

**THE ILIAD OF HOMER. IN
TWO VOLUMES.
VOLUME ONE; PP. 1-249**

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The Iliad of Homer. In Two Volumes. Volume One; pp. 1-249 by Homer & Prentiss Cummings

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HOMER & PRENTISS CUMMINGS

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THE ILIAD OF HOMER

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH HEXAMETER
VERSE BY

PRENTISS CUMMINGS

AN ABRIDGMENT

WHICH INCLUDES ALL THE MAIN STORY AND THE
MOST CELEBRATED PASSAGES

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOLUME ONE

BOSTON
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1910

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VOLUME ONE

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INTRODUCTION

It is altogether probable that the Trojan War, so called, has a basis of historic fact, and that very considerable literature respecting it existed before the time of Homer. A poem so skilful as the Iliad could hardly be accounted for unless there had been earlier literature of real merit; and the leading characters of the Iliad, such as Achil'les, Agamem'non, Odys'seus, Pri'am, Hec'tor, Hel'en and Par'is are introduced as if their names were presumed to be familiar to the ordinary Homeric audience. It has been observed that Agamem'non is repeatedly called by his patronymic "Atrei'des" before his distinctive name is given, and that Patro'klos is first mentioned simply as the "Son of Menoi'tios." Belief that such names were familiar is strengthened by the fact that, as to many subordinate characters who probably were inventions of the poet, their parentage, birth-place or dwelling-place, and some story of the family are told by way of introduction. Thus a kind of Iliad consisting of disconnected tales relating to the Trojan War and its heroes existed before the time of Homer, — tales varying in antiquity, in artistic merit, and in relative conditions of civilization and savagery.

Of the wealth of pure myth which forms the setting of the Iliad it is also probable that much antedated the poem as originally composed, and into that the poem

was fitted; and that much is of later date and invented to fit the poem. There is evidence also that names and myths belonging to other localities are boldly appropriated by the poet and made to do duty as part of the story of Troy.

The myths most fundamental to the main story center largely about the marriage of Pe'leus and The'tis. The'tis was daughter of Ne'reus, "the Ancient of the Sea," and when grown was so beautiful that many of the gods would have wished her in marriage but for an oracle that she would bear a son mightier than his father. That kind of a son the gods did not want, and as a matter of precaution it was decided that she must marry a mortal. Accordingly the gods arranged that she should be captured on the seashore by Pe'leus, king of the Myr'midons. Thetis submitted to this marriage with reluctance; and to make the affair as palatable to her as possible the gods gave her a brilliant wedding; among other gifts they gave Peleus a suit of divine armor, and Posei'don (Neptune) gave him the immortal horses, Xan'thos and Ba'lios, named in the poem. From Peleus and Thetis was born an only son, Achilles, the hero of the Iliad. Of these three characters Peleus only appears in the poem by hearsay, yet the reader will have a vivid picture of an old man wise, high-minded, generous, and kindly. Thetis is the fond mother of an only son, and takes his part in every controversy as a complete partisan. Achilles is highly gifted both physically and mentally, is intense in his loves and hates, and the reader will feel that he has a noble na-

ture; but he is a spoiled child of fortune, and is selfish, impetuous, wilful and often unreasonable, ambitious, and tenacious as to all matters pertaining to his personal dignity and interests. The reader most probably will like Hector the better of the two, but will realize that he represents an inferior type of man.

To insure harmony at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis the goddess Discord was not invited; but she in revenge threw an apple into the midst to be awarded to the most beautiful goddess present. This made trouble enough, for He'ra (Juno), Athe'na (Minerva) and Aphrodi'tè (Venus) all claimed the apple. As a decision in favor of either would give great offense to the other two, Zeus (Jupiter) left the question to a mortal, Paris, son of Priam. Before the birth of Paris his mother Hek'abè (Hecuba) dreamed she brought forth a firebrand that consumed the city of Troy; and deeming the dream a portent, his parents exposed him to die on Mt. Ida. As happened in other myths, the child was found by a shepherd and brought up as his own. The goddesses all three sought to bribe Paris, Hera promising power, Athena wisdom, and Aphrodi'tè the most beautiful woman on earth as a wife; and he awarded the apple to Aphrodi'tè. His true parentage was then made known, and he sailed to Sparta and brought back Helen, wife of King Menela'üs, a brother of Agamemnon. To recover Helen an army was collected which sailed to Troy, and captured it in the tenth year of the war. The myth of the judgment of Paris seems to have been invented to fit the story. It is only

alluded to once in the Iliad in a passage which is obscure and probably a late interpolation; and Hera and Athena, while bitter against the Trojans generally, nowhere show ill will to Paris himself, not even misdirecting his darts. The reader will observe how little the Achæans talk about Helen, and how much about booty; and it is altogether improbable that the war was in fact for any other object than plunder and adventure.

This translation comprises about half the Iliad, and includes all the main story and nearly all the most celebrated passages. The abridgment was not merely to save work. The omitted parts with few exceptions are inferior in literary skill and interest, are irrelevant to the plot and unduly delay its action, and in the opinion of the translator are mostly interpolations or later additions. Apart from these considerations the Iliad is much too long to suit modern taste; and its inordinate length, even in ancient times, became a proverb both in the Greek and Latin tongues. The scholar who cares little for the story as a whole, and likes to pick up the original for single passages, and the student and antiquarian who read it for special purposes, find the Iliad none too long, but with the ordinary reader it is otherwise.

That the Iliad, as it now stands, lacks unity as a poem in the sense that the several parts do not fit together well, and that much serves no purpose in the development of the plot, appears to be beyond controversy. If the work of one man, it must be deemed a reservoir from which

to draw different settings for its main story. As to unity of authorship, opinions are still divided, and any comprehensive discussion of the subject is inadvisable here; but as the present translator has at least been a long and faithful student of the poem, he could hardly fail to have an opinion. In brief that opinion is that, in addition to minor interpolations, at least three great authors had a hand in the composition of the Iliad; and this opinion is not based on differences of style, though such differences exist, but upon apparent mental and moral differences in the author, differences in taste, in purpose, and in the plan and conception of the poem.

In line with what seem the best authorities, I believe that the Iliad as we now have it began with a simple lay, "The Wrath of Achilles," and consisted mainly of the relevant parts of the first, eleventh, sixteenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twenty-second books, giving an account of the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon, the appeal of Achilles to Thetis to obtain the interference of Zeus to right the wrong done him, her advice to him to abstain from the war, the granting by Zeus of victory to the Trojans, so that from waging merely defensive war they actually threatened to destroy the ships which, being drawn up on the shore, formed the camp and principal barracks of the Achaians, the relenting by Achilles so far as to let his friend Patroklos lead the Myrmidons out to save the ships, the fall of Patroklos at the hands of Hector, the consequent renunciation by Achilles of his wrath and inactivity, and his slaying of Hector.