

**THE ILIAD OF HOMER;
BOOKS I-IV. TRANSLATED
INTO ENGLISH
HEXAMETER VERSE**

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HENRY SMITH WRIGHT

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THE
ILIAD OF HOMER;

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TRANSLATED INTO
ENGLISH HEXAMETER VERSE.

BY
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TO HIS HONOURED FRIEND,

THE RIGHT REV. WILLIAM ALEXANDER,
LORD BISHOP OF DERRY AND RAPHOE,

AS A SLIGHT TRIBUTE OF ADMIRATION FOR HIS
CHARACTER, ELOQUENCE, AND HIGH POETIC GIFTS ;

AND ALSO

IN SINCERE GRATITUDE FOR THE KIND AND ENCOURAGING INTEREST
HIS LORDSHIP HAS TAKEN IN THIS ATTEMPT TO DO JUSTICE
TO THE POET HE LOVES SO WELL ;

THIS TRANSLATION OF THE FIRST PORTION OF THE ILIAD
IS DEDICATED.

NOTTINGHAM :

JAMES HILL, PRINTER, CARLTON STREET.

PREFACE.

NUMEROUS as have been the attempts to reproduce the Iliad of Homer in English verse, and in almost every variety of metre, including many excellent renderings in blank verse,—one of them being by the present translator's father, the late Mr. Ichabod Charles Wright,—it may probably be assumed that there has been no version of the poem in *hexameters* (the metre of the original Greek) which has commanded much success. At the same time, it has long been the opinion of many distinguished scholars and lovers of Homer, that the metre of the original is the only one whereby it is possible to give anything approaching to a true representation, in English, of the glorious swing and musical rhythm of the Greek Iliad. Amongst those holding this view may be specially mentioned Mr. Matthew Arnold, who, when Professor of Poetry at Oxford, in 1861, strongly insisted on it in his "Three Lectures on Translating Homer," followed in 1862 by his "Last Words on Translating Homer" (Longman & Co.), and the present translator has the authority of this distinguished scholar and poet, for saying that his opinion remains entirely unaltered.

If, then, the Hexameter Metre is the right one to adopt, the question may be naturally asked, Why it is that so little success has attended any of the several versions where it has been used?

The author of the present attempt would humbly suggest, in reply, that their want of success is mainly due to the fact that a large proportion of the lines that have been written in English, and called "hexameters"—not only by translators of Homer, but by other writers and poets as well—are not really hexameters at all; *i.e.* they cannot be read as such except by putting a totally wrong and false emphasis on many of the syllables forming the lines.

Now, since *accentuation of syllables* is the only possible equivalent in English for what is called "quantity" in Greek or Latin, it follows that any unnatural *wresting* or *straining* of the accentuation must necessarily destroy the music and rhythm of the metre, just as "false quantities" would do in Greek or Latin verse, and thus render its sound unpleasing, rugged and harsh.

The temptation to fall into this error in *English*, where the accentuation is entirely a matter of "ear," and dependent to a great extent on the exact sense intended, is no doubt very great, and especially so in a translation, where the meaning of the original *must* be faithfully given.

It would frequently be easy to write a line that will scan well enough to the mental ear of its producer, (*if he allows himself to smuggle in a slight variation from the correct and natural emphasis of the syllables*), but which, when a stranger comes to read it, will necessarily cause a grievous stumble. To give one instance out of hundreds that could be quoted: the word *too* can never possibly be anything but a *long* syllable; yet there is a line in one of the Hexameter versions of the *Iliad* which commences thus: "Subjects too base to resent," the unfortunate little word being made to do duty as the final *short* syllable of a dactyl, whereby it loses every particle of its meaning.

Another point of great importance in Hexameters, in whatever language they may be written, is the infinite capacity for *variety* which this metre possesses; and the failure to attend to this point has resulted, in many cases, in the metre being considered "monotonous" and "jingling,"—the latter fault being due to the too free use of dactyls, without a proper admixture of spondees to give dignity to the line.

The "cæsure" is also as essential in *English* as in the classical languages.

"Spondaic" lines (*i.e.* lines where a spondee occurs in the fifth foot instead of the usual dactyl) have been used occasionally in this translation, but very sparingly; in fact their occurrence, on the average of the four Books, will hardly be found to be as frequent as in the Greek.

In mentioning the above points, the translator's object is to shew what he has *aimed at*: whether or no he has in any degree succeeded in overcoming the difficulties of the task, he must leave to be decided by those who may honour his attempt with a perusal.

It only remains to refer to a few matters of detail belonging to the execution of the work.

1. The names of the old Greek divinities have of course been retained in their Greek form, and not Latinized. Not only did Zeus, Hera, Pallas Athênê, Aphroditê, &c., widely differ, in many of their attributes and