

most truthful—the hard lot of captives, the wrongs of women, the sacred rights of hospitality most sacredly observed, the strength and sanctity of ties of blood, the honourable pursuit of piracy and free-booting, the investiture of the Olympian Deities with human motives, passions, and frailties—all these (taking a few examples out of many) find a place in the Homeric picture, for they were all in keeping with the character of his own times: and it is thus, that these compositions are the unconscious expositors of their own contemporary society. We have no parallel in ancient or modern history to measure and denote the supreme and universal influence Homer had on the Greek mind, sympathies, and character. At school the Greek learned his Homer by heart, and was taught all he knew or cared to know of history, geography, genealogy, religion, morality, and criticism, from this authorised and standard text-book. In international disputes this poet was appealed to as an infallible authority, as in the dispute between Athens and Megara respecting Salamis. In religious solemnisations Homer was to the soul of devotion what the Bible is to ourselves. In discussions of moral philosophy, history, and genealogy, his authority was held decisive. And on all questions of literary taste the only orthodox canons of criticism were those drawn from, or sanctioned by, this—

“dead but sceptred sovereign, who still ruled
Their spirits from his urn.”

It is not without reason that these poems have occupied so large a space in the thoughts and affections of mankind. It was not, indeed, without reason that the haughty soul of Alexander the Great yielded only to their irresistible power and beauty, and that, over them alone the philosophic Plato