BOOK REVIEWS


In an article on "Contemporary Sociology" in the *American Journal of Sociology* for March, 1902, I ventured this remark: "I have sometimes thought that more could be extracted from literature than is commonly supposed. If the early literature, like that of Greece and Rome, of India, Egypt, Persia, Syria, and China, could be thoroughly sifted for social facts, the labor, though great, would be well repaid. Such writers did not intentionally inform the world as to the industrial, economic, and social condition of the ages and countries in which they lived and wrote, but on every page occur words that are full of meaning for the sociologist who will carefully weigh them and learn what they imply" (p. 641). While that article was in press the present little book came into my hands. Judging from it there seems reason to think that Professor Sumner and his assistants at Yale are working somewhat along that line. This work, certainly, which, the author says, "is modelled on the as yet unpublished system of Professor Sumner," aims to accomplish for the Homeric literature the purpose outlined in the passage quoted. On the whole it may be said to have been successful in this, although the treatment is much too brief to do justice to the theme. An entire volume might well have been devoted to the industrial and economic aspects which are treated in one chapter (chap. xi) of 72 pages, or at most to that and the very short chapter on Property (chap. iv), which two cognate subjects are here illogically separated by the long chapter on Religious Ideas and Usages, with which the world is already comparatively familiar. Marriage and the Family (chap. v) is also much underdone, while Government, Classes Justice, etc. (chap. vi) receive a fairly proportionate treatment.

A careful reading of this work, however, affords a pretty good picture of the Homeric Greeks as a race. They were the result of the natural process of race amalgamation shown by Gumplovicz (with whom our author is acquainted) to be almost universal, at least throughout the Old World, brought about by the conquest of an inferior by a superior
race. In this case the superior race was "a detachment of those nomadic conquerors who ever and anon swept forth from the plains of central Asia, infusing fresh blood and vigor into the societies with which they came into contact." The native races were mostly enslaved, but the women were largely made concubines of the conquerors, which insured a complete mixing of the blood. The resultant Greek and Trojan race occupied in Homer's time about the second status of barbarism. We are so accustomed to think of the Greeks as a highly civilized race of men that this may sound strange. But in talking about the Greeks we entirely lose the perspective and ignore the immense difference between the Greece of Homer and the Greece of Pericles or Aristotle. It is something like confounding the age of King Arthur with that of Queen Victoria.

The Homeric Greeks rated themselves as an inferior race, and looked to the far East for culture and refinement. They were an advanced race only in a relative sense, when, for example, they compared themselves with the Cyclopes and Læstrygonians, who were reputed to be cannibals. The culture of the East was brought to Greece chiefly through the Phœnicians (Phœacians), who were the traders of the world, and therefore despised, but upon whom the Greeks were wholly dependent for all civilizing elements. Most manufactured or artificial products were brought from the East by the Phœnicians, but the Greeks could exchange for them fabrics, especially linen, papyrus-made articles, wines, oil, and certain prepared spices, incense, perfumes, dyes, drugs, etc., the raw materials for which came mainly from Egypt. Cattle were the chief staple, but cows were not milked. Sheep and swine were also common. Horses were used only for travel and in war, and in the latter case were never ridden, but always harnessed to war chariots. "Fowls were kept as pets, and eggs are not mentioned." Early as is the potter's art everywhere, it seems to have been nearly unknown in Greece at that date, but baskets were woven. Counting and reckoning were done on the fingers by the decimal system. There was no alphabet, and hence no written language; and the Homeric legends were simply traditional poems handed down from generation to generation through the properly appointed priests or guardians of them who learned them by heart and transmitted them to their successors until the time when there had been invented a means of permanently recording and preserving them. How much they lost or gained by this process will never be known, nor will it ever be known who Homer was or whether there ever was such a particular man.

There was no circulating medium, and the ox was the standard of
value. Property was wholly insecure and every man must defend his own by force. Theft was honorable if successful, and murder for booty was legitimate, and to be avenged by the relatives of the murdered man. The author has logically classed marriage after property, for marriage was only a mode of transferring property in women. All women were property, and most of them were slaves. The rulers and men of influence had one wife belonging to the noble class whom they bought with presents, and as many concubines as they wanted whom they could barter at will. Women had no rights or privileges and were only occasionally allowed to appear at sacrifices. "Adultery in Homer is, as usual in early societies, assimilated to theft, and is reprehended as the violation of a property-right." A female slave "who knew many works" was valued at four oxen.

Skilled labor and all productive work was honorable, and the greatest men worked and boasted of it. But work for a wage was detestable, and the wage-worker was far worse off than a slave. Of course the wage must consist chiefly in food and raiment, for what could the discharged laborer do with an ox? Mercantile business was severely condemned as mean, and was left almost entirely to the Phœnicians who would penetrate the country and peddle their wares.

Homer society was a nearly pure patriarchate. Daughters were promised and married (sold) by their fathers with no thought of consulting them. The principal wife was only "head-servant, an overseer of the female slaves; women, even princesses, made and washed the clothing of the family."

Much is said of hospitality or guest-friendship, and nothing was considered more base than to turn away or ill-treat a stranger who chanced to pass by on his travels. This custom is almost universal in races at about this stage of culture. To understand it it is only necessary to remember how undeveloped were the means of getting about the world in those days. The appearance of a traveler must have been a rare occurrence, and aside from the interest in seeing a new face and hearing reports from a distance when all communication with the outside world is thus cut off, there is the fact that without such hospitality there could be no such thing as travel. Anyone attempting it would certainly perish in a few days after leaving his home. There were no sources of supplies along the road, no places to sleep, should the weather be inclement. The custom of taking in strangers in such a country, therefore, may be looked upon as little more than a substitute for hotels.

Religion with the Homeric peoples was an almost purely economic institution. It was looked upon as a means of averting the evils that
would otherwise be visited upon man by offended gods. The gods were not loved, but only feared, and only through propitiation was it hoped to avoid the consequences of their wrath. This was a somewhat expensive necessity, and every means and artifice was resorted to to deceive the gods and avoid expense. Already in Homer's time sacrifices, although performed with great pomp and ceremony, had come to consist largely in fictions. The sacrifice of a whole hecatomb before a vast assembly was a performance strongly suggesting a modern barbecue. Some wine was wasted in gingerly libations, but most of it was drank, and the share of the meat that ultimately fell to the gods was very small indeed. The bulk of it was eaten and apparently much relished by the assembled multitude.

Their beliefs about the soul were an almost pure form of animism. It is as well described by Tylor under that name and by Spencer in his ghost-theory as by Homer or our present author. Hades in Homer is a god and not a place, and there is nothing very dreadful about his requirements. Punishments are in this world, and the only "sin was the violation of any of the multitudinous rights of the gods; failure in sacrifice and the like, or transgression against any of the norms of life which had received the sanction of the superior powers."

Such in brief was Homeric society as revealed in the two greatest epics of the world, but, unfortunately, everything clusters about a few great names belonging to the upper class and leaves us almost wholly ignorant of the true nature of society itself.

Lester F. Ward.


The Ostiaks constitute the eastern group of the extensive Finnish stock. Their language is assigned to the Ugrian branch of the Ugro-Finnic family of languages, to which also Vogul and Hungarian belong. They are scattered through the governments of Tobolsk and Tomsk, along the banks of the Ob and Yenisei in Russian Siberia. M. Patkanov's account is based largely on personal observations made during a sojourn of two years (1887-88) in that region. He distinguishes three tribes or groups among the Ostiaks: the northern, which occupies the Berezov district in the government of Tobolsk, and which has been much influenced in manners and language by the Samoyeds; the eastern, in the government of Tomsk, which has best preserved its language and tribal peculiarities; and the southwestern group, surnamed the