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New and generous sorrow

"A learned commentator knows something of the Greeks, in the same sense as an oil-and-colour man may be said to know something of painting; but take an untamed child, and leave him alone for twelve months with any translation of Homer, and he will be nearer by twenty centuries to the spirit of old Greece; he does not stop in the ninth year of the siege to admire this or that group of words; he has no books in his tent, but he shares in vital counsels with the "king of men," and knows the inmost souls of the impending gods; how profanely he exults over the powers divine when they are taught to dread the prowess of mortals! and most of all, how he rejoices when the God of War flies howling from the spear of Diomed, and mounts into heaven for safety! Then the beautiful episode of the Sixth Book: the way to feel this is not to go casting about, and learning from pastors and masters how best to admire it. The impatient child is not grubbing for beauties, but pushing the siege; the women vex him with their delays, and their talking; the mention of the nurse is personal, and little sympathy has he for the child that is young enough to be frightened at the nodding plume of a helmet; but all the while that he thus chafes at the pausing of the action, the strong vertical light of Homer's poetry is blazing so full upon the people and things of the Iliad, that soon to the eyes of the child they grow familiar as his mother's shawl; yet of this great gain he is unconscious, and on he goes, vengefully thirsting for the best blood of Troy, and never remitting his fierceness till almost suddenly it is changed for sorrow—the new and generous sorrow that he learns to feel when the noblest of all his foes lies sadly dying at the Scaean gate."

~ A. W. Kinglake, *Eothen* [#Kinglake](#) [#Homer](#)

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