

## Homer's Iliad—Condensed by William F. Harris

THE Greeks were princes of story-telling, and Homer was their king, who he was and where he lived is one of the unanswered questions of history. Seven cities and more claimed him as their greater source of pride. The most we can be sure of is that to us have come down two of the many poems that bear his name, the Iliad and the Odyssey.

Like the Hebrew Bible, they have become part of the heritage of universal humanity. We call them epic poems; they are rather great historical romances.

Each has a story of its own: in the Iliad it is the wrath of Achilles against King Agamemnon; in the Odyssey it is the wanderings of Odysseus on his way back from the wars at Troy. Back of them both as remotest cause is the tale of the fatal beauty of Helen. In each are innumerable short stories, which have been stored.

The elders of the Trojans from their seats upon the Scæan Gate looked down upon the hosts of Greeks and Trojans marshalled in the plain. For nine long years the armies had contended. Why had Agamemnon brought the men of cities to fight around the walls of Priam's Troy? What was it all about?

Homer sings of the wrath of Achilles, but the beginning of all the trouble goes far back of that, to the tale of a princely shepherd on a night surprised as he watched his flock upon Mount Ida. The goddesses Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite makes him choose one of the world-old wishes: the judgment of Paris for a fair face and love. So fulfil her promise. Aphrodite leads him to King Menelaus' court in Sparta. Back to Troy Paris brings Queen Helen and great treasure. A hue and cry follow throughout Greece; Menelaus calls to his help the great overlord, his brother Agamemnon, Achilles the sacker of cities, wily Odysseus, venerable and genial Nestor, and all the chivalry of the land with men and ships to make war on Troy.

Others must pay for the wrongs of Paris—old King Priam of the Ashen Spear, his venerable queen Hecuba, Hector and his noble wife Andromache, his little son Astyanax, Cassandra, and all the rest whom the toll of war involves. Other stories of the many Greek epics, now lost, bring the tale winding up to the tenth, where the Iliad begins. Hector is the leader of the Trojans; Achilles has been the great fighting force of the Greeks, though now he has withdrawn in anger to his tent because of a slight put upon his honor by King Agamemnon.

The battle hosts are advancing to the battle, a dramatic moment brings Menelaus and Paris in sight of one another. The wrath of Hector blazes out against Paris for all the evil and shame his theft of woman and wealth have brought. The gay and debonair Paris, however, can show splendid moments. Hector, they taught, just. But through not the lovely gifts of golden Aphrodite. The glorious gifts that the gods give are not to be flung away, no man could take them by mere willingness. But if thou doest wish me to battle and fight, make all the rest of the Trojans and Achalians sit down, and put me in the midst with warlike Menelaus to fight for Helen and all her goods, to see which shall conquer and prove the better man. Let the rest conclude a friendship of trusty oaths; may ye dwell in fertile Troyland, and the others go back to Argos, nurse of steeds, and Achaea for fair women."

So it was that the hosts sat in high expectation in the plain, and Priam and the Trojan elders were



houses of romance for writers ever since first they became known.

It is one of the marvels of the Greeks that they step out of the mist of unrecorded history with a highly developed civilization, portrayed in two of the world's masterpieces of literature. The Greeks in later years wrote "lives" of Homer with great exactness and minute detail. They knew no more about the "blind bard" than do we. Indeed they were not even sure that one poet wrote both tales. But that the stories were the work of supreme geniuses they were as sure as have been all men since their day who have read them.

Homer was a Greek's "best seller"; they thronged in thousands to hear them recited; their religion, their thought, their education were all based on him, under whose name is told the great story of their heroes.

gathered on the Scæan gate. And Priam, who bore no grudge against Helen for all the misery her fair face had brought to him and Troy—for he saw the hands of the gods in it all—called her to his side to tell him of the chiefs among whom she had once lived. Then those elders, who had long since seen their day, and the first to compliment a woman's beauty has ever received—how many thousand years ago—as they saw Helen advancing. "No cause for anger that Trojans and well-greaved Achalians for such a woman long time should suffer sorrow." Not another word! But those old men upon the wall have drawn on you and me a picture of the world's desire. "But even so," they continued, "let our men home upon the ships and stay not as a source of sorrow to us and to our children after us."

The high hopes raised of settling all the troubles by the duel of the champion were in vain. The contest was inconclusive and the truce was broken.

The scene changes to Troy itself.

In an interval of the battle great Hector of the glancing helm had gone to the citadel. And there he said farewell to Andromache, his wife, and to his little boy,

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