

was not. It was the same religion in this respect, that, at no epoch during that long course of years, was there a general breach in the continuity of its traditions; while the names and characteristics of its deities were reputed to be maintained. But it was not the same religion in so far as its ethical tone had on the whole seriously declined. A mass of new matter had overlaid it, and had altered the more delicate lines of its features.

Thus far we have treated the Olympian religion largely with reference to its authorship. Perhaps it will be well to give a short outline of its doctrines. There are, in effect, three characteristics to which we may attach special weight as proving of themselves that the Olympian scheme of Homer exhibits a real and practical, though an imperfect religion. Firstly, it embodies the doctrine of Providence, or an actual divine government in human affairs. Secondly, it exhibits a constant resort to prayer in present emergencies. The prayer is in most cases, limited to the needs or aims of the person who offers it. If it be a public prayer, then of course it embraces collectively the cases of all those whom the person offering it may represent. Beyond this it seems clear that there was an act of worship not only in the sacrificial feasts, but at every meal or entertainment, at least where animal food was used.

Thirdly, it appears that worship and moral conduct were regarded as having some real connection one with the other. The virtue specially religious was the case of the suppliant and stranger, while the devout or pious man is never a man of wicked life. If we look beneath the surface, the affairs of this world are in truth governed according to the poems, by the interplay of three agencies. These are first, the Gods: second, destiny; third, human will; and the acts of man and events of life are the resultant. (to use the phrase of mechanics), from these competing forces, each of which is real, acts upon the others and is limited by them. Destiny may overcome man; or again man may overcome destiny. Again, the gods or a god may overcome man, but nowhere do we find that man overcomes a recognized Achaian god.

Without attempting here to define the degree in which the great undertaking of Homer partook of the elements of moral reform, this much at least appears to be certain. He first, and he only, in the history of ancient religions, brought order out of chaos, and unity out of diversities which might well have seemed irreconcilable. The statement is not made that the Homeric system represents more accurately the beliefs of the people among whom it sprang into existence than