

BOOK XXII.

ARGUMENT.

THE DEATH OF THE SUITORS.

Ulysses begins the slaughter of the suitors by the death of Antinous. He declares himself, and lets fly his arrows at the rest. Telemachus assists and brings arms for his father, himself, Eumaeus, and Philaetius. Melanthius does the same for the wooers. Minerva encourages Ulysses in the shape of Mentor. The suitors are all slain, only Medon and Phemius are spared. Melanthius and the unfaithful servants are executed. The rest acknowledge their master with all demonstrations of joy.

Then fierce the hero o'er the threshold strode;
Stripp'd of his rags, he blazed out like a god.
Full in their face the lifted bow he bore,
And quiver'd deaths, a formidable store;
Before his feet the rattling shower he threw,
And thus, terrific, to the suitor-crew:

"One venturous game this hand hath won to-day,
Another, princes! yet remains to play;

Another mark our arrow must attain.
Phoebus, assist! nor be the labour vain."
Swift as the word the parting arrow sings,
And bears thy fate, Antinous, on its wings:
Wretch that he was, of unprophetic soul!
High in his hands he rear'd the golden bowl!
E'en then to drain it lengthen'd out his breath;
Changed to the deep, the bitter draught of death:
For fate who fear'd amidst a feastful band?
And fate to numbers, by a single hand?
Full through his throat Ulysses' weapon pass'd,
And pierced his neck. He falls, and breathes his last.
The tumbling goblet the wide floor o'erflows,
A stream of gore burst spouting from his nose;
Grim in convulsive agonies he sprawls:
Before him spurn'd the loaded table falls,
And spreads the pavement with a mingled flood
Of floating meats, and wine, and human blood.
Amazed, confounded, as they saw him fall,
Up rose he throngs tumultuous round the hall:
O'er all the dome they cast a haggard eye,
Each look'd for arms--in vain; no arms were nigh:
"Aim'st thou at princes? (all amazed they said;)
Thy last of games unhappy hast thou play'd;
Thy erring shaft has made our bravest bleed,
And death, unlucky guest, attends thy deed.

Vultures shall tear thee." Thus incensed they spoke,
While each to chance ascribed the wondrous stroke:
Blind as they were: for death e'en now invades
His destined prey, and wraps them all in shades.
Then, grimly frowning, with a dreadful look,
That wither'd all their hearts, Ulysses spoke:

"Dogs, ye have had your day! ye fear'd no more
Ulysses vengeful from the Trojan shore;
While, to your lust and spoil a guardless prey,
Our house, our wealth, our helpless handmaids lay:
Not so content, with bolder frenzy fired,
E'en to our bed presumptuous you aspired:
Laws or divine or human fail'd to move,
Or shame of men, or dread of gods above;
Heedless alike of infamy or praise,
Or Fame's eternal voice in future days;
The hour of vengeance, wretches, now is come;
Impending fate is yours, and instant doom."

Thus dreadful he. Confused the suitors stood,
From their pale cheeks recedes the flying blood:
Trembling they sought their guilty heads to hide.
Alone the bold Eurymachus replied:

"If, as thy words import (he thus began),

Ulysses lives, and thou the mighty man,
Great are thy wrongs, and much hast thou sustain'd
In thy spoil'd palace, and exhausted land;
The cause and author of those guilty deeds,
Lo! at thy feet unjust Antinous bleeds
Not love, but wild ambition was his guide;
To slay thy son, thy kingdom to divide,
These were his aims; but juster Jove denied.
Since cold in death the offender lies, oh spare
Thy suppliant people, and receive their prayer!
Brass, gold, and treasures, shall the spoil defray,
Two hundred oxen every prince shall pay:
The waste of years refunded in a day.
Till then thy wrath is just." Ulysses burn'd
With high disdain, and sternly thus return'd:

"All, all the treasure that enrich'd our throne
Before your rapines, join'd with all your own,
If offer'd, vainly should for mercy call;
'Tis you that offer, and I scorn them all;
Your blood is my demand, your lives the prize,
Till pale as yonder wretch each suitor lies.
Hence with those coward terms; or fight or fly;
This choice is left you, to resist or die:
And die I trust ye shall." He sternly spoke:
With guilty fears the pale assembly shook.

Alone Eurymachus exhorts the train:
"Yon archer, comrades, will not shoot in vain;
But from the threshold shall his darts be sped,
(Whoe'er he be), till every prince lie dead?
Be mindful of yourselves, draw forth your swords,
And to his shafts obtend these ample boards
(So need compels). Then, all united, strive
The bold invader from his post to drive:
The city roused shall to our rescue haste,
And this mad archer soon have shot his last."
Swift as he spoke, he drew his traitor sword,
And like a lion rush'd against his lord:
The wary chief the rushing foe repress'd,
Who met the point and forced it in his breast:
His falling hand deserts the lifted sword,
And prone he falls extended o'er the board!
Before him wide, in mix'd effusion roll
The untasted viands, and the jovial bowl.
Full through his liver pass'd the mortal wound,
With dying rage his forehead beats the ground;
He spurn'd the seat with fury as he fell,
And the fierce soul to darkness dived, and hell.
Next bold Amphinomus his arm extends
To force the pass; the godlike man defends.
Thy spear, Telemachus, prevents the attack,
The brazen weapon driving through his back.

Thence through his breast its bloody passage tore;
Flat falls he thundering on the marble floor,
And his crush'd forehead marks the stone with gore.
He left his javelin in the dead, for fear
The long encumbrance of the weighty spear
To the fierce foe advantage might afford,
To rash between and use the shorten'd sword.
With speedy ardour to his sire he flies,
And, "Arm, great father! arm (in haste he cries).
Lo, hence I run for other arms to wield,
For missive javelins, and for helm and shield;
Fast by our side let either faithful swain
In arms attend us, and their part sustain."

"Haste, and return (Ulysses made reply)
While yet the auxiliar shafts this hand supply;
Lest thus alone, encounter'd by an host,
Driven from the gate, the important past be lost."

With speed Telemachus obeys, and flies
Where piled in heaps the royal armour lies;
Four brazen helmets, eight refulgent spears,
And four broad bucklers to his sire he bears:
At once in brazen panoply they shone.
At once each servant braced his armour on;
Around their king a faithful guard they stand.

While yet each shaft flew deathful from his hand:
Chief after chief expired at every wound,
And swell'd the bleeding mountain on the ground.
Soon as his store of flying fates was spent.
Against the wall he set the bow unbent;
And now his shoulders bear the massy shield,
And now his hands two beamy javelins wield:
He frowns beneath his nodding plume, that play'd
O'er the high crest, and cast a dreadful shade.

There stood a window near, whence looking down
From o'er the porch appear'd the subject town.
A double strength of valves secured the place,
A high and narrow; but the only pass:
The cautious king, with all-preventing care,
To guard that outlet, placed Eumaeus there;
When Agelaus thus: "Has none the sense
To mount yon window, and alarm from thence
The neighbour-town? the town shall force the door,
And this bold archer soon shall shoot no more."
Melanthius then: "That outlet to the gate
So near adjoins, that one may guard the strait.
But other methods of defence remain;
Myself with arms can furnish all the train;
Stores from the royal magazine I bring,
And their own darts shall pierce the prince and king."

He said; and mounting up the lofty stairs,
Twelve shields, twelve lances, and twelve helmets bears:
All arm, and sudden round the hall appears
A blaze of bucklers, and a wood of spears.

The hero stands oppress'd with mighty woe,
On every side he sees the labour grow;
"Oh cursed event! and oh unlook'd for aid!
Melanthius or the women have betray'd--
Oh my dear son!"--The father with a sigh
Then ceased; the filial virtue made reply;

"Falsehood is folly, and 'tis just to own
The fault committed: this was mine alone;
My haste neglected yonder door to bar,
And hence the villain has supplied their war.
Run, good Eumaeus, then, and (what before
I thoughtless err'd in) well secure that door:
Learn, if by female fraud this deed were done,
Or (as my thought misgives) by Dolius' son."

While yet they spoke, in quest of arms again
To the high chamber stole the faithless swain,
Not unobserved. Eumaeus watchful eyed,
And thus address'd Ulysses near his side:

"The miscreant we suspected takes that way;
Him, if this arm be powerful, shall I slay?
Or drive him hither, to receive the meed
From thy own hand, of this detested deed?"

"Not so (replied Ulysses); leave him there,
For us sufficient is another care;
Within the structure of this palace wall
To keep enclosed his masters till they fall.
Go you, and seize the felon; backward bind
His arms and legs, and fix a plank behind:
On this his body by strong cords extend,
And on a column near the roof suspend:
So studied tortures his vile days shall end."

The ready swains obey'd with joyful haste,
Behind the felon unperceived they pass'd,
As round the room in quest of arms he goes
(The half-shut door conceal'd his lurking foes):
One hand sustain'd a helm, and one the shield
Which old Laertes wont in youth to wield,
Cover'd with dust, with dryness chapp'd and worn,
The brass corroded, and the leather torn.
Thus laden, o'er the threshold as he stepp'd,
Fierce on the villain from each side they leap'd,

Back by the hair the trembling dastard drew,
And down reluctant on the pavement threw.
Active and pleased the zealous swains fulfil
At every point their master's rigid will;
First, fast behind, his hands and feet they bound,
Then straighten'd cords involved his body round;
So drawn aloft, athwart the column tied,
The howling felon swung from side to side.

Eumaeus scoffing then with keen disdain:
"There pass thy pleasing night, O gentle swain!
On that soft pillow, from that envied height,
First may'st thou see the springing dawn of light;
So timely rise, when morning streaks the east,
To drive thy victims to the suitors' feast."

This said, they, left him, tortured as he lay,
Secured the door, and hasty strode away:
Each, breathing death, resumed his dangerous post
Near great Ulysses; four against an host,
When lo! descending to her hero's aid,
Jove's daughter, Pallas, War's triumphant maid:
In Mentor's friendly form she join'd his side:
Ulysses saw, and thus with transport cried:

"Come, ever welcome, and thy succour lend;

O every sacred name in one, my friend!
Early we loved, and long our loves have grown;
Whate'er through life's whole series I have done,
Or good, or grateful, now to mind recall,
And, aiding this one hour, repay it all."

Thus he; but pleasing hopes his bosom warm
Of Pallas latent in the friendly form.
The adverse host the phantom-warrior eyed,
And first, loud-threatening, Agelaus cried:

"Mentor, beware, nor let that tongue persuade
Thy frantic arm to lend Ulysses aid;
Our force successful shall our threat make good,
And with the sire and son commix thy blood.
What hopest thou here? Thee first the sword shall slay,
Then lop thy whole posterity away;
Far hence thy banish'd consort shall we send;
With his thy forfeit lands and treasures blend;
Thus, and thus only, shalt thou join thy friend."

His barbarous insult even the goddess fires,
Who thus the warrior to revenge inspires:

"Art thou Ulysses? where then shall we find
The patient body and the constant mind?"

That courage, once the Trojans' daily dread,
Known nine long years, and felt by heroes dead?
And where that conduct, which revenged the lust
Of Priam's race, and laid proud Troy in dust?
If this, when Helen was the cause, were done;
What for thy country now, thy queen, thy son?
Rise then in combat, at my side attend;
Observe what vigour gratitude can lend,
And foes how weak, opposed against a friend!"

She spoke; but willing longer to survey
The sire and son's great acts withheld the day!
By farther toils decreed the brave to try,
And level poised the wings of victory;
Then with a change of form eludes their sight,
Perch'd like a swallow on a rafter's height,
And unperceived enjoys the rising fight.

Damastor's son, bold Agelaus, leads,
The guilty war, Eurynomus succeeds;
With these, Pisander, great Polyctor's son,
Sage Polybus, and stern Amphimedon,
With Demoptolemus: these six survive:
The best of all the shafts had left alive.
Amidst the carnage, desperate as they stand,
Thus Agelaus roused the lagging band:

"The hour has come, when yon fierce man no more
With bleeding princes shall bestrew the floor;
Lo! Mentor leaves him with an empty boast;
The four remain, but four against an host.
Let each at once discharge the deadly dart,
One sure of six shall reach Ulysses' heart:
The rest must perish, their great leader slain:
Thus shall one stroke the glory lost regain."

Then all at once their mingled lances threw,
And thirsty all of one man's blood they flew;
In vain! Minerva turned them with her breath,
And scattered short, or wide, the points of death!
With deaden'd sound one on the threshold falls,
One strikes the gate, one rings against the walls:
The storm passed innocent. The godlike man
Now loftier trod, and dreadful thus began:
"'Tis now (brave friends) our turn, at once to throw,
(So speed them Heaven) our javelins at the foe.
That impious race to all their past misdeeds
Would add our blood, injustice still proceeds."

He spoke: at once their fiery lances flew:
Great Demoptolemus Ulysses slew;
Euryades received the prince's dart;

The goatherd's quiver'd in Pisander's heart;
Fierce Elatus by thine, Eumaeus, falls;
Their fall in thunder echoes round the walls.
The rest retreat: the victors now advance,
Each from the dead resumes his bloody lance.
Again the foe discharge the steely shower;
Again made frustrate by the virgin-power.
Some, turn'd by Pallas, on the threshold fall,
Some wound the gate, some ring against the wall;
Some weak, or ponderous with the brazen head,
Drop harmless on the pavement, sounding dead.

Then bold Amphimedon his javelin cast:
Thy hand, Telemachus, it lightly razed:
And from Ctesippus' arm the spear elanced:
On good Eumaeus' shield and shoulder glanced;
Not lessened of their force (so light the wound)
Each sung along and dropped upon the ground.
Fate doom'd thee next, Eurydamus, to bear,
Thy death ennobled by Ulysses' spear.
By the bold son Amphimedon was slain,
And Polybus renown'd, the faithful swain.
Pierced through the breast the rude Ctesippus bled,
And thus Philaetius gloried o'er the dead:

"There end thy pompous vaunts and high disdain;

O sharp in scandal, voluble and vain!
How weak is mortal pride! To Heaven alone
The event of actions and our fates are known:
Scoffer, behold what gratitude we bear:
The victim's heel is answered with this spear."

Ulysses brandish'd high his vengeful steel,
And Damastorides that instant fell:
Fast by Leocritus expiring lay,
The prince's javelin tore its bloody way
Through all his bowels: down he tumbled prone,
His batter'd front and brains besmear the stone.

Now Pallas shines confess'd; aloft she spreads
The arm of vengeance o'er their guilty heads:
The dreadful aegis blazes in their eye:
Amazed they see, they tremble, and they fly:
Confused, distracted, through the rooms they fling:
Like oxen madden'd by the breeze's sting,
When sultry days, and long, succeed the gentle spring,
Not half so keen fierce vultures of the chase
Stoop from the mountains on the feather'd race,
When, the wide field extended snares beset,
With conscious dread they shun the quivering net:
No help, no flight; but wounded every way,
Headlong they drop; the fowlers seize their prey.

On all sides thus they double wound on wound,
In prostrate heaps the wretches beat the ground,
Unmanly shrieks precede each dying groan,
And a red deluge floats the reaking stone.

Leiodes first before the victor falls:

The wretched augur thus for mercy calls:

"Oh gracious hear, nor let thy suppliant bleed;
Still undishonoured, or by word or deed,
Thy house, for me remains; by me repress'd
Full oft was check'd the injustice of the rest:
Averse they heard me when I counselled well,
Their hearts were harden'd, and they justly fell.
O spare an augur's consecrated head,
Nor add the blameless to the guilty dead."

"Priest as thou art! for that detested band
Thy lying prophecies deceived the land;
Against Ulysses have thy vows been made,
For them thy daily orisons were paid:
Yet more, e'en to our bed thy pride aspires:
One common crime one common fate requires."

Thus speaking, from the ground the sword he took
Which Agelaus' dying hand forsook:
Full through his neck the weighty falchion sped;

Along the pavement roll'd the muttering head.

Phemius alone the hand of vengeance spared,
Phemius the sweet, the heaven-instructed bard.
Beside the gate the reverend minstrel stands;
The lyre now silent trembling in his hands;
Dubious to supplicate the chief, or fly
To Jove's inviolable altar nigh,
Where oft Laertes holy vows had paid,
And oft Ulysses smoking victims laid.
His honour'd harp with care he first set down,
Between the laver and the silver throne;
Then prostrate stretch'd before the dreadful man,
Persuasive thus, with accent soft began:

"O king! to mercy be thy soul inclined,
And spare the poet's ever-gentle kind.
A deed like this thy future fame would wrong,
For dear to gods and men is sacred song.
Self-taught I sing; by Heaven, and Heaven alone,
The genuine seeds of poesy are sown:
And (what the gods bestow) the lofty lay
To gods alone and godlike worth we pay.
Save then the poet, and thyself reward!
'Tis thine to merit, mine is to record.
That here I sung, was force, and not desire;

This hand reluctant touch'd the warbling wire;
And let thy son attest, nor sordid pay,
Nor servile flattery, stain'd the moral lay."

The moving words Telemachus attends,
His sire approaches, and the bard defends.
"O mix not, father, with those impious dead
The man divine! forbear that sacred head;
Medon, the herald, too, our arms may spare,
Medon, who made my infancy his care;
If yet he breathes, permit thy son to give
Thus much to gratitude, and bid him live."

Beneath a table, trembling with dismay,
Couch'd close to earth, unhappy Medon lay,
Wrapp'd in a new-slain ox's ample hide;
Swift at the word he cast his screen aside,
Sprung to the prince, embraced his knee with tears,
And thus with grateful voice address'd his ears

"O prince! O friend! lo, here thy Medon stands
Ah stop the hero's unresisted hands,
Incensed too justly by that impious brood,
Whose guilty glories now are set in blood."
To whom Ulysses with a pleasing eye:

"Be bold, on friendship and my son rely;
Live, an example for the world to read,
How much more safe the good than evil deed:
Thou, with the heaven-taught bard, in peace resort
From blood and carnage to yon open court:
Me other work requires." With timorous awe
From the dire scene the exempted two withdraw,
Scarce sure of life, look round, and trembling move
To the bright altars of Protector Jove.

Meanwhile Ulysses search'd the dome, to find
If yet there live of all the offending kind.
Not one! complete the bloody tale he found,
All steep'd in blood, all gasping on the ground.
So, when by hollow shores the fisher-train
Sweep with their arching nets the roaring main,
And scarce the meshy toils the copious draught contain,
All naked of their element, and bare,
The fishes pant, and gasp in thinner air;
Wide o'er the sands are spread the stiffening prey,
Till the warm sun exhales their soul away.

And now the king commands his son to call
Old Euryclea to the deathful hall:
The son observant not a moment stays;
The aged governess with speed obeys;

The sounding portals instant they display;
The matron moves, the prince directs the way.
On heaps of death the stern Ulysses stood,
All black with dust, and cover'd thick with blood.
So the grim lion from the slaughter comes,
Dreadful lie glares, and terribly he foams,
His breast with marks of carnage painted o'er,
His jaws all dropping with the bull's black gore.

Soon as her eyes the welcome object met,
The guilty fall'n, the mighty deed complete;
A scream of joy her feeble voice essay'd;
The hero check'd her, and composedly said.

"Woman, experienced as thou art, control
Indecent joy, and feast thy secret soul.
To insult the dead is cruel and unjust;
Fate and their crime have sunk them to the dust.
Nor heeded these the censure of mankind,
The good and bad were equal in their mind
Justly the price of worthlessness they paid,
And each now wails an unlamented shade.
But thou sincere! O Euryclea, say,
What maids dishonour us, and what obey?"

Then she: "In these thy kingly walls remain

(My son) full fifty of the handmaid train,
Taught by my care to cull the fleece or weave,
And servitude with pleasing tasks deceive;
Of these, twice six pursue their wicked way,
Nor me, nor chaste Penelope obey;
Nor fits it that Telemachus command
(Young as he is) his mother's female band.
Hence to the upper chambers let me fly
Where slumbers soft now close the royal eye;
There wake her with the news"--the matron cried
"Not so (Ulysses, more sedate, replied),
Bring first the crew who wrought these guilty deeds."
In haste the matron parts: the king proceeds;
"Now to dispose the dead, the care remains
To you, my son, and you, my faithfull swains;
The offending females to that task we doom,
To wash, to scent, and purify the room;
These (every table cleansed, and every throne,
And all the melancholy labour done)
Drive to yon court, without the palace wall,
There the revenging sword shall smite them all;
So with the suitors let them mix in dust,
Stretch'd in a long oblivion of their lust."
He said: the lamentable train appear,
Each vents a groan, and drops a tender tear;
Each heaved her mournful burden, and beneath

The porch deposed the ghastly heap of death.
The chief severe, compelling each to move,
Urged the dire task imperious from above;
With thirsty sponge they rub the tables o'er
(The swains unite their toil); the walls, the floor,
Wash'd with the effusive wave, are purged of gore.
Once more the palace set in fair array,
To the base court the females take their way;
There compass'd close between the dome and wall
(Their life's last scene) they trembling wait their fall.

Then thus the prince: "To these shall we afford
A fate so pure as by the martial sword?
To these, the nightly prostitutes to shame,
And base revilers of our house and name?"

Thus speaking, on the circling wall he strung
A ship's tough cable from a column hung;
Near the high top he strain'd it strongly round,
Whence no contending foot could reach the ground.
Their heads above connected in a row,
They beat the air with quivering feet below:
Thus on some tree hung struggling in the snare,
The doves or thrushes flap their wings in air.
Soon fled the soul impure, and left behind
The empty corse to waver with the wind.

Then forth they led Melanthius, and began
Their bloody work; they lopp'd away the man,
Morsel for dogs! then trimm'd with brazen shears
The wretch, and shorten'd of his nose and ears;
His hands and feet last felt the cruel steel:
He roar'd, and torments gave his soul to hell.
They wash, and to Ulysses take their way:
So ends the bloody business of the day.

To Euryclea then address'd the king:
("Bring hither fire, and hither sulphur bring,
To purge the palace: then the queen attend,
And let her with her matron-train descend;
The matron-train, with all the virgin-band,
Assemble here, to learn their lord's command.")

Then Euryclea: "Joyful I obey,
But cast those mean dishonest rags away;
Permit me first the royal robes to bring:
Ill suits this garb the shoulders of a king."
"Bring sulphur straight, and fire" (the monarch cries).
She hears, and at the word obedient flies.
With fire and sulphur, cure of noxious fumes,
He purged the walls, and blood-polluted rooms.
Again the matron springs with eager pace,

And spreads her lord's return from place to place.
They hear, rush forth, and instant round him stand,
A gazing throng, a torch in every hand.
They saw, they knew him, and with fond embrace
Each humbly kiss'd his knee, or hand, or face;
He knows them all, in all such truth appears,
E'en he indulges the sweet joy of tears.