

The World's Greatest Poems.

IV.—HOMER'S "ILIAD".



R. Augustine Birrell, among his delightful "Obiter Dicta," (1) has what one must, I suppose, call, for want of a better name, an essay on Pope, whom he ranks "amongst the first of the successful authors", those "who have turned their lyrical cry into consols, and their "odes into acres".(2) As might be expected, he devotes a due share of attention to the poet's translation of Homer;

"Since, thanks to Homer, I do live and thrive": whereanent, he relates a pleasant anecdote, to the effect that "Homer's Iliad is "the best, and Pope's Homer's Iliad is the second best. Whose is "the third best", Mr. Birrell adds, "is controversy."

Pope, certainly, did "live and thrive" by Homer's aid, as he, himself, admits, as above, in his one of his Epistles—I think. The Iliad took him five years to translate—or write; but he cleared over \$25,000 thereby; no inadequate "remuneration", surely. Note, if you will, that I said "write", rather than "translate"; for Pope, as Mr. Augustine Birrell reminds us "knew next to no Greek." "But then" he continues, he did not work upon the Greek text. "He "had Chapman's translation ever at his elbows, also the version of "John Ogilvy, which had appeared in 1660". (3)

Concerning Chapman's "Iliads of Homer" I shall have something to say, presently. Concerning Pope's work, listen to Professor Conington, (4) as quoted by Mr. Birrell:

"It has been, and I hope still is, the delight of every intelligent school-boy. They read of kings and heroes, and mighty "deeds, in language which in its calm, majestic flow, unhasting, "unresting, carries them on as irresistibly as Homer's own could do, "were they born readers of Greek, and their minds are filled with "a conception of the heroic age, not, indeed, strictly true, but almost as near the truth as that which was entertained by Virgil himself." Possibly, Professor Conington's hope may, hereafter, be fulfilled in the case of Ottawa University students. *Fiat.*

(1) Second series.

(2) P. 75.

(3) *Ibid.*

(4) P. 76.