

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editors of THE CLASSICAL REVIEW.

SIRS,—In reply to Mr. Thomson's letter in your last issue, I considered the sentence, 'it is impossible to identify a single site described in the poem,' with some care, and came to the conclusion, in spite of the context, that Mr. Thomson meant exactly what he said. He now explains that he did not; a limitation of this most emphatic and comprehensive statement was intended, which was to be gathered from the context, and this I failed to perceive. That being so, I express my great regret that I misrepresented him.¹

I think I might well submit that the rude and dictatorial style of the rest of his letter absolves me from any obligation to notice it. But as it is possible the omission to reply might be misunderstood, I waive my right.

Mr. Thomson charges me, in terms which are certainly lacking in polish, with settling the Homeric Question — no less — 'by authority and tradition,' and so resorting to what is 'simply the old disreputable dodge of obscurantism.' But there are dodges more disreputable than obscurantism. One of these is to impute to an opponent a palpably absurd view which he does not hold, in order to win a little brief credit by demolishing the phantom with the air of a superior person. For example, Dr. Leaf's discussion in his new work did not appear to me to advance the Leukadists' case. That being so, I adhered to the view of Dörpfeld's failure which I stated recently in the *J. H. S.* As Dörpfeld fails, the Ithaka case, I argued, stands, for no one, so far as I can remember, throughout the abundant literature of the question, has ever thought of denying that the author of the controversy must prove his case, and least of all, I should think, Dörpfeld himself. It was a perfectly fair argument, but that I can leave for the present. The point is that, because the view which Dörpfeld seeks to upset was the view of the ancients, Mr. Thomson sees and seizes a chance of inducing people to believe that I regard the Homeric Question as settled for the Unitarian, or holding the field, because the ancients had a particular belief about Homer, and this though he has no reason to suppose that I regard that belief as other than one and a comparatively small element in the question. To characterise such tactics properly I should have to borrow from and improve upon his terminological store.

And, similarly, in regard to another misrepresentation. The Homeric Question is not settled. I do hold as my personal belief that the Homeric work of many great authorities, both specialists and others, and

particularly the work done of recent years, has succeeded in making a good *prima facie* case for unity, and that belief is encouraged by the consistent and continuing failure of a century's determined efforts to disintegrate the poems. It is a reasonable view which Mr. Thomson twists to unreason by representing it as an 'assumption' that Unitarianism is true because it is not disproved. A belief well grounded in good and abundant evidence, and not engendered but only confirmed by failure to invalidate it, is not to be so described. Mr. Thomson's procedure, and we know how he would stigmatise it in an opponent, is to ignore the essential part of the Unitarian case altogether and distort the rest by his own presentation of it and the misuse of a term. It is a perversion that surprises one in an authority who poses as a stickler for logical precision, and seems by his language to arrogate to himself the office of Homeric dictator.

Had he said that to me a *presumption* in favour of unity arises on the evidence that has accumulated, he would have been correct. But what then? A presumption is only a presumption and 'settles' nothing. It is satisfying, no doubt, *quantum valet*, but not settling. It may gall an opponent, floundering, it may be, in a morass of abortive endeavour, and send him *furentem in convicium*; it does not give him the right to argue a 'closed mind.' It may be rebutted; but it may also—and there perchance is the rub—grow stronger, both by the accession of positive proof and if the opposition's efforts at disproof grow wilder and weaker. Mr. Thomson no doubt takes a different view of the evidence—when he does not ignore it altogether—and feels for the Unitarian appreciation the scorn which so many feel for the traditional book. Be it so. σοὶ μὲν ταῦτα δοκοῦντ' ἔστω ἐμοὶ δὲ γὰρ

To eke out his case he proclaims with emphasis that satisfying proof from his side is not to be expected. In fact it is 'impossible.' The problem is apparently to be promoted to the realm where men embrace, if they embrace at all, by faith, 'believing where they cannot prove,' some of them also stubbornly disbelieving though they cannot disprove. The pronouncement has all the appearance of a lofty, transcendental conception; it is really a specious and pusillanimous expedient that will deceive few minds. To the Homerist whose grandiose theorisings have met with a cool reception it will be a comforting doctrine. Such an one naturally takes a gloomy view, and is disposed, when he contemplates the Unitarian case and compares it with his own shredded hypothesis, to long for a truce to proof and for a free rein to imagination; but we need not let his dejection, much less a take-away-that-bauble tone and strong language, prevent us from pursuing an interesting problem.

¹ This does not of course include an admission that the assertion is not fatuous in regard to Ithaka.

Proofs 'eternally impossible!' An impressive phrase! I wonder, in my turn. What would Carl Robert say if he were told, not only that he has not established his case against the *Iliad*, but that it is eternally ridiculous of him to think such a case *could* be established? What would Bethe the *bombsicher* say, or the chorizont who tells us certain evidence of his *must* be accepted, or the multitudes who have swallowed incontinently as genuine gospel the conclusions of Lachmann and Kirchhoff and Spohn and all the rest? With all respect for Mr. Thomson, I must express the opinion that this particular dictum has no sense in it.

'The truth must be sought at all costs,' and we cannot dispense with proofs. The question is not settled. We must carry on the struggle for existence, not displaying temper when things go badly, and not thinking to restrict discussion and hamper the opposition and anticipate its knocks by resorting to ambitious but hollow phrases, with nothing but *κίρος ἔφα* to back them. 'The Homeric Question is a question of scholarship.' Again, a sounding sentence, but containing only a truism that is half the truth, and incapable of interpretation till all concerned are agreed what 'scholarship' is to include. I think the word has been discussed before now in connection with the Homeric problem. And 'I do know that all this legal language is entirely beside the point.' The interdict is futile. I for one do not know that the language objected to is the exclusive property of the legal profession. It is the expression of principles which are of universal application to the discovery of truth, including the Homeric dispute as it is carried on by controversialists of the saner sort. Mr. Thomson may have forgotten, but it is not so long since Disruptionists were very insistent on a certain obligation which they said lay on Unitarians, and funnily enough they called it the *onus probandi*. And that, too, was at a time when they claimed a monopoly of 'scientific' method in a mood as bold and peremptory as Mr. Thomson's is now.

The present outburst, superlatively positive in tone, is an unfortunate reversion to the arrogant attitude towards the Unitarian belief that used to prevail in advanced circles. There is no reason in it and no reason for it. The *amari aliquid* is no doubt partly due to soreness at having to take a turn as under dog. *Haud ignarus mali*, the Unitarian can sympathise sincerely. But there is the further reason that I have made what Mr. Thomson describes as 'frequent and somewhat pointed references' to him in the *Classical Review*. These are confined, excepting the brief mention noted above, to a notice of his *Studies* (there was another in the *Classical Weekly*), and a paper on his Waterfowl Penelopé. The reviews were of course written in compliance with requests, and much more (God wot!) as a matter of duty than of pleasure, and the Penelopé theory was surely a legitimate subject for examination. The point is, was there any-

thing unfair in my dealing? There is no ground for any such suggestion. One is entitled when one sees a head to hit it, if it be uttering fancies for ascertained truth. The more discussion the better. But an unprejudiced witness may speak. The reporter on *Greek Literature* in the current *Year's Work* calls attention to these very three papers, and seems to be far indeed from finding anything objectionable in the treatment. I have, as many can testify, always expressed high admiration for the *Studies*, and few Homeric treatises have occupied me longer or to my greater eventual profit. That its author had hitched his waggon to the star—to me as to many others the *ὄλιος ἀστήρ*—of the *R. G. E.* of course put us on opposite sides in the Homeric struggle. But, though I abhorred the thesis and objected to the method, I could and did admire the fine setting which Mr. Thomson gave his theory. On the general question of the functions of Homeric criticism he and I will never agree, but I do wonder what exactly he means by reviewing a book from the author's standpoint. The handy expression might be made to connote so much or so little. It would be rash to assume that he means to exclude the exposure of unbalanced speculation and positive error, but after his predication about the eternal impossibility of proof I fear one must be prepared for any *bizarrerie*.—I am, yours, etc.,

A. SHEWAN.

June 16, 1916.

ERASMIANUM (*Vid. P. 72 ET 128*).

O ERASME venerande, quem tandem aliquando ex Orco surrexisse gaudeo, quid tibi accidit? Si tacuisses philologus fuisses! Ridiculo enim vitio sanare conabar lepidum tuum dialogum, quoniam haud credere poteram *te* unquam perhibuisse in tenebris de se ipso collucere aurum. *Te* dico, qui ut hominum vanitatem auri ignisque naturam optime perspexisti. An fugit te *ignem* in *tenebris*, *aurum* vero in *sole* fulgere? Attamen asseveras te verbis tuis e Problemate allatis spectasse non odam Nem. IV., sed odam Ol. I. Itanevero? Tunc autem confitendum tibi erit graviorem esse rem, quam hucusque putare: verba Pindarica te male vertisse, sani poetae sententiam ad insaniam te detorsisse. Legimus enim initio odae primae haec: *ὁ δὲ χρυσὸς αἰθόμενον πῦρ ἄτε διαπρέπει νυκτί*. Quae verba quae sunt vertenda? Audi rationem tuam, audi editores *omnes*, audi antiquum scholiastam, qui rectissime construxit *αἰθόμενον πῦρ διαπρέπει νυκτί* et optime est interpretatus: *τὸ πῦρ ἐν νυκτί καίόμενον διαλάμπει*. Vocabulum *νυκτί* cum '*αἰθόμενον πῦρ*' non cum '*χρυσός*,' ut brevissime dicamus, est coniungendum. Quae tu vero scripsisti: '*aurum videtur habere plus igneae naturae, quia noctu, velut ignis, lucet*,' nullo modo stare possunt. Redi igitur, o bone, ad inferos, nam stultitiam quam cecinisti ne tu quidem prorsus effugere potuisti.

J. VÜRTHEIM.

Lugd. Bat. m. Jun. 18, 1916.