

FAMILIAR STUDIES

IN

HOMER

BY

AGNES M. CLERKE

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in Homer**

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# FAMILIAR STUDIES IN HOMER

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AGNES M. CLERKE

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*AB HOMERO OMNE PRINCIPIUM*

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1892

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## PREFACE.

HOMERIC archæology has, within the last few years, finally left the groove of purely academic discussion to advance along the new route laid down for it by practical methods of investigation. The results are full of present interest, and of future promise. They already imply a reconstruction of the Hellenic past; they vitalise the Homeric world, bringing it into definite relations with what went before, and with what came after, and transforming it from a poetical creation into an historical reality. Excavations and explorations in Greece, Egypt, and Asia Minor, have thus entirely changed the aspect of the perennial Homeric problem, and afford reasonable hope of providing it with a satisfactory solution.

These remarkable, and promptly-gathered fruits of an experimental system of inquiry deserve the attention, not of scholars alone, but of every educated person; nevertheless, their value has as yet been realised by a very limited class. The following chapters may then, it is hoped, usefully serve to illustrate some of them for the benefit of the general reading public, while making no pretension to discuss, formally or exhaustively, the wide subject of Homeric antiquities. For the proper discharge of that task, indeed, qualifications would be needed to which the writer lays no claim. The object of the present little work will be attained if it contribute to stir a wider interest in the topics it discusses; above all, should it in any degree help to promote a non-erudite study of the noble poetical monuments it is concerned with. Greek enough to read the Iliad and Odyssey in the original can be learned with comparative ease; and what trouble there may be in its acquisition meets an ample reward in mental profit and enjoyment of a high order. These ancient epics have a unique freshness about them; they are still

open founts of animating pleasure for all who choose to apply to them; one cannot, then, but regret that so few have intellectual energy to do so.

The author's best thanks are due to Messrs. Macmillan, and to Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton, for their courteous permission to reprint the chapters entitled 'Homeric Astronomy,' 'Homer's Magic Herbs,' and 'The Dog in Homer,' originally published in the pages of *Nature*, *Macmillan's Magazine*, and the *British Quarterly Review* respectively.

In quoting illustrative passages from the Homeric poems, considerable use has been made of the admirable prose version of the Iliad by Messrs. Lang, Leaf, and Myers, and of the Odyssey by Messrs. Butcher and Lang. With the object, however, of securing a certain variety of effect, versified translations have also been resorted to, their authors being duly specified in foot-notes. The citations of Helbig's valuable work, *Das Homerische Epos aus den Denkmälern erläutert*, refer to the second enlarged edition published in 1887.



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# FAMILIAR STUDIES IN HOMER.

## CHAPTER I.

### HOMER AS A POET AND AS A PROBLEM.

THE perennial youth of the Homeric poems is without a parallel in the history of art. No other imaginative works have so nearly succeeded in bidding defiance to the 'tooth of time.' Like the golden watch-dogs of Alcinous, they seem destined to be 'deathless and ageless all their days.' Nor is theirs the faded immortality of Tithonus—the bare preservation of a material form emptied of the glow of vitality, and grown out of harmony with its environment. Their survival is not even that of an 'Attic shape' whose undeniable beauty has, in our eyes, assumed somewhat of a recondite coldness, very different from the loveliness of old, when connoisseurship was not needed for appreciation. The Iliad and Odyssey are still auroral. They have the charm of an 'unpremeditated lay,' springing from the very source of our own life; they appeal alike to rude sensibilities and to cultivated tastes; their splendour and pathos, their powerful vitality, the strength and swiftness of their numbers, require to be accentuated by no critical notes of admiration; they strike of themselves the least tutored native perception. These vigorous growths out of the deep soil of humanity have not yet been transported from the open air of indiscriminate enjoyment into the greenhouse of æstheticism; delight in them lays hold of any schoolboy capable of reading them fluently in the original as naturally as enthrallment with 'Cinderella' or 'Jack the Giant-Killer' commands the unreflecting nursery. For they combine, as no other primitive poetry does, imaginative energy with sobriety of thought and diction. The *ne quid nimis* regulates all their scenes. They are simple without being archaic, fervid without extravagance, fanciful, yet never grotesque. The strict proprieties of

classic form effectually restrain in them the exuberance of romantic invention. Not that any such distinctions in the mode of composition had then begun to be thought of. The poet was unconsciously a 'law unto himself.' Indeed the very potency of his creative faculty prescribed retrenchment and moderation; the images conjured up by it with much of the plastic reality of sculpture subjecting themselves spontaneously to the laws of sculptural fitness. Clear-cut and firm of outline, they move in the transparent ether of definite thought. Projected into the vaporous atmosphere of a riotous fancy, they might show vaster, but they could hardly be equally impressive.

But these matchless productions are not merely the 'wood-notes wild' of untrained inspiration. They imply a long course of free development under favourable conditions. The vehicle of expression used in them might alone well be the product of centuries of pre-literary culture. Greek hexameter verse was by no means an obvious contrivance. It is an exceedingly subtle structure, depending for its effect—nay, for its existence—upon unvarying obedience to a complex set of metrical rules. These could not have originated all at once, by the decree of some poetical law-giver. They must have been arrived at more or less tentatively by repeated experiments, the recognised success of which led, in the slow course of time, to their general adoption.

Moreover, the legendary materials of the Epics were not dug straight out of the mine of popular fancy and tradition. They had doubtless been elaborated and manipulated, before Homer took them in hand, by generations of singers and reciters. The 'tale of Troy divine' was already a full-leaved tree when he plucked from it and planted the branches destined to flourish through the ages. His verses display or betray acquaintance with many 'other stories' of public notoriety besides those completely unfolded in them. The fate of Agamemnon, the death of Achilles, the madness of Ajax, the advent of Neoptolemus, the slaying of Memnon, son of the Morning, the ambush in the Wooden Horse, the mysterious wanderings of Helen, the last journey of Odysseus, furnished themes of surpassing interest, all or most of which had been made into songs for the pastime of lordly feasters and the solace of noble dames, before the wrath of Achilles

suggested a more adventurous flight. Inexhaustible, indeed, was the store of romantic adventure furnished by the famous ten years' siege.

A castle built in cloudland, or at most  
A crumbling clay-fort on a windy hill,  
Where needy men might flee a robber-host,  
This, this was Troy! and yet she holds us still.[1]

1. Lang's *Helen of Troy*, vi. 21.

But the saga-literature of the Greeks did not begin with the mustering of the fleet at Aulis. The 'ante-Troica' were not neglected. Many a ballad was chanted about the doings of those 'strong men' who 'lived before Agamemnon,' although it was not their fortune to be commemorated by a supreme singer. That supreme singer, however, knew much concerning the Argonauts, the War of Thebes, the Calydonian Boar-hunt, the sorrows of Niobe, and the betrayal of Bellerophon; ante-Trojan lays served as parables for the instruction of Clytemnestra, and the recreation of Achilles in that disastrous interval when he doffed his armour and strung his lyre. And a small but privileged class of the community was devoted, under the presumed tuition of the Muses, to the perfecting and perpetuation of these treasures of poetic lore.

Homer was accordingly no unprepared phenomenon. He rose in a sky already luminous. The flowering of his genius, indeed, marked the close of an epoch. His achievements were of the definitive and synthetic kind; they summed up and surpassed what had previously been accomplished; they were the outcome—although not the necessary outcome—of a multitude of minor performances.

Now it is impossible to admit the prevalence of such sustained poetical activity as the Homeric Epics by their very nature postulate, apart from the existence of a tolerably widespread and well-regulated social organisation. They besides describe a polity which was certainly not imaginary, and thus lead us back to a pre-Hellenic world, different in many ways from historical Greece, and separated from it by several blank and silent centuries. The people who moved and suffered, and nurtured their loves and grudges in it, were called 'Achæans'—the ethnical title given by Homer to his countrymen from all parts of the Greek peninsula and its adjacent islands.

Homer himself was evidently an Achæan; Achilles, Agamemnon, and Odysseus, Helen and Penelope, sprang from the same race, which was an offshoot from the general Hellenic stock. They were a seafaring people, but not much given to commerce; active, energetic, sensitive, highly imaginative, they showed, nevertheless, receptivity rather than inventiveness as regards the practical arts of life. Their great national exploit was probably that bellicose expedition to the Troad upon which the Ilian legend, with all its mythical accretions, was founded; and some records of attacks by them on Egypt have been deciphered on hieroglyphically-inscribed monuments; but they can claim no assured place in history. As a nation, they ceased indeed to exist before the dim epoch of fables came to an end; the Dorian conquest of the Peloponnesus brought about their political annihilation and social disintegration, impelling them, nevertheless, to establish new settlements in Asia Minor, and thus setting on foot the long process by which Greek culture became cosmopolitan.

Homeric conditions do not then represent simply an initial stage in classic Greek civilisation. There was no continuous progress from the one state of things to the other. Development was interrupted by revolution. Hence, much irretrievable loss and prolonged seething confusion; until, out of the chaos, a renovated order emerged, and the Greece of the Olympiads comes to view in the year 776 B.C.

For this reason Homeric Greece is strange to history; the relative importance of the states included in it, the centre of gravity of its political power, the modes of government and manners of men it displays, are all very different from what they had become in the time of Herodotus. But it is only of late that these differences have come to have an intelligible meaning. Until expounded by archæological research, they were a source of unmixed perplexity to the learned. The state of society described by Homer could certainly not be regarded as fictitious; yet it hung suspended, as it were, in the air, without definite limitations of time or place. These uncertainties have now been removed. The excavations at Mycenæ, undertaken by Dr. Schliemann in 1876, may be said to have had for their upshot the rediscovery of the old Achæan civilisation, the material relics of which have been brought to light from the 'shaft-tombs' of Agamemnon's citadel, the 'bee-hive tombs' of the lower city, in the palaces and other

coeval buildings of Tiryns, Mycenæ, and Orchomenos. The points of agreement between Homeric delineations and Mycenæan antiquities are, in fact, too numerous to permit the entertainment of any reasonable doubt that the poet's experience lay in the daily round of Mycenæan life—of life, that is to say, governed by the same ideas and carried on under approximately the same conditions with those prevailing through the ancient realm of the sons of Atreus.

The detection of this close relationship has lent a totally new aspect to what is called the Homeric Question, widening its scope at the same time that it provides a sure basis for its discussion. For this can no longer be disconnected from inquiries into the status and fortunes of the great confederacy, out of the wreck of which the splendid fabric of Hellenic society arose. The civilisation centred at Mycenæ covered a wide range; how wide we do not yet fully know: the results of future explorations must be awaited before its limits can be fixed. It undoubtedly spread, however, beyond Greece proper through the Sporades to Crete, Rhodes, the coasts of Asia Minor, and even to Egypt. The traces left behind by it in Egypt are of particular importance.<sup>[2]</sup> From the Mycenæan pottery discovered in the Fayûm, tangible proof has been derived that the Græco-Libyan assaults upon that country were to some extent effective, and that the seafaring people who took part in them were no other than the Homeric Achæans, then in an early stage of their career. The fact of their having secured a foothold in the Nile Valley accounts, too, for the strong Egyptian element in Mycenæan art; and the evidence of habitual intercourse is further curiously strengthened by the presence of an ostrich egg amid the other antique remains in the Mycenæan citadel graves.<sup>[3]</sup> Above all, the Egypto-Mycenæan pottery, from its association with other objects of known dates, is determinable as to time. And it appears, as the outcome of Mr. Flinders Petrie's careful comparisons, that one class of vases, adorned with linear patterns, goes back to about 1400 B.C., while those exhibiting naturalistic designs were freely manufactured in 1100. The culminating period, however, of pre-Hellenic fictile art is placed considerably earlier, in 1500-1400 B.C., and there are indications that its development had occupied several previous centuries. Mr. Petrie, indeed, finds himself compelled to believe that the Græco-Libyan league was already active in or before the

year 2000 B.C. Achæan predominance may, then, very well have boasted a millennium of antiquity when the Dorians crossed the Gulf of Corinth. Its subversion drove many of the leading native families over the Ægean, where they found seats already doubtless familiar to them through their own and their ancestors' maritime and piratical adventures, and the colonising impulse once given, did not soon cease to promote the enlargement of the Greek domain. But the mass of the Achæan people lived on in their old homes, in a state of subjection resembling that of the Saxons in England after the Norman Conquest. They were designated 'Periœci' by their Dorian rulers.

2. Flinders Petrie, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vols. xi. p. 271; xii. p. 199.

3. Schuchhardt and Sellers, *Schliemann's Excavations*, p. 268.

Archæological discoveries have thus shown the largeness of the historical issues embraced in the Homeric Question; they also afford the possibility, and still more, the promise, of satisfactorily answering it. The problem is threefold. It includes the consideration of where, when, and how the great Epics were composed.

Seven cities—

Smyrna, Chios, Colophon, Salamis, Rhodos, Argos, Athenæ—

competed for the honour of having given birth to their author. Wherever, in short, their study was localised by the foundation of a school of 'Homerids,' there was asserted to be the native place of the eponymous bard. The truth is that no really authentic tradition regarding him reached posterity. The very name of 'Homer,' or the 'joiner together,' is obviously rather typical than personal; and it gradually came to aggregate round it all that was antique and unclaimed in the way of verse. The aggregation, it is true, was presumably formed in Asiatic Ionia; the 'Cyclic Poems,' supplementary to the Iliad, were mainly the work of Ionic poets; and the Epic was substantially an Ionic dialect. Yet the inference of an Asiatic origin thence naturally arising now clearly appears to be invalid. The linguistic argument, to begin with, has been completely disposed of by Fick's remarkable demonstration that the Iliad and Odyssey underwent an

early process of Ionicisation.[4] So far as metrical considerations permitted, they were actually translated from the Æolic, or rather Achæan tongue, in which they were composed, into the current idiom of Colophon and Miletus. Objections urged from this side against their production in Europe have accordingly lost their force; and the reasons favouring it, always strong, have of late grown to be well-nigh irresistible. Some of the more cogent were briefly stated by Mr. D. B. Monro in 1886;[5] and others might now be added. One only, but one surely conclusive, need here be mentioned. It is this. Homer could not have been an Asiatic Greek, because Asiatic Greece did not exist in Homer's time. He was aware of no Achæan settlements in Asia Minor; not one of the twelve cities of the Ionian confederacy emerges in the Catalogue, Miletus only excepted, and Miletus with a special note of 'barbarian' habitation attached to it.[6] The Ionian name is, in the Iliad, once applied to the Athenians[7] (presumably), but does not occur at all in the Odyssey; where, on the other hand, Dorians, unknown in the Iliad, are casually named as forming an element in the mixed population of Crete.[8] The reputed birthplaces of Homer, then, on the eastern coast of the Ægean, were, when he had reached his singing prime, still occupied by Carians and Mæonians; and we must accordingly look for his origin in the West. There is no escape from this conclusion except by the subterfuge of imagining the geography of the Epics to be artificially archaic. They related to a past time, it might be said, they should then reproduce the conditions of the past. But this is a notion essentially modern. No primitive poet ever troubled himself about such scruples of congruity. Nor if he did, could the requisite detailed information by possibility be at his command, while his painful care to avoid what we call anachronisms would cause nothing but perplexity to his unsophisticated audience. Homer's map of Greece must accordingly be accepted as a true picture of what came under his personal observation. It is, indeed, as Mr. Freeman says, 'so different from the map of Greece at any later time that it is inconceivable that it can have been invented at any later time.'[9] Since, however, it affords the Greek race no Asiatic standing ground, it follows of necessity that Homer was a European.

4. *Die Homerische Odyssee in der ursprünglichen Sprachform wiedergestellt*, 1883.

5. *English Historical Review*, January, 1886.

6. *Iliad*, ii. 868.

7. *Ib.* xiii. 685.

8. *Od.* xix. 177.

9. *Historical Geography*, p. 25.

This same consideration helps to determine the age in which he lived. Homeric geography is entirely pre-Dorian. Total unconsciousness of any such event as the Dorian invasion reigns both in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Not a hint betrays acquaintance with the fact that the polity described in them had, in the meantime, been overturned by external violence. A silence so remarkable can be explained only by the simple supposition that when they were composed, the revolution in question had not yet occurred. Other circumstances confirm this view. Practical explorations have shown pre-Hellenic Greece to have been the seat of a rich, enterprising, and cultivated nation. They have hence removed objections on the score of savagery, inevitably to be encountered, formerly urged against pushing the age of Homer very far back into the past. The life carried on at Mycenæ, in fact, twelve or thirteen centuries before the Christian era, was in many respects more refined than that depicted in the poems. It was known to their author only after it had lost something of its pristine splendour. But the Mycenæan civilisation of his experience, if a trifle decayed, was complete and dominant; and this it never was subsequently to the Dorian conquest. To have collected, however, into an imaginary organic whole the fragments into which it had been shattered by that catastrophe, would assuredly have been a task beyond his powers. Nothing remains, then, but to admit that he lived in the pre-Dorian Greece which he portrayed. Moreover, the state of seething unrest ensuing upon the overthrow of the Mycenæan order must have been absolutely inconsistent with the development of a great school of poetry. If Homer, then, was a European—as appears certain—the inference is irresistible that he flourished before the society to which he belonged was thrown by foreign invaders into irredeemable disarray—that is, at some section of the Mycenæan epoch.

There are many convincing reasons for holding that section to have been a late one. One of the principal is the familiar use of iron in the poems, although none has been met with in the old shaft-tombs within the citadel of

Mycenæ, and only small quantities in the less distinguished graves below. It is, to be sure, conceivable that a substance introduced as a vulgar novelty devoid of traditional or ancestral associations might have been employed for the ordinary purposes of everyday life long before it was allowed to form part of sepulchral equipments; a similar motive prescribing its virtual exclusion from the Homeric Olympus. Still, the discrepancy can hardly be explained away without the concession of some lapse of time as well.

The Homeric and Mycenæan modes of burial, too, were different. Cremation is practised throughout the Epics; the Mycenæan dead were preserved intact. ‘The contrast,’ Dr. Leaf remarks,<sup>[10]</sup> ‘is a striking one; but it is easy to lay too much stress upon it. It may well be that the conditions of sepulture on a campaign were perforce different from those usual in times of peace at home. The mummifying of the body and the carrying of it to the ancestral burying-place in the royal citadel were not operations such as could be easily effected amidst the hurry of marches or the privations of a siege; least of all after the slaughter of a pitched battle. It is therefore quite conceivable that two methods of sepulture may of necessity have been in use at the same time. And for this assumption the Iliad itself gives us positive grounds. One warrior who falls is taken home to be buried; for to a dead son of Zeus means of carriage and preservation can be supplied which are not for common men. Sarpedon is cleansed by Apollo, and borne by Death and Sleep to his distant home in Lycia, not that his body may be burnt, but that his brethren and kinsfolk may *preserve* it ‘with a tomb and gravestone, for such is the due of the dead.’

<sup>10</sup>. Introduction to *Schliemann's Excavations*, p. 26.

He said; obedient to his father's words,  
Down to the battle-field Apollo sped  
From Ida's height; and from amid the spears  
Withdrawn, he bore Sarpedon far away,  
And lav'd his body in the flowing stream;  
Then with divine ambrosia all his limbs  
Anointing, cloth'd him in immortal robes;  
To two swift bearers gave him then in charge,  
To Sleep and Death, twin brothers; in their arms  
They bore him safe to Lycia's widespread plains.<sup>[11]</sup>

<sup>11</sup>. *Iliad*, xvi. 676-88 (Lord Derby's translation).

The Mycenæan custom of embalming corpses was not, then, strange to Homer; and the Homeric custom of burning them has *perhaps*—for the evidence is indecisive—left traces in the more recent graves of the Mycenæan people. What is certain is that simple interment was everywhere primitively in use, and that the pyre was a subsequent innovation, at first only partially adopted, and perhaps nowhere exclusively in vogue.

The plastic art of Mycenæ seems to have been on the decline when the ‘sovrän poet’ arose. This can be inferred from the wondering admiration displayed in his verses for what must once have been its ordinary performances, as well as from the marked superiority assigned in them to foreign over native artists. They include besides no allusion to the signet-rings so plentiful at Mycenæ, no notice, in any connexion, of the art of gem-engraving, nor of the indispensable luxury—to ladies of high degree—of toilet-mirrors. Active intercourse with Egypt, again, had evidently ceased long prior to the Homeric age. The Nile is, in the poems, not even known by name, but only as the ‘river of Egypt;’ and the country is reached, not in the ordinary course of navigation, but through recklessness or ill-luck, by adventurers or castaways.

We can now gather the following indications regarding the date of the Homeric poems. They must have originated during the interval between the Trojan War—which, in some shape, may be accepted as an historical event—and the Dorian invasion of the Peloponnesus. They probably originated not very long before the latter event, when the Mycenæan monarchy was of itself tottering towards a fall precipitated by the frequently repeated incursions of ruder tribes from the north. The generally accepted date for the final event is eighty years after the taking of Troy, or 1104 B.C. But this rests on no authentic circumstance, and may very well be a century or more in error. A preferable chronological arrangement would place Homer’s flourishing in the eleventh century, and the overthrow of Mycenæ near its close. Difficulties of sundry kinds can thus be, in a measure, evaded or conciliated, without encroaching overmuch on the voiceless centuries available for the unrecorded readjustment of the disturbed elements of Greek polity.

As to the mode of origin of the two great poems which have come down to us from so remote an age, much might be said; but a few words must here suffice. It is a topic on which the utmost diversity of opinion has prevailed since F. A. Wolf published, in 1795, his famous ‘Prolegomena,’ and as to which unity of views seems now for ever unattainable. For demonstrative evidence is naturally out of the question, and estimates of opposing probabilities are apt to be strongly tinged with ‘personality.’ Prepossessions of all kinds warp the judgment, even in purely literary matters, and, in this case especially, have led to the learned advocacy of extreme opinions. Thus, partisans of destructive criticism have carried the analysis of the Homeric poems to the verge of annihilation; while ultra-conservatives insist upon a seamless whole, and regard the Iliad and the Odyssey as the work of Homer, in the same sense and with the same implicit confidence that they hold the Æneid and the Eclogues to be Virgilian, or ‘Paradise Lost’ and ‘Samson Agonistes’ to be Miltonic productions. Between these widely diverging paths, however, there is a middle way laid down by common sense, which it is tolerably safe to follow. A few simple considerations may help us to find it.

We must remember, in the first place, that the Homeric poems were composed, not to be privately read, but to be publicly recited. They remained unwritten during at least a couple of centuries, flung on the waves of unaided human memory. Oral tradition alone preserved them; and not the punctilious oral tradition of a sacerdotal caste like the Brahmins, but that of a bold and innovating class of ‘rhapsodes,’ themselves aspiring to some share in the Muse’s immediate favours, and prompt to flatter the local vanities and immemorial susceptibilities of their varied audiences. Within very wide limits, they were free to ‘improve’ what long training had enabled them to appropriate. Their licence infringed no literary property; there was no authorised text to be corrupted; one man’s version was as good as another’s. It is not, then, surprising that the primitive order of the Epics became here and there disarranged, or that interpolated and substituted passages usurped positions from which they could not afterwards easily be expelled. Expository efforts have, indeed, sometimes succeeded only in adding fresh knots to the already tangled skein. Pisistratus, however, did good service by for the first time *editing* the Homeric poems. [12] Scattered

manuscripts of them had doubtless existed long previously; but it was their collection and collation at Athens, and the disposal in a determinate succession of the still disjointed materials they afforded, which placed the Greek people in the earliest full possession of their epical inheritance.

[12.](#) German critics doubt the fact. See Niese, *Die Entwicklung der Homerischen Poesie*, p. 5.

As the general result of a century of Homeric controversy, instinctive appreciation may be said broadly to have got the better of verbal criticism. Not but that the latter has done valuable work; but it is now pretty plainly seen to have been, in some quarters, carried considerably too far. The triumphs enjoyed by German advocates of the ‘Kleinliedentheorie’—of the disjunction, that is to say, of the Epics into numerous separate lays—are generally recognised to have been merely temporary. A large body of opinion was, at the outset, captivated by their arguments; it has of late tended to swing back towards some approximation to the old orthodoxy. There is, indeed, much difficulty in conceiving the profound and essential unity apparent to unprejudiced readers of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to be illusory; nor should it be forgotten that the evoking of a cosmos from a chaos implies a single regulative intelligence. And a cosmos each poem might very well be called; while the ‘embryon atoms’ from which they sprang, of legends, stories, myths, and traditions, constituted scarcely less than an

Ocean without bound,  
Without dimension; where length, breadth, and highth,  
And time, and place, are lost.

The *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, however, stand in this respect by no means on the same footing. In the former, fundamental unity is obvious; the development of the plot is logical and continuous; there are no considerable redundancies, no superfluous adventures, no oblivious interludes; the sense of progress towards a purposed end pervades the whole. Careful scrutiny, it is true, detects, in the details of the narrative, some few trifling discrepancies; but attempts to remove them by tampering with the general plan of its structure lead at once to intolerable anomalies. So much cannot be said for the *Iliad*. Here the component strata are manifestly dislocated, and some intruded masses can be clearly identified. Thus the Tenth Book at

once detaches itself both in substance and style from the remaining cantos. It narrates an adventure wholly disconnected from the main action unfolded in them, and narrates it with a coolness and easy fluency very unlike the rush and glow of genuine Iliadic verse. Few, accordingly, are the critics who venture to claim the episode, brilliant and interesting though it be, as an integral part of the original poem. Yet even when it has been set aside, things do not go altogether straight. The basis of the story is furnished by the wrath of Achilles and its direful consequences; but while the hero sulks in his tent, a good deal of miscellaneous and largely irrespective fighting proceeds, during which he sinks out of sight, and is only transiently kept in mind. Zeus himself is allowed to forget his solemn promise to Thetis of avenging, through the defeat of the Greeks, the injury done to her son by Agamemnon; and the Olympian machinery generally works in an ill-regulated and haphazard fashion. Moreover, the embassy of conciliation in the Ninth Book is ignored later on; while the Twenty-third and Twenty-fourth Books, devoted mainly to the obsequies of Patroclus and Hector, have by some critics been deemed superfluous, by others inconsistent with an exordium announcing—as Pope has it—

The wrath that hurled to Pluto's gloomy reign  
The souls of mighty chiefs untimely slain,  
Whose limbs unburied by the naked shore,  
Devouring dogs and hungry vultures tore.

Through the weight of these objections, Mr. Grote felt compelled to dissever the Iliad into a primitive part, which he called the Achilleid, and a mass of accessional poetry, most likely of diverse origin and date. And a similar view still prevails. Only that the Achilleid has been cut down, by further retrenchments, to the compass of a somewhat prolix Lay, treating, as its express subject, of the 'Wrath' of Achilles. Dr. Leaf indeed accentuates the separation by upholding the probable origin, on opposite sides of the Ægean, of the nuclear and adventitious portions of the Epic.

The force of some of the arguments urging to this analysis cannot be denied, yet there are others, perhaps of a higher order of importance, which indicate the former predominance of a partially destroyed entirety of design through by far the larger portion of this wonderful prehistoric work.

Speaking broadly, an identical spirit pervades the whole. The Tenth Book, and a few notoriously interpolated passages, such as the feeble and futile Theomachy, make the sole exceptions to this rule of ethical homogeneity. Elsewhere, from beginning to end, we meet the same spontaneous fervour of expression, the same magnificent energy kept in hand like a spirited steed; an unflinching sense of the splendour of heroic achievement, and a glowing joy in human existence, tempered by the heart-thrilling remembrance of its pathetic mystery of sorrow. This prevalent uniformity in manner and spirit is certainly unfavourable to the hypothesis of divided authorship.

The marvellous beauty and power of those sections of the poem believed to be adventitious is also a circumstance to be considered. They include many of its most famous scenes—the parting of Hector and Andromache, the arming of Athene, the meeting of Glaucus and Diomed, and the whole vivid interlude of Diomed's prowess, the orations in the tent of Achilles, the chariot-race, the reception of Priam as his suppliant by the fierce slayer of his son. To them exclusively, above all, belongs the personal presentation of Helen; outside their limits, she has no place in the Iliad.

These same accretions are not merely magnificent in themselves, and rich in shining incidents, but they add incalculably to the general effect of the Epic. They contribute, in fact, a great part of its dramatic force and the whole of its moral purport. Without them it would be a bald and unfinished performance—the abortive realisation of a sublime conception. The arming of Agamemnon, for instance, and his feats of private valour, could never have been designed as the immediate sequel to the Promise of Zeus; while they constitute a most fitting climax to the series of the baffled Greek efforts for victory. They are admirably prepared for by the stories of the duel between Menelaus and Paris, of the broken pact, of the prowess of Diomed, of the nocturnal embassy to Achilles. Moreover, the irresistible might of Pelides is brought with tenfold impressiveness on the scene after the fighting powers of each of the other Achæan chiefs have been fully displayed, and proved fruitless. Above all, the Achillean drama itself would lose its profound significance by the retrenchment of the Ninth and two closing Books. For it was the implacability of the 'swift-footed' hero that was justly punished by the calamity of the death of Patroclus; and he

showed himself implacable only when he haughtily rejected a formal offer of ample reparation.<sup>[13]</sup> At that point he became culpable; and might only win revenge at the cost of the acutest anguish of which his nature was capable. The Ninth Book, in short, constitutes the ethical crisis of the Iliad; and the moralising at second-hand, to the innermost core of its structure, of a work purporting to be already complete, is certainly a unique, if not an impossible phenomenon.

13. Mr. A. Lang urges this point with great effect in an article on 'Homer and the Higher Criticism' (*National Review*, Feb. 1892), published after the present Chapter had been sent to press.

Nor is it easily credible that the ransom of the body of Hector made no part of its fundamental plan. Greek feelings of propriety would have been outraged—and outraged in the most distasteful way—by disregard of the dying petition of so spotless and disinterested a champion, albeit of a lost cause, and by the abandonment of his body as carrion to unclean beasts and birds. And Achilles, without the elevating traits of his courtesies in the Games, and his pity for Priam, would have remained colossal only in brutality, a blind instrument of fury, an example of the triumph of ignoble instincts. But such a presentation of his character could never have been purposed by the author of the First Iliad. Not of this base stamp was the hero whom Thetis rose from the sea to comfort. For even in the first rush of his tremendous passion, he still saw the radiant eyes and listened to the voice of Athene; he did not wholly desert celestial wisdom; and celestial wisdom could never have suffered the balance of his stormy soul to be finally overthrown. But just the needed compensatory touches are supplied by his noble bearing in the Patroclean celebration, and far more, by his chivalrous compassion for the hapless old king of Troy. They could not have been omitted by a poet of supreme genius—could not, since the imagination has its logical necessities, among which may be reckoned that of *equilibration*. There is accordingly no possibility of founding a truly great poem, wholly, or mainly, on the crude brutalities of actual warfare. Humanity revolts from them in the long run; and humanity prescribes its laws to art. The slaughtering rage of Achilles demands a corresponding height of generosity and depth of pity; it would else be atrocious. His wrath, in fact, postulates his tenderness; and hence the great difficulty in believing

that the singer of the First Book failed to insert the Ninth, or stopped short at the Twenty-second Book of the Iliad.

The upshot of our little discussion, then, is to assign both to the Iliad and Odyssey a European origin, in the pre-Dorian time, when Mycenæ was the political centre of the Achæan world. Provisionally, they may be said to date from the eleventh century B.C. Moreover, the Odyssey in its essential integrity, and the Iliad in large part, are each the work of one master-mind. The Iliad, none the less, can no longer be said to present a poem 'of one projection'; it shows seams, and junctures, and discrepancies; its mass has, perhaps, been broken up and awkwardly pieced together again; it is a building, in fact, which has suffered extensive restoration.

The further question remains as to the united or divided authorship of these antique monuments, regarded as separate wholes. Are they twin-productions, or did they spring up independently, favoured by the same prevailing climate, from a soil similarly prepared? The answer may be left to the dispassionate judgment of any ordinary, uncritical reader. Supposing his mind, *per impossibile*, a blank on the point, it would certainly not occur to him to attribute the two poems to a single individual. They are probably as unlike in style as, under the circumstances, it was possible for them to be. A great deal, indeed, belongs to them in common. They were rooted in the same traditions; they arose under the same sky and in the same ideal atmosphere; the inexhaustible storehouse of their legendary raw material was the same. Strictly analogous conditions of politics and society are depicted in them; they were addressed to similarly constituted audiences; their verses were constructed on the same rhythmical model. Moreover, the author of one was familiar with the grand example set him by the other. Yet the temper and spirit of each are profoundly different. In the Iliad, a magnificent ardour prevails; the singer is aflame with his theme; his words glow; vivid impressions crowd upon his mind; it takes all the power of his genius to restrain their riotous audacity and marshal them into orderly succession. The author of the Odyssey, on the other hand, is in no danger of being swept away by the impetuosity of his thoughts. He is always collected and at leisure; he has even *esprit*, which implies a low mental temperature; he can stand by with a smile, and look on, while his characters unfold

themselves; his passion never blazes; it is smouldering and sustained, like that of his protagonist.

Numerous small discrepancies, besides, seem to betray a personal diversity of origin. So Iris, the frequent, indeed the all but invariable messenger of the gods in the *Iliad*, drops into oblivion in the *Odyssey*, and is replaced by Hermes; Charis is the wife of Hephæstus in the *Iliad*, Aphrodite in the *Odyssey*; Neleus has twelve sons in the *Iliad*, three in the *Odyssey*; Pylos is a district in the *Iliad*, a town in the *Odyssey*; the oracle of the Dodonæan Zeus is located in Thessaly in the *Iliad*, in Epirus in the *Odyssey*, and so on.<sup>[14]</sup> The *Odyssey*, moreover, is obviously junior to the *Iliad*. It gives evidence of an appreciable development of the arts of life relatively to their state in the rival poem; the processes of verbal contraction have advanced in the interval; the ethical standard has become more refined; while formulaic and other expressions common to both are unmistakably ‘in place,’ as geologists say, in the *Iliad*, ‘erratic,’ or ‘transported,’ in the *Odyssey*.

<sup>14</sup>. See an article on the ‘Doctrine of the Chozizontes,’ in the *Edinburgh Review*, vol. 133.

A difference in the place of origin, perhaps, helps to accentuate the effect due to a difference of time. The thread of tradition regarding these extraordinary works is indeed hopelessly broken. Their prehistoric existence is divided from their historical visibility by the chasm opened when the civilisation of which they were the choicest flowers was subverted by the irrepressible Dorians. The *Iliad*, however, contains strong internal evidence of owning Thessaly as its native region. The vast pre-eminence of the local hero, the Olympian seat of the gods, the partiality displayed for the horse, intimacy with Thessalian traditions and topography, all suggest the relationship. The name of Thessaly, it is true, does not occur either in the *Iliad* or in the *Odyssey*; nor had the semi-barbarous Thessalians, when they were composed, as yet crossed the mountains from Thesprotia to trample down the Achæan culture of the land of Achilles. It thus became, after Homer’s time, the scene of a revolution analogous in every respect to that which overwhelmed the Peloponnesus.

The Homer of the *Odyssey*, who was not improbably of Peloponnesian birth, must have travelled widely. He had undeniably some personal

acquaintance with Ithaca, his topographical indications, apart from the gross blunder of planting the little island west, instead of east of Cephalonia, corresponding on the whole quite closely with reality. And he knew something besides of most parts of the mainland of Greece, of Crete, Delos, Chios, and the Ionian coast of Asia Minor. The experience of the Iliadic bard was doubtless somewhat, though not greatly, more limited. Its range extended, at any rate, from 'Pelasgic Argos' to the Troad, familiarity with which is shown in all sections of the Trojan epic. The cosmopolitan character of both poets is only indeed what might have been expected. The privileged members of an Achæan community must have enjoyed wide opportunities of observation. For Mycenæan culture was strongly eclectic. Elements from many quarters were amalgamated in it, Asiatic influences, however, predominating. The men of genius who acted as the interpreters of its typical ideas would hence have been unfit for their task unless they had personally tried and proved all such elements and influences. They were presumably to some extent adventurers by sea and land. But, further than this, their individuality remains shrouded in the impenetrable veil of their silence.



## CHAPTER II.

### HOMERIC ASTRONOMY.

THE Homeric ideas regarding the heavenly bodies were of the simplest description. They stood, in fact, very much on the same level with those entertained by the North American Indians, when first brought into European contact. What knowledge there was in them was of that 'broken' kind which (in Bacon's phrase) is made up of wonder. Fragments of observation had not even begun to be pieced in one with the other, and so fitted, ill or well, into a whole. In other words, there was no faintest dawning of a celestial science.

But surely, it may be urged, a poet is not bound to be an astronomer. Why should it be assumed that the author (or authors) of the Iliad and Odyssey possessed information co-extensive on all points with that of his fellow-countrymen? His profession was not science, but song. The argument, however, implies a reflecting backward of the present upon the past. Among unsophisticated peoples, specialists, unless in the matter of drugs or spells, or some few practical processes, do not exist. The scanty stock of gathered knowledge is held, it might be said, in common. The property of one is the property of all.

More especially of the poet. His power over his hearers depends upon his presenting vividly what they already perceive dimly. It was part of the poetical faculty of the Ithacan bard Phemius that he 'knew the works of gods and men.' [15] His special function was to render them famous by his song. What he had heard concerning them he repeated; adding, of his own, the marshalling skill, the vital touch, by which they were perpetuated. He

was no inventor: the actual life of men, with its transfiguring traditions and baffled aspirations, was the material he had to work with. But the life of men was very different then from what it is now. It was lived in closer contact with Nature; it was simpler, more typical, consequently more susceptible of artistic treatment.

[15](#). *Odyssey*, i. 338.

It was accordingly looked at and portrayed as a whole; and it is this very *wholeness* which is one of the principal charms of primitive poetry—an irrecoverable charm; for civilisation renders existence a labyrinth of which it too often rejects the clue. In olden times, however, its ways were comparatively straight, and its range limited. It was accordingly capable of being embraced with approximate entirety. Hence the encyclopædic character of the early epics. *Humani nihil alienum*. Whatever men thought, and knew, and did, in that morning of the world when they spontaneously arose, found a place in them.

Now, some scheme of the heavens must always accompany and guide human existence. There is literally no choice for man but to observe the movements, real or apparent, of celestial objects, and to regulate his actions by the measure of time they mete out to him. Nor had he at first any other means of directing his wanderings upon the earth save by regarding theirs in the sky. They are thus to him standards of reference and measurement as regards both the fundamental conditions of his being—time and space.

This intimate connexion, and, still more, the idealising influence of the remote and populous skies, has not been lost upon the poets in any age. It might even be possible to construct a tolerably accurate outline-sketch of the history of astronomy in Europe without travelling outside the limits of their works. But our present concern is with Homer.

To begin with his mode of reckoning time. This was by years, months, days, and hours.[\[16\]](#) The week of seven days was unknown to him; but in its place we find[\[17\]](#) the triplicate division of the month used by Hesiod and the later Attics, implying a month of thirty, and a year of 360 days, corrected, doubtless, by some rude process of intercalation. These ten-day intervals were perhaps borrowed at an early stage of Achæan civilisation from Egypt, where they correspond to the Chaldean ‘decans’—thirty-six

minor astral divinities presiding over as many sections of the Zodiac.[18] But no knowledge of the Signs accompanied the transfer. A similar apportionment of the hours of night into three watches (as amongst the Jews before the Captivity), and of the hours of day into three periods or stages, prevails in both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The seasons of the year, too, were three—spring, summer, and winter—like those of the ancient Egyptians and of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers;[19] for the Homeric *Opora* was not, properly speaking, an autumnal season, but merely an aggravation of summer heat and drought, heralded by the rising of Sirius towards the close of July. It, in fact, strictly matched our ‘dog-days,’ the *dies caniculares* of the Romans. The first direct mention of autumn is in a treatise of the time of Alcibiades ascribed to Hippocrates.[20] This rising of the dog-star is the only indication in the Homeric poems of the use of a stellar calendar such as we meet full-grown in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. The same event was the harbinger of the Nile-flood to the Egyptians, serving to mark the opening of their year as well as to correct the estimates of its length.

16. *Odyssey*, x. 469; xi. 294.

17. *Ib.* xix. 307.

18. Brugsch, *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Bd. ix. p. 513.

19. Lewis, *Astronomy of the Ancients*, p. 11. Tacitus says of the Germans, ‘Autumni perinde nomen ac bona ignorantur’ (*Germania*, cap. xxvi.)

20. Smith’s *Dictionary of Antiquities*, article ‘Astronomy.’

The annual risings of stars had formerly, in the absence of more accurate means of observation, an importance they no longer possess. Mariners and husbandmen, accustomed to watch, because at the mercy of the heavens, could hardly fail no less to be struck with the successive effacements by, and re-emergences from, the solar beams, of certain well-known stars, as the sun pursued his yearly course amongst them, than to note the epochs of such events. Four stages in these periodical fluctuations of visibility were especially marked by primitive observers. The first perceptible appearance of a star in the dawn was known as its ‘heliacal rising.’ This brief glimpse extended gradually as the star increased its seeming distance from the sun, the interval of precedence in rising lengthening by nearly four minutes each morning. At the end of close upon six months occurred its ‘acronycal

rising,' or last visible ascent from the eastern horizon after sunset. Its conspicuousness was then at the maximum, the whole of the dark hours being available for its shining. To these two epochs of rising succeeded and corresponded two epochs of setting—the 'cosmical' and the 'heliacal.' A star set cosmically when, for the first time each year, it reached the horizon long enough before break of day to be still distinguishable; it set heliacally on the last evening when its rays still detached themselves from the background of illuminated western sky, before getting finally immersed in twilight. The round began again when the star had arrived sufficiently far on the other side of the sun to show in the morning—in other words, to rise heliacally.

Wide plains and clear skies gave opportunities for closely and continually observing these successive moments in the revolving relations of sun and stars, which were soon found to afford a very accurate index to the changes of the seasons. By them, for the most part, Hesiod's prescriptions for navigation and agriculture are timed; and although Homer, in conformity with the nature of his subject, is less precise, he was still fully aware of the association.

His sun is a god—Helios—as yet unidentified with Apollo, who wears his solar attributes unconsciously. Helios is also known as Hyperion, 'he who walks on high,' and Elector, 'the shining one.' Voluntarily he pursues his daily course in the sky, and voluntarily he sinks to rest in the ocean-stream—subject, however, at times to a higher compulsion; for, just after the rescue of the body of Patroclus, Heré favours her Achæan clients by precipitating at a critical juncture the descent of a still unwearied and unwilling luminary.<sup>[21]</sup> On another occasion, however, Helios memorably asserts his independence, when, incensed at the slaughter of his sacred cattle by the self-doomed companions of Ulysses, he threatens to 'descend into Hades, and shine among the dead.'<sup>[22]</sup> And Zeus, in promising the required satisfaction, virtually admits his power to abdicate his office as illuminator of gods and men.

<sup>21.</sup> *Iliad*, xviii, 239.

<sup>22.</sup> *Odyssey*, xii. 383.

Once only, the solstice is alluded to in Homeric verse. The swineherd Eumæus, in describing the situation of his native place, the Island of Syriê, states that it is over against Ortygia (Delos), ‘where are the turning-places of the sun.’ [23] The phrase was probably meant to indicate that Delos lay just so much south of east from Ithaca as the sun lies at rising on the shortest day of winter. But it must be confessed that the direction was not thus very accurately laid down, the comprised angle being  $15\frac{1}{3}^{\circ}$ , instead of  $23\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ . [24] To those early students of nature, the travelling to and fro of the points of sunrise and sunset furnished the most obvious clue to the yearly solar revolution; so that an expression, to us somewhat recondite, conveyed a direct and unmistakable meaning to hearers whose narrow acquaintance with the phenomena of the heavens was vivified by immediate personal experience of them. And in point of fact, the idea in question is precisely that conveyed by the word ‘tropic.’

[23.](#) *Ib.* xv. 404.

[24.](#) Sir W. Geddes believes that the solstitial place of the setting sun, as viewed from the Ionic coast, is that used to define the position of Ortygia.—*Problem of the Homeric Poems*, p. 294.

Selene first takes rank as a divine personage in the pseudo-Homeric Hymns. No moon-goddess is recognised in the Iliad or Odyssey. Nor does the orbéd ruler of ‘ambrosial night,’ regarded as a mere light-giver or time-measurer, receive all the attention that might have been expected. A full moon is, however, represented with the other ‘heavenly signs’ on the shield of Achilles, and figures somewhat superfluously in the magnificent passage where the Trojan watch-fires are compared to the stars in a cloudless sky:

As when in heaven the stars about the moon  
Look beautiful, when all the winds are laid,  
And every height comes out, and jutting peak  
And valley, and the immeasurable heavens  
Break open to their highest, and all the stars  
Shine, and the shepherd gladdens in his heart:  
So many a fire between the ships and stream  
Of Xanthus blazed before the towers of Troy,  
A thousand on the plain; and close by each  
Sat fifty in the blaze of burning fire;  
And eating hoary grain and pulse, the steeds,  
Fixt by their cars, waited the golden dawn. [25]

[25.](#) *Iliad*, viii. 551-61 (Tennyson’s translation).

Here, as elsewhere, the simile no sooner presents itself than the poet's imagination seizes upon and develops it without overmuch regard to the illustrative fitness of its details. The multitudinous effect of a thousand fires blazing together on the plain inevitably suggested the stars. But with the stars came the complete nocturnal scene in its profound and breathless tranquillity. The 'rejoicing shepherd,' meantime, who was part of it, would have been ill-pleased with the darkness required for the innumerable stellar display first thought of. And since, to the untutored sense, landscape is delightful only so far as it gives promise of utility, brilliant moonlight was added, for his satisfaction and the safety of his flock, as well as for the perfecting of that scenic beauty felt to be deficient where human needs were left uncared for. Just in proportion, however, as rocks, and peaks, and wooded glens appeared distinct, the lesser lights of heaven, and with them the fundamental idea of the comparison, must have become effaced; and the poet, accordingly, as if with a misgiving that the fervour of his fancy had led him to stray from the rigid line of his purpose, volunteered the assurance that 'all the stars were visible'—as, to his mind's eye, they doubtless were.

Of the 'vivid planets' thrown in by Pope there is no more trace in the original, than of the 'glowing pole.' Nor could there be; since Homer was totally ignorant that such a class of bodies existed. This curious fact affords (if it were needed) conclusive proof of the high antiquity of the Homeric poems. Not the faintest suspicion manifests itself in them that Hesperus, 'fairest of all stars set in heaven,' is but another aspect of Phosphorus, herald of light upon the earth, 'the star that saffron-mantled Dawn cometh after, and spreadeth over the salt sea.'<sup>[26]</sup> The identification is said by Diogenes Laertius to have been first made by Pythagoras; and it may at any rate be assumed with some confidence that this elementary piece of astronomical knowledge came to the Greeks from the East, with others of a like nature, in the course of the seventh or sixth century B.C. Astonishing as it seems that they should not have made the discovery for themselves, there is no evidence that they did so. Hesiod appears equally unconscious with Homer of the distinction between 'fixed' and 'wandering' stars. According to his genealogical information, Phosphorus, like the rest of the stellar

multitude, sprang from the union of Astræus with the Dawn,[\[27\]](#) but no hint is given of any generic difference between them.

[26.](#) *Iliad*, xxiii. 226-27.

[27.](#) *Theogony*, 381.

There is a single passage in the *Iliad*, and a parallel one in the *Odyssey*, in which the constellations are formally enumerated by name. Hephæstus, we are told, made for the son of Thetis a shield great and strong, whereon, by his exceeding skill, a multitude of objects were figured.

‘There wrought he the earth, and the heavens, and the sea, and the unwearying sun, and the moon waxing to the full, and the signs every one wherewith the heavens are crowned, Pleiads, and Hyads, and Orion’s might, and the Bear that men call also the Wain, her that turneth in her place, and watcheth Orion, and alone hath no part in the baths of Ocean.’[\[28\]](#)

[28.](#) *Iliad*, xviii. 483-89.

The corresponding lines in the *Odyssey* occur in the course of describing the hero’s voyage from the isle of Calypso to the land of the Phæacians. Alone, on the raft he had constructed of Ogygian pine-wood, he sat during seventeen days, ‘and cunningly guided the craft with the helm; nor did sleep fall upon his eyelids, as he viewed the Pleiads and Boötes, that setteth late, and the Bear, which they likewise call the Wain, which turneth ever in one place, and keepeth watch upon Orion, and alone hath no part in the baths of Ocean.’[\[29\]](#)

[29.](#) *Odyssey*, v. 271-75.

The sailing-directions of the goddess were to keep the Bear always on the left—that is, to steer due east.

It is clear that one of these passages is an adaptation from the other; nor is there reason for hesitation in deciding which was the model. Independently of extrinsic evidence, the verses in the *Iliad* have the strong spontaneous ring of originality, while the *Odyssean* lines betray excision and interpolation. The ‘Hyads and Orion’s might’ are suppressed for the sake of introducing Boötes. Variety was doubtless aimed at in the change; and the conjecture is at least a plausible one, that the added constellation

may have been known to the poet of the *Odyssey* (admitting the hypothesis of a divided authorship), though not to the poet of the *Iliad*—known, that is, in the sense that the stars comprising the figure of the celestial Husbandman had not yet, at the time and place of origin of the *Iliad*, become separated from the anonymous throng circling in the ‘murk of night.’

The constellation Boötes—called ‘late-setting,’ probably from the perpendicular position in which it descends below the horizon—was invented to drive the Wain, as Arctophylax to guard the Bear, the same group in each case going by a double name. For the brightest of the stars thus designated we still preserve the appellation Arcturus (from *arktos*, bear, *oûros*, guardian), first used by Hesiod, who fixed upon its acronycal rising, sixty days after the winter solstice, as the signal for pruning the vines.<sup>[30]</sup> It is not unlikely that the star received its name long before the constellation was thought of, forming the nucleus of a subsequently formed group. This was undoubtedly the course of events elsewhere; the Great and Little Dogs, for instance, the Twins, and the Eagle (the last with two minute companions) having been individualised as stars previous to their recognition as asterisms.

<sup>30</sup>. *Works and Days*, 564-70.

There is reason to believe that the stars enumerated in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* constituted the whole of those known by name to the early Greeks. This view is strongly favoured by the identity of the Homeric and Hesiodic stars. It is difficult to believe that, had there been room for choice, the same list *precisely* would have been picked out for presentation in poems so widely diverse in scope and origin as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* on the one side, and the *Works and Days* on the other. As regards the polar constellations, we have positive proof that none besides *Ursa Major* had been distinguished. For the statement repeated in both the Homeric epics, that the Bear *alone* was without part in the baths of Ocean, implies, not that the poet veritably ignored the unnumbered stars revolving within the circle traced out round the pole by the seven of the Plough, but that they still remained a nameless crowd, unassociated with any terrestrial object, and therefore attracting no popular observation.

The Greeks, according to a well-attested tradition, made acquaintance with the Lesser Bear through Phœnician communication, of which Thales was the medium. Hence the designation of the group as *Phoinike*. Aratus (who versified the prose of Eudoxus) has accordingly two Bears, lying (in sailors' phrase) 'heads and points' on the sphere; while he expressly states that the Greeks still (about 270 B.C.) continued to steer by *Helike* (the Twister, Ursa Major), while the expert Phœnicians directed their course by the less mobile *Kynosoura* (Ursa Minor). The absence of any mention of a Pole-star seems at first sight surprising. Even the Iroquois Indians directed their wanderings from of old by the one celestial luminary of which the position remained sensibly invariable.<sup>[31]</sup> Yet not the gods themselves, in Homer's time, were aware of such a guide. It must be remembered, however, that the axis of the earth's rotation pointed, 2800 years ago, towards a considerably different part of the heavens from that now met by its imaginary prolongation. The precession of the equinoxes has been at work in the interval, slowly but unremittingly shifting the situation of this point among the stars. Some 600 years before the Great Pyramid was built, it was marked by the close vicinity of the brightest star in the Dragon. But this in the course of ages was left behind by the onward-travelling pole, and further ages elapsed before the star at the tip of the Little Bear's tail approached its present position. Thus the entire millennium before the Christian era may count for an interregnum as regards Pole-stars. Alpha Draconis had ceased to exercise that office; Alruccabah had not yet assumed it.

<sup>31</sup>. Lafitau, *Mœurs des Sauvages Américains*, p. 240.

The most ancient of all the constellations is probably that which Homer distinguishes as never-setting (it then lay much nearer to the pole than it now does). In his time, as in ours, it went by two appellations—the Bear and the Wain. Homer's Bear, however, included the same seven bright stars constituting the Wain, and no more; whereas our Great Bear stretches over a sky-space of which the Wain is only a small part, three of the striding monster's far-apart paws being marked by the three pairs of stars known to the Arabs as the 'gazelle's springs.' How this extension came about, we can only conjecture; but there is evidence that it was fairly well established when Aratus wrote his description of the constellations. Aratus, however,

copied Eudoxus, and Eudoxus used observations made—doubtless by Accad or Chaldean astrologers—above 2000 B.C.[32] We infer, then, that the Babylonian Bear was no other than the modern Ursa Major.[33]

[32.](#) According to Mr. Proctor's calculation. See R. Brown, *Eridanus: River and Constellation*, p. 3.

[33.](#) See Houghton, *Trans. Soc. Bibl. Arch.* vol. v. p. 333.

But the primitive asterism—the Seven Rishis of the old Hindus, the Septem Triones of the Latins, the Arktos of Homer—included no more than seven stars. And this is important as regards the origin of the name. For it is impossible to suppose a likeness to any animal suggested by the more restricted group. Scarcely the acquiescent fancy of Polonius could find it 'backed like a weasel,' or 'very like a whale.' Yet a weasel or a whale would match the figure equally well with, or better than, a bear. Probably the growing sense of incongruity between the name and the object it signified may have induced the attempt to soften it down by gathering a number of additional stars into a group presenting a distant resemblance to a four-legged monster.

The name of the Bear, this initial difficulty notwithstanding, is prehistoric and quasi-universal. It was traditional amongst the American-Indian tribes, who, however, sensible of the absurdity of attributing a conspicuous protruding tail to an animal almost destitute of such an appendage, turned the three stars composing it into three pursuing hunters. No such difficulty, however, presented itself to the Aztecs. They recognised in the seven 'Arctic' stars the image of a Scorpion,[34] and named them accordingly. No Bear seems to have bestridden their sky.

[34.](#) Bollaert, *Memoirs Anthropol. Society*, vol. i. p. 216.

The same constellation figures, under a divinified aspect, with the title *Otawa*, in the great Finnish epic, the 'Kalevala.' Now, although there is no certainty as to the original meaning of this word, which has no longer a current application to any terrestrial object, it is impossible not to be struck with its resemblance to the Iroquois term *Okowari*, signifying 'bear,' both zoologically and astronomically.[35] The inference seems justified that *Otawa* held the same two meanings, and that the Finns knew the great northern constellation by the name of the old Teutonic king of beasts.

[35.](#) Lafitau, *op. cit.* p. 236.

It was (as we have seen) similarly designated on the banks of the Euphrates; and a celestial she-bear, doubtfully referred to in the Rig-Veda, becomes the starting-point of an explanatory legend in the Râmâyana.[\[36\]](#) Thus, circling the globe from the valley of the Ganges to the great lakes of the New World, we find ourselves confronted with the same sign in the northern skies, the relic of some primeval association of ideas, long since extinct.

[36.](#) Gubernatis, *Zoological Mythology*, vol. ii. p. 109.

Extinct even in Homer's time. For the myth of Callisto (first recorded in a lost work by Hesiod) was a subsequent invention—an effect, not a cause—a mere embroidery of Hellenic fancy over a linguistic fact, the true origin of which was lost in the mists of antiquity.

There is, on the other hand, no difficulty in understanding how the Seven Stars obtained their second title of the Wain, or Plough, or Bier. Here we have a plain case of imitative name-giving—a suggestion by resemblance almost as direct as that which established in our skies a Triangle and a Northern Crown. Curiously enough, the individual appellations still current for the stars of the Plough, include a reminiscence of each system of nomenclature—the legendary and the imitative. The brightest of the seven,  $\alpha$  Ursæ Majoris, the Pointer nearest the Pole, is designated *Dubhe*, signifying, in Arabic, 'bear'; while the title *Benetnasch*—equivalent to *Benât-en-Nasch*, 'daughters of the bier'—of the furthest star in the plough-handle, perpetuates the lugubrious fancy, native in Arabia, by which the group figures as a corpse attended by three mourners.

Turning to the second great constellation mentioned in both Homeric epics, we again meet traces of remote and unconscious tradition: yet less remote, probably, than that concerned with the Bear—certainly less inscrutable; for recent inquiries into the lore and language of ancient Babylon have thrown much light on the relationships of the Orion fable.

There seems no reason to question the validity of Mr. Robert Brown's interpretation of the word by the Accadian *Ur-ana*, 'light of heaven.'[\[37\]](#) But a proper name is significant only where it originates. Moreover, it is

considered certain that the same brilliant star-group known to Homer no less than to us as Orion, was termed by Chaldeo-Assyrian peoples ‘Tammuz,’ [38] a synonym of Adonis. Nor is it difficult to divine how the association came to be established. For, about 2000 B.C., when the Euphratean constellations assumed their definitive forms, the belt of Orion began to be visible before dawn in the month of June, called ‘Tammuz,’ because the death of Adonis was then celebrated. It is even conceivable that the heliacal rising of the asterism may originally have given the signal for that celebration. We can at any rate scarcely doubt that it received the name of ‘Tammuz’ because its annual emergence from the solar beams coincided with the period of mystical mourning for the vernal sun.

[37.](#) *Myth of Kirke*, p. 146.

[38.](#) Lenormant, *Origines de l'Histoire*, t. 1. p. 247.

Orion, too, has solar connexions. In the Fifth Odyssey (121-24), Calypso relates to Hermes how the love for him of Aurora excited the jealousy of the gods, extinguished only when he fell a victim to it, slain by the shafts of Artemis in Ortygia. Obviously, a sun-and-dawn myth slightly modified from the common type. The post-Homeric stories, too, of his relations with Enopion of Chios, and of his death by the bite of a scorpion (emblematical of darkness, like the boar’s tusk in the Adonis legend), confirm his position as a luminous hero. [39] Altogether, the evidence is strongly in favour of considering Orion as a variant of Adonis, imported into Greece from the East at an early date, and there associated with the identical group of stars which commemorated to the Accads of old the fate of Dumuzi (*i.e.* Tammuz), the ‘Only Son of Heaven.’

[39.](#) R. Brown, *Archæologia*, vol. xlvii. p. 352; *Great Dionysiak Myth*, chap. x. § v.

It is remarkable that Homer knows nothing of stellar mythology. He nowhere attempts to account for the names of the stars. He has no stories at his fingers’ ends of translations to the sky as a ready means of exit from terrestrial difficulties. The Orion of his acquaintance—the beloved of the Dawn, the mighty hunter, surpassing in beauty of person even the divinely-born Aloidæ—died and descended to Hades like other mortals, and was there seen by Ulysses, a gigantic shadow ‘driving the wild beasts together over the mead of asphodel, the very beasts which he himself had slain on

the lonely hills, with a strong mace all of bronze in his hand, that is ever unbroken.’ [40] His stellar connexion is treated as a fact apart. The poet does not appear to feel any need of bringing it into harmony with the Odyssean vision.

[40.](#) *Odyssey*, xi. 572-75.

The brightest star in the heavens is termed by Homer the ‘dog of Orion.’ The name *Seirios* (significant of sparkling), makes its *début* in the verses of Hesiod. To the singer of the Iliad the dog-star is a sign of fear, its rising giving presage to ‘wretched mortals’ of the intolerable, feverish blaze of late summer (*opora*). The deadly gleam of its rays hence served the more appropriately to exemplify the lustre of havoc-dealing weapons. Diomed, Hector, Achilles, ‘all furnish’d, all in arms,’ are compared in turn, by way of prelude to an ‘*aristeia*,’ or culminating epoch of distinction in battle, to the same brilliant but baleful object. Glimmering fitfully across clouds, it not inaptly typifies the evanescent light of the Trojan hero’s fortunes, no less than the flashing of his armour, as he moves restlessly to and fro. [41] Of Achilles it is said:

[41.](#) *Iliad*, xi. 62-66.

Him the old man Priam first beheld, as he sped across the plain, blazing as the star that cometh forth at harvest-time, and plain seen his rays shine forth amid the host of stars in the darkness of night, the star whose name men call Orion’s Dog. Brightest of all is he, yet for an evil sign is he set, and bringeth much fever upon hapless men. Even so on Achilles’ breast the bronze gleamed as he ran. [42]

[42.](#) *Iliad*, xxii. 25-32.

In the corresponding passage relating to Diomed (v. 4-7), the *naïve* literalness with which the ‘baths of Ocean’ are thought of is conveyed by the hint that the star shone at rising with increased brilliancy through having newly washed in them.

Abnormal celestial appearances are scarcely noticed in the Homeric poems. Certain portentous darknesses, reinforcing the solemnity of crises of battle, or impending doom, [43] are much too vaguely defined to be treated as indexes to natural phenomena of any kind. Nevertheless, Professor Stockwell finds that, by a curious coincidence, Ajax’s Prayer to Father Zeus for death—if death was decreed—in the light, might very well have been

uttered during a total eclipse of the sun, the lunar shadow having passed centrally over the Hellespont at 2h. 21 min. P.M. on August 28, 1184 B.C.[44] Comets, however, have left not even the suspicion of a trace in these early songs; nor do they embody any tradition of a star shower, or of a display of Northern Lights. The rain of blood, by which Zeus presaged and celebrated the death of Sarpedon,[45] might, it is true, be thought to embody a reminiscence of a crimson aurora, frequently, in early times, chronicled under that form; but the portent indicated is more probably an actual shower of rain tinged red by a microscopic alga. An unmistakable meteor, however, furnishes one of the glowing similes of the Iliad. By its help the irresistible swiftness and unexpectedness of Athene's descent from Olympus to the Scamandrian plain are illustrated.

[43.](#) *Iliad*, xv. 668; xvii. 366; *Odyssey*, xx. 356.

[44.](#) *Astronomical Journal*, Nos. 220, 221.

[45.](#) *Iliad*, xvi. 459; also xi. 53.

Even as the son of Kronos the crooked counsellor sendeth a star, a portent for mariners or a wide host of men, bright shining, and therefrom are scattered sparks in multitude; even in such guise sped Pallas Athene to earth, and leapt into their midst.[\[46\]](#)

[46.](#) *Iliad*, iv. 75-79.

In the Homeric verses the Milky Way—the ‘path of souls’ of prairie-roving Indians, the mediæval ‘way of pilgrimage’[\[47\]](#)—finds no place. Yet its conspicuousness, as seen across our misty air, gives an imperfect idea of the lustre with which it spans the translucent vault which drew the wondering gaze of the Achæan bard.

[47.](#) To Compostella. The popular German name for the Milky Way is still *Jakobsstrasse*, while the three stars of Orion's belt are designated, in the same connexion, *Jakobsstab*, staff of St James.

The point of most significance about Homer's scanty astronomical notions is that they were of home growth. They are precisely such as would arise among a people in an incipient stage of civilisation, simple, direct, and childlike in their mode of regarding natural phenomena, yet incapable of founding upon them any close or connected reasoning. Of Oriental mysticism there is not a vestige. No occult influences rain from the sky. Not so much as a square inch of foundation is laid for the astrological superstructure. It is true that Sirius is a ‘baleful star’; but it is in the sense of

being a harbinger of hot weather. Possibly, or probably, it is regarded as a concomitant cause, no less than as a sign of the August droughts; indeed the *post hoc* and the *propter hoc* were, in those ages, not easily separable; the effect, however, in any case, was purely physical, and so unfit to become the starting-point of a superstition.

The Homeric names of the stars, too, betray common reminiscences rather than foreign intercourse. They are all either native, or naturalised on Greek soil. The transplanted fable of Orion has taken root and flourished there. The cosmopolitan Bear is known by her familiar Greek name. Boötes is a Greek husbandman, variously identified with Arcas, son of Callisto, or with Icarus, the luckless mandatory of Dionysus. The Pleiades and the Hyades are intelligibly designated in Greek. The former word is usually derived from *pleîn*, to sail; the heliacal rising of the ‘tangled’ stars in the middle of May having served, from the time of Hesiod, to mark the opening of the season safe for navigation, and their cosmical setting, at the end of October, its close. But this etymology was most likely an after-thought. Long before rules for navigating the Ægean came to be formulated, the ‘sailing-stars’ must have been designated by name amongst the Achæan tribes. Besides, Homer is ignorant of any such association. Now in Arabic the Pleiades are called *Eth Thuraiyâ*, from *therwa*, copious, abundant. The meaning conveyed is that of many gathered into a small space; and it is quite similar to that of the Biblical *kîmah*, a near connexion of the Assyrian *kimtu*, family.[48] Analogy, then, almost irresistibly points to the interpretation of Pleiades by the Greek *pleiones*, many, or *pleîos*, full; giving to the term, in either case, the obvious signification of a ‘cluster.’

48. R. Brown, *Phainomena of Aratus*, p. 9; Delitzsch, *The Hebrew Language*, p. 69.

Of the Hyades, similarly, the ‘rainy’ association seems somewhat far-fetched. They rise and set respectively about four days later than the Pleiades; so that, as prognostics of the seasons, it would be difficult to draw a permanent distinction between the two groups; yet one was traditionally held to bring fair, the other foul weather. There can be little doubt that an etymological confusion lay at the bottom of this inconsistency. ‘To rain,’ in Greek is *huein*; but *hus* (cognate with ‘sow’) means a ‘pig.’ Moreover, in old Latin, the Hyades were called *Suculæ* (‘little pigs’); although the

misapprehension which he supposed to be betrayed by the term was rebuked by Cicero.[49] Possibly the misapprehension was the other way. It is quite likely that ‘Sukulæ’ preserved the original meaning of ‘Hyades,’ and that the pluvius derivation was invented at a later time, when the conception of the seven stars in the head of the Bull as a ‘litter of pigs’ had come to appear incongruous and inelegant. It has, nevertheless, just that character of *naïveté* which stamps it as authentic. Witness the popular names of the sister-group—the widely-diffused ‘hen and chickens,’ Sancho Panza’s ‘las siete cabrillas,’ met and discoursed with during his famous aërial voyage on the back of Clavileño, the Sicilian ‘seven dovelets,’—all designating the Pleiades. Still more to the purpose is the Anglo-Saxon ‘boar-throng,’ which, by a haphazard identification, has been translated as Orion, but which Grimm, on better grounds, suggests may really apply to the Hyades.[50] It is scarcely credible that any other constellation can be indicated by a term so manifestly reproducing the ‘Sukulæ’ of Latin and Sabine husbandmen.

49. *De Naturâ Deorum*, lib. ii. cap. 43.

50. *Teutonic Mythology* (Stallybrass), vol. ii. p. 729.

The Homeric scheme of the heavens, then (such as it is), was produced at home. No stellar lore had as yet been imported from abroad. An original community of ideas is just traceable in the names of some of the stars; that is all. The epoch of instruction by more learned neighbours was still to come. The Signs of the Zodiac were certainly unknown to Homer, yet their shining array had been marshalled from the banks of the Euphrates at least 2000 years before the commencement of the Christian era. Their introduction into Greece is attributed to Cleostratus of Tenedos, near, or shortly after, the end of the sixth century B.C. By that time, too, acquaintance had been made with the ‘Phœnician’ constellation of the Lesser Bear, and with the wanderings of the planets. Astronomical communications, in fact, began to pour into Hellas from Egypt, Babylonia, and Phœnicia about the seventh century B.C. Now, if there were any reasonable doubt that ‘blind Melesigenes’ lived at a period anterior to this, it would be removed by the consideration of what he lets fall about the heavenly bodies. For, though he might have ignored formal astronomy, he

could not have remained unconscious of such striking and popular facts as the identity of Hesperus and Phosphorus, the Sidonian pilots' direction of their course by the 'Cynosure,' or the mapping-out of the sun's path among the stars by a series of luminous figures of beasts and men.

Thus the hypothesis of a late origin for the Iliad and Odyssey is negated by the astronomical ignorance betrayed in them. It has, however, gradations; whence some hints as to the relative age of the two epics may be derived. The differences between them in this respect are, it is true, small, and they both stand approximately on the same astronomical level with the poems of Hesiod. Yet an attentive study of what they have to tell us about the stars affords some grounds for placing the Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Works and Days in a descending series as to time.

In the first place, the division of the month into three periods of ten days each is unknown in the Iliad, is barely hinted at in the Odyssey, but is brought into detailed notice in the Hesiodic calendar. Further, the 'turning-points of the sun' are unmentioned in the Iliad, but serve in the Odyssey, by their position on the horizon, to indicate direction; while the winter solstice figures as a well-marked epoch in the Works and Days. Hesiod, moreover, designates the dog-star (not expressly mentioned in the Odyssey) by a name of which the author of the Iliad was certainly ignorant. Besides which an additional constellation (Boötes) to those named in the Iliad appears in the Odyssey and the Works and Days; while the title 'Hyperion,' applied substantively to the sun in the Odyssey, is used only adjectivally in the Iliad. Finally, stellar mythology begins with Hesiod; Homer (whether the Iliadic or the Odyssean) takes the names of the stars as he finds them, without seeking to connect them with any sublunary occurrences.

To be sure, differences of place and purpose might account for some of these discrepancies, yet their cumulative effect in fixing relative epochs is considerable; and, even apart from chronology, it is something to look towards the skies with the 'most high poet,' and to retrace, with the aid of our own better knowledge, the simple meanings their glorious aspect held for him.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE DOG IN HOMER.

TWO sets of strongly contrasted, nay, one might beforehand have thought mutually exclusive qualities, go to make up the canine character. In all ages, and amongst all nations, the dog has become a byword for its uncleanly habits, disgusting voracity, its quarrelsome and aggressive selfishness. The cynic, or 'dog-like' philosopher, is a type of what is unamiable in human nature. Growling, snarling, whining, barking, snapping and biting, crouching and fawning, constitute a vocabulary descriptive of canine deportment conveying none but repulsive and odious associations. Our language pursues the animal through its different varieties and stages of existence in order to find varying epithets of contumely and reproach. The universal and almost prehistoric term of abuse formed by the simple patronymic—so to speak—has lost little of its pristine favour, and none of its pristine force; while amongst ourselves 'hound,' 'puppy,' 'cur,' 'whelp,' and 'cub,' come in as harmonics of the fundamental note of insult.

On the other hand, some millenniums of experience have constituted the dog a type of incorruptible fidelity, patient abnegation, devoted attachment reaching unto and beyond the grave. Many animals have been made the slaves and victims of man; some have been found capable of becoming his willing allies; none, save the dog, affords to his master a true and intelligent companionship. Other members of the brute creation are subdued by domestication; the dog is, it might be said, transfigured by it. A new nature awakes in him. A higher ideal presents itself to him. His dormant affections are kindled; his latent intelligence develops. The overwhelming fascination

of humanity submerges his native ignoble instincts, evokes virtues which man himself admires rather than practises, engages a pathetic confidence, inspires an indomitable love. Literature teems with instances of canine constancy and self-devotion. The long life-in-death of ‘Grey Friars Bobby’ forms no prodigy in the history of his race. From the dog of Colophon to the dog of Bairnsdale, man’s four-footed friend has been found capable of the supreme sacrifice which one living creature can make for another. Even in the dim dawns of civilisation this animal was chosen as the symbol of watchful attendance and untiring subordination. The bright star Sirius, owing to its close waiting on the ‘giant’ of the skies, was from the earliest time known as the ‘dog of Orion.’ A brace of hounds typified to the ardent imagination of the Vedic poets the inseparable association with the sun of the morning and evening twilight. Æschylus elevates and enlarges the idea of divine companionship in the eagle by calling it the ‘winged dog of Zeus.’ [51] Clytemnestra, in her hypocritical protestations before the elders of Argos, could find no more striking image of fidelity than that of a house-dog left by its master to guard his hearth and possessions. [52]

[51]. *Agamemnon*, 133; and *Prometheus*, 1057.

[52]. *Agamemnon*, 520.

Two opposing currents of sentiment regarding the animal have thus from the first set strongly in—one of repulsion verging towards abhorrence, the other of sympathy touched by the yearning pity which a superior being cannot choose but feel towards an inferior laying at his feet the priceless gift of love. But since his higher qualities develop, as it would seem, exclusively under the stimulation of human influence, it might have been anticipated, and it is actually the case, that in those countries where the dog is neglected, he is also despised, as by an inevitable reaction it must follow that where he is despised, he will also be neglected. It is accordingly among peoples whose pursuits repel his co-operation that the sinister view prevails, while in hunting and pastoral regions his credit grows as his faculties are cultivated, and from the minister and delegate, he creeps by insensible gradations into the place of canine beatitude as the friend of man. The attitude of repulsion is, as is well known, general amongst Mahometan populations, and may be described—although with notable exceptions, such

as of the ancient Egyptians and Assyrians, the modern Parsees and Japanese—as the Oriental position towards the species; while a benevolent sentiment is, on the whole, characteristic of Western nations.

Now each of these opposite views is strongly and characteristically represented in the Homeric poems; represented not as the mere reflection of a popular instinct, but with a certain ardour of personal feeling which now and again seems for a moment to draw back the veil of epic impersonality from before the living face of the poet. To the bigoted believers in an indivisible Homer the fact is, no doubt, of most perplexing import, and we leave them to account for it as best they may; but to impartial inquirers it affords at once a clue and an illumination. For the Epic of Troy is not more sharply characterised by canine antipathy than the Song of Ulysses by canine sympathy; while, to enhance the contrast, dislike to the dog is most remarkably associated with a vivid and untiring enthusiasm for the horse; and deep feeling for the dog with comparative indifference to the equine race. More effectually than the most elaborate arguments of the Separatists, this innate disparity of sentiment appears to shiver the long contested unity of Homeric authorship.

To descend, however, to particulars. Homeric dogs may be divided into four categories. (1) Dogs used in the chase; (2) shepherds' dogs; (3) watch-dogs and house-dogs; (4) scavenger dogs. In the Iliad, the first two classes occur incidentally only, either by way of illustration or in the course of some episodical narrative, such as that of the Calydonian boar-hunt in the Ninth Book. The plastic circumference of the Shield of Achilles includes a cameo of dog-life; but it is noticeable that the position there assigned to the animal is of a somewhat ignominious character, and is indicated with a perceptible touch of contempt. The scene is depicted in the following lines:

---

Of straight-horn'd cattle too a herd was grav'n;  
Of gold and tin the heifers all were wrought;  
They to the pasture from the cattle-yard,  
With gentle lowings, by a babbling stream,  
Where quiv'ring reed-beds rustled, slowly moved.  
Four golden shepherds walk'd beside the herd,  
By nine swift dogs attended; then amid  
The foremost heifers sprang two lions fierce  
Upon the lordly bull; he, bellowing loud,  
Was dragg'd along, by dogs and youths pursu'd.  
The tough bull's hide they tore, and gorging lapp'd  
Th' intestines and dark blood; with vain attempt  
The herdsmen following closely, to th' attack  
Cheer'd their swift dogs; these shunn'd the lions' jaws,  
And close around them baying, held aloof.[53]

53. *Iliad*, xviii. 573-86 (Lord Derby's translation). For illustrations drawn from the dog's instinctive fear of the lion, see also v. 476; xvii. 65-67.

It can scarcely be maintained that a lover of the species would have selected the incident for typical representation in his great world-picture.

The direct Iliadic references to dogs, on the other hand, show clearly that they were domesticated in Troy, that they lived in the tents of the Achæan chiefs, (probably with a guarding office), and that they roamed the camp, devouring offal, and hideously contending with vultures and other feathered rivals for the human remains left unburied on the field of battle. The circumstance that in this revolting capacity they were predominantly present to the mind of the poet unveils the secret of his profound aversion. Not as the humble and faithful minister of man, hearkening to his voice, hanging on his looks, holding his life at a pin's fee in comparison with his service, the author of the *Iliad* conceived of the dog; but as a filthy and bloodthirsty beast of prey, the foul outrager of the sanctities of death, the ravenous and indiscriminating violator of the precious casket of the human soul. In the tragic appeal of Priam to Hector as he awaits the onslaught of Achilles beneath the walls of Troy, this aversion touches its darkest depth, and obtains an almost savage completeness of expression. Anticipating the imminent catastrophe of his house and kingdom, the despairing old man thus portrays his own approaching doom—

Me last, when by some foeman's stroke or thrust  
The spirit from these feeble limbs is driv'n,  
Insatiate dogs shall tear at my own door;  
The dogs my care has rear'd, my table fed.  
The guardians of my gates shall lap my blood,  
And crave and madden, crouching in the porch.[54]

[54](#). Book xxii. 66-71. (Author.)

Is it credible that the same mind which was capable of conjuring up this abhorrent vision should have conceived the pathetic picture of the faithful hound in the *Odyssey*? Nor can there be found, in the wide range of the great Ilian epic, a single passage inconsistent in spirit with the lines cited above. Throughout its cantos, in which the usefulness of the animal is nevertheless amply recognised, and his peculiarities sketched with graphic power and truthfulness, runs, like a dark thread, the remembrance of his hateful office as the inflictor of the last and most atrocious insult upon 'miserable humanity.'[\[55\]](#) One of the leading 'motives' of the poem is, indeed, the fate of the body after death. The overmastering importance attached to its honourable interment forms the hinge upon which a considerable portion of the action turns. The dread of its desecration continually haunts the imagination of the poet, and broods alike over the ramparts of Ilium and the tents of Greece. From the first lines almost to the last the loathsome processes of canine sepulture stand out as the direst result of defeat—the crowning terror of death. Among the disastrous effects of the wrath of Achilles foreshadowed in the opening invocation, the visible and tangible horror is afforded by 'devouring dogs and hungry vultures' exercising their revolting function on the corpses of the slain; before the dying eyes of Hector rises, like a nightmare, the horrible anticipation of becoming the prey of 'Achæan hounds,'[\[56\]](#) while his fierce adversary refuses to impair the gloomy perfection of his vengeance by remitting that supreme penalty;[\[57\]](#) next to the honours of his funeral-pyre, the chiefest consolation offered to the Shade of Patroclus is the promise to make the body of his slayer food for curs;[\[58\]](#) in her despair, Hecuba shrieks that she brought forth her son to 'glut swift-footed dogs,'[\[59\]](#) and bids Priam not seek to avert the abhorred doom. These instances, which it would be easy to multiply, are unmodified by a solitary expression of tenderness towards canine nature, or a single example of canine affection towards man.

[55.](#) Book xxii. 76.

[56.](#) *Iliad*, xxii. 339.

[57.](#) *Ib.* 348.

[58.](#) *Ib.* xxiii. 183.

[59.](#) *Ib.* xxiv. 211.

It is true that a different view has been advocated by Sir William Geddes, who, in his valuable work, 'The Problem of the Homeric Poems,' first dwelt in detail on the contrasted treatment of the horse and dog in those early epics. He did not, however, stop there. A theory, designed to solve the secular puzzle of Homeric authorship, had presented itself to him, and demanded for its support a somewhat complex marshalling of facts. His contention was briefly this:—that the *Odyssey*, with the ten books of the *Iliad*[\[60\]](#) amputated by Mr. Grote's critical knife from the trunk of a supposed primitive *Achilleid*, are the work of one and the same author, an Ionian of Asia Minor, to whom the venerable name of Homer properly belongs; while the fourteen books constituting the nucleus and main substance of our *Iliad* are abandoned to an unknown Thessalian bard. He has not, indeed, succeeded in engaging on his side the general opinion of the learned, yet it cannot be denied that his ingenious and patient analysis of the Homeric texts has served to develop some highly suggestive minor points. The validity of his main argument obviously depends, in the first place, upon the discovery of striking correspondences between the *Odyssey* and the non-Achillean cantos of the *Iliad*; in the second, upon the exposure of irreconcilable discrepancies between the *Odyssey* and the Grotean *Achilleid*. But the attempt is really hopeless to transplant the canine sympathy manifest in the *Odyssey* to any part of the *Iliad*, or to localise in any particular section of the *Iliad* the equine sympathies displayed throughout the many-coloured tissue of its composition.

[60.](#) These are Books ii. to vii. inclusive, ix. x. xxiii. and xxiv. The *Achilleid* thus consists of Books i. viii. and xi.-xxii.

Everywhere alike enthusiasm for the horse is evoked, vividly and spontaneously, on all suitable occasions. Ardent admiration is uniformly bestowed upon his powers and faculties. He is nowhere passed by with indifference. The verses glow with a kind of rapture of enjoyment that

describe his strength and beauty, his eager spirit and fine nervous organisation, his intelligent and disinterested participation in human struggles and triumphs. In the region of the Iliad claimed for the Odyssean Homer, it suffices to point to the episode of the capture by Diomed and Sthenelus of the divinely-descended steeds of Æneas;[\[61\]](#) to the careful provision of ambrosial forage for the horses of Heré along the shores of Simoeis;[\[62\]](#) to the resplendent simile of Book vi.;[\[63\]](#) to the gleeful zeal with which Odysseus and Diomed secure, as the fruit and crown of their nocturnal expedition, the milk-white coursers of Rhesus;[\[64\]](#) to the living fervour imported into the chariot-race at the funeral games of Patroclus; to the tender pathos with which Achilles describes the grief of his immortal horses for their well-loved charioteer.[\[65\]](#) The enumeration of similar examples from non-Achillean cantos might be carried much further, but where is the use of ‘breaking in an open door’? The evidence is overwhelming as to homogeneity of sentiment, in this important respect, through the entire Iliad. If more than one author was concerned in its production, the coadjutors were at least unanimous in their glowing admiration for the heroic animal of battle.

[61.](#) *Iliad*, v. 267.

[62.](#) *Ib.* 775-77.

[63.](#) This is certainly original in book vi. It comes in as an awkward interpolation at xv. 263.

[64.](#) *Iliad*, x. 474-569.

[65.](#) *Ib.* xxiii. 280-84.

Nor can the search, in the same ten cantos, for indications of a sympathetic feeling towards the dog consonant to that displayed in the Odyssey, be pronounced successful. Certainly much stress cannot be laid, for the purpose, upon the striking passage in the Twenty-third Book, descriptive of the cremation of Patroclus; yet it makes the nearest discoverable approach to the desired significance. It runs as follows in Lord Derby’s translation:

A hundred feet each way they built the pyre,  
And on the summit, sorrowing, laid the dead.  
Then many a sheep and many a slow-pac'd ox  
They flay'd and dress'd around the fun'ral pyre;  
Of all the beasts Achilles took the fat,  
And covered o'er the dead from head to foot,  
And heap'd the slaughter'd carcasses around;  
Then jars of honey plac'd, and fragrant oils,  
Resting upon the couch; next, groaning loud,  
Four pow'rful horses on the pyre he threw;  
Then, of nine[66] dogs that at their master's board  
Had fed, he slaughter'd two upon his pyre;  
Last, with the sword, by evil counsel sway'd,  
Twelve noble youths he slew, the sons of Troy.  
The fire's devouring might he then applied,  
And, groaning, on his lov'd companion call'd.[67]

[66.](#) The number *nine* is curiously associated with the canine species. The herdsmen's pack on the Shield of Achilles consists of *nine*; *nine* were the dogs of Patroclus; and we learn from Mr. Richardson (*Dogs: their Origin and Varieties*, p. 37), that Fingal kept *nine* great dogs, and *nine* smaller game-starting dogs.

[67.](#) *Iliad*, xxiii. 164-78.

These sanguinary rites have been thought to afford proof that canine companionship was necessary to the happiness of a Greek hero in the other world. For, amongst rude peoples, from the Scythians of Herodotus[68] to the Indians of Patagonia, such sacrifices have been a common mode of testifying respect to the dead. And it may readily be admitted that their originally inspiring idea was that of continued association after death with the objects most valued in life. But such an idea appears to have been very remotely, if at all, present to the mind of our poet. The Ghost of Patroclus, at any rate, though sufficiently communicative, expresses no desire for canine, equine, bovine, or ovine society, although specimens of all four species were immolated in its honour. The purpose of Achilles in instituting the ghastly solemnity was, as he himself expressed it,

[68.](#) Book iv. 71, 72.

That with provision meet the dead may pass  
Down to the realms of night.[69]

[69.](#) Geddes, *Problem*, &c., p. 227.

But the motives that crowded upon his fierce soul were probably in truth as multitudinous as the waves of passion which rolled over it. He desired to appease the parted spirit of his friend with a sacrifice matching his own pride and the extent of his bereavement. Still more, he sought to glut his vengeance, and allay, if possible, the intolerable pangs of his grief. He perhaps dimly imaged to himself a pompous funeral throng accompanying the beloved soul even to the gates of Hades, provision for the way being supplied by the flesh of sheep and oxen, an escort by horses and dogs, while an air of gloomy triumph was imparted to the shadowy procession by the hostile presence of outraged and indignant human shades. A similar ceremony was put in practice, by comparison recently, in Lithuania. When the still pagan Grand Duke Gedimin died in 1341, his body was laid on a pyre and burned with two hounds, two falcons, his horse saddled and still living, and a favourite servant.<sup>[70]</sup> But here the disembodied company was altogether friendly, and may have been thought of as willingly paying a last tribute of homage to their lord.

<sup>70</sup>. Hehn and Stallybrass, *Wanderings of Plants and Animals*, p. 417.

The information is in any case worth having that Patroclus, like Priam, kept a number of ‘table-dogs,’ whose presence doubtless contributed in some degree to the stateliness of his surroundings. It is, however, given casually, without a word of comment, as if the bard instinctively shrank from dwelling on the intimate personal relations of the animal to man. The son of Menœtius had a gentle soul, and we cannot doubt, although no hint of such affection is communicated, that he loved his dogs, and was loved by them. Of the horses accustomed to his guidance—the immortal pair of Achilles—we indeed hear how they stood, day after day, with drooping heads and silken manes sweeping the ground, in sorrow for his and their lost friend; but no dog is permitted to whine his sense of bereavement beside the body of Patroclus; no dog misses the vanished caress of his master’s hand; no dog crouches beside Achilles in his solitude, or offers to his unsurpassed grief the dumb and wistful consolation of his sympathy. The privilege of sharing the sorrows, as of winning the applause of humanity, is, in the *Iliad*, reserved exclusively for the equine race.

Turning to the *Odyssey*, we find ourselves in a changed world. Ships have here become the ‘chariots of the sea’;[71] navigation usurps the honour and interest of charioteering; a favourable breeze imparts the cheering sense of companionship felt by a practised rider with his trusty steed. The scenery on shore leaves this sentiment undisturbed. Rocky Ithaca, Telemachus informs Menelaus,[72] contains neither wide tracks for chariot-driving, nor deep meadows for horse-pasture; it is a goat-feeding land, though more beautiful, to his mind, in its ruggedness than even the ‘spacious plain’ of Sparta, with its rich fields of lotus-grass, its sedgy flats, its waving tracts of ‘white barley,’ wheat, and spelt. A suitable habitat is thus, in his native island, wanting for the horse, who is accordingly relegated to an obscure corner of the stage, while the foreground of animal life is occupied by his less imposing rival in the regard of man. The dog is, in fact, the characteristic and conspicuous animal of the *Odyssey*, as the horse is of the *Iliad*. Xanthus and Balius, the wind-begotten steeds bestowed by Poseidon upon the sire of Achilles, who own the sorrowful human gift of tears, and the superhuman gift of prophetic speech, are replaced[73] by the more homely, but not less pathetic, figure of Argus, the dog of Odysseus, whose fidelity through a score of years we feel to be no poetical fiction, but simply a poetical enhancement of a familiar fact. Canine society is, indeed, placed by the author of the *Odyssey* on a higher level than it occupies, perhaps, in any other work of the imagination. When Telemachus, starting into sudden manhood under the tutelage of Athene, goes forth to lay his wrongs before the first Assembly convened in Ithaca since his father’s ‘hollow ships’ sailed for Troy, we are told that he carried in his hand a brazen spear, and that the goddess poured out upon him a divine radiance of beauty such that the people marvelled as they gazed on him. But the most singular and significant part of the description lies in the statement (thrice repeated on similar occasions[74]) that he went ‘not alone; two swift-footed dogs followed him.’ Alone indeed he was, as far as human companionship was concerned—a helpless youth, isolated and indignant in the midst of a riotous and overbearing crew, intent not less upon wasting his substance than upon wooing his unwidowed mother. Comrade or attendant he had none, but instead of both, a pair of four-footed sympathisers, evidently regarded as adding dignity to his appearance in public, as well as imparting

the strengthening consciousness of social support. The conjunction, as Mr. Mahaffy well remarks, shows an intense appreciation of dog-nature.

[71.](#) *Odyssey*, iv. 708; cf. Geddes, *Problem, &c.*, p. 215.

[72.](#) *Odyssey*, iv. 605.

[73.](#) Mahaffy, *Social Life in Greece*, pp. 57, 63.

[74.](#) *Odyssey*, ii. 11; xvii. 62; xx. 145.

In the cottage of Eumæus the swineherd, Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, weary with long wanderings, a stranger in peril of his life in his own islet-kingdom, finds his first hospitable refuge. Here again we are met by graphic and frequent sketches of canine manners and character. In the office of guarding and governing the 960 porkers composing his herd, Eumæus had the aid of four dogs reared by himself. They were large and fierce, ‘like wild beasts’;[\[75\]](#) but the savage instincts even of these half-reclaimed creatures are discovered to be directed towards duty, to be subdued by affection, nay, to be elevated by a touch of supersensual awe. If they erred, it was by excess of zeal in the cause of law and order. For when Odysseus (it must be remembered, in extremely disreputable guise) approached the thorn-hedged enclosure, they set upon him together, barking furiously, and threatening to tear him to pieces on the spot. He had not, however, edged his way between Scylla and Charybdis to perish thus ingloriously. With unflinching presence of mind he instantly took up an attitude of non-resistance, stood still and laid aside his staff. This passivity doubtless produced some hesitation on the part of his assailants, for when the swineherd hurried out to the rescue, he was still unhurt. No small amount of compulsion, both moral and physical—exerted by means of oburgatory remonstrance, coupled with plentiful stone-pelting—was, however, required to calm the ardour of such impetuous allies.

[75.](#) *Odyssey*, xiv. 21.

Nevertheless, their ferocity is represented as far from indiscriminating. It is, in fact, strictly limited by their official responsibilities. They know how to suit their address to their company, from an Olympian denizen to a homeless tramp, and get unexpected opportunities of displaying these social accomplishments. For the rustic dwelling of Eumæus becomes a

rendezvous for the principal personages of the story, and the demeanour of the four dogs is a leading incident, carefully recorded, connected with the arrival of each. We have just seen what an obstreperous reception they gave to the disguised king of Ithaca. Telemachus, on the other hand, they rushed to welcome, fawning and wagging their tails *without barking*,<sup>[76]</sup> as that quick-witted vagrant, whose arrival had preceded his, was the first to observe. But when Athene visited the farm for the purpose of bringing about the recognition of the father by the son, which was the first step towards retribution upon their common enemies, while Telemachus remained unconscious of her presence—'for not to all do the gods manifest themselves openly'—it is said, with a very remarkable coupling of man and beast, that 'Odysseus and the dogs saw her';<sup>[77]</sup> and the mysterious sense of the supernatural attributed in much folk-lore to the canine species found vent in whimperings of fear and panic-stricken withdrawal.

<sup>76.</sup> *Odyssey*, xvi. 4-10.

<sup>77.</sup> *Odyssey*, xvi. 162.

We are next transported to the scene of the revellings of the Suitors, and the fortitude of Penelope. The sight of the once familiar turreted enclosure of his palace, and the sound of the well-remembered voice and lyre of the minstrel Phemius, proclaiming the progress of the festivities, all but overturned the equanimity of the counterfeit mendicant. His practised powers of dissimulation, however, came to his aid; and grasping the hand of his unsuspecting retainer, he brought, with a cunningly devised speech, his tell-tale emotion into harmony with his assumed character. They advanced to the threshold, and there, on a dung-heap, half devoured with insect parasites, lay a dog—the dog Argus. But we must allow the poet to tell the story in his own way.

Thus as they spake, a dog that lay apart,  
 Lifted his head, and pricked his list'ning ears,  
 Argus, whom erst Odysseus patient bred,  
 But use of him had none; for ere that day,  
 He sailed for sacred Troy; and other men  
 Had trained and led him forth o'er field and fell,  
 To chase wild goats, hares, and the pricket deer.  
 But now, his master gone, in foul neglect,  
 On dung of ox and mule he made his couch;  
 Fattening manure, heaped at the palace-gate,  
 Till spread to enrich Odysseus' wide domain;  
 Thus stretched, with vermin swarming, Argus lay.  
 But when he saw Odysseus close approach,  
 He knew, and wagged his tail, and dropped his ears,  
 Yet could not rise to fawn upon his lord,  
 Who paused, and stood, and brushed aside a tear,  
 Hiding his grief. Then thus with crafty speech:  
 'Eumæus, sure 'tis wonder in such plight  
 To see this dog, of goodly form and limbs;  
 But tell me did his fleetness match his shape,  
 Or was he such as, reared for pride and show,  
 Inactive at their masters' tables feed?'  
 Eumæus heard, and quickly made reply:  
 'To one who perished in a distant land  
 This dog belongs. But couldst thou see him now  
 Such as Odysseus left him, bound for Troy,  
 Thou well might'st wonder at his strength and speed.  
 'Mid the deep thickets of the forest glades,  
 No game escaped his swift pursuing feet,  
 Nor hound could match his prowess in the chace.  
 But now his days are evil, since his lord  
 Is dead, and careless women heed him not.  
 For when the master's hand no longer rules,  
 Servants no longer work in order due.  
 Full half the virtue leaves the man condemned  
 By wide-eyed Zeus to drag the servile chain.'  
 Thus as he spake, he crossed the stately hall,  
 And took his place amidst the suitors' train.  
 But Argus died; for dark doom ravished him,  
 Greeting Odysseus after twenty years.[\[78\]](#)

[78.](#) *Odyssey*, xvii. 290-327 (Author's translation).

Surely—even thus inadequately rendered—the most poignantly pathetic narrative of dog-life in literature! The hero, returning after a generation of absence, in a disguise impenetrable to son, servants, nay to the wife of his bosom, is recognised by one solitary living creature, a dog. And to this faithful animal, unforgetting in his forlorn decrepitude, whose affectionate

gestures form his only welcome to the home now occupied by unscrupulous foes, ready to take his life at the first hint of his identity, he is obliged to refuse a stroke of his hand, or so much as a glance of his eye, to soothe the fatal spasm of his joy. A case that might well draw a tear, even from the much-enduring son of Laertes.

It has not escaped the acumen of Sir William Geddes[79] that the compliment of an individual name is, in the *Iliad*, paid exclusively amongst the brute creation to horses; in the *Odyssey* (setting aside the mythical coursers of the Dawn, Book xxiii. 246) to a single dog. Now this may at first sight seem to be a trifling point; but a very little consideration will suffice to show its significance. To the author of the *Odyssey*, at least, the imposition, or even the disclosure of a name, was a matter clothed with a certain solemn importance. He lets us know how and why his hero came to be called ‘Odysseus,’ and furnishes us, to the best of his ability, with an etymological interpretation of that ill-omened title.[80] How distinctively human a thing it is to have a name we are made to feel when Alcinous conjures his mysterious guest to reveal the designation by which he is known to his parents, fellow-citizens, and countrymen, ‘since no man, good or bad, is anonymous’![81] And the reply is couched in an earnest and exalted strain, conveying at once the extent of the trust reposed, and the momentousness of the revelation granted—

[79.](#) *Problem of the Homeric Poems*, p. 218.

[80.](#) *Odyssey*, xix. 409.

[81.](#) *Ib.* viii. 552.

Ulysses, from Laertes sprung, am I,  
Vers'd in the wiles of men, and fam'd afar.[82]

[82.](#) *Ib.* ix. 19, 20.

The same scene, thrown into a grotesque form, is repeated in the cave of Polyphemus, where the upshot of the adventure depends wholly upon the prudence of the storm-tossed chieftain in responding to the monster’s vinous enthusiasm with the mock disclosure of a *no-name*.

These illustrations help to make it plain that, in assigning to brutes individual appellations, we bestow upon them something essentially human, which they have not, and cannot have of themselves, but which marks their share in human interests, and their claim on human sympathy. So accurately is this true, that a table showing the relative frequency of individual nomenclature for different animals in various countries would assuredly, on the strength of that fact alone, set forth their relative position in the estimation of man.

The dog Argus belonged presumably to the famous Molossian breed, the first specimen of which was fabled to have been cast in bronze by Hephæstus,<sup>[83]</sup> and presented by Jupiter to Cephalus, the eponymous ruler of the island of Cephallenia. These animals were not more remarkable for fierceness than for fidelity. To the race were assigned creatures of such evil mythological reputation as the voracious hound of Hades, and the barking pack of Scylla; a Molossian sent to Alexander was stated to have brought down a lion; while, on the other hand, the canine detective of Montargis had a rival in the army of Pyrrhus, whose funeral pile was signalled by a desperate act of canine self-immolation; and the dog of Eupolis (likewise a Molossian), after having torn to pieces a thieving servant, died of grief and voluntary starvation on the grave of the Æginetan poet.<sup>[84]</sup> These qualities are presented and perpetuated in the four dogs of Eumæus and the neglected hound of Odysseus.

<sup>83</sup>. From this legend the poet not improbably derived the idea of the gold and silver watch-dogs, framed by Hephæstus for Alcinous. *Odyssey*, vii. 91-94.

<sup>84</sup>. Ælian, *De Natura Animalium*, vii. 10; x. 41.

The Homeric poems ignore the varieties of the species—

Mastiff, greyhound, mongrel grim,  
Hound or spaniel, brach or lym,  
Or bobtail tike, or trundle-tail.

A dog is simply a dog, as a horse is a horse. But individual horses are in the Iliad distinguished by differences of colour, while no colour-epithet is anywhere applied to a dog. It is probable, however, that in the shepherd-dogs of Albania an almost perfect reproduction of the animals dear to the

poet is still to be found. For in that wild and mountainous region the Chaonian or Molossian race is said to survive undegenerate, and, judging by the reports of travellers, its modern representatives preserve the same vigilance in duty and alacrity in attack which distinguished the formidable band of the Odyssean swineherd. An English explorer, who had some serious encounters with them, has described these fierce pastoral guardians as ‘varying in colour from dark-brown to bright dun, their long fur being very soft, thick, and glossy. In size they are equal to an English mastiff. They have a long nose, delicate ears finely pointed, magnificent tail, legs of a moderate length, with a body nicely rounded and compact.’<sup>[85]</sup> It is added that they still possess the strength, swiftness, sagacity, and fidelity anciently ascribed to them, showing their pedigree to be probably unimpaired.

<sup>85.</sup> Hughes, *Travels in Albania*, vol. i. p. 483.

The Suliot dog, or German boar-hound, comes from the same region, and has also strong claims to the honours of Molossian descent. Some of the breed were employed by the Turkish soldiery in the earlier part of this century, to guard their outposts against Austrian attacks; and one captured specimen, presented to the King of Naples, was reputed to be the largest dog in existence.<sup>[86]</sup> Measuring nearly four feet from the shoulder to the ground, he in fact rivalled the dimensions of a Shetland pony. Others were secured as regimental pets, and used to make a grand show in Brussels, marching with their respective corps to the blare of martial music. They were fierce-natured animals, rough-coated, and coarsely formed; mostly tan-coloured, but with blackish markings on the back, shoulders, and round the ears. Tan-coloured, too, was probably the immortal Argus; and we can further picture him, on the assumption that the modern races west of Pindus reproduce many features of his aspect, as a wolf-like hound, with a bushy tail, small, sensitive ears, and a glance at once eager, intelligent, and wistful. Drooping ears in dogs are, it may be remarked, a result of domestication; and varieties distinguished by them were unknown in Europe until Alexander the Great introduced from Asia some specimens of the mastiff kind. Consequently, Shakespeare’s description of the pack of Theseus—

With ears that sweep away the morning dew,

is one among many examples of his genial disregard for archæological detail. Argus, then, resembled 'White-breasted Bran,' the dog of Fingal, in his possession of 'an ear like a leaf.'

It is not too much to say that the opposed sentiments concerning the relations of men with animals displayed in the Iliad and Odyssey suffice in themselves to establish their diversity of origin. For they render it psychologically impossible that they could have been the work of one individual. The varying *prominence* assigned respectively to the horse and the dog might, it is true, be plausibly accounted for by the diversified conditions of the two epics; but no shifting of scene can explain a *reversal* of sympathies. Such sentiments form part of the ingrained structure of the mind. They take root before consciousness is awake, or memory active; they live through the decades of a man's life; are transported with him from shore to shore; survive the enthusiasm of friendship and the illusions of ambition; they can no more be eradicated from the tenor of his thoughts than the type of his features can be changed from Tartar to Caucasian, or the colour of his eyes from black to blue.

After all, the difficulty of separating the origin of these stupendous productions is considerably diminished by the reflection that they are but the surviving members of an extensive group of poems, all originally attributed without discrimination to a single author. Not the Iliad and Odyssey alone, but the 'Cypria,' the 'Æthiopis,' the 'Lesser Iliad,' and other voluminous metrical compositions, were, in the old, uncritical, individual sense, 'Homeric.' So apt is Fame to make

A testament  
As worldlings do, giving the sum of more  
To that which had too much.

The depreciatory tone of the query, 'What's in a name?' should not lead us to undervalue that indispensable requisite to sustained and specialised existence. A name is, indeed, a power in itself. It serves, at the least, as a

peg to hang a personality upon, and not the most 'powerful rhyme' can sustain a reputation apart from its humble aid. But the bard of Odysseus has long ceased to possess one. His only appellation must remain for all time that of his hero in the Cyclops' cave. The jealous Muses have blotted him out from memory. We can only be sure that he was a man who, like the protagonist of his immortal poem, had known, and seen, and suffered many things, who had tears for the past, and hopes for the future, had roamed far and near with a 'hungry heart,' and had listened long and intently to the 'many voices' of the moaning sea; who had tried his fellow-men, and found them, not all, nor everywhere wanting; who had faith in the justice of Heaven and the constancy of woman; who had experienced and had not disdained to cherish in his heart the life-long fidelity of a dog.



## CHAPTER IV.

### HOMERIC HORSES.

THE greater part of the Continent of Europe, including Britain, not then, perhaps, insulated by a 'silver streak,' was prehistorically overrun with shaggy ponies, large-headed and heavily-built, but shown by their short, pointed ears and brush-tails to have been genuine *horses*, exempt from leanings towards the asinine branch of the family. This, indeed, would be a hazardous statement to make upon the sole evidence of the fragmentary piles of these animals' bones preserved in caves and mounds; since even a complete skeleton could tell the most experienced anatomist nothing as to the shape of their ears or the growth of hair upon their tails. We happen, however, to be in possession of their portraits. For the men of that time had artistic instincts, and drew with force and freedom whatever seemed to them worthy of imitation; and among their few subjects the contemporary wild horse was fortunately included. With his outward aspect, then, we are, through the medium of these diluvial *graffiti*, on bone-surfaces and stags' antlers, thoroughly familiar.

It was that of a sturdy brute, thirteen or fourteen hands high, not ill represented, on a reduced scale, by the Shetland ponies of our own time, but untamed, and, it might have been thought, untameable. The race had not then found its true vocation. Man was enabled, by his superior intelligence, to make it his prey, but had not yet reached the higher point of enlisting its matchless qualities in his service. Horses were, accordingly, neither ridden nor driven, but hunted and eaten. Piles of bones still attest the hippophagous habits of the 'stone-men.' At Solutré, near Mâcon, a veritable equine

Golgotha has been excavated; similar accumulations were found in the recesses of Monte Pellegrino in Sicily; and Sir Richard Owen made the curious remark that, evidently through gastronomic selection, the osseous remains of colts and fillies vastly predominated, in the débris from the cave of Bruniquel, over those of full-grown horses. [87]

[87.](#) *Phil. Trans.* 1869, p. 535.

The descent of our existing horses from the cave-animals is doubtful, Eastern importations having at any rate greatly improved and modified the breed. Wild horses, indeed, still at the end of the sixteenth century roamed the slopes of the Vosges, and were hunted as game in Poland and Lithuania; [88] but they may have been *muzins*, or runaways, like the mustangs on the American prairies. Nowadays, certainly, the animal is found in a state of aboriginal freedom nowhere save on the steppes of Central Asia, in the primitive home of the race. There, in all likelihood, the noblest of brute-forms was brought to perfection; there it was dominated by man; and thence equestrian arts, with their manifold results for civilisation, were propagated among the nations of the world. They were taught to the Egyptians, it would seem, by their shepherd conquerors, but were not learned by the Arabs until a couple of millenniums later, the Arab contingent in Xerxes' army having been a 'camel-corps.' The Persians, indeed, early picked up the habit of riding from the example of their Tartar neighbours; yet that it was no original Aryan accomplishment, the absence of a common Aryan word to express the idea sufficiently shows. The relations of our primitive ancestors with the animal had, at the most, reached what might be called the second, or Scythian stage, when droves of half-wild horses took the place of cattle, and mares' milk was an important article of food. The aboriginal cavalry of the desert belonged, on the other hand, to the wide kinship of Attila's Huns, who, separated from their steeds, were as helpless as swans on shore. The war-chariot, however, was an Assyrian invention, dating back at least to the seventeenth century B.C. It quickly reached Egypt on one side, India on the other, and was adopted, some time before the Dorian invasion, by the Achæans of the Peloponnesus. Mycenæan grave-stones of about the twelfth century are engraven with battle and hunting scenes, the actors in which are borne along in vehicles of essentially the same construction with those brought before us in the *Iliad*. They show scarcely any variation from the

simple model developed on the banks of the Tigris; yet there was no direct imitation. Homer was profoundly unconscious of Ninevite splendours. He had no inkling of the existence of a great Mesopotamian monarchy far away to the East, beyond the rising-places of the sun, where one branch of his dichotomised Ethiopians dwelt in peace. Nevertheless, the life that he knew, and that was glorified by him, was touched with many influences from this unknown land. If some of them filtered through Egypt on their way, acquaintance with the art of charioteering certainly took a less circuitous route. For the third horse of the original Assyrian team was never introduced into Egypt, and was early discarded in Assyria itself. He figures continually, however, in Homeric engagements, running, loosely attached, beside the regularly yoked pair, one of whom he was destined to replace in case of emergency. The presence, then, of this ‘silly,’ or roped horse,<sup>[89]</sup> *παρήγορος ἵππος*, demonstrates both the high antiquity, and the Anatolian negotiation, of the loan which included him.

<sup>88.</sup> Hehn and Stallybrass, *Wanderings of Plants and Animals*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>89.</sup> The word ‘silly’ thus applied is evidently cognate with the German *Seile* = Greek *σειρὰ*, a rope, from the root *swar*, to tie. So in the *Ancient Mariner*, the ‘silly buckets on the deck’ are the buckets attached to a rope. Similarly, the third horse was sometimes called by the Greeks *σειραφόρος*, ‘drawing by a rope.’

The fertile plains of Babylonia probably furnished the equine supplies of Egypt and Asia Minor during some centuries before the Nisæan stock,<sup>[90]</sup> cultivated in Media, acquired its Hellenic reputation. So far as can be judged from ancient vase-paintings, the horses of Achilles and Hector were of pure Oriental type. They owned the same points of breeding—the small heads, slender yet muscular legs, and high-arching necks, the same eager eye and proud bearing, characterising the steeds that shared the triumphs of Asurbanipal and Shalmaneser. The same quasi-heroic position, too, belonged to the horse in the camp before Troy and at Nineveh. He shared, in both scenes of action, only the nobler pursuits of man, and was exempt from the drudgery of servile work. The beasts of burden, alike of the Iliad and of the sculptures of Khorsabad and Kouyunjik, were mules and oxen, not horses. Equine co-operation was reserved for war and the chase—for war alone, indeed, by the Homeric Greeks, who appear always to have hunted on foot. This was inevitable. Modes of conveyance, were they drawn

by Sleipnir or Areion, would have been an encumbrance in pursuing game through the thickets of Parnassus, or over the broken skirts of Mount Ida.

[90](#). Blakesley's *Herodotus*, iii. 106.

Only the chief Greek and Trojan leaders rode in chariots. Their possession was a mark of distinction, and conferred the power of swift locomotion, but was otherwise of no military use. Their owners alighted from them for the serious business of fighting, although glad, if worsted or disabled, to fall back upon the utmost speed of their horses to carry them out of reach of their foes. This fashion of warfare, however, had completely disappeared from Greece proper before the historic era. Only in Cyprus, chariots are heard of among the paraphernalia of battle in 498 B.C.[\[91\]](#) None figured at Marathon or Mantinea; brigades of mounted men had taken their place. Cavalry, on the other hand, had no share in the engagements before Troy.

[91](#). *Herodotus*, v. 113.

The definiteness of intention with which Homeric epithets were bestowed is strikingly evident in the distribution of those relating to equestrian pursuits. That they have no place worth mentioning in the *Odyssey*, readers of our last chapter will be prepared to hear; nor are they sprinkled at random through the *Iliad*. Thus, while the Trojans collectively are frequently called 'horse-tamers,' *hippodamoi*—a designation still appropriate to the dwellers round Hissarlik—the Greeks collectively are never so described.[\[92\]](#) They could not have been, in fact, without some degree of incongruity. For many of them, being of insular origin and maritime habits, knew as much about hippogriffs as about horses, unless it were the white-crested ones ruled by Poseidon. And the poet's close instinctive regard to such distinctions appears in the remarkable circumstance that Odysseus and Ajax Telamon, islanders both, are the only heroes of the first rank who invariably combat on foot.

[92](#). Mure, *Literature of Ancient Greece*, vol. ii. p. 87.

The individual Greek warriors singled out for praise as 'horse-tamers' are only two—Thrasymedes and Diomed. The choice had, in each case, readily discernible motives. Thrasymedes was a son of Nestor; and Nestor, through

his father Peleus, was sprung from Poseidon, the creator and patron of the horse. This mythical association resulted from a natural sequence of ideas. The absence of the horse from the 'glist'ring zodiac' is one of many proofs of his strangeness to Eastern mythology; but the neglect was compensated in the West. His position in Greek folk-lore, according to Dr. Milchhöfer, [93] indicates a primitive confusion of thought between winds and waves as cause and effect, or rather, perhaps, tells of the transference to the sea of the cloud-fancies of an inland people. However this be, horse-headed monsters are extremely prevalent on the archaic engraved stones found numerously in the Peloponnesus and the islands of the Ægean; and these monsters—winged, and with birds' legs—represent, it would seem, the original harpy-form in which early Greek imagination embodied the storm-winds—

[93]. *Die Anfänge der Kunst in Griechenland*, pp. 58-61.

Boreas and Cæcias and Argestes loud—  
Eurus and Zephyr with their lateral noise,  
Sirocco and Libeccio.

The horse-headed Demeter, too, was one of the Erinyes, under-world dæmonic beings of windy origin, merging indeed into the Harpies. The Homeric Harpy Podarge, mother of the immortal steeds of Achilles, was, moreover, of scarcely disguised equine nature; while the colts of Erichthonius had Boreas for their sire.

These, o'er the teeming cornfields as they flew,  
Skimm'd o'er the standing ears, nor broke the haulm,  
And, o'er wide Ocean's bosom as they flew,  
Skimm'd o'er the topmost spray of th' hoary sea.[94]

[94]. *Iliad*, xx. 226-29 (Lord Derby's translation).

So Æneas related to Achilles; not perhaps without some touch of metaphor.

The figure of speech by which the swiftest of known animals was likened to a rushing tempest, lay ready at hand; and a figure of speech is apt to be treated as a statement of fact by men who have not yet learned to make fine distinctions. Upon this particular one as a basis, a good deal of fable was built. The northern legends, for instance, of the Wild Huntsman, and of the rides of the blustering Odin upon an eight-legged charger equally at home

on land and on sea; besides the story of the strong horse Svadilfaxi, personifying the North Wind, who helped his master, the icy Scandinavian winter, to build the castle of the Asar. The same obvious similitude was carried out, by southern imaginations, in the subjection of the horse to the established ruler of winds and waves, who is even qualified by the characteristically equine epithet ‘dark-maned’ (κυανοχαίτης.)<sup>[95]</sup> The attribution, however, to Poseidon of a more or less equine nature may have been immediately suggested by the resemblance, palpable to unsophisticated folk, of his crested billows to the impetuous advance of galloping steeds, whose flowing manes and curving lineaments of changeful movement seemed to reproduce the tossing spray and thunderous charge of the ‘earth-shaking’ element.

<sup>95</sup>. Cf. Geddes, *Problem of the Homeric Poems*, p. 207.

In the Thirteenth Iliad, the closeness of this relationship is naïvely brought into view. The occasion was a pressing one. Nothing less was contemplated than the affording of surreptitious divine aid to the hard-pressed Achæan host; and the ‘shining eyes’ of Zeus, whose interdict was still in full force, might at any moment revert from the Thracians and Hippomolgi to the less virtuous Greeks and Trojans. Everything, then, depended upon promptitude, and Poseidon accordingly, in the absence of his consort Amphitrite, did not disdain to act as his own groom. Himself he harnessed to his brazen car the ‘bronze-hoofed’ coursers stabled beneath the sea at Ægæ; himself wielded the golden scourge with which he urged their rapid passage, amid the damp homage of dutiful but dripping sea-monsters, to a submarine recess between Tenedos and Imbros:

And the sea’s face was parted with a smile,  
And rapidly the horses sped the while.<sup>[96]</sup>

There he himself provided ambrosial forage for their support during his absence on the battle-field, taking the precaution, before his departure, of attaching infrangible golden shackles to the agile feet that might else have been tempted to stray. Yet all this pains was taken for the mere sake of what must be called ‘swagger.’ Poseidon, calmly seated on the Samothracian height, was already within full view of the plain and towers of Ilium, when

Sudden at last  
He rose, and swiftly down the steep he passed,  
The mountain trembled with each step he took,  
The forest with the quaking mountain shook.  
Three strides he made, and with the fourth he stood  
At Ægæ, where is founded 'neath the flood  
His hall of glorious gold that cannot fade.[97]

And the journey westward was deliberately made for the purpose of fetching an equipage which proved rather an embarrassment than an assistance to him. 'But for the honour of the thing,' as an Irishman remarked of his jaunt in a bottomless sedan-chair, he 'might just as well have walked.'

[96.](#) *Iliad*, xiii. 29, 30. (Translation by R. Garnett, *Universal Review*, vol. v.)

[97.](#) *Ib.* xiii. 17-22.

Not without reason, then, was equestrian skill associated with Poseidonian lineage. Nestor himself was an enthusiastic horse-lover; yet the Pylian breed was none of the best; and he anxiously warned his son Antilochus, preparatory to the starting of the chariot-race commemorative of Patroclus, that he must supply by finesse for the slowness of his team. Poseidon himself, he reminded him, had been his instructor; and no less, it may be presumed, of his brother Thrasymedes, whose feats in this direction, however, are summed up in the laudatory expression bestowed on him in common with Diomed.

The connoisseurship of this latter, on the contrary, is perpetually in evidence. As king of 'horse-feeding Argos,' he knew and prized what was best in horseflesh, and counted no risk too great for the purpose of securing it. His brilliant success accordingly, in the capture of famous steeds, rendered the original inferiority of his own a matter of indifference. It served, indeed, only to quicken his zeal to replace them by force or fraud with better. And it fell out most opportunely that, just at the conjuncture when the protection of Athene rendered him irresistible, Æneas, temporarily allied with the Lycian archer Pandarus, undertook the hopeless task of staying his victorious career. The Dardanian hero was driving a matchless team, 'the best under the dawn or the sun'; and he found leisure, notwithstanding the celerity of their onset, to extol their qualities to his

companion, while Diomed recited the to him familiar tale of their pedigree to his charioteer, Sthenelus. They were of the race of those with which the ransom of Ganymede had been paid by Zeus to Tros, King of Phrygia, his father, and were hence known distinctively as *Trojan* horses. Their possession was regarded as of inestimable importance.

That was the day of glory of the son of Tydeus, whom 'Pallas Athene did not permit to tremble.' Destiny waited on his desires. His spear sent Pandarus to the shades; Æneas was barely rescued by the maternal intervention of Aphrodite, who came off by no means scatheless from the adventure. Above all, the Dardanian 'messengers of terror' were led in triumph across to the Achæan camp. They did not remain there idle. On the following day, Nestor was invited to admire their paces, as they carried him and their new master beyond the reach of Hector's fury, the fortune of war having by that time effectively changed sides. Their subsequent victory in the Patroclean chariot-race was a foregone conclusion. For their Olympian connexions would have made their defeat by clover-cropping animals of ordinary lineage appear a gross anomaly; and the horses of Achilles, as being immortal and invincible, were expressly excluded from the competition.

The night-adventure of Diomed and Odysseus, narrated in the Tenth Iliad, is unmistakably an after-thought and interlude. To what precedes it is in part irrelevant; with what follows it is wholly unconnected; nor is it logically complete in itself. The interpolation is, none the less, of respectable antiquity, going back certainly to the eighth century B.C.; it has high merits of its own, and could ill be spared from the body of what it is convenient to call Homeric poetry. Its admission, to be sure, crowds into one night performances enough to occupy several, but this superfluity of business scarcely troubles any genially disposed reader; nor need he grudge Odysseus the three suppers—one of them perhaps better described as a breakfast—amply earned by his indefatigable services in the epic cause, and counterbalanced by many subsequent privations. The point, however, to be specially noted by us here, is that in the 'Doloneia'—as the tenth book is designated—equestrian interests, its extraneous origin notwithstanding, are paramount.

The opening situation is that magnificently described at the close of the eighth book, when the ‘dark-ribbed ships’ by the Hellespont seemed to cower before the menacing camp-fires of the victorious Trojans. Indeed, most of those who lay in their shadow would gladly have grasped, before it was too late, at the means of escape they offered. Agamemnon’s fluctuating mind, too, might easily have been brought to that inglorious decision; but for the moment, he relieved his restless anxiety by hastily summoning to a nocturnal council a few of the most prominent Achæan chiefs. The somewhat inadequate result of their deliberations was the despatch of a scouting party to the Trojan quarters, Diomed and Odysseus being inevitably chosen for the discharge of the perilous office—inevitably, since in the legend of Troy, these two are again and again coupled in the performance of venturesome, if not questionable, exploits.[98] They had sallied forth unarmed on the sudden summons of the ‘king of men,’ but collected from the sympathetic bystanders a scratch-lot of weapons; and Meriones lent to Odysseus for the emergency a peculiar head-piece of leather lined with felt, and strengthened with rows of boars’ teeth,[99] the like of which, judging from the profusion of sliced tusks met with in Mycenæan graves, was probably familiar of old in the Peloponnesus.

[98.](#) Preller, *Griechische Mythologie*, Bd. ii. p. 405, 3te Auflage.

[99.](#) *Iliad*, x. 261-71.

It was pitch dark as the adventurers traversed the marshy land about the Simoeis; but the rise, with heavy wing-flappings, of a startled heron on their right, dispelled their misgivings, and evoked their pious rejoicings at the assurance it afforded of Athene’s protection. Their next encounter was with Hector’s emissary, the luckless Dolon, a poor creature beyond doubt, vain, feather-headed, unstable, pusillanimous, yet piteous to us even now in the sanguine loquacity that merged into a death-shriek as the fierce blade of Diomed severed the tendons of his throat. He had served his purpose, and was contemptuously, nay treacherously, dismissed from life. But the temptation suggested by him was irresistible. Instincts of cupidity, keen in both heroes, had been fully roused by his account of the splendid and unguarded equipment of the newly-arrived leader of a Thracian contingent to the Trojan army. As he told them:

King Rhesus, Eionëus' son, commands them, who hath steeds,  
More white than snow, huge, and well shaped; their fiery pace exceeds  
The winds in swiftness; these I saw, his chariot is with gold  
And pallid silver richly framed, and wondrous to behold;  
His great and golden armour is not fit a man should wear,  
But for immortal shoulders framed.[100]

[100.](#) *Iliad*, x. 435-41 (Chapman's trans.).

Now Odysseus and Diomed both loved plunder; each in his own way was of a reckless and dare-devil disposition; and one at any rate was a passionate admirer of equine beauty. They accordingly did not hesitate to follow up Dolon's indications, which proved quite accurate. The followers of Rhesus were weary from their recent journey; Diomed had no difficulty in slaying a dozen of them in ranks as they slept, and so reaching the king, whose premonitory nightmare of destruction was abruptly dissolved by its realisation. The coveted horses tethered alongside having been meanwhile secured by Odysseus, swiftly conveyed the exultant raiders back to the Achæan ships.

But in what manner? On their backs or drawn behind them in the glittering Thracian chariot? Opinions are divided. Euripides assumed that the latter formed part of the booty,[101] yet the Homeric expressions rather imply that it was left *in statu quo*. They are not, on the other hand, easily reconciled with the supposition of an escape on horseback from the scene of carnage. This, none the less, was almost certainly what the poet meant to convey, and his unfamiliarity with the art of riding was doubtless the cause of his conveying it badly.[102] Homeric heroes, as a rule infringed only by this one exception, never mounted their steeds; they used them solely in light draught. Equitation was indeed known of as a branch in which special skill might be acquired; but for the ignoble purpose of popular, perhaps venal, display. Thus the performance of leaping from one to the other of four galloping horses, brought in to illustrate the agility with which Ajax strode from deck to deck of the menaced Thessalian ships,[103] excites indeed astonishment, but astonishment of the inferior kind raised by the feats of a clown or a circus-rider. The passage has found a curious commentary in a faded painting on a wall of the ancient palace at Tiryns, representing an acrobat springing on the back of a rushing bull.[104] He is

unmistakably a specimen of the class of performer to which the nimble equestrian of the Iliad belonged.

[101.](#) *Rhesos*, 797.

[102.](#) Eysenhardt, *Jahrbuch für Philologie*, Bd. cix. p. 598; Ameis's *Iliad*, Heft iv. p. 38.

[103.](#) *Iliad*, xv. 679.

[104.](#) Schuchhardt and Sellers, *Schliemann's Excavations*, p. 119.

The animated story of the Doloneia, however, originated most likely in a primitive nature-parable, symbolising, in one of its innumerable forms, the ever-renewed struggle of darkness with light. The prize carried off by Diomed and Odysseus was, this being so, nothing less than the equipage of the sun; yet the solar horses are, mythologically, scarcely separable from the vehicle attached to them. Our bard, it is true, being wholly intent upon the concrete aspect of the tale he had to tell, felt no incongruity in the disjunction; and he certainly took no pains to perpetuate the traditional shape of his materials. Unconsciously, however, he has allowed some vestiges of solar relationships to survive among the less fortunate actors in his little drama. They can be traced in the wrath of Apollo at the exploit achieved, while he was off his guard, through the assistance of the predatory Athene; [\[105\]](#) and perhaps in the costume of Dolon, who clothed himself, we are told, for his disastrous expedition in 'the skin of a grey wolf.' Now the wolf became early entangled, in Aryan folk-lore, with luminous associations. At first, possibly through contrast and antagonism, exemplified in the hostile pursuit, by the Scandinavian animal, of the sun and moon; later, through capricious identification. The lupine connexions of the Hellenic Apollo may be thus explained. They were, at any rate, strongly accentuated; and Dolon wore, in some sense, albeit ignobly, 'the livery of the burnished sun.'

[105.](#) It is worth notice that in the Euripidean tragedy *Rhesos*, 'Phœbos' is the watchword for that night.

Manifestly solar, on the other hand, are the snowy horses from across the Hellespont. Nestor, who, characteristically enough, first caught the sound of their galloping approach to the Greek outposts, demanded of their captors in amazement:

How have you made this horse your prize? Pierced you the dangerous host,  
Where such gems stand? Or did some god your high attempts accost,  
And honoured you with this reward? Why, they be like the rays  
The sun effuseth.[106]

[106.](#) *Iliad*, x. 545-47 (Chapman's trans.).

The Thracian pair, moreover, are the only *white* horses mentioned in the *Iliad*. All the rest were chestnut, bay, or brown. One of those reft from Æneas by Diomed, was sorrel, with a white crescent on the forehead;[107] Achilles, or Patroclus for him, drove a chestnut and a piebald; a pair of rufous bays drew the chariot of Asius. No black horse appears on the scene; nor can we be sure that the 'dark-maned,' mythical Areion was really understood to be of sable tint. Admiration for white horses was not spontaneous among the Greeks. It sprang up in the East as a consequence of their figurative association with the sun. The Iranian fable of the solar chariot drawn by spotless coursers, carried everywhere with it, in its diffusion west, south, and north, an imaginative impression of the sacredness of such animals.[108] They were chosen out for the Magian sacrifices;[109] they were tended in Scandinavian temple-enclosures, and their neighings oracularly interpreted;[110] a white horse was dubiously reported by Strabo to be periodically immolated by the Veneti in commemoration of Diomed's fabulous sovereignty over the Adriatic;[111] and it became a recognised mythological principle that superhuman beings should be, like the Wild Huntsman of the Black Forest, *Schimmelreiter*. 'White as snow' were the steeds of the Great Twin Brethren; white as snow the 'horse with the terrible rider' in Raphael's presentation of the Vision that vindicated the sanctity of the Jewish Temple; Odin thundered over the mountain-tops on a pallid courser; and it was deemed scandalous presumption in Camillus to have his triumphal chariot drawn to the Capitol after the fall of Veii by a milk-white team, fit only for the transport of an immortal god.

[107.](#) *Ib.* xxiii. 454.

[108.](#) Hehn and Stallybrass, *Wanderings of Plants and Animals*, pp. 53-54.

[109.](#) *Herodotus*, vii. 114.

[110.](#) Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, p. 49.

[111.](#) *Geography*, lib. v. cap. i. sect. 9.

Such, too, were the horses of Rhesus; and their evanescent appearance in Homeric narrative tallies with their unsubstantial nature. They sink into complete oblivion after the scene of their nocturnal abduction. Their quondam master could lay claim to scarcely a more solid core of existence. Euripides' account of his parentage is that he was the son of the River Strymon and of the muse Terpsichore; which, being interpreted, means that he personified a local stream.[\[112\]](#) He obtained, however, posthumous reputation and honours, as a prophet at Amphipolis, as a rider and hunter at Rhodope.

[112.](#) Preller, *Griech. Myth.* Bd. ii. p. 428.

The relations of men and horses are, in every part of the Iliad, systematically regulated and consistently maintained. There is nothing casual about them. Thus, Paris's lack of a conveyance serves to emphasise his inferiority in the field. He was a craven at close quarters, though formidable as a bow-man, despatching his arrows from the safe shelter of the ranks. For the adventurous sallies rendered possible only by the aid of fleet steeds, he had neither taste nor aptitude.

Hector, on the contrary, was distinguished above all other Homeric warriors by driving four horses abreast—above all Homeric gods and goddesses even, since Poseidon himself, Ares, Heré, and Eos, were content each with a pair. In their case, however, the seeming deficiency was a point of real superiority. For no more than two horses can have been in effective employment in drawing Hector's chariot, the remaining two being held in reserve against accidents. But Olympian coursers were presumably exempt from mortal casualties, and there was hence no need to provide for the emergency of their disablement. Critics, nevertheless, of the ultra-strict school, taking offence at the unexpected introduction of a four-in-hand, have proclaimed the entire enshrining passage spurious. Perhaps on insufficient grounds; yet as to this there may be two opinions; there can be only one as to its being stirring and splendid.

The formal introduction of the only horses on the Trojan side dignified with proper names, makes an impressive exordium to the lay of Trojan victory after Diomed's audacious resistance had been turned to flight by the

thunder-bolt of Zeus. Hector's fiery incitements were addressed no less earnestly to his equine servants than to his Lycian and Dardanian allies.

Then cherished he his famous horse: O Xanthus now, said he,  
And thou Podargus, Æthon, too, and Lampus, dear to me,  
Make me some worthy recompense for so much choice of meat  
Given you by fair Andromache; bread of the purest wheat,  
And with it for your drink mixed wine, to make ye wished cheer,  
Still serving you before myself, her husband young and dear.[\[113\]](#)

He went on to represent to them the glorious fruits and triumphs of victory, but gave no hint of a penalty for defeat. The absence of any such savage threat as Antilochus hurled at his slow-paced steeds in the chariot-race marks his innate gentleness of soul. He urged only the nobler motives for exertion appropriate to conscious intelligence. Trust in equine sympathy is, indeed, widespread in legend and romance. Even the cruel Mezentius, wounded and doomed, made a final appeal to the pride and valour of his faithful Rhœbus; to say nothing of 'Auld Maitland's' son's call upon his 'Gray,' of the stirrup-rhetoric of Reynaud de Montauban, of Marko, the Cid of Servia, of the Eddic Skirnir starting for Jotunheim, or other imperilled owners of renowned steeds.

[113.](#) *Iliad*, viii. 184-190 (Chapman's trans.).

These, now and then, are enabled to respond; but speaking horses should be reserved for emergencies. They occur, for instance, with undue profusion in modern Greek folk-songs. Not every notorious klepht lurking in the thickets of Pindus, but only some hero towering to the clouds of fancy, should, rightly considered, possess an animal so exceptionally endowed. The lesson is patent in the *Iliad*. Homer's instinctive self-restraint and supreme mastery over the secrets of artistic effect are nowhere more conspicuous than in his treatment of the horses of Achilles.

'Thessalian steeds and Lacedæmonian women' were declared by an oracle to be the best Greek representatives of their respective kinds. In Thessaly was the legendary birthplace of the horse; there lived the Lapiths—if Virgil is to be believed—the first horse-breakers:

Fræna Pelethronii Lapithæ, gyrosque dedere  
Impositi dorso, atque equitem docuere sub armis  
Insultare solo, et gressus glomerare superbos.[114]

There, too, the Centaurs were at home; the Thessalian cavalry became historically famous; the Thessalian marriage ceremony long included the presentation to the bride by the bridegroom, of a fully caparisoned horse; [115] and the noble equine type of the Parthenon marbles is still reproduced along the fertile banks of the Peneus.[116] Thence, too, of old to Troy

Fair Pheretiades

The bravest mares did bring by much; Eumelus managed these,  
Swift of their feet as birds of wings, both of one hair did shine,  
Both of an age, both of a height, as measured by a line,  
Whom silver-bowed Apollo bred in the Pierian mead,  
Both slick and dainty, yet were both in war of wondrous dread.[117]

[114]. *Georg.* iii. 115-17.

[115]. Geddes, *Problem of the Homeric Poems*, p. 247.

[116]. Dodwell, *Tour in Greece*, vol. i. p. 339.

[117]. *Iliad*, ii. 764-67 (Chapman's trans.).

Only, indeed, a fraud on the part of Athene prevented the mares of Eumelus from winning the chariot-race against the heaven-descended 'Trojan' horses of Diomed; and the Muse, solemnly invoked as arbitress of equine excellence, declared them the goodliest of all 'the steeds that followed the sons of Atreus to war,' save, of course, the incomparable Pelidean pair.

Xanthus and Balius were the wedding-gift of Poseidon to Peleus. The sea-god himself had been a suitor for the hand of the bride, the silver-footed Thetis; but, on its becoming known that the son to be born of her marriage was destined to surpass the strength of his father, something of an Olympian panic prevailed, and a mortal bridegroom was, by the common determination of the alarmed Immortals, forced upon the reluctant goddess. Of this unequal and unhappy marriage, the far-famed Achilles was the ill-starred offspring.

So intense is the Homeric realisation of the hero's superhuman powers, that they scarcely excite surprise. And his belongings are on the scale of his qualities. None but himself could wield his spear; his armour was forged in Olympus; his shield was a panorama of human life; his horses would obey only his guidance, or that of his delegates. Not for common handling, indeed, were the 'wind-swift' coursers born of Zephyr and the Harpy on the verge of the dim Ocean-stream. Themselves deathless and invulnerable, they were destined, nevertheless, to share the pangs of 'brief mortality.'

Sunt lachrymæ rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt.

For they had a yoke-fellow of a different strain from their own, captured by Achilles at the sack of the Cilician Thebes, and killed by Sarpedon in the course of his duel with Patroclus. And they had to endure worse than the loss of Pedasus. Patroclus, whose gentle touch and voice they had long ago learned to love, fell in the same fight, and they stood paralysed with grief, and unheeding alike the blows and the blandishments of their authorised driver, Automedon.

They neither to the Hellespont would bear him, nor the fight,  
But still as any tombstone lays his never-stirred weight  
On some good man or woman's grave, for rites of funeral,  
So unremoved stood these steeds, their heads to earth let fall,  
And warm tears gushing from their eyes with passionate desire  
Of their kind manager; their manes, that flourished with the fire  
Of endless youth allotted them, fell through the yoky sphere,  
Ruthfully ruffled and defiled. [118]

[118](#). *Iliad*, xvii. 432-40 (Chapman's trans.).

A northern companion-picture is furnished by Grani mourning the death of Sigurd, whom he had borne to the lair of Fafnir, and through the flames to woo Brynhild, and now survived only to be immolated on his pyre. The tears, however, of the weeping horses in the Ramayana and Mahabharata flow rather through fear than through sorrow.

The final appearance of the Pelidean steeds upon the scene of the *Iliad* reaches a tragic height, probably unequalled in the whole cycle of poetical delineations from the lower animal-world. Achilles, roused at last to battle,

and gleaming in his new-wrought armour, cried with a terrible voice as he leaped into his car—

Xanthus and Balius, far-famed brood of Podargê's strain,  
Take heed that in other sort to the Danæan host again,  
Ye bring your chariot-lord, when ourselves from the battle refrain,  
And not, as ye left Patroclus, leave us yonder slain. [119]

The sting of the reproach, and the favour of Heré, together effected a prodigy, and Xanthus spoke thus to his angry lord:

Yea, mighty Achilles, safe this day will we bear back thee;  
Yet nigh is the day of thy doom. Not guilty thereof be we,  
But a mighty God, and the overmastering Doom shall be cause.  
For not by our slowness of foot, neither slackness of will it was  
That the Trojans availed from Patroclus' shoulders thine armour to tear;  
Nay, but a God most mighty, whom fair-tressed Lêtô bare,  
Slew him in forefront of fight, giving Hector the glory meed.  
But for us, we twain as the blast of the West-wind fleetly could speed,  
Which they name for the lightest-winged of the winds; but for thee indeed,  
Even thee, is it doomed that by might of a God and a man shalt thou fall. [120]

[119]. *Iliad*, xix. 400-403 (Way's trans.).

[120]. *Ib.* xix. 408-17 (Way's trans.).

But here the Erinyes, guardians of the natural order, interposed, and Xanthus's brief burst of eloquence was brought to a close. The arrested prophecy, however, was only too intelligible; it could not deter, but it exasperated; and provoked the ensuing fiery rejoinder—a 'passionate outcry of a soul in pain,' if ever there was one—

Xanthus, why bodest thou death unto me? Thou needest not so.  
Myself well know my weird, in death to be here laid low,  
Far-off from my dear loved sire, from the mother that bare me afar;  
Yet cease will I not till I give to the Trojans surfeit of war.  
He spake, and with shouts sped onward the thunder-foot steeds of his car. [121]

[121]. *Iliad*, xix. 420-24 (Way's trans.).

The aged Peleus was, indeed, destined to leave unredeemed his vow of flinging to the stream of the Spercheus the yellow locks of his safely-returned son; they were laid instead on the pyre of Patroclus. Nor was their wearer ever to revisit the forest fastnesses of Pelion, where he had learned

from Chiron to draw the bow and cull healing herbs; yet of the short time allotted to him for vengeance not a moment should be lost.

Although Homer tells us nothing as to the eventual fate of Xanthus and Balius, supplementary legends fill up the blank left by his silence. It appears hence that they were divinely restrained from carrying out their purpose of retiring, after the death of Achilles, to their birthplace by the Ocean-stream, and awaited instead the arrival of Neoptolemus at Troy.[\[122\]](#) For he was their appointed charioteer on the Elysian plains, which they may scour to this day, for anything that is known to the contrary, in friendly emulation with Pegasus, the hippogriff, and

rutilæ manifestus Arion  
Igne jubæ:

with the last above all, whose ‘insatiate ardour’ of speed saved Adrastus from Theban pursuit, and brought him in the original mythical winner in the Nemæan games; whose sympathy, moreover, with human miseries broke down, as in their own case, the barriers of nature, and accomplished the portent of speech and tears. Their quasi-immortality is shared by Bayard, heard to neigh, it is said, every Mid-summer-night, along the leafy aisles of the Forest of Ardennes;[\[123\]](#) and by Sharats, who still crops the moss of the cavern where sleeps his long-accustomed rider, Marko, waiting, like other hibernating heroes, for the dawn of better days.

[122.](#) Quintus Smyrnæus, iii. 743.

[123.](#) Grimm and Stallybrass, *Teutonic Mythology*, p. 666.

Prophetic horses of the Xanthus type have been heard of in many lands. They are a commonplace of Esthonian folk-lore; Dulcefal, the charger of Hreggvid, king of Gardariki in Old Russia, could infallibly forecast the issue of a campaign; the coursers of the Indian Râvana had a just presentiment of his fate;[\[124\]](#) and Cæsar’s indomitable horse was reported—credibly or otherwise—to have wept during three days before the stroke of Brutus fell. Even the remains of the dead animals were of high importance in Teutonic divination. Their flesh was pre-eminently witches’ food; horses’ hoofs made witches’ drinking-cups; the pipers at witches’

revels played on horses' heads, which were besides an indispensable adjunct to many diabolical ceremonies. [125]

[124.](#) Gubernatis, *Zoological Mythology*, vol. i. p. 349.

Homer describes the Trojans as flinging live horses into the Scamander; [126] and the Persians in the time of Herodotus occasionally resorted to the same barbarous means of propitiating rivers. In honour of the sun—perhaps the legitimate claimant to such honours—horses were immolated on the summit of Taygetus, and a team of four, with chariot attached, was yearly sunk by the Rhodians into the sea. The Argives worshipped Poseidon with similar rites, [127] certainly not learned from the Phœnicians, to whom they were unknown. They were unknown as well to the Homeric Greeks; for the slaughter on the funeral-pyre of Patroclus belonged to a different order of ideas. Here the prompting motive was that ingrained desire to supply the needs, moral and physical, of the dead, which led to so many blood-stained obsequies. Horses and dogs fell, in an especial manner, victims to its prevalence; and have consequently a prominent place on early Greek tomb-reliefs representing the future state. [128]

[125.](#) Grimm and Stallybrass, *op. cit.* pp. 47, 659, 1050.

[126.](#) *Iliad*, xxi. 132.

[127.](#) Pausanias, lib. iii. cap. 20, viii. 7.

[128.](#) Gardner, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. v. p. 130.

Homer's description of the Troad as 'rich in horses' has been very scantily justified by the results of underground exploration. Few of the animal's bones were found at Hissarlik, none at the neighbouring Hanai-Tepe. [129] Yet every Trojan at the present day is a born rider. [130] Locomotion on horseback is universal, at all ages, and for both sexes. Priam himself could scarcely now be accommodated with a mule-cart. He should leave the Pergamus, if at all, mounted in some fashion on the back of a steed.

[129.](#) Calvert, in Schliemann's *Ilios*, p. 711.

[130.](#) Virchow, *Abhandlungen Berlin. Acad.* 1879, p. 62.

The author of the Iliad, however, was no equestrian. His knowledge of horses was otherwise acquired. But how intimate and accurate that knowledge was, one example may suffice to show. A thunderstorm, sent by Zeus in tardy fulfilment of his promise to Thetis, caused a panic among the Greeks; the bravest yielded to the contagion of fear; there was a *sauve qui peut* to the ships. In the wild rout,

Geranian Nestor, aged prop of Greece,  
Alone remained, and he against his will,  
His horse sore wounded by an arrow shot  
By godlike Paris, fair-hair'd Helen's lord:  
Just on the crown, where close behind the head  
First springs the mane, the deadliest spot of all,  
The arrow struck him; madden'd with the pain  
He rear'd, then plunging forward, with the shaft  
Fix'd in his brain, and rolling in the dust,  
The other steeds in dire confusion threw.[131]

[131.](#) *Iliad*, viii. 80-86 (Lord Derby's trans.).

The most vulnerable point is here pointed out with anatomical correctness.[132] Exactly where the mane begins, the bony shield of the skull comes to an end, and the route to the brain, especially to a dart coming, like that of Paris, from behind, lies comparatively open. The sudden upspringing of the death-smitten creature, followed by his struggle on the ground, is also perfectly true to nature, and suggests personal observation of the occurrence described.

[132.](#) Buchholz, *Homer. Realien*, Bd. i. Abth. ii. p. 175.

Observation, both close and sympathetic, assuredly dictated the brilliant lines in which Paris, issuing from the Scæan gate, is compared to a courser breaking loose from confinement to disport himself in the open.

As some proud steed, at well-fill'd manger fed,  
His halter broken, neighing, scours the plain,  
And revels in the widely-flowing stream  
To bathe his sides; then tossing high his head,  
While o'er his shoulders streams his ample mane,  
Light borne on active limbs, in conscious pride,  
To the wide pastures of the mares he flies.[133]

The simile, less happily appropriated to Hector, is repeated in a subsequent part of the poem;[\[134\]](#) and it was by Virgil transferred bodily to the Eleventh Æneid, where it serves to adorn Turnus, the wearer of many borrowed Iliadic plumes. They, however, it must be admitted, make a splendid show in their new setting.

[133.](#) *Iliad*, vi. 506-11 (Lord Derby's trans.).

[134.](#) *Ib.* xv. 263.

The makers of the Iliad, whether few or many, were at least unanimous in their fervid admiration for the horse. The verses glow with a kind of rapture of enjoyment that describe his strength, beauty, and swiftness, his eager spirit and fine nervous organisation, his docility to trusted guidance, his intelligent participation in human contentions and pursuits. No animal has elsewhere achieved true epic personality;[\[135\]](#) no animal has been raised to so high a dignity in art. The whole Iliad might be called an 'Aristeia' or eulogistic celebration of the species.

[135.](#) Cf. Milchhöfer, *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, p. 57.



## CHAPTER V.

### HOMERIC ZOOLOGY.

THE establishment of a clear distinction between men and beasts might seem a slight effort of defining intellect, yet it has not been quite easily made. In children the instinct of assimilation long survives the experience of difference. A little boy of six, asked by the present writer what profession he thought of adopting, replied with alacrity that he 'would like to be a bird,' and it was only on being reminded of the diet of grubs associated with that state of life, that he began to waver as to its desirability. The same incapacity for drawing a boundary-line between the realm of their own imperfect consciousness and the mysterious encompassing region of animal life, is visible in the grown-up children of the wilds. Hence the zoological speculations of primitive man inevitably take the form of a sort of projection of human faculties into animal natures. Now human faculties, released from the control of actuality, spontaneously expand. In a vague and vaporous way, they transcend the low level of hard fact, and become pleasantly diffused in the 'ampler ether' of the unknown. Beasts thus transfigured are incapable, it may be said, of simple rationality. The powers transferred to them grow like Jack's Beanstalk, beyond the range of sight.

Universal folk-lore, in all its tangled ramifications, bears witness to the truth of this remark. Tutelary animals, of the Puss in Boots type, abound and expatiate there. They are all-contriving and infallible. Their favour leads to fortune and power. They hold the clue to the labyrinth of human destinies. Through their protection the oppressed are rescued, the ragged are clothed in golden raiments, the outwardly despicable win princely honours,

and have their names inscribed in the 'Almanach de Gotha' of fairy-land. No wonder that such beneficent potentates, albeit feathered or furry, should have been claimed as ancestors and hereditary protectors by human beings full of untutored yearnings for the unattainable. To our ideas, indeed, there seems little comfort or credit to be got out of counting kinship with a beaver, a bear, or an opossum; but things looked differently when the world was young; nor has it yet everywhere grown old. In Australia, black bipeds still own themselves the cousins and clients of kangaroos. American Indians pay homage to 'manitous' personally, as well as to 'totems' tribally associated with them; and twilight tales are perhaps to this hour whispered in Ireland, about a certain 'Master of the Rats,' whose hostility it is eminently undesirable though lamentably easy to incur.

Even among Greeks and Romans of the classical age, to say nothing of Aztecs and Alemanni, belief lurked in the preternatural wisdom of certain animals. Their formal worship, most fully elaborated in Egypt, but diffused over 'Tellus' orbed ground,' sprang from the same stock of ideas. To a remarkable extent, the Greeks were exempt from its degrading associations. Their partial survival on Greek soil, as in the veneration at Phigaleia, of the horse-headed Demeter, represented, without doubt, an under-current of aboriginal tradition, reaching back to the Pelasgic fore-time.

Now it might have been anticipated that the earliest literature would have been the most deeply permeated by these primitive reminiscences. But this is very far from being the case. Their influence is scarcely perceptible in the two great epics of Troy and Ithaca; and indeed the modes of thought from which they originated were completely alien to the ethical sentiments pervading those marvellous first-fruits of Greek genius. Neither poem includes the smallest remnant of zoolatry. The Homeric divinities are absolutely anthropomorphic. They are men and women, exempt from the limitations, unscathed by the ills of humanity, and radiant with the infinite sunshine of immortal happiness. Of infra-human relationships they exhibit no trace. They are far less concerned with the animal kingdom than they grew to be in classical times. Typical beasts or birds have not yet become attached to them. The eagle, though once in the Iliad called the 'swift messenger' of Zeus, is altogether detached from his throne and his thunder-bolt; Heré has not developed her preference for the peacock—a bird

introduced much later from the East; Athene is without the companionship of her owl; no doves flutter about the fair head of the 'golden Aphrodite'; Artemis needs no dogs to bring down her game. The Olympian menagerie, in short, has not been constituted. On the 'many-folded' mountain of the gods, no beasts are maintained save the half-dozen horses strictly necessary for the purposes of divine locomotion.

Very significant, too, is Homer's ignorance of the semi-bestial, semi-divine beings who figure in subsequent Greek mythology. 'Great Pan' has no place in his verse; Satyrs and Tritons are equally unrecognised by him; his Nereids are 'silver-footed sea-nymphs,' with no fishy tendencies.

Mixed natures of any kind seem, in truth, to have been little to his taste. Even if he could have apprehended the symbolical meanings underlying them in dim Oriental imaginations, he could scarcely have reconciled himself to the sacrifice of beauty which they involved. Men, horses, bulls, lions, were all separately admirable in his eyes; but to blend, he felt instinctively, was not to heighten their perfections. Thus, the hybrid nature of the Centaurs, if present to his mind, was left undefined as something 'abominable, inutterable.' The Harpies, realised by Hesiod as half-human fowls, remained with him barely personified tornadoes. Neither Pegasus nor the Minotaur, neither the bird-women of Stymphalis, nor the Griffons of the Rhipæan mountains, found mention in his song, and he admitted—and that in a family-legend—but one true specimen of the dragon-kind in the 'Chimæra dire' slain by Bellerophon. The monstrosity of Scylla is left purposely vague. She is a fancy-compound defying classification. She lived, too, in the outer world of the Odyssey, where 'things strange and rare' flourished in quiet disregard of laws binding elsewhere.

In the same region of wonderland occur the oxen of the Sun—the only sacred animals recognised by our poet. They had their pasturing-ground in the island of Thrinakie, whither Helios retired to divert himself with their frolics after each hard day of steady Mediterranean shining; and so keen was his indignation at their slaughter by the famished comrades of Odysseus, that a cosmical strike would have ensued but for the promise of Zeus to inflict condign punishment upon the delinquents. From the

shipwreck by which this promise was fulfilled, Odysseus, alone exempt from guilt in the matter, was the solitary survivor.

The Homeric treatment of animals, compared with the extravagances prevalent in other primitive literature, is eminently sane and rational. Not through indifference to their perfections. A peculiar intensity of sympathy with brute-nature is, on the contrary, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Homeric poems. But that sympathy is based upon the appreciation of real, not upon the transference of imaginary qualities. Beasts are, on the whole, kept strictly in their proper places. The only genuine example of their sublimation into higher ones is afforded by the horses of Achilles, and this during a transport of epic excitement. Otherwise, the fabulous element admitted concerning animals—and it is just in their regard that fable commonly runs riot—is surprisingly small.

In its room, we find such a wealth of acute and accurate observation, as no poet, before or since, has had the capacity to accumulate, or the power to employ for purposes of illustration. It is unmistakably private property. Details appropriated at second-hand could never have fitted in so aptly with the needs of imaginative creation. Moreover, the conventional types of animal character were of later establishment. There was at that early time no recognised common stock of popular or proverbial wisdom on the subject to draw upon. The lion had not yet been raised to regal dignity; the fox was undistinguished for craft, as the goose for folly. Beasts and birds had their careers in literature before them. Their reputations were still to make. They carried about with them no formal certificates of character. The poet was accordingly unfettered in his dealings with them by preconceived notions; whence the delightful freshness of Homer's zoological vignettes. The dew of morning, so to speak, is upon them. They are limned direct from his own vivid impressions of pastoral, maritime, and hunting scenes.

As to the locality of those scenes, some hints, but scarcely more than hints, can be derived. For in the course of nearly three thousand years, the circumstances of animal distribution have been affected by changes too considerable and too indeterminate to admit of confident argument from the state of things now to the state of things then; while the notices of the poet, incidental by their very nature, are of the utmost value for what they tell,

but warrant only very hesitating inferences from what they leave untold. Thus, it does not follow that because Homer nowhere mentions the cuckoo, he was therefore unfamiliar with its note, which, from Hesiod's time until now, has not failed to proclaim the advent of spring among the olive-groves of Bœotia, and must have been heard no less by Paris or Anchises than by the modern archæological traveller, along the oak-clad and willow-fringed valley of Scamander. Nor is the faintest presumption of a divided authorship supplied by the fact that the nightingale sings in the *Odyssey*, but not in the *Iliad*. Nevertheless, analogous considerations should not be altogether neglected in Homeric criticism. They may possibly help towards the answering of questions both of time and place: of time, through allusions to domesticated animals; of place, by a comparison of the known range of wild species with the fauna of the two great epics. And, first, as regards domesticated animals.

The list of these is a short one. The Greeks and Trojans of the *Iliad* commanded the services of the horse in battle, of oxen and mules for draught; dogs were their faithful allies in hunting and cattle driving, and they kept flocks of sheep and goats. The ass appears only once, and then indirectly, on the scene, when the lethargic obstinacy of his behaviour serves to heighten the effect of Ajax's stubbornness in fight. Thus:

And as when a lazy ass going past a field hath the better of the boys with him, an ass that hath had many a cudgel broken about his sides, and he fareth into the deep crop, and wasteth it, while the boys smite him with their cudgels, and feeble is the force of them, but yet with might and main they drive him forth when he hath had his fill of fodder; even so did the high-hearted Trojans and allies, called from many lands, smite great Aias, son of Telamon, with darts on the centre of his shield, and ever followed after him. [136]

[136]. *Iliad*, xi. 557-64.

The creature's 'little ways' were then already notorious, although all mention of him or them is omitted from the *Odyssey*, as well as from the Hesiodic poems. His existence is indeed implied by the parentage of the mule. But mules were brought to the Troad *ready-made* from Paphlagonia. [137] It was not until later that they were systematically bred by the Greeks.

[137]. Hehn and Stallybrass, *Wanderings of Plants and Animals*, pp. 110, 460.

The Semitic origin of the word 'ass' rightly indicates the introduction of the species into Europe from Semitic Western Asia. As to the date of its

arrival, all that can be told is that it was subsequent to the beginning of the bronze epoch. The pile-dwellers of Switzerland and North Italy were unacquainted with an animal fundamentally Oriental in its habitudes. Its reluctance, for instance, to cross the smallest streamlet attests the physical tradition of a desert home; and the white ass of Bagdad represents to this day, the fullest capabilities of the race.[138] Yet neither the ass nor the camel was included in the primitive Aryan fauna. For they could not have been known, still less domesticated, without being named, and the only widespread appellations borne by them are derived from Semitic sources. Evidently the loan of the words accompanied the transmission of the species. It is very difficult, in the face of this circumstance—as Dr. Schrader has pertinently observed[139]—to locate the Aryan cradle-land anywhere to the east of the Bosphorus.

[138.](#) Houghton, *Trans. Society of Biblical Archæology*, vol. v. p. 49.

[139.](#) *Thier- und Pflanzen-Geographie*, p. 17.

Dr. Virchow was struck, on his visit to the Troad, in 1879, with the similarity of the actual condition of the country to that described in the Iliad.[140] The inhabitants seem, in fact, during the long interval, to have halted in a transition-stage between pastoral and agricultural life, by far the larger proportion of the land supplying pasturage for ubiquitous multitudes of sheep, oxen, goats, horses, and asses. The sheep, however, belong to a variety assuredly of post-Homeric introduction, since the massive tails hampering their movements could not well have escaped characterisation in some emphatic Homeric epithet.

[140.](#) *Beiträge zur Landeskunde der Troas*; Berlin. *Abhandlungen*, 1879, p. 59.

Both short and long-horned cattle, all of a dark-brown colour, may now be seen grazing over the plain round Hissarlik, the latter probably resembling more closely than the former those with which Homer was acquainted. The oxen alike of the Iliad and Odyssey are ‘wine-coloured,’ ‘straight-horned,’ ‘broad-browed,’ and ‘sinuous-footed’; it was above all through the shuffle of their gait, indicated by the last adjective, and due to the peculiar structure of the hip-joint in the whole species, that the poet distinctively visualised them. ‘Lowing kine,’ and ‘bellowing bulls’ are occasionally heard of, chiefly—it is curious to remark—in later, or

suspected portions of the Iliad. Sheep and goats, on the other hand, are often described as ‘bleating,’ and the cries of birds are called up at opportune moments; but Homer’s horses neither whinny nor neigh; his pigs refrain from grunting; his jackals do not howl; the tremendous roar of the lion nowhere resounds through his forests. Homeric wild beasts are, indeed, save in the vaguely-indicated case of one indeterminate specimen,[\[141\]](#) wholly dumb.

[141.](#) *Iliad*, x. 184.

Singularly enough, a peculiar sensitiveness to sound is displayed in the description of the Shield of Achilles. Yet plastic art is essentially silent. Even the perpetuated cry of the Laocoön detracts somewhat from the inherent serenity of marble. The metal-wrought creations of Hephæstus, however, not only live and move, but make themselves audible to a degree uncommon elsewhere in the poems. Thus, in one scene, or compartment, a *lowing* herd issues to the pasturing-grounds, where two lions seize from their midst, and devour, a *loudly-bellowing* bull, while nine *barking*, though frightened dogs are, by the herdsmen, vainly urged to a rescue. In the vintage-episode of the same series, delight in melodious beauty is almost as apparent as in the so-called ‘Homeric’ hymn to Hermes. The ‘Linus-song,’ ‘sweet even as desire,’ sung to the youthful grape-gatherers, sounds through the ages scarcely less sweet than

The liquid voice  
Of pipes, that filled the clear air thrillingly,

when the Muses gathered round Apollo long ago in the ethereal halls of Olympus.

Among the animals now variously serviceable to man by the shores of the Hellespont, are the camel, the buffalo, and the cat, none of them known, even by name, to the primitive Achæans. The household cat, as is well known, remained, during a millennium or two, exclusively Egyptian; then all at once, perhaps owing to the exigency created by the migration westward of the rat, spread with great rapidity in the first centuries of the Christian era, over the civilised world. Saint Gregory Nazianzen set the first recorded European example of attachment to a cat. His pet was kept at

Constantinople about the year 360 A.D.[142] No archæological vestiges of the species, accordingly, have been found in Asia Minor. Cats haunt the ruins of Hissarlik, but in no case lie buried beneath them.

[142.](#) Houghton, *Trans. Society Biblical Archæology*, vol. v. p. 63.

The bones mixed up among the prehistoric *débris* belong chiefly, as might have been expected, to sheep, goats, and oxen, those of swine, dogs, and horses being relatively scarce.[143] Hares and deer are also represented, and of birds, mainly the goose, with scanty traces of the swan and of a small falcon. These remains are of different epochs, yet all without exception belong to animals mentioned in the Iliad, whether as wild or tame. The Homeric condition of the pig and goose respectively presents some points of interest.

[143.](#) Virchow, *loc. cit.* p. 63.

The pig was not one of the animals primitively domesticated in the East. The absence of Vedic or Avestan mention of swine-culture makes it practically certain that the species was known only in a wild state to the early Aryan colonists of Iran and India. Nor had any more intimate acquaintance with it been developed in Babylonia; although the Swiss pile-dwellers, at first similarly behindhand, advanced, before the stone age had terminated, to pig-keeping.[144] Dr. Schrader, indeed, bases upon the occurrence only in European languages of the word *porcus*, the conjecture that the subjugation of the ‘full-acorned boar’ was first accomplished in Europe;[145] and if this were so, the operations of swine-herding would naturally come in for a larger share of notice in the Odyssey, as the more European of the two poems, than in the Iliad. And in fact, the swineherd of Odysseus is an important personage, and plays a leading part in the drama of his return—pigs, moreover, figuring extensively among the agricultural riches of Ithaca, while there is no sign that any were possessed by Priam or Anchises. Alone among the Greeks of the Iliad, Achilles is stated to have placed before his guests a ‘chine of well-fed hog’; and the very few Iliadic allusions to fatted swine are all in immediate connexion with the same hero. If this be a result of chance, it is a somewhat grotesque one.

[144.](#) Rüttimeyer, *Die Fauna der Pfahlbauten*, pp. 120-21.

[145.](#) *Prehistoric Antiquities of the Aryans*, p. 261.

The porcine proclivities of modern Greeks are especially strong. Christian and Mahometan habitations were, in the days of Turkish domination, easily distinguished by the sty-accommodation attached to the former; while in certain villages of the Morea and the Cyclades, the pigs no longer occupied a merely subordinate position, and odours not Sabæan, wafted far on the breeze, announced to the still distant traveller the nature of the harbourage in store for him. [\[146\]](#)

[146.](#) Gell, *A Journey in the Morea*, p. 63.

The most antique of domesticated birds is the goose, and Homer was acquainted with no other. Penelope kept a flock of twenty, [\[147\]](#) mainly, it would seem, for purposes of diversion, since the loss of them through the devastations of an eagle is treated from a purely sentimental point of view. They were fed on wheat, the 'height of good living,' in Homeric back-premises. The court-yard, too, of the palace of Menelaus sheltered a cackling flock, [\[148\]](#) the progenitors of which Helen might have brought with her from Egypt, where geese were prehistorically reared for the table. That the bird occurs *only* tame in the *Odyssey*, and *only* wild in the *Iliad*, constitutes a distinction between the poems which can scarcely be without real significance. The species employed, in the *Second Iliad*, to illustrate, by the tumult of their alighting on the marshy banks of the Cayster, the clangorous march-past of the Achæan forces, has been identified as *Anser cinereus*, numerous specimens of which fly south, in severe winters, from the valley of the Danube to Greece and Asia Minor.

[147.](#) *Odyssey*, xix. 536.

[148.](#) *Ib.* xv. 161.

The familiar cocks and hens of our poultry-yards are, in the West, post-Homeric. Their native home is in India; but through human agency they were early transported to Iran, where the cock, as the bird that first greets the light, acquired in the eyes of Zoroastrian devotees, a pre-eminently sacred character. His introduction into Greece was a result of the expansion westward of the Persian empire. No cocks are met with on Egyptian monuments; the Old Testament leaves them unnoticed; and the earliest mention of them in Greek literature is by Theognis of Megara, in the middle

of the sixth century B.C.[149] Pigeons, on the other hand, are quite at home in Homeric verse. They are of two kinds. One is the rock-pigeon, called from its slate-coloured plumage *peleia* (πελός = dusky), and described as finding shelter in rocky clefts, and evading pursuit by a rapid, undulating flight.[150] Its frequent recurrence in similes can surprise no traveller who has observed the extreme abundance of *Columba livia* all round the coasts of the Ægean.[151] The second Homeric species of *Columba* is the ring-dove, once referred to as the habitual victim of the hawk. Tame pigeons are ignored, and were, indeed, first seen in Greece after the wreck of the Persian fleet at Mount Athos in 492 B.C.[152] Yet dove-culture was practised as far back as the oldest records lead us in Egypt and Persia. The dove was marked out as a ‘death-bird’ by our earliest Aryan ancestors, and figures in the Vedas as a messenger of Yama. But Homer, unconcerned, as usual, with animal symbolism, makes no account, if he had ever heard, of its sinister associations.

[149.](#) Hehn and Stallybrass, *Wanderings of Plants and Animals*, pp. 241-43.

[150.](#) Buchholz, *Realien*, Bd. i. Abth. ii. p. 120.

[151.](#) Lindermayer, *Die Vögel Griechenlands*, p. 120.

[152.](#) Hehn and Stallybrass, *op. cit.* p. 257.

Among Homeric wild animals, the first place incontestably belongs to the lion, and the Iliad, in especial, gives extraordinary prominence to the king of beasts. In savage grandeur he stalks, as it were, through the varied scenery of its similitudes, indomitable, fiercely-despoiling, contemptuous of lesser brute-forces. His impressive qualities receive no gratuitous enhancement; he rouses no myth-making fancies; there is no fabulous ‘quality of mercy’ about him, nor of magnanimity, nor of forbearance; he is simply a ‘gaunt and sanguine beast,’ a vivid embodiment of the energy of untamed and unsparing nature.

He is not brought immediately upon the scene of action; the Homeric poems nowhere provide for him a local habitation; it is only in the comparatively late Hymn to Aphrodite that a place is specifically assigned to him among the feral products of Mount Ida. His portraiture, nevertheless, in the similes of the Iliad is too minute and faithful to leave any shadow of

doubt of its being based upon intimate personal acquaintance. The poet must have witnessed with his own eyes the change from majestic indifference to bellicose frenzy described in the following passage; he must have caught the greenish glare of the oblique feline eyes, noted the preparatory tail-lashings, and mentally photographed the crouching attitude, and the yawn of deadly significance, that preceded the fierce beast's spring.

And on the other side, the son of Peleus rushed to meet him, like a lion, a ravaging lion whom men desire to slay, a whole tribe assembled; and first he goeth his way unheeding, but when some warrior-youth hath smitten him with a spear, then he gathereth himself open-mouthed, and foam cometh forth about his teeth, and his stout spirit groaneth in his heart, and with his tail he scourgeth either side his ribs and flanks and goadeth himself on to fight, and glaring is borne straight on them by his passion to try whether he shall slay some man of them, or whether himself shall perish in the forefront of the throng. [153]

[153.](#) *Iliad*, xx. 164-73.

Take, again, the picture of the lioness defending her young, while

Within her the storm of her might doth rise,  
And the down-drawn skin of her brows over-gloometh the fire of her eyes. [154]

Or this other, exemplifying, like the 'hungry people' simile in 'Locksley Hall,' the 'imperious' beast's dread of fire:

And as when hounds and countryfolk drive a tawny lion from the mid-fold of the kine, and suffer him not to carry away the fattest of the herd, all night they watch, and he in great desire for the flesh maketh his onset; but takes nothing thereby, for thick the darts fly from strong hands against him, and the burning brands, and these he dreads for all his fury, and in the dawn he departeth with vexed heart. [155]

[154.](#) Way's *Iliad*, xvii. 135-36. The feminine pronouns are here introduced to avoid incongruity. The Homeric vocabulary did not include a word equivalent to 'lioness.'

[155.](#) *Iliad*, xx. 164-75.

Scenes of leonine ravage among cattle are frequently presented. As here:

And as when in the pride of his strength a lion mountain-reared  
Hath snatched from the pasturing kine a heifer, the best of the herd,  
And, gripping her neck with his strong teeth, bone from bone hath he snapped,  
And he rendeth her inwards and gorgeth her blood by his red tongue lapped,  
And around him gather the dogs and the shepherd-folk, and still  
Cry long and loud from afar, howbeit they have no will  
To face him in fight, for that pale dismay doth the hearts of them fill. [156]

We seem, in reading these lines—and there are many more like them—to be confronted with a vivified Assyrian or Lycian bas-relief. In the antique sculptures of the valley of the Xanthus, above all, the incident of the slaying of an ox by a lion is of such constant recurrence[157] as almost to suggest, in confirmation of a conjecture by Mr. Gladstone,[158] a similarity of origin between them and the corresponding passages of the Iliad. The lion, indeed, occupies throughout the epic a position which can now with difficulty be conceived as having been assigned to him on the strength of European experience alone. Still, it must not be forgotten that the facts of the matter have radically changed within the last three thousand years.

[156.](#) Way's *Iliad*, xvii. 61-67.

[157.](#) Fellows' *Travels in Asia Minor*, p. 348, ed. 1852.

[158.](#) *Studies in Homer*, vol. i. p. 183.

In prehistoric times, the lion ranged all over Europe, from the Severn to the Hellespont; for the *Felis spelæus* of Britain[159] was specifically identical with the grateful clients of Androclus and Sir Iwain, no less than with the more savage than sagacious beasts now haunting the Upper Nile valley, and the marshes of Guzerat and Mesopotamia.

[159.](#) Boyd Dawkins and Sanford, *Pleistocene Mammalia*, p. 171.

Already, however, at the early epoch of the pile-built villages by the lake of Constance, he had disappeared from Western Europe; yet he lingered long in Greece. Of his presence in the Peloponnesus only legendary traces remain, although he figures largely in Mycenæan art; but in Thrace he can lay claim to an historically attested existence. Herodotus[160] recounts with wonder how the baggage-camels of Xerxes' army were attacked by lions on the march from Acanthus to Therma; and he defines the region haunted by them as bounded towards the east by the River Nestus, on the west by the Achelous. Some Chalcidicean coins, too, are stamped with the favourite oriental device of a lion killing an ox; and Xenophon *possibly*—for his expressions are dubious—includes the lion among the wild fauna of Thrace. The statements, on the other hand, of Polybius and Dio Chrysostom leave no doubt that he had finally retreated from our continent before the beginning of the Christian era.[161]

[160](#). Lib. vii. caps. 125, 126.

[161](#). Sir G. C. Lewis, *Notes and Queries*, vol. viii. ser. ii. p. 242.

A Thessalian Homer might, then, quite conceivably, have beheld an occasional predatory lion descending the arbutus-clad slopes of Pelion or Olympus; yet the continual allusions to leonine manners and customs pervading the Iliad show an habitual acquaintance with the animal which is certainly somewhat surprising. It corresponds, nevertheless, quite closely with the perpetual recurrence of his form in the plastic representations of Mycenæ.

The comparatively few Odyssean references to this animal can scarcely be said to bear the stamp of visual directness unmistakably belonging to those dispersed broadcast through the earlier epic. Yet it would probably be a mistake to suppose them derived at second-hand. Without, then, denying that the author of the Odyssey had actually ‘met the ravin lion when he roared,’ we may express some wonder that he, like his predecessor of the Iliad, left unrecorded the auditory part of the resulting brain-impression. For the voice of the lion is assuredly the most imposing sound of which animated nature seems capable. Casual allusions to it in the Hymn to Aphrodite and in the (nominally) Hesiodic ‘Shield of Hercules,’ are, nevertheless, perhaps the earliest extant in Greek literature.

The bear figures in the Iliad and Odyssey solely as a constellation, except that a couple of verses interpolated into the latter accord him a place among the embossed decorations of the belt of Hercules. The living animal, however, is still reported to lurk in the ‘clov’n ravines’ of ‘many-fountain’d Ida,’ and, according to a local tradition, was only banished from the Thessalian Olympus through the agency of Saint Dionysius.[\[162\]](#) The panther or leopard, on the contrary, although contemporaneously with the cave-lion an inmate of Britain, disappeared from Europe at a dim and remote epoch, while plentifully met with in Caria and Pamphylia during Cicero’s governorship of Cilicia. Even in the present century, indeed, leopardskins formed part of the recognised tribute of the Pasha of the Dardanelles. The life-like scene, then, in which the animal emerges to view in the Iliad, bears a decidedly Asiatic character. Mr. Conington’s version of the lines runs as follows:

As panther springs from a deep thicket's shade  
To meet the hunter, and her heart no fear  
Nor terror knows, though barking loud she hear,  
For though with weapon's thrust or javelin's throw  
He wound her first, yet e'en about the spear  
Writhing, her valour doth she not forego,  
Till for offence she close, or in the shock lie low.[163]

[162.](#) Tozer, *Researches in the Highlands of Turkey*, vol. ii. p. 64.

[163.](#) *Iliad*, xxi. 573-78.

Thoroughly Oriental, too, is the vision conjured up in the Third Iliad of Paris challenging

To mortal combat all the chiefs of Greece,[164]

armed with a bow and sword, poising 'two brass-tipped javelins,' a panther skin flung round his magnificent form. Elate with the consciousness of strength and beauty, unsuspecting of the betrayal in store for him by his own weak and volatile spirit, the *gaietta pelle* of the fierce beast might have encouraged, as it did in Dante, a cheerful forecast of the issue; yet illusorily in each case. In the *Odyssey*, the panther is only mentioned as one of the forms assumed by Proteus.

[164.](#) *Iliad*, iii. 20 (Lord Derby's trans.).

The Homeric wild boar is of quite Erymanthian powers and proportions; with more valour than discretion, he does not shrink from encountering the lion himself—

Being ireful, on the lion he will venture;

and the laying-low of a single specimen is reckoned no inadequate result of a forest-campaign by dogs and men. Such an heroic brute, worthy to have been the emissary of enraged Artemis, succumbed, no longer ago than in 1850, to the joint efforts, during several toilsome days, of a band of thirty hunters.[165] The 'chafed boar' in the *Iliad* either carries everything before him, as Ajax scattered the Trojans fighting round the body of Patroclus; or he dies, tracked to his lair, if die he must, fearlessly facing his foes, incarnating rage with bristles erected, blazing eyes, and gnashing tusks. Nor

was the upshot for him inevitably fatal. Idomeneus of Crete, we are told, awaiting the onset (which proved but partially effective) of Æneas and Deiphobus,

Stood at bay, like a boar on the hills that trusteth to his strength, and abides the great assailing throng of men, in a lonely place, and he bristles up his back, and his eyes shine with fire, while he whets his tusks, and is right eager to keep at bay both men and hounds.  
[166]

[165](#). Erhard, *Fauna der Cycladen*, p. 26.

[166](#). *Iliad*, xiii. 471-75.

The boar is a solitary animal. Like Hal o' the Wynd, he fights for his own right hand; and he was accordingly appropriated by Homer to image the valour of individual chiefs, while the rank and file figure as wolves and jackals, hunting in packs, pinched with hunger, bloodthirsty and desperately eager, but formidable only collectively. Jackals still abound in the Troad and throughout the Cyclades, and their hideous wails and barkings enhance the desolation of the Nauplian and Negropontine swamps.[\[167\]](#) Neither have wolves disappeared from those regions; and the old dread of the animal which was at once the symbol of darkness and of light, survives obscurely to this day in the vampire-superstitions of Eastern Europe. The closeness of the connexion between vampires and were-wolves is shown by a comparison of the modern Greek word *vrykolaka*, vampire, with the Zend and Sanskrit *vehrka*, a wolf.[\[168\]](#) Nor were the Greeks of classical times exempt from the persuasion that men and wolves might temporarily, or even permanently, exchange semblances. Many stories of the kind were related in Arcadia in connexion with the worship of the Lycæan Zeus; and Pausanias, while critically sceptical as regards some of these, was not too advanced a thinker to accept, as fully credible, the penal transformation of Lycaon, son of Pelasgus.[\[169\]](#) Such notions belonged, however, to a rustic mythology of which Homer took small cognisance. His thoughts travelled of themselves out from the sylvan gloom of primeval haunts into the open sunshine of unadulterated nature.

In wood or wilderness, forest or den,

he met with no bogey-animals. For him neither beast nor bird had any mysterious significance. He attributed to encounters with particular species no influence, malefic or beneficial, upon human destiny. Of themselves, they had, in his view, no concern with it, although ordinary animal instincts might, under certain conditions, be so directed as to be expressive to man of the will of the gods. In the Homeric scheme, birds and serpents exclusively are so employed, without, however, any departure from the order of nature. Thus, by night near the sedgy Simoeis, a heron, *Ardea nycticorax*, disturbed by the approach of Odysseus and Diomed, assured them, by casually flapping its way eastward, that their expedition had the sanction of their guardian-goddess.<sup>[170]</sup> The choice of the bird was plainly dictated by zoological considerations alone; it had certainly no such recondite motive as that suggested by Ælian,<sup>[171]</sup> who, with almost grotesque ingenuity, argued that the owl, as the fowl of Athene's special predilection, could only have been deprived of the privilege of acting as her instrument on the occasion through Homer's consciousness of its reputation as a bird of sinister augury—

Ignavus bubo, dirum mortalibus omen—

the truth being that both kinds of association—the mythological and the superstitious—were equally remote from the poet's mind.

<sup>167.</sup> Von der Mühle, *Beiträge zur Ornithologie Griechenlands*, p. 123; Buchholz, *Homerische Realien*, Bd. i. Abth. ii. p. 202.

<sup>168.</sup> Tozer, *Researches*, vol. ii. p. 82.

<sup>169.</sup> *Descriptio Græciæ*, lib. vi. cap. 8; viii. cap. ii.

<sup>170.</sup> *Iliad*, x. 274.

<sup>171.</sup> *De Naturâ Animalium*, lib. x. fr. 37.

Similarly, the portent of

An eagle and a serpent wreathed in fight

appeared such only by virtue of the critical nature of the conjuncture at which it was displayed. Hector, relying upon what he took to be a promise

of divine help, aimed at nothing less than the capture, in the rout of battle, of the Greek camp, and the conflagration of the Greek ships. But every step in advance brought him nearer to the tent where the irate epical hero lay inert, but ready to spring into action at the last extremity; and it was fully recognised that the arming of Achilles meant far more than the mere loss of the fruits of victory. The balance of events, then, if the proposed *coup de main* were persevered with, hung upon a knife-edge of destiny; and pale fear might well invade the eager, yet hesitating Trojan host when, just as the foremost warriors were about to breach the Greek rampart, an eagle flying westward—that is, towards the side of darkness and death—let fall among their ranks a coiling and blood-stained snake. [172]

And adown the blasts of the wind he darted with one wild scream;  
Then shuddered the Trojans, beholding the serpent's writhing gleam  
In the midst of them lying, the portent of Zeus the Ægis-lord,  
And to Hector the valiant Polydamas spoke with a bodeful word. [173]

His vaticinations were defied. The Trojan leader met them with the memorable protest:

But thou, thou wouldst have us obey the long-winged fowl of the air!  
Go to, unto these have I not respect, and nought do I care  
Whether to rightward they go to the sun and the dayspring sky,  
Or whether to leftward away to the shadow-gloomed west they fly.  
But for us, let us hearken the counsel of Zeus most high, and obey,  
Who over the deathling race and the deathless beareth sway.  
One omen of all is best, that we fight for our fatherland!

[172]. Shelley has adopted and developed the incident in the opening stanzas of the *Revolt of Islam*.

[173]. *Iliad*, xii. 207-10 (Way's trans.).

Magnificent, but, in the actual case, mistaken. The shabby counsel of Polydamas really carried with it the safety of Troy.

The eagle is virtually the Homeric king of birds. He is in the *Iliad* 'the most perfect,' as well as 'the strongest and swiftest of flying things'; his appearances in both poems, often expressly ordained by Zeus, are always momentous, and are, accordingly, eagerly watched and solicitously interpreted; moreover, they never deceive; to disregard the warning they convey is to rush spontaneously to destruction. It is only, however, in the

Twenty-fourth Iliad, usually regarded as subsequent, in point of composition, to the cantos embodying the primitive legend of the 'Wrath of Achilles,' that the eagle begins to be marked out as the special envoy of Zeus. Later, the companionship became so close as to justify Æschylus in implying that the bird was in lieu of a dog to the 'father of gods and men.' The position, on the other hand, assigned, in one passage of the Odyssey, to the hawk as the 'swift messenger' of Apollo, was not maintained. The Hellenic Phœbus eventually disclaimed all relationship with the hawk-headed Horus of the Nile Valley. The rapidity, however, of the hawk's flight, and his agility in the pursuit of his prey, furnish our poet, again and again, with terms of comparison. Here is an example, taken from the description of the deadly duel outside the Scæan gate.

As when a falcon, bird of swiftest flight,  
From some high mountain top on tim'rous dove  
Swoops fiercely down; she, from beneath, in fear,  
Evades the stroke; he, dashing through the brake,  
Shrill-shrieking, pounces on his destin'd prey;  
So, wing'd with desp'rate hate, Achilles flew,  
So Hector, flying from his keen pursuit,  
Beneath the walls his active sinews plied.[174]

[174.](#) *Iliad*, xxii. 139-44 (Lord Derby's trans.).

In popular Russian parlance, too, 'the hurricane in the field, and the luminous hawk in the sky,' are the favourite metaphors of swiftness.[175] Only that Homer's falcon has no direct relations with light; and of those indirectly traceable in the one phrase connecting him with Apollo, the poet himself was certainly not cognisant.

[175.](#) Gubernatis, *Zoological Mythology*, vol. ii. p. 193.

Vultures always lurk behind the scenes, as it were, of the Homeric battle-stage. The abandonment to their abhorrent offices of the bodies of the slain formed one of the chief terrors of death in the field, and presented a much-dreaded means of enhancing the penalties of defeat. The carrion-feeding birds perpetually on the watch to descend from the clouds upon the blood-stained plain of Ilium, are clearly 'griffon-vultures,' *Vultur fulvus*; but the 'bearded vulture,' *Gypaëtus barbatus*, the *Lämmergeier* of the Germans, which, like the eagle, pursues live prey, occasionally lends, in a figure, the

swoop and impetus of its flight to vivify some incident of extermination.  
[176] Both species occur in modern Greece.[177]

[176.](#) *Odyssey*, xxii. 302; *Iliad*, xvi. 428, xvii. 460.

[177.](#) Buchholz, *Realien*, Bd. i. Abth. ii. p. 134.

One of the few bits of primitive folk-lore enshrined in the *Iliad* relates to the wars of the cranes and pygmies. The passage is curious in many ways. It contains the first notice of bird-migrations, implies the constancy with which the 'annual voyage' of the 'prudent crane' was steered during three thousand years,[178] and records the dim wonder early excited by the sight and sound of that

Aery caravan, high over seas  
Flying, and over lands with mutual wing  
Easing their flight.

[178.](#) Koerner, *Die Homerische Thierwelt*, pp. 62-65.

In the *Iliadic* lines, the clamour of the Trojan advance, in contrast to the determined silence of their opponents, is somewhat disdainfully accentuated:

When afar through the heaven cometh pealing before them the cry of the cranes,  
As they flee from the wintertide storms and the measureless deluging rains.  
Onward with screaming they fly to the streams of the ocean-flood,  
Bringing down on the folk of the Pigmies battle and murder and blood.[179]

[179.](#) Way's *Iliad*, iii. 3-7.

The simile is felicitously plagiarised by Virgil in his

Quales sub nubibus atris  
Strymoniaë dant signa grues, atque æthera tranant  
Cum sonitu, fugiuntque Notos clamore secundo,[180]

but with the omission of the pygmy-element, probably as too childish for the mature taste of his Roman audience. Its origin may perhaps be sought in obscure rumours concerning the stunted races encountered by modern travellers in Central Africa. The association of ideas, however, by which they were connected in a hostile sense with 'fowls o' the air' is of trackless

antiquity. It partially survives in the notion, current in Finland, that birds of passage spend their winters in dwarf-land, 'a dweller among birds' meaning, in polite Finnish phrase, a dwarf; and bird-footed mannikins have a well-marked place in German folk-stories;[181] but the root from which these withered leaves of fable once derived vitality has long ago perished. Aristotle described the 'small infantry warr'd on by cranes' as cave-dwellers near the sources of the Nile;[182] Pliny turned them into a kind of pantomime-cavalry, mounted on rams and goats, locating them among the Himalayas, and conjuring up a fantastic vision of their periodical descents to the seacoast, to destroy the eggs and young of their winged enemies, against whom they could no otherwise hope to make head.[183] For such disinterested ravage as was committed on their behalf by Herzog Ernst, a mediæval knight-errant smitten with compassion for the miserable straits to which they were reduced by the secular feud imposed upon them, could scarcely be of more than millennial recurrence.[184]

[180]. *Æneid*, x. 264-66.

[181]. Grimm and Stallybrass, *Teutonic Mythology*, pp. 1420, 1450.

[182]. *De Animal. Hist.* lib. vii. cap. ii.; lib. iii. cap. xii.

[183]. *Hist. Nat.* lib. vii. cap. 2.

[184]. *Zeitschrift für Deutsches Alterthum*, Bd. vii. p. 232.

The Homeric wild swan is *Cygnus musicus*, great numbers of which yearly exchange the frozen marshes of the North for the 'silver lakes and rivers' of Greece and Asia Minor. But the swan of the Epics sings no 'sad dirge of her certain ending.' Unmelodiously exultant, she flutters with the rest of the fluttering denizens of the Lydian water-meadows, in a scene full of animation.

And as the many tribes of feathered birds, wild geese or cranes or long-necked swans, on the Asian mead by Kaystros' stream, fly hither and thither joying in their plumage, and with loud cries settle ever onwards, and the mead resounds; even so poured forth the many tribes of warriors from ships and huts into the Scamandrian plain.[185]

Nor do the

of Homeric landscapes; once only, the ‘solemn nightingale’ is permitted, in the story of the waiting of Penelope, ‘to pour her soft lays.’ ‘Even as when the daughter of Pandareus,’ the Ithacan queen tells the disguised Odysseus, ‘the brown bright nightingale, sings sweet in the first season of the spring, from her place in the thick leafage of the trees; and with many a turn and thrill she pours forth her full-voiced music bewailing her child, dear Itylus, whom on a time she slew with the sword unwitting, Itylus the son of Zethus the prince; even as her song, my troubled soul sways to and fro.’ [186]

[185.](#) *Iliad*, ii. 459-63.

[186.](#) *Odyssey*, xix. 518-24.

Intense appreciation of the sentiment of sound is here unmistakable; yet elsewhere in the Homeric poems we hear of the sharp cry of the swallow, of the screams of contending vultures, the piercing shriek of the eagle, the wild pæan of the hawk, the clamorous vociferations of his terrified victims, but nothing of the tender notes of thrush, lark, or linnet, though deliciously audible throughout Greece

In spring time, when the sun with Taurus rides.

Even in the island of Calypso, where delights are imaginable at will, the poplars and cypresses house only such harsh-voiced birds as owls, hawks, and cormorants—perhaps in order to leave the uncontested palm for sweet singing to the nymph herself. The power of song does not, indeed, appear to be, in Homer’s view, ‘an excellent thing in woman.’ It is not included among the gifts of Athene, or even among the graces of Aphrodite. None of his noble or admirable heroines possess it. It is reserved, as part of a baleful dower of fascination, for enchantresses who lure men to oblivion or ruin—for Calypso, Circe, and the Sirens.

The *Odyssey* being essentially a sea-story, the prevalence in its fauna of marine species is not surprising. Seals frequently present themselves; coots and cormorants, laughing gulls and sea-mews, dive and play amid the

surges that beat upon its magic shores; ospreys call and cry; a cuttle-fish is limned to the life; Scylla has been supposed to represent a magnified and monstrous cephalopod. Dolphins are common to the Iliad and Odyssey, and frequent the Ægean nowadays as of old.<sup>[187]</sup> Their mythical associations in post-Homeric literature are, indeed, forgotten; but the direction in which they travel, collected into shoals, helps the fishermen of Syra and Melos to a rude forecast of the set of impending winds.

<sup>187.</sup> Erhard, *Fauna der Cycladen*, p. 27.

The only significant zoological novelty, then, in the Odyssey may be said to lie in its recognition of the goose as a domesticated bird. The prominence given by it to swine-keeping, only incidentally mentioned in the Iliad, is also noteworthy. A dissimilarity, on the other hand, in the ethical sentiment towards animals displayed in the two poems—above all, as regards the horse and dog—cannot fail to strike a dispassionate reader; but this has been sufficiently dwelt upon in a separate chapter. The remark need only here be added that the conception of the dog Argos seems no less thoroughly European than that of the horses of Rhesus is Asiatic. Both, it is true, may have had a local origin on the same side of the Hellespont, but, from the point of view of moral geography, they undoubtedly belong to different continents.



## CHAPTER VI.

### TREES AND FLOWERS IN HOMER.

IF we can accept as tolerably complete the view of early Achæan beliefs presented to us in the Iliad and Odyssey, they included but few legendary associations with vegetable growths. The treatment of the Homeric flora, like that of the Homeric fauna, is essentially simple and direct. One magic herb has a place in it, and the 'enchanted stem' of the lotus bears fruit of inexplicable potency over the subtly compounded human organism; but tree-worship is as remote from the poet's thoughts as animal-worship, and flower-myths seem equally beyond his ken. He knew of no 'love-lies-bleeding' stories interpreting the passionate glow of scarlet petals; nor of 'forget-me-not' stories fitted to the more tender sentiment of azure blooms; nor of delicate calyxes nurtured by goddesses' tears; nor of any other of the wistful human fancies endlessly intertwined with the beautiful starry apparitions of spring-tide on the blossoming earth. The simplicity of his admiration for them might, indeed, almost have incurred the disapprobation of ultra-Wordsworthians. With the 'yellow primrose' he never had an opportunity of making acquaintance, by 'the river's brim' or elsewhere; but crocuses or hyacinths, violets or poppies, drew him into no reveries; no mystical meanings clung about the images of them in his mind; he looked at them with open eyes of delight, and went his way.

The oak has been called the king of the forest, as the lion the king of beasts. But its supremacy is largely a thing of the past. To the early undivided Aryans, it was the tree of trees. Their common name for it, which survived with its original special meaning in Celtic and Greek, came, in

other languages, to denote the generalised conception of a tree, showing the oak to have been pre-eminent in their common ancestral home. Traces of this shifting of the linguistic standpoint are preserved in some Homeric phrases. Thus, *drûs*—etymologically identical with the English *tree*—means, not only an oak, but, most probably, the particular kind of oak familiar to us in England—*Quercus robur*, ‘the unwedgeable and gnarled oak’ of Shakespeare. But the generic significance gradually infused into the specific term comes to the front in several of its compounds. A wood-cutter, for instance, is, in the *Iliad*, literally an ‘oak-cutter,’ and the ‘solemn shade’ round Circe’s dwelling was afforded, etymologically, by an oaken grove, although the meaning really conveyed by the word *drûma* was that of a collection of forest-trees of undetermined and various kinds. In later Greek, too, we find a woodpecker styled an ‘oakpecker’; and the Dryades, while in name ‘oak-nymphs,’ were, in point of fact, unrestricted in their choice of an arboreal dwelling-place. By a curious survival of associations, the name in modern Greek of this antique forest-constituent is *dendron*, a tree; yet it is now by no means common in Greece. Homer’s oaks were mountain-reared, sturdy, proof against most contingencies of climate. Of similar nature were Leonteus and Polypœtes, of the rugged Lapith race, who indomitably held the way into the Greek camp against the mighty Asius. ‘These twain,’ we are told, ‘stood in front of the lofty gates, like high-crested oak-trees in the hills, that for ever abide the wind and rain, firm fixed with roots great and long.’ [188]

[188](#). *Iliad*, xii. 131-34.

The species of oak at present dominant both in Greece and the Troad is the ‘oak of Bashan,’ *Quercus ægilops*. Its fruit, the valonia in commercial demand for tanning purposes, was made serviceable, within Homer’s experience, under the almost identical name of *balanoi*, only as food for pigs. Homer’s name for this fine tree—extended, perhaps, to the closely allied *Quercus esculus*—is *phegos*, signifying ‘edible,’ and denoting, in other European languages, the beech. How, then, did it come to be transferred, south of the Ceraunian mountains, to a totally different kind of tree? The explanation is simple. No beeches grew in the Hellenic peninsula when the first Aryan settlers entered it. A word was hence left derelict, and was naturally claimed by a conspicuous forest-tree, until then anonymous,

because unknown further north, which shared with the beech its characteristic quality—so the necessities of hunger caused it to be esteemed—of producing fruit capable, after a fashion, of supporting life.[189] So, in the United States, the English names ‘robin,’ ‘hemlock,’ ‘maple,’ and probably many others, were unceremoniously handed on to strange species, on the strength of some casual or superficial resemblances.[190] The tradition of acorn-eating connected with the rustic Arcadians applied evidently to the fruit of the valonia-oak, or one of its nearest congeners; [191] and the oracular oak of Dodona, to which Odysseus pretended to have hied for counsel, appears to have been of the same description; as was certainly the tree of Zeus before the Scæan gate, whence Apollo and Athene watched the single combat between Hector and Ajax, and beneath which the spear of Tlepolemus was wrenched from the flesh of the fainting Sarpedon. These two are the only trees divinely appropriated in Homeric verse, and they command but a small share of the reverence paid by Celts and Teutons to their sacred oaks.

[189]. Schrader and Jevons, *Prehistoric Antiquities of the Aryans*, p. 273.

[190]. Taylor, *Origin of the Aryans*, p. 27.

[191]. Kruse, *Hellas*, Th. i. p. 350; Fraas, *Synopsis*, p. 252.

The beech is an encroaching tree. Wherever it is capable of thriving, it tends to replace the oak, which has lost, apparently, a great part of its old propagative energy. Possibly its exposure to the attacks of countless insect-enemies, from which the beech enjoys immunity, may account for its comparative helplessness in the battle for life. The beech is, at any rate, now the typical tree of central Europe; it has aided in the extirpation of the ancient oak-forests of Jutland, and has established itself, within the historic period, in Scotland and Ireland.[192] Its habitat is, however, bounded to the east by a line drawn from Königsberg on the Baltic to the Caucasus; it is not found in the Troad, or in Greece south of a track crossing the peninsula from the Gulf of Arta to the Gulf of Volo. It grows freely, however, on the slopes of the Mysian Olympus, as well as on Mount Pelion in Thessaly. At the beginning of the Macedonian era, too, Dicæarchus[193] described the thick foliage of Pelion as prevalently beechen, though cypresses, silver firs, junipers, and maples, also abounded, the last three kinds of tree having

since disappeared, while the beech seems to have only just held its ground. [194] Its relative importance, then, five hundred years earlier, is not likely to have been very different; yet Homer, who certainly knew a good deal about Pelion, whether by report, or from observation, never mentions the beech. It is true that we cannot argue with any confidence from omission to ignorance. An epic is not an encyclopædia. The illustrations employed in it are not necessarily exhaustive of all that the poet's world contains. We can, then, be certain of nothing more than that Homer's idea of a typical forest did not include the beech. Its appearance, then, in the following spirited lines from Mr. Way's excellent translation of the *Iliad*, has no warrant in the original, where the third kind of tree mentioned is the *phegos*, or valonia-oak.

And as when the East-wind and South-wind in stormy contention strive  
In the glens of a mountain, a deep dark forest to rend and rive,  
Scourging the smooth-stemmed cornel-tree, and the beech and the ash,  
While against each other their far-spreading branches swing and dash  
With unearthly din, and ever the shattering limbs of them crash. [195]

[192]. Selby, *History of British Forest Trees*, pp. 309, 319.

[193]. Müller, *Geographi Græci minores*, t. i. p. 106.

[194]. Tozer, *Researches in the Highlands of Turkey*, vol. ii. pp. 122-23.

[195]. Way's *Iliad*, xvi. 765-69.

The ash, on the other hand, though abundant on many Greek mountains, no longer waves along the ridgy heights of Pelion. Yet it was here that the ashen shaft of the great Pelidean spear was cut by the Centaur Chiron. For in the Homeric account of the arming of Patroclus, after we have been told of his equipment with the shield, cuirass, and formidably nodding helmet of Achilles, it is recounted:

Then seized he two strong lances that fitted his grasp, only he took not the spear of the noble son of Aiakos, heavy, and huge, and stalwart, that none other of the Achaians could wield, but Achilles alone availed to wield it: even the ashen Pelian spear that Chiron gave to his father dear, from the crown of Pelion, to be the bane of heroes. [196]

The shaft in question could certainly have been hewn nowhere else; the fact of the Centaur's residence being attested, to this day, by the visibility of the cavern inhabited by him, dilapidated, it is true, but undeniable. [197] Here,

surely, is evidence to convince the most sceptical. Its conclusive force is scarcely inferior to that of the testimony borne by the graves of Hamlet and Ophelia at Elsinore to the reality of the tragic endings of those distraught personages.

[196.](#) *Iliad*, xvi. 139-44.

[197.](#) Tozer, *Researches*, vol. ii. p. 126.

The Homeric epithet, ‘quivering with leaves,’ is fully justified, Mr. Tozer informs us, [\[198\]](#) by the dense clothing of all the heights and hollows of Chiron’s mountain with beech and oak, chestnut and plane-trees, besides evergreen *under-garments* of myrtle, arbutus, and laurel-bushes. Yet the ash, as we have said, is missing, nor have the pines felled to build the good ship ‘Argo’ [\[199\]](#) left, it would seem, any representatives.

[198.](#) *Ib.* p. 122.

[199.](#) *Medea*, 3.

In the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, too, pine-wood is the approved material for nautical constructions. It was probably derived from the mountain-loving silver-fir, some grand specimens of which grew nevertheless conveniently near the sea-shore in remote Ogygia, and provided ‘old Laertes’ son’ with material for his rapidly and skilfully built raft. Homer distinguishes, in a loose way, at least two species of pine, but their identification in particular cases is to a great extent arbitrary. The trees, for instance, employed in conjunction with ‘high-crested’ oaks, to fence round the court-yard of Polyphemus, may have been the picturesque stonepines of South Italy, but they may just as well, or better, have been maritime pines, such as spring up everywhere along the sandy flats of modern Greece. [\[200\]](#) The stone-pine was sacred to Cybele. [\[201\]](#) Her husband, Atys, was transformed into one, with the result of bringing her as near the verge of madness as might be consistent with her venerable dignity; for actually bereft of reason a goddess presumably cannot be. This, however, was a post-Homeric legend, and a post-Homeric association.

[200.](#) Daubeny, *Trees of the Ancients*, p. 19.

[201.](#) Dierbach, *Flora Mythologica*, p. 42.

What might be called the ornamental part of the Ogygian groves consisted of black poplars, aromatic cypresses, and alders. Indigenous there, likewise, although heard of only as supplying perfumed firewood, were the ‘cedar’ and ‘*thuon*,’ split logs of which blazed within the fragrant cavern where Calypso was found by Hermes tunefully singing while she plied the shuttle. The cedar here mentioned, however, was no ‘cedar of Lebanon,’ but a description of juniper which attains the full dimensions of a tree in the lands bordering on the Levant.[202] The resinous wood yielded by it was highly valued by the Homeric Greeks for its ‘grateful smell’; store-rooms for precious commodities, and the ‘perfumed apartments’ of noble ladies were constructed of it. This, at least, is expressly stated of Hecuba’s chamber, and can be inferred of Helen’s and Penelope’s. The *thuon*, or ‘wood of sacrifice,’ burnt with cedar-wood on Calypso’s hearth, was identified by Pliny with the African *citrus*, extravagantly prized for decorative furniture in Imperial Rome, and thought to be represented by a coniferous tree called *Thuya articulata*, now met with in Algeria.[203]

[202]. Buchholz, *Realien*, Bd. i. Abth. ii. p. 232.

[203]. Daubeny, *op. cit.* pp. 40-42.

The trees shadowing, in the Odyssey, the entrance by the ‘deep-flowing Ocean’ to the barren realm of death,[204] appear to have been selected for that position owing to a supposed incapacity for ripening fruit. The grove in question was composed of ‘lofty poplars’ and ‘seed-shedding willows’; and poplars and willows were alike deemed sterile and, because sterile, of evil omen.[205] Even among ourselves, the willow retains a dismal significance, and it is prominent in Chinese funeral rites.[206] The black poplar continued to the end sacred to Persephone; but its connexion with Hades, in the traditions of historic Greece, was less explicit than that of the white poplar (*Populus alba*). This last tree, called by Homer *acherois*, had its especial habitat on the shores of the Acheron in Thesprotia, whence, as Pausanias relates,[207] it was brought to the Peloponnesus by Hercules; and the same hero, in a variant of the story, returned crowned with poplar from his successful expedition to Hades. In the Odyssey the white poplar does not occur, and in the Iliad only in a simile employed to render more impressive, first the collapse of Asius under the stroke of Idomeneus, and

again the overthrow of Sarpedon by Patroclus. ‘And he fell, as an oak falls, or a poplar, or tall pine tree, that craftsmen have felled on the hills, with new-whetted axes.’ [208]

[204.](#) *Odyssey*, x. 510.

[205.](#) Hayman’s ed. of the *Odyssey*, vol. ii. p. 174; Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xvi. 46.

[206.](#) Gubernatis, *Mythologie des Plantes*, t. ii. p. 337.

[207.](#) *Descriptio Græciæ*, v. 14.

[208.](#) *Iliad*, xiii. 389; xvi. 482-84.

The author of the *Iliad* ascribes no under-world relationships either to the white or to the black poplar. His sole funereal tree is the elm. Relating the misfortunes of her family, Andromache says:

Fell Achilles’ hand  
My sire Aetion slew, what time his arms  
The populous city of Cilicia raz’d,  
The lofty-gated Thebes; he slew indeed,  
But stripp’d him not; he reverenc’d the dead;  
And o’er his body, with his armour burnt,  
A mound erected, and the mountain-nymphs,  
The progeny of ægis-bearing Jove,  
Planted around his tomb a grove of elms. [209]

Now the elm, like the poplar and willow, had, from of old, the not-unfounded reputation of partial sterility, and was for this reason made the legendary abode of dreams [210]—things without progeny or purpose, that passing ‘leave not a rack behind.’ Virgil’s giant elm in the vestibule of Orcus,

Quam sedem Somnia vulgo  
Vana tenere ferunt, foliisque sub omnibus hærent,

is the literary embodiment of this popular idea. Evidently, then, the trees of mourning in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were singled out owing to their possession of a common, though by no means obvious peculiarity; yet their selection in each poem is different. This is the more remarkable because associations of the sort, once established, are almost ineradicable from what

we may call tribal consciousness. Cypresses have no share in them, so far as Homer is concerned. Their appointment to the office of mourning the dead would seem to have been subsequently resolved upon. The connexion was, at any rate, well established before the close of the classic age, when funeral-pyres were made by preference of cypress wood, the tree itself being consecrated to the hated Dis.[211] And Pausanias met with groves of cypresses surrounding the tomb of Laïs near Corinth, and of Alcmaëon, son of the ill-fated seer Amphiaraus, at Psophis in Arcadia.[212] The tradition survives, nowadays in the East, in the planting of Turkish cemeteries.

[209](#). Lord Derby's *Iliad*, vi. 414-20.

[210](#). Dierbach, *Flora Mythologica*, p. 34.

[211](#). *Ib.* p. 49.

[212](#). *Descriptio Græciæ*, ii. 2, viii. 24.

The vegetation along the shores of the Scamander (now the Mendereh) has undergone, so far as can be judged, singularly little alteration during nearly three thousand years. Homer sings of

the willows, elms, and tamarisk shrubs,  
The lotus, and the reeds, and galingal,  
Which by the lovely river grew profuse.[213]

And there they have continued to grow. The swampy district below Hissarlik bristles with reeds and bulrushes; the whole plain is thick with trefoil (the 'lotus' of the *Iliad*); while the banks of the famous stream, once choked with Trojan dead, are fringed—Dr. Virchow relates—with double rows of willows intermixed with tamarisks and young elms. If no such robust trunk is now to be seen as that of the elm-tree, by the help of which Achilles struggled out of the raging torrent, the deficiency is accidental, not inherent. Potential trees are kept perpetually in the twig stage by the unsparing ravages of camels and browsing goats. To judge of the former sylvan state of the Troad, one must ascend the valley of the Thymbrius—the modern Kimar Su.[214] There the valonia-oak, the ilex, the plane, and the hornbeam, attain a fine stature; pine-groves clothe the declivities; hazel-bushes and arbutus, hops and wild vines, trail over the rocks, and cluster in the hollows. Along the Asmak, dense growths of asphodel send up flower-

stalks reaching a horse's withers; the elm-bushes are entangled with roses and arums; the turf is sprinkled with coronilla, dandelion, starry trefoil, red silene; fields are sheeted white with the blossoms of the water-ranunculus; the 'flowery Scamandrian plain' that gladdened the eyes of the ancient bard is still visibly spread out before the traveller of to-day. Homer, indeed, as Dr. Virchow remarks, knew a good deal more about the Troad than most of his critics, even if he did, on occasions, subordinate topographical accuracy to poetical exigency.

[213](#). Lord Derby's *Iliad*, xxi. 350-52.

[214](#). *Berlin. Abhandlungen*, 1879, p. 71.

The plane-tree nowhere shows to more splendid advantage than in Greece and Asia Minor; but the only specimen commemorated in the Greek epics grew at Aulis, and sheltered the altar upon which the hecatombs of the expeditionary force were offered during the time of waiting terminated by the sacrifice of Iphigenia. It was the scene, too, of a portent; for one day, in full view of the astonished Achæans, a serpent crept up its trunk to devour the nine callow inmates of a sparrow's nest among its branches, and on the completion of a sufficiently ample meal by the deglutition of the mother-bird, was then and there turned into stone.[\[215\]](#) The decade of consumed sparrows—mother and chicks—signified, according to the interpretation of Calchas, the ten years of the siege of Troy; and the reality of the event was attested to later generations by the display, in the temple of Artemis at Aulis, of some wood from the identical tree within the living compass of whose branches it had occurred.[\[216\]](#) Had the petrified snake been producible as well, the evidence would have been complete.

[215](#). *Iliad*, ii. 305-29.

[216](#). Pausanias, ix. 20.

The legendary plane-tree had, however, when Pausanias visited Aulis, been replaced by a group of palms imported from Syria, the nearest home of the species, whence the Phœnicians had not failed to transport it westward. It accordingly, as being derived from the same prolific source of novelties, shared the name 'Phœnix' with the brilliant colour produced by the Tyrian dye. But its introduction seems to belong to the later Achæan

age. For the palm is unknown in the *Iliad*, and emerges only once in the *Odyssey*,[\[217\]](#) although then with particular emphasis. The individual tree seen by Homer was probably the first planted on Greek soil. It spread its crown of leaves above the shrine of Apollo, at Delos. And when the storm-tossed Odysseus set his wits to work to win the protection of Nausicaa—a matter of life or death to him at the moment—he could think of no more flattering comparison for the youthful stateliness of her aspect, than to the vivid upspringing grace of the tall, arboreal exotic. A tradition, not reported by Homer, who nowhere localises the birth of a god, asserted Apollo to have come into the world beneath that very tree, or one of its predecessors in the same spot; and it still had successors in the Augustan age.[\[218\]](#)

[217.](#) *Odyssey*, vi. 162.

[218.](#) Hayman's *Odyssey*, vol. i. p. 226.

The laurel, although exceedingly common in Greece, is found only in one of the semi-fabulous regions of the Homeric world. The entrance to the cavern of Polyphemus was shaded by its foliage, not as yet sacred to the sun-god. Equally detached from relationship to Athene is the olive, with which, however, acquaintance is implied both in its wild and cultivated varieties. The latter Pindar asserts to have been introduced into his native country, from the 'dark sources of the Ister,' by Hercules,[\[219\]](#) who showed unexpected skill in the difficult art of acclimatisation; and the value in which it was held can readily be gathered from the following beautiful simile:

[219.](#) *Olymp.* iii. 25-32.

As when a man reareth some lusty sapling of an olive in a clear space where water springeth plenteously, a goodly shoot fair-growing; and blasts of all winds shake it, yet it bursteth into white blossom; then suddenly cometh the wind of a great hurricane and wresteth it out of its abiding-place and stretcheth it out upon the earth; even so lay Panthoös' son, Euphorbos of the good ashen spear, when Menelaos, Atreus' son, had slain him, and despoiled him of his arms.[\[220\]](#)

[220.](#) *Iliad*, xvii. 53-60.

Olive-wood was the favourite material for axe-handles and clubs; and the bed of Odysseus was carved by himself out of an olive-tree still rooted within a chamber of his palace.[\[221\]](#) In the modern Ithaca, the olive alone

of all the trees that once flourished there has resisted extirpation, and everywhere in the Ionian Islands attains a size entitling its assemblages to rank as forests, rather than as mere groves.[222] Thus, the olive planted at the head of the bay where Odysseus landed after his long wanderings, was ‘wide-spreading’ in point of simple fact, needing no poetical licence to make it so. Olive-oil does not appear to have been then in culinary employment; its chief use was for anointing the body after bathing. This indispensable luxury was provided for, in opulent establishments, by laying up a goodly stock of oil among such household treasures as were entrusted by Penelope to the care of Eurycleia.[223]

[221.](#) *Odyssey*, xxiii. 190.

[222.](#) Schliemann, quoted in Hayman’s *Odyssey*, vol. iii. p. 15.

[223.](#) *Odyssey*, ii. 339.

The Homeric poems contain no allusion to the perfume of either flowers or fruit. This is the more surprising from the extreme sensitiveness betrayed in them to olfactory impressions of other kinds. We hear of ‘scented apartments,’ ‘sweet-smelling garments,’ of the aromatic quality of the cypress, of the spicy air wafted through Calypso’s island from the juniper and citron-logs serving her for fuel, even of the barely appreciable fragrance of olive-oil. Offensive odours excite corresponding horror. Menelaus and his comrades were utterly unable to endure, without the solace of an ambrosial antidote, the ‘ancient and fish-like smell’ of the sealskins disguised in which they lay in wait for Proteus, under the tutelary guidance of the sea-nymph Eidothea, his scarcely dutiful daughter. The Spartan king, relating the incident to Telemachus, was confident of meeting with fellow-feeling when he said:

There would our ambush have been most terrible, for the deadly stench of the sea-bred seals distressed us sore; nay, who would lay him down by a beast of the sea? But herself she wrought deliverance, and devised a great comfort. She took ambrosia of a very sweet savour, and set it beneath each man’s nostril, and did away with the stench of the beast.  
[224]

[224.](#) *Odyssey*, iv. 441-46, and Hayman’s notes.

As we read, the tradition that Homer’s last days were prolonged by the perfume of an apple, grows intelligible. And yet the balmy breath of Pierian

violets and Cilician crocuses drew no comment from him!

The flowers distinctively noticed by him are: poppies, hyacinths, crocuses, violets, and, by implication, roses and white lilies. And it is somewhat remarkable that, while all the items of this not very long list can be collected from the Iliad, only two of them recur in any shape in the Odyssey. The former poem recognises the artificial cultivation of the poppy, probably, as we shall see, for gastronomic purposes, since there could be no question at that epoch, in Greece or Asia Minor, of the preparation of opium. The death, by an arrow-shot from the bow of Teucus, of the youthful Gorgythion, son of Priam and Castianeira, is thus described.

Even as in a garden a poppy droopeth its head aside, being heavy with fruit and the showers of spring, so bowed he aside his head laden with his helm. [225]

[225]. *Iliad*, viii. 306-308.

Crimson poppies now bloom freely along the Mendereh valley; they were symbolical, in classical Greece, of fruitfulness, love, and death, and were associated with the cult of Demeter. [226] Their fabled origin from the tears of Aphrodite for the death of Adonis, was shared with anemones.

[226]. Buchholz, *Realien*, Bd. i. Abth. ii. p. 250.

Mount Gargarus, the loftiest peak of Ida, blossomed, according to the Iliad, with hyacinths, crocuses, and lotus. This last term designates, however, not the lily of the Nile, but a kind of clover, much relished by the steeds, not only of heroic, but of immortal owners. The fragrant yellow flowers borne by it are not expressly adverted to; the function of the Homeric lotus-grass was rather to supply herbage than to evoke delight.

The identification of the hyacinth of Mount Ida has employed much learning and ingenuity, and the result of learned discussions is not always unanimity of opinion. The case in point is indeed very nearly one of *quot homines, tot sententiæ*. The gladiolus, larkspur, iris, the Martagon lily, the common hyacinth, have all had advocates, each of whom considers his case to be of convincing, not to say, of irresistible strength. The last-mentioned and most obvious solution of the problem is that favoured by Buchholz, [227]

[227]. *Loc. cit.* p. 219.

and he supports it with the reasonable surmise that the epithet ‘hyacinthine,’ applied to the locks of Odysseus, referred, not to colour, but to form, their closely-set curls recalling forcibly enough the *ringleted* effect of the congregated flowerets. The dry soil of Greece is particularly suitable to the hyacinth, sundry kinds of which—one of them so deeply blue as to be nearly black—are found all over the Peloponnesus, in the Ionian islands, and high up on the outlying bulwarks of Olympus.[228] The ‘flower of Ajax,’ legibly inscribed with an interjection of woe, sprang up for the first time in Salamis, it was said, just after the hero it commemorated had met his tragic fate.[229] Another story connected it similarly with the death of Hyacinthus; and it was probably identical with the scarlet gladiolus (*Gladiolus byzantinus*), almost certainly with the *suave rubens hyacinthus* of the Third Eclogue, but not with the Homeric hyacinth, which is undistinguished in folk-lore.

[228.](#) Kruse, *Hellas*, Th. i. p. 359.

[229.](#) Pausanias, i. 35.

The ‘violet-crowned’ Athenians of old, could they recross the Styx to wander by the Ilissus, would be struck with at least one unwelcome change. For violets no longer grow in Attica. They are nevertheless found, although sparingly, in most other parts of Greece, and up to an elevation of two thousand feet on the slopes of Parnassus. Homer often mentions them allusively, but introduces them directly only once, and then, as Fraas has remarked, in the incongruous company of the marsh-loving wild parsley (*Apium palustre*).[230] Unjustifiable from a botanical point of view, the conjunction may have had an æsthetic motive. In the festal garlands of classic Greece, violets and parsley were commonly associated, and their association was perhaps dictated by a survival of the taste displayed in the embellishment of Calypso’s well-watered meadow.

[230.](#) *Synopsis Plantarum*, p. 114; Hayman’s *Odyssey*, vol. i. p. 175.

Homeric violets, at any rate, flourished nowhere else ostensibly; but from their modest retirement within the poet’s mind supplied him with a colour-epithet, which he employed, one might make bold to say, without over-nice discrimination. The sea might indeed, under certain aspects, be fitly so described; but iron makes a very distant approach to the hue indicated; and

Nature must have been in her most sportive mood when she clothed the flock of Polyphemus in violet fleeces. Polyphemus, to be sure, lived in a semi-fabulous world, where it has been suggested[231] that wool might conceivably *grow dyed*, as in the restored Saturnian kingdom imagined by Virgil;[232] and the dark-blue material attached to Helen's golden distaff[233] was evidently a far-travelled rarity, such as might be produced by the use of a foreign dye. But there is no evidence of primitive acquaintance with a blue dye; indeed, if one had been known, it is practically certain that the colour due to it would have been named, either, like indigo, from the substance affording it, or, like 'Tyrian' purple, from its place of origin. The hue of the violet, however, as it appeared to Homer, does not bear to be more distinctly defined than as dusky, while with Virgil it was frankly *black*.

Et nigræ violæ sunt, et vaccinia nigra.

Not preternaturally blue, but naturally black sheep, may then be concluded to have been tended by the Cyclops.

[231](#). Hayman's *Odyssey*, vol. ii. p. 116.

[232](#). *Ecl.* iv. 42.

[233](#). *Odyssey*, iv. 135.

The crocus of Mount Ida—the crocus that 'brake like fire' at the feet of the three Olympian competitors for the palm of beauty—was the splendid golden flower (*Crocus sativus*) yielding, through its orange-coloured stigmas, a dye once deemed magnificent, a perfume ranked amongst the choicest luxuries of Rome, and a medicine in high ancient and mediæval repute. But its vogue has passed. Saffron slippers are no longer an appanage of supreme dignity; the 'saffron wings' of Iris are folded; the 'saffron robes' of the Dawn retain the glamour only of what they signify; to the chymist and the cook, the antique floral ingredient, so long and so extravagantly prized, is of very subordinate importance.

Both the word 'crocus' and its later equivalent 'saffron,' are of Semitic origin. Witness the Hebrew form *karkom* of the first,[234] the Arabic *sahafaran* of the second, developed out of *assfar*, yellow, and represented

by the Spanish *azafran*, whence our ‘saffron.’ The plant was widely and profitably cultivated under Moorish rule in Spain, and was probably introduced by the Phœnicians into Greece, though the common vernal crocus is certainly indigenous there, its white and purple cups begemming all the declivities of ‘Hellas and Argos.’ The saffron-crocus, too, now grows wild in such dry and chalky soil as Sunium and Hymettus afford;[235] yet its name betrays its foreign affinities. Saffron-tinted garments had perhaps never, down to Homer’s time, been seen in Greece itself; he was beyond doubt unacquainted with the actual use of the dye, and distributed with the utmost parsimony the splendour conferred by it. Not only were mere mortals excluded from a share in it, neither Hecuba nor Helen owning a crocus-bordered peplos, but none such set off the formidable charms of the goddess-hostesses of Odysseus, in the fairy isles where he lingered, home-sick amid strange luxury. Saffron robes are, in fact, assigned by the poet of the Iliad, exclusively to Eos, the Dawn, while in the Odyssey, the crocus is never referred to, directly or indirectly.

[234.](#) Hehn and Stallybrass, *op. cit.* p. 199; De Candolle, however, inclines to believe that carthamine, not saffron, is indicated by the Hebrew *karkom* (*Origin of Cultivated Plants*, p. 166).

[235.](#) Buchholz, *Realien*, Bd. i. Abth. ii. p. 220.

Some centuries after the material part of Homer had been reduced to

A drift of white  
Dust in a cruse of gold,

crocus-coloured tresses came poetically into fashion. The daughters of Celeus, in the Hymn to Demeter, were endowed with them; Ariadne at Naxos, too, besides other mythical maidens. And Roman ladies realised the idea of employing saffron as a hair-dye, the stern disapproval of Tertullian and Saint Jerome notwithstanding.[236] The scent of the crocus was made part of the pleasures of the amphitheatre by the diffusion among the audience of saffron-wine in the finest possible spray, and Heliogabalus habitually bathed in saffron-water. The flower, too, was noted by Pliny with the rose, lily, and violet, for its delicious fragrance,[237] Homer’s apparent insensibility to which may well suggest a doubt whether, after all, he knew the late-blooming, golden crocus otherwise than by reputation.

[236.](#) Syme, *English Botany*, vol. ix. p. 151.

[237.](#) *Hist. Nat.* xxi. 17.

As regards the rose and the lily, the doubt becomes wellnigh certainty. Both gave rise to Homeric epithets; neither takes in the Homeric poems a concrete form. The Iranic derivation of their Greek names, *rhodon* and *leirion*, shows the native home of each of these matchless blossoms to have been in Persia.[\[238\]](#) Thence, according to M. Hehn, they travelled through Armenia and Phrygia into Thrace, and eventually, by that circuitous route, reached Greece proper. Commemorative myths strewed the track of their progressive transmissions. Thus, the mountain Rhodope in Thrace took its name from a ‘rosy-footed’ attendant upon Persephone, in the ‘crocus-purple hour’ of her capture by ‘gloomy Dis;’ and in the same vicinity were located the Nysæan Fields—the scene of the disaster—then, for a snare of enticement to the damsel, ablaze with roses and lilies, ‘a marvel to behold,’ with narcissus, crocuses, violets, and hyacinths.[\[239\]](#) Moreover, roses, each with sixty leaves, and highly perfumed, were said to blossom spontaneously in the Emathian gardens of King Midas;[\[240\]](#) Theophrastus places near Philippi the original habitat of the hundred-leaved rose; and roses were profusely employed in the rites of Phrygian nature-worship.

[238.](#) Hehn, *op. cit.* p. 189.

[239.](#) *Hymn to Demeter.*

[240.](#) Herodotus, viii. 138.

Dim rumours of their loveliness spread among the Homeric Greeks. The standing Odyssean designation of Eos as ‘rosy-fingered,’ alternating, in the Iliad, with ‘saffron-robed,’ heralded, it might be said, the European advent of the flower itself. For rose-gardens can have lain only just below the Homeric horizon. Their ambrosial products did not indeed come within mortal reach, but were at the disposal of the gods. By the application of oil of roses, Aphrodite kept the body of Hector fresh and fair during the twelve days of its savage maltreatment by Achilles; and oil of roses was later an accredited antiseptic. Archilochus seems to have been the first Greek poet to make living acquaintance with the blushing flower of Dionysus and Aphrodite, which became known likewise only to the writers of the later

books of Scripture. The 'Rose of Sharon' is accordingly believed to have been a narcissus.

Allusions to the lily do not occur in the *Odyssey*, and are vague and ill-defined in the *Iliad*. The flesh of Ajax might intelligibly, if not appropriately, be designated 'lily-like'; but the same term applied to sounds conveys little or no meaning to our minds. Even if we admit a far-fetched analogy between the song of the Muses, as something uncommon and tenderly beautiful, and a fragile white flower, we have to confess ourselves bewildered by the extension of the comparison to the shrill voices of cicadas, rasping out their garrulous contentment amidst summer foliage.

The slenderness, then, of Homer's acquaintance with the finer kinds of bloom introduced gradually from the East, is apparent from his seeming ignorance of their ravishing perfumes, no less than from the inadequacy of his hints as to their beauty of form and colour. His love of flowers was in the instinctive stage; it had not come to the maturity of self-consciousness. They obtained recognition from him neither as symbols of feeling, nor as accessories to enjoyment. Nausicaa wove no garlands; the cultivation of flowers in the gardens of Alcinous is left doubtful; Laertes pruned his pear-trees, and dug round his vines, but reared for his solace not so much as a poppy. No display of living jewellery aided the seductions of Circe's island; Calypso was content to plant the unpretending violet; Aphrodite herself was without a floral badge; floral decorations of every kind were equally unthought of. Flowers, in fact, had not yet been brought within the sphere of human sentiment; they had not yet acquired significance as emblems of human passion; they had not yet been made partners with humanity in the sorrows of death, and the transient pleasures of a troubled and ephemeral existence.



## CHAPTER VII.

### HOMERIC MEALS.

HEROIC appetites were strong and simple. They craved ‘much meat,’ and could be completely appeased with nothing else; but they demanded little more. They needed no savoury caresses or spicy blandishments. Occasion indeed to stimulate them there was none, though much difficulty might arise about satisfying them. For they disdained paltry subterfuges. Fish, game, and vegetables they accepted in lieu of more substantial prey; but under protest. Hunger, in consenting to receive such trifles, merely compounded for a partial settlement of her claim.

The Homeric bill of fare was concise, and admitted of slight diversification. Day after day, and at meal after meal, roast meat, bread, and wine were set before perennially eager guests, in whose esteem any fundamental change in the materials of the banquet would certainly have been for the worse. Variety, in fact, was in the inverse ratio of abundance. Want alone counselled departures from the beaten track of opulent feasting, and compelled the reluctant adoption of inadequate expedients for silencing the imperative outcries of famine. Nevertheless it cannot be supposed that the epical setting forth of Achæan culinary resources was as exhaustive as the menu of a Guildhall dinner. For where would be the ‘swiftness’ of a narrative which could not leave so much as a dish of beans to the imagination? Homeric criticism is indeed everywhere complicated by the necessity of admitting wide gaps of silence; and in this particular department, so much evidently remains in those gaps, that our list of comestibles must be to a great extent inferential.

‘Butcher’s meat’ (as we call it) was the staple food of Greek heroes. Oxen, however, were not recklessly slaughtered. ‘Great meals of beef’ usually honoured solemn occasions. The fat beasts, reckoned to be in their prime at five years old, met their fate for the most part in connexion with some expiatory ceremony, as that employed to stay the pestilence in the First Iliad, or as the sacrifice for victory offered by Agamemnon in the Second Iliad. The gods were then served first with tit-bits wrapped in fat, and reduced by fire to ashes and steamy odours, peculiarly grateful to immortal nostrils. Portions of the haunches were often chosen for this purpose; the tongue might be added; while at other times, samples of the whole carcass at large seemed preferable. What remained was cut up into small pieces after a fashion still prevailing in Albania,[\[241\]](#) and these, having been filed upon spits, were rapidly grilled. Thickly strewn with barley-meal, they were then distributed by a steward, and eaten with utensils of nature’s providing. Specially honoured guests had pieces from the chine—‘*perpetui tergo bovis*’—allotted to them; and they might, if they chose, share their ‘booty’ (so it was designated) with any other to whom they desired to pass on the compliment, as Odysseus did to Demodocus at the Phæacian feast. The glad recipients of these greasy favours were obviously exempt from modern fastidiousness.

[241.](#) E. F. Knight, *Albania*, p. 225, 1880.

Sheep and goats were prepared for table precisely in the same way with oxen, and so likewise were pigs, save that they were not divested of their skins. ‘Cracklings’ were already appreciated. Roast pork appears, in the Iliad, only on the hospitable board of Achilles; but is less exclusively apportioned in the Odyssey. A brace of sucking-pigs were instantly killed and cooked by Eumæus, the swineherd of Odysseus, on the arrival of his disguised master. Yet he was very far from estimating at their true value the tender merits of the dish celebrated by Elia as perfectly ‘satisfactory to the criticalness of the censorious palate,’ actually apologising for it as ‘servants’ fare,’ wholly unacceptable to the haughty Suitors, for whose profuse entertainment a full-grown porker had to be daily sacrificed. Each man, however, despatched his pig, and was shortly ready for more. And so captivated was Eumæus, by the time his four underlings returned from the fields for supper, with his outwardly sorry guest, that, enlarging the bounds

of his liberality, he ordered the slaughter of a noble hog, whose adipose perfections had been ripening during full five years of life. His cooking was promptly executed, and one share having been set aside for the local nymphs, the six men fell to, and left only such scraps as served for an early breakfast next morning. The performance would have been creditable in modern Somaliland.

Every Homeric hero was an accomplished butcher, and no despicable cook. Both offices were, indeed, too closely connected with religious ritual to have any note of degradation attached to them. Thus, animals were habitually understood to be ‘sacrificed,’ not killed in the purely carnal sense, and the preparation of their flesh for table was formalised as part of the ceremony of worship. The Suitors were marked out as a reckless and impious crew by discarding all sacerdotal functions from their meal-time operations; yet they reserved to themselves, as if it belonged to their superior station, the pleasing duty of cutting the throats of the beasts they were about to devour, passing with the least possible delay from the shambles to the banqueting-hall.

Homeric culinary art perhaps really covered a wider range than is attributed to it in the Poems, where it is designedly represented under a quasi-ritualistic aspect. Although meat, for instance, so far as can be learned from direct statement, was invariably roast or grilled, it by no means follows that it was never eaten boiled or stewed. The contrary inference is indeed fairly warranted by the frequent conjunction of pots, water, and fire; and was thought by Athenæus to derive support from the use as a missile, aimed at Odysseus in unprovoked savagery by Ctesippus, one of the Suitors, of an ox’s foot, which happened to be lying conveniently at hand in a bread-basket.[242] For who, asked the gastronomical sophist, ever thought of roasting an ox’s foot?[243] The casual display, too, in a simile of the Iliad, of a caldron of boiling lard,[244] assures us that some kind of frying process was familiar to the poet.

[242.](#) *Odyssey*, xx. 299.

[243.](#) Potter, *Archæologia Græca*, vol. ii. p. 360.

[244.](#) *Iliad*, xxi. 362.

Among the few secondary articles of diet specified by him was a sausage-like composition, of so irredeemably coarse a character, that 'ears polite' cannot fail to be offended at its literal description. It consisted, to speak plainly, of the stomach or intestines of a goat, stuffed with blood and fat, and kept revolving before a hot fire until thoroughly done. The Suitors, of noble lineage though they were, occasionally supped off this seductive viand, which may, nevertheless, be concluded to have engaged chiefly plebeian patronage.

No quality of game is known to have been rejected through prejudice or superstition by the Homeric Greeks. But even venison ranked in the second line after beef, mutton, and pork. It was sheer hunger that made the 'sequestered stag' brought down by Odysseus in *Ææa* a real godsend to his disconsolate crew; and hunger again reduced them, in the island of Thrinakie, to the necessity of supporting life with fish and birds, both kinds of prey equally being taken by means of baited hooks.<sup>[245]</sup> But they set about their capture only when the exhaustion of the ship's store of flour and wine warned them to bestir themselves; and the regimen their ingenuity provided was so distasteful, and fell so little short, in their opinion and sensations, of absolute starvation, that the fatal temptation to seek criminal relief at the expense of the oxen of the Sun, proved irresistible. They succumbed to it, and perished.

<sup>245.</sup> *Odyssey*, xii. 332.

Small birds were, however, beyond doubt habitually eaten by the poor. The snaring of pigeons and fieldfares is alluded to in the *Odyssey*,<sup>[246]</sup> and was practised, we may be sure, in the interests of the appetite. Nor can we suppose that Penelope and the 'divine Helen' entirely abstained from tasting the geese reared by them, although curiosity and amusement may have been the chief motives for the care bestowed upon them. Poultry of other kinds, as we have seen in another chapter, there was none. But hares must have been used for food, since, like roebucks and wild goats, they were hunted with dogs,<sup>[247]</sup> certainly not for the mere sake of sport. As regards boars, the case stands somewhat differently. For their destructiveness imposed their slaughter as a necessity. The subsequent consumption of their flesh is left to conjecture. The remains of the Calydonian brute seem to have been

contended for rather through arrogance than through appetite, Meleager and the sons of Thestius standing forth as the champions of antagonistic claims to the trophies of the chase. That the boar sacrificed in attestation of the oath of Agamemnon in the Nineteenth Iliad was afterwards flung by Talthybius far into the sea to be 'food for fishes,' is without significance on the point of edibility. Victims thus immolated never furnished the material for feasts; they belonged to the subterranean powers, and fell under the shadow of their inauspicious influence.

[246.](#) *Odyssey*, xxii. 468.

[247.](#) *Odyssey*, xvii. 295.

The fish-eating tastes of the Greeks were of comparatively late development. Homeric prepossessions were decidedly against 'fins and shining scales' of every variety. Eels were ranked apart. Etymological evidence shows them to have been primitively classified with serpents, [\[248\]](#) and they appeared, from this point of view, not merely unacceptable, but absolutely inadmissible, as food. The resemblance was thus protective, not by the design of nature, but through the misapprehension of man, and the ingenuity of hunger was diverted from seeming watersnakes to less repulsive prey. This was found in the silvery shoals and 'fry innumerable' inhabiting the same element, but differentiated from their congeners by the more obvious possession, and more active use of fins. The Homeric fishermen, however, were not enthusiastic in their vocation. Its meditative pleasures made no appeal to them, and they were very sensible of the unsatisfied gastronomic cravings which survived the utmost success in its pursuit. Nets or hooks were employed as occasion required. A heavy haul from the deep is recalled by the gruesome spectacle of the piled-up corpses in the banqueting-hall at Ithaca.

[248.](#) Skeat, *Etymological Dictionary*. Ἐγγελοῦς, an eel, is equivalent to *anguilla*, diminutive of *anguis*, a snake; cf. Buchholz, *Realien*, Bd. i. Abth. ii. p. 107.

But he found all the sort of them fallen in their blood in the dust, like fishes that the fishermen have drawn forth in the meshes of the net into a hollow of the beach from out the grey sea, and all the fish, sore longing for the salt sea-waves, are heaped upon the sand, and the sun shines forth and takes their life away; so now the woovers lay heaped upon each other. [\[249\]](#)

We do not elsewhere hear of net-fishing;[\[250\]](#) but rod-and-line similes occur twice in the *Iliad*, and once in the *Odyssey*. So Patroclus, after the manner of an angler, hooked Thestor, son of Enops.

[249.](#) *Odyssey*, xxii. 383-89.

[250.](#) Either birds or fishes might be understood to be taken in the net mentioned in *Iliad*, v. 487.

And Patroclus caught hold of the spear and dragged him over the rim of the car, as when a man sits on a jutting rock, and drags a sacred fish forth from the sea, with line and glittering hook of bronze; so on the bright spear dragged he Thestor gaping from the chariot, and cast him down on his face, and life left him as he fell.[\[251\]](#)

[251.](#) *Iliad*, xvi. 406-410.

So too, Scylla exercised her craft:

As when a fisher on a jutting rock,  
With long and taper rod, to lesser fish  
Casts down the treacherous bait, and in the sea  
Plunges his tackle with its oxhorn guard;  
Then tosses out on land a gasping prey;  
So gasping to the cliff my men were raised.[\[252\]](#)

[252.](#) *Odyssey*, xii. 251-55 (W. C. Green's translation in *Similes of the Iliad*, p. 259).

Spearing, not rod-fishing, is thought by some commentators to be here indicated; but a weighted line is plainly described where the 'storm-swift Iris' plunges into the 'black sea' on the errand of Zeus to Thetis.

Like to a plummet, which the fisherman  
Lets fall, encas'd in wild bull's horn, to bear  
Destruction to the sea's voracious tribes.[\[253\]](#)

[253.](#) *Iliad*, xxiv. 80-82. (Lord Derby.)

River-fishing is passed over in silence. Yet it was doubtless practised, since the finny denizens of Scamander are remembered with pity for the discomfort ensuing to them from the fight between Achilles and the River; and the admixture of perch with tunny and hake-bones in the prehistoric waste-heaps at Hissarlik[\[254\]](#) makes it clear that fresh-water fish were not neglected by the early inhabitants of the Troad.

[254.](#) Virchow, *Berlin. Abh.* 1879, p. 63.

Homeric seafarers did not resort to fishing as a means of diversifying the monotony, either of their occupations or of their commissariat. They got out their hooks and lines when famine was at hand, and never otherwise. Menelaus accordingly, recounting the story of his detention at Pharos, vivified the impression of his own distress, and the hunger of his men, by the mention of the piscatorial pursuits they were reduced to.[255] And Odysseus, in his narrative to Alcinous, similarly emphasised a similar experience. Fishermen by profession, it can hence be inferred, belonged to the poorest and rudest of the community. Among them were to be found divers for oysters. Patroclus, mocking the fall of Cebriones, exclaims:

[255.](#) *Odyssey*, iv. 368.

Out on it, how nimble a man, how lightly he diveth! Yea, if perchance he were on the teeming deep, this man would satisfy many by seeking for oysters, leaping from the ship, even if it were stormy weather; so lightly now he diveth from the chariot into the plain. Verily among the Trojans too there be diving men.[256]

The trade was then well known, and the molluscs it dealt in constituted, it is equally plain to be seen, a familiar article of diet. Their provision for the dead, in the graves of Mycenæ,[257] emphasises this inference all the more strongly from the absence of any other evidence of Mycenæan fish-eating.

[256.](#) *Iliad*, xvi. 745-50.

[257.](#) Schliemann, *Mycenæ*, p. 332.

Neither fish nor flesh was, in the Homeric world, preserved by means of salt or otherwise as a resource against future need. The distribution of superfluity was not better understood in time than in space. Meat, as we have seen, was killed and eaten on the spot; and the husbanding of fish-supplies was still less likely to be thought of. Salt was, however, regularly used as a condiment; it was sprinkled over roast meat,[258] and a pinch of salt was a proverbial expression for the indivisible atom, so to speak, of charity.[259] Only the marine stores of the commodity were drawn upon; those concealed by the earth remained unexplored—a circumstance in itself marking the great antiquity of the poems; and it was accordingly regarded as characteristic of an inland people to eat no salt with their food.[260] Its efficacy for ritual purification was fully recognised; and the ceremonial of

sacrifice probably involved some use of it; but this is not fully ascertained.  
**[261]**

[258.](#) *Iliad*, ix. 214.

[259.](#) *Odyssey*, xvii. 455.

[260.](#) *Odyssey*, xi. 123, with Hayman's note.

[261.](#) Buchholz, *Realien*, Bd. i. Abth. ii. p. 294.

The farinaceous part of Homeric diet was furnished, according to circumstances, either by barley-meal, or by wheaten flour. The former was lauded as the 'marrow of men'; ship-stores consisted mainly of it; and it was probably eaten boiled with water into a kind of porridge, corresponding perhaps by its prominence in Achæan rustic economy, to the *polenta* of the Lombard peasantry. Barley is called by Pliny 'the most antique form of food,' and its antiquity lent it sacredness. Hence the preliminary sprinkling with barley-groats, alike of the victim, and of the altar upon which it was about to be sacrificed. So essential to the validity of the offering was this part of the ceremony, that the guilty comrades of Odysseus, in default of barley, had recourse to shred oakleaves, in their futile attempt at bribing the immortal gods with a share of the spoil, to condone their transgression against the solar herds.

The favourite Homeric epithet for barley was 'white,' and the quality of whiteness is also conveyed by the name, *alphiton*, of barley-meal.**[262]** But our word 'wheat' has the same meaning, while the Homeric *puros* was a yellow grain.**[263]** Nor can there be much doubt that it was a different variety, identical, presumably, with the small, otherwise unknown kind unearthed at Hissarlik. As the finest cereal then extant, its repute nevertheless stood high; its taste was called 'honey-sweet'; its consumption was plainly a privilege of the well-to-do classes. Our poet is not likely to have 'spoken by the card' when he included wheat among the spontaneous products of the island of the Cyclops; yet the assertion of its indigenous growth there was repeated by Diodorus Siculus,**[264]** who had better opportunities for knowing the truth, and had taken out no official licence for its embellishment. Nevertheless there is much difficulty in believing that

wheat had its native home elsewhere than in Mesopotamia and Western India.

[262](#). Hehn and Stallybrass, *op. cit.* p. 431.

[263](#). *Odyssey*, vii. 104; Buchholz, *op. cit.* p. 118.

[264](#). De Candolle, *Origin of Cultivated Plants*, p. 357.

Bakers were as little known as butchers to Homeric folk, whose bread-making was of the elementary description practised by the pile-dwellers of Robenhausen and Mooseedorf. The corn was first ground in hand-mills[\[265\]](#) worked by female slaves, of whom fifty were thus exclusively employed in the palace of Alcinous.[\[266\]](#) The loaves or cakes, for which the material was thus laboriously provided, were probably baked on stones, like those fragmentarily preserved during millenniums beneath Swiss lacustrine deposits of peat and mud.[\[267\]](#) Only wheaten flour was so employed in Achæan households; but wheaten bread was indispensable to every well-furnished table, and was neatly served round in baskets placed at frequent intervals. Barley-bread was the invention of a later age; the word *maza*, by which it is signified, does not occur in the Epics.

[265](#). Blümner, *Technologie und Terminologie bei Griechen und Römern*, Bd. i. p. 24.

[266](#). *Odyssey*, vii. 104.

[267](#). Heer, *Die Pflanzen der Pfahlbauten*, p. 9.

They include, however, the mention of two additional kinds of grain, varieties, it is supposed, of spelt. And of these one, *olura*, is limited to the Iliad, the other, *zeia*, belongs properly to the Odyssey, occurring in the Iliad only in the traditional phrase ‘zeia-giving soil.’ The expression doubtless enshrined the memory of spelt-eating days, as did, among the Romans, the appropriation of this species of corn for the *mola* of sacrifices.[\[268\]](#) But neither *zeia* nor *olura* served within Homer’s experience for human food; both were left to horses, whose fodder was moreover enriched by the addition of ‘white barley’ and clover, nay, in exceptional cases, of wheat and wine. With these restoring dainties the steeds of Hector were pampered by Andromache on their return from battle; while the snowy team of Rhesus shared with the ‘Trojan’ horses of Æneas, the generous wheaten diet

provided for them in the opulent stables of their new master, the intrepid king of Argos.

[268.](#) Potter, *Archæologia Græca*, vol. i. p. 215.

One of the unaccountable Egyptian perversities enumerated by Herodotus[\[269\]](#) was that of rejecting wheat and barley as bread-stuffs, and adopting spelt (*olura*). The grain indicated, however, must have been either rice or millet, since spelt does not thrive in hot countries.[\[270\]](#) Millet, too, which was unknown in primitive Greece, was specially favoured by Celts, Iberians, and other tribes.[\[271\]](#) It was also cultivated with barley and several kinds of wheat, by the amphibious villagers of Robenhausen. And the discovery of caraway and poppy seeds mingled in the *débris* of their food[\[272\]](#) suggests that varied flavourings were in prehistoric request. It suggests further a non-æsthetic, hence a probable, motive for the cultivation of the poppy by the early Achæans.[\[273\]](#) The flower was in fact actually grown in classical times for the sake of its seeds, which were roasted and strewn on slices of bread, to be eaten with honey after meals as a sort of dessert.[\[274\]](#)

[269.](#) Lib. ii. cap. 36.

[270.](#) De Candolle, *Cultivated Plants*, p. 363.

[271.](#) Hehn, *op. cit.* pp. 439-40.

[272.](#) Dawkins, *Early Man in Britain*, pp. 293, 301.

[273.](#) *Iliad*, viii. 306; cf. *ante*, p. 166.

[274.](#) Dierbach, *Flora Mythologica*, p. 117.

Vegetables figured very scantily, if at all, at Achæan feasts. One species only is expressly apportioned for heroic consumption. Nestor and Machaon were avowedly guilty of eating onions as a relish with wine.[\[275\]](#) Some degree of refinement has indeed been vindicated for their tastes on the plea that the Oriental onion is of infinitely superior delicacy to our objectionable bulb; but we scarcely wrong the Pylian sage by admitting the likelihood of his preference for the stronger flavour; nor can we raise high the gustatory standard according to which wine compounded with goats' cheese and honey was esteemed the most refreshing and delightful of drinks. The same

root, moreover, in its crudest form, seems to have recommended itself to refined Phæacian palates. There is persuasive, if indirect evidence, that ‘the rank and guilty garlic’ was privileged to flourish in the sunny gardens of Alcinous.[276] Socrates, indeed, eulogised the onion, whereas Plutarch contemned it as vulgar, and Horace did not willingly permit onion-eaters to come ‘between the wind and his nobility.’ The company of Nestor would not, then, have been agreeable to him.

[275.](#) *Iliad*, xi. 629.

[276.](#) Buchholz, *Realien*, Bd. i. Abth. ii. p. 216.

Peas and beans keep out of sight in the *Odyssey*, but are just glanced at in the *Iliad*. The following simile explains itself:

As from the spreading fan leap out the peas  
Or swarthy beans o’er all the spacious floor,  
Urged by the whistling wind and winnowe’r’s force;  
So then from noble Menelaus’ mail,  
Bounding aside far flew the biting shaft.[277]

Here there is evidently no thought of green vegetables. The elastic and agile pellets cleansed by winnowing were fully ripe. They can be identified as chick-peas and broad-beans—species, both of them, abundantly produced in modern Greece. The former even retain in Crete their Homeric name of *erebinthoi*, ground down, however, by phonetic decay to *rebithi*. [278] They afforded, under the designation ‘*frictum cicer*,’ a staple article of food to the poorer inhabitants of Latium; and, as the Spanish *garbanzo*, they derive culinary importance from the part assigned to them in every properly constituted *olla podrida*. [279] Beans were the first pod-fruit cultivated. They are mentioned in the Bible, and have been excavated at Hissarlik. Some pea-like grains, however, found in the same spot, proved on examination to be lentils. [280] These, too, were presumably in common use when Homer lived, as they certainly were some centuries later, yet he makes no allusion to them. More significant, possibly, is his silence on the subject of chestnuts. Although the tree covers wide tracts of modern Greece, it is held by some eminent authorities to have been introduced there from Pontic Asia Minor at a comparatively late period. [281] And the fact that the rural wisdom of Hesiod completely ignores the chestnut certainly inclines

the balance towards the opinion of its arrival subsequent to the composition of the 'Works and Days.'

[277.](#) *Iliad*, xiii. 588-92 (trans. by W. C. Green).

[278.](#) Buchholz, *loc. cit.* p. 269.

[279.](#) Rhind, *Hist. of the Vegetable Kingdom*, p. 315.

[280.](#) Virchow, *Berlin. Abh.* 1879, p. 69.

[281.](#) Hehn, *op. cit.* p. 294.

Grapes and olives are the only fruits of which the cultivation is recorded in the *Iliad*; but the list is greatly extended in the *Odyssey*. Alcinous had at perennial command, besides apples and pears, figs and pomegranates. Within the precincts of his palace, Odysseus cast his exploratory glances round 'a great garden of four plough-gates,' hedged round on either side.

'And there grow tall trees blossoming, pear-trees and pomegranates, and apple-trees with bright fruit, and sweet figs and olives in their bloom. The fruit of these trees never perisheth neither faileth, winter nor summer, enduring through all the year. Evermore the west wind blowing brings some fruits to birth and ripens others. Pear upon pear waxes old, and apple on apple, yea, and cluster ripens upon cluster of the grape, and fig upon fig. There too hath he a fruitful vineyard planted, whereof the one part is being dried by the heat, a sunny spot on level ground, while other grapes men are gathering, and yet others they are treading in the wine-press. In the foremost row are unripe grapes that cast the blossom, and others there be that are growing black to vintaging. There, too, skirting the furthest line, are all manner of garden beds, planted trimly, and that are perpetually fresh, and therein are two fountains of water.'[\[282\]](#)

[282.](#) *Odyssey*, vii. 112-29.

The same fruits, the grape excepted, as being too low-growing to fulfil the required conditions, hung suspended above the head of Tantalus in his dusky abode, where alone the olive seems to be classed as food. They claimed, moreover, all but the pomegranate, the care of Laertes, occupying his chagrined leisure during the absence of his son from Ithaca.

Apples and pears are alike indigenous in Greece, and their discovery, dried and split longitudinally, among the winter-stores of the Swiss and Italian lake-dwellers, suggests that they may have been similarly treated, with a similar end in view, by Achæan housewives. The apple evidently excited Homer's particular admiration; he, in fact, made it his representative fruit. That it should have been so considered in the North, where

competition for the place of honour was small, is less surprising; and apples, accordingly, of an etherealised and paradisaical kind, served to restore youth to the aging gods of Asaheim.[283]

[283](#). Grimm and Stallybrass, *Teutonic Mythology*, p. 319.

The pomegranate is believed to have been the ‘apple’ of Paris. Known to the Greeks by the Semitic name *roia*, it may hence be safely classed among Phœnician gifts to the West. And its associations were besides characteristically Oriental. The fruit, called from the Sun-god Rimmon, had a prominent place in Syrian religious rites; Aphrodite introduced it into Cyprus, and eventually transferred to Demeter her claims to the symbolical ownership of it.[284] But with its mythological history, the poet of the *Odyssey* did not concern himself.

[284](#). Hehn and Stallybrass, *op. cit.* p. 180.

The wild fig-tree is native in Greece, and is mentioned both in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. But the cultured fig occurs only in the latter poem, the author doubtless having made its acquaintance somewhere on the Anatolian seaboard, whither it would naturally have been conveyed from Phrygia. For Phrygia was in those days more renowned for its figs than Attica became later. Those of Paros were celebrated by Archilochus about 700 B.C.;[285] but none, it would seem, were produced on the mainland of Greece when Hesiod’s homely experiences took metrical form at Orchomenus. The ripe figs contributed by his garden to the frugal repasts of Laertes were then an anachronism to the full as glaring as turkeys in England, when Falstaff and Poins took purses ‘as in a castle, cock-sure,’ on Gadshill. The very idea, indeed, of archæological accuracy was foreign to the mind of either poet; nor could it, without detriment to the vigour and freedom of their conceptions, have been introduced.

[285](#). *Ib.* p. 86.

The pastoral section of the Achæan people drew their subsistence immediately, and almost exclusively from their flocks and herds. The commodities directly at hand were supplemented to a very slight extent, if at all, through the secondary channels of sale or barter. Milk and cheese hence formed the staple of their food, and were mainly the produce of sheep

and goats. Cow's milk never found favour in Greece; Homer ignored the possibility of its use; Aristotle depreciated its quality; and it is now no more thought of as an article of consumption than ewe's milk in Great Britain or Ireland.[286] Those early herdsmen differed from us, too, in liking their simple beverage well watered. The part played occasionally by the pump in our London milk-supply would have met with their full approbation—unless, indeed, they might have preferred to add the qualifying ingredient at their own discretion. But the native strength of milk was, at any rate, too much for them. Only Polyphemus, a giant and a glutton, was voracious enough to swallow the undiluted contents of his pails. To him, as to his curious visitors from over the sea, butter-making was an unknown art, cheese being the sole modified product of Homeric dairies. That the first step towards its preparation consisted in the curdling of fresh milk with the sap of the fig-tree, we learn from the following allusion:

Soon as liquid milk  
Is curdled by the fig-tree's juice, and turns  
In whirling flakes, so soon was heal'd the wound.[287]

[286.](#) Kruse, *Hellas*, Bd. i. p. 368.

[287.](#) *Iliad*, v. 902-904. (Lord Derby.)

The patient on this occasion was Ares himself, and the rapid closing of the gash inflicted by the audacious Diomed was brought about by the application of Pæonian simples, unavailable, it can readily be imagined, outside of Olympus.

Although the keeping of bees was strange to Homer's experience, the product of their industry was pleasantly familiar to him. The ideal of deliciousness was furnished by honey, and Homeric palates reached their acme of gratification with things 'honey-sweet.' But Homeric bees were still in a state of nature, their 'roofs of gold' getting built in hollow trees or rocky clefts. Artificial dwellings were provided for them, by interested human agency, considerably later. The use of bee-hives in Greece is first attested in the Hesiodic Theogony; and in Russia and Lithuania, wild honey was still gathered in the woods little more than a century and a half ago. [288] Alike in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, honey figures in a manner totally inconsistent with our notions of gastronomic harmony. We, in our

unregenerate condition, should seek to be excused from partaking of the semi-ambrosial diet of cheese, honey, and sweet wine supplied by Aphrodite to the divinely brought-up daughters of Pandareus;[289] nor do we envy to ‘Gerenian Nestor’ and his wounded companion the posset brewed for them on their return from the battle-field by the skilful Hecamede. The palates indeed must have been hardy, and the constitutions robust, of those upon whom it acted as an agreeable restorative. The process of its preparation was as follows. In a bowl of such noble capacity that an ordinary man’s strength scarcely availed to raise it brimming to his lips,

Their goddess-like attendant first  
A gen’rous measure mixed of Pramnian wine;  
Then with a brazen grater shredded o’er  
The goatsmilk cheese, and whitest barley-meal,  
And of the draught compounded bade them drink.[290]

Nothing loath, they obeyed, nor did they shrink from adding piquancy to the liquid concoction by simultaneously devouring a dozen or so of raw onions! A precisely similar drink, designed as a vehicle for the ‘evil drugs’ mingled with it, was treacherously served round by Circe to her guests, and imbibed with the debasing and transforming results one has heard of.[291] Only the onions were absent, and with good reason, the crafty sorceress being fully aware of their antidotal power against malign influences. The practice of sweetening and thickening wine was handed on from heroic to classic times. Old Thasian especially was considered, when tempered with honey and meal, to be of most refreshing quality in the heats of summer; and Athenæus relates, without surprise or disapproval, that the islanders of Thera preferred, for the purpose of making porridge of their wine, ground pease or lentils to barley.[292] The tolerant motto, *De gustibus*, needs now and then, as we study the past of gastronomy, to be recalled to mind.

[288.](#) Hehn and Stallybrass, *op. cit.* p. 463.

[289.](#) *Odyssey*, xx. 69.

[290.](#) *Iliad*, xi. 637-40. (Lord Derby.)

[291.](#) *Odyssey*, x. 234.

[292.](#) Athenæus, x. 40.

Honey is now, to a great extent, a superannuated article of food. The sugar-cane has usurped its place and its importance. But to the ancients, its value, as the chief saccharine ingredient at their disposal, was enormous. It could not then be expected that the myth-making faculty should remain idle in regard to it. The nectar of the earth was accordingly believed to drop down from heaven into the calyxes of half-opened flowers; it fell from the rising stars, or, at any rate, near the places, so Aristotle averred,[293] whence they rose, and was distilled from rainbows upon the blossoming plains they seemed to touch. Nature's winged agents, too, for the collection of what must have seemed to the first rude experimenters in diet, an almost supersensual dainty, had a niche assigned to them in the edifice of fancy. Bees were connected with poetry, music, and eloquence; as *Musarum volucres*, they brought the gift of song to the sleeping Pindar; they were themselves nymphs and priestesses, intertwined more especially with the worship of Demeter and Cybele.[294] The germ of some of these imaginative shoots and sprays seems to be laid bare in the simple Homeric metaphor by which the discourse of Nestor was said to flow with more than the sweetness of honey from his lips.[295] The same idea—a very obvious one—is embodied in the English word *mellifluous*. But a figure, in older times, was often only the beginning of a fable; and hence the hovering of bees about the lips of the infant Plato, and round the head of Krishna, when he expounded the nature of the divinity. A genuine Homeric trace, moreover, of the legendary associations of bees is supplied by their installation in the Nymphs' Grotto at Ithaca,[296] where they gathered honey for the local divinities, ministering to them as Melissa, the Nymph-bee *par excellence*, ministered to the young Zeus on Ida.

[293.](#) *De Animal.* lib. v. cap. 22.

[294.](#) Preller, *Griechische Mythologie*, Bd. i. p. 105, 3te Auflage.

[295.](#) *Iliad*, i. 249.

[296.](#) *Odyssey*, xiii. 106.

Homer was fully acquainted with the virtue of honey for propitiating the dead. A vase of honey was placed by Achilles on the pyre of Patroclus,[297] and Odysseus poured a due libation of milk and honey as part of his apparatus of enticement to the shade of Tiresias. Subsequent experience

showed this beverage to be acceptable even to the Erinyes; nor was Cerberus proof against a lure of honey-cakes. Luckily for himself, however, Odysseus escaped an encounter with the Dog of Hades, for whom he brought no pacifying recipe.

[297](#). *Iliad*, xxiii. 170.

The earliest European intoxicant was made from honey, but was in Greece quickly and completely discarded on the introduction of vine-culture. Floating reminiscences of its primitive use, however, were preserved by Plutarch and Aristotle,[\[298\]](#) and survived unconsciously in the tolerably frequent substitution, by Homer, of the word ‘mead,’ under the form μέθυ, for ‘wine.’ The survival was indeed linguistic only. No mental association with honey clung to the term ‘mead.’ The fermented juice of the grape is the sole Homeric stimulant, and excites a fully corresponding amount of Homeric enthusiasm. From the old epics, accordingly, Pindaric praises of water are wholly absent. The crystal spring occupies in them a strictly subordinate place. The merits allowed to it are purely relative. That is to say, it exercises, like the nitrogen of our atmosphere, a qualifying function. The exuberant energy of a more fiery element is modified by its innocuous presence, and it helps to neutralise some of the heady virtue inherent in the ‘subtle blood of the grape.’

[298](#). Lippmann, *Geschichte des Zuckers*, p. 6.

A draught of clear water was a luxury unappreciated by the early Greeks. On the other hand, they freely watered their wine, counting its full strength scarcely less redoubtable than that of raw spirits appears to ordinary Englishmen. Polyphemus alone drank—in post-Homeric phraseology—‘like a Scythian’—that is, swallowed his liquor ‘neat’; and he plunged thereby into disastrous drunkenness. The wine provided for him, it is true, was of unusual and overweening potency. Of Thracian growth, it was supplied to Odysseus by Maron, a priest of Apollo at Ismarus, in grateful acknowledgment of protection afforded during the Odyssean sack of the Ciconian metropolis. The secret of its manufacture was jealously guarded in the Maronian family;[\[299\]](#) its bouquet was irresistible; its power against sobriety formidable. Even if the statement that it required, or at least tolerated, a twenty-fold admixture of water, be taxed as hyperbolic, we

can still fall back upon Pliny's assurance that the Maronian wine of his epoch was commonly diluted with eight measures of water;[\[300\]](#) and the proportion of twenty-five to one of Thasian wine from the same neighbourhood was recommended by Hippocrates for invalids.[\[301\]](#)

[299.](#) *Odyssey*, ix. 205.

[300.](#) *Hist. Nat.* xiv. 6.

[301.](#) Hayman's *Odyssey*, vol. ii. p. 96.

Red wines only were quaffed by Homeric heroes. 'Golden,' or 'white' kinds were unknown to them; and it may be suspected that the pleasure of sharing their potations would have been qualified, to modern connoisseurs, by strong gustatory disapproval. We do not know that the practice of using turpentine in the preparation of wine prevailed so early, but it was in full force when Plutarch wrote, and it subsisted too long for the comfort of Mr. Dodwell, who warmly protested his preference of sour English beer to the resinous wines of Patra and Libadia.[\[302\]](#) Some of their worst qualities were probably shared by the famous 'Pramnian,' described by Galen as 'black and austere.'[\[303\]](#) This was the leading component of the draught administered by Hecamede and Circe; but traditions as to its local origin are obscure and contradictory. The credit of its production was now assigned to a mountain in Caria, now to the Icarian Isle, or to some favoured section of Lesbian territory. Others again held that its distinction resided, not in the place of its growth, but in the method of its manufacture. A particular variety of grape perhaps yielded it; at any rate, Dioscorides says that it was a *prototropum*—that is, a product of the first running of self-expressed juice, making it, among wines, what a proof before letters is among engravings. It took rank, however this might have been, as a choice vintage, meet for the refreshment of heroes, and strictly reserved for exceptional use; while the ordinary demand of the army before Troy was met by the importation of Lemnian and Thracian wines of commonplace quality, brought in ships to the shores of the Hellespont, and purchased with the spoils of war—copper and iron, cattle and slaves.[\[304\]](#) A night's carouse might sometimes ensue upon the arrival of a wine-fleet; but temperance was the rule of old Achæan life. Excess was reprobated, and often figured as the cause of misfortune. Thus, the 'Drunken Assembly,' held immediately after

the sack of Troy, was the first link in the long chain of disasters incurred by the returning Achæans;[305] Elpenor, one of the crew of Odysseus, preceded him to Hades ‘on foot,’ as it is quaintly said, having broken his neck by a fall from a roof-top when overcome with wine in the house of Circe; the ungovernable rage of Achilles could find no more opprobrious epithet than ‘wine-laden’ to be hurled, in lieu of a javelin, at Agamemnon; and in Polyphemus, vinous excess assuredly took on its least inviting aspect. The Homeric ideal of life was indeed a festive one, but the conviviality it included was kept within the bounds of moderation and decorum. Moreover, the pleasures of the table, however keenly appreciated, were redeemed from grossness by the finer touches of social sympathy and æsthetic enjoyment. Minstrelsy formed a regular part of a well ordered entertainment, and the rhythmical movements of the dance accompanied, on occasions, or alternated with chanted narratives of adventure.

[302.](#) *Classical Tour*, vol. i. p. 212.

[303.](#) Leaf’s *Iliad*, xi. 639.

[304.](#) *Iliad*, vii. 467; ix. 72.

[305.](#) Cf. Hayman’s *Odyssey*, vol. ii. p. 73; Gladstone’s *Studies in Homer*, vol. ii. p. 447.

In the palace of Ithaca, guests were served at separate small tables; but this may not have been the case everywhere. An erect posture was maintained by them. The Roman fashion of reclining at meals came in much later. An opening formality of ablution was designed for ceremonial purification; in the interests of corporeal cleanliness, a repetition of the process after the meal was concluded would have been desirable, but appears to have been neglected. As regards the food-supply, a stewardess, or housekeeper, brought round bread in a basket; a carver sliced and distributed the grilled meat; a herald filled the goblets in orderly succession; and good appetites did the rest. Women habitually ate apart. So Penelope sat by, spinning and silent, though feverish with eagerness for news of her absent lord, until Telemachus and Theoclymenus had concluded their repast; and Nausicaa supped in retirement while her father feasted with the Phæacian elders. But the rule of seclusion appears to have had no application to nymphs and goddesses. Wine, however, was freely allowed to women and children. Arêtê, the mother of Nausicaa, supplied a goat’s skin

full for her pic-nic by the seashore; and it was with wine that the tunic of Phœnix was wont to be soiled as he fed the infant Achilles upon his knee.

Three meals a day made the full Homeric complement, reduced, nevertheless, to two under frequently recurring circumstances. Breakfast—*ariston*—was not always insisted upon, and we hear only twice of its formal preparation. It consisted ordinarily, there is reason to believe, of nothing more than bread soaked in wine; but Eumæus, who, for all his vigilant husbandry, loved talk and good cheer, offered better fare to his wily, unknown guest. A fire was lit in his hut at dawn; some cold pork, left from supper the night before, got re-broiled, and was barely hot when Telemachus made an appearance more welcome than looked for, having run the gauntlet of the Suitors' sea-ambuscade on his return from Pylos. Hence a considerable amount of weeping for joy was indispensable before they could all three—seeming beggar, prince, and swineherd—sit down comfortably to breakfast together.

But when life ran out of its accustomed groove, and opportunities for eating became precarious, breakfast and dinner—*ariston* and *deipnon*—were apt to coalesce. Noon, the regular dinner-hour, might, under such circumstances, be anticipated. Thus, when Telemachus and Pisistratus were setting out from Sparta towards Pylos, Menelaus, who was the soul of hospitality, ordered a *deipnon* to be hastily got ready, and it had certainly been preceded by no lighter repast. The third Homeric meal—*dorpon*—was taken at, or after sundown. Its status fluctuated. Of primary importance to those busily engaged in out-of-door occupations, it counted for relatively little with idle folk like the Suitors, whose feasts and diversions might be prolonged, if they so willed it, from dawn to dusk. Supper, on the other hand, was naturally the chief meal of soldiers and sailors. 'Perils will be paid with pleasures,' says Verulam; and when the rage of battle was spent, or the ship brought safely into port, a banquet was spread with every available luxury, and enjoyed to the utmost. At sea, cooking was reduced to a minimum, even to zero, the probability being small that fires were ever kindled on shipboard. So that the hardships of long voyages were very great, if rarely incurred. When possible, land was made by nightfall, the vessel moored, and the crew disembarked.

Ac magno telluris amore  
Egressi, optata potiuntur Troes arena.

Supper followed, and sleep.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### HOMER'S MAGIC HERBS.

THERE are certain low-lying districts in southern Spain where the branched lily, or king's spear, blooms in such profusion that whole acres, seen from a distance towards the end of March, show as if densely strewn with new-fallen snow. Just such in aspect must have been the abode of the Odyssean dead. There, along boundless asphodel plains, Odysseus watched Orion, a spectral huntsman pursuing spectral game: there Agamemnon denounced the treachery of Clytemnestra: there Ajax still nursed his wrath at the award of the Argive kings: there Achilles gnawed a shadowy heart in longing, on any terms, for action and the upper air: thither Hermes conducted the delinquent souls of the suitors of Penelope. A tranquil dwelling-place: where the stagnant air of apathy was stirred only by sighs of inane regret.

Homer's asphodel grows only in the under-world, yet it is no mythical plant. It can be quite clearly identified with the *Asphodelus ramosus*,<sup>[306]</sup> now extensively used in Algeria for the manufacture of alcohol, and cultivated in our gardens for the sake of its tall spikes of beautiful flowers, pure white within and purple-streaked without along each of the six petals uniting at the base to form a deeply-indented starry corolla. The continual visits of pilfering bees attest a goodly store of honey; while the perfume spread over the northern shores of the Gulf of Corinth by the abundant growth of asphodel was said to have given their name, in some far-off century, to the Ozolians of Locris.

[306](#). The daffodil has no other connexion with the asphodel than having unaccountably appropriated its name, through the old French *affodille*. It is a kind of narcissus, while the asphodel belongs to the lily tribe.

Introduced into England about 1551, it was succeeded, after forty-five years, by the yellow asphodel (*Asphodelus luteus*), of which already in 1633 Gerard in his Herbal reports ‘great plenty in our London gardens.’ Hence Pope’s familiarity with this kind, and his consequent matter-of-course identification of it with the classical flower in the lines,

By those happy souls who dwell  
On yellow meads of asphodel:

wherein he has entirely missed what may with some reason be called the local colouring of Hades.

In order to explain the lugubrious associations of the branched asphodel, we must go back to an early stage of thought regarding the condition of the dead.

Instinctively man assumes that his existence will, in some form, be continued beyond the grave. Only a few of the most degraded savages, or a handful of the most enlightened sceptics, accept death with stolid indifference as an absolute end. The almost universally prevalent belief is that it is a change, not a close. Humanity, as a whole, never has admitted and never can apostatise from its innate convictions by admitting that its destiny is mere blank corruption. Apart from the body, however, life can indeed be conceived, but cannot be imagined; since imagination works only with familiar materials. Recourse was then inevitably had to the expedient of representing the under-world as a shadowy reflection of the upper. Disembodied spirits were supposed to feel the same needs, to cherish the same desires, as when clothed in the flesh; but they were helpless to supply the first or to gratify the second. Their opulence or misery in their new abode depended solely upon the pitying care of those who survived them. This mode of thinking explains the savage rites of sacrifice attendant upon primitive funeral ceremonies: it converted the tombs of ancient kings into the treasure-houses of modern archæologists; and it suggested a system of commissariat for the dead, traces of which still linger in many parts of the world.

Here we find the clue we are in search of. It is afforded by the simple precautions adopted by unsophisticated people against famine in the realm of death. Amongst the early Greeks, the roots of the branched lily were a familiar article of diet. The asphodel has even been called the potato of antiquity. It indeed surpassed the potato in fecundity, though falling far below it in nutritive qualities. Pliny, in his 'Natural History,' states that about eighty tubers, each the size of an average turnip, were often the produce of a single plant; and the French botanist Charles de l'Écluse, travelling across Portugal in 1564-5, saw the plough disclose fully two hundred attached to the same stalk, and together weighing, he estimated, some fifty pounds. Moreover, the tubers so plentifully developed are extremely rich in starch and sugar, so that the poorer sort, who possessed no flocks or herds to supply their table with fat pork, loins of young oxen, roasted goats' tripe, or similar carnal delicacies, were glad to fall back upon the frugal fare of mallow and asphodel lauded by Hesiod. Theophrastus tells us that the roasted stalk, as well as the seed of the asphodel served for food; but chiefly its roots, which, bruised up with figs, were in extensive use. Pliny seems to prefer them cooked in hot ashes, and eaten with salt and oil; but it may be doubted whether he spoke from personal experience.

Their consumption, however, was recommended by the example of Pythagoras, and was said to have helped to lengthen out the fabulous years of Epimenides. Yet, such illustrious examples notwithstanding, the degenerate stomachs of more recent times have succeeded ill in accommodating themselves to such spare sustenance. When about the middle of last century the Abate Alberto Fortis was travelling in Dalmatia, he found inhabitants of the village of Bossiglina, near Traù, so poor as to be reduced to make their bread of bruised asphodel roots, which proving but an indifferent staff of life, digestive troubles and general debility ensued. This is the last recorded experiment of the kind. The needs of the human economy are far better, more widely, and almost as cheaply subserved by the tuber brought by Raleigh from Virginia. The plant of Persephone is left for Apulian sheep to graze upon.

Asphodel roots, accordingly, rank with acorns as a prehistoric, but now discarded article of human food. They were, it is likely, freely consumed by the earliest inhabitants of Greece, before the cultivation of cereals had been

introduced from the East. There is little fear of error in assuming that the later Achæan immigrants found them already consecrated by traditional usage to the sustenance of the dead—perhaps because the immemorial antiquity of their dietary employment imparted to them an idea of sacredness; or, possibly, because the slightness of the nourishment they afforded was judged suitable to the maintenance of the unsubstantial life of ghosts. At any rate, the custom became firmly established of planting graves with asphodel, with a view to making provision for their silent and helpless, yet still needy inmates. With changed associations the custom still exists in Greece, and, very remarkably, has been found to prevail in Japan, where a species of asphodel is stated to be cultivated in cemeteries, and placed, blooming in pots, on grave-stones. We can scarcely doubt that the same train of thought, here as in Greece, originally prompted its selection for sepulchral uses. Unquestionably some of the natives of the Congo district plant manioc on the graves of their dead, with no other than a provisioning design.<sup>[307]</sup> The same may be said of the cultivation of certain fruit-trees in the burying-grounds of the South Sea Islanders. One of these is the *Cratæva religiosa*, bearing an insipid but eatable fruit, and held sacred in Otaheite under the name of ‘Purataruru.’ The *Terminalia glabrosa* fills (or filled a century ago) an analogous position in the Society Islands. It yields a nut resembling an almond, doubtless regarded as acceptable to phantasmal palates.

<sup>307</sup>. Unger, *Die Pflanze als Todtenschmuck*, p. 23.

We now see quite clearly why the Homeric shades dwell in meadows of asphodel. These were, in the fundamental conception, their harvest-fields. From them, in some unexplained subsensual way, the attenuated nutriment they might require must have been derived. But this primitive idea does not seem to have been explicitly present to the poet’s mind. It had already, before his time, we can infer, been to a great extent lost sight of. It was enough for him that the plant was popularly associated with the dusky regions out of sight of the sun. He did not stop to ask why, his business being to see, and to sing of what he saw, not to reason. He accordingly made his Hades to bloom for all time with the tall white flowers of the king’s spear, and so perpetuated a connexion he was not concerned to explain.

Homer cannot be said to have attained to any real conception of the immortality of the soul. The shade which flitted to subterranean spaces when the breath left the body, resembled an animal principle of life rather than a true spiritual essence. Disinherited, exiled from its proper abode, without function, sense, or memory, it survived, a vaporous image, a mere castaway residuum of what once had been a man. Tiresias, the Theban soothsayer, alone, by special privilege of Persephone, retained the use of reason: the rest were vain appearances, escaping annihilation by a scarcely perceptible distinction. No wonder that life should have been darkened by the prospect of such a destiny—or worse. For there were, in the Homeric world to come, awful possibilities of torment, though none—for the common herd—of blessedness. Deep down in Tartarus, those who had sinned against the gods—Sisyphus, Ixion, Tantalus—were condemned to tremendous, because unending, punishment; while the haunting sense of loss, which seems to have survived every other form of consciousness, giving no rest, nor so much as exemption from fear, pursued good and bad alike. Nowhere does the utter need of mankind for the hope brought by Christianity appear with such startling clearness as in the verses of Homer, from the contrast of the vivid pictures of life they present with the appalling background of despair upon which they are painted.

Its relation to the unseen world naturally brought to the asphodel a host of occult or imaginary qualities. Of true medicinal properties it may be said to be devoid, and it accordingly finds no place in the modern pharmacopœia. Anciently, however, it was known, from its manifold powers, as the ‘heroic’ herb. It was sovereign against witchcraft, and was planted outside the gates of villas and farmhouses to ward off malefic influences. It restored the wasted strength of the consumptive: it was an antidote to the venom of serpents and scorpions: it entered as an ingredient into love-potions, and was invincible by evil spirits: children round whose necks it was hung cut their teeth without pain, and the terrors of the night flew from its presence. Briefly, its faculties were those of (in Zoroastrian phraseology) a ‘smiter of fiends’; yet from it we moderns distil alcohol! Of a truth it has gone over to the enemy.

Sweet is moly, but his root is ill,

wrote Spenser in one of his sonnets. But it may be doubted whether he would have committed himself to this sentiment had he realised that the gift of Hermes was neither more nor less than a clove of garlic.

Odysseus approaching the house of Circe in search of his companions (already, as he found out later, transformed into swine), was met on the road by the crafty son of Maia, and by him forewarned and forearmed against the wiles of the enchantress. Skilled in drugs as she was, a more potent herb than any known to her had been procured by the messenger of the gods. 'Therewith,' the hero continued in his narrative to the Phæacian king, 'the slayer of Argos gave me the plant that he had plucked from the ground, and he showed me the nature thereof. It was black at the root, but the flower was like to milk. The gods call it moly, but it is hard for mortal men to dig; howbeit, with the gods all things are possible.' It is thus evident that the Homeric moly is compounded of two elements—a botanical, so to speak, and a mythological. A substratum of fact has received an embellishment of fable. Before the mind's eye of the poet, when he described the white flowers and black root of the vegetable snatched from the reluctant earth by Hermes, was a specific plant, which he chose to associate, or which had already become associated, with floating legendary lore, widely and anciently diffused among our race. The identification of that plant has often been attempted, and not unsuccessfully.

The earliest record of such an effort is contained in Theophrastus's 'History of Plants.' He there asserts the moly of the Odyssey to have been a kind of garlic (*Allium nigrum*, according to Sprengel), growing on Mount Cyllene in Arcadia (the birthplace, be it observed, of Hermes), and of supreme efficacy as an antidote to poisons; but he, unlike Homer, adds that there is no difficulty in plucking it. We shall see presently that this difficulty was purely mythical. The language of Theophrastus suggests that the association of moly with the Arcadian garlic was traditional in his time; and the tradition has been perpetuated in the modern Greek name, *molyza*, of a member of the same family.

John Gerard in his Herbal, calls moly (of which he enumerates several species) the 'Sorcerer's garlic,' and describes as follows the Theophrastian, assumed as identical with the epic, kind.

Homer's moly hath very thick leaves, broad toward the bottom, sharp at the point, and hollowed like a trough or gutter, in the bosom of which leaves near unto the bottom cometh forth a certain round bulb or ball of a green colour; which being ripe and set in the ground, groweth and becometh a fair plant, such as is the mother. Among those leaves riseth up a naked, smooth, thick stalk of two cubits high, as strong as is a small walking-staff. At the top of the stalk standeth a bundle of fair whitish flowers, dashed over with a wash of purple colour, smelling like the flowers of onions. When they be ripe there appeareth a black seed wrapt in a white skin or husk.

The root is great and bulbous, covered with a blackish skin on the outside, and white within, and of the bigness of a great onion.

So much for the question in its matter-of-fact aspect. We may now look at it from its fabulous side.

And first, it is to be remembered that moly was not a charm, but a counter-charm. Its powers were defensive, and presupposed an attack. It was as a shield against the thrust of a spear. Now if any clear notion could be attained regarding the kind of weapon of which it had efficacy thus to blunt the point, we should be perceptibly nearer to its individualisation. But we are only told that the magic draught of Circe, the effects of which it had power to neutralise, contained pernicious drugs. The poet either did not know, or did not care to tell more.

There is, however, a plant round which a crowd of strange beliefs gathered from the earliest times. This is the *Atropa mandragora*, or mandrake, probably identical with the *Dudaim* of Scripture, and called by classical writers *Circæa*, from its supposed potency in philtres. The rude resemblance of its bifurcated root to the lower half of the human frame started its career as an object of credulity and an instrument of imposture. It was held to be animated with a life transcending the obscure vitality of ordinary vegetable existence, and occult powers of the most remarkable kind were attributed to it. The little images, formed of the mandrake root, consulted as oracles in Germany under the name of *Alrunen*, and imported with great commercial success into this country during the reign of Henry VIII., were credited with the power of multiplying money left in their charge, and generally of bringing luck to their possessors, especially when their original seat had been at the foot of a gallows, and their first vesture a fragment of a winding-sheet. But privilege, as usual, was here also fraught with peril. The operation of uprooting a mandrake was a critical one,

formidable consequences ensuing upon its clumsy or negligent execution. These could only be averted by a strict observance of forms prescribed by the wisdom of a very high antiquity. According to Pliny, three circles were to be drawn round the plant with a sword, within which the digger stood, facing west. This position had to be combined, as best it might, with an approach from the windward side, upon his formidable prey. Through the pages of Josephus the device gained its earliest publicity, of employing a dog to receive the death penalty, attendant, in his belief, on eradication. It was widely adopted, and by mediæval sagacity fortified with the additional prescriptions that the canine victim should be black without a white hair, that the deed should be done before dawn on a Friday, and that the ears of the doer should be carefully stuffed with cotton-wool. For, at the instant of leaving its parent-earth, a fearful sound, which no mortal might hear and sanely survive, issued from the upturned root. This superstition was familiar in English literature down to the seventeenth century.

Thus Suffolk alleging the futility of bad language in apology for the backwardness in its use with which he has just been reproached by the ungentle queen of Henry VI., exclaims,

Would curses kill, as doth the mandrake's groan,  
I would invent as bitter-searching terms,  
As curst, as harsh, and horrible to hear,  
Deliver'd strongly through my fixed teeth,  
With full as many signs of deadly hate,  
As lean-fac'd Envy in her loathsome cave.

And poor Juliet enumerates among the horrors of the charnel-house,

Shrieks like mandrakes' torn out of the earth,  
That living mortals hearing them, run mad.

The persuasion was, moreover, included amongst the Vulgar Errors gravely combated by Sir Thomas Browne.

Mandragora, then, is the most ancient and the most widely famous of all magic herbs; and the old conjecture is at least a plausible one that from its exclusive possession were derived the evil powers employed to the detriment of her wind-borne guests by the inhospitable daughter of Perse.

Moly, on the other hand, must be sought for amongst the herbaceous antidotes of fable. Perhaps the best known of these is the plant repugnant to the fine senses of Horace, and equally abominable to the nostrils of Elizabethan gallants. The name of garlic in Sanskrit signifies ‘slayer of monsters.’ Juvenal ridiculed the Egyptians for paying it reverence as a divinity.

Porum et cepe nefas violare ac frangere morsu.  
O sanctas gentes, quibus hæc nascuntur in hortis  
Numina!

The Eddic valkyr, Sigurdriða, sang of its unassailable virtue. As a sure preservative from witchcraft it was, by mediæval Teutons, infused in the drink of cattle and horses, hung up in lonely shepherds’ huts, and buried under thresholds. It was laid on beds against nightmare: planted on cottage roofs to keep off lightning: it cured the poisoned bites of reptiles: it was eaten to avert the evil effects of digging hellebore; while, in Cuba, immunity from jaundice was secured by wearing, during thirteen days, a collar consisting of thirteen cloves of garlic, and throwing it away at a cross-road, without looking behind, at midnight on the expiration of that term. The occult properties of this savoury root originated, no doubt, as M. Hehn conceives, [308] in its pungent taste and smell. Substances strongly impressive to the senses are apt to acquire the reputation of being distasteful to ‘spirits of vile sort.’ Witness sulphur, employed from of old, in ceremonial purification. But this may have been owing to its association, through the ‘sulphurous’ smell of ozone, with the sacred thunder-bolt.

[308](#). *Wanderings of Plants*, p. 158.

All the magic faculties of garlic, it may be remarked, are directed to beneficent purposes; whereas those of the mandrake (regarded as an herb, not as an idol) are purely maleficent. Later folk-lore, however, has not brought them into direct competition. Each is thought of as supreme in its own line. Only in the Odyssey (on the supposition here adopted) they were permitted to meet, with the result of signal defeat for the powers of evil.

Thus we see that the identification of moly with garlic is countenanced by whatever scraps of botanical evidence are at hand, fortified by a constant

local tradition, no less than by the fantastic prescriptions of superstitious popular observance. The difficulty or peril of uprooting, which made the prophylactic plant obtained by Hermes all but unattainable to mortals, is a common feature in vegetable mythology. It figures as the price to be paid for something rarely precious, enhancing its value and at the same time affixing a scarcely tolerable penalty to its possession. It belonged, for instance, in varying degrees, to hellebore and mistletoe, as well as to mandragora. With the last it most likely originated, and from it was transferred by Homer, in the exercise of his poetical licence, to moly.

From the adventure in the Ææan isle, as from so many others, Odysseus came out unscathed. But it was not without high moral necessity that he passed through them. The leading motive of his character is, in fact, found in his multiform experience. He is appointed to see and to suffer all that comes within the scope of Greek humanity. No vicissitudes, no perils are spared him. Protection from the extremity of evil must and does content him. For his keen curiosity falls in with the design of his celestial patroness, in urging him to drink to the dregs the costly draught of the knowledge of good and evil. Yet it is to be noted that from the house of the enchantress there is no exit save through the gates of hell.

Within the spacious confines of the universe there is perhaps but one race of beings whose implanted instincts and whose visible destiny are irreconcilably at war. Man is born to suffer; but suffering has always for him the poignancy of surprise. The long record of multiform tribulation which he calls his history, has been moulded, throughout its many vicissitudes, by a keen and ceaseless struggle for enjoyment. Each man and woman born into the world looks afresh round the horizon of life for pleasure, and meets instead the ever fresh outrage of pain. Our planet is peopled with souls disinherited of what they still feel to be an inalienable heritage of happiness. No wonder, then, that quack-medicines for the cure of the ills of life should always have been popular. Of such nostrums, the famous Homeric drug nepenthes is an early example, and may serve for a type.

We read in the *Odyssey* that Telemachus had no sooner reached man's estate than he set out from Ithaca for Pylos and Lacedæmon, in order to

seek news of his father from Nestor and Menelaus, the two most eminent survivors of the expedition against Troy. But he learned only that Odysseus had vanished from the known world. The disappointment was severe, even to tears, notwithstanding that the banquet was already spread in the radiant palace of the Spartan king. The remaining guests, including the illustrious host and hostess, caught the infection of grief, and the pleasures of the table were over-clouded.

Then Helena the child of Zeus strange things  
Devised, and mixed a philter in their wine,  
Which so cures heartache and the inward stings,  
That men forget all sorrow wherein they pine.  
He who hath tasted of the draught divine  
Weeps not that day, although his mother die  
And father, or cut off before his eyne  
Brother or child beloved fall miserably,  
Hewn by the pitiless sword, he sitting silent by.

Drugs of such virtue did she keep in store,  
Given her by Polydamna, wife of Thôn,  
In Egypt, where the rich glebe evermore  
Yields herbs in foison, some for virtue known,  
Some baneful. In that climate each doth own  
Leech-craft beyond what mortal minds attain;  
Since of Pæonian stock their race hath grown.  
She the good philter mixed to charm their pain,  
And bade the wine outpour, and answering spake again.[309]

[309](#). *Odyssey*, iv. 219-32 (Worsley's translation).

Such is the story which has formed the basis of innumerable conjectures. The name of the drug administered by Helen signifies the negation of sorrow; and we learn that it grew in Egypt, and that its administration was followed by markedly soothing effects. Let us see whither these scanty indications as to its nature will lead us.

Many of the ancients believed nepenthes to have been a kind of bugloss, the leaves of which, infused in wine, were affirmed by Dioscorides, Galen, and other authorities, to produce exhilarating effects. It is certain that in Plutarch's time the hilarity of banquets was constantly sought to be increased by this means. But this was done in avowed imitation of Helen's hospitable expedient. It was, in other words, a revival, not a survival, and

possesses for us, consequently, none of the instructiveness of an unbroken tradition.

A new idea was struck out by the Roman traveller Pietro della Valle, who visited Persia and Turkey early in the seventeenth century. He suspected the true nepenthean draught to have been coffee! From Egypt, according to the antique narrative, it was brought by Helen; and by way of Egypt the best Mocha reached Constantinople, where it served to recreate the spirits, and pass the heavy hours, of the subjects of Achmet. Of this hypothesis we may say, in the phrase of Sir Thomas Browne, that it is 'false below confute.' The next, that of honest Petrus la Seine, has even less to recommend it. His erudite conclusion was that in nepenthes the long-sought *aurum potabile*, the illusory ornament of the Paracelsian pharmacopœia, made its first historical appearance! Egypt, he argued, was the birthplace of chemistry, and the great chemical desideratum from the earliest times had been the production of a drinkable solution of the most perfect among metals. Nay, its supreme worth had lent its true motive to the famous Argonautic expedition, which had been fitted out for the purpose of securing, not a golden fleece in the literal sense, but a parchment upon which the invaluable recipe was inscribed. The virtues of the elixir were regarded by the learned dissertator as superior to proof or discussion, in which exalted position we willingly leave them.

More enthusiastic than critical, Madame Dacier looked at the subject from a point of view taken up, many centuries earlier, by Plutarch. Nepenthes, according to both these authorities, had no real existence. The effects ascribed to it were merely a figurative way of expressing the charms of Helen's conversation.

But this was to endow the poet with a subtlety which he was very far from possessing. Simple and direct in thought, he invariably took the shortest way open to him in expression; and circuitous routes of interpretation will invariably lead astray from his meaning. It is clear accordingly that a real drug, of Egyptian origin, was supposed to have soothed and restored appetite to the guests of Menelaus—a drug quite possibly known to Homer only by the rumour of its qualities, which he ingeniously turned to account for the purposes of his story. Now, since those

qualities were undoubtedly narcotic, the field of our choice is a narrow one. We have only to inquire whether any, and, if so, what, preparations of the kind were anciently in use by the inhabitants of the Nile valley.

Unfortunately our information does not go very far back. A certain professor of botany from Padua, however, named Prosper Alpinus, has left a remarkable account of his personal observations on the point towards the close of the sixteenth century. The vulgar pleasures of intoxication appear to have been (as was fitting in a Mohammedan country) little in request: among all classes their place was taken by the raptures of solacing dreams and delightful visions artificially produced. The means employed for the purpose were threefold. There was first an electuary of unknown composition imported from India called *bernavi*. But this may at once be put aside, since the ‘medicine for a mind diseased’ given by Polydamna to Helen was, as we have seen, derived from a home-grown Egyptian herb. There remain of the three soothing drugs mentioned by Alpinus, hemp and opium. Each was extensively consumed; and the practice of employing each as a road to pleasurable sensations was already, in 1580, of immemorial antiquity. One of them was almost certainly the true Homeric nepenthes. We have only to decide which.

The first, as being the cheaper form of indulgence, was mainly resorted to, our Paduan informant tells us, amongst the lower classes. From the leaves of the herb *Cannabis sativa* was prepared a powder known as *assis*, made up into boluses and swallowed, with the result of inducing a lethargic state of dreamy beatitude. *Assis* was fundamentally the same with the Indian *bhanga*, the Arabic *hashish*—one of the mainstays of Oriental sensual pleasure.

The earliest mention of hemp is by Herodotus. He states that it grew in the country of the Scythians, that from its fibres garments scarcely distinguishable in texture from linen were woven in Thrace, and that the fumes from its burning seeds furnished the nomad inhabitants of what is now Southern Russia, with vapour-baths, serving them as a substitute for washing. Marked intoxicating effects attended this peculiar mode of ablution.

In China, from the beginning of the third century of our era, if not earlier, a preparation of hemp was used (it was said, with perfect success) as an anæsthetic; and it is mentioned as a remedy under the name of *b'hanga*, in Hindu medical works of probably still earlier date. Its identity with nepenthes was first suggested in 1839, and has since been generally acquiesced in. But there are two objections.

The practice of eating or smoking hemp, for the sake of its exalting effects upon consciousness, appears to have originated on the slopes of the Himalayas, to have spread thence to Persia, and to have been transmitted farther west by Arab agency. It was not, then, primitively an Egyptian custom, and was assuredly unknown to the wife of Thôn. Moreover, hemp is not indigenous on the banks of the Nile. It came thither as an immigrant, most probably long after the building of the latest pyramid. Herodotus includes no mention of it in his curious and particular account of the country; and, which is still more significant, no relic of its textile use survives. Not a hempen fibre has ever been found in any of the innumerable mummy-cases examined by learned Europeans. The ancient Egyptians, it may then be concluded, were unacquainted with this plant, and we must look elsewhere for the chief ingredient of the comfort-bringing draught distributed by the daughter of Zeus.

There is only opium left. It is legitimately reached by the 'method of exclusions.' Should it fail, no substitute can be provided. But it does not fail. No serious discrepancy starts up to shake our belief that in recognising opium under the disguise of nepenthes we have indeed struck the truth. All the circumstances correspond to admiration: the identification runs 'on all fours.' The physical effects indicated agree perfectly with those resulting from a sparing use of opium. They tend to just so much elevation of spirits as would impart a roseate tinge to the landscape of life. The intellect remains unclouded and serene. The Nemesis of indulgence, however moderate, is still behind the scenes. The exhibition of a soporific effect has even been seriously thought to have been designed by the poet in the proposal of Telemachus to retire to rest shortly after the nepenthean cup has gone round; but so bald a piece of realism can scarcely have entered into the contemplation of an artist of such consummate skill.

For ages past, Thebes in Egypt has witnessed the production of opium from the expressed juice of poppyheads. Six centuries ago, the substance was known in Western Europe as *Opium Thebaicum*, or the 'Theban tincture.' Prosper Alpinus states that the whole of Egypt was supplied, at the epoch of his visit, from Sajeth, on the site of the ancient hundred-gated city. And since a large proportion of the upper classes were undisguised opium-eaters, the demand must have been considerable. Now it was precisely in Thebes that Helen, according to Diodorus, received the sorrow-soothing drug from her Egyptian hostess; while the women of Thebes, and they only, still in his time preserved the secret of its qualities and preparation. Can we doubt that the ancient nepenthes was in truth no other than the mediæval Theban tincture? Even stripping from the statement of Diodorus all historical value, its legendary significance remains. It proves, beyond question, the existence of a tradition localising the gift of Polydamna in a spot noted, from the date of the earliest authentic information on the subject, for the production of a modern equivalent. The inference seems irresistible that the two were one, and that, as De Quincey said, Homer is rightly reputed to have known the virtues of opium.



## CHAPTER IX.

### THE METALS IN HOMER.

THE undivided Aryans knew very little of the underground riches of the earth. They transmitted to their dispersed descendants no common words for mining, forging, or smelting, none to indicate a metal in general, and only one designative of a metal in particular. This took in Sanskrit the form *ayas*, in Latin, *æs*; it is represented by the German *Erz*, equivalent to the English *ore*; and, after drifting through a Celtic channel, took a new meaning and form as *Eisen*, or *iron*.**[310]** The original signification of the term was *copper*; and copper seems, in general, to have been the first metal to engage the attention of primitive man. This is easily accounted for. Copper is widely distributed; it frequently occurs in the native state, when its strong colour at once catches the eye; it is easily worked, and displays a luminous glow highly engaging to an unsophisticated taste for ornament. And, because copper was at first the only substance of the kind known, its name was used to determine those of other related substances. Thus, in Sanskrit, iron was called 'dark blue *ayas*,' *ayas* having come to mean metal in general; and a specific sign (possibly that for *hardness*) added, in the Egyptian inscriptions, to the hieroglyph for copper, causes it to denote iron.**[311]** But in South Africa these positions are exchanged. There iron ranks as the fundamental metal; gold being known to at least one Kafir tribe as 'yellow,' silver as 'white,' copper as 'red' iron.**[312]** And to these linguistic facts corresponds the exceptional circumstance, due probably to early intercourse with Egypt, that the stone-age in South Africa yielded immediately to an iron-age.

[310](#). Much, *Die Kupferzeit in Europa*, p. 173; Schrader and Jevons, *Prehistoric Antiquities of the Aryans*, p. 188; Taylor, *Origin of the Aryans*, p. 138.

[311](#). Lepsius, *Les Métaux dans les Inscriptions Égyptiennes*, p. 55.

[312](#). Schrader and Jevons, *op. cit.* p. 154; Rougemont, *L'Âge de Bronze*, p. 14.

In Asia, gold was discovered next after copper, the Massagetæ, described by Herodotus, exemplifying this stage of progress; silver, or 'white gold' succeeded, bringing lead in its train; then, little by little, tin crept into use; while iron, destined to predominate, came last. All the six, however, are enumerated in a Khorsabad inscription;[313](#) they were familiar to the ancient Egyptians, to the Israelites of the Exodus, and to the Homeric Greeks.

[313](#). Lenormant, *Trans. Soc. Bibl. Archæology*, vol. vi. p. 345.

Gold was with Homer supreme among terrestrial substances. It represented to him beauty, splendour, power, wealth, incorruption. It was the metal of the gods, and mortals by its profuse employment, borrowed something of divine glory. Its availability for them had, nevertheless, narrow limitations unfelt supernally. For the visionary metal of Olympus might be dispensed at will without restrictions either as to quantity or qualities. Inexhaustible stores of it lay at command; and it could be rendered infrangible and impenetrable by some mythical process unknown to sublunary metallurgists. Hence the golden hobbles with which Poseidon secured his coursers might have proved less satisfactory for the restraint of commonplace Thracian or Thessalian horses; the golden sword of Apollo would surely have bent in the hand of Hector; the golden mansion of the sea-god built for aye in the blue depths of the Ægean, could not have supported its own weight for an hour on realistic dry land; nor would the process of lifting earth to heaven by hauling on a rope have been facilitated by making that rope (as Zeus proposed to do for the purpose in question) of gold. Of gold, too, were the garments of the gods, their thrones, utensils, implements, appurtenances; the pavement of their courts was 'trodden gold'; golden were the wings of Iris, golden was the beauty of Aphrodite. No doubt, all these attributions were half consciously metaphorical, but their main design was to set off immortal existence by decorating it with an

enhanced degree of the same kind of magnificence marking the dignity of mortal potentates.

It is remarkable that the Olympian gold in the Shield of Achilles retained some part of the occult virtue properly belonging to it only in that elevated sphere. Of the five metallic layers composing the great buckler, the middle and most precious one gets the whole credit of having arrested the quivering spears of Æneas and Asteropæus.[314] The verses, to be sure, recording its superior efficacy are held to be spurious, and the inclusion of a hidden stratum of gold does indeed seem without reason, as it is certainly without precedent. Yet the original poet would not have altogether disavowed the inspiring idea of the passage; and the alleged impenetrability of the gold-mail of Masistius[315] may be held to imply that traces of its old mystical faculty of resistance lingered about the metal so late as when Xerxes invaded Greece.

[314.](#) *Iliad*, xx. 268; xxi. 165; and Leaf's annotations.

[315.](#) Herodotus, ix. 22.

The metallic treasures allotted to the gods in the *Iliad* are confiscated for human enrichment in the *Odyssey*. For the golden automata of Hephæstus are substituted the golden watch-dogs and torch-bearers of Alcinous; resplendent dwellings are erected, no longer on Olympus or at Ægæ, but in Sparta and Phæacia; Helen shares with Artemis in the *Odyssey* the golden distaff exclusively attributed to the latter in the *Iliad*; the 'dreams of avarice,' in short, are tangibly realised, in the Epic of adventure, only by human possessions; they shrink for the most part into shadowy epithets where divine surroundings are concerned. Nor is this diversity accidental or unmeaning. It indicates a genuine shifting of the mythological point of view—an advance, slight yet significant, towards a more spiritualised conception of deity.

Oriental contact first stirred the *auri sacra fames* in the Greek mind. That this was so the Greek language itself tells plainly. For *chrusos*, gold, is a Semitic loanword, closely related to the Hebrew *chârûz*, but taken immediately, there can be no reasonable doubt, from the Phœnician. The restless treasure-seekers from Tyre were, indeed, as the Græco-Semitic term *metal* intimates,[316] the original subterranean explorers of the Balkan

peninsula. As early, probably, as the fifteenth century B.C. they ‘dugged out ribs of gold’ on the islands of Thasos and Siphnos, and on the Thracian mainland at Mount Pangæum; and the fables of the Golden Fleece, and of Arimaspians wars with gold-guarding griffins, prove the hold won by the ‘precious bane’ over the popular imagination. Asia Minor was, however, the chief source of prehistoric supply, the native mines lying long neglected after the Phœnicians had been driven from the scene. Midas was a typical king in a land where the mountains were gold-granulated, and the rivers ran over sands of gold. And it was in fact from Phrygia that Pelops was traditionally reported to have brought the treasures which made Mycenæ the golden city of the Achæan world.

[316](#). Schrader and Jevons, *Antiquities of the Aryans*, p. 155; Much, *Die Kupferzeit in Europa*, p. 147.

The Epic affluence in gold was not wholly fictitious. From the sepulchres of Mycenæ alone about one hundred pounds Troy weight of the metal have been disinterred; freely at command even in the lowest stratum of the successive habitations at Hissarlik, it was lavishly stored, and highly wrought in the picturesquely-named ‘treasure of Priam;’ and has been found, in plates and pearls, beneath twenty metres of volcanic debris, in the Cycladic islands Thera and Therapia.[317](#) This plentifulness contrasts strangely with the extreme scarcity of gold in historic Greece. It persisted, however, mainly owing to the vicinity of the auriferous Ural Mountains, in the Milesian colony of Panticapæum, near Kertch, where graves have been opened containing corpses shining ‘like images’ in a complete clothing of gold-leaf, and equipped with ample supplies of golden vessels and ornaments.

[317](#). Much, *Die Kupferzeit*, p. 41.

Silver[318](#) was, at the outset, a still rarer substance than gold. Not that there is really less of it. The ocean alone is estimated to contain nearly ten thousand million tons, and the mines yielding it, though few, are rich. But it occurs less obviously, and is less easy to obtain pure. Accordingly, in some very early Egyptian inscriptions, silver, by heading the list of metals, claims a supremacy over them which proved short-lived. It terminated for ever with the scarcity that had produced it, when the Phœnicians began to pour

the flood of Spanish silver into the markets and treasure-chambers of the East. Armenia constituted another tolerably copious source of supply; and it was in this quarter that Homer located the ‘birthplace of silver.’ [319] Alybé, on the coast of the Euxine east of Paphlagonia, whence the Halizonians came to Troy, was identified by Strabo with Chalybe, a famous mining district. [320] The people there, indeed, as Xenophon recorded, lived mostly by digging iron; and their name was preserved in the Greek *chalups*, steel, and survives with ourselves in *chalybeate* waters. The district has, however, in modern times, again become known as argentiferous. The Homeric tradition receives countenance from the discovery, in the neighbourhood of Tripoli, of antique, half obliterated silver-workings; and from the existence, not far off, of a ‘Silver-town’ (Gunnish-kana), and a ‘Silver-mountain’ (Gunnish-dagh), whence a large tribute in silver still flowed, a few years ago, into the leaky coffers of Turkey. [321]

[318]. Blümner, *Technologie der Gewerbe*, Bd. iv. pp. 28-32.

[319]. *Iliad*, ii. 857.

[320]. *Geog.* xii. 3.

[321]. Rougemont, *L’Âge de Bronze*, p. 169; Riedenauer, *Handwerk und Handwerker*, p. 101.

The word *silver* (Gothic, *silubr*) has even been conjecturally associated with the Homeric Alybé; [322] while other philologists prefer to regard it as equivalent to the Assyrian *sarpu*. [323] All that is certain is the absence of a general Aryan name for the metal, showing that the Aryans collectively made no acquaintance with it. Thus, the Greek *arguros* and the Latin *argentum*, although closely related, are really different words. That is to say, they were formed independently from the common root, *ark*, to shine, modified into *arg*, white. Its whiteness, in fact, has supplied the designations of this metal in all parts of the world. Silver is the ‘white iron’ of the Kaffirs, the ‘white gold’ of the Afghans, the ‘white copper’ of the Vedic Indians; and the antique Accadians and Egyptians defined it by the same obvious quality. [324] The Greek *arguros* is, then, a comparatively late word, formed, perhaps, after the Achæan tribes were already settled in their Hellenic home, when their first supplies of silver began to come in from Pontic Asia Minor.

[322.](#) Hehn, *Wanderings of Plants*, p. 443.

[323.](#) Taylor, *Origin of the Aryans*, p. 143.

[324.](#) Schrader and Jevons, *Antiquities of the Aryans*, pp. 154, 180-82.

The subsequence of its invention to the adoption into the Greek language of *chrusos*, gold, can be inferred from the relative paucity of proper and placenames compounded with it. Homer has only four such, while his 'golden' appellations number thirteen. Take as specimens the series Chryse, Chryses, and Chryseïs, designating a place in the Troad, the priest of Apollo in that place, and his daughter, all memorably connected with the tragic Wrath of Achilles. The nomenclature, no doubt, took its rise from solar associations; yet the typical relationship between gold and the sun, silver and the moon, is nowhere in the Epics directly recognised. Helios is never decorated with the epithet 'golden'; Apollo, if he wears a golden sword, is more strongly characterised by his silver bow. Lunar mythology is ignored; nor is the ready metaphor of the 'silver moon' to be found in Homeric verse. The 'apparent queen' of the nocturnal sky does not there, as elsewhere in poetry and folk-lore, 'throw her silver mantle o'er the dark.' The metallic sheen, on the other hand, of water rippling in sunshine, produces its due effect in the generation of epithets; rivers being habitually called 'silver-eddying,' and Thetis, the Undine of the Iliad, wearing a specific badge as 'silver-footed.'

For the concrete purposes of actual decoration, the metal was in constant Homeric demand. Heré's chariot and the car of Rhesus shone with its delicate radiance; the chair of Penelope was spirally inwrought with silver and ivory; the greaves of Paris were silver clasped, and the sheath of his sword silver-studded; a silver hilt adorned the weapon of Achilles, and the strings of his lyre were attached to a silver yoke.[\[325\]](#) Of silver, too, was the tool-chest of Hephæstus; the guests of Circe ate off silver tables; the guests of Menelaus, if particularly favoured, might have bathed in silver tubs, two of which were presented to him in Egypt; and from golden ewers water was poured into silver basins for the ablutions before meals in every establishment of some pretension. The fittings shared the splendours of the furniture in Odyssean palaces. In the great hall of Alcinous, the door-posts and lintel were of silver, and golden and silver hounds, fashioned by

Hephæstus, kept watch beside its golden gates. And the courts of Menelaus were resplendent with gold, bronze, silver, and electrum.

[325](#). *Iliad*, i. 219; ix. 187; Buchholz, *Homerische Realien*, Bd. i. Abth. ii. p. 316.

The term ‘electrum,’ however, is a somewhat ambiguous one. In classical Greek, it denotes two perfectly distinct substances, one metallic, the other of organic origin—the latter, indeed, chiefly; the word came to be applied almost exclusively to *amber*. Or it may be that two primarily distinct words coalesced with time into one. Lepsius has urged the probability that the name of the metal was of the masculine form *elektros*, while amber was designated by the neuter *elektron*.[\[326\]](#) Nor is it unlikely that these words had separate genealogies, the first being derived from an Aryan root signifying ‘to shine,’ the second from a Semitic name for resin. Phœnician inscriptions may eventually throw light upon a point which must otherwise remain unsettled, by acquainting us with the Phœnician mode of designating amber.

[326](#). *Les Métaux dans les Inscriptions Égyptiennes*, p. 60.

The metallic electrum was an alloy of gold with about twenty per cent. of silver. It occurs naturally, but was produced artificially as well, especially in Egypt, where *asem*, as it was called, came into favour long before any of the pyramids were built. It was in the Nile valley thought fit for goddesses’ wear, its pale radiance suggesting feminine refinement; and stores of it were laid up in the treasures of all the early kings. The first Lydian coinage was of electrum; many of the utensils and ornaments discovered at Hissarlik and Mycenæ prove to be similarly composed; and electrum continued in favour down to a particularly late date in the Græco-Scythic settlements on the Black Sea. It made one of its few historical appearances in the ‘white gold’ offered by Cræsus at Delphi;[\[327\]](#) and there are two instances of its epical employment. The ground of the Hesiodic Shield of Hercules was inlaid, the walls of the banqueting-hall of Menelaus were overlaid, with gold, electrum, and ivory. Although, in two other passages of the *Odyssey*, the same word undoubtedly designates amber, it is safe to affirm that here, where mural incrustations are in question, a metallic substance, none other than the immemorial *asem* of Egypt, should be understood. Egyptian analogies, as Lepsius many years ago pointed out, strongly support this

supposition, above all where Egyptian associations are so marked as in the Odyssean description of the Spartan court. Electrum is unknown in the Iliad. The word occurs only in the form *elektor*, signifying ‘the beaming sun.’

[327](#). Herodotus, i. 50.

The third Homeric metal, and the most important of all, is *chalkos*. But what does *chalkos* mean? Copper or bronze? The question is not one to be answered off-hand or categorically. It has been long and learnedly debated; and admits, perhaps, of no decision more absolute than the cautious arbitrament of Sir Roger de Coverley.

No help towards clearing up the point in dispute has been derived from etymological inquiries. The word *chalkos* is without Aryan equivalents, and can best be explained by means of the Semitic *hhalaq*, signifying ‘metal worked with a hammer.’[\[328\]](#) Its primitive meaning, thus left conjectural, was most probably ‘copper.’ For, from all parts of Europe, evidence has gradually accumulated that the transition from the use of stone to the use of bronze was through a ‘copper age,’ which, though perhaps of short duration, has left relics impossible to be ignored. Indications are even forthcoming among the prehistoric ‘finds’ at Hissarlik, of the tentative processes by which copper was improved into bronze.[\[329\]](#) The lower strata of ruins on the site of ancient Troy contained articles and implements of approximately pure copper; nearer the surface, a sensible ingredient of tin was added, augmented, here and there, to the normal proportion for bronze of about twelve per cent. At Mycenæ, domestic vessels were fabricated of copper, weapons and ornamental objects of bronze; and a copper saw, dug from beneath the lavas of Santorin, gives corroborative evidence of the early Greek use of the unalloyed metal.

[328](#). Lenormant, *Antiquités de la Troade*, p. 11.

[329](#). *Ib.* p. 10.

*Chalkos*, then, must, to begin with, have denoted copper, and indeed it partially preserves that sense in the Homeric poems. The cargo, for example, taken on board at Temesé, in Cyprus, by the Taphian king Mentès,[\[330\]](#) must have been of pure copper, the distinctively ‘Cyprian’ metal. The

port of Temesé, afterwards Tamassos, be it observed, was a Phœnician establishment, and bore a Phœnician name denoting ‘smelting-house,’ both instructive circumstances as regards the agency by which metallic supplies were transmitted westward.[331] Again, when Achilles enumerated with gold and ‘grey iron,’ red *chalkos* as forming part of his wealth,[332] he could have meant nothing but unadulterated copper. The colour-adjective does not recur, but its employment this once strongly supports the inference that the unwrought *chalkos*, frequently spoken of as stored for future use or barter, was without sensible admixture of tin.

[330.](#) *Odyssey*, i. 184.

[331.](#) Schrader and Jevons, *op. cit.* p. 196; Buchholz, *Homer. Real.* Bd. i. Abth. ii. p. 326.

[332.](#) *Iliad*, ix. 365.

This inference, however, cannot reasonably be carried further. Homeric armour was altogether of *chalkos*, and it would be absurd to suppose that the ‘well-greaved Greeks’ went into action copper-clad. This on two grounds. In the first place, archæological research has proved to demonstration that bronze was fully and freely available in the late Mycenæan age, when Homer, there is good reason to believe, flourished. Articles composed of it must have been continually before his eyes and within his grasp. Unless he deliberately elected, which is inconceivable, to exclude from his poems all mention of a material of primary importance to the known arts, his *chalkos* was a term sufficiently comprehensive to embrace *both* bronze and copper. In the second place, pure copper could not have played the part assigned to it. Its inadequacy as a material for weapons or armour should promptly have led to its rejection. Assuredly it could neither have sustained, nor been the means of inflicting, the heavy blows and buffets exchanged by the heroes of the Trojan War. The mere fact of the shattering of Menelaus’s sword against the helmet of Paris[333] is conclusive as to its having been made of a less yielding substance than copper;[334] and the hardening process, by sudden cooling, imagined with the view to removing the difficulty, has been pronounced, on the authority of experts, impracticable.[335] The rigidity and occasional brittleness of the Homeric *chalkos* was imparted to it, we may be quite sure, by the tin mixed with it.

[333.](#) *Iliad*, iii. 363.

[334.](#) Riedenauer, *Handwerk und Handwerker*, p. 103.

[335.](#) Blümner, *Technologie*, Bd. iv. p. 51.

Moreover, it is incredible that the Homeric Greeks, although acquainted with iron, had no share in the bronze-culture flourishing, then and previously, along the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. The persistence, anywhere in that region, of so late, and so extraordinarily developed a copper age, would indeed be a glaring anomaly. Already, [\[336\]](#) in the third millennium B.C., bronze tools were used in Egypt; and under the name *zabar*, whence the Arabic *zifr*, bronze was fabricated by Sumero-Accadian metallurgists at the very outset of Mesopotamian civilisation. [\[337\]](#) It was, in fact, probably from Mesopotamia that knowledge of the art and its attendant advantages was carried westward by Sidonian traffickers. Customers, then, who, like the Achæans, procured from them plentiful supplies of copper, and a smaller quantity of tin, could not long have remained ignorant of the vast superiority of their alloyed over their separate condition. The conclusion is inevitable that *chalkos*, like the corresponding Hebrew term *nechosheth*, and the Egyptian *chomt*, was a word of some elasticity of meaning, designating ordinarily bronze, but occasionally copper. The translation, it need hardly be said, of any of the three by the English *brass* involves a gross error. Copper was not systematically alloyed with zinc until about the second century B.C. [\[338\]](#)

[336.](#) Perrot et Chipiez, *Histoire de l'Art*, t. i. p. 829; Beck (*Gesch. des Eisens*, p. 79) considers, however, that no Egyptian bronzes yet analysed go back beyond the eighteenth dynasty, about 1700 B.C.

[337.](#) Lenormant, *Trans. Soc. Bibl. Archæology*, vol. vi. p. 344.

[338.](#) Blümner, *Technologie*, Bd. iv. p. 199.

But the bronze industry of old must have been seriously hampered in its growth and spread by the scarcity of tin. This metal is of most restricted distribution. The reservoirs of it held by the earth are few and far apart. The two principal, in Cornwall and the Malaccan peninsula respectively, are 'wide as the poles asunder.' Yet its discovery goes back to a hoar antiquity, and its prehistoric use was extensive and continuous. This wide dispersion of so scarce an article gives cogent proof of unexpectedly early intercourse

between remote populations, and strikingly illustrates the effectiveness of those gradual processes of primitive trade by which desirable commodities permeated continents, and reached the least accessible markets.

The earliest historical source of tin was in the Cassiterides, or 'tin-islands' of Britain; and there can be no doubt, geographical mystifications notwithstanding, that the tin thence derived came, directly or indirectly, from Cornwall. Not improbably, the staple of the Phœnician tin-trade was in the Isle of Wight, which accordingly became the representative tin-island. [339] But this is questionable. What is certain is, that the metal was transported overland to the Gulf of Lyons long before the Phœnicians passed the Pillars of Hercules, and was available, much earlier still, in Egypt and Assyria. The Cornish was not, then, the first source of supply to be opened, nor was the Malaccan. Tin was, in fact, an article of export from Alexandria to India down to the beginning of the Christian era. The modern discovery, however, of tin-mines in Khorassan, the ancient Drangiana, irresistibly suggests that the primitive bronze-workers derived the less plentiful material of their industry from the Paropamisus, and tends to confirm the Turanian lineage imputed to them by Lenormant. [340]

[339]. Blümner, *Technologie*, Bd. iv. p. 86.

[340]. Von Baer, *Archiv für Anthropologie*, Bd. ix. p. 266; Blümner, *Technologie*, Bd. iv. p. 84.

The Homeric name for tin, *kassiteros*, is at any rate clearly of Oriental origin. The Greeks adopted it from the Phœnicians; the Phœnicians *may*, it is thought, have picked it up from Accadian bronze-smiths along the shores of the Persian Gulf. It survives in the Arabic *kasdîr*, and under the form *kastîra* made its way into Sanskrit, on the occasion of Alexander's invasion of the Punjâb. Pure tin ranked with Homer almost as a precious metal. Its scarcity gave it prestige; but he had evidently very little acquaintance with its qualities. As Helbig remarks, [341] difficulties of interpretation arise wherever *kassiteros* is brought on the scene. A good deal of critical discomfort, for instance, has been created by the statement that greaves of tin were included in the warlike outfit supplied to Achilles from Olympus. And bewilderment is heightened later on by the defensive power they are made to exhibit in the hardest trials of actual battle. In point of fact, they would have been as ineffective as papier-maché against the thrust of

Agenor's spear; and their clattering would scarcely have produced the awe-inspiring effect ascribed to it in the following passage.

[341.](#) *Das Homerische Epos*, p. 285.

He [Agenor] said, and hurled his sharp spear with weighty hand, and smote him [Achilles] on the leg beneath the knee, nor missed his mark, and the greave of new-wrought tin rang terribly on him; but the bronze bounded back from him it smote, nor pierced him, for the god's gift drove it back. [\[342\]](#)

[342.](#) *Iliad*, xxi. 591-94; cf. Blümner, *Technologie*, Bd. iv. p. 53.

Elsewhere in the *Iliad*, tin is employed ornamentally, as it was on the pottery of the ancient pile-dwellers of Savoy. [\[343\]](#) But the poet is much more sparing of it than he is of either gold or silver. Even his imaginary stores appear to be strictly limited. 'Relucent tin,' however, bordered the breastplate presented by Achilles to Eumelus as a consolation-prize in the Patroclean games; the chariot of Diomed was 'overlaid with gold and tin'; [\[344\]](#) the cuirass of Agamemnon was inlaid with parallel stripes, and the buckler of Agamemnon decorated with bosses of tin.

[343.](#) Dawkins, *Early Man in Britain*, p. 402.

[344.](#) *Iliad*, xxiii. 503.

The metal was also turned to account by Hephæstus for the purpose of adding to the effect and variety of his delineations on the Shield of Achilles. But we get no hint as to how it came into Achæan hands; no rich man's treasure contains it; and it drops completely out of sight in the *Odyssey*.

Tin corrodes so readily that its extreme archæological rarity is not surprising. None has been found, either at Mycenæ or in any part of the stratified débris at Hissarlik. [\[345\]](#) Lead, on the other hand, has been disinterred from all the Trojan cities, and was in use at Mycenæ, both pure, and alloyed with silver. Among the objects brought to light there was a leaden figure of Aphrodite, doubtless an idol, [\[346\]](#) and a vessel in stag-shape composed of silver mixed with half its weight of lead. [\[347\]](#) The latter substance is unmentioned in the *Odyssey*, but is twice familiarly alluded to in the *Iliad*. Its cheapness and commonness can be gathered from the circumstance incidentally disclosed, that poor fishermen attached pieces of it as weights to their lines. [\[348\]](#) Its quality of softness comes in to illustrate

the ease with which the spear of Iphidamas was turned by the silver in the belt of Agamemnon.[349]

[345.](#) Schliemann, *Troy*, pp. 31, 162.

[346.](#) Schuchhardt and Sellers, *op. cit.* p. 67.

[347.](#) Schliemann, *Mycenæ*, p. 257.

[348.](#) *Iliad*, xxiv. 80.

[349.](#) *Ib.* xi. 237.

Tin and lead made part of the booty taken in the land of Midian by the Israelites, as well as of the Asiatic tribute paid to early Egyptian conquerors. But the lead disposed of by the Achæans of the *Iliad* was most likely brought by the Phœnicians from southern Spain; and the surmise is plausible that the Homeric word, *molubdos*—lead—otherwise isolated and unexplained, may have been transferred, by the same agency, from the perishing Iberian to the vigorous Greek tongue.[350]

[350.](#) Schrader, *Prehistoric Antiquities*, p. 217.

The Greek name for iron, *sideros*, is equally destitute of known affinities. It has, indeed, sometimes been deemed cognate with the Latin *sidus*, a star, on the ground that meteoric, or star-sent iron was the earliest form of the metal made available for human purposes; but modern philologists do not see their way to admitting the connexion. The coincidence is impressive, yet may, none the less, be wholly misleading.

The Homeric poems testify to everyday experience of the powers and faculties of iron. In the *Iliad*, knives are made of it, and rustic implements of all sorts; iron-tipped arrows are sped from tough bows; iron axes perform the rough work of the forest and farm-yard. The Odyssean functions of the metal cover a still wider range. The iron age, just beginning in the first Epic, has pretty well made good its footing in the second. Thus, Beloch[\[351\]](#) has pointed out that, while *chalkos* is mentioned 279, *sideros* only 23 times in the *Iliad*, the proportion has become, in the *Odyssey*, 80 to 29; and his detailed analysis partially supports the conclusion that iron comes most prominently into view in the latest portions of both poems. Yet no amount of skill in critical carving can divide off a section of either in

which ignorance of the metal prevails. The differences are only in degrees of acquaintanceship.

[351](#). *Rivista di Filologia*, t. ii. p. 55.

The diversity in this respect between the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* can be perceived at a glance by contrasting the weapons Odysseus left behind him at Ithaca with those he wielded before Troy. The first set were of iron, probably of steel, the existence of which is implied in the practice of tempering by immersion in cold water, referred to in connexion with the feat of plunging a hot stake into the vast orbit of the Cyclops' solitary eye.

And from the burning eye-ball the fierce steam  
Singed all his brows, and the deep roots of sight  
Crackled with fire. As when in the cold stream  
Some smith the axe untempered, fiery white,  
Dips hissing; for thence comes the iron's might;  
So did his eye hiss, and he roared again.[\[352\]](#)

[352](#). *Odyssey*, ix. 391-95 (Worsley's trans.).

Iron or steel has even reached, in the *Odyssey*, the stage of proverbial familiarity as the material for arms. *Sideros* stands for sword in a maxim which may be translated 'Cold steel masters the man,' [\[353\]](#) signifying that when weapons are at hand, bloodshed is not far off. In the *Iliad*, on the contrary, swords and spears are invariably of bronze; and the commentators' *caveat* marks the lines presenting the iron-headed arrow of Pandarus, and the iron mace of Areithöus. The passage, too, is not exempt from their suspicions, in which Achilles offers, as prizes in the Funeral Games, a 'massy clod' of freshly-smelted iron, and two sets of iron axe-heads.

[353](#). *Ib.* xvi. 294.

The scanty use made of *sideros* in the compounding of Homeric epithets, [\[354\]](#) no less than its total neglect in the formation of proper names, is a further argument for the comparatively late introduction of the metal. More especially when the plentifulness of derivatives from *chalkos* is taken into consideration. Nevertheless, a good deal of allowance has to be made, in this matter, for what may be called ethnical caprice. So the Teutons excluded copper from among the elements of their local and personal appellations, while admitting gold and iron; those of the Slavs were coined

from gold, silver, and iron; the Celts excluding from employment for the purpose all the metals except iron.[355] More decisive is the designation of a smith as *chalkeus*, irrespective of the particular metal wrought by him, showing that the term had been fixed when neither gold nor iron, but only copper or bronze, was welded in Achæan forges. *Nam prior æris fuit quam ferri cognitus usus.*

[354.](#) Beloch, *loc. cit.* p. 50.

[355.](#) Schrader and Jevons, *op. cit.* p. 194.

Iron, copper, and gold served as the Homeric media of exchange. Definitions of value, however, are always by head of oxen. The golden armour of Glaucus, for instance, was worth one hundred, the bronze equipment of Diomed, inconsiderately taken in exchange by the chivalrous Lycian, no more than nine oxen,[356] and the figures may be considered to represent the proportionate value of those two metals. Iron probably occupied an intermediate position. It must, however, have been much cheaper in Ithaca than in the Troad. For, since the Taphians are said to have conveyed it in ships to Cyprus, where they bartered it for copper, it was evidently mined and smelted in notable quantities on the mainland of Epirus.

[356.](#) *Iliad*, vi. 235.

Iron has no decorative function in the Homeric Poems. It contributes nothing to the polymetallic splendours of the palaces of Menelaus and Alcinous, of the Shield of Achilles, or of the Breastplate of Agamemnon. Except where it furnishes an axletree for the chariot of Heré, it is never employed in purposeful combination with any other substance. Esteem, rather than admiration, seems, in fact, to be considered its due. Its colour is described, usually as grey, sometimes as violet; and the distinction may possibly, as has been supposed,[357] mark the observed difference between the hoary appearance of newly fractured iron, and the bluish gleam of steel blades. Nevertheless, an arbitrary element in Homeric tints has often to be admitted. Iron is, however, chiefly characterised in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—and with indisputable justice—as ‘hard to work.’ It demands, indeed, far more strenuous treatment than its ancient rival, copper; and the difficulties connected with its production and working long retarded the prevalence of

its use. Metallurgy advanced but slowly to the point of being dominated by its influence.

[357.](#) Buchholz, *Homer. Realien*, Bd. i. Abth. ii. p. 335.

This was probably first reached in Mesopotamia. Some Chaldean graves have been found to contain immense quantities of iron, of the best quality, and wrought with the finest skill.[\[358\]](#) One, opened by Place at Khorsabad, was a veritable magazine of chains and implements, still recognisable, though of course partly devoured by rust. They dated from about the eighth century B.C.; but the metal had been in some degree available for ages previously. In Egypt, although *men* (iron) may have been known under the early Memphite dynasties, the nature of the hieroglyph employed to denote it proves that copper had the precedence. Utensils of iron were enumerated among the spoils of Thothmes III., in the seventeenth century, B.C.;[\[359\]](#) *barzel* has a place in the Books of Moses, and was wrought at Tyre in the days of king Hiram, and no doubt indefinitely earlier. The Latin *ferrum*, indeed (equivalent to the Semitic *barezum*) testifies, it is held, to the Phœnician introduction of the metal to Italy in the twelfth century, B.C.[\[360\]](#)

[358.](#) Perrot et Chipiez, *Hist. de l'Art dans l'Antiquité*, t. ii. p. 720.

[359.](#) Lepsius, *Les Métaux dans les Inscriptions Égyptiennes*, p. *missing page* See this [transcriber note](#).

[360.](#) Taylor, *Origin of the Aryans*, p. 145.

Its still earlier diffusion through Greece is only, then, what might have been expected: and the complete acquaintance with it manifested in the Homeric poems conveys, in itself, no presumption of lateness in their origin. But there are archæological difficulties. Prehistoric iron is unaccountably scarce in the neighbourhood of the Ægean. True, it is of a perishable nature; but where not even a ferruginous stain survives, it is difficult to believe that objects made out of iron once existed. Until lately, iron was believed to be entirely absent from the ruins both at Hissarlik and Mycenæ, as well as from those of Orchomenos and Tiryns. But in 1890, Dr. Schliemann, in clearing the foundations of a building on the Trojan Pergamus, came upon two lumps of the missing substance; and some finger-rings composed of it are among the trophies of the recent excavations carried on in the lower city of Mycenæ, under the auspices of the Greek

Archæological Society.[361] But the metal was then evidently very rare, although the ‘bee-hive tombs,’ where it was discovered, belong to a later stage of Mycenæan history than the ‘shaft-graves’ of the citadel. Still, the gap previously supposed to divide, at this point, the Homeric from the Mycenæan world, has to a certain extent been bridged; and other discrepancies may, in like manner, be qualified, if not removed, by further research.

[361](#). Schuchhardt, *op. cit.* pp. 332, 296.

The metals chiefly employed in Homeric verse to typify abstract qualities are bronze and iron. The Shakespearian use of ‘golden’ to convey delightfulness of almost any kind, as in the expressions ‘*golden* cadence of poesy,’ ‘a *golden* mind,’ ‘*golden* joys,’ ‘*golden* sleep,’ and so on, is paralleled only by the Homeric ‘*golden* Aphrodite.’ Lead does not exemplify, with the Greek poet, heaviness and sloth, nor silver the gentle ripple of sweet sounds. But death, as ‘a sleep of bronze,’ comes before us in all its unrelenting sternness; Stentor has a ‘voice of bronze;’ a ‘memory of bronze’ was needed for exceptional feats of recitation; and the ‘iron noise’ of battle went up to a ‘bronzes sky’ during the struggle ensuing upon the fall of Patroclus. In the *Odyssey*, the sky is alternately of bronze and of iron, the same idea of stability—of a ‘brave, o’erhanging firmament’ being conveyed by both epithets.[362] Moreover, iron is there the recognised symbol of pitilessness, strength of mind, and self-command. Odysseus listens, masked in an ‘aspect of iron,’ while Penelope, strangely touched by his still unrecognised presence, recites the weary story of her sorrows. A heart *steeled*—as we should say—against pity was said to be ‘of iron,’ as was that of Achilles against Hector in the days of his ‘iron indignation’ at the slaying of his loved comrade; and silence and secrecy, even in a woman, were represented by the rigidity of that unbending metal. Such metaphors occur, it is true, more frequently in the *Odyssey* than in the *Iliad*; but the conception upon which they are founded is present throughout the whole sphere of Homeric thought. There are, nevertheless, as we have seen, clearly definable differences, in the matter of metallic acquisitions, between the two great Epics. The *Iliad* knows six, while the *Odyssey* refers only to four of these substances, tin and lead not chancing to be noticed in its cantos; and iron, in their record, has made a considerable advance upon its

Iliadic status. This is unquestionably a circumstance to be taken into account in attempting to deal with the Homeric problem.

[362](#). Hayman's *Odyssey*, vol. i. p. 63.



## CHAPTER X.

### HOMERIC METALLURGY.

MAN is a tool-shaping animal. He alone infuses matter with purpose, and so makes it effective for widening and strengthening his wonderful dominion over physical nature. What is more, his thoughts themselves grow with the means at his command, and their growth in turn inspires a further restless seeking after instruments of fresh conquests. The first metal-workers, accordingly, crossed a gulf destined to divide the ages. It was not for nothing that legendary honours were paid to them; they were the vague recognition of a really momentous advance. Its importance consisted, not so much in the immediate gain of power, as in the implication of what was to come. For metallurgy is an art which does not easily stand still. Even in its crudest stages it demands some technical skill; and technical skill cannot be attained without division of labour, differentiation of classes, and development of intelligence by its direction into special channels, and towards feasible ends. There are, then, few better tests of civilisation than the degree of command acquired over the metals.

The wide compass of metallic qualities was in itself stimulating to ingenuity. There was always something new to be found out about them, and they lent themselves with facility to every variety of treatment. This versatility contrasted strongly with the rigid and impracticable nature of the stony substances they tended to supersede. Thus, the six primitive metals not only presented, at first sight, a great number of diverse characteristics, but those characteristics proved, on the most elementary trials, highly susceptible of change. They could be surprisingly modified, for instance, by

mutual admixtures, and, in a lesser degree, by differences of manipulation. Secrets of the craft hence multiplied, and invited, as they continue to invite, further experiments and research.

Of still greater consequence to civilisation at large was the comparatively recondite occurrence of the metals. They are not to be met with, like flints or pebbles, strewing the bed of every stream; their distribution is defined and restricted. The demand for them could, for this reason, only be supplied by opening long lines of communication; it led to extended intercourse between nations, and created wants stimulating to traffic.

Metals, besides, present themselves only by exception in the native state; they are commonly disguised under some form of ore, subterraneously bestowed. Nature holds them concealed in her bosom, or at most attracts the eye with niggardly samples of her treasures. The very word *metal*, indeed, records a 'quest,' a searching for something hidden; and it is remarkable that these substances have been least effective for promoting culture just where they have come most readily to hand. By the shores of Lake Superior pure copper can be quarried like sandstone; and it was, in fact, cut away and hammered into axes and knives by Indian tribes long before they came into contact with Europeans. A similar use has been made of meteoric iron by the Esquimaux. But no development of ingenuity resulted in either case. And for this reason among others, that the metal was used *cold*. It received essentially the treatment of stone, and made very much the same kind of response. Because smelting processes were not needed, forging processes were not thought of. The furnace was absent, and with it the power of rendering metals plastic to human wants and purposes. There was, then, good warrant for the figuring, as the arch-metallurgist of mythology, of the incorporated element of fire.

Hephæstus was the Homeric Wayland Smith. He embodied the antique, universal notion of magic metallurgy, but embodied it after a dignified manner suitable to the grand epical standard. Homer was not given to repeating folk-stories current among the lower strata of—shall we say?—Pelagian society. His associations were with courts and camps, his sympathies with heroic achievements and maritime adventures in distant, perhaps fabulous, countries. There, indeed, grotesque aboriginal fancies

might be permitted to flourish; but they were excluded as much as possible from the sunlit spaces of the Hellenic world. Even here they crept in unbidden, for the Homeric theology is by no means exempt from the influence of rustic persuasions. But these were only admitted after passing through the alembic of fine fancy or ennobling thought. Thus, Hephæstus, although he has not wholly put off the semblance of the 'drudging goblin' of caves and cairns, stands for a formidable nature-power, and possesses the capability of being sublime. Panting, perspiring, shaggy, and limping, he is still no dubious divinity, but a genuine Olympian. His dwelling is on the mountain of the gods; he shares their councils; his operations are at the command of none; he is self-directed and self-inspired with his art, having taken to the hammer and anvil as spontaneously as the infant Hermes took to music and thievery. Indeed, the ill-used, yet not ill-natured, son of Heré surpasses his progenitors in one important respect. He is the only one of the Homeric gods in whom some remnant of creative power remains active. He alone commands a glimmer of the Promethean spark, half-hidden though it be in the ashes of material conceptions. Not, indeed, life in any true sense, but faculties of perception and animation are his to give to the works of his hands. His forge can turn out intelligent automata. Among its products are golden handmaidens,<sup>[363]</sup> conscious without being self-conscious, endowed with all the useful attributes, while devoid of the inconveniences of personality. Their efficiency was purely altruistic; they acted, but neither sought nor suffered. The bellows, too, of the great Iliadic armourer could be left to blow at discretion; and his wheeled tripods repaired to, and withdrew from, the assembly of the gods, at fit times, unsummoned and undismissed. This lingering of the creative tradition, completely dissociated from the mighty Zeus, about the misshapen nursling of Thetis, illustrates his connexion with Pthah, the creative and at the same time the metallurgical deity of the Nile-valley.

<sup>363</sup>. Ilmarine, the Finnish Hephæstus, made himself a wife of gold.

The Teutonic Wieland sprang from the same mythological stock. He could, however, lay claim to no trait of divinity, but was merely an artist of supreme skill, taught by subterranean pygmies. He was lamed by King Nidung, an early art-patron, eager for a monopoly of his services; but eventually escaped by means of a flying-apparatus of his own construction,

his maladroit brother Ægil barely escaping the fate of Icarus. Here, then, Wieland merges into Dædalus, who is only once mentioned by Homer, and that as a builder. In a passage full of the ‘local colour’ of Crete, he is said to have constructed the ‘chorus,’ or dancing-place of Ariadne.[364] The dream of a levitative art lurked nowhere within the Homeric field of view. Least of all had it been mastered by the ‘eternal smith’ of Olympus, who owed his life-long infirmity to the want of a parachute. His ‘summer’s day’ fall from the ‘crystal battlements’ of Olympus ‘on Lemnos, th’ Ægean isle,’ crippled him incurably; and his return thither was effected by other than aeronautic means. But the story of his alliance with Dionysus is not Homeric, so we have nothing to do with it.

[364.](#) *Iliad*, xviii. 592.

Still less Homeric is the comparatively late account of his localisation in the Lipari Islands:

Vulcani domus, et Vulcania nomine tellus.

And yet it is worth recalling, as evidence that the prime metallurgists of Northern and Southern Europe were offshoots from the same stem. Every one knows that, in the days of old, travellers’ horses were wont to be privily shod, ‘for a consideration,’ at a cromlech at Ashbury in Berkshire,[365] by a certain ‘Wayland Smith,’ who had no doubt his own reasons for eschewing public observation. It seems, however, from the testimony of Pytheas, a Massilian Greek of Alexander’s epoch, that the Liparine Hephæstus conducted himself in just the same kind of way.[366] He worked invisibly, but could be hired to do any given job. This shows a marked decline from his palmy Iliadic days, when his services might by exception be had for love, but never for money. From the position of a god, he had sunk to that of a mere mercenary troll or kobold.

[365.](#) Wright, *Archæologia*, vol. xxxii. p. 315.

[366.](#) Scholium to Apoll. Rhod. *Argonautica*, iv. 761.

Among the Achæans at the time of the siege of Troy, works in metal[367] of traditional repute were ascribed to Hephæstus no less freely than swords and cuirasses in the Middle Ages to Wieland or his French equivalent,

Galand, or than fiddles in later days to Straduarius. A Wieland's sword, first brandished by Alexander the Great, was said to have been transmitted successively to Ptolemy, Judas Maccabæus, and Vespasian; Charlemagne's 'Durandal' and Taillefer's 'Durissima' were from his master-hand, which armed as well the prowess of Julius Cæsar, and Godfrey of Bouillon. Part at least of the armour of Beowulf was also from the cavernous northern workshop which reproduced the forge on Mount Olympus, where the behest of Thetis was carried into execution; and to this day in Kurdistan King David is believed to labour, in a desolate sepulchre among the hills, at hauberks, greaves, and cuirasses. [368]

Never on earthly anvil  
Did such rare armour gleam,

as that supplied by Hephæstus to Achilles, after his original outfit had been stript by Hector from the dead body of Patroclus. Only the shield, however, is described in detail. It was a world-picture—a succession of typical scenes of human life:

All various, each a perfect whole  
From living Nature—

wrought in gold, silver, tin, and enamel on a bronze surface. The implements at hand were hammer, anvil, tongs, and bellows. A self-supporting furnace—we hear of no fuel—contained crucibles, in which the metals were rendered plastic by heat, but not, it would appear, melted. The bronze used was presumably ready-made. [369] Processes of alloying, like processes of mining and smelting, are ignored in the Homeric poems. They seem to have lain outside the range of ordinary Achæan experience, and can have been carried on only to a very limited extent on Greek soil, and there, perhaps, by foreigners. No part of the 'clypei non enarrabile textum' was cast. Forged throughout, inlaid and embossed, it was a piece of work of which the great Mulciber had no reason to be ashamed.

[367]. Besides some of mixed materials, such as the Ægis of Zeus and the Sceptre of Agamemnon.

[368]. Mrs. Bishop's *Travels in Persia*, vol. i. p. 85.

[369]. Beck, *Geschichte des Eisens*, p. 383.

The technique employed by him has, within the last few years, received a curiously apposite illustration. The Homeric description is of a series of vignettes depicted by means of polymetallic combinations, in a manner wholly alien to the practice of historic antiquity. But now prehistoric antiquity has come to the rescue of the commentators' perplexity. From the graves at Mycenæ were dug out some rusty dagger-blades, which proved, on being cleaned and polished at Athens, to be skilfully ornamented in coloured metallic intarsiatura. The ground is of bronze, prepared with a kind of black enamel for the reception of figures cut out of gold-leaf tinted of various shades, from silvery-white to copper-red, the details being brought out with a graver.[370] Groups of men and animals, mostly in rapid motion, are thus depicted with considerable vigour, and forcibly recall the naturalistic effects suggested by the plastic power of the poet. 'On these blades,' Mr. Gardner remarks,[371] 'we find fishes of dark gold swimming in a stream of pale gold; drops of blood are represented by inserted spots of red gold; in some cases silver is used. What could be nearer to Homer's golden vines with silver props, or his oxen of gold and tin?'

[370.](#) Koehler, *Mitth. Deutsch. Archäol. Institut*, Bd. vii. p. 241; Schuchhardt and Sellers, *Schliemann's Excavations*, p. 229.

[371.](#) *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. liv. p. 377.

This peculiar kind of damascening work was completely forgotten before the classical age. It seems to have originated in Egypt at least as early as 1600 B.C.[372] and Egyptian influences are palpable both in the decorative designs on the Mycenæan blades and in the mode of their execution. The papyrus, for instance, is conspicuous in a riverside scene. Nevertheless, these remarkable objects were certainly not imported. They were wrought by native artists inspired by Egyptian models. The freedom and boldness with which the subjects chosen for portrayal are treated make this practically certain. A specimen of the same style of work, brought from the island of Thera (now Santorin) to the Museum of Copenhagen, suffices to show that acquaintance with it was at one time pretty widely diffused through the Ægean archipelago, and hence cannot serve to localise the origin of the Homeric poems.

[372.](#) 'A sword exactly in the style of the Mycenæan blades was taken from the grave of Aa Hotep, the mother of Ah Mose, who freed Egypt, about 1600 B.C., from the Hyksos.'—Schuchhardt,

*op. cit.* p. 316.

In its entirety, the Shield of Achilles was beyond doubt an ideal creation. The poet described something imaginatively apprehended as the *chef-d'œuvre* of a superhuman artist, but claiming no existence out of the shining realm of fancy. Only the elements of the creation were taken from reality. The idea dominating its construction, of moulding a work of art into a comprehensive world-picture, is eminently Oriental. It recurs in the mantle of Demetrius Poliorcetes, and, more or less abortively, in various Indian and Moorish embroideries. And the arrangement of the sequence of scenes in concentric circles on the 'vast circumference' of the 'orbed shield' was certainly copied from Assyrio-Phœnician models.

In its manufacture no iron was employed; and this was quite in accordance with Homeric usage. The latest metallic acquisition of the fore-time boasted no traditional consecration; it could impart neither beauty nor splendour; the part its nature assigned to it was one of prosaic usefulness. It is accordingly excluded from the Mycenæan scheme of ornament imitated in the Shield, and may, indeed, have been unknown to the artists by whom that scheme was elaborated. The Olympian Demiurgus, at any rate, was acquainted with no such substance; but then the gods of Greece were never quick to adopt new improvements. So far as Homer tells us, the only Olympian use of iron was in the chariot of Heré, thus described in the Fifth Iliad:

And Hebe quickly put to the car the curved wheels of bronze, eight-spoked, upon their axletree of iron. Golden is their felloe, imperishable, and tires of bronze are fitted thereover, a marvel to look upon; and the naves are of silver, to turn about on either side. And the car is plaited tight with gold and silver thongs, and two rails run round about it. And the silver pole stood out therefrom; upon the end bound she the fair golden yoke, and set thereon the fair breast-straps of gold.[373]

[373](#). *Iliad*, v. 722-31.

This passage shows, as Dr. Leaf points out,[\[374\]](#) that the chariots of those times, being very light, were, in the intervals of use, taken to pieces and laid by on stands. That they were then covered with linen cloths is told to us elsewhere in the Iliad. Not all were furnished with eight-spoked wheels. The emphasis laid upon the fact as regards the goddess's car indicates that it was exceptional; and the indication is confirmed by the four-spoked wheels

of every vehicle in the Mycenæan reliefs. As to the iron axletree, it was plainly meant, not for show, but for strength; yet its introduction, even in that humble capacity, among the appurtenances of a divine being, can scarcely have been warranted by prescription, and may have appeared a no less daring innovation than the serving-out of gunpowder to the infernal host in ‘Paradise Lost.’

[374](#). Leaf’s *Iliad*, vol. i. p. 186.

Homeric archæology has assumed a new aspect since the opening of the prehistoric graves at Mycenæ. The doubts of centuries have now at last met a criterion of truth; the debates of centuries are in many cases already virtually closed. And this is only a beginning. If the spade be the best commentator, it will hardly be laid aside until further light has been thrown upon still twilight places in Homeric controversy. What has been done is indeed surprising enough. Not very rarely, what might pass—allowing for some slight poetical amplification—for the originals of implements or utensils described in the Epics, have been unearthed in the course of the excavations begun by Dr. Schliemann. Among them is an excellent model, on a reduced scale, of Nestor’s Cup, an acquisition almost as surprising as would have been the recovery of Jason’s Mantle, or Penelope’s Web.

The Pramnian beverage prepared by the skilled Hecamede for the refreshment of Nestor and Machaon was served in ‘a right goodly cup that the old man brought from home, embossed with studs of gold, and four handles there were to it; and round each two golden doves were feeding; and to the cup were two feet below.’[\[375\]](#)

[375](#). *Iliad*, xi. 631-39.

The golden beaker now, after three millenniums of sepulture, exhibited in the Polytechnicon at Athens,[\[376\]](#) has two, instead of two pairs of dove-surmounted handles; but the support of each by a separate prop riveted on to the base, corresponds strictly to the construction with ‘two feet below’ (πυθμένεζ), as described in the *Iliad*. The real and imagined objects unmistakably belong to the same class and epoch, and their agreement is in itself strong evidence of coherence between Homeric and Mycenæan civilisation. The ‘studs of gold’ embossing the Nestorean drinking-cup were doubtless the ornamental heads of the nails used as rivets. The art of

soldering, in the proper sense, was a later discovery;[\[377\]](#) but the Mycenæan goldsmith sometimes had recourse to a cement of borax for fastening pieces of gold together. In general, however, decorative adjuncts were separately cast, and afterwards attached with rivets to the objects they were intended to embellish. In this way, probably, the purely ornamental use of metallic knobs and bosses grew up. The Homeric epithets ‘silver-studded’ and ‘bossy,’ applied to sword-sheaths, chairs, and shields, have been copiously illustrated by the discovery at Mycenæ of innumerable gold, or rather gilt, discs and buttons, which had evidently once formed the adornment of the sheaths and shields lying alongside.[\[378\]](#) At Olympia, too, bronze sheathings have been found set with rows of solid silver nails,[\[379\]](#) by means of which they may have been fastened to chairs of the exact type of those described in the Iliad.

[376.](#) Schliemann, *Mycenæ*, p. 236; Helbig, *Das Homerische Epos aus den Denkmälern erläutert*, p. 371; Schuchhardt and Sellers *Schliemann's Excavations*, p. 241.

[377.](#) Riedenauer, *Handwerk und Handwerker in den Homerischen Zeiten*, p. 122.

[378.](#) Schuchhardt and Sellers, *op. cit.* p. 237, &c.

[379.](#) Furtwängler, *Bronzefunde aus Olympia*, p. 102.

For his effects of palatial splendour, Homer relied all but exclusively on the metals. Upholstery was for him non-existent. Small carpets for placing under the feet of distinguished persons, and rugs for their beds, were the utmost luxuries known to him in this line, and they were mere individual appurtenances. But for producing general effects, his means were exceedingly limited. He could dispose neither of rich draperies, nor of silken hangings. Polished and rare woods lay outside his acquaintance; the marbles of Paros and Pentelicus had not yet been quarried; porphyry, jasper, alabaster, and all other kinds of ornamental stones seem to have been strange to him. Not so much as a coat of plaster, or a dash of distemper, clothed the bareness of his walls. Floors of trodden earth, rafters blackened with smoke, chimneyless and windowless apartments, belonged even to the royal residences of his time, at least in Ithaca. But in a few of the more opulent houses of the Peloponnesus, something was done to dispel this sordid aspect by means of metallic incrustations; and the possibility was made the most of by the poet. Nor need the looks of Mammon have been

‘always downward bent’ in the radiant dwellings imagined by him, since their riches lay on every side. They are, in the *Iliad*, appropriated exclusively to the gods, and are vaguely characterised as ‘golden,’ or ‘of bronze,’ all details of construction being omitted. But the terrene magnificence of the *Odyssey* is more distinctly realised.

‘Son of Nestor, delight of my heart!’ [exclaimed Telemachus, entering the ‘megaron’ or banqueting-saloon of Menelaus], ‘mark the flashing of bronze through the echoing halls, and the flashing of gold and of amber,[\[380\]](#) and of silver and of ivory. Suchlike, methinks, is the court of Olympian Zeus within, for the world of things that are here; wonder comes over me as I look thereon.’[\[381\]](#)

[380.](#) See *supra*, p. 241.

[381.](#) *Odyssey*, iv. 71-75.

His experienced sire was little less astonished at the pomp surrounding the Phæacian king. All the ‘cities of men’ visited by him in the progress of his long wanderings had not prepared him for the dazzling effect of those stately halls.

‘Meanwhile,’ it is said, ‘Odysseus went to the famous palace of Alcinous, and his heart was full of many thoughts as he stood there, or ever he had reached the threshold of bronze. For there was a gleam as it were of sun or moon through the high-roofed hall of great-hearted Alcinous. Brazen were the walls which ran this way and that from the threshold to the inmost chamber, and round them was a frieze of blue, and golden were the doors that closed in the good house. Silver were the doorposts that were set on the brazen threshold, and silver the lintel thereupon, and the hook of the door was of gold. And on either side stood golden hounds and silver, which Hephæstus wrought by his cunning, to guard the palace of great-hearted Alcinous, being free from death and age all their days.... Yea, and there were youths fashioned in gold, standing on firm-set bases, with flaming torches in their hands, giving light through the night to the feasters in the palace.’[\[382\]](#)

[382.](#) *Odyssey*, vii. 81-102.

Both here, and at Sparta, besides perhaps some gilding of smaller surfaces with overlaid gold-leaf, the stone and woodwork of the houses can be understood to have been coated with metal plates—a mode of decoration usual in Mesopotamia from a very early date. Thus, the temple of Bel at Babylon had its walls covered with silver and ivory, while the shimmer of gold came from pavement and roof.[\[383\]](#) The fashion was adopted in Egypt, and spread to Asia Minor, perhaps through the conquests of Ramses II., who built at Abydos a temple to Osiris, plated with ‘silver-gold.’ It was

diffused as well among the pre-Dorian Greeks. Both the so-called ‘Treasury of Minyas’ at Orchomenus, and the ‘Treasury of Atreus’ at Mycenæ, bear evident traces of having once been scale-plated with bronze, not, it is thought, uniformly, but in fixed patterns.[384] So, here again, archæological research supplies the most instructive gloss upon the Homeric text. Metallic incrustations lost their charm when tinted marbles and manifold draperies had become fully available; but a glint of their traditional splendour was introduced by Plato into his Atlantis, where the temple of Poseidon was lined interiorly with the semi-mythical ‘orichalcum’ (later identified with brass), dug up appropriately in great profusion from the soil of a fabulous island.[385]

[383](#). Helbig, *op. cit.* p. 436.

[384](#). Schuchhardt and Sellers, *op. cit.* p. 147.

[385](#). *Critias*, 116; Jowett’s *Plato*, vol. iii. p. 697.

The watch-dogs of Alcinous find analogues in the pairs of sphinxes, winged bulls, or other nondescript monsters, guarding Egyptian and Assyrian portals. There is nothing to show that they possessed automatic powers. In those unsophisticated times, works of consummate imitative skill would readily take rank as samples of magic metallurgy; and what was life-like so inevitably suggested animation, that the distinction could scarcely be drawn very clearly. Similarly, the torch-bearers in the banqueting-hall may be regarded as poetical anticipations of the Greek art of statuary, then still unborn, or at most in swaddling-clothes.

One of the rarities brought by Helen with her from Egypt to Sparta was a silver basket, mounted on wheels, for holding the wool which she industriously span into thread.[386] Now wheeled utensils were presumably a Phœnician invention, since they are mentioned among the furniture of Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings vii.). Their occurrence in prehistoric Greece is hence one of many proofs of Oriental influence. The *Iliad* knows them as the handiwork of Hephæstus, who facilitated by means of subjacent wheels, the movements of his intelligent tripods; and Homeric indications have been substantiated by the unearthing, in the Altis at Olympia, of remnants of objects belonging, apparently, to the same category.[387] Others,

probably incense-pans, were found, a quarter of a century ago, in tombs of great antiquity at Præneste, Veii, and Cære.[388]

[386.](#) *Odyssey*, iv. 125.

[387.](#) Furtwängler, *Die Bronzefunde aus Olympia*, p. 440.

[388.](#) Garrucci, *Archæologia*, vol. xi. p. 206.

Helen's silver workbasket was gilt round the edges, like the 'crater,' or mixing-bowl, presented by Menelaus as a 'guest-gift' to Telemachus.[389] The latter was a work of Hephæstus, and had been presented to Menelaus by the king of Sidon, when he was driven thither on his way back from Troy. The process of gilding, however, is well known in the *Odyssey*, and was practised by native craftsmen. In the scene of Nestor's sacrifice at Pylos,[390] the goldsmith Laerkes is summoned to gild the horns of the victim, which he evidently did by the simple expedient of overlaying them with gold-leaf. Fusion had indeed not yet been resorted to for the purpose; nevertheless the art of plating silver with gold, to which is compared the beautifying action of Athene upon Odysseus, in order to his advantageous appearance before Nausicaa,[391] excites the extreme personal admiration of the poet, and is regarded as a direct fruit of divine tuition. And it is noticeable that the artists of Mycenæ, although in most respects far above the Homeric standard, found the operation of plating silver directly with gold so difficult that they commonly interposed a layer of copper to receive the more precious metal.[392]

[389.](#) *Odyssey*, iv. 615.

[390.](#) *Ib.* iii. 425.

[391.](#) *Odyssey*, vi. 232.

[392.](#) Schuchhardt and Sellers, *op. cit.* p. 249.

No gilt objects are expressly mentioned in the *Iliad*,[393] but the delineative inlaying of the Shield of Achilles involved the same sort of process as that required for producing them. The *Iliadic* Hephæstus, however, was somewhat behind his time. For the 'latest thing out,' one would be inclined to look elsewhere. He was, as we have seen, unacquainted with iron, and his models were often a trifle archaic. From the

very outset of his career, when, as an infant and a foundling, he was cared for by Thetis and Eurynome, the divine artificer appears to have been more dexterous than inventive.

[393](#). In the adventitious Tenth Book, v. 294, the practice of gilding the horns of victims for sacrifice is, however, alluded to.

‘Nine years,’ he himself afterwards related, ‘with them I wrought much cunning work of bronze; brooches, and spiral armbands, and cups and necklaces, in the hollow cave; while around me the stream of ocean with murmuring foam flowed infinite.’ [\[394\]](#)

[394](#). *Iliad*, xviii. 400-403.

But these ornaments were already of obsolete forms. Three of the four kinds mentioned find no place elsewhere in Homeric descriptions, and would probably have struck Homeric ladies as quaint and old-fashioned. They can, however, be more or less plausibly identified with compound spiral brooches and other decorative objects from pre-Hellenic, pre-Etruscan, and Scandinavian tombs. [\[395\]](#)

[395](#). Gerlach, *Philologus*, Bd. xxx. p. 491; Helbig, *op. cit.* p. 279.

The armour of Agamemnon was of foreign manufacture. Cinyras, king of Cyprus, of semi-mythical fame as a metallurgist, had sent it to him, perhaps as a pledge of benevolent neutrality, [\[396\]](#) at any rate, more through fear than love. It was of a highly decorative character, being inlaid and embossed with gold and tin, silver and enamel. Fundamentally, of course, it was, like all Homeric armour, of bronze. Something further will be said about it in the next Chapter.

[396](#). Cf. Gladstone, *Studies in Homer*, vol. i. p. 189.

The Baldric of Hercules, seen by Odysseus in Hades, constituted, one must admit, an incongruously substantial article of equipment for the thin remnant of a hero owning the sway of Persephone. Yet the horrified and shrinking glance with which it is regarded brings it wonderfully into harmony with the sombre vision of the great *eidolon*, pursuing, in the under-world, a career of shadowy destruction. The golden shoulder-belt in question was from the hand of an unknown but exceptionally gifted artist. It was of chased, or repoussé work, and showed no diversity of colouring or material.

Also a wondrous sword-belt, all of gold,  
Gleamed like a fire athwart his ample breast,  
Whereon were shapes of creatures manifold,  
Boar, bear, and lion sparkling-eyed, expressed,  
With many a bloody deed and warlike gest.  
Whoso by art that wondrous zone achieved,  
Let him for ever from art's labours rest.[397]

[397](#). *Odyssey*, xi. 609-14 (Worsley's trans.). Many critics regard the passage as spurious. Yet it makes part of a splendidly impressive picture.

The design indicated seems to be that of an animal frieze fencing in a series of fighting episodes[398]—an arrangement met with on Rhodian and Etruscan vases, and adopted in productions of the needle or the loom, from the Peplum of Alcisthenes to the Bayeux Tapestry. It does not appear to have made its way into pre-Hellenic Greece; and the Belt of Hercules bears, accordingly, a completely exotic stamp.

[398](#). Gardner, *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. liv. p. 378.

The Brooch of Odysseus, on the other hand, might have been wrought within the Achæan realm. It was besides in his possession before his foreign wanderings began, and we are not told that it was procured from abroad. At his setting out from Ithaca for Troy, it is said that:

Goodly Odysseus wore a thick purple mantle, twofold, which had a brooch fashioned in gold, with a double covering for the pins, and on the face of it was a curious device; a hound in his forepaws held a dappled fawn and gazed on it as it writhed. And all men marvelled at the workmanship, how, wrought as they were in gold, the hound was gazing on the fawn and strangling it, and the fawn was writhing with his feet and striving to flee.  
[399]

[399](#). *Odyssey*, xix. 225-31.

The brooch, it is to be observed, was duplex. Two pins were received into two confronting tubes, opening opposite ways. The mechanism is exemplified in the 'pin and tube' fastening of some golden diadems from Mycenæ;[400] and, still more perfectly, in certain brooches exhumed at Præneste and Cære, each provided with two pins running into a pair of tubular sheaths, a kind of hook-and-eye arrangement behind serving to retain them in that position.[401] These were associated with a multitude of articles, known to be of Phœnician manufacture, imported into Etruria during the sixth century B.C.; but the stolid sphinxes surmounting them were

replaced, in the Ithacan ornament, by a life-like representation, conceived in the true Greek spirit, although deriving its motive from the typical Oriental group of a lion tearing an ox, or deer.[402] This, however, had become so naturalised in Mycenæan art as by no means in itself to imply a foreign origin; and the same remark applies to the mechanism of the Odyssean fibula. The poet certainly regarded it as a rare specimen of superlative skill; but the like of it may not improbably yet be unearthed from Greek soil.

[400.](#) Schliemann, *Mycenæ*, p. 156.

[401.](#) Helbig, *op. cit.* p. 277.

[402.](#) *Ib.* p. 387.

Smiths are not included among the Homeric *demiurgi*. The class of persons specially distinguished for their serviceableness to the community is made up of physicians, soothsayers, carpenters, and poets. Nevertheless, there were metal-workers in Ithaca who might have competed in general utility with the best of the native wizards. A smithy, described as a place of common resort, was situated close to the Odyssean palace; and the demand for spears, swords, axes, and knives must have been continual, and was certainly met by a local supply. There is much doubt, however, as to whether objects claiming an artistic character were produced in Ithaca. It seems more likely, on the whole, that the few existing there had been imported from the Peloponnesus. There, presumably, Nestor's Cup, stated to have been brought by him from Pylos to Troy, was manufactured; and the Brooch of Odysseus might very well have been turned out from the same workshop. It is true that a Peloponnesian origin is never expressly attributed to objects for which particular admiration is sought to be enlisted. Such are either left undetermined, claimed for Hephæstus, or said to have come from Egypt, Sidon, or Cyprus. Achæan was thus plainly ranked below foreign industry. And this in itself indicates a falling off from the 'golden prime' of Mycenæ, when Achæan craftsmen were, to say the least, not utterly below compare with those of lands earlier illuminated by the rising sun of civilisation. Hence, products of everyday familiarity to Agamemnon had become strange and wonderful to his *sacer vates*; yet the abounding vitality has not left them. They come before us in his songs, animated with the

energy of his thought, fragments of palpitating life, true prognostics of the perfect art which the future was to bring to Greece.

Homeric metallurgy thus plainly represents a declining stage of Mycenæan metallurgy; and this again included conspicuous elements from Egyptian, Phœnician, and Phrygian sources. Of the two first springs of influence, our poet shows full consciousness, but none of the last; since his admiration for spiral patterns, derived, according to the best authorities, from the banks of the Sangarius, came to him at second-hand from Mycenæ. The metallurgical traditions of Phrygia find, moreover, no place in his verses. The dæmonic artificers of Asia Minor—the hammer-and-anvil goblins, sons or servants of Hephæstus, who of old intangibly colonised the shores and islands of the Levant, make no figure in the Iliad or Odyssey. Cabiri, Curetes, Corybantes, Idæan Dactyls, Rhodian Telchines, are all equally ignored in the Homeric world. Hephæstus there works alone. He has neither aides-de-camp nor coadjutors, apart from his spontaneously helpful bellows. His predilection for Lemnos was obviously due to the existence there of an active volcano; for Mosychlus did not become extinct until about the time of Alexander the Great. He, however, consulted perhaps in the choice rather his primitive elemental character than his derived industrial function. The establishment of Cyclopean forges in the craters of volcanoes seems to have been a mythological after-thought. Its appropriateness did not at any rate strike Homer. He indeed betrays no direct acquaintance with subterranean fires. His Island of the Cyclops is entirely devoid of volcanic associations, and indeed the genealogy of Polyphemus was scarcely consistent with any such relationship. He sprang from Poseidon; and Poseidon's wrath at the evil entreatment by Odysseus of his amiable offspring was a main factor in the development of the subsequent narrative. For the resentment of the sea-god was not to be trifled with by hero or mariner who had slipped unawares into that outer region of much sea and little land, where he reigned supreme. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ.*



## CHAPTER XI.

### AMBER, IVORY, AND ULTRAMARINE.

MANY ages ago, in early Tertiary times, a great forest of conifers covered the bed of the present Baltic Sea. Their copious gummy exudations had the leisure of perhaps some hundreds of centuries to accumulate, and have in fact furnished the greater part of the amber brought into commerce from before the dawn of history until now. The value set on the commodity probably gave the first impulse to the establishment of systematic relations between the north and south of Europe; and supplied means for the diffusion, far up towards the Arctic circle, of many of the secrets of Mediterranean culture. Scandinavia exchanged her amber for bronze, and the improvements that the use of bronze implied and introduced. They travelled in opposite directions, one as the correlative of the other, from the mouth of the Elbe to the mouth of the Rhone,[403] the ever-ready Phœnicians carrying the prized Eocene product eastward. There, much inequality in its distribution was prescribed by variety of tastes. In Egypt and Assyria, it had no great vogue; it is not mentioned in the Bible; but it found a ready market among the younger communities by the Ægean, just then eagerly appropriating the elements and ornaments of civilisation. In the Odyssey, the crafty Phœnician traders who kidnapped Eumæus when a child in the island of Syriê, are represented as diverting attention from their plot by the chaffering sale of ‘a golden chain strung here and there with amber beads’; and ‘a golden chain of curious work, strung with amber beads, shining like the sun,’ was presented by the suitor Eurymachus to Penelope.[404] To critics of an earlier generation, it seemed indeed incredible that a material of such remote and exclusive origin should have

been familiar in the Levant nine centuries before the Christian era. But recent experience has enforced, as well as qualified, the maxim *Ab Homero omne principium*[405]: enforced it, by frequent archæological verifications; qualified it, by the disclosure of a pre-Hellenic world, by no means completely reflected in the Homeric Epics.

[403.](#) Genthe, *Ueber den Etruskischen Tauschhandel nach dem Norden*, p. 102.

[404.](#) *Odyssey*, xv. 460; xviii. 295.

[405.](#) Scheins, *De Electro Veterum metallico*, p. 17.

For here once more Mycenæ teaches an object-lesson. Innumerable amber beads, of varied sizes, the largest nearly an inch and half in diameter, were found in the graves there. All were perforated, and they had manifestly once been connected together to form necklaces. And the remains of amber necklaces have likewise been disinterred from the archaic tombs of Præneste and Veii,[406] from British barrows, and from a prehistoric necropolis at Hallstadt in Austria. The earliest Italian amber seems to have been conveyed from the Gulf of Lyons along the Ligurian coast; but a subsequent and more lasting stream of supply flowed directly to the Po-delta from near the site of Dantzic. Among the early Italian specimens, are some neck-pendants carved into the forms of apes, necessarily from Oriental models in a different material—most likely, ivory.

[406.](#) *Archæologia*, vol. xli. p. 205.

The particular and widespread preference for amber as a means of decorating the throat had a superstitious motive. An idea somehow originated that the substance, thus worn, was potent against malefic agencies, and the persuasion doubtless accompanied it on its travels, and added to its popularity. There is, to be sure, no sign that Homer, though he only employs amber in the fitting shape for its exercise, had any knowledge of this prophylactic power; but then his indifference to rustic lore has repeatedly come to our notice. Penelope, however, and the ladies of Mycenæ, may have been less unconcerned on the point, and perhaps gave some credence to the rumours of mysterious virtue that enhanced the value of the beautiful shining substance from the dim North. That their amber was truly hyberborean has been chemically demonstrated. Fragments of

Mycenæan beads, analysed for Dr. Schliemann by Dr. O. Helm, of Dantzic, proved to contain no less than 6 per cent. of succinic acid; and the presence of succinic acid is distinctive, for 'there has been no instance hitherto,' Dr. Helm states, 'of a product physically and chemically identical with the Baltic amber being found in another spot.'<sup>[407]</sup> The characteristic ingredient in question, for instance, is wholly wanting in Sicilian amber, a fact strongly confirmatory of the historically attested insignificance, in Mediterranean traffic, of small local supplies. Tin and amber thus agree in testifying to the wide extension, westward and northward, of prehistoric trade; yet the first of these far-travelled materials occurs in the Iliad, and is absent from the Odyssey, while the second figures in the Odyssey, but has no place in the Iliad.

<sup>407</sup>. Schuchhardt and Sellers, *Schliemann's Excavations*, p. 196.

The Greek name for amber, *elektron*, might be freely translated 'sun-stone,' a meaning partially preserved in the Latin term *lapis ardens*, Teutonicised into *Brennstein*, or *Bernstein*. The English *amber* is a loan from the Arabic, negotiated at the time of the Crusades; but the original Achæan word survives in *electricity* and its derivatives. For the first production of that still mysterious agency was by rubbing a piece of amber, the endowment of which thereby with an attractive faculty for light objects was noted with no particular emphasis by Thales, the sage of Miletus.

The 'Electrides Insulæ,' or 'amber-islands,' of the ancients, corresponded, in vagueness of geographical position, with the Cassiterides or 'tin-islands,' of which the Phœnicians long kept the secret. The former were eventually located in the Adriatic, whither the historical Greeks succeeded in tracing the Baltic product, transported in those later days, along a second overland route from the Vistula to the Danube, and thence, by intermediary Venetian tribes, to the Istrian shore. Yet Herodotus was without any definite notion as to the derivation of amber, one of his spasmodical fits of scepticism forbidding him to admit its reported origin from a river called the Eridanus, said to flow into the sea somewhere at the back of the North wind.<sup>[408]</sup> The Eridanus, in fact, had a 'name' long before it had a 'local habitation.' Æschylus was doubtfully inclined to identify it with the Rhone, showing that he was chiefly acquainted with

amber shipped at Massilia;[\[409\]](#) Pherecydes, knowing more of Adriatic supplies, established the ‘fluviorum rex Eridanus,’ in the bed of the Po, where it has remained. The myth of the Heliadæ, or sun-maidens, who, after their merciful transformation into poplars, continued to weep tears of amber for the fate of their brother, the lucklessly ambitious Phaethon, took definite shape in the hands of the Attic tragedians. Homer gives no hint of acquaintance with it.

[408.](#) Lib. iii. cap. 115.

[409.](#) Helbig, *Atti dell' Accad. dei Lincei*, t. i. p, 422, ser. iii.

The decorative use of amber disappeared from classical Greece. It had been adopted from the East, as part of a semi-barbaric system of ornament, and was abandoned on the development of a purer taste. The substance was, indeed, as Helbig has remarked,[\[410\]](#) ill-adapted for the expression of artistic ideas, and so had little value for those who directed towards the achievement of such expression their best efforts for the ennoblement and refinement of life. No amber, then, is found in the tombs of the Hellenic Greeks, nor in those of the Cimmerian Bosphorus, where the Milesian colony Panticapæum held the primacy. Even in Italy, the once prized product was left to be largely appropriated by Gallic barbarians and Iстриan and Umbrian peasants. But the ‘whirligig of time,’ as usual, ‘brought about its revenges.’ As artistic feeling decayed, the favour of amber returned, and it grew under the Empire to a higher pitch than it had ever before attained. Whereupon a cavalier was despatched from Nero’s court on an exploratory expedition to the original and genuine home of the article; direct trade was opened with the Baltic, and the morning mists which had so long enveloped the origin of the ‘sun-stone’ were at length dispersed. Nevertheless, Pausanias, who saw an amber statue of Augustus at Olympia in the second century A.D., still believed the rare substance composing it to have been collected from the sands of Eridanus.[\[411\]](#) Traditional errors possess strong vitality.

[410.](#) Helbig, *Atti dell' Accad. dei Lincei*, t. i. p. 425.

[411.](#) *Descriptio Græciæ*, v. 12.

Both in the Iliad and Odyssey, Homer shows perfect familiarity with ivory. But he is entirely unconscious of its source. No rumour of the elephant had reached him. He would surely, if it had, have shared the surprising intelligence with his hearers. In the judicious words of Pausanias, [412] he would never have passed by an elephant to discourse of cranes and pygmies. The *début* in Europe of the strange great beast ensued, in point of fact, only upon the Indian campaign of Alexander. His tusks were, however, in prehistoric demand all through the East; and the relations of archaic Greeks were almost exclusively Oriental. Assyrian ivory-carvings enjoyed a just celebrity; the palaces of Nineveh and Babylon were softly splendid with the subdued lustre of their costly material. Solomon's ivory throne, and Ahab's ivory house exemplify its profuse availability in Palestine; Tyrian galleys were fitted with ivory-bound cross-benches; musical instruments were ivory-dight and wrought; ebony and ivory furniture made part of the tribute of Ethiopia to Egypt; and the spoils of Indian elephants were in demand in Italy before the Etruscans had penetrated the Cisalpine plain. Thus, gold, silver, amber, ivory, and coloured glass combined with beautiful effect in a kind of so-called 'Tyrrhene' ornaments, extant specimens of which have been taken from the Regulini-Galassi tomb, and other coeval repositories. [413] In Troy and Mycenæ, ivory was relatively plentiful. Pins and buckles were made of it, and perhaps the handles of knives and daggers. [414] Ivory plates, round and rectangular, and perforated, in some cases, for attachment to wood or leather, have been, in both spots, sifted out from surrounding *débris*, and may be imaginatively supposed to have once enriched the horse-trappings of Hector or one of the Pelopides. The art of carving in ivory, however, was in both these places in a rude stage, and appears unfamiliar to Homer. He barely recognises the use of the material in substantive constructions, while availing himself of it freely for veneering and inlaying. The only piece of solid ivory met with in the poems is the handle of the 'key of bronze' with which Penelope opened the upper chamber to take thence the fateful bow of Odysseus. [415] For the sheath of the silver-hilted dagger given to the Ithacan stranger by the Phæacian Euryalus, [416] was assuredly not *formed* of ivory, although spirally decorated with it. This can be gathered from the re-application, in the Iliad, of the same phrase to designate the ornamentation with tin laid on in a

curving pattern, of the cuirass of Asteropæus;[417] and it recurs, undoubtedly in a similar sense, in the following passage of the *Odyssey*:

[412.](#) *Ib.* i. 12.

[413.](#) Dennis, *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*, p. 82.

[414.](#) Schliemann, *Mycenæ*, pp. 152, 359.

[415.](#) *Odyssey*, xxi. 7.

[416.](#) *Ib.* viii. 404.

[417.](#) *Iliad*, xxiii. 560; cf. Leaf's annotations, vols. i. p. 110; ii. 413.

Now forth from her chamber came the wise Penelope, like Artemis or golden Aphrodite, and they set a chair for her hard by the fire, where she was wont to sit, a chair deftly turned and wrought with ivory and silver, which on a time the craftsman Icmalius had fashioned, and had joined thereto a footstool, that was part of the chair, whereon a great fleece was wont to be laid.[418]

[418.](#) *Odyssey*, xix. 53-59.

The word rendered in English as 'turned,' however, does not refer to 'turning' with a lathe, as the earlier commentators followed by the translators supposed, but to such helical designs as Mycenæan artwork exemplifies to superfluity. And it was in the same style that Odysseus beautified his couch at Ithaca—the couch wrought of a still rooted olive tree. He reminds his queen, as yet dubious of his identity, how

Thence beginning, I the bed did mould  
Shapely and perfect, and the whole inlaid  
With ivory and silver and rich gold.[419]

[419.](#) *Ib.* xxiii. 199-200 (Worsley's trans.).

The chest of Cypselus must have been an analogous piece of work, though more highly elaborated; and the 'beds of ivory,' denounced by the Prophet with the rest of the ostentatious luxury in which Jerusalem attempted to vie with haughty Tyre, may have displayed similar ornamental designs. In the Homeric palace of Menelaus, an ideal of splendour exotic in the West, but fitting in naturally with Oriental surroundings, was sought to be realised. Some such model doubtless floated before the eyes of the poet as the house of Ahab, magnificent with panellings of that loveliest of

organic substances bartered by the ‘men of Dedan’ for the finely-wrought bronze, the purple-dyed and embroidered cloths of Phœnicia. *Domus Indodente nitescit.*

The door of deceptive dreams imagined by Penelope, may possibly, on the other hand, have had a Mycenæan prototype.

Two diverse gates there are of bodiless dreams,  
These of sawn ivory, and those of horn.  
Such dreams as issue where the ivory gleams  
Fly without fate, and turn our hopes to scorn.  
But dreams which issue through the burnished horn,  
What man soe'er beholds them on his bed,  
These work with virtue, and of truth are born.[420]

It has been conjectured that the imperfect transparency of laminæ, whether of horn or ivory, caused those materials to be associated with the shadowy forms of dreamland; but the apportionment of their respective offices was plainly determined by a play of words unintelligible except in the original Greek.[421] And it must be admitted that scarcely a worse pair of puns could be produced from the whole of Shakespeare's plays than those perpetrated by our ‘bonus Homerus’ in a passage replete, none the less, with poetical suggestions largely turned to account by his successors.

[420.](#) *Odyssey*, xix. 562-67 (Worsley's trans.).

[421.](#) See Hayman's *Odyssey*, vol. ii. p. 361.

It is scarcely likely that complete tusks ever found their way to archaic Greece, yet the comparison—used twice in the *Odyssey*—of purely white objects to ‘fresh-cut ivory,’ decidedly proves a working acquaintance with the material. Its creamy tint was, in Egypt and Assyria, constantly set off by skilful intermixture with ebony; but ebony formed no part of the Homeric stock-in-trade.

One cannot but be struck by finding that, in the *Iliad*, ivory is employed *only* for embellishing equine accoutrements, but in the *Odyssey*, *only* for purposes of domestic decoration. So far as it goes, this circumstance tends to reinforce the contrast of sentiment towards the horse apparent in the two poems. Thus, a species of art practised, we are given to understand, exclusively by foreigners, helps to conjure up more vividly the effect of the

rush of crimson blood over the white skin of the fair-haired Menelaus: ‘As when some woman of Maionia or Karia staineth ivory with purple to make a cheek-piece for horses, and it is laid up in the treasure-chamber, though many a horseman prayeth to wear it; but it is laid up to be a king’s boast, alike an adornment for his horse, and a glory for his charioteer.’[422] And the simile was adopted by Virgil to expound a blush.

[422.](#) *Iliad*, iv. 141-45.

Indum sanguineo veluti violaverit ostro  
Si quis ebur.

Ivory-staining does not seem to have been in vogue outside of Asia Minor. Tablets of ivory were, at Nineveh, often inlaid with lapis lazuli, and ornaments of ivory were gilt; but there are no surviving signs of the application to them of colouring matters.

The second mention of ivory in the *Iliad* is in connexion with the slaying, by Menelaus, of Pylæmenes, chief of the ‘bucklered Paphlagonians,’ when it is said that Antilochus simultaneously smote his charioteer Mydon with a great stone on the elbow, and ‘the reins, white with ivory, fell from his hands to earth, even into the dust.’[423] The overlaying, in a decorative design, of leathern bands with small slips and rosettes of ivory, may here doubtless be understood; and a similar fashion of lending splendour to horse-trappings can, as already pointed out, plausibly be inferred to have prevailed at Hissarlik.

[423.](#) *Iliad*, v. 583.

Homer’s name for ivory is identical with ours for the beast producing it for our benefit. And the word *elephant* is held to be cognate with the Hebrew *aleph*, an ox. Hence the designation came to the Greeks almost certainly from a Semitic source. It was exported, we may unhesitatingly say, from Phœnicia with the wares it served to label.

No Homeric crux has been more satisfactorily disposed of by actual exploration than that relating to the identity of ‘cyanus,’ or ‘kuanos.’ In later Greek, the term was of perfectly clear import. It signified lapis lazuli, either genuine or counterfeit. But the simple hypothesis of a continuity of

meaning was met by difficulties of two kinds. The first regarded colour, always a perplexed subject in the Homeric poems. For uniformly, throughout their course, 'cyanean' betokens darkness of hue, if not absolute blackness. The epithet frequently recurs, and only once with a possible, though doubtful suggestion of *blueness*. It is never used to qualify the summer sea, a serene sky, the eyes of a fair woman, or the flowers of spring. Usually, the idea of sombreness, pure and simple, is unequivocally attached to it. As when Thetis, in sign of mourning, covers herself with a cyanus-coloured robe, 'than which no blacker raiment existed.'<sup>[424]</sup> Invisibility and the shade of approaching death are each typified as a 'cyanean cloud'; the brows of Zeus and Heré, the waving locks of Poseidon, the mane of the Poseidonian steed Areion, the gathering tempest of war, are of 'cyanean' darkness; the beard of Odysseus, the raven curls of Hector, bear the same adjective, which cannot well be construed otherwise than as a poetic equivalent for *black*. Nor is there any ground for supposing that it meant to convey any special shade or quality of blackness. Fine-drawn distinctions of every kind are totally alien to the spirit of Homeric diction.

<sup>424.</sup> *Iliad*, xxiv. 94.

The second objection to identifying cyanus with lapis lazuli or ultramarine related to function. The uses to which it is put in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* seemed, to anxious interpreters, inconsistent with its being either of a stony or of a glassy nature. 'Cyanus ordinarily enters into the composition of the polymetallic works described in their verses. It forms, for instance, a dark trench round the tin-fence of the vineyard represented on the shield of Achilles; and it is especially prominent in the decoration of the armour of Agamemnon. Cinyras, king of Cyprus, was the donor of this magnificent equipment; not through pure friendship. Intimidated by the Greek armament, he probably dreaded being compelled to take an active share in the enterprise it aimed at accomplishing, and purchased with a personal gift to its supreme chief, liberty to retain his passive attitude of 'benevolent neutrality.' The breastplate alone was a ransom for royalty.

Therein were ten courses of black cyanus, and twelve of gold, and twenty of tin, and dark blue<sup>[425]</sup> snakes writhed up towards the neck, three on either side, like rainbows that the son of Kronos hath set in the clouds, a marvel of the mortal tribes of men.<sup>[426]</sup>

[425](#). The original has simply ‘of cyanus.’

[426](#). *Iliad*, xi. 24-28.

The comparison of the snakes to rainbows may possibly refer only to their arching shapes; it is not easy to connect iridescence with a substance just previously noted expressly as *black*. The shield of Agamemnon resembled his cuirass in workmanship, but was diversified as to pattern.

‘And he took,’ we are informed, ‘the richly-dight shield of his valour that covereth all the body of a man, a fair shield, and round about it were twenty white bosses of tin, and one in the midst of black cyanus. And thereon was embossed the Gorgon fell of aspect, glaring terribly; and about her were Dread and Terror. And from the shield was hung a baldric of silver, and thereon was curled a snake of cyanus; three heads interlaced had he growing out of one neck.’[\[427\]](#)

[427](#). *Iliad*, xi. 32-40.

The Mycenæan method of inlaying bronze was followed in the construction of both articles. But the arrangement of the contrasted metals on the cuirass in alternating vertical stripes, although rendered perfectly intelligible by Helbig’s learned discussion,[\[428\]](#) has not been illustrated by any actual ‘find.’ The bosses of tin and cyanus diversifying the shield, on the other hand, correspond strictly to a Mycenæan plan of ornament,[\[429\]](#) and are reproduced in the round knobs of gold and silver attached to the bronze surface of certain Phœnician dishes dug up from the ruins of Nineveh.[\[430\]](#) The Gorgon’s Head, however, does not appear in Greek art until the seventh century B.C.;[\[431\]](#) yet the suspicion of spuriousness thence attaching to the lines in which it is mentioned may prove to be unfounded. The emblem was, at least, a favourite one in Cyprus, having been introduced thither, according to some archæologists, from Egypt. Judging by the evidence of Cyprian terracottas, it figured, surrounded with serpents, very much as on the breastplate of Agamemnon, on the corslets of priests and kings; and it seems to have been specially appropriated by a priestly caste named ‘Cinyrades’[\[432\]](#) to signify their supposed descent from Agamemnon’s dubious ally. The Cyprian partiality thus manifested for the dread device goes far towards proving that genuine products of Cyprian metallurgy were limned in the passages just quoted.

[428](#). *Das Homerische Epos*, p. 382.

[429](#). Schuchhardt and Sellers, *Schliemann’s Excavations*, p. 237.

[430.](#) Rawlinson, *Phœnicia*, p. 288.

[431.](#) Furtwängler in Roscher's *Lexikon der Griech. Myth.*; art. 'Gorgoneion.'

[432.](#) Ohnefalsch-Richter, 'Cypern, die Bibel, und Homer,' *Das Ausland*, Nos. 28, 29, 1891.

Cyanus is, then, in the Iliad employed exclusively as an adjunct to the metallic inlaying of armour, and it is made similarly available in the Hesiodic poems. But in the Odyssey its sole actual use is in a frieze surmounting the bronze-clad walls of the Phæacian banqueting-hall. Hence many futile debates and perplexities. The Homeric 'cyanus,' most critics asserted, could not, since it was uniformly described as *black*, be a mineral of cærulean hue, such as the cyanus of Theophrastus unquestionably was; and it must be presumed to have been a metal, as obtaining a place among metals in the decorative industry of the time. It was hence variously held to be steel, bronze, even lead, while Mr. Gladstone at one time thought of native blue carbonate of copper,[\[433\]](#) later, however, preferring bronze. Lepsius alone recognised what is now generally admitted to be the truth—namely, that the word retained its significance unchanged from the time of Agamemnon to the time of Theophrastus.

[433.](#) *Studies in Homer*, vol. iii. p. 496.

The Assyrians fabricated out of lapis lazuli, not only personal, but architectural ornaments. Bactria was its sole available source, and thence through the Mesopotamian channel it reached Egypt. Among the Babylonian spoils of Thothmes III. were a necklace of 'true' *chesbet*, and a gold staff jewelled with the same beautiful mineral. Artificial *chesbet* was manufactured in Egypt from about the fourteenth century B.C. It was composed of a kind of glassy paste, tinted blue with salts of copper or cobalt, and it lay piled, like bricks for building, in the storehouses of successive monarchs.[\[434\]](#) Clay-bricks, too, were enamelled with it for use in decorative constructions, still exemplified in the entrance to a chamber in the Sakkarah pyramid; and the same fashion prevailed in Chaldea and Assyria.[\[435\]](#) The Egyptian admiration for *chesbet* spread to the Peloponnesus, where an architectural function was assigned to it agreeing most curiously with the Odyssean use of cyanus. The spade has, on this point, surpassed itself as an engine of research; nothing is left to speculation; we seem to find at Tiryns the very arrangement which caught

the quick eye of the eminent castaway in Phæacia. For in the palace[436] explored by Dr. Schliemann within the citadel of Perseus, fragments of an alabaster frieze, inlaid with dark blue smalt, were found strewn over the floor of a vestibule, having fallen from their place on its walls; and the smalt appears to be of precisely the same nature with the manufactured *chesbet* of Thothmes III., and the Cyprian and Egyptian cyanus described by Theophrastus.[437] That it was also identical with the substance turned to just the same architectural account in the palace of Alcinous, may be taken as certain; and the discovery constitutes one of the most telling verifications of Homeric archæology. The particular prominence of cyanus, besides, in the Cyprian armour of Agamemnon falls in admirably with what is known of the history of imitation lapis lazuli; Cyprus, owing to the abundant presence of the needful ores of copper, having become early celebrated for its production. In addition to some tubes of cobalt-glass, blue smalt trinkets in large quantities have been brought to light at Mycenæ. But if Homer took no notice of such small objects, it was probably because he deemed them too common for association with the noble or divine heroines of his song.

[434.](#) Lepsius, *Les Métaux*, &c. p. 61.

[435.](#) Helbig, *Das Homerische Epos*, p. 81.

[436.](#) Schuchhardt, *op. cit.* p. 117.

[437.](#) *De Lapidibus*, lv. The Scythian kind of cyanus was genuine lapis lazuli.

That the Homeric cyanus was really a kind of ultramarine enamel, seems, then, thoroughly established. And it is the only form of glass recognised in the poems. Yet the colour-difficulty survives. Our poet remains under the imputation of inability to distinguish black from blue—unless, indeed, we admit with Helbig that the word ‘cyanus’ comprised a jetty as well as an azure smalt. There is a good deal to be said for the opinion. Theophrastus plainly distinguishes a dark and a light variety, and even speaks of one of the derived pigments as being *black*; and a black enamel formed part of the materials for the Mycenæan inlaid-work. The stripes of Agamemnon’s cuirass were, according to this hypothesis, of black, the curling snakes on either side of blue cyanus. And this might help to explain the comparison of

the latter to rainbows. Not, to be sure, altogether satisfactorily, since the likening to a simply blue object of the brilliant arch

Mille trahens varios adverso sole colores,

strikes the modern sense as absolutely inappropriate. Nevertheless, we have to make allowance in Homer, above all as regards chromatic estimates, for an *aliter visum*. And it happens that the sole colour-epithet bestowed by him on the rainbow is *porphureos*, signifying purple of a peculiarly sombre shade. The 'crocus wings' of Iris were, then, less conspicuous to him than her violet sandals.

Amber, ivory, and cyanus, or ultramarine-enamel, are the only non-metallic precious substances with which Homer shows himself familiar. Precious stones of all kinds lay apparently outside his sphere of cognisance. Mother of pearl, coral, and rock crystal are equally strange to him. He takes no notice of the engraved gems of Mycenæ, no more than of the porphyry, agate, onyx, and alabaster, there variously employed to diversify the framework of life. No distinctions are made in his verses between one kind of stone and another. White jade, brought from the furthest confines of Asia, though in some request at Hissarlik, may not have struck him as essentially different from any vulgar piece of flint picked up by the shore of the Hellespont. Or, if it did, his vocabulary was too scanty to allow of his expressing the sentiment. Homeric mineralogy thus embraced exceedingly few species.

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- Transcriber's Notes:

- On page [236](#) there was a footnote for “*Blümner, Technologie der Gewerbe*” but there was no anchor in the text. Those pages in Blümner are a description to the use of silver in antiquity, so the anchor was attached to the word “silver” in the text.
- On page [255](#) the footnote for “Lepsius, *Les Métaux dans les Inscriptions Égyptiennes*” is missing a page number, but page 52 contains hieroglyphics referring to iron. See Google Books for scans of the pages.

[Lepsius - iron](#)

- Missing or obscured punctuation was silently corrected.
- Typographical errors were silently corrected.
- Inconsistent spelling and hyphenation were made consistent only when a predominant form was found in this book.

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