

# THE OWL.

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## PENELOPE.



**N** the spacious banquet-hall of the absent Odysseus, ranged round the festive boards, are the suitors, who hail from many lands; some from Dulichium, others from Samos, others again from Zacynthus, and from Ithaca itself others still. The tables groan beneath the weight of savoury viands; the ruby grape-juice flows in streams; the rafters and armour-hung walls ring with the lay of the inspired Phemius, as he sings the return of Greece's victorious sons from fated Iliion. The heart-stirring strains rise to the apartments above, where Penelope sits with her maidens engaged in the work of the loom. Among the deeds of mighty heroes before the Trojan gates the song recounts those of Odysseus, and thus brings to the sorrow-stricken queen the remembrance of her lord, strong of arm, and wise of word. The very mention of that dear name recalls such sad memories that she cannot bear to hear it. Accompanied by her maids, and bathed in tears, she descends to the banquet-hall, and impertunes Phemius to desist from the recital of this tale, which rends her heart. Telemachus tells her that the bard is inspired, that if the lay causes her grief, the gods are to blame; then bids her retire from the reveling of men, and apply herself to her womanly duties. The harshness of tone strikes a discordant note in our minds, and recalls forcibly the classic ideal of womanhood, and our Christian one. She receives his words with deference, and returns to her apartments, but not to the loom. The image of Odysseus rises up before her mind, as

she knew him in glorious manhood, before disastrous war tore him from her bosom, and opens the flood-gates of her sorrow. Her tears refuse to be restrained, until Athené soothes her heart in sweet slumber.

Thus does Homer introduce to us one of the most lovable characters fashioned by the genius of man; the noblest ideal of a perfect wife and mother. Here, however, we find no detailed description of her person. Minute word portraits are foreign to Homer's art. His characters manifest themselves by their action. As we study the action, the hero or heroine, as the case may be, is clothed with a personality suited to the action, and varying as regards minor details with the imagination of the reader. Those hair-strokes in the portraying of persons, which are deemed so essential by modern writers, appeared to Homer superfluous. Therefore, we search in vain through the *Odyssey* for a minute description of Penelope's personal appearance; yet do we know that she is beautiful. A few touches here and there, a single epithet, "queenly," "fair," suffices. The rest of the picture is easily filled out by the reader's own fancy, especially when considering the impression which her noble presence makes on all that enter the magic circle of its influence. The pivotal point in Penelope's character is her heart, so strong in its noble affections. Love is the mainspring of all her actions, and the source of all her misery. This love was central in two objects—Odysseus, her absent lord, and Telemachus, her darling boy. It sprang, in the first place, from the very nature of the heroine, which was sweet, mild and gentle, ore of the natures, which, like the vine, must have something