

**LITERATURE
PRIMERS: HOMER**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649492404

Literature Primers: Homer by W. E. Gladstone

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W. E. GLADSTONE

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PRIMERS: HOMER**

LITERATURE PRIMERS,

Edited by J. R. GREEN, M. A.

HOMER.

Literature Primers. Edited by J. R. GREEN.

HOMER.

BY THE
RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE,
HONORARY STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH.

Those oft are stratagems which errors seem ;
Nor is it Homer needs, but we that dream."—POPE.

NEW YORK :
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY,
1889.

gift of H. B. Wilson

TO THE
EDUCATION DEPT.
ANN ARBOR

CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I.—HOMER THE MAN	5
II.—THE HOMERIC QUESTION	17
SECTION I.—PLOTS OF THE POEMS, . . .	17
II.—AGAINST THE SEPARATORS . . .	29
III.—WOLF, AND THE TRANS- MISSION BY MEMORY, . . .	38
III.—HISTORY.	46
IV.—COSMOLOGY	54
V.—GEOGRAPHY	57
VI.—MYTHOLOGY, OR THE OLYMPIAN SYSTEM . . .	65
VII.—ETHNOLOGY	94
VIII.—ETHICS OF THE ACHAÏAN TIME.	104
IX.—POLITY	113
X.—EUROPE AND ASIA, OR TROJAN AND ACHAÏAN .	121
XI.—CHARACTERS	127
XII.—ART, AND THE ARTS	134
XIII.—HOMER'S PLACE AND OFFICE AS A POET, . . .	140

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HOMER.

CHAPTER I.

HOMER THE MAN.

I. Homer's Unique Position.—The poems of Homer do not constitute merely a great item of the splendid literature of Greece ; but they have a separate position, to which none other can approach. They, and the manners they describe, constitute a world of their own ; and are severed by a sea of time, whose breadth has not been certainly measured, from the firmly-set continent of recorded tradition and continuous fact. In this sea they lie, as a great island. And in this island we find not merely details of events, but a scheme of human life and character, complete in all its parts. We are introduced to man in every relation of which he is capable ; in every one of his arts, devices, institutions ; in the entire circle of his experience. There is no other author, whose case is analogous to this, or of whom it can be said that the study of him is not a mere matter of literary criticism, but is a full study of life in every one of its departments. To rescue this circle of studies from inadequate conceptions, and to lay the ground for a true idea of them, I have proposed to term them Homerology. Of this Homerology, I shall now endeavour to present some of the first elements in their simplest form. And at the threshold, postponing for the moment our notice of the controversies involved in what is termed the Homeric question, let us see how far we can acquire an idea of the poet himself, and the conditions under which he lived.

2. **Homer his own Witness.**—When we use the word Homer, we do not mean a person historically known to us, like Pope or Milton. We mean in the main the author, whoever or whatever he was, of the wonderful poems called respectively, not by the author, but by the world, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. His name is conventional, and its sense in etymology is not very different from that which would be conveyed by our phrase, "the author." This is a Primer of Homer. That is to say, it aims at giving elementary knowledge respecting him and the works with which his name is coupled. In such a design, it is requisite above all to let the reader understand that we know nothing either definite or certain respecting Homer, unless in so far as it can be gathered from the poems he composed. Yet they very rarely use the first person,—only once in a passage of any importance; and exclusively in invocations to the Muse (*Il.* ii. 424-93); so that they convey no direct information whatever about the bard. It does not follow that our indirect knowledge must be small or untrustworthy. Great artists may be knowable from their works; and there is a singular transparency in the mind, as there is also in the limpid language of Homer. Old as he is, the comprehensive and systematic study of him is still young. It had hardly begun before the nineteenth century. With the primary source of information found in his text, we have to combine two others: (1) the scattered notices supplied by ancient tradition, and (2) the valuable and still growing illustrations furnished by the study of language, and by the discoveries, and learned study of ancient remains.

3. **Our Earliest View of Him.**—At the first dawn of the historic period, we find the poems established in popular renown; and so prominent, that a school of minstrels takes the name of *Homeridæ* from making it their business to preserve and to recite them.