

THE LIFE OF HOMER.

THE *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, ascribed to Homer, have, in our time, like the waters of ancient Nile, no known and universally acknowledged fountain-head. And yet—long before the sublime genius of *Æschylus* “breathed horror” upon the Athenian stage; long before *Herodotus* told his quaint stories to his admiring countrymen—the name of Homer had become a spell to the ear and heart of *Hellas*, and the sunny legends of this vates (emphatically, both prophet and poet) had become the oracular sources of all knowledge, human and divine; had, in fact, become to the Greek public all that the Bible, the press, and Shakespeare combined, are to the public of our own day. It is, then, but a natural and justifiably passionate form of curiosity we indulge, when we long to know much concerning the life and career of him whose lays, after the lapse of twenty-seven centuries, still live in the brains and hearts of a civilised humanity, that fondly looks back upon him as the fountain source of all poetry, and the crystal mirror of the old Hellenic world.

The age, the country, and even the very personality of Homer have all been disputed points; and time has thrown over them a mist of uncertainty that for ever forbids the full satisfaction of the intense interest we cannot but feel respecting them. The best authorities place the date of the poet after the Ionic migration. *Herodotus* (bk. ii. 53)