XXXI.—The πάθει μάθος of Achilles

PEARL CLEVELAND WILSON

HUNTER COLLEGE

When Aeschylus declares Zeus to be the only king in heaven whose supremacy is acknowledged by the intelligent man, he also says that it is Zeus who sets us on the path where we must rely upon strength of mind and heart and will, in order to find our way, and where by suffering we learn (*πάθει μάθος*).[1] This he states as a law of life. Man may ignore it, or he may defy it, but he cannot escape. And there are supreme experiences, in which suffering develops an understanding so profound that hostility drops, like an empty glove, as hand clasps hand. Such an incident is rich in drama, and may be developed by a great poet into a scene of rare beauty and power. Aeschylus may not have had Achilles in mind when he wrote, in untranslatable words,[2] of that agony of grief which allows its victim no rest, not even unconsciousness in sleep, and which thus brings a man—though it be against his will—to understanding. Whether the Attic poet was aware of it nor not, his lines epitomize the experience of the hero of the *Iliad*. In the twenty-fourth book,[3] Achilles, frantic with grief and unable to sleep, begins each day by dragging Hector's body in the dust. Soon, however, there is a complete change

[1] Aesch. *Ag.* 173–178:

> *Ζῆνα δέ τις προφρόνως*
> *ἐπινίκια κλάζων*
> *τεύξεται φρενῶν τὸ πᾶν·*
> *τὸν φρονεῖν βροτοὺς ὁδώ-*
> *σαντα, τὸν πάθει μάθος*
> *θέντα κυρίως ἔχειν.*

[2] Aesch. *Ag.* 179–181:

> *στάζει δ' ἔν θ' ὕπνῳ πρὸ καρδίας*
> *μνησιπήμων πόνος· καὶ παρ' ἄ-*
> *κοντας ἦλθε σωφρονεῖν.*

[3] XXIV.3–18.

—a περιπέτεια, or "reversal of situation", which Aristotle has pointed out as an essential part of dramatic portrayal, whether in epic or in tragic poetry. We find Achilles showing respect to the slain hero, and this as the result of no compulsion from without, but of a strange new understanding, born in the soul of Achilles out of his bitter pain.

Aeschylus made Achilles the hero of a trilogy that has not come down to us. It began with the resolve of Patroclus to help the defeated Achaeans, and it ended with the ransom of Hector.[4] But interesting as it would be to know how Aeschylus treated the subject, it is unlikely that even he could have written anything more moving, or more essentially dramatic, than the scene between Priam and Achilles in the last book of the *Iliad*.

The dramatic qualities of the *Iliad* have been noted by many scholars, from Aristotle's day to our own. But the importance of understanding that grows out of suffering (of πάθει μάθος) in the experience of Achilles deserves, I believe, more consideration than has been accorded it; for it enhances the value of the poem as a portrayal of emotional experience belonging not to a single age, or to a single people, but to all.

The subject of the *Iliad* is the wrath of Achilles and its consequences. It is οὐλομένη, wrath causing destruction so great as to endanger the whole army of the Achaeans and determine the fall of Troy. For, as Bowra has pointed out,[5] Hector's death dooms Troy to capture; and Symonds says:[6] "The Greek poet divined the pathos and expounded the philosophy of human life, showing how the fate of nations may depend upon the passions of a man, who in his turn is but a creature of a day." No suffering, however, that was caused by the wrath of Achilles was greater than his own;

[4] *The Myrmidons, The Nereïds, The Phrygians.*

[5] C. M. Bowra, *Tradition and Design in the Iliad* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1930), chap. I.

[6] J. S. Symonds, *Studies in the Greek Poets* (London, A. C. Black, 1920), chap. III.

and its influence upon him is not completely revealed until the end of the poem.

The twenty-fourth book has been called "not absolutely necessary." [7] Bethe places the end of the action of the *Iliad* at the death of Hector, and Symonds at the burning of Patroclus, though both agree that the conclusion as we have it adds beauty and dignity. Gladstone considers it necessary to the plot, saying that Achilles, after "paying off the debt to the old laws" by slaying Hector, "contracted a new debt" by his treatment of Hector's body, and that for this "his proud will must be taught to bow." [8] With finer analysis, Bowra maintains [9] that Achilles, as a result of his imperious temper, has lost his αἰδώς, and that the poem cannot end until he regains it and is thereby restored to honor and sympathy.

The manner of his regaining it is the subject of this study. It involves πάθει μάθος, and the poet, with consummate skill,

[7] Erich Bethe, *Homer: Dichtung und Sage, I. Band: Ilias* (Leipzig, Teubner, 1914), 360.

[8] W. E. Gladstone, *Juventus Mundi* (London, Macmillan, 1869), 494.

[9] *Op. cit.* (see note 5). Homeric critics, concentrating very often on the effort to win acceptance for their theories about the composition of the *Iliad*, appear to have given little consideration to the character of Achilles and the way in which it is affected by his experience. Such comments as the following are typical:

F. Melian Stawell says, in *Homer and the Iliad* (London, J. M. Dent and Co., 1909): "Achilles is a man, fierce perhaps and even cruel in the heat of passion, but one who can hear the voice of honour and mercy in his calmer moods. This is the Achilles we know fully, when XXIV. is left to us; this is the Achilles indeed whom the 'Menis' itself, mutilated though it is, indicates as well as it can" (pp. 29–30).

Carl Rothe, in *Die Ilias als Dichtung* (Paderborn, Ferdinand Schöningh, 1910), gives some space (pp. 329–332) to consideration of such correspondences as the twelve days of "Groll" in A, after which Thetis persuades Zeus to grant the desire of Achilles, and the twelve days of "Rache" in Ω, after which Thetis persuades Achilles to yield to the will of Zeus. Then he says: "Achill aber ruht μυχῷ κλισίης ..... zum erstenmal wieder an der Seite der Briseïs, so dass auch in dieser Beziehung der Dichter die Ereignisse des ersten Buches zum völligen Abschluss bringt. Dort ist sie ihm geraubt worden; hier nimmt er nach den Worten seiner Mutter (130) wieder voll Besitz von ihr; der wilde Zorn sowohl wegen der Kränkung seiner Ehre wie wegen des Todes seines Freundes ist vollständig gewichen" (p. 332).

has made this process the ultimate consequence of the μῆνις itself. Nothing significant in the life of Achilles is left unmentioned in the poem, from his early childhood to his death by the arrow of Paris.[10] When first introduced, he is endowed in the highest degree with all the qualities that belong to youthful heroism. However, as the plot unfolds, he shows no concern for any suffering but his own.[11] What he lacks in this respect is possessed by Hector, whose understanding sympathy endears him at once to the modern reader. Such feeling is still unknown to Achilles, not because he is incapable of it, but because it has not yet been awakened by his experience. When this awakening comes, Achilles goes beyond his opponent. Hector's sympathy embraces everyone in his family and in his city. That of Achilles reaches out to all humanity, and transmutes even hatred of an enemy into gentleness.

At the beginning of the *Iliad*, Achilles stands first among the Achaean warriors. He has experienced many of life's joys, but none of its sorrows. Since coming to Troy, Achilles has often led his men from their camp, and unaided by the other chieftains he has brought back spoils from no less than twenty-three cities.[12] Before this, Achilles grew to manhood in Phthia, surrounded by loving elders who believed in his great future. Peleus, a mighty king, centered his hopes on this only son. His mother, Thetis, was ready at any time to use her divine power for his benefit, and she had often told him of the occasion when she alone had saved the king of the gods from humiliation.[13] No less than the devotion of the parents of Achilles was that of Phoenix, the royal exile whom Peleus had befriended. The baby Achilles took to him at once and would eat only when seated on his knee. Small wonder that Phoenix ceased to grieve that the gods had denied him a child of his own, as he humored and trained this attrac-

[10] XXI.276–278 and XXII.359–360.

[11] His ἁμαρτία, as it seems to me.

[12] IX.328–329.

[13] I.388–406.

tive boy, and proudly watched the growth of his powers.[14] Before long, Peleus generously opened his door to another exile and gave his son a playmate. Patroclus was a little older than Achilles, but still no more than a small boy, when his father brought him to Peleus. He must have been a frightened child, suffering as he was from the shock of a playfellow's death and of being told that he had caused it. We can imagine what it meant to him to be welcomed by the tiny Achilles, to hear Peleus say "You shall be his companion-at-arms", and know that he was trusted by both.[15] Peleus reared the boys together; and Patroclus, eagerly serving his friend, learned to understand and respond to every mood, until Achilles came to feel that Patroclus was as necessary to him as the most vital part of his own body.[16]

By the time that the expedition against Troy was being organized, Achilles knew he had attained the strength of manhood. He could brandish the spear which the centaur Chiron had given to his father, and which was too heavy for any other Achaean.[17] The Greek chieftains were no more eager to secure his aid than he was to prove his valor.[18] What if he must meet an early death on the field of battle?[19] Honor and glory were worth the price—worth far more than a long life of monotonous days idly passed at home. Patroclus must go with him, of course. His friend's father, Menoetius, had misgivings; but Achilles reassured him, promising that Patroclus would come home rich in honor and in spoils.[20] Peleus knew that Achilles did not need the usual injunction: *αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων*,[21] but he was anxious on another score. The flaming intensity of Achilles might become a source of danger to himself, as well as to the enemy.

[14] IX.479–495.
[15] XXIII.84–90.
[16] XVIII.81–82.
[17] XVI.140–144.
[18] XI.767–782.
[19] IX.410–416.
[20] XVIII.324–327 and XIX.326–333.
[21] VI.208, XI.784.

So his father sent him forth with this warning: "My son, victory will be given you by Athena and Hera, if it be their will. Your task is to control the proud spirit in your own heart. Kindliness is always better. Quarrels bring misfortune. Keep from them, and the Argives, young and old, will honor you the more." [22] At the same time, Menoetius was saying to Patroclus: "Achilles is above you, my son, in royal station, and far above you in strength. But you are the elder. Advise him, make suggestions, and point out the way. He will listen and be helped." [23]

Once the Achaean army had established itself on the Trojan plain, Achilles proved his right to the epithet *πόδας ὠκύς* in more than a literal sense. Swift in action he always was; and while the others waited for a favorable opportunity to attack the Trojans, he led his army to a more or less distant city, captured it, and came back to pile booty before Agamemnon, who divided it among all the leaders, carefully keeping for himself the largest portion.[24] Achilles was content. It was the exploit that appealed to him, not the prizes.[25] And it was never long before he was setting out again, sometimes marching inland and sometimes taking his men down the coast in ships.[26] On one of these occasions Achilles had gone to Thebe and conquered King Eëtion, the father of Andromache.[27] Nearby was the town of Chrysa. Achilles captured it as well, and brought back the maiden with whom Agamemnon became infatuated.[28]

In nine years Achilles had captured twenty-three cities, winning the admiration and friendship of Ajax and the other leaders.[29] Nestor called him *μέγα πᾶσιν ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν*,[30] and

[22] IX.254–258.
[23] XI.785–789.
[24] IX.330–333.
[25] I.166–168.
[26] IX.328–329.
[27] VI.414–416.
[28] I.366–369.
[29] IX.630–631.
[30] I.283–284.

the rank and file of the army thought him a better warrior than Agamemnon.[31] From a victory on the island of Lesbos he had brought back Briseïs,[32] and received her as his prize when the booty was divided.[33] In the opinion of some commentators, Achilles valued her as a prize but had no deeper feeling for her. Two passages may be quoted to contradict this. Patroclus, who knew and loved Achilles too well to misrepresent him, had put an end to the weeping of Briseïs over the loss of King Mynes, her husband, by telling her she would become the wedded wife (*κουριδίην ἄλοχον*) of Achilles when the war ended,[34] and by picturing the celebration of their marriage.[35] And Achilles himself says to Odysseus:[36] "Why did Agamemnon assemble an army and bring it here? Was it not for the sake of fair-haired Helen? Do they think they are the only ones who love their wives, those two sons of Atreus? Every brave man who has a heart in his breast loves his own, and cherishes her, even as I loved mine with all my heart, though my spear won her as captive."

It is clear, then, that up to the time when Achilles calls the assembly, in Book I, his experience has been free from sorrow, even from disappointment. Life to him is a constant challenge, war tests a man's courage and endurance, and brave

[31] II.239.

[32] II.689–691.

[33] I.392.

[34] This does not accord with the belief that Achilles must meet death on the Trojan plain. But it was always possible for the gods to change their minds. Zeus, at the beginning of Book IV.14–19, even considers saving Troy. It was possible, also, for the gods to deceive men (XXI.272–283).

[35] XIX.295–299. Liddell and Scott (in the old edition, under *κουρίδιος*) translate *ἔφασκες* in this passage as "wert wont to pretend thou would'st make;" but (under *φάσκω*) they quote *Od.* v.135–6:

τὸν μὲν ἐγὼ φίλεόν τε καὶ ἔτρεφον, ἠδὲ ἔφασκον
θήσειν ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀγήρων ἤματα πάντα

as an example of the use of *φάσκω* with the meaning "*promise*, c. fut. inf." The latter passage, in which the verb certainly does not mean *pretend*, can well be used to support my interpretation of the former. In the new edition of Liddell and Scott the translation of the passage in the *Iliad* is omitted.

[36] IX.338–343.

deeds win glory and honor. The first shock to this belief comes from Agamemnon and is in the nature of a disillusion.[37] As commander of this great expedition Agamemnon has claimed to be ἄριστος Ἀχαιῶν and Achilles has allowed the claim.[38] But now he reveals himself as κερδαλεόφρων. His chief concern is to satisfy his personal desire,[39] and, after this proves impossible, to assert his supremacy. A leader's dignity, as Agamemnon understands it, is measured by the number and the value of the prizes he holds. Not even to save the army will Agamemnon remain for a day without his full quota.[40] When Achilles promises that, as soon as more prizes are obtained, Agamemnon shall be compensated by receiving three or four times as many, Agamemnon accuses him of trying to exalt himself at his commander's expense. Lightning was never more destructive than these words, or more revealing. They destroy the belief, born of youthful enthusiasm in Achilles, that the Trojan War is an opportunity for heroes to prove their chivalry. They show him that it is Agamemnon's war, to get back his brother's wife, of course, but always and above all to display his own supremacy.[41] For that, Agamemnon will sacrifice chivalry and justice. The revulsion of feeling in Achilles is inevitable. He cannot accept as leader a man in whom lust for power outweighs honor and fair dealing. The pride of Achilles is founded on the consciousness of his own integrity and is deeply wounded when Agamemnon snarls: "Don't imagine you can deceive me." [42] The pride of Agamemnon feeds on the submission of a mighty host to his command. To him the unpardonable affront is in the question: "How will any of the Achaeans be willing henceforth

[37] IX.375.

[38] I.91.

[39] I.112–115.

[40] I.117–119.

[41] Nestor has a habit of prefacing or concluding his remarks with an acknowledgment of the supremacy of Agamemnon. This may have had something to do with Agamemnon's partiality to him. Cf. IX.96–102; also, II.344–5 and 82.

[42] I.131–132.

to obey you?" [43] Kindled by these sparks, the quarrel burns to a white heat. When the two part, each believes the breach to be irreparable. Achilles is convinced that Agamemnon, deprived of his aid, will suffer defeat; but he knows that he himself will first be subjected to insult before the whole army. In taking Briseïs, Agamemnon treats Achilles like an outcast whose crimes nullify any claim to respect.[44]

It was the poet's intention, I believe, to represent Achilles at this point as entirely free from blame. The subject has been thoroughly discussed by Samuel E. Bassett under the title "The Ἁμαρτία of Achilles." [45] Even when most angry, Achilles does not lose his self-control. At the moment when he draws his sword to slay Agamemnon, he considers whether he shall allow himself this satisfaction.[46] The sudden appearance of Athena confirms the better impulse of which he was already conscious. The courtesy with which Achilles receives Agamemnon's heralds, when they come, without honorable justification, to get Briseïs, stands out in strong contrast to the insolence recently shown by Agamemnon to Chryses, who had every claim to respect as a suppliant and as the bearer of a splendid ransom.[47]

After Achilles has separated himself from the army and withdrawn to his own quarters, the days pass slowly. He misses his natural activity and the excitement of battle.[48] With increasing bitterness of heart he nurses his resentment. Bravery leads not to honor, as he had thought, but to death,[49] which is the same for the coward and the hero.

When the Greeks are defeated, Agamemnon realizes that Achilles is worth more than many armies,[50] and, in order to buy

[43] I.151.
[44] IX.646–648, XVI.55–59.
[45] *T.A.P.A.* LXV (1934), 47–69.
[46] I.188–193.
[47] I.324–344 and 12–21.
[48] I.490–492.
[49] IX.318–320.
[50] IX.116–117.

his aid, offers treasures listed in no less than thirty-four lines. Agamemnon is willing to pay a high price to save himself from ignominy, but that is the reason he makes the offer. He does not acknowledge that he has treated Achilles unjustly, nor does he approach him in a friendly spirit. He will give Achilles any one of his three daughters in marriage, and with her an enormous dowry, but he demands that Achilles submit to his authority, ὅσσον βασιλεύτερός εἰμι.[51] Bassett is right, I think, in maintaining [52] that Achilles, as portrayed in Homer, did not hold his courage, or his help, as objects for barter.

By this time, however, the situation has come to involve more than Agamemnon's need. The other leaders are in equal danger. They have not actually wronged Achilles, although they did fail to support him against Agamemnon's injustice. However, Achilles does not now feel any concern for their safety. He can defend his own quarters, he tells Ajax, whenever Hector comes to attack him, and that is all he intends to do. Ajax is right when he says:

αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεὺς
ἄγριον ἐν στήθεσσι θέτο μεγαλήτορα θυμόν.[53]

The battle continues, and Achilles climbs to the stern of his ship to get a better view. Greeks are dying, but he does not care. There is exultation in his voice when he calls to Patroclus that the Achaeans cannot hold out much longer.[54] Diomedes is wounded, and so is Odysseus. Yet, as Nestor says with amazement, Achilles

ἐσθλὸς ἐὼν Δαναῶν οὐ κήδεται οὐδ' ἐλεαίρει.[55]

Achilles looks upon this as punishment meted out to the Argives by the gods because of their transgression (ὑπερβασίης ἕνεκα σφῆς)—that is, because they forgot honor and permitted

[51] IX.120–161.
[52] *Op. cit.* (see note 45).
[53] IX.628–629.
[54] XI.609–610.
[55] XI.665.

injustice.[56] Patroclus cannot understand this lack of sympathy: *σὺ δ' ἀμήχανος ἔπλευ, 'Αχιλλεῦ*, he says. And again:

> *νηλεές, οὐκ ἄρα σοί γε πατὴρ ἦν ἱππότα Πηλεύς,*
> *οὐδὲ Θέτις μήτηρ· γλαυκὴ δέ σε τίκτε θάλασσα*
> *πέτραι τ' ἠλίβατοι, ὅτε τοι νόος ἐστὶν ἀπηνής.*[57]

But though the suffering of the Achaeans does not matter to Achilles, the distress of Patroclus does.[58] For his friend's sake, Achilles gives up the intention, so proudly declared, to wait till his own ships are attacked.[59] He cannot quite bring himself to enter the battle, for Agamemnon's insult still rankles. But he hands over his armor and his men to Patroclus, and sends them forth with brave commands,[60] wise counsel,[61] and a prayer.[62]

Counsel and prayer, however, are not enough to save Patroclus. He drives back the Trojans and wins respite for the Greeks, then meets his death.[63] Thus the first grief that comes to Achilles is the greatest he could suffer—*οὐ μὲν γάρ τι κακώτερον ἄλλο πάθοιμι*.[64] Even his father is not so close to him as the friend who has shared his life at Troy as intimately as the hours of boyhood at home.[65] From the beginning, Achilles, as Homer portrays him, is distinguished by a physical energy and an emotional intensity beyond other men.[66] Now, he flings himself on the ground in such an agony of grief that

[56] XVI.17–18.

[57] XVI.29, 33–35.

[58] XVI.5.

[59] XVI.61–65.

[60] XVI.200–209.

[61] XVI.91–96.

[62] XVI.233–248.

[63] Thetis had foretold the death of Patroclus (XVIII.9–11). But in spite of this, Achilles had hoped that Patroclus might survive him and take charge of his son, Neoptolemus (XIX.328–333).

[64] XIX.321. Also XXIII.46–47.

[65] IX.190–191.

[66] Gladstone mentions the fact that in the works of other poets Achilles is brave and chivalrous, but lacks this touch of superhuman greatness.

Antilochus fears he will cut his throat.[67] Only the goddess, his mother, ventures to speak to him, reminding him that Zeus has made the Achaeans realize that without Achilles they are lost. This is the triumph for which he has hungered with passionate intensity, but it means nothing to him. Darkness has fallen upon his world.[68] He has not only lost Patroclus

> τὸν ἐγὼ περὶ πάντων τῖον ἑταίρων,
> ἶσον ἐμῇ κεφαλῇ[69]

but he is to blame for his death: ἐμεῖο δὲ δῆσεν ἀρῆς ἀλκτῆρα γενέσθαι.[70] He failed to save Patroclus and failed to save his other comrades:

> οὐδέ τι Πατρόκλῳ γενόμην φάος οὐδ' ἑτάροισι
> τοῖς ἄλλοις, οἳ δὴ πολέες δάμεν Ἕκτορι δίῳ.[71]

This is the earliest indication of πάθει μάθος. In the first hour of grief, Achilles understands the suffering which he has caused others. A short time before, he had taken satisfaction in it, as proof of his personal triumph. "Hector struck them down," he now says, "while I sat by my ships, a useless burden upon the earth's back! I, who could have done more on the field of battle than any other Achaean!" [72] All this has resulted from a quarrel. "Let quarrels end!," he cries, "nevermore to arise among men or gods!—and anger, too! anger, that drives even a thinking man to savagery!" [73]

Now, Achilles passionately dedicates to his friend the short span of life that is still granted him. The death of Patroclus, for which he is responsible, he must avenge by slaying Hector. Nothing else matters, and delays are hard to bear. But he must wait for Thetis to bring him armor, he must go through

[67] XVIII.34.
[68] XVIII.22.
[69] XVIII.81–82.
[70] XVIII.100.
[71] XVIII.102–103.
[72] XVIII.104–106.
[73] XVIII.107–108.

the form of a public reconciliation with Agamemnon, and he must even allow the soldiers time for a substantial meal before going into battle.[74]

The new understanding of Achilles has broadened his outlook, but it does not yet influence his action. In the presence of the assembled Greeks he admits his responsibility for the loss of the warriors who fell while he refused his aid.[75] And the poet takes this opportunity to contrast the attitude of Agamemnon, who also refers to their quarrel, but will not accept any of the blame:

ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ αἴτιός εἰμι,
ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς καὶ Μοῖρα καὶ ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινύς.[76]

Agamemnon never acknowledges that he has done wrong,[77] and this prevents any real reconciliation. The gifts which he had offered previously Agamemnon now orders brought from his quarters for Achilles, enjoying, as he always does, the display of superior power and wealth.[78] Achilles is courteous, but indifferent.[79] Only one thing matters to him now—to express the full measure of his love for Patroclus.[80] This he had not done when he sent Patroclus out alone, and the tragic result is unalterable. But he will do all that is still possible, and even more than the code of honor requires, for is not his love greater than that for which codes were made? Achilles returns to the battlefield because the smart of wounded pride is of no importance to a heart suffering the agony of love bereaved.

Swept along by this agony of grief, of remorse, and of anguished longing to do more for Patroclus,[81] Achilles commits acts of shocking violence. Some of these, though revolting

[74] XIX.230–237, 275.
[75] XIX.56–64.
[76] XIX.86–87.
[77] XIX.134–138.
[78] XIX.140–144 and 185–195.
[79] XIX.146–150.
[80] XIX.199–214, 315–321.
[81] XXI.100–107, 133–135; XXII.386–392; XXIII.19–23, 134–183, 218–261.

to the modern reader, were customs of the Homeric age, as Bassett has shown.[82] All that Achilles can think of he does for Patroclus. He willingly shortens his own life in order to slay Hector,[83] he gives Patroclus a noble funeral, dignified by games in which great princes take part, and he constructs a tomb for Patroclus and himself,[84] and promises to the spirit of his friend that their ashes shall be laid together in one golden urn.[85]

All this Achilles does, but his soul finds no peace. Exhausted, he flings himself upon his bed at night, staring into darkness until the memory of the days of perfect comradeship brings the hot tears. He springs from bed, in an agony of longing, and going out upon the desolate shore strides furiously up and down till daybreak. Then he mounts his chariot and again drags Hector's body three times around the tomb of Patroclus.[86] It does not ease his suffering. A generous and noble nature may undertake revenge as an obligation, but it cannot find relief in vengeful acts.

Then the extraordinary thing happens. Unnoticed, Priam has entered the quarters of Achilles. Without guards or pomp, the king of mighty Troy stands there, a sorrowful old man. "Remember your own father," he says to Achilles, "your father, old and helpless as I, with no son at his side to protect him from enemies." [87] It is true. A new grief tortures the heart of Achilles and brings tears to his eyes. From his father's hour of need he will be absent, as he was from his

[82] "Achilles' Treatment of Hector's Body," *T.A.P.A.* LXIV (1933). Significant in this connection is the manner in which Achilles treated the body of another enemy, Eëtion, Andromache's father. Andromache herself tells Hector that Achilles slew Eëtion, but did not strip off his armor, though the victor in Homeric warfare was expected to do so. The generosity of Achilles went even farther. He placed on the pyre the body of Eëtion, clad in the splendid armor, and afterward erected a tomb for him (VI.416–420).

[83] XVIII.96–99.

[84] XXIII.125–126.

[85] XXIII.91–96.

[86] XXIV.3–18.

[87] XXIV.486–489.

friend's. More than any other man, Achilles has strength and swiftness in battle, yet the two he loves best on earth must die for lack of his aid. Achilles realizes the bitterest tragedy of human life—to live on, after losing one so dear that the joy and meaning of life have gone with him:

> ὣς γὰρ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι,
> ζώειν ἀχνυμένοις· [88]

This will soon be the lot of Peleus, and it is already the lot of Achilles and of Priam.[89] A kinship of suffering seems to draw these three together. Achilles raises the aged Priam as gently as if he were his own father, and his words are tender with understanding. Never before has Achilles realized any sorrow but his own. Now he says: "Poor man, how much you have endured! How could you summon courage to come alone to me, who slew so many of your valiant sons? Truly your spirit is of iron!—But come, sit near me now, and we shall let the sorrow in our hearts lie still, although our pain is great." [90]

Absorbed in his new understanding and what it reveals, Achilles is shocked when Priam disregards it and asks to see his son. The strange new mood is broken, and for a moment Achilles is afraid his anger may return and set him against Priam.[91] To avoid this, he rushes out of the room and with his men takes from the wagon Hector's ransom—all except

[88] XXIV.525–526.

[89] That Hector stood in this relation to Priam is clear. Polydorus had received the protective love which goes naturally to the youngest son (XX.407–410). He has already been slain by Achilles (XX.412–418). (Virgil's account in *Aen.* III is different.) But Hector meant even more to Priam (XXII.46–58). After Hector's death, Priam says of Achilles (XXII.422–426):

> μάλιστα δ' ἐμοὶ περὶ πάντων ἄλγε' ἔθηκε.
> τόσσους γάρ μοι παῖδας ἀπέκτανε τηλεθάοντας·
> τῶν πάντων οὐ τόσσον ὀδύρομαι ἀχνύμενός περ
> ὡς ἑνός, οὔ μ' ἄχος ὀξὺ κατοίσεται Ἄϊδος εἴσω,
> Ἕκτορος.

[90] 518–523.

[91] Now he fears, *and avoids*—which he had not done before.

two mantles and a beautifully woven chiton. He calls the women, bids them bathe Hector's body and anoint it with oil, and put about it these rich garments. When this has been done, Achilles raises Hector in his arms and lays him on a couch. Then, with his friends, he puts the couch on Priam's wagon, breathing a prayer: "Be not angry with me, Patroclus, if you learn in the world of the dead that I have given Hector back to his dear father." [92]

Achilles returns to Priam. "Your son has been restored," he says, "and in the morning you shall look upon him. Now let us eat together. Even Niobe, when all her children had been slain—even she, after long weeping, dried her tears and tasted food. Let us now break bread together. Tomorrow you shall grieve over your dead son, after you have taken him back to Troy. Many shall be the tears shed for him." [93]

There is no longer any hatred between these men.[94] Priam had once declared that grief for the sons he had lost could only be assuaged if the dead body of Achilles were torn by dogs and vultures.[95] Achilles had felt an equally savage desire: to satisfy him, Hector's flesh must feed the beasts and birds of prey. No ransom would be large enough to buy his body—not even its own weight in gold.[96]

[92] To all who are familiar with Homeric custom, there is no less pathos in the words that follow. Achilles says that an adequate ransom has been brought—this made the surrender of the body obligatory—and that he will share this ransom with Patroclus. John A. Scott, in *The Unity of Homer* (Berkeley, Univ. of Calif. Press, 1921), has commented on the symmetry in the arrangement of events in Books I and XXIV. It may not be too far-fetched to see an intentional contrast between Agamemnon's defiance of custom and divine will, in connection with the restoration of Chryseïs, and the attitude of Achilles with regard to Hector. There are verbal similarities:

ὁ γὰρ ἦλθε θοὰς ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν
λυσόμενός τε θύγατρα φέρων τ' ἀπερείσι' ἄποινα. I.12–13.

ἰκάνω νῆας Ἀχαιῶν
λυσόμενος παρὰ σεῖο, φέρω δ' ἀπερείσι' ἄποινα. XXIV.501–502.

[93] 599–620.

[94] 628–633.

[95] XXII.41–45.

[96] XXII.344–354.

What is it that finally draws together two men, widely separated by age, by national hostility and prejudice, and by so violent a hunger for revenge? The answer brings us face to face with something very simple, yet so far-reaching in its possibilities that one can hardly contemplate it without awe. Achilles and Priam are drawn together by the understanding that grows out of suffering and needs no statement in words, because it is so profoundly felt.

The moving presentation of this truth is not weakened by the intervention of the gods. The divine machinery was too inevitable a part of epic poetry to be ignored at this point, so we find Thetis telling Achilles, before Priam's arrival, that Zeus bids him restore Hector's body and accept the ransom. Achilles, unlike Agamemnon, does not defy the will of heaven or the laws of man, whenever they clash with his desires. He replies: "Let him who brings ransom take the body away, if this is the god's will." [97]

But the last great scene in the *Iliad* involves more, as we have seen, than the surrender of Hector's body. Recognizing the bond that draws him to Priam, Achilles finds strength to bear the burden of his own grief while he keeps at his side the man who bears a heavier burden with such dignity. Furthermore, Achilles is now moved of his own accord to restore Hector's body:

νοέω δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς
Ἕκτορά τοι λῦσαι.[98]

The command of Zeus, though remembered, is no longer needed.[99] The same feeling leads Achilles to an act of noble generosity that no god has suggested. "How many days," he asks, "will it require to bury Hector with all the honor that is a hero's due? Tell me, that I may keep the Greek army in its quarters till the time has passed." [100] It is the

[97] xxiv.133–140.
[98] xxiv.560–561.
[99] xxiv.561–567.
[100] xxiv.656–658.

understanding and forethought of Achilles that provide the opportunity for those who loved Hector to lament and to bury him with reverence and with tenderness. And Achilles himself, who found no peace, so long as he was bent upon revenge, is able to sleep at last.[101]

As Bowra says: "Homer is not a teacher like Aeschylus, and he does not preach his views. He takes them largely for granted, and is content to let them be merged in his story." [102] The wrath of Achilles causes the death of many brave men and, finally, of his dearest friend. This is the result of the failure of Achilles to see more than his own side of the situation. When understanding comes to him, in the meeting with Priam, it rises, like everything in his nature, to a lofty height. Achilles has been moved first by devastating wrath, then by a measureless love, that strove mistakenly to gain satisfaction from revenge. Last of all, he is moved by a profound understanding of the feelings that draw men together—sorrow, and suffering, and the courage to endure. These can become strong enough to sweep away the barriers of war and hate.

The concluding line of the poem is:

> Thus they were busied with the burial of Hector, the warrior.

The burial was made possible by Achilles, who had slain Hector, and in the blindness of passion insulted his body, but had come at last to understand that the anger that parts men is born and dies, but the bond of their common humanity is everlasting.

[101] XXIV.675.

[102] *Op. cit.* (see note 5), 26.