

## HOMER AND THE PROPHETS.

OR

HOMER AND NOW.

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PERHAPS the best approach to Homer today is by means of the "Movie," at least, a young university scholar who has seen the film of *Odyssey* tells me what would argue this happy conclusion. He says that it is a "thriller" of the first order, and that when it was given in his university town, it attracted large and increasing crowds of townsfolk and students before its run of a week was over, not at all because it was "scholarly stuff," and "highbrow," but because it has a strong human appeal. Its action rushes along carrying spectators with it though new to the story and foreign to Greek traditions. Even the gods and fabulous monsters seem real, because they are seen with the physical eye—in this respect the new art of the moving picture is at an advantage as compared with the ancient art of the Bard, though Bards acted the parts as they sang them. Miraculously, in a mist, a god can appear, and then vanish miraculously.

A great improvement, this of attending a "Movie," instead of thumbing a dictionary and grammar laboriously, pondering roots and points of construction as the means of approach to the story. Every move of the thumb, every act of acquiring knowledge, every judgment passed distracts the reader's attention from characters and situations so that he cannot realize them intensely. If he is to get the full effect of the story when a "Movie" is not available, a dramatic reading will be the next best approach, with an epic pitch and tension. Those who have had the good fortune to hear Professor Clarke's dramatic reading of *The Descent into Hades* will realize much of the human appeal of the *Odyssey*. Two small boys whom I took to hear it sat congealed during the reading and agreed later that this was the greatest "show" that they had ever seen.

It would not be possible for spectators and hearers to remain unmoved by the epic hero of Homer if they realized his character

and situation. He is bayed about by a large band of desperate conspirators who threaten his life, and his wife; he is endangered at every turn by alluring sorceresses and monsters; and false and hostile gods block his way when he tries to return home after the war. But friends and righteous gods rise up to help him, and Wisdom, personified as the goddess Athene, gives him guidance and pleads his cause, in Olympus, on Earth, even down in Hades, whither he has to go to learn all that a mortal may know. It is a thrilling sight to see him go down and learn it.

As a background and foil to Homer's great hero, strange and horrible monsters appear, as man-eating Polyphemus, a terrible one-eyed giant. The enchantress Circe changes her victims to swine by means of a magic drink; two evil water spirits, Scylla and Charybdis, half women and half snakes, wreck sailors on the rocks and in the whirlpool; alluring Sirens charm men to destruction with their beauty and their songs. These, out of many, are strange and horrible enough, and Odysseus escapes from them all by moral strength, courage, resolution, and craft; but stranger and more horrible are those whom he meets in the Lower World. There the Dead are not men, but pale shadows without substance, as he learns when he tries to embrace his own mother, whom he finds among them, she having died since he left home. Pale shadows are his companions who died in the war, or since, and they weakly and pathetically complain of the wrongs they have had to endure. Others are suffering penance for the sins they committed when they were alive, as Sisyphus, who rolls a great rock forever up a hill, for when he gets it nearly to the top it rolls down and he has to do his work all over again,—a good allegory of the life that men lead, forever rolling stones up an incline, but never reaching the top. Near him, Tantalus is forever thirsty because the water that rises almost to his lips is siphoned out of his cup just before he is able to drink it—again an allegory, of us poor thirsty mortals who see the waters of our hopes recede just when we expect to drink our Desire. Tityus is tortured by an Eagle, which comes every day to tear his liver out as fast as it grows again—we say that our *heart is torn*, meaning the same.

On earth, the human characters range from very villainous villains, the Suitors, who are plotting dishonor and death for the hero, to the hero and heroine, Odysseus and his Penelope, who are almost too good to be true. In the background lie dark tragedies of the House of Atreus, a House "baneful and driven to ruin" as its name signifies derivatively,—will the House of Odysseus go down in

tragedy as dark? Can Odysseus arrive in time to save his wife from the Suitors? and will he be able to hold his own against such odds if he does?

The first scene is laid in heaven, where the righteous gods are discussing the fate of Odysseus and decide to help him to return. This foreknowledge does much to sustain us through the many harrowing scenes that follow, which might be too harrowing to simple-minded hearers. The next scene shows Odysseus' home, where his steadfast wife is weeping and praying for his return and his handsome young son, Telemachus, the image of his father, except that he is young and tall, is dreaming apart about the day of his father's return. The Suitors are lying around, leading their customary vicious life, gambling, drinking wine, talking unwisely, and doing nothing useful. Now the goddess of Wisdom appears, in the guise of a middleaged man who was Odysseus' friend. Telemachus welcomes her and cares for her comfort in every way with extreme politeness, and accepts gratefully her wise advice that he shall no longer remain inactive like a boy, but rouse himself to act like a man. From this moment he deserves the epithet that Homer gives him, *discreet*, and his name, *Telemachus*, which signifies derivatively, *The Perfect Warrior*. To the joy of his mother and the confusion of the Suitors, he announces his majority, orders the Suitors to leave, calls the gods to bear witness and to give him help against them should they refuse, calls an assembly of the people, makes his charges before them, and announces his purpose to go in search of his father. This is not starting a battle, but a campaign. Every word and act is wise, and will win the approval of Wise Odysseus on his return.

The many scenes in which Odysseus meets his trials are varied and effective, laid on enchanted Islands, at the fireside, in a Swineherd's cottage, in a palace, out at sea. The scene of his shipwreck, where the winds and the waves toss his frail raft about until it sinks—he is saved by a kind seaymph who lends him her wimple for a life-preserver—is followed by a charming idyllic scene on the shore of an inland rivulet where a young Princess, Nausicaä, is washing the family clothes in company with her maidens. They have finished trampling them in the washing-pool and have spread them out on the sand to dry, and now they have refreshed themselves from the baskets that they brought with them and are playing a game of ball, when Odysseus appears before them, a shipwrecked stranger, unclothed except for a broken bough of a tree, which he holds before

him in lieu of a figleaf apron. A sorry plight for a world-hero! Athene befriend him and Apollo inspire him, so that he can win the young Princess to take up his cause!

They do befriend him. A marvellous grace is shed about him and words of wisdom flow from his lips. The Princess listens, encouraged by Athene, and is persuaded to give him some of her brothers' beautiful clothes, along with sage advice as to how he can reach her mother, Queen Virtue, and win her heart to his cause. Under the guidance of Wisdom, the Princess Nausicaä, who had turned like a child to flee at sight of the stranger, takes the part of a perfect woman. As Telemachus is the model for all Greek boys, so Nausicaä is for the girls, able to meet a difficult situation with perfect success, maidenly, modest, gentle, affectionate (she calls the King, her father, "Papa, dear"), brave, kindly, courteous, helpful, generous, prudent, wise—we must name all of the virtues for women and show that she was possessed of them all from evidence in the text. A Princess but not above doing the family washing! Such should all maidens be! Telemachus will doubtless marry her, and their house will be, through them, the happiest ever, protected by the righteous gods to the happiest of conclusions—nothing *baneful*, *driven to ruin* there!

It begins to be clear why the Greeks made their Homer the foundation book for the education of their young. Their best ideals were here, implicit in characters and situations, possibly more effective, certainly more attractive, than if they had been set forth in didactic form. Not only Odysseus and Penelope, but this mere youth and maiden, "follow Wisdom like a guiding star," an inspiration for others also to summon resolution and endure to Victory. Homer holds forth a promise of honor and reward for following Wisdom as clearly as did the preacher to the youth of Israel, in Proverbs:

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom.

Exalt her and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honor when thou dost embrace her.

Hear, O my Son, and receive my savings; and the years of thy life shall be *mauv.*

Enter not into the path of the wicked and go not in the way of evil men,

For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence.

Involuntarily the question rises when we see the perfect accord in Grecian and Israelitish ideals. Did Homer's epics inspire the writer of the Proverbs? Did the writer of the Proverbs inspire Homer to write his epics? Nice questions of priority and influence

as between Homer and Sacred Books of Israel are not for us, but we shall count it sufficient to see that Homer and the writers of the Sacred Books of Israel are in accord in the praise of Wisdom, rewards for Wisdom, and punishment for evil.

The same questions rise as to the *Works and Days* of Hesiod, which is assigned by scholars to the period of Homer,  $\pm 800$  B. C., and which, like *Proverbs*, was didactic in its purpose. The main themes presented in *Proverbs* and *Works and Days* are *right social relations*, *work*, and *piety*, these in the form of exhortations, or injunctions *to be kind to the stranger and the suppliant, to be just to the fatherless, to respect another man's property, to regard another's bed . . .* and these are the very themes that Homer presented in narrative form. Odysseus was a *stranger and suppliant* at the palace of Alcinous and the cottage of the Swineherd, who treated him kindly, and afterwards at his own palace, where the Suitors treated him ill; the depraved Suitors scorned to do honest *work* to maintain themselves, but quartered themselves on Telemachus and devoured his substance, he being then practically *fatherless*, while they threatened to force his mother to choose one of them in *marriage*, though if she had consented she would have been considered guilty of violating her *husband's bed*; for it was the Law of Babylon, and doubtless throughout the East, that if a man failed to return from a war, perhaps because he was held as a slave in some foreign land, his wife must stay true to him in case he left property sufficient for her support. If she were unprovided, she was free to marry again. Unlike the Suitors, all who are good in Homer's stories are *workers*, even the Queens and Princesses are busy, spinning and weaving cloth, and washing the clothes. In the end, all who do evil in any form are punished: "Finally Zeus imposes dear requital for the wicked man's unjust deeds," say Hesiod, and this a most careful scrutiny of characters and incidents in Homer proves true.

It need not surprise us that this most artistic of storytellers has perfect retribution, or poetic justice in all of his stories, for early, unsophisticated ages, like that to which he belonged, love a moral, as unsophisticated children do. As late as the period of Solon, didactic poetry was loved in Athens, and Solon won much of his influence in the city by the didactic verses that he wrote. It seems to be the mark of a degenerate age to rate low the didactic and the moral in works of art, but to care overmuch for manner and method. As to Homer, a person bent on sermonizing, could get as many texts



for sermons from his writings as he could from *Works and Days*, or from *Proverbs*—of course, Homer does not preach them.

In general, the basic idea of Homer's poems is that men and nations, nay, even gods, are punished when they do wrong. So the hundreds of wicked Suitors who abused the hospitality and wooed the virtuous wife of Odysseus when he was away after the war suffered death as a just retribution at his hands when he came home; so Prince Paris of Troy, who led Queen Helen astray when he was a trusted guest in the home of her husband, King Menelaus, suffered final defeat and death in the course of the Trojan War, which resulted from his act; so Priam, the aged King of Troy, along with all of his family and his nation, went down to utter destruction because they unwisely protected the guilty pair in Troy instead of punishing them, their city burned to the ground, their women enslaved; so Aphrodite, though a god, met humiliation and defeat at the hands of the righteous gods because she misguided these mortals and tried to protect them with the aid of War, Ares, her own false, secret lover. Against these false gods, (1) Zeus fought, because he protects the rights of hosts, of guests and of nations; (2) Athene fought, because she protects the wise and must punish the foolish; (3) Hera fought, because she guards the hearth and home; and (4) Apollo fought because he does poetic justice and sends retribution, and had warned Priam by prophets not to protect Paris in Troy.

Let us examine closely the conduct of Priam and the Trojans to see just who were guilty, that the righteous gods visited all with doom. When Paris broke the law of the righteous gods by leading away another man's wife (his name is derived from *I sleep beside*, the term used for committing adultery), the Trojans were morally bound to punish him, to drown him, in the river if they followed the Law of Babylon, to stone him to death, if they followed the law of their near-neighbor, Israel, at least to expel him from the city, if they followed the warning sent them by Apollo before Paris committed his crime. Priam showed perfect willingness to obey the god at first, and sent Paris out of the city, but later he weakened, and admitted him when he came to Troy leading Helen, the Shining One, by the hand. The derivation of these names makes our assurance doubly sure in the interpretation. As *Paris* is derived from the term for committing adultery, so *Helen* is derived from a root cognate with that in *Helios*, the Sun, and it puns upon the infinitive meaning *to lead by the hand*, *to seduce*, a fact which explains the ancient vase-paintings, where Helen and

Paris are represented as *hand in hand*. Homer calls Paris also by the name *Alexander*, a contraction of the Greek, *I am defended of men*, a name which is a reproach to both Paris and those who defended him, for this defense of the guilty was an exceedingly grave offense in the eyes of the righteous gods, as it was to Jehovah in Israel, to be punished with destruction of the city.

In the Sacred Books of Israel many instances are given of cities destroyed for harboring this sin of Paris, or others like it. Among these was Israel herself when she turned from the worship of the gods of the fathers to Ashtarothe, an Eastern "false goddess," parallel with Aphrodite, as is told in Judges ii, 14, 15.

And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said and the Lord had sworn unto them, and they were greatly distressed.

This punishment of Israel was earlier than the fall of Troy, and other still earlier parallel incidents are told in the bible, in which cities conquered by Israel were punished because they also had been guilty of this law. Such parallels are shown in Leviticus xviii:

(1) And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

(2) Speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them, I am the Lord thy God.

(3) After the doings of the Land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do; and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do; neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. . . .

(2) Ye shall not lie carnally with thy neighbor's wife, to defile thyself with her. . . .

(24) Defile not ye yourselves with any of these things, for in all of these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you.

(25) And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit its iniquities upon it, and the land herself vomiteth forth her inhabitants.

A still further example of punishment inflicted upon a city for a sin very like that of Troy, is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah:

*And lo, the smoke of the country went up like the smoke of a furnace.*

The cities destroyed for their wickedness, especially Sodom and Gomorrah became "a proverb and a by-word" in Israel, as did Troy among the Greeks, therein receiving the *Curse for Disobedience* pronounced upon breakers of the Law in Deut. XVIII:

*Thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a by-word among all nations.*

If, on the contrary, they had obeyed the law, they would have received the *Blessings for Obedience* promised:

*And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of thee.*

Here we are again struck by the fact that Homer and the ancient Greeks were in perfect accord with the Prophets and writers of the Sacred Books on this important question of morals, both holding the conviction that a city giving obedience to God's law will receive a blessing, as a city disobeying will receive his curse. *Athens*, named in honor of *Athene*, is an example of a city *called by the name of the Lord* and confident of power in any righteous cause; *Troy* is an example of a city *called by the name of an evil one* and weak against its enemies, being the name of the hated winter dragon and his lair, of labyrinth, who imprisons the Princess of the Sun every year until the assaults of the Spring set her free. Of this we shall have occasion to speak more fully later. Throughout the ancient world this myth of a hated labyrinth destroyed was told, and celebrated in spring festivals, so it might well be taken by a Bard to supply a moral background for his story of a city punished for its sin.

Was King Priam alone guilty of bringing destruction on Troy? Were the brothers of Paris guilty? Were the Counsellors? Were the young warriors? Were the women? It is marvellous how conclusively the poet gives answer to these questions in what he tells in the famous scene at the Scaean Gate, where Paris meets Menelaus in single combat on the plain below, while Priam, Helen and the old Counsellors watch from the walls.

(1) The aged Counsellors bore tribute to Helen's exceeding fairness, though at the same time they condemned her:

"Now when they saw Helen coming to the Tower they softly spake winged words one to the other, 'Small blame it is that Trojans and well greaved Achaeans should for such a woman long time suffer hardships; marvellously like is she to the immortal goddesses to look upon. Yet even so, though she be so goodly, let her go upon their ships and not stay to vex us and our children after us.'"

Blaming her, though lightly, and not guilty of wanting to protect her in their city, they are still guilty of not raising their voices actively in council for the death or expulsion of Paris and Helen from the city according to the warning of Apollo and the law. There are ways of putting pressure on a king, as the scenes representing councils show, and they might use them, so they must be held guilty of the destruction which follows.

(2) The sentiment among the people in Troy was against Paris



and Helen and they would willingly have betrayed Paris to Menelaus :

"They surely in no wise hid him from kindness, could any have seen him, for he was hated of all even as black death.

It will be noted that the people were the soundest of head among those in Troy. But they remained inactive against Paris.

(3) The rank and file of warriors in Troy were willing to see the wrong-doer punished, for before the combat began they prayed thus :

"Father Zeus, that rulest from Ida, most glorious, most great, whichsoever it be that brought this trouble upon both peoples, vouchsafe that he may die and enter the House of Hades, that so for us peace may be assured and trusty oaths."

But they made no active effort to fix the guilt or to inflict punishment upon the guilty persons, so they also were not guiltless of the destruction of their city.

(4) This is particularly true of Hector, the oldest of the king's sons, the natural leader of the young men of the city, whom they love. In the powerful speech that Hector makes to Paris before the combat, he heaps reproach and scorn upon him for bringing Helen to Troy :

"Evil Paris, most fair in semblance, thou deceiver, woman-mad, would thou hadst been unborn or died unwed. . . . It would be better far than thus to be our shame and looked at askance of all men . . . to bring back a fair woman from a far country . . . that she might be a sore mischief to thy father and city and all the realm, but to our foes a rejoicing, and to thyself a hanging of the head! . . . Thy lyre will not avail thee, nor the gifts of Aphrodite, those locks and thy fair favor, when thou grovellest in the dust. But the Trojans are very cowards, else long ere this hadst thou donned a robe of stone for all the ill thou hast wrought."

So sternly an Israelite might speak, imposing the penalty of the law, *a robe of stone*, that is, *the death by stoning*. The last sentence has bitter significance :

"*The Trojans are very cowards, else long ere this hadst thou donned the robe of stone for all the ill thou hadst wrought.*"

Accusing the Trojans of being cowards for not stoning Paris, does not Hector here include himself? Since he was the daily witness of the crime, and the leader of the people, he must feel that he should have led in the stoning. Being a true and a brave man, since he has failed in his duty he must admit the truth that he has been a physical coward, afraid to face Achilles in arms, and a moral coward, afraid to face his father in protest when he is doing a wrong that will wreck the city. Priam has been a kind father, but this

\* Lang, Leaf and Myers translation of *Iliad*.

son must feel that now the one hope of the city is in his opposing his father, and, if that should be necessary, of deposing him from his throne. In the days of the Patriarchs of the Oldest Dispensation, it had been a son's duty to obey his father unquestionably, but this speech shows that in Hector's mind his sense of duty to his father and king is now in conflict with his sense of duty to his fatherland. It is for him to save Troy, or to bear God's retribution when the city falls, when his white-haired mother, his wife, and his child, will be led away into slavery as a consequence of his father's foolish doting. If Hector should call in the name of the law and the righteous gods of their fathers, the young men would rise with him and purify the city, perhaps they have even invited him to it, for they call his little son *Astyanax*, king of the city, though the name that he had given the child was *Scamander*, after the name of the river at Troy.

Mistakenly, Hector decides to obey his father and to fight for him in the cause that he judges wrong. His decision is not ignoble, and for his nobility of spirit Apollo still loves him and does a great deal to assist him. Prolonging the war as a just punishment upon Agamemnon, he can still give Hector a chance to distinguish himself and win fame which will never die; and he lets Hector fall before that last dark day when the city falls, when his aged father will die by violence and the women he loves will be driven forth. Even Hector's pitiful death, when wisdom has betrayed him, and the violence done his dead body after Achilles has killed him, are a gift of Apollo, to make of Hector a noble "Song in the ears of men" . . . and a warning.

The moral truth that a son must set himself against his father and his brothers when they are wrong is implicit in Homer's character of Hector. Three centuries later the theme of a son in conflict with his father and his brothers was dramatized on the Athenian religious stage in the myth of Prometheus, where the hero will not help his father and brothers do wrong and is made to endure a kind of crucifixion because he will not yield. This is what Hector should have done, and if he had done it, he would have found himself a victor, even suffering crucifixion. The martyr's death would not have been so cruel to him as any death which he must suffer in Troy, self-condemned. But this light had not broken on him, and it was more than a thousand years after Troy fell before the teaching that a son must rise against his father was not only made explicit, but put in the form of the strongest command, when Jesus said:

I am come to set a man at variance with his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me is not worthy of me.

He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

That sermon might well have been written to cover the case of Trojan Hector, for his love of his father and mother, his wife and his son led him to do what he knew was wrong; it also covers the case of his sister Cassandra, who denounced Paris, inspired by Apollo to do so, and thus set herself against her father and mother; it also covers the case of Andromache the Queen's daughter-in-law, who agreed with Hector as to the guilt of Paris, whom his parents would not expel; it also covers the case of King Priam, the father who loved his son Paris so well that he defended him knowing that he was wrong. Did the Supreme Teacher have Troy in mind when He spoke these truths, and the sword that should have been drawn within the city, to save it? "I come not to bring peace but a sword"—not unity, but division would have saved that city, and divine wisdom has it, even in Homer by implication, that victory could come only by giving up the defense of what was wrong.

Priam himself was also divided against himself as to defending Paris, as we have said, having first expelled him and then admitted him with Helen. In the speech that he makes to Helen at the Scaean Gate, he is shown still divided against himself, for he clearly admits that she was wrong, but lays the blame for what she did on the gods:

"Come hither, dear child, and sit before me, that thou mayest see thy former husband and thy kinsfolk and thy friends. I hold not thee to blame; nay, I hold the gods to blame who brought on me the dolorous War."

This is sophistical, and Homer does not agree with Priam, for in the first scene of the *Odyssey* he represents Zeus himself as denying that the gods are to blame for evil, and stating that evil-doers must bear the blame themselves since the gods have given them laws and even special warnings by prophecy, he using the case of Aegisthus as an example, who also was guilty of adultery and had been punished by the just gods for it. The speech of Priam blaming the gods would be blasphemous if he realized it, at the least it is pathetic, and the retribution sent upon him is certainly sufficient—the death of many of his sons before his eyes in battle, including noble Hector, for sheltering one evil son in his crime. With tender

pity the poet tells of the gray-haired father humbled to beg the mutilated body of his son Hector from the victor—even Zeus feels pity then and sends Iris down to command Achilles, under severest penalty, to be merciful to the poor old man.

And Helen . . . how human and appealing Homer made her without for a moment blinking her crime, or condoning it! When Hector taunted Paris, it will be remembered he referred to Helen as "a fair woman from a far country," "a sore mischief to thy father and city and all the realm, to our foes a rejoicing, and to thyself a hanging of the head," and we know that he was more merciful in his treatment of her than the other members of the king's family, except Priam himself. So Helen's life in Troy had been like that of the "strange woman" of Proverbs v, "as bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword."

When Homer first shows Helen at the Scaean Gate, where she watches the battle with Priam, she has learned from bitter experiences to be very humble and very apologetic. She is no haughty beauty, but very gentle, and she has formed the habit of self-accusation. Speaking to Priam, she refers to herself as "shameless me"; she calls herself "worthless me" when she talks of herself to Telemachus, in the *Odyssey*, in the presence of Menelaus and the party of wedding guests. And nobody, excepting doting Priam seems to gainsay her. On her part, this may be artful and intended to disarm her critics and forestall them, but how sad a consciousness and a sub-consciousness her words reveal!

All of the incidents in which Helen appears, show scorpions in her mind, as that in which Hector is urging Paris to enter the combat with Menelaus:

"My brother, even mine that am a dog, mischievous and abominable, would that on the day when my mother bare me an evil storm-wind had caught me away to a mountain or a billow of the loud-sounding sea, when the billow had swept me away before all these things came to pass. . . . But now, my brother, enter in and sit here upon this seat, since thy heart hath been troubled chiefly for my sake, that am a dog, and for Alexander's, on whom Zeus bringeth evil doom, that in days to come we may be a song in the ears of men."

Hector refuses her pathetic appeal and invitation with a curt and cold rebuff:

"Do not bid me sit, Helen; thou wilt not persuade me of thy love."

If she had invited any of his brothers, the answer would have been worse than curt and cold, as we see from what Helen says brokenly at the bier of Hector, in her lament,

"Hector, of all my brethren far dearest to my heart! Truly my lord is

godlike Alexandros who brought me to Troyland—would I had died ere then. . . . Never yet heard I evil or despicable word from thee; nay, if any other haply upbraided me in the palace halls, whether brother or sister of thine, or brother's fair-robed wife, or thy mother . . . then would thou soothe such and refrain them by the gentleness of thy spirit and by thy gentle words. . . . No more is any left in wide Troyland to be my friend and kind to me, but all men shudder at me."

Her speeches reveal gulphs of suffering and despair. She despises and hates herself and, what is worse, she despises and hates Paris, and struggles to break the bonds by which Aphrodite commands Helen to return to him, but Helen speaks wild, rebellious words to the goddess:

"Strange Queen, why art thou desirous now to beguile me? . . . Thou comest hither with guileful intent. Go thou and sit thou by his side, and depart from the ways of the gods; neither let thy feet ever bear thee back to Olympus, but still be vexed for his sake and guard him till he make thee his wife, or perchance his slave. But thither will I not go—to array the bed of him; all the women of Troy will blame me hereafter; and I have griefs untold within my soul."

Here are glimpses of untold griefs; that she had broken from the ways of her own home people, that her feet never bore her back to her childhood home, that she had doubted his keeping his promise to make her his wife, that she had felt only his slave, that she had no friend among the women of Troy, only shudderings among strangers and griefs in her own soul.

She has come to judge Paris inferior to even Menelaus, as she tells him to his face after his combat:

"Thou comest back from the battle; would thou hadst perished there, vanquished by that great warrior that was my former husband. Verily, it was once thy boast that thou wast a better man than Menelaus dear to Ares, in the might of thy arm and thy spear. Nay, I, even I . . . bid thee not to attack him recklessly lest perchance thou fall on his spear."

This for his physical cowardice; to Hector she shows that she understands the evil of his heart:

"Would that I had been wedded with a better man, who felt dishonor and the many reproaches of men. As for him, he has no sound heart now, nor will he ever have."

Her ideals are not bad, and she is not a light woman as has been generally supposed. Her husband was not lovable, and she made the tragic mistake, like Guinevere, of giving her love to a less noble man supposing that he was nobler. If she had been wedded to a man like Odysseus, or like Hector, she might not have been tempted to leave him for a man like this Paris. As it is, the Apple of Love with which Aphrodite tempted her has turned out to be that Apple



of Sodom, fair to the eye, but ashes and dust on the tongue. Poor Helen!

Helen of Troy led a darkly tragic life even when Paris and Priam lived, and it continued to be darkly tragic. After Paris was killed, following Hector, it is told that Helen was given in marriage to Deiphobus, who was a notable coward, for his name is expressive of constant fear. With him she must have been even less happy than with Paris, for Aphrodite had not moved her to love him and marriage with him would not soften the judgment against her in Troy.

Poor Helen! When Troy fell and Menelaus carried her back to Sparta instead of subjecting her to the penalty of the law, she was never to be happy there. Perhaps his motive in letting her live was, as has been suggested, a hope he harbored of attaining eternal life through her, for she was of the immortals, being a sister of Castor and Pollux—his words in the *Odyssey* make this theory probable; perhaps, as has been suggested, his hope of keeping Helen's regal dowry was contingent on his keeping her. At any rate, his motive cannot have been love. He had never shown that he loved her, and incidents told of him make it certain that he could not have won her love, or even commanded her respect. He had drawn her by a lot, then he had tried to get out of marrying her because he was afraid other Suitors might make him trouble if he did marry her, and he finally made her his wife only when his companion kings promised that they would stand by him if trouble should come of the marriage—what a contrast to Kingly Odysseus, who stood ready to protect his wife single-handed against hundreds of hostile suitors! Helen must have realized that her marriage with Menelaus was far from perfect, and far from sacred. Under such conditions, it is not very surprising that when Prince Charming came, with "fair looks and fair favor," and offering her the golden Apple of Love, she was strongly tempted to give him her hand, unwise though this conduct might be.

How wretched the life of Helen was after Menelaus brought her back to Sparta is shown in the scene at their hearth when Tele-machus visits them. She is evidently trying to make the best of her husband, paying him compliments as "a man who looks for nothing, either in mind or person," and telling other pitiful lies with a show of devotion, while she abases herself by calling herself "worthless me." She pretends that when her heart had turned back to him before Troy fell she gave aid to the Greeks who came into the city as spies, so making herself a traitor to Troy for his sake. But

Menelaus shows that he does not believe her story and follows it at once with an incident which would prove that she was, instead, actively treacherous to him and the other Grecian chieftains, and tried to betray them to their enemies to the last day that they were in Troy. The incident is this: When the Greeks lay concealed in the wooden horse and within the walls of Troy, Helen came alongside the horse, followed by "godlike Deiphobus," and spoke each chieftain's name, in turn, mimicking the voice of his wife, trying to get the Greeks to answer and so betray them into the hands of their foes. In telling this incident, Menelaus addresses Helen as "wife," and the manner of his retort seems courteous, but this is only the more cutting, an example of withering irony. Was the incident that he told true? It has the earmarks of being invented, a lie to outmatch her lie, a stab into her heart, a blow in her face. She makes no denial or explanation, but takes his browbeating silently, gently bidding the maids prepare the couches for the night. Verily, in her soul she carried "griefs untold"!

Homer is very just to Helen, possibly generous in giving her such a husband, for he makes her conduct seem natural, at least, where he might have made it seem simply revolting. So Aeschylus, also, in the *Agamemnon*, makes that of Clytemnestra, by showing the very unlovely husband she had. In this, the poets both seem to be saying, "Given such husbands, the wives will be tempted, so: Moral, for husbands as well as for wives."

Poor Helen! Her soul was to suffer increasingly until the end—like that of the "strange woman" in Proverbs V, her parallel:

*Her feet go down to death: her steps take hold on Hell.*

Euripides shows Helen's own father refusing to give her protection and the common people hating her so that she dares not show her face on the streets for fear they will do her violence, but ventures forth only at night and veiled. Her legend tells that finally, after her unhappy life with Menelaus, she suffered a horrible death. When Menelaus died, his sons, along with those of Nicostratus, *the victorious people*, drove her forth from his palace. She fled for refuge to the Island of Rhodes, but there was refused protection by Polyxo, the queen, whose husband had died in battle in the Trojan War. Hating Helen for the sorrows that had come upon the world by reason of her sin, the women of Polyxo disguised themselves as Furies and fell upon her while she was in the bath. Finally they dragged her forth and hanged her on a tree.

Helen's death was thus more sad and ignominious than the

death decreed by Babylon and Israel for the sin she had committed. Except for the speeches of Priam and the aged counsellors, no touch of wavering in condemnation of Helen occurs in the literature of Greece, so far as I have seen, and these suffered grievous punishment for their un-Wisdom. Homer, like the Prophets, is thus of the old dispensation, though he presents the character of Helen in such a way as to wring the heart with pity. It remained for the merciful Saviour to speak the word of pity for such as she, when the woman taken in adultery was brought to him:

*Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone. . . . Neither do I condemn thee, go in peace.*

This is of the new dispensation, founded on love and a justice deeper than Apollo's. Had Homer's pitiful Helen helped to prepare the world to accept the new law?

Agamemnon is pictured in his home as an even less worthy husband and father than Menelaus was, no more of a man. There must have been a long record of base deeds done by this king to warrant Achilles in taunting him, when they quarrelled, with having *the face of a dog* and *the heart of a stag*. We know some of the things he had done: (1) He had angered Apollo by injuring the family of a priest, and thereby brought pestilence upon his army in retribution; (2) he had outraged and estranged the best of his warriors by doing him an injustice, depriving him of his prize; (3) he had sacrificed his own daughter to secure military success; (4) he was not regardful of the feelings of his wife, as Odysseus was, and was bringing to her home a captured Trojan Princess and the children she had borne him. Then Clytemnestra struck him down "like an ox in the stall," having disarmed him first and quieted his fears by warmly welcoming him home. The character of Agamemnon would justify Clytemnestra if anything could do so, but Homer does not justify her, and all praised her son Orestes later for putting his mother to death in retribution. The gods also approved this act, and when Orestes' own heart was driven toward madness with doubt as to whether, even in such a case, he should have raised his hand against his own mother, tradition tells that Athene and Apollo set his conscience at rest—the goddess of wisdom came down to Athens in person and founded the Court of the Areopagus to try his case, and Divine Justice, Apollo, acted as judge.

In happy contrast with these unhappy kings, who wrecked their homes by their own unworthiness, and were wrecked by their wives, stands wise Odysseus, and in contrast with their wives stands his Penelope, faithful and "heedful" Penelope. When the story opens,

it is many years since Odysseus went to war, but Penelope has not forgotten. She still weeps for him, and she prays. She has brought up her son in his father's ways and to dream his father's return. She entertains all passing strangers so that she may learn from them any rumor about him that they may have heard, "a rumor sent from Zeus." She is sought by a host of suitors, but does not consider their offers of marriage; and, where she dares not reject them definitely because that would probably bring on a struggle among them and her forcible abduction by the victor, she holds them off by her clever stratagem of the web that she is weaving—a windingsheet for Odysseus' aged father, promising that she will announce her decision when she takes it from the loom. But every night she unravels the work that she has done in the day, and never announces her decision. It is this incident which gives her her name, for Penelope is derived from a *web*, to cover or wrap up.

And Odysseus deserves her devotion. Where Agamemnon and Menelaus make plural marriages and keep concubines, Odysseus considers the feelings of his wife so much that he does not even take the good nurse, Eurycleia, as Homer tells. When plural marriages are no reproach, how good that Penelope cares so much, and that Odysseus cares that she cares! He gave her a monogamous home, and she made that home so happy that he did not want to go to the war. When they came to conscript him, they found him busy plowing salt into the earth to prove that he had gone crazy and ought to be exempted—a wily ruse! But they knew his wiles so well that they suspected him, and tested him by placing his baby on the ground where the plow would strike him. Odysseus turned aside so as not to plow the child under, so they concluded that his mind was sound and led him away to the ships. This incident does well to illustrate his love of home, but it is post-Homeric and does not do justice to Odysseus' profound belief in the righteousness of this war, which Homer shows in many incidents.

The personal love that his home-folk give to Odysseus is proved more than justified when we come to see this Zeus-praised, Athene-protected world-famous hero in the incidents of the Epics. In the first scene where he appears in the *Odyssey* he is a captive, held by a goddess who wants him to be her husband, and who would make him immortal if he would consent to remain. But he is not tempted to do so, and, when the curtain rises upon him, the greatest of heroes is seen sitting in tears on the shore of the sea, his face turned toward his little island kingdom, longing but to see the smoke rise in the distance from his own hearthstone. He is not thinking of the glory



he won in the war and scheming for more riches and power, he is thinking of how to reach home, and this is the more to his credit because more than one goddess had offered him her love.

Circe had tried to enchant him and hold him with her, but he had resisted and forced her to do his bidding; even the Sirens could not win him, though he listened to their songs, for he had wisely restrained himself against their enticements. With women, as with goddesses, he won an instant success. His godlike bearing, his gentle courtesy, his manly strength in making a plea, his sincere use of compliment, his freedom from all that would characterize the male-flirt, or "lady-killer"—these win him a way to the hearts of good women. Instantly, Nausicaä feels confidence in him, as later her mother, Queen Virtue, does, and as her father and his sage councillors do. From the moment when Odysseus comes as a suppliant among them, seats himself in the ashes of their hearth to signify his utter need, and reaches up his hands to the knees of the queen in appeal for assistance, he wins them all.

Stripped of every advantage of pomp and circumstance, he makes them feel his worth, not only of character, but also of physical power. He knew that he could win in their contests, but he held himself in the background modestly and would not enter until he was forced to do so by the taunt of a bystander, and even then he would not enter a contest against any member of the family of his kind entertainer. In all of the physical contests except running and dancing he won—it would have been unhuman if no defect whatever had been shown in this greatest of heroes, too discouraging for the coming generation of fellow-mortals. There was no flaw in his wits, in his heart, in his action; no other man could equal him in strength, or even draw his bow; no other equalled him in manly beauty, except in one important respect—the lower part of his body was out of proportion to the upper, being too short. It was this one defect that prevented him from being the first in dancing and first in single combat, as he was easily first in council, in shooting with the bow, in hurling the javelin, and in putting the shot. In that age, success in personal combat came to him who was most determined, courageous, skillful, and powerful, but also fleetest of foot *and longest of leg*, for he must be able to overtake his enemy who tried to flee, or to outstrip him if he for the time being tried to do the fleeing—Grecian warriors often chose to postpone a combat, and they counted it no disgrace to turn the back on an enemy, and run. It was Achilles, who was the fastest runner, who fought the single combats for the Greeks, a man counted less than wise and without high ideals, but



the glory of bringing the war to a close was by common consent given to Odysseus, who planned the strategy with Wisdom.

So Odysseus was first in war, as he was first in building a home in peace, and certainly first among the kings in the hearts of all wise and good men. He and his household prayed often to the righteous gods, but no prayer to Aphrodite or Ares by either him or Penelope is reported by Homer, nor did any other of the high-souled heroes of Troy pray to them, a final proof, if one were needed, that they condemned them, along with the frail mortals whom they misled. The love which is wise is the love of Odysseus' home.

This condemnation of Aphrodite that we find in Homer, we find strengthened, if possible, in the myth of Cupid and Psyche, which was developed several centuries after Homer, but in harmony with his spirit. In this beautiful myth, which was one of those presented among the most sacred mysteries at Eleusis, Cupid (Eros, Desire), is the son of Aphrodite but has so transcended his mother that he is the lover of the soul, Psyche, whereas she represents love of the body only. There is nothing about Eros of the naughty little fluterer who shoots his arrows so as to make a Midsummer Madness of loving,—*in-and-out, out-and-in! Presto! Change about!* So Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus, late and degenerate Grecians might picture him, or degenerate Roman poets, who laughed at vows broken by lovers, and at discord between husbands and wives. To the Eleusinian worshippers, as to Homer, life was serious and earnest among men who were wise; to them, as to Penelope and Odysseus, love is devotion through long years of trial.

In the myth of Cupid and Psyche it is told that Cupid gave his love to a mortal maiden, the Soul, against the wishes of his hateful and low-minded mother, and that he was constant in his devotion though Psyche proved to be far from perfect. When she did not trust him though he loved her truly, he flew away, for love cannot live with suspicion; but while she was suffering the long and hard punishment which Aphrodite inflicted upon her, he watched over her secretly, won friends for her in her need, and finally came back to her when she had proved herself worthy. Such love as theirs was judged worthy of immortality, so a council of the gods at last decided to give her the butterfly wings and translate her to heaven, where she was fed on ambrosia, the nectar of Olympus. The meaning of this myth as a whole is that love, purified of earthly imperfections, is immortal. In the time of Homer the Greeks had not expected a happy life beyond the grave, but this myth is evidence that a hope of immortality had risen *for those souls that had loved*

*and suffered steadfastly.* Thus poetic Justice was satisfied, that a soul like Penelope shall not wander in blank forgetfulness in a sad, dark underworld, and that an Odysseus can have the immortality for which he would not sell himself to a goddess.

In this myth, the butterfly wings would not signify any lightness of character in Psyche such as we are accustomed to ascribe to the butterfly, but only an analogy between the soul that rises from earth to heaven through purified love and that beautiful winged thing that has experienced transformation through stages of caterpillar and chrysalis. The caterpillar sometimes even descends into the earth, as into a grave, to make its chrysalis, and seems dead, but from it there issues forth the very beautiful winged creature, which rises above the earth where it crawled and lay buried, to live a new life in a finer and rarer element, feasting on nectar. The Greeks doubtless adopted this nature-allegory and belief in the immortality of the soul from Egypt, where the Sacred Beetle had been used as the symbol of rising from literal corruption into incorruption. As the Egyptians buried scarabs in tombs, wrapped their dead in grave-cloth (like the gossamer in cocoons), and laid the mummy to repose in a sarcophagus which imitated the chrysalis of the Sacred Beetle in markings and design (as Fabre has pointed out), so the Greeks adopted the custom of carving a butterfly on the stone that marked the restingplace of the dead. The interpretation of the butterfly wings in the myth of Psyche to signify immortality is therefore beyond question.

Like the myth of Prometheus, Fore-Thought, the god who bore torture for saving man, this myth of the Soul immortalized by true love became a stage to still higher religious teaching. It was presented, as we have said, in the Mysteries at Eleusis, an institution developed three centuries after Homer to present the highest religious themes, the ways of gods to men, the immortality of the soul, the brotherhood of man, and the fatherhood of God. Along with the solemn initiations and the sacrament of the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine at Eleusis in sign of mystic brotherhood, these religious myths presented there helped to prepare the way for the fuller religious truth and the deepened mystic signification to be given to the world five centuries later in Palestine where the mystic brotherhood consisted of those who stood ready to take up their cross, and the bread and the wine were given the meaning of self-sacrifice to the point of the body broken and the blood shed.

The fact of a connection between Grecian and Hebrew thought was forgotten by Western writers in later centuries, but patristic

Grecian writers had made much of it on the affirmative side, for theological and practical purposes. To one who looks for it, the line of growth is as clear in Grecian thought as in Israelitish between the prophets and their fulfillment in Jesus—both show what is called in Christian terminology the *working of the Holy Spirit*, in scientific, *an evolution*.

In the light of these profound moral and religious truths of Homer, we see how inadequate and often false are the ideas commonly held as to the ancient Greek religion. It seems that many of our ill-considered opinions on the subject have come to us from early Christians, like Saint Augustine, who rightly condemned the myths of degenerate Roman Vergil, but did not thereby, as Saint Augustine was careful to state, condemn the myths of the Grecian dramatists, or of Homer. Vergil's gods were Homer's false gods, for Vergil exalted Venus (Aphrodite) and Mars (Ares) and showed them triumphant, where Homer had shown them ignominious and defeated, Vergil's motive being to flatter the Romans and his patrons, who had adopted Mars (Ares) as an ancestor of Romulus and Venus (Aphrodite) as an ancestor of the Caesars.

Other ill-considered opinions have come down to us as with authority from the scholars who revived the study of Greek at the time of the Italian Renaissance, under the patronage of the powerful princes and business men of the period, and under the influence of Vergil. These scholars did not draw fine distinctions in interpretation, and the princes were no more of Athene and Apollo than Vergil had been, though they gave Apollo lip-service and amused themselves with his arts, which is a very different thing from creating a high art under his inspiration. The real gods of their daily devotion were Aphrodite and Ares, Hermes and Hephaestos, False Love and War, Trade and Manufacture. . . . again, the false gods of Homer. Such a spirit as this has never created a high art. The Borgias, the DeMedici, and the D'Estes took little real interest in morals and religion, extended their power unscrupulously (Machiavelli told the truth about them in "The Prince"), and led riotous lives in their luxurious palaces, less like Odysseus' than like the Suitors'. To use the word art for their pseudo-Grecian product, voluptuous, languishing Venuses, sportful, naughty Cupids, riotous ramping Satyrs, and the like, is little short of profanation. These were in spirit the opposite of high, austere, Apollonian Homer, whose truly great art served nothing less than the exalted Sun, Apollo, the Destroyer of evil. The patrons of the Renaissance took from degenerated mythology

only what suited their own views of life, and imputed these back to Homer. Love and war, private luxury and display, collection and investment were the purposes of their pseudo-Grecian art (?), as it has been of those rich patrons ever since whose real interest in life is the getting of money and power, and more and more money and power. All of this is offense to Apollo, whose great art in ancient Greece, from Homer to Pericles, was fundamentally religious and public, to serve the gods and lift men above their lower selves by inspiration.

The truly great art of the Renaissance in Italy was Christian, not that of the pseudo-Grecians, not for private luxury and display. Like Athenian art it was fundamentally religious, and largely public, an expression of the best ideals of that day in literature, public buildings, temples for the worship of God, statues and pictures to adorn them. The ideals of this great Christian Renaissance art are also those of Homer, and the opposite of pseudo-Grecian.

Judged by the standards of Homeric, Appollonian, and Christian art, Dante is to be ranked among the highest artists, along with Homer. Unlike Vergil, he was no flatterer of princes, and he was certainly not Aphrodisian; unlike the pseudo-Grecians, he was of the austere school of Homer and the prophets, being Vergilian only as he honored Vergil because Vergil was mistakenly believed to have prophesied the coming of the Saviour and so to have been a kind of pagan-prophet and herald of Christianity. This was a great mistake of those uncritical times, for Vergil's prophesying applied to the Caesars, who were assuming divine honors in imitation of the rulers of the East, and his expected Saviour was Augustus, whose "Roman Peace" was to be attained by means of war, and world-conquest.

Great as Dante was—he has been well called the voice of ten silent centuries—he was far less of a power and an influence among his people and those of the following centuries than Homer is seen to have been in Greece, for Homer was a national poet who not only gave his nation a voice, but became its religious leader by presenting wisdom and justice in such a way, embodied in Athene and Apollo, as to form, or determine its later religion, politics, and art. Athens would not have been more glorious than other nations if Athenians had not built their institutions on wisdom and justice more than other nations, more than our foremost modern so-called democracies in various important respects, not only in the arts, but also in the wisdom and justice of their law and their administration of land, courts and finance. The Athenian passion for wisdom and



justice we may credit to Homer, and also the practical fruits that came from this passion, including the influence that Athens has had upon the whole civilized world. When we add to this, that Homer, with the prophets prepared the way for Christianity, we begin to understand how great a moral and religious power he has been, and still is, indirectly, though his ideals have been mistakenly identified for centuries with those of Vergil.

When these points become clear, we must revalue Homer, and assign him the foremost place among poets, a place very near to the prophets, so giving to him the honor that the middle ages gave to Vergil by mistake. If there was a pagan-prophet and herald of Christianity, it was Homer.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

### DOES SCIENCE UNDERSTAND NATURE?

(An appreciative footnote to Mr. H. R. Vanderbyll's articles on "Intellect, Religion and the Universe" in the *Open Court* for August and September, 1921.)

BY HARDIN T. MCCLELLAND.

PEOPLE as a rule live from day to day without the least venture of speculation as to what keeps their bodies alive and healthy, and their minds conscious and rational. Work and food and sleep, and the occasional pastime of conversation make up the principal items of interest in practically any home or community within our public observation. Even in the private studios and laboratories where intellect and mechanical devices are less ephemerally concerned but more directly in contact with the obstinate facts of Reality, the *same* physical and mental functions of our vital economy are largely in the ascendent. The scientist has the same senses and faculties as the man in the street, but he exacts greater accuracy and more patient effort from the use to which he puts them. While the latter conceives life to be little other than a turbulent zone of livelihood and ephemeral utility, the former regards it as a clearing-house for functional values and phases of development.

What degree of spirituality then is actually and durably present in human nature? What proportion of our intelligence is devoted to the