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BUTLER'S HUMOUR OF HOMER.

The Humour of Homer. A lecture by SAMUEL BUTLER. Cambridge: Metcalfe. 1892.

MR. BUTLER is made by the printer to say (p. 35): 'there is no even tolerable prose translation of Homer.' To any one who knows (and who does not?) the admirable translations by Mr. Lang and his coadjutors this remark must appear too eccentric even for the author of *Erewhon*. Accordingly I venture to assume that the word 'translation' is a misprint or a slip of the pen, and to substitute 'travestie.' The statement thus emended is probably true. And what places my conjecture 'beyond power of contradiction' is that, to judge from the essay before us, Mr. Butler himself proposes to fill this gap in our Homeric literature. At any rate his piquant and frankly modern paraphrases of the 'scenes' in the Olympian household and of the meeting of Odysseus with Nausicaa are strongly suggestive of an 'up to date' Homeric extravaganza. If any doubt remains, the reader will probably find it dispelled in the course of the lecturer's argument.

We have indeed, besides these clever illustrations of the humour of Homer (and the author's), some interesting suggestions: e.g. as to the passage of the *Iliad* where the ultimate disappearance of the Greek wall is so emphatically predicted. This, in Mr. Butler's opinion, implies a near acquaintance with the Troad; the poet was addressing those who knew the plain of Troy and would ask what had become of the wall. But the criticism is for the most part too indiscriminate to be of real value. It is assumed throughout that anything found anywhere in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* may serve as a criterion for the whole poem. Thus, the ridicule of the gods (in which Mr. Butler detects a Trojan animus!) is really confined to one section of the *Iliad*, viz. that in which the theurgic element is strongest and coarsest. It is only in a portion of the *Odyssey* that Athene plays the part of a fairy godmother, as Mr. Butler puts it, to the hero and his son. In some of the most important adventures and in certain scenes of the Retribution she plays no part at all. And so as regards the absurdities, of which so much is made, e.g. Menelaus' offer to Telemachus of a 'personally conducted tour round the Peloponnese'; these are frequently assignable, like the one just quoted, to a diasceuaist or compiler. In

other and much more crucial instances the mistake is manifestly the critic's. For example, he finds preposterous ignorance exhibited in the Cyclopea (that perfect masterpiece), where the Cyclops is described as milking his ewes and goats in the early morning after putting the lambs and kids to them the evening before. Why not? The poet does not say that they had their young with them all night, but simply 'he put beneath each ewe her lamb' etc.; in other words, he gave the lambs their share of the milk once in the evening and once in the morning. It was a matter of course that the young were removed when they had had their food. In another case, that of Alcinous' promise of a talent of gold to Odysseus, which is afterwards forgotten, an oversight is certainly proved. But it is scarcely evidence of intentional 'chaff' on the poet's part. He has merely omitted to repeat the line concerning the talent. At all events if 'Homer' nods here, Mr. Butler falls asleep, so to speak, under the table; for he actually confounds the Homeric talent with the Attic! But, perhaps, we are here again placed at the burlesque point of view, and we ought to acknowledge the moderation of the humourist, who tells us merely that Alcinous promised '£250,' but not that he drew a cheque for that sum. Similarly, when we are informed that certain scandalous stories about Penelope, 'alluded to in many of the classic authors,' were known to the 'writer' of the *Odyssey*, we should thank Mr. Butler for not straining the joke by throwing in, say, Offenbach's 'La Belle Hélène.'

The theory to which we are thus pleasantly led up is as follows:—The *Odyssey* was prompted by a reaction in the mind of a 'young, ardent, brilliant' Greek lady, who 'wrote' the poem by way of protest against the too masculine views of the *Iliad*. Her starting-point was her own family circle. Alcinous represented her gay, untidy, impecunious papa, Arete her strong-minded mother, Demodocus the domestic bard, whose interminable recitations of the *Iliad* determined her to 'pay out' its author for his insistence on the masculine hobbies of love, war and plunder, and for his misunderstanding of her sex. Nausicaa is the 'writer' herself. Penelope has a girlish ideal of a wife who is all she should be, while the bald, elderly bourgeois Odysseus is an average,

typical husband, a would-be astute but thoroughly stupid man, domesticated as men go but easily 'detained' by a Calypso or a Circe, anxious to get home, but chiefly on account of his investments in house-property and farm-stock. This young lady was, of course, sadly wanting in all technical knowledge (even of the dairy!); in fact she was nowhere on her own ground except in the laundry. Her defective inventory of a ship's stores is severely criticised. But no explanation is offered of her somewhat remarkable knowledge of ship-building.

All this suggests chiefly the inference that Mr. Butler intends his 'Odyssey up to date' to be introduced by a prologue, in which his heroine will appear and let us into the secret of the authorship: just as if he made Ophelia the author of 'Hamlet' and asked us to regard her as a gifted girl writing from her own experience of flirtatious widows and shilly-shallying young men.

To return.—Mr. Butler applies his theory, in an appendix, to the geography of the *Odyssey*. He begins by identifying Scheria (the author's supposed abode and her point of departure) with Drepane (Trapani) on the coast of Sicily, opposite the Aegæan isles: first, because he finds there a double harbour, a rock possibly resembling the sunken Phæacian ship, and pools near the shore; secondly, on the ground that Drepane

was also the earlier name of Corcyra; it is this coincidence of name (so he argues) which underlies the mistaken tradition connecting Scheria with Corcyra. This being premised, he interprets the poet's geography on the simple hypothesis that it was taken from her own Sicilian environment. Not only did Sicily furnish her with the scenes of all Odysseus' adventures, excepting the land of the Lotophagi, but by a wider stretch of imagination she utilised the Aegæan isles for the grouping of the islands known to her, but merely by name, from the Catalogue of the Ships, as Ithaca, Same and Zacynthus. The fourth, Dulichium, she invented for herself from the Isola Grande, which is 'long' and also relatively large; hence the importance ascribed to it, which is absurd, if it be identified with one of the petty Echinades.

This is, no doubt, a highly ingenious way of explaining the mistakes of the *Odyssey* with respect to the relative situation of Ithaca and the size of Dulichium. But it is open to the decisive objection that the Greek Drepane, on which Mr. Butler's speculations depend from first to last, did not exist till long after the close of the Homeric age. Drepane was merely the sea-port of Eryx, and that city continued to belong to the barbarian Sicels even in the time of Thucydides.

GEORGE C. W. WARR.

SCHOELL'S *PERSA* OF PLAUTUS.

The Persa of Plautus, edited by F. SCHOELL (Teubner, Leipzig, 1892). Mk. 5.60.

THOSE who have followed Schoell in his recent editions of the *Menaechmi* and *Casina* must have noticed his increasing caution in dealing with texts. This tendency is, I think, carried further in the present work, in which he has done well to take counsel with Seyffert and to follow his guidance in a number of difficult passages. The statement of principles in the Preface is conceived in the right spirit: *sed omnino parum refert quid ludamus, cum maioris momenti sit iudicium de sede corruptelae stabilitum: non modo propter singulos locos, verum etiam propter artem poetæ recte aestimandam. Quamquam hodie multi nihil antiquius habent quam ut librorum memoriam artificii cuiusque modi servant, ignari scilicet quæ qualisque sit illa 'memoria.'* The principles on which the scientific emendation of texts is con-

ducted are certainly often misunderstood; it is supposed that we are face to face with the alternatives of a blind adherence to the method of *mumpsimus* on the one hand, and indulgence in brilliant flights of fancy on the other. Thus a writer in the last *Quarterly Review* sets up 'genius,' as represented by Porson, against 'pedantry,' of which he finds a type in Bentley¹, as though it were the object of textual criticism to

¹ A second reading of the *Quarterly* article shows me that the writer does not use the word 'pedantry' in relation to Bentley; he speaks of 'mere acuteness.' When will scholars cease to make Bentley's unhappy treatment of *Paradise Lost* as though it were a corrupt classical text a measure of the value of his emendations in other departments? That poetical feeling is essential in the criticism of the text of a poet is of course true; but poetical feeling is only one of the requisites of the critic. I cannot conclude without a word of gratitude to the *Quarterly Reviewer* for his brilliant and generous advocacy of the claims of Theobald as a critic (surely not unscientific!) of the text of Shakspeare.