THESIS
FOR DEGREE OF M.A.
College of Literature and Science,
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS.
M. E. Sparks, Class of 1889.
Thesis

The Influence of Homer

Myrtle E. Sparks

For Degree of M. A.

June 4th 1889.
Down through the ages of the past three centuries, we hear the voice of one crying in the wilderness, a voice of such sweetness and force that twenty-five centuries have not sufficed to drown its melody or check its force. Who knows now, or when, he heard one man truly know? It is sufficient for us that sometime, somewhere, a masterhand struck the lyre and set the strings vibrating with matchless melody.

Although the Iliad and the Odyssey are the earliest expression of Greek thought, they presuppose an earlier epic literature. They are the culmination, not the beginning, of a period. For, although they have all the simplicity and freshness of a primitive age, they show us immaturity in conception or evidence of expression. Indeed, it has been maintained by some men of note, especially among the Germans, that it would have been an impossibility for one man in the absence of writing to compose and transmit poems of such beauty and excellence, and that they are undoubtedly a number of poet
Shakespeare collected in a later age into one whole. This theory of the "Separatists" as they are called, seems to be most wounding, it is a question which must now to definitely settled, and is of little benefit to literature. Whatever knowledge can be gained upon the subject must come by a patient, living, individual study of the poems themselves.

In Homer we have a picture of primitive human life exceedingly different from historical Greece. It is a life of contrasts, dark and bright. On the bright side we see the strange, courtesanly treated, as questions asked as to manners or minims; until the rites of hospitality have been freely bestowed. If he is a suppllicant, we behold the man who disregards his prayers, for Zeus unmercifully punishes a betrayed trust. We see the home life skillfully depicted, and the influence and position of women much higher than in historic times, and of all the pictures of home life there is none more beautiful than the pasting of Hector and Andromache. For her the agony of sep-
oration unsals the fountain of his affection and all his
merry devotion from reclusively from his life. While he who
ever in his darkest hours had been and of course for Helen,
author of all his woes, puts aside the clinging bands and, goes
to duty and to death. What wonder is it that even the scene
representation of this parting drew an uncontrollable outburst
of grief from Pityia the Roman Matron. In dark contrast to
these noble pictures, we have seen divided into many petty,
jealously mingling states, each governed by its own king, whose
power is unlimited, while the people are but dust. The town
was carried on with pitiable barbarity, maidens of high degree
dragged into slavery while old men and children are slain
with savage cruelty. There is no such thing as protection
by law, captured towns were given up to plunder, piracy was
an honorable calling which even kings did not disdain to follow.
How the Greeks, if in later periods
regarded Homer is well illustrated by the fact, that they often
spoke of him as "The Poet." And, truly, none of the succeeding poets have the same marvelous power of portrayal. The aged Titan, the false Paris, the crafty Ulysses, the selfish Agamemnon, the childish Nausicaa were all well known to him. Fidel. destiny, love of friends, piety towards the gods, reverence for the beautiful show him truly and how recently he sang of that which dwells in the hearts of men.

Some of the characters of Homer became in historical time sources of inspiration. Achilles was the typical Greek, the national representative of youth and bravery and Hellenic chivalry. His pure abiding friendship for Patroclus is one of the most beautiful expressions of the kinship of souls. Achilles was the ideal to which Alexander vainly strove to attain, it was his noblest ambition. The Iliad accompanied him in all his expeditions. Like his hero Alexander died young, yet after all, he fell far below his model. The one was real, the other ideal. The one the hero of history, the other the hero of
humanity.

How Homer was a source of inspiration to the later Greeks, is especially shown by the dramatists. They, almost without exception, drew their material for their tragedies from him, each one interpreting them in a different way. By Aeschylus the myths were made to illustrate divine and unalterable truths. In Sophocles they serve as an opportunity for the study of human nature, but Euripides they show only the misfortune of human life, its hopes and fears, its joys and sorrows, its passions and its despair. How far that they fell in their interpretation of Homer is seen in the different delineations of Helen of Troy. Homer drew her with quick light stroke, and she became for all ages the ideal representation of Greek womanhood, an embodiment of eternal youth and beauty. Linus with his remorseless hand, touches her not. As we read these words up into our hearts, a deep pity that we are grand, so fair, so surpassingly beautiful, should be the bane of so much
nee, the recipient of so much hate. With eager haste we follow her through all the vicissitudes of her changeful life, and breathe a sigh of relief when in the Colosseum we find her in the palace of Menelaus, the mistress of his house and secure in his affection. Yet what true woman? today in this, who, reading the story, would not prefer to have been Andromache, carrying into a life of slavery the memories of her purity and the twofold devotion, than Helen, renowned and beloved, overwhelmed continually with remorse? In the hands of the later poets, Helen becomes nothing. Aeschylus shows only the frailty of her character and its terrible results. In Epicurus even her magnificent beauty is lost sight of and Helen sinks to the level of the Athenian women of the day, when as the historian phrases it that woman is best who is least spoken of among men either for good or evil. Homer may be truly called the father of history, although he did not write to chronicle historical events, yet
to the Greeks his narrations were historical, his men and women were not the airy creations of a poet's brain, but living, breathing creatures. Pindar's Iliad treats the Homeric catalogue as authentic, and mentions the Phaecians as identical with the Cynicians. Writing in a time when the people were without books, without travel, without acquaintance with surrounding customs, the scenes he depicted were naturally of a strong local coloring, and from a valuable memorial of the state of society, the feeling and intellect which must have been the starting point of Greek history.

No one factor of Greek education for quickening the mind and refining the taste can be placed above Homer. Homeric lullabies wafted little children to dreamland. At their mothers' side before the State claimed them, they listened to the tale of Siry divine, and unwittingly with the very air they breathed, they inhaled, ideas of chivalry and virtue. Later Plato tells us that the envoys of Homer called him the educator of Greece.
When the Sphanta traveled from one city to another putting the finishing touches upon the education of Persian gentlemen Homer was the text book used.

Homer was undoubtedly a teacher of morals, although, as an English critic has observed, that nowhere in his works is there a tenet used that means goodness in the abstract. Yet throughout them are admonitions as to generosity, courtesy, honor, faithfulness, entire dependence upon the gods, the hatredfulness of anger.

"Would that strife might perish among gods and men, with wrath which makes even wise ones foolish, and though sweet at first as dripping honey, growing fills the heart with its foul smoke."

He advises gentleness:

"But curb then the high spirit in thy breast, for gentle ways are best, and keep aloof from sharp contentions; that the young and old among the Greeks may honor thee the more."
Homer may be called the author of Greek Mythology. Writing before Egypt had sent its lotus blossoms to India, he dreamt to systematize the viracions Greek mythology, he took the various legends, and giving them definite shape and form, he wove them into the Olympian system. He unfolded to Greek minds a wonderful picture of Olympian life an exaggeration of earthly existence. It is a life of languishing and love, a life of joy and sorrow, of love and hate, a life intensely human in its sweetness and bitterness in its gloom and shame. One point in this mythology which greatly influenced the Greek mind was the expression of divinity in human form. Apollo was a man ideally beautiful. Athena was the type of perfect womanhood. Human life thus became the link between the finite and the infinite, between the visible and the invisible. This gave to the Greeks their strong reverence for human life. Any violence to the human body was looked upon with horror, and the perfect development of the human form was deemed obligatory. Nowadays does Homer enslave man to human sacrifices in ludicrous ceremonies. He entirely ignores the
sacrifice of Labugemus, and, although Achilles slew twelve Trojan
heroes upon the funeral pyre of Patroclus, the act had no connection
with religious ceremonies. With the Greeks worship was an adoration of
the beautiful. Beauty a divine gift, the outward expression of the soul
within. Ulysses tells us that the three great gifts of the gods to man were
"beauty, the power of thought, the power of speech." So the typical
Greek hero was given a divine beauty, as the typical wretch was piled
hideous deformity. This love for the beautiful has placed Greece above
competition in art, but it was the destroyer of religion. The soul was
forbidden, and external beauty without beauty within became only
the gratification of the senses and could last but last. Thus fell the
religion of Homer.

With their theology settled and their language
amalgamated, the Hellenic nation entered upon that grand career
of literature and art which has placed her at the head of all
succeeding nations. And amid all her beautiful constellations the
light of Homer has ever shone. Most other nations have turned
away from the poetry of their youth as a child outgrows the toys.