

HOMER AND THE PROPHETS, OR HOMER AND NOW.

HISTORY AND HISTORICITY.

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THOSE who serve Apollo in any age will body forth the ideal, but they may show the real, even when it is evil, to throw what is good into a more effective light, perhaps to introduce a contrast. So they may use the actual, or historic fact along with allegory or myth. Literal truth, of course, has nothing to do with Apollo, except as it carries ideal truth, a point which Saint Augustine appreciated when he said that he did not accept Christianity because of its historic facts, but because of its myths, meaning by that, the ideal truths that they carry. To him it did not matter whether the Bible stories were, or were not literally true, but it was enough that they carried the highest ideal or spiritual truth. The greatest poets, as Homer and Dante, have used historical material in their poems when this served their purposes, and questions of history and historicity become important in both only as throwing light on the poet's meaning.

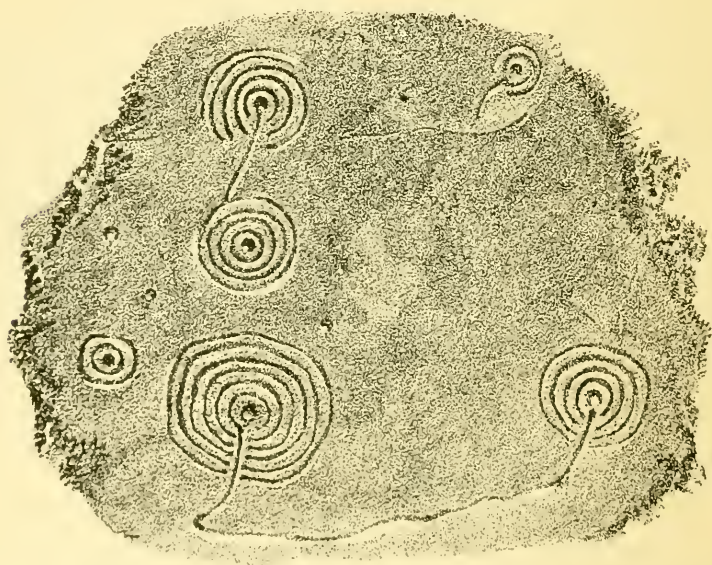
As to Troy and Helen, all ages have had their doubts. The excavations of Schliemann proved that an ancient city existed in primitive times on the spot that he investigated in Asia Minor having located it by means of such points as he found in Homer's poems, the citadel, the river, the washingpools and the sea; but that it was called by the name *Troy* has never been proved.

As to the reasons for the destruction of that city, all ages have had their doubts, and the question seems to have been a live issue in the time of Herodotus (484-420? B. C.). When Herodotus visited Egypt, four centuries after Homer, he asked the priests of Memphis whether all that Homer told of the Trojan War was to be regarded as fable and received the reply that it was, for the sufficient reason

that Paris did not abduct Helen to Troy and so the Greeks did not pursue her there to bring her back. Their reason for holding this opinion as to Troy was that Paris had brought her to Memphis instead! Herodotus concludes his observations on Paris and Helen thus:

"With regard to Helen, I assent entirely to the opinion of the Egyptian priests, and for the following reasons: If the princess had been in Troy, they would certainly have returned her to the Greeks no matter whether Alexander had agreed or opposed. Priam and the princes of the royal family could not have been so deprived of all sense as to sacrifice themselves along with their children and their city merely to secure the possession of Helen to Alexander."

The reason for the destruction of the burned city which Schliemann excavated was doubtless political, at bottom economic—it has been suggested that the king of that city had levied too high tolls

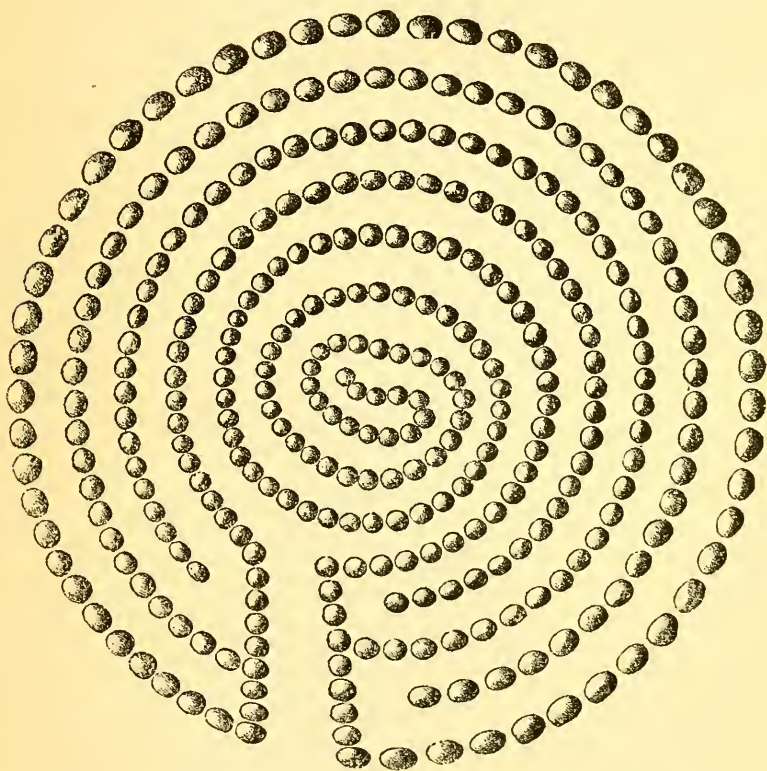


FRAGMENT OF SCULPTURED STONE FROM THE TOP OF
WHITSUNBANK HILL, NORTHUMBERLAND.

on the Grecian ships that passed to bring grain from the plains bordering on the Black Sea or gold from the auriferous rivers, where it had been gathered from the earliest ages by the primitive method of catching it in fleeces thrown into the water, a fact which gave local coloring to the myth of the Golden Fleece.

As Homer localized the plot of Paris and Helen in the Burned City that Schliemann excavated; so it seems now most likely that

he attached to it also the name *Troy*, a hated name which had been widely used in all Aryan countries for the labyrinth where the Winter Demon imprisons the Shining One, the Sun Princess, *Helen*—for the name *Helen* is cognate with that of *Helios*, the Sun. Cognates with *Troy* are found in *Druh*, *Druja*, *Draogha*, *Troja*, *Troy*, the name used for the Winter Demon among Hindus, Persians, Slavs, and Northern nations. The names of both *Helen* and *Troy* would argue a connection of Homer's story with the Sun Myth, which was the possession of the Aryans from the North to India, who



STONE LABYRINTH ON THE ISLAND OF WIER, RUSSIA.

After E. v. Baer's drawing in *Bulletin de l'académie de St. Pétersbourg*, 1844.

practiced Sun Dances from the earliest times. This is clear from the remains of the structures which were made for these rites. In England are many remains and pictures on standstone, representing the lair of Winter, called *Troy-Towns*, of which the accompanying illustration gives an example.

In Scotland also these are numerous, and in central and southern Europe many like structures are found, usually called *labyrinths*, and all so intricate as to justify the legend that it would take a long time to rescue a person imprisoned in them.

One of the most perfect is in Russia:

At Cnossus (Crete) the labyrinth became the national symbol and was used on coins:



OLD COIN OF KNOSSOS, CRETE.

In Rome, a Troy Dance was celebrated in very ancient times; and such dances must have been celebrated as early as the Seventh Century B. C., in Tuscany, of which fact the proof is a pitcher lettered in the earliest Etruscan and discovered at Tragliatella, an Etruscan village.



THE PITCHER OF TRAGLIATELLA.

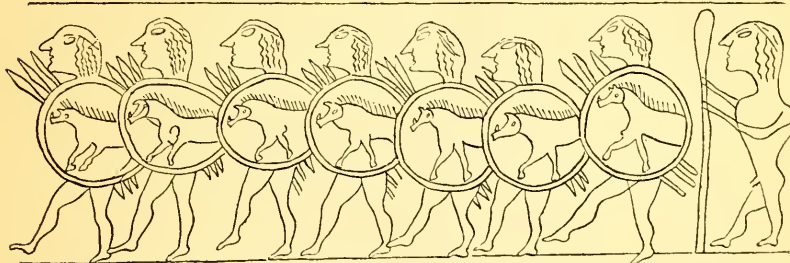
The bands of decoration on the pitcher discovered at Tragliatella show (1) the escaping princess in company with her rescuer, (2) the labyrinth from which they are escaping, (3) a company of dancers moving before them joyfully in procession. Finally, (4) the labyrinth is labelled in Etruscan characters, *truia*, or Troy. This piece of pottery, then, justifies a conclusion that the story of the fall of Troy as Homer tells it was a Sun Myth in its origin, as scholars

had surmised, and the label on the labyrinth proves the connection of the name of Troy with the Sun Myth. But the pitcher of Traglilatella proves more than these points, for in another scene it shows a goddess in the act of giving an apple, a man receiving the apple,



RIDERS COMING OUT OF THE "TROJABURG."

After *Jahrbücher d. röm. Inst.*, Vol. LIII, plate L.



GROUP OF SEVEN DANCERS.

After plate L of *Jahrbücher d. archäol. Inst.*, 1881.



SO-CALLED JUDGMENT OF PARIS OF THE PITCHER.

and a woman whom he holds by the hand, the woman labelled *mi felena*, I AM, or *THIS IS HELEN*, leaving no doubt that the other figures are those of Paris and Aphrodite. It will be concluded, finally, that the maker of this pitcher drew his illustration before people

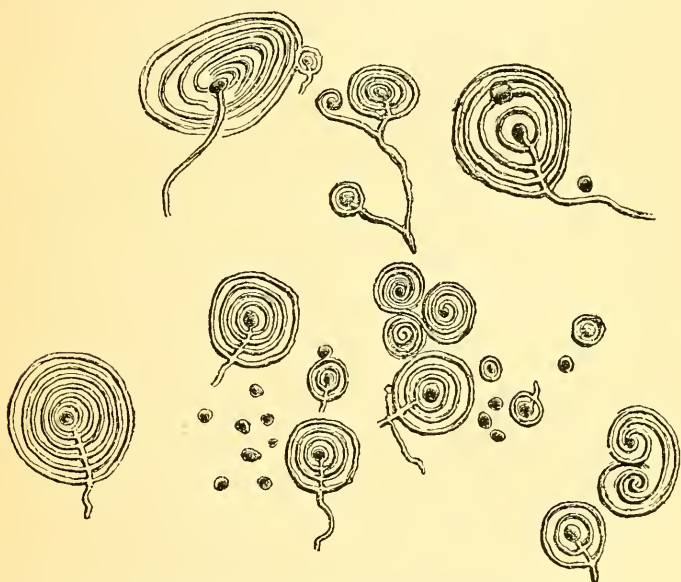
had forgotten the origin of Homer's story in the Sun Myth and the connection of the incident of the Apple of Love with the Sun Myth. It is clear from the discussion of the Trojan story in Herodotus that by his day many of the best informed people had come to regard the story of the abduction as actual fact, but questioned the place where it had occurred, and that a connection with the Sun Myth had been forgotten. Perhaps the Spring Dances had been discontinued in the course of the four hundred years that intervened, or their interpretation had been lost, as is common with festivals, especially before the art of writing has given them something of permanence. Also, Homer may have changed the meaning of the myth so much from its original that the connection was obscured, for his sad return of Helen is quite the opposite of the glad return of the Shining Sun Princess as pictured on the pitcher and in the dance. He shows Helen hated and distrusted for sharing the guilt of Paris, and probably the more active of the two, and the tempter, for in the illustration on the pitcher she is shown leading, and he suggests in her name that she is the seducer, by a pun on *ἐλεῖν*, the infinitive active from the verb *αἰρέω*, meaning *to lead by the hand, to seduce*. Ancient illustrations commonly represented this pair *hand in hand*, with Helen leading—early stories always represent the woman as the temptress, it seems, and all precedents would be broken if Paris were shown as leading.

As fact, or authentic history, then, the two main incidents of Homer, (1) the abduction of Helen and (2) the fall of the city which sheltered her, turn out to be more than doubtful, and to be, instead, such stuff as poets have always made their dreams of, myth, allegory, and high romance, in which can be expressed the loves, the hates and the aspirations of the times.

Is there nothing of historic value, then, in Homer's poems? Helen as a motive for a ten years' siege and the Apple of Love are not in themselves facts, but are evidence of the important facts (1) that the home and family relations were felt to be endangered in Homer's day by false, foreign gods who tempted people into evil ways, especially by Aphrodite, who was Ashtaroth of Israel, Istar of Babylon; and that (2) poets of Apollo in Greece, as well as Prophets of Jehovah in Israel, were teaching the people Wisdom as to Love and the Home, and as to life generally.

It is a fact, also, that the Windy Citadel where Homer localized his story existed as he represented it, and from Schliemann's discoveries there we can see the walls, the pottery, the jewelry and many

of the articles of daily interest in that prehistoric time. From Schliemann's discoveries at Mycenae, we believe that Agamemnon also was historic, and that he suffered such a death as Homer tells. The local traditions at Mycenae and the traditions that ran through history pointed Dr. Schliemann the way to Agamemnon's tomb, and what he found in the tombs that he unearched at Mycenae was more than enough to justify the traditions that had lingered through the centuries. It is reasonable to believe also that a king of a neighboring island found his wife faithful to him when he returned from the war after long wanderings, thanks to the clever device she had used to put suitors off, and that she became as a proverb for her



ROCK SCULPTURES OF AUCHNABREACH, SCOTLAND.

After Sir. J. Lubbock and Sir J. Y. Simpson.

wifely fidelity. Such a death as Agamemnon's and such a device as Penelope's are distinctive, hard for a story-teller to invent, and more likely than not to have happened in such ancient, unsettled times and under such circumstances as the war brought about.

But the King whose body lay buried so richly at Mycenae until his tomb was opened by Schliemann cannot have been called *Agamemnon* during his life, and his Queen cannot have been called *Clytemnestra* when he married her, for these names are allegorical and apply to the events of their later life—Agamemnon can have been called by that name only after his death:

Clytemnestra, κλύτω μνηστήρ, I give ear to a suitor;

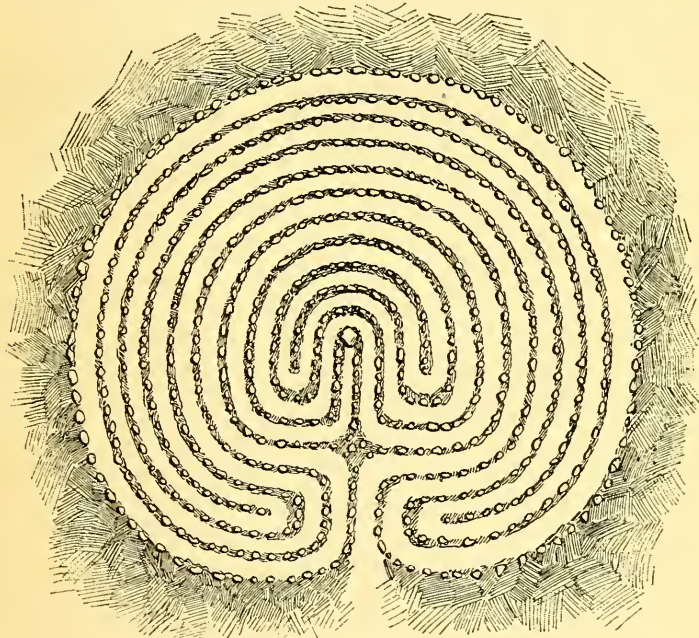
Agamemnon, ἀγάμος, a fatal marriage, a marriage that is no marriage.

Clytemnestra gave ear to her suitor, Aegisthus, and she made Agamemnon's a fatal marriage by killing him. The poet does not even mention the names by which this King and Queen were actually called in life, and these allegorical names became fixed upon them to the exclusion of the names to which they had answered, even in their home towns, where their tombs were called *Agamemnon's* and *Clytemnestra's* from Homer's day to Schliemann's. The use of these names is proof that the poet used his historic facts as a means to ideal truth, not for their literal value.

Still another fact that bears in upon us as we study the characters and the incidents of Homer is that Democracy was rising, and was near at hand. The first evidence of this is the many unusually horrible crimes ascribed to the members of the House of Atreus, to which Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Aegisthus belonged. An exactly parallel case is argued by Saint Augustine in the *City of God*, where he shows that the early kings of Rome did probably not commit the many unsually horrible crimes ascribed to them, but that at least some of the stories to their discredit were probably started as rumors against them by men of a rising republican party who distrusted kings and were ready to believe the worst against them. When the kings had fallen and the republican party prevailed, these rumors would be passed along as true history. It is a melancholy fact that much of the history that has been given to the world is of this untrustworthy kind, having been written by the victorious party to whiten its own cause and blacken its adversary's. We may well chew upon this profound comment of Saint Augustine's whether we ponder the legendary account of the House of Atreus, or that of Tarquin, or the equally untrustworthy stories that pass as actual history down to the latest times. Men and events should not be judged on the testimony of enemies alone. With this principle in mind, we conclude that the House of Atreus, which seems to have really existed, was probably not so bad as it has been reputed, but that a democratic party, which was forming, and which succeeded in abolishing kings in Greece shortly after Homer's time, made the worst of its members, probably assisted in this work by the great Ionian Bard, who pointed his moral and adorned his tale by painting the Mycenaean, or Spartan Kings into his story.

Homer might well take the hated House from Mycenae to pic-

ture baneful kings, driven to ruin, as an example of what kings ought not to be; he would naturally repeat all that had been told of them by their enemies, and even add artistic shadows of his own to heighten the effect. As his story was mainly romantic and allegorical, it would be nothing against him that he used his facts freely, his theme being general, *good and bad kings, good and bad homes, and good and bad men and women*. As with the names of the individual characters, the allegorical name of this house as a whole is notice on the part of the poet to his hearers and readers that literal truth, or history, is not his purpose. The name *Atreus*, derived from ἀτρός, meaning *baneful, driven to ruin*, like the names *Clytemnestra*



TROJABURG AT WISBY, GOTLAND.

After K. Braun's *Wisbyfahrt*, Leipsic, 1882, p. 120.

and *Agamemnon*, would not be used by their friends and supporters in addressing the Kings of this House, but might be used by discontented people murmuring against them, in secret so long as the kings continued to rule, openly as soon as the kings had been deposed, or driven out. Or, this name may have been originated by some person of a foreign or hostile State, to express his reaction to the Mycenaean House—so Homer might have originated it himself.

Homer certainly did not hold a theory that kings can do no wrong, witness his *Agamemnon*, *Menelaus*, and *Priam*; he did

believe that there might be wise and generous kings, witness his Odysseus, who may be taken as representing what the best king would be. Whether or not Homer believed in kings as an institution and preferable to judges, such as had ruled Israel or such as were to constitute the Court of Areopagus after his day, is another question.

Odysseus was a king who had the good of his law-abiding people at heart, as we realize when he cared for one of his men who was killed by falling from a housetop as a result of his drinking too much wine. The man was to blame himself for his accident, and it might be looked upon as a judgment of the gods upon him for his foolishness—persons who looked too much upon the wine when it was red were often punished for it in the *Odyssey*, as in the book of *Proverbs*. So this sailor was punished, and Polyphemus, and the men whom Circe turned into swine, "swine" being allegorical, as with us, for those who eat and drink too much. Though Odysseus was in no wise responsible for this foolish companion, he sailed far out of his way to return to the place where the accident had occurred so as to give the body the rites of burial, for the Greeks believed that if the rites of the dead had not been performed the soul must wander disconsolate, unable to attain forgetfulness by crossing the River. Odysseus protected his men well throughout the journey, counselled them well, and had uncommon patience with them, even with the one who was least wise and loyal and who seemed to be trying to start a mutiny against him. It was not his fault that none of his men returned with him when he finally reached home—they had fallen by the way through their own perversity, having, contrary to his advice, "devoured the Kine of the exalted Sun," that is, committed some sin against the god Apollo.

As Homer shows Odysseus, he is a King after the model of the King commanded in Deuteronomy XVII, "his heart not lifted up above his brethren," "not turning aside from the Commandments to the right hand or the left"; and of him Athene, Wisdom, might say, as was written of Abraham, "I know him, that he will command his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do judgment." His ideal as a ruler is that of the Judges and officers of Israel, expressed in Deuteronomy XVI, "They shall judge the people with just judgment," and in practice he is shown very deliberate and cautious in collecting evidence before he forms his judgment against evil-doers. He is even generous in giving the Suitors and the guilty servants a last chance to mend their ways. Where his people "do keep the way of the Lord," as his good slave,

the swineherd Eumaeus does. Odysseus is humanly warm and kind, "as man to man," and democratic if the fact of slavery could be forgotten—if he had lived in the time of Solon, the transition to a true Democracy would not have been so hard for him as for kings of the type of Menelaus and Agamemnon.

However, Odysseus was far from being democratic, and Homer shows just how far in the incident where men of the common people presume to voice their opinion on public policies when an Assembly has been called. As king to king, Odysseus has rebuked Agamemnon sternly and has opposed his policy, for Agamemnon has proposed to give up the siege and go home:

"Atreus' son, what word has passed the barrier of thy lips! Man of mischief, sure thou shouldst lead some other inglorious army, not be king among us. . . . Be silent, lest some other of the Achaeans hear thy word, that no man should so much as suffer to pass from his mouth. . . . And now I wholly scorn thy thoughts, such words as thou hast uttered, that thou, in the midst of war and battle dost bid us draw down the well-timbered ships to the sea, that more than ever the Trojans should possess their desire . . . and sheer destruction fall upon us."

All of the Chieftains, as well as the Kings, were permitted to speak their minds freely on this question, and even the youngest, Diomedes, opposed the king in the council, "where it is right to do so." It is clear that within that narrow circle, democracy had almost arrived.

But the common people were prevented from speaking and by Odysseus:

"Wherever man of the people he saw and found him shouting, he drave him with his sceptre and chode him with loud words: 'Good sir, sit still, and hearken to the words of others that are thy betters; thou art no warrior, but a weakling, never reckoned whether in battle or in Council. In no wise can the Achaeans all be kings here. A multitude of masters is no good thing. Let there be one master, one king, to whom the Son of Chronos hath granted it.'"

Among those men of the people whom Odysseus found shouting and silenced was Thersites, who was criticizing Agamemnon hotly and advising his companions to take him at his word and return home, his points against the king being that he was discontented though he lacked nothing, that his tents were full of bronze and of women captives taken by the army, and that he would "gorge himself with meed of honors" but would not give due honor to those who fought for him, as to Achilles and the common soldiers. These charges were all justified, as Homer's story shows, and from our democratic point of view and that of democratic Athens, Thersites was right in his opinion of Agamemnon and of kings is general. Perhaps this speech was the more irritating to Odysseus because it was true, and because it might, if followed by free discussion, lead

the army to give up the siege. His own motive was higher than that of Agamemnon, but he did not propose to discuss that matter, made no reply to the charges that Thersites made, and resorted to insults and blows instead:

"Looking sternly at him, goodly Odysseus came straight to his side and with hard words rebuked him: 'Thersites, reckless of words, shrill orator though thou art, refrain thyself, nor aim to strive singly against kings. For I deem that no mortal is baser than thou of all that with the sons of Atreus came from Ilios. Therefore were it well that thou shouldst not have kings in thy mouth as thou talkest, and utter revilings against them and be on thy watch for departure. . . . But I will tell thee plain, and what I say shall even be brought to pass: If I find thee again raving as now thou art, then may Odysseus' head no longer abide upon his shoulders, nor may I any more be called father of Telemachus, if I take thee not and strip from thee thy garments, thy mantle and tunic that cover thy nakedness, and for thyself send thee weeping to the swift ships, and beat thee out of the Assembly with shameful blows.'

"So spake he, and with his staff smote Thersites' back and shoulders; and he bowed down and a big tear fell from him, and a bloody weal stood up from his back beneath the golden sceptre.

"Then he sat down and was amazed and in pain with helpless look wiped away the tear. But the rest, though they were sorry, laughed lightly at him, and thus would one speak, looking at another standing by: 'Go to, . . . never again, forsooth, will this proud soul henceforth bid him revile the kings with slanderous words.'"

"The more 'tis the truth, sir, the more 'tis a libel," as Robert Burns wrote of a parallel case centuries later. The speakers who agreed with Odysseus that day that Thersites had "slandered" the kings, agreed on other occasions probably, and on the quiet, with Thersites in criticizing Odysseus. When they came to reflect on it, they would realize that Thersites had not been more "reckless in words" than Achilles had been in the Council, and that Odysseus himself had told Agamemnon truths bitterer than Thersites had spoken. Achilles had laid his hand on his sword to threaten the King, while he called him "folkdevouring king," making the same charge that Thersites made, and more vigorously, implying by this epithet "folkdevouring" that he stood with the people against Agamemnon. Not restraining himself from a feeling that majesty hedges a king, Achilles proceeded, "Thou heavy with wine, dog-faced and deer-hearted" (and this, in round terms, would mean *sot*, *brute* and *coward*), "thou shalt tear the heart within thee that thou didst in no wise honor the best of the Achaeans." Then he put his threat into execution by sulking in his tent and refusing to fight thereafter, although his services were sadly needed and many men of the Grecian army were to die because of his withdrawing. For this, Agamemnon did not punish him, and Odysseus did not punish him—only Apollo punished him, not because he had opposed the king, but because he had considered his own wrongs and his material reward rather than the high cause that his nation had espoused. The sons of

Atrous were given titular honor, and Homer calls Agamemnon "goodly" and "shepherd of the host" . . . where Achilles calls him "folk-devouring" and many incidents show what a baneful king he is to his people and his army, can it be that the poet uses "goodly" and "shepherd" in the spirit of Erasmus, with ironic praise of folly? Throughout the epics, he calls him also "baneful, driven to ruin," which would make him out to be a poor "shepherd," and far from "goodly"!

This incident of Thersites murmuring against the king and beaten for it, is evidence that a democratic spirit was rising in Homer's time, among the people, but was being repressed with violence. When Odysseus beat Thersites into silence, this was not refutation, though it might pass as such for the moment with thoughtless people, especially because the man who administered the beating held a reputation of being unusually wise and just, but as time passed those same thoughtless people would come to understand that Odysseus had prevailed by one of his many wiles over their spokesman, who had been right in the main, telling some wholesome truths about Agamemnon. At the worst, Thersites had been more nearly right than Agamemnon was, and showed a nobler spirit, though not appreciation of the great issues that Athene, and Apollo, and great Odysseus were fighting out at Troy.

As one reads this whole passage, one doubts whether Homer himself in his deepest heart was not with Thersites, although he admired Odysseus greatly and thought that one such king might redeem several of the type of Menelaus and Agamemnon. As between Odysseus and Thersites, Homer is doubtless with Odysseus, but as between Agamemnon and Thersites? . . . He pictured the sons of Atrous too well to let us think that he believed in monarchy under such baneful and ruinous kings. A rapid succession of blunders and conscious wrongs is Agamemnon's reign, with hardly a point to the good. He is incompetent, as he is generally unworthy. How demoralizing, for him to propose to the soldiers to launch the ships and return to Greece, before the matter had even been discussed in Council. How foolish, to call an Assembly late in the day, when the young soldiers would have dulled their judgment by heavy drinking! This, just after he alienated his foremost soldier by doing him an injustice, and that just after he had brought pestilence on his army by wronging a priest of Apollo!

(To Be Continued).