

the principal cities of Greece, as is intimated in the well known lines,

"Seven cities contend for Homer dead,
Through which the living Homer begg'd his bread."*

It is affirmed, that through a considerable part of his life he kept a school in Chios; and modern travellers assure us, that the inhabitants pretend to point out the very seats on the rocks which were occupied by this distinguished master and his pupils. It is indeed certain, that the people of this island have ever held him in the greatest veneration; this appears from the fact, that they struck medals, on which they depicted the poet seated on a throne, and holding in his hand the Iliad and the Odyssey; and for many ages, from motives of esteem for his memory, they celebrated festivals every fifth year to his honour.

But the genius of Homer was so extraordinary, that his fame could not be confined to Greece, or to any single nation in the world. Ptolemy Philopater, as an expression of admiration of his writings, built a magnificent temple, in the midst of which he placed a fine statue of the poet, and around it beautiful models of the cities which contended for the enviable distinction of his birth. Alexander was so delighted with the poems of Homer, that he usually placed them under his pillow when he slept. The Iliad he is said to have deposited in one of the richest caskets of Darius; intimating that there was no other cabinet worthy to contain so vast a treasure. The poet is said to have been blind during a great part of the decline of life; it is also affirmed, that his ashes repose in the small island of Cos. But this is uncertain; indeed, the age in which he lived is so remote, that the authentic particulars of his life and death are involved in very great obscurity.

The Athenian magistrate, Pisistratus, collected his poems, and placed them in the order in which they have come down to our hands.

However uncertain the biographical accounts of this great poet may be, it is unquestionable that he has immortalized his name by the originality, energy, beauty, and sublimity of his writings. The stern anger of Achilles, with its fatal results to the Grecian army, is the principal subject of the Iliad. His other great poem, the Odyssey, narrates the history of the adventures of Ulysses on his return to Ithica, after the destruction of Troy. It is evident, even to a superficial reader, that the Iliad is written in a far higher strain of poetry than the Odyssey. Longinus compares the Iliad to the mid-day, and the Odyssey to the setting sun; and remarks, that the latter still presents much of its original splendour and majesty, though deprived of its meridian heat.

In ancient times, no man was thought to have been well educated, who could not readily quote from memory large portions of these truly astonishing productions.

The justly celebrated traveller, Dr. Clarke, bears ample testimony to the accuracy of Homer's geographical allusions and narrations. And very many learned persons who have visited Greece, have particularly noticed, that the several countries and objects described by the poet several thousand years since, present, even at the present day, the same general appearances.

It is impossible, that a person of any feeling or taste can read Homer without a full conviction that he possessed a sublime and an original genius. His verse, indeed is music. As his lines are recited which refer to the ocean, who does not hear the resounding of the waves and the tempests? Who does not feel, on this, and on a multitude of other subjects, that the very language beautifully harmonizes with the sense? The scenes described by the vivid fancy of the poet, actually rise in succession before the delighted or terrified imagination of the reader.

It would be an endless task to point out all the beauties of this distinguished writer. A few of them, however, cannot fail highly to gratify the youthful reader. The description of the shield of Achilles, formed of five massy plates of silver, is a beautiful creation of this sublime poet. How admirable and how varied are its ornaments! On it shine the moon, the sun, and the principal of the constellations of heaven. Next, there are two cities, one in a state of profound peace; banquets and music, youthful mirth and

gaiety, with the assembled senate, calmly deliberating on its affairs, are presented to the eye. The other town is besieged by its foes; hosts of warriors are in array around it; on this side the citizens form the secret ambush. Yonder, on the turrets of the towers, stand the trembling mothers, with their children, while the contest rages beneath them.

In the next compartment of the shield are the labours of agriculture; the plowmen, with the shining share, turn up the furrowed field; they take the full goblet from their master's hand, and with new energy resume their labours. A field immediately succeeds, where the golden grain waves in its beauty; there are the reapers with their sickles. Some are cutting down the yellow treasure,—others are binding it up,—and there are children who are carrying away the sheaves. There, too, the owner of the crop looks on and smiles; he has spread the banquet on the cool turf, beneath the ample shade of the fine spreading oak.

Beyond the field of ripe grain is a fine vineyard. The large clusters seem to hang on props of silver; blooming youth, and fair maidens, gather, and bear homeward on their heads the purple harvest.

Then, herds of oxen meet the eye, with the herdsmen and their dogs. Two lions rush from the woods,—they seize the noblest of the cattle, while the dogs bay at a distance, and refuse to attack them.

Thick forests and verdant meadows; bleating flocks and folds; stalls for cattle, and scattered cottages and rustic revelry, then burst on the view, and decorate the shield. As a finish to this noble work, the artist poured around its extremity the waters of the ocean; the waves seem to roll in "living silver."

The poet's description of Juno's chariot, which he calls "a blazing car," is very beautiful:

"The bossy naves of solid silver shone,
Braces of gold suspend the moving throne;
The car, behind, an arching figure bore;
The bending concave form'd an arch before;
Silver the beam, th' extended yoke was gold,
And golden reigns the immortal coursers hold."

The course of her chariot through the ethereal way, is, perhaps, one of the sublimest passages in Homer:

"Swift down the steep of heav'n the chariot rolls,
Between th' expanded earth and stary poles:
Far, as a shepherd from some point on high,
O'er the wide main extends his boundless eye;
Thro' such a space of air, with thund'ring sound,
At every leap th' immortal coursers bound."

The parting of Andromache and Hector, is a scene full of tenderness and beauty. The hero had put on his armour, and was just issuing through the gate of Troy to combat the foe,—when, mindful of the uncertainty of his return, he pauses, and comes back to bid his wife and little boy farewell. The nurse brought the dear babe; when, as the poet tells us,

"Silent the warrior smil'd, and pleas'd resign'd
To tender passions all his mighty mind."

As the father stretched out his arms to clasp the infant in his embrace,—frightened at his dazzling helmet, and nodding plumes, the little boy clung more closely to the bosom of his nurse,—

"With secret pleasure each fond parent smil'd;
And Hector hastened to relieve his child;
The glittering terrors from his brows unbound,
And plac'd the beaming helmet on the ground;
Then kiss'd the child,"—

And lifting him on high, affectionately commended him to the care of heaven.

Full of apprehension for her husband's welfare, Andromache entreats him not to go forth to meet the foe; she points him to a tower, near some wild fig trees, where he may effectually, and with more security to himself, serve his country; she enforces her counsel by reminding him of the greatness of his danger, since her father, and her seven brothers, and many of her kindred had fallen by the hand of Achilles. With great tenderness and beauty she adds—

"Yet while my Hector still survives I see
My father, mother, brethren, all, in thee;
Alas! my parents, brothers, kindred, all,
Once more will perish, if my Hector fall;
Thy wife, thy infant, in thy danger share;
O prove a husband's and a father's care!"

* "Smyrna, Chios, Colophon, Salamis, Rhodes, Argos, Athens,
Orbis de patria certat, Homere, tuâ."