

The World of Homer by Andrew Lang In 1895 I published *Homer and the Epic* (pp. 424), containing a criticism of Wolf's theory, if theory it can be called, which is the mother of modern Homeric criticism. I analysed, book by book, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, observing on the modern ideas of interpolation and the modern objections to many scores of passages which, as a rule, I defended from charges of lateness and inconsistency. I added chapters on the Lost Epics of Greece, on Archeology, and on the early Epic poetry of other ages and peoples which offers analogies, more or less imperfect, with Homer. On the whole my conclusions were identical with those of Signor Comparetti, in his preface to his learned book on the Finnish Kalevala. He says: The anatomical and conjectural analysis which has been applied so often and so long ... to the Homeric poems and other national epics, proceeds from an universal abstract principle, which is correct, and from a concrete application of that principle, which is imaginary and groundless. The true principle, recognised since the end of the eighteenth century, separates the personal and learned Art Epics, like the *Æneid* and the *Gerusalemme Liberata*, from those which belong to the period of spontaneous epic production, when Folk-singers fashioned many epic lays of small or moderate compass. (Perhaps Folk-singers is hardly the right term. Such songs of exploits as the Borderers made themselves, as Bishop Lesley said in 1578, were not epic lays, but ballads like *Jock o the Side*, and *Archie o Cafield*, and *Johnie Cock*, despite its name the most romantic of all.) These epic lays were called national or popular, not only by virtue of their contents, sentiment, and audience, but mainly because the poetry which takes this form is natural, collective, popular, and hence national in its origin and development. (By collective I understand the author to mean, not that a whole country-side automatically and collectively bellows out a new ballad, but that the original author uses traditional formulae in verse wherever he can, and that his ballad is altered in the course of recitation by others, so that any version which has been obtained from recitation is, in fact, one of many variants which have arisen in course of time and recitation.) The baseless application of this principle is to regard the national poems not as creations of a single poet, but as put together out of shorter pre-existing lays (either by a single person at one time, or by several in succession), until the final fashioning of the poem. And this process is conceived of as a mere stringing together, without any sort of fusion, so that a critical philologist, thanks to his special sharpness and by aid of certain criteria, would be in a position to recognise the joinings, and to recover the lays out of which the poem has been made up. With this preconceived idea people have gone on anatomising the Epics; from Lachmann to the present day they have not desisted, although so far no positive satisfactory and harmonious results have been won. This restless business of analysis, which has lasted so long, impatient of its own fruitlessness, yet unconvinced of it, builds up and pulls down, and builds again, while its shifting foundations, its insufficient and falsely applied criteria, condemn it to remain fruitless, tedious, and repulsive. The observer marks with amazement the degree of intellectual shortsightedness produced by excessive and exclusive analysis. The investigator becomes a sort of man-microscope, who can see atoms but not bodies; motes, and these magnified, but not beams. Comparetti proceeds: No doubt before the epic there existed the shorter lays; but what is the relation of the lays to the epic? Is the epic a mere material synthesis of lays, or does it stand to them as a thing higher in the scale of poetic organisms,—does it move on a loftier plane, attaining higher, broader c

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