**The Shield of Achilles** is the [shield](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shield) that [Achilles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achilles) uses to fight [Hector](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hector), described in a passage in Book 18, lines 478-608 of [Homer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homer)'s [*Iliad*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iliad). In the poem, Achilles has lost his armour. Achilles' mother [Thetis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thetis) asks the god [Hephaestus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hephaestus) to provide replacement armor for her son.

„he set his great anvil on its block, and with one hand

grasped his mighty hammer while he took the tongs in the other.

First he shaped the shield so great and strong, adorning it all

over and binding it round with a gleaming circuit in three

layers; and the baldric was made of silver. He made the shield in

five thicknesses, and with many a wonder did his cunning hand

enrich it.

He wrought the earth, the heavens, and the sea; the moon also at

her full and the untiring sun, with all the signs that glorify

the face of heaven--the Pleiads, the Hyads, huge Orion, and the

Bear, which men also call the Wain and which turns round ever in

one place, facing. Orion, and alone never dips into the stream of

Oceanus.

He wrought also two cities, fair to see and busy with the hum of

men. In the one were weddings and wedding-feasts, and they were

going about the city with brides whom they were escorting by

torchlight from their chambers. Loud rose the cry of Hymen, and

the youths danced to the music of flute and lyre, while the women

stood each at her house door to see them.

Meanwhile the people were gathered in assembly, for there was a

quarrel, and two men were wrangling about the blood-money for a

man who had been killed, the one saying before the people that he

had paid damages in full, and the other that he had not been

paid. Each was trying to make his own case good, and the people

took sides, each man backing the side that he had taken; but the

heralds kept them back, and the elders sate on their seats of

stone in a solemn circle, holding the staves which the heralds

had put into their hands. Then they rose and each in his turn

gave judgement, and there were two talents laid down, to be given

to him whose judgement should be deemed the fairest.

About the other city there lay encamped two hosts in gleaming

armour, and they were divided whether to sack it, or to spare it

and accept the half of what it contained. But the men of the city

would not yet consent, and armed themselves for a surprise; their

wives and little children kept guard upon the walls, and with

them were the men who were past fighting through age; but the

others sallied forth with Mars and Pallas Minerva at their head--

both of them wrought in gold and clad in golden raiment, great

and fair with their armour as befitting gods, while they that

followed were smaller. When they reached the place where they

would lay their ambush, it was on a riverbed to which live stock

of all kinds would come from far and near to water; here, then,

they lay concealed, clad in full armour. Some way off them there

were two scouts who were on the look-out for the coming of sheep

or cattle, which presently came, followed by two shepherds who

were playing on their pipes, and had not so much as a thought of

danger. When those who were in ambush saw this, they cut off the

flocks and herds and killed the shepherds. Meanwhile the

besiegers, when they heard much noise among the cattle as they

sat in council, sprang to their horses, and made with all speed

towards them; when they reached them they set battle in array by

the banks of the river, and the hosts aimed their bronze-shod

spears at one another. With them were Strife and Riot, and fell

Fate who was dragging three men after her, one with a fresh

wound, and the other unwounded, while the third was dead, and she

was dragging him along by his heel: and her robe was bedrabbled

in men's blood. They went in and out with one another and fought

as though they were living people haling away one another's dead.

He wrought also a fair fallow field, large and thrice ploughed

already. Many men were working at the plough within it, turning

their oxen to and fro, furrow after furrow. Each time that they

turned on reaching the headland a man would come up to them and

give them a cup of wine, and they would go back to their furrows

looking forward to the time when they should again reach the

headland. The part that they had ploughed was dark behind them,

so that the field, though it was of gold, still looked as if it

were being ploughed--very curious to behold.

He wrought also a field of harvest corn, and the reapers were

reaping with sharp sickles in their hands. Swathe after swathe

fell to the ground in a straight line behind them, and the

binders bound them in bands of twisted straw. There were three

binders, and behind them there were boys who gathered the cut

corn in armfuls and kept on bringing them to be bound: among them

all the owner of the land stood by in silence and was glad. The

servants were getting a meal ready under an oak, for they had

sacrificed a great ox, and were busy cutting him up, while the

women were making a porridge of much white barley for the

labourers' dinner.

He wrought also a vineyard, golden and fair to see, and the vines

were loaded with grapes. The bunches overhead were black, but the

vines were trained on poles of silver. He ran a ditch of dark

metal all round it, and fenced it with a fence of tin; there was

only one path to it, and by this the vintagers went when they

would gather the vintage. Youths and maidens all blithe and full

of glee, carried the luscious fruit in plaited baskets; and with

them there went a boy who made sweet music with his lyre, and

sang the Linos-song with his clear boyish voice.

He wrought also a herd of horned cattle. He made the cows of gold

and tin, and they lowed as they came full speed out of the yards

to go and feed among the waving reeds that grow by the banks of

the river. Along with the cattle there went four shepherds, all

of them in gold, and their nine fleet dogs went with them. Two

terrible lions had fastened on a bellowing bull that was with the

foremost cows, and bellow as he might they haled him, while the

dogs and men gave chase: the lions tore through the bull's thick

hide and were gorging on his blood and bowels, but the herdsmen

were afraid to do anything, and only hounded on their dogs; the

dogs dared not fasten on the lions but stood by barking and

keeping out of harm's way.

The god wrought also a pasture in a fair mountain dell, and a

large flock of sheep, with a homestead and huts, and sheltered

sheepfolds.

Furthermore he wrought a green, like that which Daedalus once

made in Cnossus for lovely Ariadne. Hereon there danced youths

and maidens whom all would woo, with their hands on one another's

wrists. The maidens wore robes of light linen, and the youths

well woven shirts that were slightly oiled. The girls were

crowned with garlands, while the young men had daggers of gold

that hung by silver baldrics; sometimes they would dance deftly

in a ring with merry twinkling feet, as it were a potter sitting

at his work and making trial of his wheel to see whether it will

run, and sometimes they would go all in line with one another,

and much people was gathered joyously about the green. There was

a bard also to sing to them and play his lyre, while two tumblers

went about performing in the midst of them when the man struck up

with his tune.

All round the outermost rim of the shield he set the mighty

stream of the river Oceanus.

Then when he had fashioned the shield so great and strong, he

made a breastplate also that shone brighter than fire.He threw tough copper into the fire, and tin, with silver and gold….;”

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| **John Keats: Ode on a Grecian Urn** |
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| |  | | --- | |  | | 1.  THOU still unravish’d bride of quietness, |  | | Thou foster-child of silence and slow time, |  | | Sylvan historian, who canst thus express |  | | A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme: |  | | What leaf-fring’d legend haunts about thy shape | *5* | | Of deities or mortals, or of both, |  | | In Tempe or the dales of Arcady? |  | | What men or gods are these? What maidens loth? |  | | What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? |  | | What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy? | *10* | |  |  | | 2.  Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard |  | | Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on; |  | | Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear’d, |  | | Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone: |  | | Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave | *15* | | Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare; |  | | Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss, |  | | Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve; |  | | She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss, |  | | For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! | *20* | |  |  | | 3.  Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed |  | | Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu; |  | | And, happy melodist, unwearied, |  | | For ever piping songs for ever new; |  | | More happy love! more happy, happy love! | *25* | | For ever warm and still to be enjoy’d, |  | | For ever panting, and for ever young; |  | | All breathing human passion far above, |  | | That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy’d, |  | | A burning forehead, and a parching tongue. | *30* | |  |  | | 4.  Who are these coming to the sacrifice? |  | | To what green altar, O mysterious priest, |  | | Lead’st thou that heifer lowing at the skies, |  | | And all her silken flanks with garlands drest? |  | | What little town by river or sea shore, | *35* | | Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel, |  | | Is emptied of [this folk, this](http://www.bartleby.com/126/1000.html#41.37) pious morn? |  | | And, little town, thy streets for evermore |  | | Will silent be; and not a soul to tell |  | | Why thou art desolate, can e’er return. | *40* | |  |  | | 5.  O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede |  | | Of marble men and maidens overwrought, |  | | With forest branches and the trodden weed; |  | | Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought |  | | As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral! | *45* | | When old age shall this generation waste, |  | | Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe |  | | Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say’st, |  | | “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,”—that is all |  | | Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know. |  | |

**The Shield of Achilles**   
*W. H. Auden*

She looked over his shoulder

For vines and olive trees,

Marble well-governed cities

And ships upon untamed seas,

But there on the shining metal

His hands had put instead

An artificial wilderness

And a sky like lead.

A plain without a feature, bare and brown,

No blade of grass, no sign of neighborhood,

Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down,

Yet, congregated on its blankness, stood

An unintelligible multitude,

A million eyes, a million boots in line,

Without expression, waiting for a sign.

Out of the air a voice without a face

Proved by statistics that some cause was just

In tones as dry and level as the place:

No one was cheered and nothing was discussed;

Column by column in a cloud of dust

They marched away enduring a belief

Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief.

She looked over his shoulder

For ritual pieties,

White flower-garlanded heifers,

Libation and sacrifice,

But there on the shining metal

Where the altar should have been,

She saw by his flickering forge-light

Quite another scene.

Barbed wire enclosed an arbitrary spot

Where bored officials lounged (one cracked a joke)

And sentries sweated for the day was hot:

A crowd of ordinary decent folk

Watched from without and neither moved nor spoke

As three pale figures were led forth and bound

To three posts driven upright in the ground.

The mass and majesty of this world, all

That carries weight and always weighs the same

Lay in the hands of others; they were small

And could not hope for help and no help came:

What their foes like to do was done, their shame

Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride

And died as men before their bodies died.

She looked over his shoulder

For athletes at their games,

Men and women in a dance

Moving their sweet limbs

Quick, quick, to music,

But there on the shining shield

His hands had set no dancing-floor

But a weed-choked field.

A ragged urchin, aimless and alone,

Loitered about that vacancy; a bird

Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone:

That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,

Were axioms to him, who'd never heard

Of any world where promises were kept,

Or one could weep because another wept.

The thin-lipped armorer,

Hephaestos, hobbled away,

Thetis of the shining breasts

Cried out in dismay

At what the god had wrought

To please her son, the strong

Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles

Who would not live long.

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|  | |  | | --- | |  |   **As I Walked Out One Evening**   |  |  | | --- | --- | | As I walked out one evening, Walking down Bristol Street, The crowds upon the pavement Were fields of harvest wheat.  And down by the brimming river I heard a lover sing Under an arch of the railway: 'Love has no ending.  'I'll love you, dear, I'll love you Till China and Africa meet, And the river jumps over the mountain And the salmon sing in the street,  'I'll love you till the ocean Is folded and hung up to dry And the seven stars go squawking Like geese about the sky.  'The years shall run like rabbits, For in my arms I hold The Flower of the Ages, And the first love of the world.'  But all the clocks in the city Began to whirr and chime: 'O let not Time deceive you, You cannot conquer Time.  'In the burrows of the Nightmare Where Justice naked is, Time watches from the shadow And coughs when you would kiss.  'In headaches and in worry Vaguely life leaks away, And Time will have his fancy To-morrow or to-day. | 'Into many a green valley Drifts the appalling snow; Time breaks the threaded dances And the diver's brilliant bow.  'O plunge your hands in water, Plunge them in up to the wrist; Stare, stare in the basin And wonder what you've missed.  'The glacier knocks in the cupboard, The desert sighs in the bed, And the crack in the tea-cup opens A lane to the land of the dead.  'Where the beggars raffle the banknotes And the Giant is enchanting to Jack, And the Lily-white Boy is a Roarer, And Jill goes down on her back.  'O look, look in the mirror? O look in your distress: Life remains a blessing Although you cannot bless.  'O stand, stand at the window As the tears scald and start; You shall love your crooked neighbour With your crooked heart.'  It was late, late in the evening, The lovers they were gone; The clocks had ceased their chiming, And the deep river ran on. | |