

CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE.

ORIGIN OF THE HOMERIC POEMS. A lecture by Dr. Hermann Bonitz. Translated from the Fourth German Edition by Lewis R. Packard. New York: Harper & Brothers; Toronto: James Campbell & Son.

THIS lecture of Dr. Bonitz adds another contribution to the now somewhat voluminous literature on the Homeric question. It contains an excellent digest, in the shape of appended notes, of the main features of the controversy viewed from a German standpoint. Since the days of Wolf's celebrated *Prologomena* the question has assumed, varied forms, and while the lecture in question by no means settles the points in dispute, we recommend its careful perusal to all students of classical literature as an earnest endeavour to narrow the difficulties of arriving at a satisfactory conclusion. We shall endeavour to give a brief resumé.

The influence of the Homeric poems on subsequent literature is manifold. The tragedians were eminently indebted to him—the historians accepted his legends—the philosophers considered him an oracle of the national faith—while even the most eminent of Greek sculptors borrowed the idea of his celebrated statue of Olympian Zeus from the description found in Homer. This influence was further extended by Solon ordering the recital of these poems at the Panathenæo, and from this time no doubt every Athenian youth was taught the poems of the divine bard. The argument, which in many respects is similar to that of Wolf, may be briefly stated thus: "The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are not the works of a single poet, but each of them—certainly the older of the two, the *Iliad*—is made up of separate songs of different poets. Trojan legends were in circulation among the Greeks, each giving an account of a single action, designed to be

accompanied by the lyre and to be sung on festive occasions. In course of time the songs were arranged." The author then assumes as proved the question that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were not originally committed to writing, and considers that the question of the plurality of authorship can only satisfactorily be settled by examining the self-consistency of the poems themselves. Lachmann first gave an impulse to this part of the dispute and regarded this as the only solution of the difficulty. Dr. Bonitz then enumerates the various poems included by the ancients as Homeric, such as went under the general name of "*Troica*," and concludes that the Alexandrian grammarians were the first to limit the authorship of Homer to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

"But not only did the ancients differ as to what poems were Homeric and what were not, but we also find that the dates of the age of Homer vary from the eleventh century to the eighth, or a period of about 400 years. The *Synmæan* traditions place him in the eleventh century, the Chian in the tenth, the Samian and Herodotus in the ninth. These facts lead us to conclude that the name Homer signified nothing more than the rise of epic poetry at a particular point, and the sequence of dates marks the gradual development of this class of composition over the shores of Western Asia." Such are the main arguments affecting the traditional statements of the Homeric question. His arguments as to the self-consistency of the *Iliad* may be stated as follows: The events recorded in the main part of the *Iliad* occupy three days. The adventures of the first day are recorded in *Il.* ii.-vii.; those of the second day in *Il.* xi.-xviii.; while those of the third day comprise *Il.* xx.-xxii. In describing the second day's conflict, after some eighty lines we are