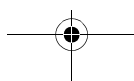
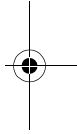
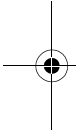
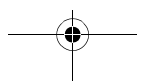
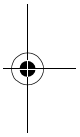
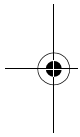
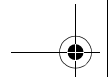
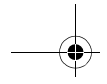


Articles from
Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine
1841







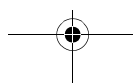
HOMER AND THE HOMERIDAE {PART I}

First published in *Blackwood's*, October 1841, pp. 411–27. Reprinted in *F, Historical and Critical Essays* (i), 1853. A revised version appeared in *SGG*, V, *Sketches, Critical and Biographic*, 1857. There is no known manuscript.

The article's context is the 'Homeric question' that had raged in scholarly circles ever since the German philologist Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824) had published his *Prolegomena ad Homerum* in 1795. Wolf had proposed that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Greek epic poems dating, probably, from around 800 BC and conventionally attributed to Homer, were not the work of a single poet but rather had been assembled from collections of shorter narrative poems orally composed and recited by wandering bards, among whom were the 'Homeridae' of De Quincey's title. After centuries of oral transmission these poems, Wolf suggested, had been written down and then assembled into coherent unified narratives, probably at the instigation of Pisistratus (d. 527 BC), tyrant of Athens. The great poet 'Homer' was thus, in Wolf's opinion, a fiction, and criticism of the poems could address itself to identifying the original 'lays' or shorter epics out of which they had been built.

Wolf's argument was not entirely new: it had long been suggested that Homer had lived in an age before writing was known to the Greeks, so that the received text of the poems was unlikely to be exactly as originally composed. Richard Bentley, in his *Remarks Upon a Late Discourse of Free Thinking* (1713) and the Abbé d'Aubignac in *Conjectures* (1715), among others, had already suggested that the Homeric poems had been assembled from earlier, shorter poems composed either by Homer or by several poets. But Wolf's argument was presented in combative and scholarly terms, and found a receptive audience with a Romantic interest in orality and folk poetry. The debate, embracing an enormous range of views between the extremes of a single originating 'Homer' on the one hand and collective composition by a multitude of bards, scribes and editors over several centuries on the other, is still in progress and seems unlikely to be resolved.

The present series of three articles is of particular interest as containing De Quincey's most sustained critical discussion of the *Iliad*, and (in Part III) giving an autobiographical glimpse of the eight-year-old De Quincey's first inspiring encounter with the poem, in an English paraphrase (see below, p. 62).





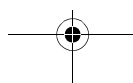
WORKS OF DE QUINCEY: VOLUME 13

HOMER, the general patriarch of Occidental literature, reminds us oftentimes, and powerfully, of the river Nile. If you, reader, should (as easily you may) be seated on the banks of that river in the months of February or March 1842, you may count on two luxuries for a poetic eye – first, on a lovely cloudless morning; secondly, on a gorgeous flora. For it has been remarked, that nowhere, out of tropical regions, is the vernal equipage of nature so rich, so pompously variegated, in buds, and bells, and blossoms, as precisely in this unhappy Egypt – ‘a house of bondage’¹ undeniably, in all ages, to its own working population; and yet, as if to mock the misery it witnesses, the gayest of all lands in its spontaneous flora. Now, supposing yourself to be seated, together with a child or two, on some flowery carpet of the Delta; and supposing the Nile – ‘that ancient river’² – within sight; happy infancy on the one side, the everlasting pomp of waters on the other; and the thought still intruding, that on some quarter of your position, perhaps fifty miles out of sight, stand pointing to the heavens the mysterious pyramids. These circumstances presupposed, it is inevitable that your thoughts should wander upwards to the dark fountains of origination. The pyramids, why and when did they arise? This infancy, so lovely and innocent, whence does it come, whither does it go? This creative river, what are its ultimate well-heads? That last question was viewed by antiquity as charmed against solution. It was not permitted, they fancied, to dishonour the river Nile by stealing upon his solitude in a state of weakness and childhood –

‘Nec licuit populis parvum te, Nile, videre.’³

So said Lucan. And in those days no image that the earth suggested could so powerfully express a mysterious secrecy, as the coy fountains of the Nile. At length came Abyssinian Bruce; and that superstition seemed to vanish. Yet now again the mystery has revolved upon us. You have drunk, you say, from the fountains of the Nile? Good; but, my friend, from which fountains? ‘Which king, Bezonian?’⁴ Understand that there is another branch of the Nile – another mighty arm, whose fountains lie in far other regions. The great letter Y, that Pythagorean marvel,⁵ is still covered with shades in one half of its bifurcation. And the darkness which, from the eldest of days, has invested Father Nile with fabulous awe, still broods over his most ancient fountains, defies our curious impertinence, and will not suffer us to behold the survivor of Memphis, and of Thebes – the hundred-gated⁶ – other than in his grandeur as a benefactor of nations.

Such thoughts, a world of meditations pointing in the same direction, settle also upon Homer. Eight-and-twenty hundred years, according to the improved views of chronology, have men drunk from the waters of this earliest amongst poets. Himself, under one of his denominations, the son of a river [Melesigenes], or the grandson of a river [Maeonides],⁷ he has been the parent of fertilizing streams carried off derivatively into every land. Not the fountains of the Nile have been so diffusive, or so creative, as those of Homer –





HOMER AND THE HOMERIDAE [PART I]

– ‘a quo, ceu fonte perenni,
Vatum Pieriis ora rigantur aquis.’⁸

There is the same gayety of atmosphere, the same ‘blue rejoicing sky,’⁹ the same absence of the austere and the gloomy sublime, investing the Grecian Homer as invests the Nile of the Delta. And again, if you would go upwards to the fountains of this ancient Nile, or of this ancient Homer, you would find the same mysterious repulsion. In both cases you find their fountains shyly retreating before you; and like the sacred peaks of Ararat, where the framework of Noah’s ark reposes, never less surmounted than when a man fancies himself within arm’s reach of their central recesses.*

A great poet appearing in early ages, and a great river, bear something of the same relation to human civility and culture. In this view, with a peculiar sublimity, the Hindoos consider a mighty fertilizing river, when bursting away with torrent rapture from its mountain cradle, and billowing onwards through two thousand miles of realms made rich by itself, as in some special meaning ‘the Son of God.’¹¹ The word Burrampooter is said to bear that sublime sense. Hence arose the profound interest about the Nile: what cause could produce its annual swelling? Even as a phenomenon *that* was awful, but much more so as a creative agency; for it was felt that Egypt, which is but the valley of the Nile, had been the mere creation of the river annually depositing its rich layers of slime. Hence arose the corresponding interest about Homer; for Greece and the Grecian Isles were in many moral respects as much the creation of Homer as Egypt of the Nile. And if, on the one hand, it is unavoidable to assume some degree of civilization before a Homer could exist, on the other, it is certain that Homer, by the picture of unity which he held aloft to the Greeks, in making them co-operate to a common enterprise against Asia, and by the intellectual pleasure which he first engrafted upon the innumerable festivals of Hellas, did more than lawgivers to propagate this early civilization, and to protect it against those barbarizing feuds or migrations which through some centuries menaced its existence.

Having, therefore, the same motive of curiosity – having the same awe, connected first, with secrecy; secondly, with remoteness; and thirdly, with beneficent power, which turn our enquiries to the infant Nile, let us pursue a parallel investigation with regard to the infant Homer. How was Homer possible? how could such a poet as Homer – how could such a poem as the *Iliad* – arise in days so illiterate? Or rather, and first of all, *was* Homer possible? If the *Iliad* could and did arise, not as a long series of separate phenomena, but as one solitary birth of revolutionary power, how was it preserved? how passed

* Seven or eight Europeans – some Russian, some English – have not only taken possession of the topmost crag on Ararat¹⁰ by means of the broadest disc which their own persons offered, but have left flags flying, to mark out for those below, the exact station which they had reached. All to no purpose! The bigoted Armenian still replied – these are mere illusions worked by demons.



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onwards from generation to generation? how propagated over Greece during centuries, when our modern facilities for copying on paper, and the general art of reading, were too probably unknown?

We presume every man of letters to be aware, that, since the time of the great German philologer, Fred. Augustus Wolf, [for whose life and services to literature, see Wilhelm Koerte's '*Leben und Studien Friedr. Aug. Wolfs*,' 1833,]¹² a great shock has been given to the slumbering credulity of men on these Homeric subjects; a galvanic resuscitation to the ancient scepticism on the mere possibility of an *Iliad*, such as we now have it, issuing sound and complete, in the 10th or 11th century before Christ, from the brain of a blind man, who had not (*they say*) so much as chalk towards the scoring down of his thoughts. The doubts moved by Wolf in 1795, propagated a controversy in Germany which has subsisted down to the present time. This controversy concerns Homer himself, and his first-born child the *Iliad*; for as to the *Odyssey*, sometimes reputed the child of his old age, and as to the minor poems, which never could have been ascribed to him by philosophic critics, these are universally given up – as having no more connexion with Homer personally, than any other of the many epic and cyclical poems which arose during Post-Homeric ages, in a spirit of imitation, more or less diverging from the primitive Homeric model.

Fred. Wolf raised the question soon after the time of the French Revolution. Afterwards he pursued it [1797] in his letters to Heyne.¹³ But it is remarkable that a man so powerful in scholarship, witnessing the universal fermentation he had caused, should not have responded to the general call upon himself to come forward and close the dispute with a comprehensive valuation of all that had been said, and all that yet remained to be said, upon this difficult problem. Voss,¹⁴ the celebrated translator of Homer into German dactylic hexameters, was naturally interested by a kind of personal stake in the controversy. He wrote to Wolf – warmly, perhaps, and in a tone almost of moral remonstrance; but without losing his temper, or forgetting the urbanity of a scholar. 'I believe,' said he, in his later correspondence of the year 1796, 'I believe in one *Iliad*, in one *Odyssey*, and in one Homer as the sole father of both. Grant that Homer could not write his own name – and so much I will concede that your acute arguments have almost demonstrated – still to my thinking *that* only enhances the glory of the poet. The unity of this poet, and the unity of his works, are as yet to me unshaken ideas. But what then? I am no bigot in my creed, so as to close my ears against all hostile arguments. And these arguments, let me say plainly, you now owe to us all: arguments drawn from the *internal* structure of the Homeric poems. You have wounded us, Mr Wolf, in our affections: you have affronted us, Mr Wolf, in our tenderest sensibilities. But still we are just men; ready to listen, willing to bear and to forbear. Meantime the matter cannot rest here. You owe it, Mr Wolf, to the dignity of the subject, not to keep back those proofs which doubtless you possess; proofs, observe, conclusive proofs. For hitherto, permit



HOMER AND THE HOMERIDAE [PART I]

me to say, you have merely played with the surface of the question. True, even that play has led to some important results; and for these no man is more grateful than myself. But the main battle is still in arrears.'

Wolf, however, hearkened not to such appeals. He had called up spirits, by his evocation, more formidable than he looked for or could lay. Perhaps, like the goddess Eris¹⁵ at the wedding feast, he had merely sought to amuse himself by throwing a ball of contention amongst the literati: – a little mischief was all he contemplated, and a little learned Billingsgate.¹⁶ Things had taken a wider circuit. Wolf's acuteness in raising objections to all the received opinions had fallen upon a kindly soil: the public mind had reacted powerfully; for the German mind is but too naturally disposed to scepticism; and Wolf found himself at length in this dilemma – viz. that either, by writing a very inadequate sequel, he must forfeit the reputation he had acquired; or that he must prepare himself for a compass of research to which his spirits were not equal, and to which his studies had not latterly been directed. A man of high celebrity may be willing to come forward in undress, and to throw out such casual thoughts as the occasion may prompt, provided he can preserve his *incognito*; but if he sees a vast public waiting to receive him with theatric honours, and a flourish of trumpets announcing his approach, reasonably he may shrink from facing expectations so highly raised, and may perhaps truly plead an absolute impossibility of pursuing further any question under such original sterility of materials, and after so elaborate a cultivation by other labourers.

Wolf, therefore, is not to be blamed for having declined, in its mature stages, to patronise his own question. *His own* we call it, because he first pressed its strongest points; because he first kindled it into a public feud; and because, by his matchless revisal of the Homeric text, he gave to the world, simultaneously with his doubts, the very strongest credentials of his own right to utter doubts. And the public, during the forty-six years' interval which has succeeded to his first opening of the case, have viewed the question as so exclusively *his* – that it is generally known under the name of the Wolfian hypothesis. All this is fair and natural: that rebel who heads the mob of insurgents is rightly viewed as the father of the insurrection. Yet still, in the rigour of justice, we must not overlook the earlier conspirators. Not to speak here of more ancient sceptics, it is certain that in modern times Bentley,¹⁷ something more than 150 years back, with his usual divinity of eye, saw the opening for doubts. Already in the year 1689, when he was a young man fresh from college, Bentley gave utterance to several of the Wolfian scruples. And, indeed, had he done nothing more than call attention to the digamma,¹⁸ as applied to the text of Homer, he could not have escaped feeling and communicating these scruples. To a man who was one day speaking of some supposed *hiatus* in the *Iliad*, Bentley, from whom courtesy flowed as naturally as 'milk from a male tiger,'¹⁹ called out – '*Hiatus*, man! *Hiatus* in your throat! There is no such thing in Homer.' And, when the other had timidly submitted to him such cases as *μεγα ειπων*, or *καλα εργα*, or *μελιηδεα οινον*,²⁰ Bentley



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showed him that, unless where the final syllable of the prior word happened to be *in arsi*,²¹ (as suppose in Πηληιαδεω Αχιλλου),²² universally the *hiatus* had not existed to the ears of Homer. And why? Because it was cured by the interposition of the digamma: ‘apud Homerum saepe *videtur* hiatus esse, ubi prisca littera digamma explebat intermedium spatium.’²³ Thus, μελιηδεα οινον in Homer’s age was μελιηδεα Φοινον (from which Aeolic form is derived our modern word for *wine* in all the western and central languages of Christendom: F is V, and V is W all the world over – whence vin, wine, vino, wein, wün, and so on; all originally depending upon that Aeolic letter F, which is so necessary to the metrical integrity of Homer.) Now, when once a man of Bentley’s sagacity had made that step – forcing him to perceive that here had been people of old time tampering with Homer’s text, (else how had the digamma dropped out of the place which once it must have occupied,) he could not but go a little further. If you see one or two of the indorsements on a bill mis-spelt, you begin to suspect general forgery. When the text of Homer had once become frozen and settled, no man could take liberties with it at the risk of being tripped up himself on its glassy surface, and landed in a lugubrious sedentary posture, to the derision of all critics, compositors, pressmen, devils,²⁴ and devillets. But whilst the text was yet piping hot, or lukewarm, or in the transitional state of cooling, every man who had a private purpose to serve might impress upon its plastic wax whatever alterations he pleased, whether by direct addition or by substitution, provided only he had skill to evade any ugly seam or cicatrice. It is true he could run this adulterated Homer only on that particular road to which he happened to have access. But then, in after generations, when all the Homers were called in by authority for general collation, *his* would go up with the rest; his forgery would be accepted for a various reading, and would thus have a fair chance of coming down to posterity – which word means, at this moment, *you*, reader, and ourselves. We are posterity. Yes, even we have been humbugged by this Pagan rascal; and have doubtless drunk off much of his swipes²⁵ under the firm faith that we were drinking the pure fragrant wine (the μελιηδεα Φοινον) of Homer.

Bentley having thus warned the public, by one general *caveat*, that tricks upon travellers might be looked for on this road, was succeeded by Wood, who, in his *Essay on the Genius of Homer*,²⁶ occasionally threw up rockets in the same direction. This Essay first crept out in the year 1769, but only to the extent of seven copies; and it was not until the year 1775,* that a second edition diffused the new views freely amongst the world. The next memorable era for this question occurred in 1788, during which year it was that Villoison published his *Iliad*,²⁷ and, as part of its apparatus, he printed the famous

* It is a proof, however, of the interest, even at that time, taken by Germany in English literature, as well as of the interest taken in this Homeric question, that one of the seven copies published in 1769 must have found its way to some German scholar; for already, in 1773, a German translation of Wood had been published at Frankfort.

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Venetian *Scholia*,²⁸ hitherto known only to inspectors of MSS. These *Scholia* gave strength to the modern doubts, by showing that many of them were but ancient doubts in a new form. Still, as the worshipful Scholiasts do not offer the pleasantest reading in the world, most of them being rather drowsy or so – truly respectable men, but somewhat apoplectic – it could not be expected that any explosion of sympathy should follow: the clouds thickened; but the man who was to draw forth the lightnings from their surcharged volumes, had not yet come forward. In the mean time, Herder,²⁹ not so much by learning as by the sagacity of his genius, threw out some pregnant hints of the disputable points. And finally, in 1795, Wolf marched forth in complete mail, a sheaf of sceptical arrows rattling on his harness, all of which he pointed and feathered, giving by his learning, or by masculine sense, buoyancy to their flight, so as to carry them into every corner of literary Europe. Then began the ‘row’ – then the steam was mounted which has never since subsided – and then opened upon Germany a career of scepticism, which from the very first promised to be contagious. It was a mode of revolutionary disease, which could not by its very nature confine itself to Homer. The religious reader has since had occasion to see, with pain, the same principles of audacious scepticism applied to books and questions far more important; but, as might be shown upon a fitting occasion, with no reason whatever for serious anxiety as to any popular effect. Meantime, for those numerous persons who do not read Latin or German with fluency, but are familiar with French, the best comprehensive view of Wolf’s arguments, (as given in his Homeric *Prolegomena*, or subsequently in his *Briefe an Heyne*,) is to be found in Franceson’s *Essai sur la question – Si Homère a connu l’usage de l’écriture: Berlin, 1818*.³⁰

This French work we mention, as meeting the wants of those who simply wish to know how the feud began. But, as that represents only the early stages of the entire speculation, it will be more satisfactory for all who are seriously interested in Homer, and without partisanship seek to know the plain unvarnished truth – ‘Is Homer a hum, and the Iliad a hoax?’ – to consult the various papers on this subject which have been contributed by Nitzsch to the great *Allgemeine Encyclopaedie*³¹ of modern Germany. Nitzsch’s name is against him; it is intolerable to see such a thicket of consonants with but one little bit of a vowel amongst them; it is like the proportions between Falstaff’s bread, and his sack.³² However, after all, the man did not make his own name, and the name looks worse than it sounds, for it is but our own word *niche*, barbarously written. This man’s essays are certainly the most full and representative pleadings which this extensive question has produced. On the other hand, they labour in excess with the prevailing vices of German speculation; viz. 1st, vague, indeterminate conception; 2ndly, total want of power to methodize or combine the parts, and indeed generally a barbarian inaptitude for composition. But, waiving our quarrel with Nitzsch and with Nitzsch’s name, no work of his can be considered as generally accessible; his body is not in court, and, if it were, it talks German. So, in his chair we shall

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seat ourselves; and now, with one advantage over him – viz. that we shall never leave the reader to muse for an hour over our meaning – we propose to state the outline of the controversy; to report the decisions upon the several issues sent down for trial upon this complex suit; and the apparent tendencies, so far as they are yet discoverable, towards that kind of general judgment which must be delivered by the Chancery of European criticism, before this dispute will subside into repose.

The great sectional or subordinate points into which the Homeric controversy breaks up, are these: –

I. *Homer* – that is, the poet as distinct from his works.

II. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* – that is, the poems as distinct from their author.

III. The *Rhapsodoi*, or poetic chanters of Greece; these, and their predecessors or their contemporaries – the *Aoidoi*, the *Citharaedi*, the *Homeridai*.

IV. *Lycurgus*.

V. *Solon* – and the Pisistratidae.

VI. The *Diascenastae*.³³

We hardly know at what point to take up this ravelled tissue; but, by way of tracing the whole theme *ab ovo*,³⁴ suppose we begin by stating the chronological bearings of the principal objects (things as well as persons) connected with the *Iliad*.

Ilium was that city of Asia Minor, whose memorable fortunes and catastrophe furnished the subject of the *Iliad*. At what period of human history may we reasonably suppose this catastrophe to have occurred? Never did a great man err so profoundly as Sir Isaac Newton³⁵ on this very question, in deducing the early chronology of Greece. The semi-fabulous section of Grecian annals he crowded into so narrow a space, and he depressed the whole into such close proximity to the regular opening of history, (that is, to the Olympiads,) that we are perfectly at a loss to imagine with what sort of men, events, and epochs, Sir Isaac would have peopled that particular interval of a thousand years in Grecian chronology, which corresponds to the Scriptural interval between the patriarch Abraham and Solomon the Jewish king. This interval commences with the year 2000 before Christ, and terminates with the year 1000 before Christ. But such is the fury of Sir Isaac for depressing all events not absolutely fabulous below this latter terminus, that he has really left himself without counters to mark the progress of man, or to fill the cells of history, through a millennium of Grecian life. The whole thousand years, as respects Hellas, is a mere desert upon Sir Isaac's map of time. As one instance of Sir Isaac's modernizing propensities, we never could sufficiently marvel at his supposing the map of the heavens, including those constellations which are derived from the Argonautic enterprise,³⁶ to have been completed about the very time of that enterprise; as if it were possible that a coarse clumsy hulk like the ship *Argo*, at which no possible Newcastle collier but would have sneezed, or that any of the men who navigated her could take



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a consecrated place in men's imagination, or could obtain an everlasting memorial in the starry heavens, until time, by removing gross features, and by blending all the circumstances with the solemnities of vast distance, had reconciled the feelings to a sanctity which must have been shocking, as applied to things local and familiar.

Far different from Sir Isaac's is the present chronological theory. Almost universally it is now agreed, that the siege of Troy occurred about 1300, or, at the lowest calculation, more than 1200 years before Christ. What, then, is the chronological relation of Homer to Troy? It is generally agreed, that the period of his flourishing was from two to three centuries after Troy. By some it was imagined that Homer himself had been a Trojan; and therefore contemporary with the very heroes whom he exhibits. Others, like our Jacob Bryant,³⁷ have fancied that he was not merely coeval with those heroes, but actually was one of those heroes – viz. Ulysses; and that the *Odyssey* rehearses the personal adventures, the voyages, the calamities of Homer. It is our old friend the poet, but with a new face; he is now a soldier, a sailor, a king, and, in case of necessity, a very fair boxer, or 'fistic artist,' for the abatement of masterful beggars, 'sorners,'³⁸ or other nuisances. But these wild fancies have found no success. All scholars have agreed in placing a deep gulf of years between Homer and the Ilium which he sang. Aristarchus fixes the era of Homer at 140 years after the Trojan war; Philochorus at 180 years; Apollodorus at 240; the Arundel Marbles at 302; and Herodotus,³⁹ who places Homer about 400 years before his own time, (*i.e.* about 850 before Christ,) ought, therefore, to be interpreted as assuming 350 years at least between Homer and Troy. So that the earliest series of events connected from before and from behind with the Grecian bard, may be thus arranged: –

Years bef. Christ.

1220 – Trojan expedition.

1000 – Homer a young man, and contemporary with the building of the *first* temple at Jerusalem.

820 – Lycurgus brings into the Peloponnesus from Crete, (or else from Ionia,) the Homeric poems hitherto unknown upon the Grecian continent.

Up to this epoch (the epoch of transplanting the *Iliad* from Greece insular and Greece colonial to Greece continental) the Homeric poems had been left to the custody of two schools, or professional orders, interested in the text of these poems: *how* interested, or in what way their duties connected them with Homer, we will not at this point enquire. Suffice it, that these two separate orders of men *did* confessedly exist; one being elder, perhaps, than Homer himself, or even than Troy – viz. the *Aoidoi* and *Citharaedi*. These, no doubt, had originally no more relation to Homer than to any other narrative poet; their duty of musical recitation had brought them connected with Homer, as it would have done with any other popular poet; and it was only the increasing current of Homer's predominance over all rival poets, which gradually

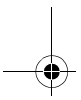
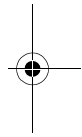
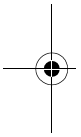




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gave such a bias and inflection to these men's professional art, as at length to suck them within the great Homeric tide: they became, but were not originally, a sort of Homeric choir and orchestra – a chapel of priests having a ministerial duty in the vast Homeric cathedral. Through them exclusively, perhaps, certainly through them chiefly, the two great objects were secured – first, that to each separate generation of men Homer was *published* with all the advantages of a musical accompaniment; secondly, that for distant generations Homer was *preserved*. We do not thus beg the question as to the existence of alphabetic writing in the days of Homer; on the contrary, we go along with Nitzsch and others in opposing Wolf upon that point. We believe that a laborious art of writing *did* exist; but with such disadvantages as to writing materials, that Homer (we are satisfied) would have fared ill as regards his chance of reaching the polished ages of Pericles, had he relied on written memorials, or upon any mode of publication less impassioned than the orchestral chanting of the *Rhapsodoi*. The other order of men dedicated to some Homeric interest, whatever that might be, were those technically known as the *Homeridae*. The functions of these men have never been satisfactorily ascertained, or so as to discriminate them broadly and firmly from the *Citharæadi* and *Rhapsodoi*. But in two features it is evident that they differed essentially – first, that the *Homeridae* constituted a more *local* and domestic college of Homeric ministers, confined originally to a single island, not diffused (as were the *Rhapsodoi*) over all Greece; secondly, that by their very name, which refers them back to Homer as a mere product from his influence, this class of followers is barred from pretending in the Homeric equipage, (like the *Citharæadi*,) to any independent existence, still less to any anterior existence. The musical reciters had been a general class of public ministers, gradually sequestered into the particular service of Homer; but the *Homeridae* were, in some way or other, either by blood, or by fiction of love and veneration, Homer's direct personal representatives.

Thus far, however, though there is evidence of two separate colleges or incorporations who charged themselves with the general custody, transmission, and publication of the Homeric poems, we hear of no care applied to the periodical review of the Homeric text; we hear of no man taking pains to qualify himself for that office by collecting copies from all quarters, or by applying the supreme political authority to the conservation and the authentication of the Homeric poems. The text of no book can become an object of anxiety, until by numerous corruptions it has become an object of doubt. Lycurgus,⁴⁰ it is true, the Spartan lawgiver, *did* apply his own authority, in a very early age, to the general purpose of importing the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. But there his office terminated. Critical skill, applied to the investigation of an author's text, was a function of the human mind as unknown in the Greece of Lycurgus as in the Germany of Tacitus, or the Tongataboo of Captain Cook.⁴¹ And of all places in Greece, such delicate reactions of the intellect upon its own creations were least likely to arise amongst the illiterate Dorian tribes of

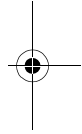
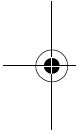




HOMER AND THE HOMERIDAE [PART I]

the Southern Peloponnesus – wretches that hugged their own barbarizing institutions as the very jewels of their birthright, and would most certainly have degenerated rapidly into African brutality, had they not been held steady, and forcibly shouldered into social progress, by the press of surrounding tribes more intellectual than themselves.

Thus continued matters through about four centuries from Homer. And by that time we begin to feel anxious about the probable state of the Homeric text. Not that we suppose any *interregnum* in Homer's influence – not that we believe in any possible defect of links in that vast series of traditional transmitters; the integrity of that succession was guaranteed by its interweaving itself with human pleasures, with religious ceremonies, with household and national festivals. It is not that Homer would have become apocryphal or obscure for want of public repetition; on the contrary, too constant and too fervent a repetition would have been the main source of corruptions in the text. Sympathy in the audience must always have been a primary demand with the *Rhapsodoi*; and, to perfect sympathy, it is a previous condition to be perfectly understood. Hence, when allusions were no longer intelligible or effectual, it might sometimes happen that they would be dropped from the text; and when any Homeric family or city had become extinct, the temptation might be powerful for substituting the names of others who could delight the chanter by fervid gratitude for a distinction which had been merited, or could reward him with gifts for one which had not. But it is not necessary to go over the many causes in preparation, after a course of four centuries, for gradually sapping the integrity of Homer's text. Every body will agree, that it was at length high time to have some edition 'by authority;' and that, had the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* received no freezing arrest in their licentious tendency towards a general interfusion of their substance with modern ideas, most certainly by the time of Alexander, *i.e.* about seven centuries from Homer, either poem would have existed only in fragments. The connecting parts between the several books would have dropped out; and all the *αριστειαι*, or episodes dedicated to the honour of a particular hero, might, with regard to names less hallowed in the imagination of Greece, or where no representatives of the house remained, have perished utterly. It was a real providential care for the civilization of Greece, which caused the era of state editions to supersede the *ad libitum* text of the careless or the interested, just at that precise period when the rapidly rising tide of Athenian refinement would soon have swept away all the landmarks of primitive Greece, and when the altered character of the public reciters would have co-operated with the other difficulties of the case to make a true Homeric text irrecoverable. For the *Rhapsodoi* were in a regular course of degradation to the rank of mere mercenary artists, from that of sacred minstrels, who connected the past with the present, and who sang – precisely because their burthen of truth was too solemn for unimpassioned speech. This was the station they *had* occupied; but it remains in evidence against them, that they were rapidly sinking under the





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changes of the times – were open to bribes, and, as one consequence (whilst partly it was one cause) of this degradation, that they had ceased to command the public respect. The very same changes, and through the very same steps, and under the very same agencies, have been since exhibited to Europe in the parallel history of the minstrels. The pig-headed Ritson,⁴² in mad pursuit of that single idea which might vex Bishop Percy,⁴³ made it his business, in one essay, to prove, out of the statutes at large, and out of local court records, that the minstrel, so far from being that honoured guest in the courts of princes whom the bishop had described, was, in fact, a rogue and a vagabond by act of Parliament, standing in awe of that great man, the parish beadle, and liable to be kicked out of any hundred or tithing where he should be found trespassing. But what nonsense! the minstrel was, and he was not, all that the bishop and others had affirmed. The contradiction lay in the *time*; Percy and Ritson spoke of different periods; the bishop of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries – the attorney of the sixteenth and seventeenth. Now the Grecian *Rhapsodoi* passed through corresponding stages of declension. Having ministered through many centuries to advancing civilisation, finally they themselves fell before a higher civilisation; and the particular aspect of the new civilisation, which proved fatal to *them*, was the general diffusion of reading as an art of liberal education. In the age of Pericles, every well-educated man could read; and one result from his skill, as no doubt it had also been one amongst its exciting causes, was – that he had a fine copy at home, beautifully adorned, of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Paper and vellum, for the last six centuries B.C., (that is, from the era of the Egyptian king, Psammetichus,)⁴⁴ were much less scarce in Greece than during the ages immediately consecutive to Homer. This fact has been elaborately proved in recent German essays.

How providential therefore, – (and with the recollection of that great part played by Greece in propagating Christianity through the previous propagation of her own literature and language, what is there in such an interference unworthy of Providence?) – how providential, that precisely in that interval of 111 years, between the year 555 B.C., the *locus* of Pisistratus, and 444, the *locus* of Pericles,⁴⁵ whilst as yet the traditional text of Homer was retrievable, though rapidly nearing to the time when it would be strangled with weeds, and whilst as yet the arts of reading and writing had not weakened the popular devotion to Homer by dividing it amongst multiplied books; just then, in that critical isthmus of time, did two or three Athenians of rank, first Solon, next Pisistratus, and lastly (if Plato is right) Hipparchus,⁴⁶ step forward to make a public, solemn, and *legally* operative review of the Homeric poems. They drew the old vessel into dock; laid bare its timbers; and stopped the further progress of decay. What they did more than this, and by what characteristic services each connected his name with a separate province in this memorable restoration of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* – we shall enquire further on.



HOMER AND THE HOMERIDAE [PART I]

One century after Pisistratus we come to Pericles; or, counting from the *locus* of each, (555 B.C., and 444 B.C.,) exactly 111 years divide them. One century after Pericles we come to Alexander the Great; or, counting from the *locus* of each, (444 B.C., and 333 B.C.,) exactly 111 years divide them. During the period of 222 years Homer had rest. Nobody was allowed to torment his text any more. And it is singular enough that this period of 222 years, during which Homer reigned in the luxury of repose, having nothing to do but to let himself be read and admired, was precisely that ringfence of years within which lies true Grecian history; for, if any man wishes to master the Grecian history, he needs not to ascend above Pisistratus, nor to come down below Alexander. Before Pisistratus all is mist and fable: after Alexander, all is dependency and servitude. And remarkable it is – that, soon after Alexander, and indirectly through changes caused by him, Homer was again held out for the pleasure of the tormentors. Among the dynasties founded by Alexander's lieutenants, was one memorably devoted to literature. The Macedonian house of the Ptolemies,⁴⁷ when seated on the throne of Egypt, had founded the very first public library and the first learned public. Alexander died in the year 320 B.C.; and already in the year 280 B.C., (that is, no more than forty years after,) the learned Jews of Alexandria and Palestine had commenced, under the royal patronage, that translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, which, from the supposed number of the translators, has obtained the name of the *Septuagint*.⁴⁸ This was a service to posterity. But the earliest *Grecian* service to which this Alexandrian library ministers, was Homeric; and strikes us as singular, when we contrast it with the known idolatry towards Homer of that royal soldier, from whom the city itself, with all its novelties, drew its name and foundation. Had Alexander survived forty years longer, as very easily he might if he had insisted upon leaving his heeltaps at Babylon,⁴⁹ how angry it would have made him that the very first trial of this new and powerful galvanic battery should be upon the body of the *Iliad*!

From 280 B.C. to 160 B.C., there was a constant succession of Homeric critics. The immense material found in the public library towards a direct history of Homer and his fortunes, would alone have sufficed to evoke a school of critics. But there was, besides, another invitation to Homeric criticism, more oblique, and eventually more effective. The Alexandrian library contained vast collections towards the study of the Greek language through all its dialects, and through all its chronological stages. This study led back by many avenues to Homer. A verse or a passage which hitherto had passed for genuine, and which otherwise, perhaps, yielded no internal argument for suspicion, was now found to be veined by some phrase, dialect, terminal form, or mode of using words, that might be too modern for Homer's age, or too far removed in space from Homer's Ionian country. We moderns, from our vast superiority to the Greeks themselves in Greek metrical science, have had an extra resource laid open to us for detecting the spurious in Greek poetry; and many are the condemned passages in our modern editions of Greek books,

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against which no jealousy would ever have arisen amongst unmetrical scholars. Here, however, the Alexandrian critics, with all their slashing insolence, showed themselves sons of the feeble:⁵⁰ they groped about in twilight. But, even without that resource, they contrived to riddle Homer through and through with desperate gashes. In fact, after being 'treated' and 'handled' by three generations of critics, Homer came forth (just as we may suppose one of Lucan's legionary soldiers,⁵¹ from the rencontre with the amphisbaena, the dipsas, and the water-snake of the African wilderness)⁵² one vast wound, one huge system of confluent ulcers. Often in reviewing the labours of three particularly amongst these Alexandrine scorpions, we think of the Aesopian fable,⁵³ in which an old man with two wives, one aged as befitted him, and the other young, submits his head alternately to the Alexandrine revision of each. The old lady goes to work first; and upon 'moral principle' she indignantly extirpates all the black hairs which could ever have inspired him with the absurd fancy of being young. Next comes the young critic: she is disgusted with age; and upon system eliminates (or, to speak with Aristarchus, 'obelizes,')⁵⁴ all the grey hairs. And thus, between the two ladies and their separate editions of the old gentleman, he, poor Homeric creature, comes forth as bald as the back of one's hand. Aristarchus might well boast that he had cured Homer of the dryrot: he *has*; and by leaving hardly one whole spar of his ancient framework. Nor can we, with our share of persimmon,⁵⁵ comprehend what sort of abortion it is which Aristarchus would have us to accept and entertain in the room of our old original *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. To cure a man radically of the toothach, by knocking all his teeth down his throat, seems a suspicious recommendation for 'dental surgery.' And, with respect to the Homer of Aristarchus, it is to be considered, that besides the lines, sentences, and long passages, to which that Herod of critics affixed his *obelus* (†) or stiletto, there were entire books which he found no use in assassinating piecemeal; because it was not this line or that line into which he wished to thrust his dagger, but the whole rabble of lines – 'tag, rag, and bobtail.' Which reminds us of Paul Richter,⁵⁶ – who suggests to some author anxiously revising the table of his own errata – that perhaps he might think it advisable on second thoughts, to put his whole book into the list of errata; requesting of the reader kindly to erase the total work as an oversight, or general blunder, from page 1 down to the word *finis*. In such cases, as Martial observes, no plurality of cancelings or erasures will answer the critic's purpose: but, '*una litura potest.*'⁵⁷ One mighty bucket of ink thrown over the whole will do the business: but, as to obelizing, it is no better than snapping pocket-pistols in a sea fight, or throwing crackers amongst the petticoats of a female mob.

With the Alexandrine tormentors, we may say that Homer's pre-Christian martyrdom came to an end. His post-Christian sufferings have been due chiefly to the Germans, who have renewed the warfare not only of Alexandrine critics, but of the ancient *Chorizontes*. These people we have not mentioned separately, because, in fact, nothing remains of their labours, and



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the general spirit of their warfare may be best understood from that of modern Germany. They acquired their name of *Chorizontes* (or separators) from their principle of breaking up the *Iliad* into multiform groups of little tadpole *Iliads*; as also of splitting the one old hazy but golden Homer, that looms upon us so venerably through a mist of centuries, into a vast reverberation of little silver Homers, that twinkled up and down the world, and lived when they found it convenient.

Now, let us combine the separate points of this chronological deduction into one focus, after which we will examine apart, each for itself, the main questions which we have already numbered as making up the elements of the controversy.

Years before Christian era.

1220 – Troy.

1000 – Solomon the king of Jewry, and Homer the Grecian poet.

800 – Lycurgus the lawgiver, imports the *Iliad* into Sparta, and thus first introduces Homer to Continental Greece.

555 – Solon the Athenian lawgiver, Pisistratus the ruler of Athens, and Hipparchus his son, do something as yet undetermined for the better ascertaining and maintaining of the original Homeric text.

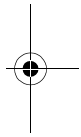
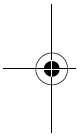
444 – From the text thus settled, are cited the numerous Homeric passages which we find in Plato, and all the other wits belonging to this period, the noontide of Greek literature, viz. the period of Pericles; and these passages generally coincide with our present text, so that we have no reason to doubt about our present *Iliad*, being essentially the same as that which was used and read in the family of Pisistratus.

333 – This is the main year of Alexander's Persian expedition, and probably the year in which his tutor Aristotle published those notions about the tragic and epic 'unities,' which have since had so remarkable an effect upon the arrangement of the *Iliad*. In particular, the notion of 'episodes,' or digressional narratives, interwoven with the principal narrative, was entirely Aristotelian; and under that notion, people submitted easily to interpolations which would else have betrayed themselves for what they are.

320 – Alexander the Great dies.

280 down to 160 – The Alexandrian library is applied to for the searching revision of Homer; and a school of Alexandrine critics (in which school, through three consecutive generations, flourished as its leaders – Zenodotus, Aristophanes, and Aristarchus) dedicated themselves to Homer. They are usually called the Alexandrine '*grammatici*,' or *littérateurs*.

After the era of 160 B.C., by which time the second Punic war had liberated Rome from her great African rival, the Grecian or eastern states of the Mediterranean began rapidly to fall under Roman conquest. Henceforward the text of Homer suffered no further disturbance or inquisition, until it reached the little wicked generation (ourselves and our immediate fathers) which we have the honour to address. Now, let us turn from the *Iliad*, viewed in its chronological series of fortunes, to the *Iliad* viewed in itself and in its personal



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relations; *i.e.* in reference to its author, to its Grecian propagators or publishers, and to its reformers or restorers, its re-casters or interpolators, and its critical explorers.

A. — HOMER.

About the year 1797, Messrs Pitt and Dundas laboured under the scandal of sometimes appearing drunk in the House of Commons,⁵⁸ and on one particular evening, this impression was so strong against them, that the morning papers of the following three days fired off exactly 101 epigrams on the occasion. One was this: —

PITT. — I cannot see the Speaker, Hal, — can *you*?

DUND. — Not see the Speaker! D—m'e, *I* see two.⁵⁹

Thus it has happened to Homer. Some say, 'there never was such a person as Homer.' 'No such person as Homer! On the contrary,' say others, 'there were scores.' This latter hypothesis has much more to plead for itself than the other. Numerous Homers were postulated with some apparent reason, by way of accounting for the numerous Homeric poems, and numerous Homeric birthplaces. One man, it was felt, never could be equal to so many claims. Ten camel-loads of poems you may see ascribed to Homer in Fabricius;⁶⁰ and more states than seven claimed the man. These claims, it is true, would generally have vanished, if there had been the means of critically probing them; but still there was a *primâ facie*⁶¹ case made out for believing in a plurality of Homers; whilst on the other hand, for denying Homer, there never was any but a verbal reason. The polytheism of the case was natural; the atheism was monstrous. Ilgen, in the preface to his edition of the Homeric Hymns, says, 'Homeri nomen, si recte video, derivandum est ex ὄμου et ἀρω.'⁶² And so, because the name (like many names) can be made to yield a fanciful emblematic meaning, Homer must be a *myth*. But in fact, Mr Ilgen has made little advance with his ὄμου ἀρω. For next comes the question, what do those two little Greek words mean? Ἀρω is *to join, to fit, or adapt* — ὄμου is *together, or in harmony*. But such a mere outline or schematism of an idea may be exhibited under many different constructions. One critic, for instance, understands it in the sense of dove-tailing, or metaphorical cabinet-making, as if it applied chiefly to the art of uniting words into metrical combinations. Another, Mr Ilgen himself, takes it quite differently; it describes, not the poetical composition, or any labour whatever of the poet *as* a poet, but the skill of the musical accompaniment and adaptations. By accident the poet may chance to be also the musical reciter of the poem; and in that character he may have an interest in this name of Ὀμηρος, but not as a poet. Ὀμηρεῖν and δμηρευεῖν, says Hesychius,⁶³ mean συμφωνεῖν, (*to harmonize in point of sound*;) the latter of the two is used in this sense by Hesiod;⁶⁴ and more nicely, says Mr Ilgen, it means

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accinere, to sing an accompaniment to another voice or to an instrument; and it means also *succinere*, to sing such an accompaniment in an under key, or to sing what we moderns call a *second* – *i.e.* an arrangement of notes corresponding, but subordinated to the other or leading part. So says Ilgen in mixed Latin, German, and Greek. Now, we also have our pocket theory. We maintain that ὄμου αρω is Greek for *packing up*; and very pretty Greek, considering the hot weather. And our view of the case is this – ‘Homer’ was a sort of Delphic⁶⁵ or prophetic name given to the poet, under a knowledge of that fate which awaited him in Crete, where, if he did not pack up any trunk that has yet been discovered, he was, however, himself packed up in the portmanteau of Lycurgus.⁶⁶ Such, at least, is the colouring which the credulous Plutarch,⁶⁷ nine hundred years after Lycurgus, gives to the story. ‘Man alive!’ says a German, apostrophising this thoughtless Plutarch, ‘Man alive! how could Lycurgus make a shipment of Homer’s poems in the shape of a parcel for importation, unless there were written copies in Crete at a time when nobody could write? Or how, why, for what intelligible purpose, could he have consigned this bale to a house in the Peloponnesus, where nobody could read?’ Homer, he thinks, could be imported at that period only in the shape of an orchestra, as a band of Homeric chanters. But, returning seriously to the name Ὀμηρος, we say that, were the name absolutely bursting with hieroglyphic life, this would be no proof that the man Homer, instead of writing a considerable number of octavo volumes, was (to use Mr Ilgen’s uncivil language) ‘an abstract idea.’ Honest people’s children are not to be treated as ‘abstract ideas,’ because their names may chance to look symbolical. Bunyan’s ‘*Mr Ready-to-sink*’ might seem suspicious; but *Mr Strong-i’tb’-arm*, who would have been a desirable companion for such an exhausted gentleman, is no abstract idea at all, but a dense broad-shouldered reality in a known street of London, liable to bills, duns, and other affections of our common humanity.⁶⁸ Suppose, therefore, that Homer, in some one of his names, really *had* borne a designation glancing at symbolical meaning, what of *that*? this should rather be looked upon as a reflex name, artificially constructed for reverberating his glory *after* it had gathered, than as any predestinating (and so far marvellous) name.

Chrysostom,⁶⁹ that eloquent father of early Christianity, had he been baptized by such a name as golden-mouthed (*Chrysostomos*), you would have suspected for one of Mr Ilgen’s ‘abstract ideas;’ but, as it happens, we all know that he existed in the body, and that the appellation by which he is usually recognized was a name of honour conferred upon him by the public in commemoration of his eloquence. However, we will bring this point to a short issue, by drawing the reader’s attention to the following case: Any man, who has looked into the body of Greek rhetoricians, must know that in that *hebdomas idearum*, or septenary system of rhetorical forms which Hermogenes⁷⁰ and many others illustrated, two of the seven (and the foremost two) were the qualities called *gorgotes* and *deinotes*.⁷¹ Now, turn to the list of early Greek

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rhetoricians or popular orators; and who stands first? Chronologically the first, and the *very* first, is a certain Tisias, perhaps; but he is a mere *nominis umbra*.⁷² The first who made himself known to the literature of Greece, is *Gorgias*,⁷³ that Gorgias who visited Athens in the days of Socrates, (see Athenaeus,⁷⁴ for a rigorous examination of the date assigned to that visit by Plato;) the same Gorgias from whose name Plato has derived a title for one of his dialogues. Again, amongst the early Greek orators you will see *Deinarchus*.⁷⁵ Gorgias and Deinarchus! – Who but would say, were it not that these men had flourished in the meridian light of Athenian literature – ‘Here we behold two ideal or symbolic orators typifying the qualities of *gorgotes* and *deinoles*!’ But a stronger case still is that of Demosthenes.⁷⁶ Were this great orator not (by comparison with Homer) a modern person, under the full blaze of history, and coeval with Alexander the Great 333 years B.C., who is there that would not pronounce him a mere allegoric man, when he understood that the name was composed of these two elements – *Demos*, the ‘people’ in its most democratic expression, and *sthenos*, ‘strength;’ this last word having been notoriously used by Homer [*mega sthenos Okeanoio*]⁷⁷ to express that sort of power which makes itself known by thundering sound, ‘the thundering strength of the people!’ or, ‘*the people’s fulminating might!*’ – who would believe that the most potent of Greek orators had actually brought with him this ominous and magnificent name, this natural patent of presidency, to the Athenian hustings? It startles us to find, lurking in any man’s name, a prophecy of his after career; as, for instance, to find a Latin legend – ‘*And his glory shall be from the Nile,*’ (*Est honor à Nilo,*) concealing itself in the name *Horatio Nelson*. But *there* the prophecy lies hidden, and cannot be extracted without a painful cork-screw process of anagram. Whereas, in *Demosthenes*, the handwriting is plain to every child: it seems witchcraft – and a man is himself alarmed at his own predestinating name. Yet for all that, with Mr Ilgen’s permission, Demosthenes was not an ‘abstract idea.’ Consequently, had Homer brought his name in his waistcoat pocket to the composition of the *Iliad*, he would still not have been half as mythical in appearance as several well-authenticated men, decent people’s sons, who have kicked up an undeniable dust on the Athenian hustings. Besides, *Homer* has other significant or symbolizing senses. It means a hostage; it means a blind man, as much as a cabinet-maker, or even as a packer of trunks. Many of these ‘significant names’ either express accidents of birth commonly recurring – such as *Benoni*, ‘the child of sorrow,’⁷⁸ a name frequently given by young women in Westmoreland to any child born under circumstances of desertion, sudden death, &c., on the part of the father; or express those qualities which are always presumable, Honor, Prudence, Patience, &c., as common female names: or, if they imply any thing special, any peculiar determination of general qualities that never could have been foreseen, in that case they must be referred to an admiring posterity – that *senior* posterity which was such for Homer, but for us has long ago become a worshipful ancestry.



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From the name it is a natural step to the country. All the world knows, by means of a satirical couplet, that

‘Seven cities claim’d the mighty Homer dead,
Through which the living Homer begg’d his bread.’⁷⁹

What were the names of these seven cities, (and islands,) we can inform the reader by means of an old Latin couplet amongst our schoolboy recollections –

‘Smyrna, Chios, Colophon, Salamis, Rhodos, Argos, Athenae,
Orbis de patriâ certat, Homere, tuâ.’⁸⁰

Amongst these the two first, Smyrna and Chios, have very superior pretensions. Had Homer been passed to his parish as a vagrant, or had Colophon (finding a settlement likely to be obtained by his widow) resolved upon trying the question, she would certainly have quashed any attempt to make the family chargeable upon herself. Smyrna lies under strong suspicion; the two rivers from which Homer’s immediate progenitors were named – the *Maeon* and the *Meles* – bound the plains near to Smyrna. And Wood insists much upon the perfect correspondence of the climate in that region of the Levant with each and all of Homer’s atmospherical indications. We suspect Smyrna ourselves, and quite as much as Mr Wood; but still we hesitate to charge any local peculiarities upon the Smyrniote climate that could nail it in an action of damages. Gay and sunny, pellucid in air and water, we are sure that Smyrna is; in short, every thing that could be wished by the public in general, or by currant dealers in particular. But really that any city whatever, in that genial quarter of the Mediterranean, should pretend to a sort of patent for sunshine, we must beg to have stated in a private letter ‘to the Marines:’⁸¹ us it will not suit.

Meantime these seven places are far from being all the competitors that have entered their names with the clerk of the course. Homer has been pronounced a Syrian which name in early Greece of course included the Jew; and so, after all, the *Iliad* may have issued from the synagogue. Babylon, also, dusky Babylon, has put in her claim to Homer; so has Egypt. And thus, if the poet were really derived from an Oriental race, his name (sinking the aspiration) may have been *Omar*. But those Oriental pretensions are mere bubbles, exhaling from national vanity. The place which, to our thinking, lies under the heaviest weight of suspicion as the seat of Homer’s connexions, and very often of his own residence, is the island of Crete. Smyrna, we doubt not, was his birthplace. But in those summer seas, quiet as lakes, and basking in everlasting sunshine, it would be inevitable for a stirring animated mind to float up and down the Egean. ‘Home-keeping youths had ever homely wits,’⁸² says a great poet of our own; and, we doubt not, that Homer had a yacht, in which he visited all the festivals of the Aegean Islands. Thus he acquired that learned eye which he manifests for female beauty. ‘Rosy-fingered,’ ‘silver-footed,’ ‘full-bosomed,’ ‘ox-eyed,’ with a large vocabulary of similar notices, show how





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widely Homer had surveyed the different chambers of Grecian beauty; for it has happened through accidents of migration and consequent modifications of origin, combined with varieties of diet and customs, that the Greek Islands still differ greatly in the style of their female beauty. Now, the time for seeing the young women of a Grecian city, all congregated under the happiest circumstances of display, was in their local festivals. Many were the fair Phidiacan⁸³ forms which Homer had beheld moving like goddesses through the mazes of religious choral dances. But at the islands of Ios, of Chios, and of Crete, in particular, we are satisfied that he had a standing invitation. To this hour, the Cretan life presents us with the very echo of the Homeric delineations. Take four several cases: –

I. The old Homeric superstition, for instance, which connects horses by the closest sympathy, and even by prescience, with their masters – that superstition which Virgil has borrowed from Homer in his beautiful episode of Mezentius⁸⁴ – still lingers unbroken in Crete. Horses foresee the fates of riders who are doomed, and express their prescience by weeping in a human fashion. With this view of the horse's capacity, it is singular, that in Crete this animal by preference should be called το αλογον, the brute or irrational creature. But the word ἵπποι⁸⁵ has, by some accident, been lost in the modern Greek. As an instance both of the disparaging name, and of the ennobling superstition, take the following stanza from a Cretan ballad of 1825: –

Ὦντεν εκαβαλλικευε,
 Εχλαιε τ' αλογο του'
 Και τοτεσα το εγνωρισε
 Πως ειναι ο θανατος τυ.⁸⁶

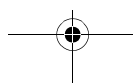
'Upon which he mounted, and his horse wept: and then he saw clearly how this should bode his death.'

Under the same old Cretan faith, Homer, in *Il.* xvii. 437, says –

Δακρυα δε σφι
 Θερμα κατα βελφερων χαμαδις ρεε μυρομενουιν
 'Ηνοιχοιο ροθη.⁸⁷

'Tears, scalding tears, trickled to the ground down the eyelids of them, (the horses,) fretting through grief for the loss of their charioteer.'

II. Another almost decisive record of Homer's familiarity with Cretan life, lies in his notice of the *agrimi*, a peculiar wild goat, or ibex, found in no part of the Mediterranean world, whether island or mainland, except in Crete. And it is a case almost without a parallel in literature, that Homer should have sent down to all posterity, in sounding Greek, the most minute measurement of this animal's horns, which measurement corresponds with all those recently examined by English travellers, and in particular with three separate pairs of these horns brought to England about the year 1836, by Mr Pashley,⁸⁸ the learned Mediterranean traveller of Trinity College, Cambridge. Mr Pashley





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has since published his travels, and from him we extract the following description of these shy but powerful animals, furnished by a Cretan mountaineer: – ‘The *agrimia* are so active, that they will leap *up* a perpendicular rock of ten to fourteen feet high. They spring from precipice to precipice; and bound along with such speed, that no dog would be able to keep up with them – even on better ground than that where they are found. The sportsman must never be to windward of them, or they will perceive his approach long before he comes within musket-shot. They often carry off a ball; and, unless they fall immediately on being struck, are mostly lost to the sportsman, although they may have received a mortal wound. They are commonly found two, three, or four together; sometimes a herd of eight and even nine is seen. They are always larger than the common goat. In the winter time, they may be tracked by the sportsman in the snow. It is common for men to perish in the chase of them. They are of a reddish colour, and never black or party-coloured like the common goat. The number of prominences on each horn, indicates the years of the animal’s age.’⁸⁹

Now Homer in *Iliad*, iv. 105, on occasion of Pandarus drawing out his bow, notices it as an interesting fact, that this bow, so beautifully polished, was derived from [the horns of] a wild goat, αἴγος ἀγρίου; and the epithet by which he describes this wild creature is ἰξάλου – preternaturally agile. In his Homeric manner he adds a short digressional history of the fortunate shot from a secret ambush, by which Pandarus had himself killed the creature. From this it appears that, before the invention of gunpowder, men did not think of chasing the Cretan ibex; and from the circumstantiality of the account, it is evident that some honour attached to the sportsman who had succeeded in such a capture. He closes with the measurement of the horns in this memorable line, [memorable as preserving such a fact for 3000 years] –

Του κερα εκ κεφαλῆς ἑκκαίδεκα δώρα πεφυκει.⁹⁰

‘The horns from this creature’s head measured sixteen *dora* in length.’ Now what is a *doron*? In the Venetian *Scholia*, some annotator had hit the truth, but had inadvertently used a wrong word. This word, an oversight, was viewed as such by Heyne, who corrected it accordingly, before any scholar had seen the animal. The *doron* is now ascertained to be a Homeric expression for a *palm*, or sixth part of a Grecian foot; and thus the extent of the horns, in that specimen which Pandarus had shot, would be two feet eight inches. Now the casual specimens sent to Cambridge by Mr Pashley, [not likely to be quite so select as that which formed a personal weapon for a man of rank,] were all two feet seven and a half inches on the outer margin, and two feet one and a half inches on the inner. And thus the accuracy of Homer’s account, (which, as Heyne observes, had been greatly doubted in past ages,) was not only remarkably confirmed, but confirmed in a way which at once identifies, beyond all question, the Homeric wildgoat (αἴξ ἀγρίου) with the present *agrimi* of Crete; viz. by the unrivalled size of the animal’s horns, and by the unrivalled power





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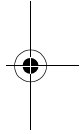
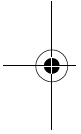
of the animal's movements, which rendered it necessary to shoot it from an ambush, in days before the discovery of powder.

But this result becomes still more conclusive for our present purpose; viz. for identifying Homer himself as a Cretan by his habits of life, when we mention the scientific report from Mr Rothman,⁹¹ of Trinity College, Cambridge, on the classification and *habitat* of the animal: — 'It is not the *bouquetin*,' [of the Alps,] 'to which, however, it bears considerable resemblance, but the real wild-goat, the *capra aegagrus* (Pallas,) the supposed origin of all our domestic varieties. The horns present the anterior trenchant edge characteristic of this species. The discovery of the *aegagrus* in Crete, is perhaps a fact of some zoological interest; *as it is the first well-authenticated European locality of this animal.*'⁹²

Here is about as rigorous a demonstration that the sporting adventure of Pandarus must have been a Cretan adventure, as would be required by the Queen's Bench. Whilst the spirited delineation of the capture, in which every word is emphatic, and picturesquely true to the very life of 1841, indicates pretty strongly that Homer had participated in such modes of sporting himself.

III. Another argument for the Cretan habitudes of Homer, is derived from his allusion to the Cretan tumblers — the *χυβιζητηρες* — the most whimsical, perhaps, in the world; and to this hour the practice continues unaltered as in the eldest days. The description is easily understood. Two men place themselves side by side; one stands upright in his natural posture; the other stands on his head. Of course this latter would be unable to keep his feet aloft, and in the place belonging to his head, were it not that his comrade throws his arm round his ankles, so as to sustain his legs inverted in the air. Thus placed, they begin to roll forward, head over heels, and heels over head: every tumble inverts their positions; but always there is one man, after each roll, standing upright on his pins, and another whose lower extremities are presented to the clouds. And thus they go on for hours. The performance obviously requires two associates; or, if the number were increased, it must still be by pairs; and accordingly Homer describes *his* tumblers as in the dual number.

IV. A fourth, and most remarkable, among the Homeric mementos of Cretan life, is the *τηλολαλια* — or conversation from a distance. This it is, and must have been, which suggested to Homer his preternatural male voices — Stentor's, for instance, who spoke as loud 'as other fifty men;' and that of Achilles, whom Patroclus roused up with a long pole, like a lion from his lair, to come out and roar at the Trojans; simply by which roar he scares the whole Trojan army.⁹³ Now, in Crete, and from Colonel Leake,⁹⁴ it appears, in Albania, (where we believe that Cretan emigrants have settled,) shepherds and others are found with voices so resonant, aided perhaps by the quality of a Grecian atmosphere, that they are able to challenge a person 'out of sight;' and will actually conduct a ceremonious conversation (for all Cretan mountaineers are as ceremonious as the Homeric heroes) at distances which to us



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seem incredible. What distances? demands a litigious reader. Why, our own countrymen, modest and veracious, decline to state what they have not measured, or even had the means of computing. They content themselves with saying, that sometimes their guide, from the midst of a solitary valley, would shout aloud to the public in general – taking his chance of any strollers from that great body, though quite out of sight, chancing to be within mouth-shot. But the French are not so scrupulous. M. Zallony, in his *Voyage à l'Archipel*,⁹⁵ &c., says, that some of the Greek islanders 'ont la voix forte et animée; et deux habitans, à une distance d'une demi-lieue, même plus, peuvent très facilement s'entendre, et quelquefois s'entretenir.'⁹⁶ Now, a royal league is hard upon three English miles, and a sea league, we believe, is two and a half; so that half a league, *et même plus*, would bring us near to two miles, which seems a long interval at which to conduct a courtship. But this reminds us of an English farmer in the north, who certainly did regularly call in his son to dinner from a place two measured miles distant; and the son certainly came. How far this punctuality, however, might depend on the father's request, or on the son's watch, was best known to the interested party. In Crete meantime, and again, no doubt, from atmospheric advantages, the τηλοσκοπια, or power of descrying remote objects by the eye, is carried to an extent that seems incredible. This faculty also may be called Homeric; for Homer repeatedly alludes to it.

V. But the legends and mythology of Crete are what most detect the intercourse of Homer with that island. A volume would be requisite for the full illustration of this truth. It will be sufficient here to remind the reader of the early civilization, long anterior to that of Greece continental, which Crete had received. That premature refinement furnishes an *à priori* argument for supposing that Homer would resort to Crete; and inversely, the elaborate Homeric use of Cretan traditional fables, furnishes an *à posteriori*⁹⁷ argument that Homer *did* seek this island.

It is of great use towards any full Homeric investigation, that we should fix Homer's locality and trace his haunts; for locality, connected with the internal indications of the *Iliad*, is the best means of approximating to Homer's true era; as, on the other hand, Homer's era, if otherwise deduced, would assist the indications of the *Iliad* to determine his locality. And if any reader demands in a spirit of mistrust, How it is that Crete, so harassed by intestine wars from Turkish, Venetian, and recently from Egyptian tyranny, the bloodiest and most exterminating, has been able, through three thousand years, to keep up unbroken her inheritance of traditions? we reply, That the same cause has protected the Cretan usages, which (since the days of our friend Pandarus) has protected the Cretan ibex; viz. the physical conformation of the island – mountains; secret passes where one resolute band of 200 men is equal to an army; ledges of rock which a mule cannot tread with safety; crags where even infantry must break and lose their cohesion; and the blessedness of rustic poverty, which offers no temptation to the marauder. These have been the Cretan



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safeguards; and a brave Sfakian⁹⁸ population, by many degrees the finest of all Grecian races in their persons and their hearts.

The main point about Homer, the man, which now remains to be settled, amongst the many that might be useful, and the few that are recoverable, is this – *could he write?* and if he could, did he use that method for fixing his thoughts and images as they arose? or did he trust to his own memory for the rough sketch, and to the chanters for publishing the revised copies?

This question, however, as it will again meet us under the head: *Solon and the Pisistratidae*, we shall defer to that section; and we shall close this personal section on Homer by one remark borrowed from Plato. The reader will have noticed that, amongst the cities pretending to Homer as a native child, stands the city of Argos. Now Plato, by way of putting a summary end to all such windy pretensions from Dorian cities, introduces in one of his dialogues a stranger who remarks, as a leading characteristic of Homer – that every where he keeps the reader moving amongst scenes, images, and usages which reflect the forms and colouring of Ionian life. This remark is important, and we shall use it in our summing up.

