

the picturing of her wild sadness, and her heart-sickness from hope deferred, Homer has given us some of his most touching conceptions. For instance, when all other expedients for the delay of the hated marriage are exhausted, and she goes in search of Ulysses' bow to test by it the suitors' strength, she takes it from the hook, where it has hung so long, and sitting down upon a stool, she bathes it with her tears, and caresses it as if it were the hero himself. Again is there a lovely picture presented to us, when we see her in the dead of night, unable to sleep, with her surging thoughts, going out on the roof, and there, in the excess of her grief crying out to the stars that twinkle and glitter far above her. Such scenes as these stir the heart and move us to tears. There is nothing cold in their description; everything is warm and glowing. And what would appear affectation in another character, in Penelope is simple nature.

Her thoughts continually feed upon the hero; whenever she appears, she speaks between her sobs of nought but him; and is so engrossed by these thoughts that she lives a sort of ideal existence.

We see her move around through the palace, from her apartments to the banquet hall and back again, up and down that stair-case, until we almost grow familiar with her step. But all this moving around and attending to her household duties form the mechanical part of her existence. Her real life is within herself, and is bound up in the thoughts of Odysseus.

The parting words of Odysseus as he pressed her to his breast were always ringing in her ears: "Take care of Telemachus." Nobly has she fulfilled his commands as regards her son. Notwithstanding the presence of the suitors and the insolence of the servants, she succeeded in bringing Telemachus to man's estate all that his father would desire. No thoughts of self occupied her mind or prompted any of her actions.

Her moral character is well preserved throughout, and stands out in striking contrast with the degradation of her unfortunate sister Clytemnestra, who looms up once in a while in the poem; and with that of the weak though beautiful Helen—not the Helen of the Odyssey, but the Helen of the Iliad. Though the same, these two are different.

The heroine of the Iliad is far from being a model of virtuous womanhood. Through her weakness, she falls a prey to godlike beauty and manlike seductions. In the Odyssey she has repented of the follies of her youth, is once more the queenly consort of Menelaus, and for any indiscretion she may have committed, the gods are blamed.

Whereas Penelope is so sensitive in her spotless purity and modesty of demeanor, that we never see her enter the banquet-hall alone; she is always accompanied by her maids; she says herself that "it is not meet that she should be seen, alone, unguarded, in the walks of men." Even when Ulysses disguised as the old beggar converses with her, she bids the maids place the stools at proper distance for conversation.

Her fidelity to her husband through all these long years is the most remarkable and admirable trait in her character. Twenty years are a long time, in which many memories can be effaced, and many passions become cold. But increasing years only strengthened Penelope's loyal affection. And yet no woman's love was ever put to such a test. In the first place she had every reason to believe Ulysses dead; and knew that the people expected her to marry one of the numerous nobles who sought her hand. In the next place, these suitors were wasting the substance of Telemachus in such a prodigal manner that, however great his wealth, it must soon be expended. The only way to save her son from ruin was to marry one of them.

A strange mode of wooing they had in those days. No less than one hundred and eighteen suitors besieged the palace, made themselves quite at home there, gave Penelope to understand that they were prepared for an extended siege, and would, if necessary, starve the garrison out. This they proceeded to do forthwith. They instituted a system of perpetual banquetting that bespeaks a digestive capacity such as we, of the nineteenth century, are unacquainted with. If they did not happen to be eating or drinking, they played quoits and hurled the spear to whet up another appetite. Consequently, the flocks and herds were fast disappearing before the insatiate greed, and as they grew not again like the crops, they were an irreparable loss. For being rivals, these suitors agreed wonderfully well,