the spring repair;
With varied toils the rest adorn the dome.
Magnificent, and blithe, the suitors come.
Some wield the sounding axe; the dodder'd oaks
Divide, obedient to the forceful strokes.

Soon from the fount, with each a brimming urn
(Eumaeus in their train), the maids return.
Three porkers for the feast, all brawny-chined,
He brought; the choicest of the tusky-kind;
In lodgments first secure his care he viewed,
Then to the king this friendly speech renew'd:
"Now say sincere, my guest! the suitor-train
Still treat thy worth with lordly dull disdain;
Or speaks their deed a bounteous mind humane?"

"Some pitying god (Ulysses sad replied)
With vollied vengeance blast their towering pride!
No conscious blush, no sense of right, restrains
The tides of lust that swell the boiling veins;
From vice to vice their appetites are toss'd,
All cheaply sated at another's cost!"

While thus the chief his woes indignant told,
Melanthius, master of the bearded fold,
The goodliest goats of all the royal herd
Spontaneous to the suitors' feast preferr'd;
Two grooms assistant bore the victims bound;
With quavering cries the vaulted roofs resound;
And to the chief austere aloud began
The wretch unfriendly to the race of man:

"Here vagrant, still? offensive to my lords!
Blows have more energy than airy words;
These arguments I'll use: nor conscious shame,
Nor threats, thy bold intrusion will reclaim.
On this high feast the meanest vulgar boast
A plenteous board! Hence! seek another host!"

Rejoinder to the churl the king disdain'd,
But shook his head, and rising wrath restrain'd.

From Cephanelia 'cross the surgy main
Philaetius late arrived, a faithful swain.
A steer ungrateful to the bull's embrace.
And goats he brought, the pride of all their race;
Imported in a shallop not his own;
The dome re-echoed to the mingl'd moan.
Straight to the guardian of the bristly kind
He thus began, benevolent of mind:

"What guest is he, of such majestic air?
His lineage and paternal clime declare:
Dim through the eclipse of fate, the rays divine
Of sovereign state with faded splendour shine.
If monarchs by the gods are plunged in woe,
To what abyss are we foredoom'd to go!"
Then affable he thus the chief address'd,

Whilst with pathetic warmth his hand he press'd:

"Stranger, may fate a milder aspect show,
And spin thy future with a whiter clue!
O Jove! for ever death to human cries;
The tyrant, not the father of the skies!
Unpiteous of the race thy will began!
The fool of fate, thy manufacture, man,
With penury, contempt, repulse, and care,
The galling load of life is doom'd to bear.
Ulysses from his state a wanderer still,
Upbraids thy power, thy wisdom, or thy will!
O monarch ever dear!-O man of woe!
Fresh flow my tears, and shall for ever flow!
Like thee, poor stranger guest, denied his home,
Like thee: in rags obscene decreed to roam!
Or, haply perish'd on some distant coast,
In stygian gloom he glides, a pensive ghost!
Oh, grateful for the good his bounty gave,
I'll grieve, till sorrow sink me to the grave!
His kind protecting hand my youth preferr'd,
The regent of his Cephallenian herd;
With vast increase beneath my care it spreads:
A stately breed! and blackens far the meads.
Constrain'd, the choicest beeves I thence import,
To cram these cormorants that crowd his court:

Who in partition seek his realm to share;
Nor human right nor wrath divine revere,
Since here resolved oppressive these reside,
Contending doubts my anxious heart divide:
Now to some foreign clime inclined to fly,
And with the royal herd protection buy;
Then, happier thoughts return the nodding scale,
Light mounts despair, alternate hopes prevail:
In opening prospects of ideal joy,
My king returns; the proud usurpers die."

To whom the chief: "In thy capacious mind
Since daring zeal with cool debate is join'd,
Attend a deed already ripe in fate:
Attest, O Jove! the truth I now relate!
This sacred truth attest, each genial power,
Who bless the board, and guard this friendly bower!
Before thou quit the dome (nor long delay)
Thy wish produced in act, with pleased survey,
Thy wondering eyes shall view: his rightful reign
By arms avow'd Ulysses shall regain,
And to the shades devote the suitor-train."

"O Jove supreme! (the raptured swain replies,
With deeds consummate soon the promised joys!
These aged nerves, with new-born vigour strung,

In that blest cause should emulate the young."
Assents Eumaeus to the prayer address'd;
And equal ardours fire his loyal breast.

Meantime the suitors urge the prince's fate,
And deathful arts employ the dire debate:
When in his airy tour, the bird of Jove
Truss'd with his sinewy pounce a trembling dove;
Sinister to their hope! This omen eyed
Amphinomus, who thus presaging cried:

"The gods from force and fraud the prince defend;
O peers! the sanguinary scheme suspend:
Your future thought let sable fate employ;
And give the present hour to genial joy."

From council straight the assenting peerage ceased,
And in the dome prepared the genial feast.
Disrobed, their vests apart in order lay,
Then all with speed succinct the victims slay:
With sheep and shaggy goats the porkers bled,
And the proud steer was on the marble spread.
With fire prepared, they deal the morsels round,
Wine, rosy-bright, the brimming goblets crown'd,
By sage Eumaeus borne; the purple tide
Melanthius from an ample jar supplied:

High canisters of bread Philaetius placed;
And eager all devour the rich repast.
Disposed apart, Ulysses shares the treat;
A trivet table, and ignobler seat,
The prince appoints; but to his sire assigns
The tasteful inwards, and nectareous wines.
"Partake, my guest (he cried), without control
The social feast, and drain the cheering bowl:
Dread not the railer's laugh, nor ruffian's rage;
No vulgar roof protects thy honour'd age;
This dome a refuge to thy wrongs shall be,
From my great sire too soon devolved to me!
Your violence and scorn, ye suitors, cease,
Lest arms avenge the violated peace."

Awed by the prince, so haughty, brave, and young,
Rage gnaw'd the lip, amazement chain'd the tongue.
"Be patient, peers! (at length Antinous cries,
The threats of vain imperious youth despise:
Would Jove permit the meditated blow,
That stream of eloquence should cease to flow."

Without reply vouchsafed, Antinous ceased:
Meanwhile the pomp of festival increased:
By heralds rank'd; in marshall'd order move
The city tribes, to pleased Apollo's grove:

Beneath the verdure of which awful shade,
The lunar hecatomb they grateful laid;
Partook the sacred feast, and ritual honours paid.
But the rich banquet, in the dome prepared
(An humble sideboard set) Ulysses shared.
Observant of the prince's high behest,
His menial train attend the stranger-guest;
Whom Pallas with unpardoning fury fired,
By lordly pride and keen reproach inspired.
A Samian peer, more studious than the rest
Of vice, who teem'd with many a dead-born jest;
And urged, for title to a consort queen,
Unnumber'd acres arable and green
(Otesippus named); this lord Ulysses eyed,
And thus burst out the imposthume with pride:

"The sentence I propose, ye peers, attend:
Since due regard must wait the prince's friend,
Let each a token of esteem bestow:
This gift acquits the dear respect I owe;
With which he nobly may discharge his seat,
And pay the menials for a master's treat."

He said: and of the steer before him placed,
That sinewy fragment at Ulysses cast,
Where to the pastern-bone, by nerves combined,

The well-horn'd foot indissolubly join'd;
Which whizzing high, the wall unseemly sign'd.
The chief indignant grins a ghastly smile;
Revenge and scorn within his bosom boil:
When thus the prince with pious rage inflamed:
"Had not the inglorious wound thy malice aim'd
Fall'n guiltless of the mark, my certain spear
Had made thee buy the brutal triumph dear:
Nor should thy sire a queen his daughter boast;
The suitor, now, had vanish'd in a ghost:
No more, ye lewd compeers, with lawless power
Invade my dome, my herds and flocks devour:
For genuine worth, of age mature to know,
My grape shall redden, and my harvest grow
Or, if each other's wrongs ye still support,
With rapes and riot to profane my court;
What single arm with numbers can contend?
On me let all your lifted swords descend,
And with my life such vile dishonours end."

A long cessation of discourse ensued,
By gentler Agelaus thus renew'd:

"A just reproof, ye peers! your rage restrain
From the protected guest, and menial train:
And, prince! to stop the source of future ill,

Assent yourself, and gain the royal will.
Whilst hope prevail'd to see your sire restored,
Of right the queen refused a second lord:
But who so vain of faith, so blind to fate,
To think he still survives to claim the state?
Now press the sovereign dame with warm desire
To wed, as wealth or worth her choice inspire:
The lord selected to the nuptial joys
Far hence will lead the long-contested prize:
Whilst in paternal pomp with plenty bless'd,
You reign, of this imperial dome possess'd."

Sage and serene Telemachus replies:
"By him at whose behest the thunder flies,
And by the name on earth I most revere,
By great Ulysses and his woes I swear!
(Who never must review his dear domain;
Enroll'd, perhaps, in Pluto's dreary train),
Whene'er her choice the royal dame avows,
My bridal gifts shall load the future spouse:
But from this dome my parent queen to chase!
From me, ye gods! avert such dire disgrace."

But Pallas clouds with intellectual gloom
The suitors' souls, insensate of their doom!
A mirthful frenzy seized the fated crowd;

The roofs resound with causeless laughter loud;
Floating in gore, portentous to survey!
In each discolour'd vase the viands lay;
Then down each cheek the tears spontaneous flow
And sudden sighs precede approaching woe.
In vision wrapp'd, the Hyperesian seer
Uprose, and thus divined the vengeance near:

"O race to death devote! with Stygian shade
Each destin'd peer impending fates invade;
With tears your wan distorted cheeks are drown'd;
With sanguine drops the walls are rubied round:
Thick swarms the spacious hall with howling ghosts,
To people Orcus, and the burning coasts!
Nor gives the sun his golden orb to roll,
But universal night usurps the pole!"

Yet warn'd in vain, with laughter loud elate
The peers reproach the sure divine of Fate;
And thus Eurymachus: "The dotard's mind
To every sense is lost, to reason blind;
Swift from the dome conduct the slave away;
Let him in open air behold the day."

"Tax not (the heaven-illumined seer rejoin'd)
Of rage, or folly, my prophetic mind,

No clouds of error dim the ethereal rays,
Her equal power each faithful sense obeys.
Unguided hence my trembling steps I bend,
Far hence, before yon hovering deaths descend;
Lest the ripe harvest of revenge begun,
I share the doom ye suitors cannot shun."

This said, to sage Piraeus sped the seer,
His honour'd host, a welcome inmate there.
O'er the protracted feast the suitors sit,
And aim to wound the prince with pointless wit:
Cries one, with scornful leer and mimic voice,
"Thy charity we praise, but not thy choice;
Why such profusion of indulgence shown
To this poor, timorous, toil-detesting drone?
That others feeds on planetary schemes,
And pays his host with hideous noon-day dreams.
But, prince! for once at least believe a friend;
To some Sicilian mart these courtiers send,
Where, if they yield their freight across the main,
Dear sell the slaves! demand no greater gain."

Thus jovial they; but nought the prince replies;
Full on his sire he roll'd his ardent eyes:
Impatient straight to flesh his virgin-sword;
From the wise chief he waits the deathful word.

Nigh in her bright alcove, the pensive queen
To see the circle sate, of all unseen.
Sated at length they rise, and bid prepare
An eve-repast, with equal cost and care:
But vengeful Pallas, with preventing speed,
A feast proportion'd to their crimes decreed;
A feast of death, the feasters doom'd to bleed!