

ANDREW LANG



HOMER
AND HIS AGE

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Andrew Lang

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ANDREW LANG (1844-1912)

Biographical Sketch from "Portraits And Sketches" by
Edmund Gosse

INVITED to note down some of my recollections of Andrew Lang, I find myself suspended between the sudden blow of his death and the slow development of memory, now extending in unbroken friendship over thirty-five years. The magnitude and multitude of Lang's performances, public and private, during that considerable length of time almost paralyse expression; it is difficult to know where to begin or where to stop. Just as his written works are so extremely numerous as to make a pathway through them a formidable task in bibliography, no one book standing out predominant, so his character, intellectual and moral, was full -of so many apparent inconsistencies, so many pitfalls

for rash assertion, so many queer caprices of impulse, that in a whole volume of analysis, which would be tedious, one could scarcely do justice to them all. I will venture to put down, almost at haphazard, what I remember that seems to me to have been overlooked, or inexactly stated, by those who wrote, often very sympathetically, at the moment of his death, always premising that I speak rather of a Lang of from 1877 to 1890, when I saw him very frequently, than of a Lang whom younger people met chiefly in Scotland.

When he died, all the newspapers were loud in proclaiming his "versatility." But I am not sure that he was not the very opposite of versatile. I take "versatile" to mean changeable, fickle, constantly ready to alter direction with the weather-cock. The great instance of versatility in literature is Ruskin, who adopted diametrically different views of the same subject at different times of his life, and defended them with equal ardour. To be versatile seems to be unsteady, variable. But Lang was through his long career singularly unaltered; he never changed his point of view; what he liked and admired as a youth he liked and admired as an elderly man. It is true that his interests and knowledge were vividly drawn along a surprisingly large number of channels, but while there was abundance there does not seem to me to have been versatility. If a huge body of water boils up from a crater, it may pour down a dozen paths, but these will always be the same; unless there is an earthquake, new cascades will not form nor old rivulets run dry. In some authors earthquakes do take place as in Tolstoy, for instance, and in S. T. Coleridge but nothing of this kind was ever manifest in Lang, who was extraordinarily multiform, yet in his varieties strictly consistent from Oxford to the grave. As this is not generally perceived, I will take the liberty of expanding my view of his intellectual development.

To a superficial observer in late life the genius of Andrew Lang had the characteristics which we are in the habit of identifying with precocity. Yet he had not been, as a writer, precocious in his youth. One slender volume of verses represents all that he published in book-form before his thirty-fifth year. No doubt we shall learn in good time what he was doing before he flashed upon the world of journalism in all his panoply of graces, in 1876, at the close of his Merton fellowship. He was then, at all events, the finest finished product of his age, with the bright armour of Oxford burnished on his body to such a brilliance that humdrum eyes could hardly bear the radiance of it. Of the terms behind, of the fifteen years then dividing him from St. Andrews, we know as yet but little; they were years of insatiable acquirement, incessant reading, and talking, and observing gay preparation for a life to be devoted, as no other life in our time has been, to the stimulation of other people's observation and talk and reading. There was no cloistered virtue about the bright and petulant Merton don. He was already flouting and jesting, laughing with Ariosto in the sunshine, performing with a snap of his fingers tasks which might break the back of a pedant, and concealing under an affectation of carelessness a literary ambition which knew no definite bounds.

In those days, and when he appeared for the first time in London, the poet was paramount in him. Jowett is said to have predicted that he would be greatly famous in this line, but I know not what evidence Jowett had before him. Unless I am much mistaken, it was not until Lang left Balliol that his peculiar bent became obvious. Up to that time he had been a promiscuous browser upon books, much occupied, moreover, in the struggle with ancient Greek, and immersed in Aristotle and Homer. But in the early days of his settlement at Merton he began to concentrate his powers, and I think there were certain influences which

were instant and far-reaching. Among them one was pre-eminent. When Andrew Lang came up from St. Andrews he had found Matthew Arnold occupying the ancient chair of poetry at Oxford. He was a listener at some at least of the famous lectures which, in 1865, were collected as "Essays in Criticism"; while one of his latest experiences as a Balliol undergraduate was hearing Matthew Arnold lecture on the study of Celtic literature. His conscience was profoundly stirred by "Culture and Anarchy" (1869); his sense of prose-form largely determined by "Friendship's Garland" (1871). I have no hesitation in saying that the teaching and example of Matthew Arnold prevailed over all other Oxford influences upon the intellectual nature of Lang, while, although I think that his personal acquaintance with Arnold was very slight, yet in his social manner there was, in early days, not a little imitation of Arnold's aloofness and superfine delicacy of address. It was unconscious, of course, and nothing would have enraged Lang more than to have been accused of "imitating Uncle Matt."

The structure which his own individuality now began to build on the basis supplied by the learning of Oxford, and in particular by the study of the Greeks, and "dressed" by courses of Matthew Arnold, was from the first eclectic. Lang eschewed as completely what was not sympathetic to him as he assimilated what was attractive to him. Those who speak of his "versatility" should recollect what large tracts of the literature of the world, and even of England, existed outside the dimmest apprehension of Andrew Lang. It is, however, more useful to consider what he did apprehend; and there were two English books, published in his Oxford days, which permanently impressed him: one of these was "The Earthly Paradise," the other D. G. Rossetti's "Poems." In after years he tried to divest himself of the traces of these volumes, but he had fed upon their honey-dew and it had permeated his veins.

Not less important an element in the garnishing of a mind already prepared for it by academic and aesthetic studies was the absorption of the romantic part of French literature. Andrew Lang in this, as in everything else, was selective. He dipped into the wonderful lucky-bag of France wherever he saw the glitter of romance. Hence his approach, in the early seventies, was threefold: towards the mediaeval *lais* and *chansons*, towards the sixteenth-century Pleiade, and towards the school of which Victor Hugo was the leader in the nineteenth century. For a long time Ronsard was Lang's poet of intensest predilection; and I think that his definite ambition was to be the Ronsard of modern England, introducing a new poetical dexterity founded on a revival of pure humanism. He had in those days what he lost, or at least dispersed, in the weariness and growing melancholia of later years a splendid belief in poetry as a part of the renown of England, as a heritage to be received in reverence from our fathers, and to be passed on, if possible, in a brighter flame. This honest and beautiful ambition to shine as one of the permanent benefactors to national verse, in the attitude so nobly sustained four hundred years ago by Du Bellay and Ronsard, was unquestionably felt by Andrew Lang through his bright intellectual April, and supported him from Oxford times until 1882, when he published "Helen of Troy." The cool reception of that epic by the principal judges of poetry caused him acute disappointment, and from that time forth he became less eager and less serious as a poet, more and more petulantly expending his wonderful technical gift on fugitive subjects. And here again, when one comes to think of it, the whole history repeated itself, since in "Helen of Troy" Lang simply suffered as Ronsard had done in the "Franciade." But the fact that 1882 was his year of crisis, and the tomb of his brightest ambition, must be recognised by every one who closely followed his fortunes at that time.

Lang's habit of picking out of literature and of life the plums of romance, and these alone, comes to be, to the dazzled observer of his extraordinarily vivid intellectual career, the principal guiding line. This determination to dwell, to the exclusion of all other sides of any question, on its romantic side is alone enough to rebut the charge of versatility. Lang was in a sense encyclopaedic; but the vast dictionary of his knowledge had blank pages, or pages pasted down, on which he would not, or could not, read what experience had printed. Absurd as it sounds, there was always something maidenly about his mind, and he glossed over ugly matters, sordid and dull conditions, so that they made no impression whatever upon him. He had a trick, which often exasperated his acquaintances, of declaring that he had " never heard " of things that everybody else was very well aware of. He had " never heard the name " of people he disliked, of books that he thought tiresome, of events that bored him; but, more than this, he used the formula for things and persons whom he did not wish to discuss. I remember meeting in the street a famous professor, who advanced with uplifted hands, and greeted me with " What do you think Lang says now? That he has never heard of Pascal! " This merely signified that Lang, not interested (at all events for the moment) in Pascal nor in the professor, thus closed at once all possibility of discussion.

It must not be forgotten that we have lived to see him, always wonderful indeed, and always passionately devoted to perfection and purity, but worn, tired, harassed by the unceasing struggle, the lifelong slinging of sentences from that inexhaustible ink-pot. In one of the most perfect of his poems, " Natural Theology," Lang speaks of Cagn, the great hunter, who once was kind and good, but who was spoiled by fighting many things. Lang was never " spoiled," but he was injured; the surface of the radiant coin was rubbed by

the vast and interminable handling of journalism. He was jaded by the toil of writing many things. Hence it is not possible but that those who knew him intimately in his later youth and early middle-age should prefer to look back at those years when he was the freshest, the most exhilarating figure in living literature, when a star seemed to dance upon the crest of his already silvering hair. Baudelaire exclaimed of Theophile Gautier: " Homme heureux! homme digne d'envie! il n'a jamais aimé que le Beau!" and of Andrew Lang in those brilliant days the same might have been said. As long as he had confidence in beauty he was safe and strong; and much that, with all affection and all respect, we must admit was rasping and disappointing in his attitude to literature in his later years, seems to have been due to a decreasing sense of confidence in the intellectual sources of beauty. It is dangerous, in the end it must be fatal, to sustain the entire structure of life and thought on the illusions of romance. But that was what Lang did he built his house upon the rainbow.

The charm of Andrew Lang's person and company was founded upon a certain lightness, an essential gentleness and elegance which were relieved by a sharp touch; just as a very dainty fruit may be preserved from mawkishness by something delicately acid in the rind of it. His nature was slightly inhuman; it was unwise to count upon its sympathy beyond a point which was very easily reached in social intercourse. If any simple soul showed an inclination, in eighteenth-century phrase, to " repose on the bosom " of Lang, that support was immediately withdrawn, and the confiding one fell among thorns. Lang was like an Angora cat, whose gentleness and soft fur, and general aspect of pure amenity, invite to caresses, which are suddenly met by the outspread paw with claws awake. This uncertain and freakish humour was the embarrassment of his friends,

who, however, were preserved from despair by the fact that no malice was meant, and that the weapons were instantly sheathed again in velvet. Only, the instinct to give a sudden slap, half in play, half in fretful caprice, was incorrigible. No one among Lang's intimate friends but had suffered from this feline impulse, which did not spare even the serenity of Robert Louis Stevenson. But, tiresome as it sometimes was, this irritable humour seldom cost Lang a friend who was worth preserving. Those who really knew him recognised that he was always shy and usually tired.

His own swift spirit never brooded upon an offence, and could not conceive that any one else should mind what he himself minded so little and forgot so soon. Impressions swept over him very rapidly, and injuries passed completely out of his memory. Indeed, all his emotions were too fleeting, and in this there was something fairy-like; quick and keen and blithe as he was, he did not seem altogether like an ordinary mortal, nor could the appeal to gross human experience be made to him with much chance of success. This, doubtless, is why almost all imaginative literature which is founded upon the darker parts of life, all squalid and painful tragedy, all stories that " don't end well" all religious experiences, all that is not superficial and romantic, was irksome to him. He tried sometimes to reconcile his mind to the consideration of real life; he concentrated his matchless powers on it; but he always disliked it. He could persuade himself to be partly just to Ibsen or Hardy or Dostoieffsky, but what he really enjoyed was Dumas père, because that fertile romance-writer rose serene above the phenomena of actual human experience. We have seen more of this type in English literature than the Continental nations have in theirs, but even we have seen no instance of its strength and weakness so eminent as Andrew Lang. He was the fairy in our midst, the wonder-working, incorporeal, and tricky fay of letters, who paid

for all his wonderful gifts and charms by being not quite a man of like passions with the rest of us. In some verses which he scribbled to R.L.S. and threw away, twenty years ago, he acknowledged this unearthly character, and, speaking of the depredations of his kin, he said:

Faith, they might steal me, w? ma will,
And, ken'd I ony fairy hill
I#d lay me down there, snod and still,
Their land to win;
For, man, I maistly had my fill
O' this world's din

His wit had something disconcerting in its impishness. Its rapidity and sparkle were dazzling, but it was not quite human; that is to say, it conceded too little to the exigencies of flesh and blood. If we can conceive a seraph being fanny, it would be in the manner of Andrew Lang. Moreover, his wit usually danced over the surface of things, and rarely penetrated them. In verbal parry, in ironic misunderstanding, in breathless agility of topsy-turvy movement, Lang was like one of Milton's "yellow-skirted fays," sporting with the helpless, moon-bewildered traveller. His wit often had a depressing, a humiliating effect, against which one's mind presently revolted. I recollect an instance which may be thought to be apposite: I was passing through a phase of enthusiasm for Emerson, whom Lang very characteristically detested, and I was so ill-advised as to show him the famous epigram called "Brahma." Lang read it with a snort of derision (it appeared to be new to him), and immediately he improvised this parody:

If the wild bowler thinks he bowls,
Or if the batsman thinks he's bowled,
They know not, poor misguided souls,

They, too, shall perish unconsolated.
I am the batsman and the bat,
I am the bowler and the ball,
The umpire, the pavilion cat,
The roller, pitch and stumps, and all

This would make a pavilion cat laugh, and I felt that Emerson was done for. But when Lang had left me, and I was once more master of my mind, I reflected that the parody was but a parody, wonderful for its neatness and quickness, and for its seizure of what was awkward in the roll of Emerson's diction, but essentially superficial. However, what would wit be if it were profound? I must leave it there, feeling that I have not explained why Lang's extraordinary drollery in conversation so often left on the memory a certain sensation of distress.

But this was not the characteristic of his humour at its best, as it was displayed throughout the happiest period of his work. If, as seems possible, it is as an essayist that he will ultimately take his place in English literature, this element will continue to delight fresh generations of enchanted readers. I cannot imagine that the preface to his translation of "Theocritus," "Letters to Dead Authors," "In the Wrong Paradise," "Old Friends," and "Essays in Little" will ever lose their charm; but future admirers will have to pick their way to them through a tangle of history and anthropology and mythology, where there may be left no perfume and no sweetness. I am impatient to see this vast mass of writing reduced to the limits of its author's delicate, true, but somewhat evasive and ephemeral genius. However, as far as the circumstances of his temperament permitted, Andrew Lang has left with us the memory of one of our most surprising contemporaries, a man of letters who laboured without cessation from boyhood to the grave, who pursued his ideal with indomitable activity and

perseverance, and who was never betrayed except by the loftiness of his own endeavour. Lang's only misfortune was not to be completely in contact with life, and his work will survive exactly where he was most faithful to his innermost illusions.

HOMER AND HIS AGE

PREFACE

In *Homer and the Epic*, ten or twelve years ago, I examined the literary objections to Homeric unity. These objections are chiefly based on alleged discrepancies in the narrative, of which no one poet, it is supposed, could have been guilty. The critics repose, I venture to think, mainly on a fallacy. We may style it the fallacy of "the analytical reader." The poet is expected to satisfy a minutely critical reader, a personage whom he could not foresee, and whom he did not address. Nor are "contradictory instances" examined—that is, as Blass has recently reminded his countrymen, Homer is put to a test which Goethe could not endure. No long fictitious narrative can satisfy "the analytical reader."

The fallacy is that of disregarding the Homeric poet's audience. He did not sing for Aristotle or for Aristarchus, or for modern minute and reflective inquirers, but for warriors and ladies. He certainly satisfied them; but if he does not satisfy microscopic professors, he is described as a syndicate of many minstrels, living in many ages.

In the present volume little is said in defence of the poet's consistency. Several chapters on that point have been excised. The way of living which Homer describes is

examined, and an effort is made to prove that he depicts the life of a single brief age of culture. The investigation is compelled to a tedious minuteness, because the points of attack—the alleged discrepancies in descriptions of the various details of existence—are so minute as to be all but invisible.

The unity of the Epics is not so important a topic as the methods of criticism. They ought to be sober, logical, and self-consistent. When these qualities are absent, Homeric criticism may be described, in the recent words of Blass, as "a swamp haunted by wandering fires, will o' the wisps."

In our country many of the most eminent scholars are no believers in separatist criticism. Justly admiring the industry and erudition of the separatists, they are unmoved by their arguments, to which they do not reply, being convinced in their own minds. But the number and perseverance of the separatists make on "the general reader" the impression that Homeric unity is chose *jugée*, that *scientia locuta est*, and has condemned Homer. This is far from being the case: the question is still open; "science" herself is subject to criticism; and new materials, accruing yearly, forbid a tame acquiescence in hasty theories.

May I say a word to the lovers of poetry who, in reading Homer, feel no more doubt than in reading Milton that, on the whole, they are studying a work of one age, by one author? Do not let them be driven from their natural impression by the statement that Science has decided against them. The certainties of the exact sciences are one thing: the opinions of Homeric commentators are other and very different things. Among all the branches of knowledge which the Homeric critic should have at his command, only philology, archaeology, and anthropology can be called "sciences"; and they are not exact sciences: they are but

skirmishing advances towards the true solution of problems prehistoric and "proto-historic."

Our knowledge shifts from day to day; on every hand, in regard to almost every topic discussed, we find conflict of opinions. There is no certain scientific decision, but there is the possibility of working in the scientific spirit, with breadth of comparison; consistency of logic; economy of conjecture; abstinence from the piling of hypothesis on hypothesis.

Nothing can be more hurtful to science than the dogmatic assumption that the hypothesis most in fashion is scientific.

Twenty years ago, the philological theory of the Solar Myth was preached as "scientific" in the books, primers, and lectures of popular science. To-day its place knows it no more. The separatist theories of the Homeric poems are not more secure than the Solar Myth, "like a wave shall they pass and be passed."

When writing on "The Homeric House" (Chapter X.) I was unacquainted with Mr. Percy Gardner's essay, "The Palaces of Homer" (*Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. iii. pp. 264-282). Mr. Gardner says that Dasent's plan of the Scandinavian Hall "offers in most respects not likeness, but a striking contrast to the early Greek hall." Mr. Monro, who was not aware of the parallel which I had drawn between the Homeric and Icelandic houses, accepted it on evidence more recent than that of Sir George Dasent. Cf. his *Odyssey*, vol. ii. pp. 490-494.

Mr. R. W. Raper, of Trinity College, Oxford, has read the proof sheets of this work with his habitual kindness, but is in no way responsible for the arguments. Mr. Walter Leaf has also obliged me by mentioning some points as to which

I had not completely understood his position, and I have tried as far as possible to represent his ideas correctly. I have also received assistance from the wide and minute Homeric lore of Mr. A. Shewan, of St. Andrews, and have been allowed to consult other scholars on various points.

The first portion of the chapter on "Bronze and Iron" appeared in the *Revue Archéologique* for April 1905, and the editor, Monsieur Salomon Reinach, obliged me with a note on the bad iron swords of the Celts as described by Polybius.

The design of men in three shields of different shapes, from a Dipylon vase, is reproduced, with permission, from the British Museum *Guide to the Antiquities of the Iron Age*; and the shielded chessmen from Catalogue of Scottish Society of Antiquaries. Thanks for the two ships with men under shield are offered to the Rev. Mr. Browne, S.J., author of *Handbook of Homeric Studies* (Longmans). For the Mycenaean gold corslet I thank Mr. John Murray (Schliemann's Mycenae and Tiryns), and for all the other Mycenaean illustrations Messrs. Macmillan and Mr. Leaf, publishers and author of Mr. Leaf's edition of the *Iliad*.

CHAPTER I - THE HOMERIC AGE

The aim of this book is to prove that the Homeric Epics, as wholes, and apart from passages gravely suspected in antiquity, present a perfectly harmonious picture of the entire life and civilisation of one single age. The faint variations in the design are not greater than such as mark every moment of culture, for in all there is some movement; in all, cases are modified by circumstances. If our contention be true, it will follow that the poems themselves,

as wholes, are the product of a single age, not a mosaic of the work of several changeeful centuries.

This must be the case—if the life drawn is harmonious, the picture must be the work of a single epoch—for it is not in the nature of early uncritical times that later poets should adhere, or even try to adhere, to the minute details of law, custom, opinion, dress, weapons, houses, and so on, as presented in earlier lays or sagas on the same set of subjects. Even less are poets in uncritical times inclined to "archaise," either by attempting to draw fancy pictures of the manners of the past, or by making researches in graves, or among old votive offerings in temples, for the purpose of "preserving local colour." The idea of such archaising is peculiar to modern times. To take an instance much to the point, Virgil was a learned poet, famous for his antiquarian erudition, and professedly imitating and borrowing from Homer. Now, had Virgil worked as a man of to-day would work on a poem of Trojan times, he would have represented his heroes as using weapons of bronze. [Footnote: Looking back at my own poem, *Helen of Troy* (1883), I find that when the metal of a weapon is mentioned the metal is bronze.] No such idea of archaising occurred to the learned Virgil. It is "the iron" that pierces the head of Remulus (*Aeneid*, IX. 633); it is "the iron" that waxes warm in the breast of Antiphates (IX. 701). Virgil's men, again, do not wear the great Homeric shield, suspended by a baldric: Aeneas holds up his buckler (*clipeus*), borne "on his left arm" (X. 26 i). Homer, familiar with no buckler worn on the left arm, has no such description. When the hostile ranks are to be broken, in the *Aeneid* it is "with the iron" (X. 372), and so throughout.

The most erudite ancient poet, in a critical age of iron, does not archaise in our modern fashion. He does not follow his model, Homer, in his descriptions of shields, swords, and

spears. But, according to most Homeric critics, the later continuators of the Greek Epics, about 800-540 B.C., are men living in an age of iron weapons, and of round bucklers worn on the left arm. Yet, unlike Virgil, they always give their heroes arms of bronze, and, unlike Virgil (as we shall see), they do not introduce the buckler worn on the left arm. They adhere conscientiously to the use of the vast Mycenaean shield, in their time obsolete. Yet, by the theory, in many other respects they innovate at will, introducing corslets and greaves, said to be unknown to the beginners of the Greek Epics, just as Virgil innovates in bucklers and iron weapons. All this theory seems inconsistent, and no ancient poet, not even Virgil, is an archaiser of the modern sort.

All attempts to prove that the Homeric poems are the work of several centuries appear to rest on a double hypothesis: first, that the later contributors to the *ILIAD* kept a steady eye on the traditions of the remote Achaean age of bronze; next, that they innovated as much as they pleased.

Poets of an uncritical age do not archaise. This rule is overlooked by the critics who represent the Homeric poems as a complex of the work of many singers in many ages. For example, Professor Percy Gardner, in his very interesting *New chapters in Greek History* (1892), carries neglect of the rule so far as to suppose that the late Homeric poets, being aware that the ancient heroes could not ride, or write, or eat boiled meat, consciously and purposefully represented them as doing none of these things. This they did "on the same principle on which a writer of pastoral idylls in our own day would avoid the mention of the telegraph or telephone." [Footnote: *Op. cit.*, p. 142.] "A writer of our own day,"—there is the pervading fallacy! It is only writers of the last century who practise this archaeological refinement. The authors of *Beowulf* and the

Nibelungenlied, of the *Chansons de Geste* and of the Arthurian romances, always describe their antique heroes and the details of their life in conformity with the customs, costume, and armour of their own much later ages.

But Mr. Leaf, to take another instance, remarks as to the lack of the metal lead in the Epics, that it is mentioned in similes only, as though the poet were aware the metal was unknown in the heroic age. [Footnote: *Iliad*, Note on, xi. 237.] Here the poet is assumed to be a careful but ill-informed archaeologist, who wishes to give an accurate representation of the past. Lead, in fact, was perfectly familiar to the Mycenaean prime. [Footnote: Tsountas and Manatt, p. 73.] The critical usage of supposing that the ancients were like the most recent moderns—in their archaeological preoccupations—is a survival of the uncritical habit which invariably beset old poets and artists. Ancient poets, of the uncritical ages, never worked "on the same principle as a writer in our day," as regards archaeological precision; at least we are acquainted with no example of such accuracy.

Let us take another instance of the critical fallacy. The age of the Achaean warriors, who dwelt in the glorious halls of Mycenae, was followed, at an interval, by the age represented in the relics found in the older tombs outside the Dipylon gate of Athens, an age beginning, probably, about 900-850 B.C. The culture of this "Dipylon age," a time of geometrical ornaments on vases, and of human figures drawn in geometrical forms, lines, and triangles, was quite unlike that of the Achaean age in many ways, for example, in mode of burial and in the use of iron for weapons. Mr. H. R. Hall, in his learned book, *The Oldest Civilisation of Greece* (1901), supposes the culture described in the Homeric poems to be contemporary in Asia with that of this Dipylon period in Greece. [Footnote: *Op. cit.*, pp. 49, 222.]

He says, "The Homeric culture is evidently the culture of the poet's own days; there is no attempt to archaïse here...." They do not archaïse as to the details of life, but "the Homeric poets consciously and consistently archaïsed, in regard to the political conditions of continental Greece," in the Achæan times. They give "in all probability a pretty accurate description" of the loose feudalism of Mycenaean Greece. [Footnote: Op. cit., pp. 223, 225.]

We shall later show that this Homeric picture of a past political and social condition of Greece is of vivid and delicate accuracy, that it is drawn from the life, not constructed out of historical materials. Mr. Hall explains the fact by "the conscious and consistent" archaeological precision of the Asiatic poets of the ninth century. Now to any one who knows early national poetry, early uncritical art of any kind, this theory seems not easily tenable. The difficulty of the theory is increased, if we suppose that the Achæans were the recent conquerors of the Mycenaean. Whether we regard the Achæans as "Celts," with Mr. Ridgeway, victors over an Aryan people, the Pelasgic Mycenaean; or whether, with Mr. Hall, we think that the Achæans were the Aryan conquerors of a non-Aryan people, the makers of the Mycenaean civilisation; in the stress of a conquest, followed at no long interval by an expulsion at the hands of Dorian invaders, there would be little thought of archaïsing among Achæan poets. [Footnote: Mr. Hall informs me that he no longer holds the opinion that the poets archaïsed.]

A distinction has been made, it is true, between the poet and other artists in this respect. Monsieur Perrot says, "The vase-painter reproduces what he sees; while the epic poets endeavoured to represent a distant past. If Homer gives swords of bronze to his heroes of times gone by, it is because he knows that such were the weapons of these

heroes of long ago. In arming them with bronze he makes use, in his way, of what we call "local colour...." Thus the Homeric poet is a more conscientious historian than Virgil!" [Footnote: *La Grète de l'Épopée*, Perrot et Chipiez, p. 230.]

Now we contend that old uncritical poets no more sought for antique "local colour" than any other artists did. M. Perrot himself says with truth, "the *CHANSON DE ROLAND*, and all the *Gestes* of the same cycle explain for us the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*." [Footnote: *op. cit.*, p. 5.] But the poet of the *CHANSON DE ROLAND* accoutres his heroes of old time in the costume and armour of his own age, and the later poets of the same cycle introduce the innovations of their time; they do not hunt for "local colour" in the *CHANSON DE ROLAND*. The very words "local colour" are a modern phrase for an idea that never occurred to the artists of ancient uncritical ages. The Homeric poets, like the painters of the Dipylon period, describe the details of life as they see them with their own eyes. Such poets and artists never have the fear of "anachronisms" before them. This, indeed, is plain to the critics themselves, for they, detect anachronisms as to land tenure, burial, the construction of houses, marriage customs, weapons, and armour in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. These supposed anachronisms we examine later: if they really exist they show that the poets were indifferent to local colour and archaeological precision, or were incapable of attaining to archaeological accuracy. In fact, such artistic revival of the past in its habit as it lived is a purely modern ideal.

We are to show, then, that the Epics, being, as wholes, free from such inevitable modifications in the picture of changing details of life as uncritical authors always introduce, are the work of the one age which they

represent. This is the reverse of what has long been, and still is, the current theory of Homeric criticism, according to which the Homeric poems are, and bear manifest marks of being, a mosaic of the poetry of several ages of change.

Till Wolf published his *Prolegomena* to [blank space] (1795) there was little opposition to the old belief that the *ILIAD* and *Odyssey* were, allowing for interpolations, the work of one, or at most of two, poets. After the appearance of Wolfs celebrated book, Homeric critics have maintained, generally speaking, that the *ILIAD* is either a collection of short lays disposed in sequence in a late age, or that it contains an ancient original "kernel" round which "expansions," made throughout some centuries of changeful life, have accrued, and have been at last arranged by a literary redactor or editor.

The latter theory is now dominant. It is maintained that the *Iliad* is a work of at least four centuries. Some of the objections to this theory were obvious to Wolf himself—more obvious to him than to his followers. He was aware, and some of them are not, of the distinction between reading the *ILIAD* as all poetic literature is naturally read, and by all authors is meant to be read, for human pleasure, and studying it in the spirit of "the analytical reader." As often as he read for pleasure, he says, disregarding the purely fanciful "historical conditions" which he invented for Homer; as often as he yielded himself to that running stream of action and narration; as often as he considered the *harmony of colour* and of characters in the Epic, no man could be more angry with his own destructive criticism than himself. Wolf ceased to be a Wolfian whenever he placed himself at the point of view of the reader or the listener, to whom alone every poet makes his appeal.

But he deemed it his duty to place himself at another point of view, that of the scientific literary historian, the historian of a period concerning whose history he could know nothing. "How could the thing be possible?" he asked himself. "How could a long poem like the *Iliad* come into existence in the historical circumstances?" [Footnote, exact place in paragraph unknown: Preface to Homer, p, xxii., 1794.]. Wolf was unaware that he did not know what the historical circumstances were. We know how little we know, but we do know more than Wolf. He invented the historical circumstances of the supposed poet. They were, he said, like those of a man who should build a large ship in an inland place, with no sea to launch it upon. The *Iliad* was the large ship; the sea was the public. Homer could have no *readers*, Wolf said, in an age that, like the old hermit of Prague, "never saw pen and ink," had no knowledge of letters; or, if letters were dimly known, had never applied them to literature. In such circumstances no man could have a motive for composing a long poem. [Footnote: *Prolegomena to the Iliad*, p. xxvi.]

Yet if the original poet, "Homer," could make "the greater part of the songs," as Wolf admitted, what physical impossibility stood in the way of his making the whole? Meanwhile, the historical circumstances, as conceived of by Wolf, were imaginary. He did not take the circumstances of the poet as described in the *Odyssey*. Here a king or prince has a minstrel, honoured as were the minstrels described in the ancient Irish books of law. His duty is to entertain the prince and his family and guests by singing epic chants after supper, and there is no reason why his poetic narratives should be brief, but rather he has an opportunity that never occurred again till the literary age of Greece for producing a long poem, continued from night to night. In the later age, in the Asiatic colonies and in Greece, the rhapsodists, competing for prizes at feasts, or reciting to a

civic crowd, were limited in time and gave but snatches of poetry. It is in this later civic age that a poet without readers would have little motive for building Wolfs great ship of song, and scant chance of launching it to any profitable purpose. To this point we return; but when once critics, following Wolf, had convinced themselves that a long early poem was impossible, they soon found abundant evidence that it had never existed.

They have discovered discrepancies of which, they say, no one sane poet could have been guilty. They have also discovered that the poems had not, as Wolf declared, "one 'harmony of colour" (*unus color*). Each age, they say, during which the poems were continued, lent its own colour. The poets, by their theory, now preserved the genuine tradition of things old; cremation, cairn and urn burial; the use of the chariot in war; the use of bronze for weapons; a peculiar stage of customary law; a peculiar form of semi-feudal society; a peculiar kind of house. But again, by a change in the theory, the poets introduced later novelties; later forms of defensive armour; later modes of burial; later religious and speculative beliefs; a later style of house; an advanced stage of law; modernisms in grammar and language.

The usual position of critics in this matter is stated by Helbig; and we are to contend that the theory is contradicted by all experience of ancient literatures, and is in itself the reverse of consistent. "The *artists* of antiquity," says Helbig, with perfect truth, "had no idea of archaeological studies.... They represented legendary scenes in conformity with the spirit of their own age, and reproduced the arms and implements and costume that they saw around them." [Footnote: *L'Épopée Homérique*, p. 5; *Homerische Epos*, p. 4.]

Now a poet is an *artist*, like another, and he, too—no less than the vase painter or engraver of gems—in dealing with legends of times past, represents (in an uncritical age) the arms, utensils, costume, and the religious, geographical, legal, social, and political ideas of his own period. We shall later prove that this is true by examples from the early mediaeval epic poetry of Europe.

It follows that if the *Iliad* is absolutely consistent and harmonious in its picture of life, and of all the accessories of life, the *Iliad* is the work of a single age, of a single stage of culture, the poet describing his own environment. But Helbig, on the other hand, citing Wilamowitz Moellendorff, declares that the *Iliad*—the work of four centuries, he says—maintains its unity of colour by virtue of an uninterrupted poetical tradition. [Footnote: *Homerische Untersuchungen*, p. 292; *Homerische Epos*, p. I.] If so, the poets must have archaeologised, must have kept asking themselves, "Is this or that detail true to the past?" which artists in uncritical ages never do, as we have been told by Helbig. They must have carefully pondered the surviving old Achaean lays, which "were born when the heroes could not read, or boil flesh, or back a steed." By carefully observing the earliest lays the late poets, in times of changed manners, "could avoid anachronisms by the aid of tradition, which gave them a very exact idea of the epic heroes." Such is the opinion of Wilamowitz Moellendorff. He appears to regard the tradition as keeping the later poets in the old way automatically, not consciously, but this, we also learn from Helbig, did not occur. The poets often wandered from the way. [Footnote: Helbig, *Homerische Epos*, pp. 2, 3.] Thus old Mycenaean lays, if any existed, would describe the old Mycenaean mode of burial. The Homeric poet describes something radically different. We vainly ask for proof that in any early national literature known to us poets have been true to the colour and manners of the remote times in

which their heroes moved, and of which old minstrels sang. The thing is without example: of this proofs shall be offered in abundance.

Meanwhile, the whole theory which regards the *Iliad* as the work of four or five centuries rests on the postulate that poets throughout these centuries did what such poets never do, kept true to the details of a life remote from their own, and also did not.

For Helbig does not, after all, cleave to his opinion. On the other hand, he says that the later poets of the *Iliad* did not cling to tradition. "They allowed themselves to be influenced by their own environment: *this influence betrays ITSELF IN THE descriptions of DETAILS...* The rhapsodists," (reciters, supposed to have altered the poems at will), "did not fail to interpolate relatively recent elements into the oldest parts of the Epic." [Footnote: *Homerische Epos*, p. 2.]

At this point comes in a complex inconsistency. The Tenth Book of the *Iliad*, thinks Helbig—in common with almost all critics—"is one of the most recent lays of the *Iliad*." But in this recent lay (say of the eighth or seventh century) the poet describes the Thracians as on a level of civilisation with the Achaeans, and, indeed, as even more luxurious, wealthy, and refined in the matter of good horses, glorious armour, and splendid chariots. But, by the time of the Persian wars, says Helbig, the Thracians were regarded by the Greeks as rude barbarians, and their military equipment was totally un-Greek. They did not wear helmets, but caps of fox-skin. They had no body armour; their shields were small round bucklers; their weapons were bows and daggers. These customs could not, at the time of the Persian wars, be recent innovations in Thrace. [Footnote: Herodotus, vii. 75.]

Had the poet of *ILIAD*, Book X., known the Thracians in *this* condition, says Helbig, as he was fond of details of costume and arms, he would have certainly described their fox-skin caps, bows, bucklers, and so forth. He would not here have followed the Epic tradition, which represented the Thracians as makers of great swords and as splendidly armed charioteers. His audience had met the Thracians in peace and war, and would contradict the poet's description of them as heavily armed charioteers. It follows, therefore, that the latest poets, such as the author of Book X., did not introduce recent details, those of their own time, but we have just previously been told that to do so was their custom in the description of details.

Now Studniczka [Footnote: *Homerische Epos*, pp. 7-11, cf. Note I; *Zeitschrift für die Oestern Gymnasien*, 1886, p. 195.] explains the picture of the Thracians in *Iliad*, Book X., on Helbig's *other* principle, namely, that the very late author of the Tenth Book merely conforms to the conventional tradition of the Epic, adheres to the model set in ancient Achaean, or rather ancient Ionian times, and scrupulously preserved by the latest poets—that is, when the latest poets do not bring in the new details of their own age. But Helbig will not accept his own theory in this case, whence does it follow that the author of the Tenth Book must, in his opinion, have lived in Achaean times, and described the Thracians as they then were, charioteers, heavily armed, not light-clad archers? If this is so, we ask how Helbig can aver that the Tenth Book is one of the latest parts of the *Iliad*?

In studying the critics who hold that the *Iliad* is the growth of four centuries—say from the eleventh to the seventh century B.C.—no consistency is to be discovered; the earth is never solid beneath our feet. We find now that the poets

are true to tradition in the details of ancient life—now that the poets introduce whatever modern details they please. The late poets have now a very exact knowledge of the past; now, the late poets know nothing about the past, or, again, some of the poets are fond of actual and very minute archaeological research! The theory shifts its position as may suit the point to be made at the moment by the critic. All is arbitrary, and it is certain that logic demands a very different method of inquiry. If Helbig and other critics of his way of thinking mean that in the *Iliad* (1) there are parts of genuine antiquity; other parts (2) by poets who, with stern accuracy, copied the old modes; other parts (3) by poets who tried to copy but failed; with passages (4) by poets who deliberately innovated; and passages (5) by poets who drew fanciful pictures of the past "from their inner consciousness," while, finally (6), some poets made minute antiquarian researches; and if the argument be that the critics can detect these six elements, then we are asked to repose unlimited confidence in critical powers of discrimination. The critical standard becomes arbitrary and subjective.

It is our effort, then, in the following pages to show that the *unus color* of Wolf does pervade the Epics, that recent details are not often, if ever, interpolated, that the poems harmoniously represent one age, and that a brief age, of culture; that this effect cannot, in a thoroughly uncritical period, have been deliberately aimed at and produced by archaeological learning, or by sedulous copying of poetic tradition, or by the scientific labours of an editor of the sixth century B.C. We shall endeavour to prove, what we have already indicated, that the hypotheses of expansion are not self-consistent, or in accordance with what is known of the evolution of early national poetry. The strongest part, perhaps, of our argument is to rest on our interpretation of archaeological evidence, though we shall

not neglect the more disputable or less convincing contentions of literary criticism.

CHAPTER II - HYPOTHESES AS TO THE GROWTH OF THE EPICS

A theorist who believes that the Homeric poems are the growth of four changeful centuries, must present a definite working hypothesis as to how they escaped from certain influences of the late age in which much of them is said to have been composed. We must first ask to what manner of audiences did the poets sing, in the alleged four centuries of the evolution of the Epics. Mr. Leaf, as a champion of the theory of ages of "expansion," answers that "the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are essentially, and above all, Court poems. They were composed to be sung in the palaces of a ruling aristocracy ... the poems are aristocratic and courtly, not popular." [Footnote: Companion to the *Iliad*, pp. 2,8. 1892.] They are not *Volkspoesie*; they are not ballads. "It is now generally recognised that this conception is radically false."

These opinions, in which we heartily agree—there never was such a thing as a "popular" Epic—were published fourteen years ago. Mr. Leaf, however, would not express them with regard to "our" *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, because, in his view, a considerable part of the *Iliad*, as it stands, was made, not by Court bards in the Achaean courts of Europe, not for an audience of noble warriors and dames, but by wandering minstrels in the later Ionian colonies of Asia. They did not chant for a military aristocracy, but for the enjoyment of town and country folk at popular festivals. [Footnote: *Iliad*, vol. i. p. xvi. 1900.] The poems were *begun*, indeed, he thinks, for "a wealthy aristocracy living on the product of their lands," in European Greece; were begun by contemporary court minstrels, but were

continued, vastly expanded, and altered to taste by wandering singers and reciting rhapsodists, who amused the holidays of a commercial, expansive, and bustling Ionian democracy. [Footnote: *Companion to the Iliad*, p. II.]

We must suppose that, on this theory, the later poets pleased a commercial democracy by keeping up the tone that had delighted an old land-owning military aristocracy. It is not difficult, however, to admit this as possible, for the poems continued to be admired in all ages of Greece and under every form of society. The real question is, would the modern poets be the men to keep up a tone some four or five centuries old, and to be true, if they were true, to the details of the heroic age? "It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that some part of the most primitive *Iliad* may have been actually sung by the court minstrel in the palace whose ruins can still be seen in Mycenae." [Footnote: Leaf, *Iliad*, vol. i. p. xv.] But, by the expansionist theory, even the oldest parts of our *Iliad* are now full of what we may call quite recent Ionian additions, full of late retouches, and full, so to speak, of omissions of old parts.

Through four or five centuries, by the hypothesis, every singer who could find an audience was treating as much as he knew of a vast body of ancient lays exactly as he pleased, adding here, lopping there, altering everywhere. Moreover, these were centuries full of change. The ancient Achaean palaces were becoming the ruins which we still behold. The old art had faded, and then fallen under the disaster of the Dorian conquest. A new art, or a recrudescence of earlier art, very crude and barbaric, had succeeded, and was beginning to acquire form and vitality. The very scene of life was altered: the new singers and listeners dwelt on the Eastern side of the Aegean. Knights no longer, as in Europe, fought from chariots: war was conducted by infantry, for the most part, with mounted