

ARTICLE V.

KNÖTEL'S HOMER.

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THE appearance of Knötel's two volumes on "Homer the Blind Man of Chios"¹ both presents a valuable lesson in the historical investigation of a literary question, and apparently marks a new epoch in the assured recognition of Homer's personality and work. For a century Friedrich August Wolf and his followers have claimed to dominate the literary world with the theory that the Homeric poems were a compilation of what he termed rhapsodies composed by various unknown authors, and not the work of any one person bearing the name Homer.

It is to demolish this skillfully elaborated and widely current theory that Knötel has written these two scholarly volumes. He fully recognizes the tenacity with which the theory has been held by its advocates, and the impossibility of dealing with it on the ground of mere literary criticism without some historic basis on which the discussion shall rest. For, as he remarks, the attempt to rebut critique with counter critique proceeding from within outward, is hopeless, and we can never thus reach a clear, tangible, and conclusive result. He earnestly asserts and reiterates that the Homeric question is no grammatico-critical or purely literary question, but by all odds a historical one, which cannot be settled by acute conjectures or critical keenness of scent, but by well-proved facts. This

¹ *Homeros der Blinde von Chios und seine Werke*, von A. F. R. Knötel. Leipzig. Erster Theil, 1894, s. 378; Zweiter Theil, 1895, s. 396.

matter-of-fact aspect, he maintains, has been wholly lost sight of, and "thus we have fallen into a literary quagmire, where no sure step or firm foothold further is possible."

To find a firm historic starting-point he turns to the great historian Thucydides and the Homeric hymns. Thucydides, besides twice referring elsewhere to Homer, in chapter iii. 104 makes two quotations from the hymn to the Delian Apollo, not only distinctly ascribing them to Homer, but also affirming that in the second of these passages Homer alludes to himself. The historian, after describing the nature of the great festival held in very early times at Delos by the Ionians and the neighboring islanders, proceeds thus (as rendered by Jowett): "The character of the festival is attested by Homer in the following verses which are taken from the hymn to Apollo:—

'At other times, Phœbus, Delos is dearest to thine heart,
Where are gathered together the Ionians in flowing robes,
With their wives and children, in thy street ;
There do they delight thee with boxing, dancing, and song,
Making mention of thy name at the meeting of the assembly.'

And that there were musical contests which attracted competitors is implied in the following words of the same hymn. After commemorating the Delian dance of women, Homer ends their praises with these lines in which he alludes to himself:—

'And now may Apollo and Artemis be gracious,
And to all of you maidens I say farewell ;
Yet remember me when I am gone,
And if some toiling pilgrim of the sons of men
Comes hither and asks : O maidens,
Who is the sweetest minstrel of all who wander hither,
And in whom do you delight the most ?
Make answer with one voice, in gentle words,
The blind old man of Chios' rocky isle.' "

The four following lines of the hymn, not quoted by Thucydides but cited by Knötel, may be rendered thus:—

“ His songs shall hereafter prove triumphant,
Your fame, wherever on the earth we turn,
To densely peopled states we'll bear along,
And they will hear ; for it is very truth.”

This hymn which, with the other Homeric hymns, is summarily dismissed by Wolf as “farrago,” attested as it is by the great historian, and bearing in its allusions the distinct marks of the author's personality, and the hymn to the Pythian Apollo, immediately following and commonly having its lines numbered consecutively with it, are made the starting-point of the discussion. Taking together this attestation of the historian and the statements of the poet thus attested, Knötel finds at once the following matters of fact from which to proceed further, with additional confirmations as he proceeds :—

1. The great antiquity of the Delian hymn appears from the fact of its composition at a time when the Ionic colonies in Asia were in a highly flourishing condition, yet still so closely connected with the Attic mother country as to celebrate at Delos a union festival in common with the Athenians.

2. The author of the hymn had attended this festival, and he names himself a toil-worn or suffering pilgrim, a blind man from the island of Chios, the author of many songs, which he believes after his death will gain the highest estimation.

3. He himself sings, is highly skilled in music, and does not journey alone, but with a company of minstrels through the lands.

4. The second hymn shows the *Odyssey* to be in existence. The voyage of the Cretans to Krissa names on the west coast of the Peloponnesus the same stations in the same words as that of Telemachus from Pylos to Ithaca. An entire passage (verses 452–456) is borrowed literally from the *Odyssey*, and another strikingly corresponds to a passage in the *Iliad*.

5. It rests, moreover, on good and sufficient information that Chios was the last place where the wandering old man found a home with his son-in-law Creophilus, and where he founded the minstrel company of the Homeridæ which for a century professionally carried on the chanting of the Iliad and the Odyssey. At Chios Homer had a shrine (Heiligthum) and a hero-worship.

6. No other renowned poet of Chios can be found to contest the claim, and thus the blind man of Chios is no other than Homer, in accordance with the general belief of the Greeks that Homer was blind.

7. It can also be shown on valid grounds that other hymns, longer or shorter, as well as epigrams, which cast many glimpses in upon the life of a poor man followed by an adverse destiny, proceed from the same author that composed the hymns to Apollo, that is from Homer. From Epigram iv. it appears that the poet, who by his "two daughters of Zeus, noble children" (Iliad and Odyssey), would confer the renown of the song upon his fatherland, was born at Smyrna when that city still belonged to the Æolians; and from the hymn to Artemis (ix.) that its conquest by the Ionians of Colophon took place in his time,—an important fact for determining the time of his birth and life.

This group of historic circumstances, stated mostly in Knötel's own words, forms the point of departure for the further discussion. But with German breadth of method, on account of the necessary historic relations of the poet and his environments, the author proceeds to a wide range of historic investigations, quietly informing his readers that it will take quite a long time to reach Homer himself and his history, inasmuch as it involves the earliest traceable history of Greece. Among the points to be elucidated he specifies the rise of Hellenism, the origin and spread of the Apollo cultus, that of the Muses, the minstrel's calling,

the art of writing, the work and reign of Cadmus, and other things, including an examination of "Wolf's sophistries."

Accordingly he devotes at once one hundred and fifty pages to such historic questions as the early history of Delos, the Phœnicians in the Archipelago, the career of Cadmus in detail, the relation of Artemis and Apollo to Delos, the Hyperboreans and their land, the connection of Delos with inner Asia, Ogyges in Attica and Beotia, the Scythian worship of Apollo, the feast of Leto, and the festal gatherings of the Ionians. These and other related and subordinate topics are considered in detail, and by the aid of allusions and hints scattered through the whole circle of Grecian literature. Returning at length to Delos, a sketch of its great Pan-Ionic festival with its sacred rites, its music, dancing, and sports, introduces us to the blind old singer about 900 B.C., there present with a great company of minstrels, male and female, bringing his hymn to the Delian Apollo, previously composed and now made a thank-offering. A brief analysis of the poem follows.

This recurrence to Delos and its hymn leads to a further investigation founded on the statements, allusions, and implications of the Homeric hymns and epigrams, together with the concurrence of certain passages with passages of the Iliad and the Odyssey, and hints and suggestions gathered from the two great poems. These discussions run in two different yet partially coincident lines: the further elucidation of early Grecian history and worship on the one hand, and the personal history and relations of the poet on the other. The poet is found thus to be a welcome and honored friend of the priestesses of Delos, as well as at Samos and Delphi, a blind old man, once possessing sight, a "much-suffering" man (*ταλαπείριος*), traveling with a company of rhapsodists from land to land, already distinguished, but aspiring to still higher renown. He was an

Æolian though born in Smyrna, inasmuch as that city was then an Æolian and not an Ionian city. For a time he lived among the Ionians, but later resumed his Æolian relationship, went as a needy man to Neon Teichos, then to Cyme (Cumæ), probably next to Phocæa, then to Erythræa, and soon to Chios,—all these places lying not far from each other, and constituting the proper home of the poet. The epigrams show that he made other journeys. He had been in Troas and at the iron mines in Ida and Phrygia, apparently at the Ceramicus in Athens, and in Arabia. He sometimes journeyed in winter. He sang in the houses of nobles before distinguished people, lamented the stupidity of towns where he had hoped for applause, longs to find men of genial spirit and good taste, and he relates some trying experiences. He composes for pay, and the pay cheers him to good humor and sportiveness. He can indulge in pleasant raillery with choice women as at Samos and Delos, and in that connection describes himself as a gray-headed but vivacious and aspiring man. To him was dedicated the ditty which the children sang at Chios, when they went from house to house with a swallow announcing spring, as with us (Germans) the children do with their Mayflowers, singing in like manner a song and expecting some small present.

The author elaborately unfolds the environments of these journeys, and traces him in later years at the home of his son-in-law Creophilus at Chios, about the decade 890–880, till his death, while on a journey, at the island of Ios, between Paros and Naxos, attended by his faithful servant Skindapsos, and his burial by the seashore.

A chapter is devoted to the refutation of Wolf's assertion that writing was unknown in Greece in the time of Homer, and a showing—scarcely needed now—of the antiquity of the art in Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, and Greece alike. The first volume concludes with a chapter headed

"Homer could write," and referring to the allusions to writing in the sixth and seventh books of the Iliad and one or two other passages, as requiring no defense from the charge of anachronisms.

In his second volume the author, proceeding from the vantage-ground thus gained, which we have imperfectly indicated, does not hesitate boldly to pronounce judgment: "Thus for us again Homer is the great incomparable poet, as by the Greeks and Romans, in all antiquity and even to modern times, he was known and honored. . . . The old Greeks were right, and not Wolf, Lachmann, Dissen, Bernhardt, and the whole host of those that carp and peck¹ at his incomparable masterpieces." He calls attention to the striking fact that so little is known of the youth and manhood of the poet, and accounts for it by the fact that the Greeks chose to know nothing of that portion of his life, since then they must have owned that Homer was by residence not a Pan-Hellenic but rather a Trojan poet. "For the Iliad was not written at a Grecian royal court, but, as Schwegler had partly recognized and as may be shown, at Skepsis in Ida (of the Trojan realm), at the court of the Æneides and Hectorides, whose *attaché* he must long have been. Hence his manifest exaltation of this line of ancestry."

In further elucidation of Homer's history, Knötel thinks it clear that he had no legitimate and acknowledged father, inasmuch as (for one reason) the established Greek usage of designating the person as the son of such a one is wholly wanting in his case. He supposes the mother's name to be Critheis, and that in the free lives of the minstrel bands Homer was born outside of wedlock. This obscure origin was in one light the great misfortune of his life, and in the other its great good fortune. While it

¹ Das ganze Heer der an diesen unvergleichlichen Meisterwerken mäkeln, schnitzenden und pützelnden kritikbefissenden.

checked all other hopes of recognition and brought no little humiliation, it also threw him on his own resources, upon that varied experience, and those efforts of genius which have made him world-renowned. Yet, as indicated in his hymns and epigrams, it was felt to be a hard lot. His vast range of knowledge of nature, and of affairs in common and in higher life, is to be explained not alone by his wandering career, but by his residence at court, and that the Trojan court in the highlands of Ida. Hence the apparent inclination towards Hector and the Hectoridæ. The remarkable variety and vividness in his descriptions of armed conflicts is reasonably thought to indicate some direct and personal knowledge of the warfare of those times.

In tracing the relation of the poet to the poems and to the events which they commemorate, Knötel enters on an exhaustive account of the historic facts and tendencies which lay behind the Trojan war. The ultimate cause is found in the hereditary enmity existing between the race of Pelops, who gave name to the Peloponnesos, and that of Ilos, perpetuated in the name of Ilion, which was roused into activity by such a sensational event as the abduction of Helen. The Trojan kingdom, though for a time powerful and extensive, was but short-lived, enduring from about 1350 to 1050 B.C., its capture and destruction being assigned by Knötel to the year 1049. The *Iliad*, says our author, is but a romance narrated in verse, according to the taste of the times. It mingles all Olympus and its inhabitants with these human affairs in the one grand unity, which is a tragedy, the more sad and comfortless because the high powers bring no light or relief. It sings the wrath of Achilles which dominates the whole poem, yet with such sympathy for the Trojan cause that it celebrates the intractable strength and valor of Achilles to show how much greater and nobler is the bravery of Hector, the last guardian and defender of his unfortunate fatherland; and

Hector's tragic end is ennobled as the death sacrifice for his country hastening to its downfall. This striking thought is followed out in a careful examination and analysis of the plot in its several stages, or acts, as he terms them, ending with the fifth, wherein the author endeavors to show the unity and consistency of the whole and its parts, as well as its steady progress to the consummation, and that too, as he thinks, without any diversion that can properly be termed an episode. This analysis and interpretation is carried out with an acuteness and enthusiasm highly attractive and impressive, whether fully assented to or not. Thus—to take a single instance—the Iliad closes tragically with two burials and dirges, that of Patroclus and that of Hector; the one grand, brilliant, and loaded with all the honors that could be paid to a fallen hero, the other burdened with depression and with the sad outlook into the near future which carries in its womb the downfall of the state. Achilles likewise learns at the height of his power that death is determined for him; his mother tells him so, as does the horse Xanthus, the dying Hector, and Patroclus who appears to him in his dreams. And so there comes to view a third burial and lamentation, greater and lordlier than that of Patroclus; it is narrated noticeably in the last book of the Odyssey, where Agamemnon in Hades relates to Achilles how the Achaians shed hot tears around his bier, the sea-nymphs came over the waves lamenting bitterly and wrapping him in ambrosial robes, the nine muses bewailed him responsively, and Thetis his mother brought a golden vase, the gift of Bacchus and the work of Vulcan, to receive his ashes, for which the army built a magnificent tomb on a cape of the broad Hellespont—funeral rites surpassing all that Agamemnon had ever seen.

The last eighty pages of the second volume are occupied with a briefer account of the contents of the Odyssey, with

somewhat special reference to its geographical environments. The later poem he finds, of course, to be less marked by youthful fire. The work closes with a thoughtful estimate of Homer's genius. The two volumes cover far too wide a range to admit of a complete review in these pages. Our object is simply to call attention to the work and indicate its scope.

Knötel gives all due credit to Wolf for his great learning and his critical labors on the text, at the same time that he recognizes his lack of important literary qualities, and points out the weakness of his entire argument. He sums up virtually the fundamental mistakes that form the basis of Wolf's whole theory of the origin of the Iliad in three:—

1. The assumption that the art of writing was not then known in Greece, and consequently all composition must have been carried on in the head and preserved in the memory—a feat which he regarded as impossible in the case of poems of the length of the Iliad and the Odyssey,—this, too, notwithstanding some allusions to writing in the Iliad, which again he regarded as anachronisms and proof of later composition.

2. The vast range and variety of knowledge displayed, which Wolf determined to be too much for one brain; an objection of no weight in the case of such an extraordinary genius who, on the one hand as a wandering minstrel was brought in contact with all characters and scenes both in private and in the great gatherings and contests which it was his professional duty to attend, and on the other hand was the welcome guest of the great, and there made conversant with all that belonged to and could be learned from that aspect of life and affairs.

3. Alleged contradictions; of which, though in a work of such compass, two only are Wolf's main support. In

regard to one,¹ Knötel remarks that Wolf simply did not understand the passage, and in regard to the other² that the passage is clearly defective, disturbing the connection. In reference to a third, adduced by some later writer,³ he shows that by the slightest rectification of the text, namely, the introduction of *oŭ* to correspond with the same word in the next line, the alleged contradiction becomes an actual reminiscence of the earlier passage.

It is the steady aim and claim of these volumes to proceed from a strictly historic basis. Such is the starting-point, and so far as personal traits and career are inferred from allusions in the longer poems themselves, it is only as related to the historic foundation. Thus, for example, in view of all the abundant and exact local references contained in the *Iliad*, the author finds it evident that Homer had known and visited the ruins of Ilion that had lain waste a hundred years, and that here, standing upon the dismantled castle of Pergamos, in sight of Gargaron and other peaks of Ida, he surveyed the whole territory which by his portraiture he was to ennoble for all time. Here to the north and northwest he had before him the locality of the Dardanian and Scæan gates, and looked out beyond over the plain watered by the Scamander and the Simois, to the Hellespont, the mountain range of Sigeum, Rhœtium, and the southern peaks of the Chersonesus. There had been the camp of the Greeks, and there along the shore had lain their numerous ships. On the way thither, not far before the town had stood the oak to which before the outbreak of the strife in the Grecian camp the Trojans had been driven. Farther still and on the side of the plain was the high abrupt hill where Hector reviewed the Trojan nations, the hill Batiea, called the monument of Myrina. Beyond were the tombs of Ilos and Æsyetes, and the

¹ *Il.* xviii. 356-358. ² *Od.* iv. 621-625.

³ *Il.* xiii. 658; comp. v. 576.

Trojan observation post over against the camp. Close by was the ford over the Scamander. Westward was the Eri-neos, the hill of wild figs, where the town on its uneven site was most accessible, then the watch-tower and the Trojan women's washing-place at the two sources of the Scamander, the hot and the cold, and on one edge of the river valley the fair hill Callicolone. Over these relics and ruins, not merely of a city but of a kingdom, where the mighty shades of kings and heroes dwelt and came forth in vision from their graves, the incomparable genius of the poet was enlivened, and conceived the great thought to celebrate in song the death struggle of the unhappy state.

This outlook, which we have quoted almost exactly in the words of the author, illustrates the realizing—not "realistic"—method in which he has dealt with the great poems of Homer. The discussion is a vigorous historic protest against the "higher critics" of Homer, and is understood to have been received in Germany itself as a refutation of their results. It is a significant phenomenon, as coming from the land of speculations, and may not unsuitably be considered as perhaps heralding (with Klostermann and others) a revolt from similar unsound proceedings and unwarranted results in the line of biblical discussion.