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**THE**

**BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.**

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**ARTICLE I.**

**PREHISTORIC LITERATURE.**

**BY PROF. W. A. STEVENS, M.A., DENISON UNIVERSITY, GRANVILLE, OHIO.**

LATE years have done much in the way of research and criticism to throw light on the literary beginnings of nations. Despite the demands of modern literature and science our age is busy as never before with the products of primitive thought. There is a vast reading public with the Iliad in its hands in the noble English of Bryant and of Derby; there are repeated versions of the Scandinavian Sagas, of the German Lay of the Nibelungs; Müller is toiling to render accessible to us the songs of the remote Hindu Rig-vêda; Tennyson interprets anew the Celtic legends of Arthur; the Occident and Orient, the steppes of Russia and the wilds of Tartary are explored for such poetic relics as they may have preserved. We design in the following pages to bring together, and appropriate to use, some results of comparatively recent criticism in the field of prehistoric literature. The discussion may prove of incidental value to the student of early English poetry; it will deal directly and especially with the question concerning the literary character of the Homeric poems; it will assist to apprehend more clearly the real nature of a favorite rationalistic theory of biblical interpretation.

Such a discussion can hardly avoid reference to the poems of Homer at the outset. For it is to Homeric studies that we are chiefly indebted for the most influential movement in literary and historical criticism of the present century. That the result and positive value of this movement are still sufficiently far from being recognized, we need not look far for proof. Mr. Gladstone's *Juventus Mundi* is a confirmatory instance. Commend itself as it may to our acceptance as Homeric fruit from modern soil with modern methods, it is yet in its spirit an exponent of an old school of thought, and in so far, is a century behind its time. It shows in this respect little improvement on the earlier and larger work of which it is an abridged revision. There are some considerations on the date and origin of the Homeric poems, which, although not demonstrated facts, have a generally admitted value, that Mr. Gladstone has omitted to recognize. Several of the more important conclusions at which he arrives are seriously vitiated by this defect of view. It must be admitted, however, he has re-wrought old mines to good purpose, striking new veins, and smelting over ancient slag-heaps, with a considerable product of solid ingots. The *Juventus Mundi* rightly treats of Homer as "historic song." Homer "has probably told us more about the world and its inhabitants at his own epoch than any historian that ever lived." Gladstone's work accordingly becomes a valuable common-place book of fact and inference bearing on the worship, social life, and culture of the heroic age of Hellas. Such materials are invested with additional value in a time like the present, when history with new constructive facilities is flinging its pontoons far towards the other margin of a prehistoric past.

But the history of the poems themselves has an interest, even deeper and requires profounder research. The genesis of such extraordinary phenomena of human thought would seem to have a deeper significance to the philosophic inquirer than could any collection of the external incidents of history. That epic impulse, which, striking on the Grecian mind, has passed down through all the western world with

ceaseless energy and widening influence, where did it originate, and what forces dominated at its birth? Critical research in this direction started the intellectual agitation which dates from the issue of Wolf's "Prolegomena ad Homerum" in 1795. By virtue of this movement the Homeric poems hold a relation to the thinking of the nineteenth century different from any preceding one; they have indirectly rendered effective assistance in the "intellectual deliverance," if we may use Matthew Arnold's phrase, of this century, and inaugurated a permanent advance along the whole line of critical science.

Professor Blackie several years ago wrote: "The name of Wolf in connection with Greek literature, and of Niebuhr in reference to Roman history, wear a significance that extends far beyond the particular spheres where their gigantic critical excavations were conducted. If the Wolfian theory with regard to the origin and composition of the Homeric poems be looked at beyond the surface, it will be found to underlie a great number of the most important literary, historical, and theological questions that stir the mind of England at the present hour."<sup>1</sup> These remarks are suggestive as coming from one who does not accept the theory. The year 1795 is as much an epoch in the history of critical thought, as is 1789 in political history. The revolution then begun is beyond doubt the most suggestive phenomenon connected with the development of classical studies since their revival in the Middle Ages.

Of Wolf himself, and his one book, both possessing a career of singular interest, we should be glad to speak further. But we hasten from this historic reference to consider the subject of early popular literature, particularly epic poetry, as illustrated and brought into prominence by the advancing investigations of comparative criticism.

It has puzzled many a critic and many a thoughtful reader to analyze the felt difference between such poems as, for instance, the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, a difference similar to

<sup>1</sup> *Homer and the Iliad* (Edinburgh, 1866), Dissertation vi.

that recognized between the earliest ballads of Chevy-Chace, and one of Walter Scott's border lays. Without attempting to enumerate specific diversities, one production is like a wild forest, the other like a planted grove. In one an artificial, reflective element is far more conspicuous than in the other. One is nature and one art to a degree which an intervening distance of time or of progressive culture does not wholly account for. In reality they belong to two distinct classes of poetry, generically alike, but with marked specific differences. One of these classes criticism recognizes as an individual or personal product, the other as peculiarly collective or, so to speak, impersonal in its origin. In epic poetry, to which we wish to devote special attention, we have what the Germans call the *Kunstepos* and the *Volksepos*, the epic poem of art, and the popular epos. What an epic poem in the ordinary sense is, let Blair and the books of rhetoric define according to the recognized canons. Such are the *Aeneid*, the *Divine Comedy*, the *Jerusalem Delivered*, the *Henriad*, the *Messiah*, the *Paradise Lost*. The popular epic, the character of which we are to consider, differs from these. The national epos of Germany is transmitted to us, imperfectly and in part, in the *Nibelungenlied*, that of France in the *Chansons de Geste* of Charlemagne.

A Celtic epos once celebrated in its heroic verse the achievements of its renowned King Arthur, his race, and his chiefs. Long before the *Chronicle of Geoffrey of Monmouth*, before English was a language, before the Briton and the Saxon had coalesced into a nation, the *Morte d'Arthur* and the legends of the Holy Vessel were sung in rude, wild, epic strains by pagan bards in the wilds of Wales and Britain. As Christianity prevailed, the pagan conceptions of this literature were gradually in part eliminated. By the time of the Middle Ages these had become a body of written poetry in most of the languages of Europe, and had been recast in the moulds of ecclesiastical thought and tradition. In the Tennysonian *Idylls* it has emerged again into the common literature of Christendom, dowered with gifts alike

of classic and of modern culture. It is upon the stock of a decaying popular epos that this rare flower of contemporary poetry has budded. It is a "spear of thought" whose fashioning was in the deeps of the past; like the famous brand Excalibar, held out to its destined hero by

"An arm,  
Rising from out the bosom of the lake,  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,"

this cycle of legend, rich in historic as well as transcendent moral meanings, was brought through unknown hands to the top of time. Happy are we that the hero-poet came who could pluck and wield it.

#### THE NATIONAL EPOS.

It is a familiar fact that the earliest literature of a race is poetry. Nations with an early history unsevered by external violence have each had a literature, if we may call it so, antecedent to writing and literary cultivation. This oral literature springs up as poetry. The preservative power of rhythmic form suggests at once a reason, in the fact that such literature is exclusively selected by the memory for transmission. But beyond this it is to be remembered, that at that period the state of life and language is such as to favor in a high degree imaginative production. The Hindus had at a very early date a body of religious and epic poetry, which was preserved and transmitted orally from generation to generation. Legend, fable, incident, and chronicle take poetic form. It may be lyric, or it may be epic, or combine the features of both, but will naturally be chiefly epic, inasmuch as it embraces themes of common and national interest. That which is distinctively epic will contain the historic reminiscence of a people, its grander conceptions, the primal facts of its social and religious system. It will embrace the higher themes of what in German is called the *Sage*.<sup>1</sup> We may therefore define the national epos of a people to be *the*

<sup>1</sup> *Sage*, which we faintly render in English by *legend*, may be defined: a traditional story reciting the supposed events of a mythologic or heroic foretime.

*collective epic poetry produced by the illiterate popular mind, and embodying the heroic and mythologic traditions of its race.*

What then distinguishes the national epos, or popular epic poetry, from other forms of poetic literature? In the endeavor to fix upon some of its fundamental characteristics we note :

First, it is prehistoric. That is, it is prior to the era of written records among the people where it originates. An age becomes historic in the sense implied, only when it records its acts. Till then the spirit of tradition is dominant, a spirit antagonistic to that of history. The employment of written documents fixing events accurately and in sequence evokes a hitherto latent historic sense, and at once places the mind in a changed relation to the past. Now the epos belongs to the age of oral tradition, and where it arises, necessarily precedes history. With the advent of writing and history it dies upon the air, or else, transferred to manuscript, is preserved, as it were, in a fossil state. Of the ancient Hindu tradition a vast amount has been thus preserved in the Vêdas, in the epic poem of the Mahâbhârata, and others. Among the Britons, on the other hand, the lays and tales of the bard have flown beyond recall, and the songs have perished with the singer.

It should be borne in mind, however, that in certain social conditions, the two periods of intellectual development which we have spoken of as chronologically distinct, may co-exist in the same country, and among people of the same race. The great popular mass may remain untouched by a literary culture which has already long ago reached a certain class. Thus in feudal Europe so broad a chasm lay between serf and lord, that we find in the closest proximity two types and states of society ideally distant; the intellectual phenomena of a period of oral tradition and of historic culture appear side by side. Among the Germans a written literature of considerable extent found its way into court and castle, while the Lay of the Nibelungs and a wealth of lyric folk-song

lived on the lips of an unlettered peasantry. A striking example is also afforded in the Russian popular poetry which we shall presently mention.

Second, it is for a listening, not a reading public. We are to conceive of it as being invariably sung or chanted to assembled hearers. This exclusively oral character of the popular epos, while it accounts for various peculiarities of its style, also assists to interpret its inner spirit. Indeed, it is an essential condition of its vitality. For it lives on the popular faith, and this departs as reading and discipline come in. With the dawn of letters its muses vanish as ghosts at cock-crow. It is not so much that reading thenceforward precludes listening, or recitation, but the critical faculty developed by the accurate and permanent notation of thought destroys the faith which keeps such poetry growing.

As to form, it will be of a high order of rhythmic excellence. The ear of the hearer is more fastidious than that of the reader, and demands more perfect harmony and movement. Despite the rudeness of the age a polishing process advances with unconscious rapidity. Words and lines multiply in which the sound is echo of the sense. Accordingly a language with a long period of oral poetry in process of formation is inevitably far richer thereby in poetic forms. Students of German literature are aware how the numerous folk-songs, as well as the ballads of the Minnesingers, of whom many could neither read nor write, have enriched the rhythmic resources of the language.

From this oral poetry the dramatic element is inseparable. Macaulay's illustration is familiar, of how children and servants relate history. "Their *says hes* and *says shes* are proverbial." Yet accurately speaking this is due not so much to their being either children or servants, as because the uncultured mind, however logical it may be, develops imagination rather than reflection. It sees things, and talks in pictures. Along with a certain dramatic character, repetition also will be a marked feature. The ear welcomes refrains and choruses in popular melodies, though the reader



of the same melodies skips them. To the bard such lines and passages are welcome as the rhetorical resting-places of invention and memory. His rapt hearer anticipates them with peculiar pleasure. If the action leads to the seashore he listens eagerly for some old sonorous phrase descriptive of the "many-dashing ocean side." These repetitions are the frames in which the picture is set,—models of art in their way, but not the picture itself.

In the third place we mention, that it addresses itself to the appreciation and belief of the mass of the people at the time. The poet cannot, like Bacon, write for posterity, or with the conscious security of Thucydides, transmit his work to future ages as an everlasting possession. He may be in advance of his age, but it is that age which must hear him, or none. By native force of mind he may tower above the multitude around him, but to this multitude, and not to a select few, he must address himself.

Hence this poetry is unreflective. It gives results, not processes. It conveys great truths without reasoning upon them. No moral is aimed at, nor does it seek directly to

" Assert eternal Providence,  
And justify the ways of God to men."

Its range of observation is that of popular life. It does not roam for illustration beyond what the average man sees and knows. If we should imagine the bard possessed of the learning of books, he would nevertheless not use it.

It also accepts and rests upon popular beliefs. It is foreign to its very nature to teach new truth. At least, the bard does not in his own person assume to add to the sum of current knowledge and belief; he does not speak with prophetic voice for Zeus, but is the muse's interpreter, rehearsing from her lips the storied traditions of his own people. Hence the popular epos is not directly creative. It does not so much newly invent, as embellish already accepted facts. The very conditions under which it exists require us to conceive of it as presenting current beliefs, not at all as being either the propagator of new or the destroyer of old.

Not that its statements are necessarily true as they stand, or even have an original basis of truth,—that is another matter,—only that when taken up into the epos they are already believed as such. A primitive Munchausen may have fabricated *de novo* marvellous accounts of one-eyed giants or talking horses; but the popular poetry that we speak of does not permanently absorb these accounts, until they have passed into accepted tradition. Thus an epos does not give birth to a system of religion; it does not mould a mythology. It rather presupposes a religious system already determined, just as it presupposes a distinct people; for a determinate mythology or religious system is a fundamental condition of an organic national life. Renan, indeed, goes so far as to say that a polytheistic mythology is essential to the development of a national epos, and accounts for its absence in the Semitic races by the monotheistic type of their religion.

It is from this point of view (although we are here partly anticipating a stage of the argument not yet reached) that we take exception to a position earnestly maintained by Mr. Gladstone, in the profoundly interesting chapters which treat of the Olympian system or the Greek religion. He declares, at the outset: “Homer was the maker, not only of poems, but also, in a degree never equalled by any other poet, 1. of a language; 2. of a nation; 3. of a religion.”

This startling statement is not meant, however, to be taken too literally, and is afterwards modified: viz. “In this process of construction, the actual belief, traditions, and tendencies of the people, could not but be the chief determining force. But the potent mind and imagination of the poet, in all likelihood, exercised an influence in modifying the stages and fixing the consummation of the process, which, if secondary and subsidiary only with reference to the powers before mentioned, may still be justly supposed to have been far greater than any ever wielded by any other Greek, whether legislator, poet, or philosopher.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Juventus Mundi*, chap. vii

Still, what he attributes to individual influence is seen further on, when he says that Homer "exercised an immense influence in the construction of the Greek religion. It became with him, what it probably had never been before, and what it was not in the works of any later writer, a most gorgeous and imposing, and even, in a certain sense, a highly self-consistent whole; containing in itself, without doubt, many weak and many tarnished elements, but yet serving in an important degree the purpose of a religion to control the passions and acts of men.

"The Olympian system of Homer is eminently what Horace describes as:

'Speciosa locis morataque recte  
Fabula.'

It is wrought out with pains and care, full of character and individuality, marvellous alike in the grandeur and in the weaknesses of its personages—a work, in the very highest sense, that is applicable to any human production, of true and vast creative power."

Now, the view thus set forth by the distinguished statesman seems, with any construction that can be legitimately put upon it, to rest upon the slightest possible foundation. As far as it concerns language, the merest tyro in comparative philology needs not be told that it is utterly at variance with ascertained laws of linguistic growth. Waiving the question of the authorship of the Homeric poems, no such extended effect on language as is implied could be produced by a bard whose poems were neither written or printed. Still less is such a view consonant with the circumstances of literary production at that age and in the existing culture of the Greek race, if we are to attach any weight to the principles laid down in our present discussion. That it does not accord with the laws of mythologic development may, we think, also be clearly proved.

We mention, as a fourth characteristic of this epic literature, its perfect freedom and unreserve—its *naïveté*. This is incident to the period in which it originates. Society is

as yet unvisited by culture, and not fenced round by the reserves of a more polished age. The minstrel and his listeners are alike happily ignorant of the fact that language is an instrument for the concealment of thought. Their utterances are, accordingly, direct and thoroughly *naive*. "Indecorous! Homer never wrote that," was the dictum of old Zenodotus, when a passage transcended the proprieties, as he thought; and away went the stylus through the offending lines. It would never do to have Achilles address the monarch in command with such words as:

"Thou sot, with eye of dog and heart of deer!  
Who never dar'st to lead in armed fight  
The assembled host."

The *naïveté* of early poetry is hardly capable of description or analysis. It must be perceived and felt. It is to be remarked that it is in no manner opposed to the most bountiful use of imagination, device, and ornament. It is not baldness; it is only a certain spontaneousness, expressing its fact in the directest and most striking way. If a hero is in a boasting mood, out comes his boast in the plainest speech, and his rage flies like an arrow to its object. We are reminded, in this connection, of Goethe's remark: "Homer represents the object as it exists, we the effect; he depicts the terrible, we terribly; he the agreeable, we agreeably."

Fifthly, the national epos presents a truthful picture of its age. Unconsciously, but with inevitable accuracy, it photographs the scenes and the life it looks upon. Its facts, real or imagined, although chiefly drawn from out the past, must wear the costume of the present. The stage-furniture, so to speak, of its dramatic action, must be improvised from its own neighborhood. The story ever so old must be told in every-day words, illustrated by familiar objects. The bard and his lays are in constant close contact with actual life on every side, reflecting its aspects and deriving thence their materials. The matter which it furnishes to history, therefore, consists not so much in the story which it tells as in

the words, the idioms of expression, and the illustrations which it uses to tell the story. To a certain extent this is true of any narrative, written or spoken, of any period; the true critic often learns more from the telling than from the tale itself. But in regard to the popular epos, the very conditions of its existence tether it to the circle of the people's language, habits, and associations. It has no other store of words or objects to draw from.

Hence its inestimable value to the philosophic historian. In these far-off beginnings are the germs of a nation's conscious life.<sup>1</sup> Here find expression, unchecked and uninfluenced from without, the national traits and sympathies — tendencies which, if not arrested or absorbed, will issue as distinct forces in the culture, government, and literature of a future civilization. As to the precise period to which these historic data are referable by the subsequent investigator, it can only be inferred that they belong in general to that when the epos becomes fixed by writing. The customs, modes of thought, and religious beliefs inwrought into it change with its change and grow with its growth; they remain fixed for historic transmission only when the manuscript renders them permanent.

Such a prehistoric literature must occupy a prominent place in the intellectual history of every race with an unhindered development. We know how the literature of Germany strikes its roots far and deep into the legendary poetry of Teutonic antiquity. The genius of the nation is best studied in its folk-songs and its *Mährchen*, those popular and fairy tales of which German soil is so prolific. That indigenous poetry, sung and chanted around the hearth-fire and at the festive gathering, not only enshrined their best treasures of knowledge and thought, but aided powerfully to develop the intellectual energy of the people. In these poetic memorials — though they no longer exist in their early forms, rather than in Druidic symbols and fragments

<sup>1</sup> Compare in this connection, chapters i. and xix. in E. Mulford's recent work, "The Nation."

of Runic inscription — are to be found the significant beginnings of northern European literature.

We come, lastly, to a characteristic more fundamental than any of the preceding, broadly separating the early epos from the productions of reflective culture. It is an organic product of the national mind. It is the work of the people, rather than of the individual. Neither the epos as a whole, nor any single part of it, can be assigned to an individual mind, or to a single period. Let us endeavor to apprehend clearly what is the import of these propositions; divesting ourselves, if necessary, of conceptions which a reading and disciplined age induces, sufficiently to perceive the process that went on in the unlettered workshop of primitive literature. We owe much suggestion on this point to Steinthal, who looks at the subject from the stand-point of national psychology, and whose discussions, though they reveal a tendency to hasty generalization, display a clearness and force of statement too infrequent with German philosophers.

To illustrate by the case of language. Each language, considered as to its verbal and grammatical structure, is an organized intellectual product. Now, of whom or of what is it the product? Manifestly, the spontaneous outgrowth of the national mind. No part of it can be ascribed singly to any, however dominant, individual mind. It is true that every word and sentence uttered came from the lips of some one person, and were due to his volition. But the organic unity which belongs to it as a whole, and by virtue of which it ranks as a language, is unconsciously created by the race which speaks it. Thus, also, rises a system of law, or a body of social custom. Upon the coral structures which rise symmetrically in tropical oceans myriads of ephemera have wrought and built; but the law which determines the gigantic forms of branch and reef is collective, not individual.

So with a national epos. It is a true *vox populi*. Just as it is in language, in law, and in social institutions, what is peculiar to the individual is gradually eliminated; what is

common remains. There is, moreover, in an early state of society a community of intellectual goods such as we can hardly imagine in a later stage of civilization. In the main, all have the same sources and the same stock of knowledge, and, although diversities of personal genius exist in their full extent, they are limited to a common stock of symbols; they have a common horizon of vision.

By what steps do the rude beginnings of popular poetry reach the organic completeness of an epic cycle? First are heard the lyric strains which are born of the moment in some sudden poet, celebrating to his neighbors the recent victory, or wailing over a fallen hero. These songs pass from mouth to mouth, and are repeated with endless variations. If it be a nation which has experienced the vicissitudes of a great migration, or passed through a violent struggle for life or territory, so much the more luxuriant will be the upspringing of commemorative song. Dr. Percy, speaking of the long-continued hostilities between England and Scotland, and the feuds of border clans, notices how "the martial spirit constantly kept up and exercised near the frontiers of the two kingdoms, as it furnished continual subjects for their songs, so it inspired the inhabitants of the adjacent countries with the powers of poetry."<sup>1</sup> As time goes on, the impassioned gush of the lyric ode becomes the even flow of the epic lay. The remote event, and the hero long since departed, are celebrated in calmer tones by the bard, and with a milder light in his venerable eye. Generations pass, and new stories of adventure cluster, by a process familiar to tradition, around one heroic name, that has now become a household word. Historic perspective grows fainter, under the blending hand of tradition, and the narrative of one leader or heroic line of leaders comes to have woven into its web all the choice reminiscence of a race. The *chansons de geste*, as the old French epic ballads were termed, afford an excellent illustration of this, and show the tendency of various facts and fictitious adventures to gather by

<sup>1</sup> Percy's Reliques: "Essay on the Ancient Minstrels."

an accretive process about single names. Originally *geste* meant the adventure which was related in the ballad (Lat. *gesta*, achievements). Afterwards, when the *chanson de geste* gradually appropriated to the favorite hero the tales and deeds of remoter times, the word *geste* came to denote the house or princely line itself. Count William of Toulouse bears in the legends of the French epos a life of charmed length; there being ascribed to him facts known from historical sources to belong both to prior and subsequent periods. There is a prodigious and somewhat heterogeneous mass of legend in the collection of *chansons de geste* which celebrate the exploits of Charlemagne and his line.

To proceed — these lays, constantly losing what is local and individual in interest, obtain a more and more general diffusion. They are sung and resung, around a thousand fires, at a thousand feasts, each time with such variation as accords with the spirit of the occasion or the temper of the bard. By a natural process of selection the popular will will reject some portions, approve others, and give to the whole mass a certain general order and outline. The national character will delineate itself in its heroes; the national history will deposit its essential facts, or distil their significance into the narrative. This has meanwhile settled into a permanent metre. Each race elaborates, along with its language and its literature, its metrical system, and by the time the national genius has dictated an epos it has also constructed its peculiar epic verse.

We have indicated already that it is a living product, necessarily changing with the age that creates it, as long as it retains its oral character. Steinthal says: "We are, therefore, to conceive of folk-poetry (I lay the greatest stress upon this) as thoroughly in a state of life and incessant flow. What is true of language is exactly true of it, that it is not a work, but a force; its name is a *nomen actionis*. There are no folk-poems, but there is folk-poetizing; no epos, rather an epic art.

"Hence it is impossible, accurately speaking, to fix in



writing this popular poetry. It is a stream of poetry that flows without ceasing. You bathe in the river, but not twice in the same waters; so you do not twice hear the same lay. We may, it is true, draw from the river a vessel of water; it is then, however, no longer the flowing wave. Just so we may transcribe a lay that we have just heard; but it is no longer the folk-song. An hour afterwards—in the same hour, indeed—the same song is heard with a variation.

“The folk-poem eludes the grasp; for it is impossible to collect all the variations. It has been varied times without number already; it will be varied times without number again. The few variations which one does collect are accidental.”<sup>1</sup>

It should be added here that the facts and principles contained in the preceding pages apply, many of them, not only to the national epos, strictly so called, but to the whole mass of prehistoric folk-lore.<sup>2</sup> Lyric songs, current jests and proverbs, fables and allegories run on from age to age similarly. Part of what is now extant is the common possession of the Indo-Germanic races, carried with them from their first home. The animal-epos, as it is sometimes termed, fragments of which are preserved in the widely-diffused poems of Reynard the Fox, appears to be of Germanic, or at least of European, origin. Literary investigation and exact science have still much to do in throwing light upon the field of early myth and tradition. Philology is every day contributing facts of inductive value. We wait still for further results from the researches of comparative prosody, tracing the laws of metre, as they appear in different languages, and suggesting their significance. The researches,

<sup>1</sup> Das Epos. H. Steinthal; in the “*Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*.” Berlin. 1867.

<sup>2</sup> By folk-lore is meant “the unlearned people’s inheritance of tradition from their ancestors.” See preface to “*Lancashire Folk-Lore*;” Harland and Wilkinson, 1867. It is not, however, to be confined, especially when referring to a people without civilization, to fanciful tales and superstitions. It is “folk-lore in contradistinction to book-lore, or scholastic learning.”

too, into the history of religious belief are constantly leading into this field. These will aid in arriving at conclusions which will be less apt to incur the frequent reproach of being *a priori* theories projected into conjectural history.

#### THE NATIONAL EPOS OF RUSSIA.

Examples variously illustrative of the principles and considerations which have been presented are furnished by poetic remains of the Finns, the Servians, the Irish, which, with others, have been rescued from oblivion largely by the industry of the present generation. But it was not till ten years ago that we had an example of a living epos, or at least fragments of it, reduced to writing just as it falls from the lips of the minstrel singers of a barbarous people. We speak of the Russian epos. Other similar collections, of the Finnish and Servian poetry, for instance, had been more or less modified by the compilers or transcribers, guided by their own poetic taste. In this case the attempt was made to record the ballads just as they were at the time heard from the singers. It is not the first time that Russia has been to the critic and historian what an uptilted continent is to the geologist. Within its borders there are simultaneously visible all the strata of historical development from primeval barbarism to recent civilization.

In 1860 there was published in Moscow a volume of Russian folk-songs, collected by P. W. Kirjevskij. The author was a Russian scholar, who began his labors in this field as far back as the year 1827. It was followed later by several volumes of a second collection, made by a co-laborer in the same field, P. N. Ribnikoff.<sup>1</sup> The larger number of the ballads come from the provinces of Olonetz and Simbirsk; the one towards the north, the other towards the east, of European Russia. The task of collection, prosecuted with laborious zeal for many years, is said to have been performed with great fidelity. Some difficulties were met with.

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller account of these works see the "Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie," etc., 1867. "Das Russische Volksepos." W. Bistrom.

It was not unfrequent that the collector found himself looked upon with suspicion by the rude peasantry and their bards, to say nothing of the vexatious interference of the police. At sight of the note-book the singer would sometimes stop short, and no amount of persuasion could induce him to continue.

These collections, made by the two above-mentioned compilers, contain some two hundred and fifty-four songs and ballads, amounting to not far from forty thousand verses. They are of various lengths, ranging from nine to nine hundred and twenty-nine verses. Some partake more of the lyric than the epic style; those which are more of an epic turn are usually from one hundred and fifty to four hundred verses in length. Many are only fragments of a longer epic ballad. The minstrels by whom this poetry is mainly cultivated are not the most reputable class of the serf population. Many are vagrant tavern-haunters and beggars, though some lead a more settled and respectable life. A number of the ballads were obtained from the serfs and peasant girls of the farms.

The metrical system of the epic portions is tolerably uniform; the fundamental verse being a line of ten syllables; the principal accent falling on the third and eighth, a minor accent on the fifth and tenth syllables. The cesura falls invariably in the middle. Thus, it will be seen, the verse is divided into two equal and similarly accented parts.

It does not come within the scope of the present Article to illustrate by selections the style and character of the Russian epos. Such poetry, indeed, as another has remarked, cannot be appreciated from selections; like the singing of forest birds, it must be enjoyed *en masse*. Some portions are, it is evident, of comparatively recent date. Much of it, however, bears traces of a high antiquity. This archaic character is traceable in the mythologic stamp of an early age, as well as in the subject matter of tales which lead back into the traditional and heroic history of both the Russian and other Slavic races. Among the heroes of its

story are Vladimir the Great and Ivan the Terrible. The author of the "Literature of the Slavic Nations," published in 1850, has translated some specimens of the Russian lyrics, and many of her statements characterizing the Slavic poetry in general apply also to that of Russia.

It will be seen at once how valuable for many purposes must be such a transcript of a portion from an actually existing popular epos; the more valuable as a contribution to both national and comparative literature from the fact that this poetry is rapidly disappearing before the advance of education and reform among the serfs of Russia. It affords data by which to test the conclusions drawn from the study of the Nibelung poetry in Germany, fragments of the Tartar and the Finnish epos, together with other similar literary remains that have been previously mentioned.

#### THE HOMERIC CONTROVERSY.

What bearing this discussion has upon the so-called "Homeric question" we scarcely need explain. Since the appearance of Mure's History of Greek Literature it is too much the vogue for English and American scholars to feel safe in settling down on the old orthodox platform; viz. the Iliad and the Odyssey, fifteen thousand six hundred and fifty-nine lines in the one, twelve thousand one hundred and eleven in the other, are two entire epic poems, which tradition and internal evidence alike refer to a very early Greek poet known as Homer. Mr. Gladstone proceeds on this assumption. Professor Blackie, of Edinburgh, has his misgivings, but does not reject it. Our own veteran classical scholar, Professor Tyler, in a recently published volume, has re-affirmed his earlier conclusions. Professor Lincoln also pronounces a similar verdict, in the Baptist Quarterly for July, 1870, and endorses Colonel Mure's summing up as conclusive. These represent, we take it, the large majority of American, as well as British classical scholars. There is an evident feeling of relief in being able to reject a theory looked upon as breeding scepticism alike in literature and

religion, besides being destitute of the distinct, positive conclusions so desirable to a practical mind.

But let us first ask: What is the real "Homeric question"? It presents itself to us somewhat as follows:

There is abundant evidence of the existence in remote periods of Hellenic history of a large body of popular oral tradition and poetry. Much of this poetry was epic, and had assumed a fixed metrical form at an early date. Its themes included the tales of the Trojan cycle; it embodied the mythology and historic lore of the race. In the historic period of Greece we find this oral literature replaced by an extensive body of written epic poetry, treating of subjects principally from the same traditional sources. Excepting brief fragments, scattered here and there in ancient writers, there are now extant out of this body of written epic poetry only those portions which have long borne the names of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. Now, what is the relation subsisting between these two poems and the early oral poetry which preceded them? Assuming, if we choose, a Homeric authorship somewhere, how much in these poems is Homer, and how much is epic folk-lore, the still more ancient popular poetry? Do they belong essentially to the *Volksepos*, the epic of the race, or to the *Kunstepos*, the epic of the reflective poet?

These questions hardly admit of a definite and categorical reply; yet we may look for replies more and more clear and satisfactory, as the studies of early languages, literatures, and religions go forward hand in hand, furnishing constantly new data for the comparative method. We can perceive, at least, that the question we deal with is not merely a fossil curiosity, but alive with interest to every comprehensive scholar. There is wide space for divergent opinions. Some choose to believe that the traditional poetry of the Greeks was hardly more to Homer than Geoffrey's *Chronicle* to Tennyson, in composing the *Idyls of the King*—that out of the base ore of rude and chaotic tradition, by the genius of a single poet, those unique and splendid fabrics "rose like an exhalation." The other extreme deems them a

portion of the epos in its ancient form, with only such additions and mutilations as frequent transcription and the accidents of thirty centuries must have occasioned. Others, again, find in the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* a series of ballads so fitted together as to harmonize in most particulars; according to which Homer may have been the collector and arranger, just as some Middle Age poet is supposed to have given the *Nibelungenlied* its present shape. Lachmann's celebrated analysis, by which he thought to detect the sixteen original ballads of the *Iliad*, proceeded on this supposition.

Probably no one will deny that the basis of the poems, both as regards fact and form, is legendary — legendary as to the story, the epic metre, the prominent characters. We strongly incline to believe that the original style and treatment is largely retained, and that thus they belong essentially to the popular epos; that the creative genius of a Homer is quite a subordinate factor in their production; that whatever unity they have belongs to the poetic story in its earliest form; moreover, that the dramatic power, the inventive fertility, the vivid delineation, in a word, the distinguishing excellences of these immortal verses, have a grander lineage than that which ends in the man Homer. Rhapsodists have repeated and enlarged them; Homer, it may be, recast them all; transcribers and editors have used a liberty of modifying and interpolating to a greater or less extent; but, in spite of all this, we have in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, not two statuesque, poetic unities, carved by a single brain, but two colossal fragments of the Greek epos, out of an age far anterior to its earliest written literature.

Without attempting even a cursory review of the array of arguments entering into the determination of this question, let us take note of a few considerations specially appropriate at the present time and to the circle of readers for whom this Article is designed.

Here is one proposition: There is nothing in Greek history, either that which is authenticated by document, or

that which is drawn from tradition, to determine the personal authorship of the poems.<sup>1</sup> The argument of Grote, for one, upon this point is elaborate, and sufficient to place it beyond controversy. Add to this the results of Sengebusch's exhaustive comparison of the traditional chronologies extant relating to Homer, and the argument takes on a positive character. But to this we can only allude.<sup>2</sup>

Again, coming to internal evidence, it is certainly not yet proven that the inner unity of the Iliad, for instance, is of such a sort as necessitates the hypothesis of a single poet as its author. A certain harmony there is, and evidence of an original organic completeness. Great stress is laid upon this by those who adhere to the popular view. But is not this unity sufficiently accounted for otherwise? It is a question upon which we would speak with the greatest diffidence. What poetic insight, what comprehensive learning, what range as well as keenness of critical vision must unite, in order to furnish an authoritative verdict! And then, as Wolf suggests, who can forget Aristotle, to say nothing of other "sceptred sovereigns" of thought? We may venture to refer to the observations of Mr. Bryant, in his Preface to the translated Iliad, and put it to the thoughtful and frequent reader of Homer whether the matured judgment of our great poet does not commend itself. Mr. Bryant speaks from the point of view of a poet and a critic, not of a classical scholar,

<sup>1</sup> This argument is merely negative, but it is of great importance, in the first place, because it clears the ground of a great deal of controversial rubbish; and secondly, because it anticipates the reproach of historical scepticism. Greek history as related by the Greeks is an inexplicable maze to one who does not appreciate their irresistible instinct to plant an eponymous hero at the base of every institution; this once comprehended, the traditions about Homer assume a new meaning.

<sup>2</sup> An Article in the North American Review for April, which comes to my hand just while engaged in correcting the proof of these pages, illustrates clearly and forcibly the foregoing proposition. ("Mr. Bryant's Translation of the Iliad," Charlton T. Lewis, p. 329 seq.). The difference between the Iliad and the Odyssey, is also well stated. The reader who may wish to investigate this subject further, will find convenient references to original authorities in a pamphlet by H. Bonitz: "Ueber den Ursprung der Homerischen Gedichte." Vienna. 1864.

and evidently with no design to subserve a modern theory. The passage is too long to copy, but closes with the words: "Thus we may suppose that until Aristotle arose to demonstrate the contrary, the fable of the Iliad must have appeared to the general mind to be incomplete."

Colonel Mure has devoted a large part of two volumes, in his *History of Grecian Literature*, to the Homeric poems and the argument respecting their origin. With critical acuteness and with conscientious painstaking he has elaborated a large mass of internal evidence in favor of their one-authorship. We there have pointed out to us various correspondences in style and conception, the harmony throughout both poems in their manifold delineation of character, the tokens of a pervading moral purpose, and a variety of facts considered as marking such an organic completeness as stamps the product of a single mind. We cannot but think, however, that undue weight is allowed to this division of the argument by many who have appealed to his authority. Such evidence is not convincing in the direct ratio of its bulk. Much the same process could with additional labor have been continued through several more volumes; but the argument could hardly be considered cumulative in the degree of its expansion. If the points made by Grote<sup>1</sup> concerning the ninth book of the Iliad are sustained, they alone lessen surprisingly the force and relevancy of a number of Colonel Mure's chapters and paragraphs.

The very extreme, moreover, to which he urges his view is sufficient to refute it. He adduces the same species of evidence to prove the essential unity of all portions of the Iliad (excepting some minor interpolations) together with the Odyssey. He even clings to the ship-catalogue, as having, to judge from historical and internal evidence, "a connection from the remotest period with the remainder of the work." So, too, not only the Doloneia, but such portions as Nestor's Address, in Book II., and the close of

<sup>1</sup> Book i. chap. 21.



Book XXIV., are included in the argument. Now, it is well known that there is increasing unanimity, on the part of continental scholars, in reckoning these as later additions; and that, too, in spite of the strong reaction from the extreme positions of the Wolfian school. All this part of Colonel Mure's argument must stand or fall together; and if, now, the *Odyssey* shall be placed several generations later than the *Iliad* by advancing investigations into language and mythology, one main foundation of this argument will be at once swept away.

Since Mr. Gladstone and Colonel Mure are two prominent representatives of Homeric scholarship before the English and American public, it is not unfitting to remark on their claims to be considered competent judges in the specific case before us. In regard to the former, it is plain, from his earlier, as well as more recent work, that he leaves the question to others; so far from devoting due research to it, he has rather postulated a verdict, in order to clear the way for another class of investigations. Mure, whose lamented death left unfinished his invaluable contribution to the history of Greek literature, was in earlier life a decided adherent of what he later called the "Wolfian heresy." This fact naturally enough lends additional force to his conclusions with a reader who wishes to get at the truth, without being in circumstances to study the principal authors on the subject. But a study of his work unavoidably leads us to the conviction that, with all his stores of learning and his genial taste, he had never appreciated the full bearing of Wolf's criticism. Then there are manifest indications that the discoveries of the science of language and the modification of earlier views consequent upon them had been neglected or ignored by the author. Both he and Mr. Gladstone pay little heed to the results of linguistic studies, although these have contributed almost the only new elements for many years to the solution of some of the problems with which they deal. One is reminded of Hawthorne's shrewd remark, in which he attributes English practical

success to "their characteristic faculty of shutting one eye," thus getting a more decided view of what immediately concerns them.

It is certainly far from correct that the result of the great critical contest "has been a gradual reaction, a progressive tendency of return to the old view," at least, as regards the common authorship of these poems in Homer. Mr. F. A. Paley, one of the best Homeric scholars and Greek philologists in England, reluctantly, but strongly, dissents from what is still in England the popular opinion. Those who are familiar with the recent expressions of German and French scholars will, we think, agree that the old view is further than ever from general acceptance. Reaction there has been from some of the theories advocated by followers of Wolf, and from an unwarranted application of his principles. But the most widely prevalent view, among competent critics, concerning the chief source of the Homeric poems and their rightful place in literature, far from being the old one, still finds its fundamental exposition in the *Prolegomena*.

It will doubtless be acceptable to many readers to sketch briefly, here, the views taken by a large class among the more cautious and conservative Homeric scholars in Germany. They are those of J. U. Faesi, given in an introduction to an edition of the *Odyssey*, which, as well as his edition of the *Iliad*, is extensively used in the German gymnasias. In condensed form they may be thus stated :

The legends of the Trojan war, assuming its date as 1184 B.C., were of mingled Aeolic and Ionic origin. They took their rise on the eastern coast of the Aegean, during the period of comparative peace and prosperity which succeeded the conflicts of the first settlement. During several centuries of oral transmission these poetic legends were gradually enriched, expanded, and formed into a connected story, the interest of which centred in the heroic figure of Achilles. Afterwards, and probably during the first half of the ninth century B.C., there arose among the bards who

chanted these lays at the national games and religious festivals, one master-bard of high constructive powers and comprehensive vision, who framed many of them into one, retaining the dramatic unity he had detected, and stamping all anew with the marks of his own genius. His name disappeared, and he was known as Homer (*Ὅμηρος*, *the framer, the compiler*). At a later period the epic lays which, with tales of travel and domestic life, celebrated the fame of Ulysses, were in like manner fashioned into the *Odyssey*, by another and less-gifted hand. In such a reconstruction of the old into the new, just such inconsistencies and contradictions as appear must naturally have been expected.

To the question whether these poems were then reduced to writing, the reply is a decided no; it was not until the seventh century B.C., at the earliest.<sup>1</sup> But, even after their final reduction to writing, they were chiefly known and taught by oral communication, especially in the guilds or fraternities of rhapsodists. Thus, in the progress of time and of a wider diffusion, so many corruptions crept into the verse, and such an immethodical manner of recitation prevailed, as to suggest the reforms of Solon and Pisistratus. The former required by statute systematic adherence to the received version. The latter instituted a revision of both poems — a new edition based upon a comparison of collected manuscripts, containing, in most cases, but a lay or fragment of the whole. Pisistratus was thus a restorer of a rapidly disappearing unity — a second Homer, as it were, to the Greek epos. It was this revision, probably, that finally incorporated those interpolated verses which are manifestly designed to forecast the political supremacy of Athens.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thus from one to two centuries previous to the supposed date of the composition of the *Iliad*. How conclusive the evidence is against the existence of a written *Iliad* earlier than this, may be seen in Müller and Donaldson's "History of the Literature of Ancient Greece," Vol. i. chap. 4. Still more demonstrative on some points are facts in Kirchoff's "Geschichte des Griechischen Alphabets."

<sup>2</sup> We have given the view held by Faesi as fairly representing many of the moderate and eclectic school, and as one which in its substantial features is widely prevalent. As to the etymology and meaning of *Ὅμηρος*, the high authority of (Professor Geo. Curtius) is against it. See his "Andeutungen über den gegenwärtigen Stand der Homerischen Frage."

Faesi takes special note of the reasons for deeming the *Odyssey* the product of a later era; reasons drawn in part from style and language, but emphasizing chiefly the diverse mythologic conception and cast of the two poems. We may add that here, too, as remarked of the *Iliad*, the science of language is affording new criteria for judgment and new elements for the solution of the chronological problem. Thus far, the facts elicited tend to separate further and further the respective dates of at least the main portions of the two epics.

We draw to a conclusion with the following statement, which will, we think, be generally endorsed by those best entitled to pronounce in the case: It is in the primal Greek epos—the epic stories of an age anterior to the earliest assigned date of Homer—that the origin of the Homeric poems is to be found; to a degree unconceived by theory or tradition up to a century ago, they belong, both in substance and form, to that primitive stage of the human mind. As to the extent of the change wrought before passing into their present form, by what steps of authorship or intellectual lineage they are separated from that far beginning, history is utterly silent, and attainable evidence permits only an approximate judgment.

It is not difficult to see that this view, in so far, at least, as it deposes the individual Homer from his epic throne, is at first repugnant, not only to the great reading and listening public, but to the majority of educated minds, and perhaps in proportion to the degree of their aesthetic instinct and culture. Apart from the supposed destructive tendency of the criticism, which, as far as history is concerned, is now clearly proven to be imaginary, we naturally shrink from depersonalizing the mightiest literary force in all the ages. In the movements of thought, as well as political history, we seek the personal leader. By nature we are hero-worshippers. To reason down Homer, that regnant star of genius—it is seemingly intellectual treason; it is the beginning of a backward revolution towards anarchy. Has this majestic thought

— this Iliad-cathedral looming up out of the Greek foretime — no architect? The very question appears analogous to atheism. Froude complained, nineteen years ago, that “the origin of these poems was distributed among the clouds of a prehistoric imagination, and, instead of a single inspired Homer for their author, we were required to believe in some extraordinary spontaneous generation, or in some collective genius of an age which ignorance had personified.”<sup>1</sup> But it is no “spontaneous generation”; it is no fortuitous concurrence of atoms which this theory assumes or requires; nor is it against its acceptance that it is seen in the *chiaro-oscuro* of antiquity. It takes on clearer certainty as historic light penetrates that misty distance.

Moreover, if we find our Homer a mythologic, rather than a historic fact, our conception of his race, the Hellenic nation, obtains a new significance. If we find the Parthenon rather Greek than Phidian, and the Iliad Hellenic more than Homeric, why, it is that the Nation asserts the kingship of its mind, and, as the individual lessens, the race is more. Criticism has long ago recognized the fact that literature cannot part from the popular mind without severing its tap-root. This is only a corollary of the fact that the people in its hereditary unity has laid the foundations of literature, as of law, of language, and of national institutions. Viewed thus, the Iliad outlines a grander unity to our sense than it had done before. Its historic facts acquire profounder meaning. They are embryologic, the germs of future civilization, factors whose value can be more accurately assigned according as we are able to eliminate the individual element. As history is not the loser, so national psychology is enriched with a whole thesaurus of material for its inductions. In computing the orbit of the splendid Hellenic mind, it will thus have furnished to its hand the elements of a larger curve.

The facts and principles referred to in the earlier part of

<sup>1</sup> “Homer;” an Essay in Fraser’s Magazine, 1851, republished in “Short Studies on Great Subjects,” Vol. ii.

this discussion have a theological application still more important. Are the Christian scriptures merely the fragments of an earlier and larger national literature of the Hebrews? Are these books the recorded remnants of a prehistoric literature, in which the first task of the critic is to trace the growth of myth and legend, to detect interpolation and forgery, and to draw the line between tradition and history? We believe that rationalistic criticism finds no basis for its assumptions in the results of comparative research, but may be met on its own vantage-ground with a complete and triumphant refutation. But we defer this argument to a separate consideration.

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## ARTICLE II.

### REVELATION AND INSPIRATION.

BY REV. E. F. BARROWS, D.D., LATELY PROFESSOR OF HEBREW LITERATURE  
IN ANDOVER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

#### NO. VIII.

##### THE INSPIRATION OF THE RECORD HOW ASCERTAINED.

THE gospel rests on a basis of facts, in such a full sense that if the substratum of facts be taken away the gospel itself perishes. The facts that underlie the gospel history are to be ascertained by candid investigation according to the ordinary rules of evidence. In the preceding series of Articles we have endeavored to point out concisely the main lines of historic evidence by which this basis of facts is shown to be impregnable to all the assaults of scepticism — that the gospel history is genuine; that it has come down to us in a form essentially uncorrupt; and that it is worthy of full credence. In demonstrating this, we have also shown its supernatural character; and also that the very existence of such a supernatural history implies a preceding series of supernatural revelations, such as we have in the Old Testament, and a sequel of supernatural manifestations, like that