

**ECLECTIC ENGLISH  
CLASSICS. HOMER'S  
ILIAD: (BOOKS I.,  
VI., XXII., XXIV.)**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649508549

Eclectic English Classics. Homer's Iliad: (Books I., VI., XXII., XXIV.) by Alexander Pope

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**ALEXANDER POPE**

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ECLECTIC ENGLISH CLASSICS

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# HOMER'S ILIAD

(BOOKS I., VI., XXII., XXIV.)

TRANSLATED BY  
ALEXANDER POPE



NEW YORK · · · CINCINNATI · · · CHICAGO  
AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY

1896

## INTRODUCTION.

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OF Homer, the author of the "Iliad," we have little exact knowledge. We know that he was a Greek and a native of the country bordering the eastern part of the Mediterranean; and we may calculate that he lived in the ninth century before Christ.

He may have been blind; but his blindness must have come upon him late in life, after he had become familiar with the mountains and forests and rivers and sky of which he sings; and the sea, which he never mentions without some description of its color, its motion, its vastness, its beauty, or its usefulness.

After his death, when his fame had become established, many cities claimed his birthplace and home. The rhyme of an old couplet from the Greek bears witness to this:

"Seven rival towns contend for Homer dead,  
Through which the living Homer begged his bread."

His fellow-countrymen the Greeks, in whose language he sang his songs, called him Homeros. They were a people who loved poetry and beauty more than any race which has been on the earth since their time. Their country nurtured such tastes as these. It had the bluest and most beautiful sky and the clearest air, and through the air the sunbeams sparkled and danced over hill and stream and olive grove, and over the broad sea, too, which penetrated the land in a thousand bays and gulfs.

The habits and manners and faiths of that folk and of those

times of Homer, far back in the early morning of history, we must not suppose like the manners and thoughts of to-day. They were far different and far simpler.

In general social divisions we find among them two different classes. First there were the chiefs or kings. They ruled by reason of their supposed descent from a god, and also by their superior strength and bravery, riches and beauty. They were the fathers of the people like the patriarchs of the Old Testament. They were majestic and great. Their strength was as the strength of ten of later-born men because of their divine origin. Of such men Homer sang. As soon as they ceased to be able by their real value and manhood to assert their individual authority, they lost their kingship.

At home these chieftains lived in strong houses or palaces. About them were grouped the people in simple huts or cottages. They were the second of the two classes named above. The cottagers were commonly in the service of the chief or king under whose protection they lived and for whom they bore arms in battle. Besides giving his protection the chief probably led them in the chase, and purchased, by some process of exchange, the produce of their flocks and harvests. But of these masses we hear little. You will see in the poem that they are the vague, dark background which throws out the shining forms of heroes and gods in the broad and beautiful pictures of the "Iliad."

But Homer was a rhapsodist, as poets were then called. In thinking of that ancient time we must not suppose that Homer stood quite alone and sang to a songless race. The Greeks were a poetic, imaginative people, and there were many rhapsodists among them even in the early time of Homer. Our poet, in truth, was born towards the end of a long period in which many

others had composed epic or heroic songs. But he alone has survived to us. His is the first Greek voice coming down from the long period of stirring human life before history was written.

Like all the poets of his day he sang songs about heroes who had lived generations before him. Stories of their deeds had been preserved,—not by writing as later they might have been, but by word of mouth. For writing was not then commonly known. Songs and stories were in Homer's time handed down from father and mother to son and daughter, and also from rhapsodist to rhapsodist, by their having learned by heart the one from the other.

The songs and legends of the people Homer took up and clothed in beautiful rhythmical language—language so beautiful and of such fine simplicity that the epic poetry he composed has never been surpassed. The Greek in which he wrote was the speech of his day just as the pictures of life in the "Iliad" must be pictures of the habits and manners of the world in which he lived. For Homer sang of things which he saw.

Poetry was the literature, and in great measure the music, of that day. It was carried to the chieftain's house or palace by the poets or rhapsodists. The poet might dwell in the house of a chief, or he might go from the house of one king to that of another. In festivals, also, where the Greeks met in honor of some god or hero, the rhapsodist chanted his lays before the multitude, singing in a monotone and enlivening his song with touches now and then upon a four-stringed harp. By such recitations poets gave out their works and passed them on to other poets or rhapsodists.

"Homer," says Pope, "was no sooner come from his obscurity, but Greece received him with delight and profit." His songs,



which in the beginning passed for fine poetry, came to the later Greeks to be history, geography, and the sciences. The rites they named were quoted for the conduct of life. By their usages, questions referring to the laws between nations were settled. Singers of later Greece went to these songs for their inspiration also, and critics for their rules. Philosophers quoted them in defense of their opinions. The books written upon Homer swelled to libraries. Warriors modeled their lives by his heroes. The "Iliad" and "Odyssey" were, in short, the Bible of the Greeks, and had all the reverence and regard with which its sacred books are held by a people.

Moreover, Homer preserved to the later Greek world the early ideas of gods and goddesses. "He fixed," said the Greek historian Herodotus in after time, "the genealogies of the gods." In fact the gods and goddesses play such an important part in Homer's writings that we cannot properly appreciate his works without understanding something of the attributes with which the childlike Greeks endowed their divinities. The paragraphs immediately following will explain most of the allusions to the gods found in these four books of the "Iliad."

Far back in the very beginning of their race, in their total ignorance of causes the Greeks wondered at everything. Certain forces of nature and certain spiritual powers of man seemed so strange and inexplicable to them that they said "Some god or spirit is in this thing." Forthwith, having thus conceived it, they gave the inexplicable a name, and it was to them divine,—a god or goddess. "When thunder terrified them, they attributed their own nature to the phenomenon; and, being apt to express their most violent passions by howls and roarings, they conceived heaven as a vast body, which gave notice of its anger by light-

nings and thunderings." From such a beginning was formed the Greek mythology.

Now almost all races in all times have conceived their heaven, or abode of the gods, as some place high above them. So it was with the Greeks. They fancied that their gods dwelt on the top of Mt. Olympus, a lofty mountain in Thessaly which was the most northern state of Greece. The summit of this mountain was wrapped in clouds. The mystery of it touched their quick imagination, and they came to make this mountain top the doorway to the home of their divinities.

The chief of all the gods, and king of heaven, was Jupiter, the thunderer, called also Jove. Although the other gods submitted to his will, even his power was limited by a higher fate, or destiny.

Jupiter shared the kingdom of the world with his brothers Neptune, or Poseidon, and Pluto. Neptune was god of the sea and, with Nereus, Thetis, and the Nereids, personified the power of the sea. Pluto had the kingship of the lower world, or Hades.

Juno, or Hera, was wife of Jove and also his sister. But in spite of her exalted position her power was not greater than that of the other goddesses, for Jupiter was not inclined to follow his wife's inclinations in the favors he showed to gods and mortals.

Jove's daughter Minerva, Pallas, or Athene, who sprang full-grown and armed from her father's head, was the personification of wisdom and intelligence. She plays an important part in Homer's poems, appearing at most opportune times. But whenever the poet says that Pallas came to the aid of a hero, it is but another way—the early poetic way—of telling how this hero thought to do a wise and clever act.

Other daughters of Jupiter were Venus, the goddess of beauty, fabled to have risen from the foam of the sea, and Diana, or Artemis, goddess of the moon.

One of Jupiter's sons was the beautiful Apollo, or Phœbus, twin brother of Diana. He was god of the sun, of medicine, and of music and all fine arts. To the Greeks the sun was an archer and the sunbeams his arrows.

Other sons of Jove were Mars, or Ares, the god of war, Mercury, or Hermes, the messenger of the gods, Vulcan, or Hephestus, the god of fire and the forge, and Bacchus, or Dionysus, god of wine and revelry.

The Greeks thought their gods like men; they endowed them with the attributes of men, and we must not therefore be surprised to see these gods display all passions common to men. As their divinities were conceived as actively interested in the affairs of mortals, the disputes and quarrels of the gods had a considerable influence on the fortunes of the men they favored. It was in fact a dispute among the goddesses which led to the Trojan War. Plainly told, the story is in this wise:

Among the guests present at the wedding of the sea nymph Thetis to Peleus, King of the Myrmidons, the goddess of discord left an apple marked "To the fairest." Juno, Minerva, and Venus all claimed the prize, but the gods, having in mind the resentment of the two who should lose, refused to judge between them. And so it happened that the decision was left to Paris, son of Priam, King of Troy. By promising gifts each of the three goddesses tempted Paris to make the award in her favor. Pallas promised wisdom, Juno, unlimited power; but Venus offered a most beautiful bride. With a man of Paris's taste the award could not but fall to Venus.