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## Holland's Translation of Plutarch's *Roman Questions* *Plutarch's Roman Questions*: Philemon Holland's translation, edited with introductions by F. B. Jevons. (Bibliothèque de Carabas, Vol. VII.) 10s. 6d.

W. Warde Fowler

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surely be asserted without fear that the defence of the *Iliad* as a whole is no longer possible to any one, that the poem has been a great deal meddled with, and in fact, in the words of Mr. Darwin, 'in such a muddle every man must hope and believe as he can.' It is a realm of *πίστις* and *εὐκαρία*, nothing that can be called *ἐπιστήμη*.

One consideration is forced very prominently forward by this book, the great antiquity of the poems as we have them. 'We may see how little Athens, with all her advantages, could interpolate the poems, by the very scarcity of allusions to the city.... How very little even an ambitious and poetic state could do in the way of interpolating. She could not introduce the *Aristeia* of a local hero' (p. 71). In Solon's time the text appears to have been fixed almost as much as it is now. Moreover by that date we have epic poets imitating the old ones, men whose names we know, men who would be ambitious for glory. Supposing such men to undertake and to be able to carry out decently the task of working over and actu-

ally improving into shape the old poems, what a noise we should have heard about it. They *could* not have got their new editions accepted when nations already appealed to the old ones as sacred books. No one can seriously suppose that this does not apply as much to *Odyssey* as to *Iliad*. Yet we have German critics bringing down the date of the *Odyssey* to the second half of the seventh century, nay to the middle of the sixth. Such notions might be left to jostle with circle-squaring and flat-earth philosophy, if it were not for the fact that Prof. Jebb in a moment of weakness has declared in his generally so admirable book on Homer that Kirchhoff's late date cannot be proved wrong. Mr. Lang has proved it wrong with as much cogency as can possibly be expected in a literary problem.

Space fails me to speak of the charming introduction, of the chapters on other epics, Greek and barbarian, among which one would have liked to find the epic of the Cid included, and on archaeology.

ARTHUR PLATT.

#### HOLLAND'S TRANSLATION OF PLUTARCH'S *ROMAN QUESTIONS*.

*Plutarch's Roman Questions*: PHILEMON HOLLAND'S translation, edited with introductions by F. B. JEVONS. (Bibliothèque de Carabas, Vol. VII.) 10s. 6d.

It was a happy thought to reprint, in a series so handy and attractive, this quaint translation of a very curious work. Holland's Pliny and Plutarch are almost unique among translations. They not only reproduce their originals with sufficient accuracy to be useful, but they give them a fresh and a genuine literary value. They contain an extraordinary wealth of English, and a quaint felicity of phrase, which should make them better known than they are to students of English literature, who might in reading them kill two birds with one stone. Let us hope that other fragments of them may find editors as good as Mr. Jevons.

The volume is issued chiefly for the benefit of students of religion and folklore, and Mr. Jevons's introduction is entirely devoted to those subjects. There are however other questions of interest suggested by Plutarch's work, which would doubtless have found place in the introduction had the size of the volume allowed. Where did Plutarch find

his information on so many points of curious detail? How far does he reflect the learning of Varro and Verrius Flaccus, and did that learning come to him through the Greek medium of Juba, the most learned of the kings? At what period in his life did he put these questions together, and what is their relation to his Roman Lives? Did he then know Latin even in the haphazard way which he acknowledges in his Life of Demosthenes? He is so liable to make serious blunders of detail in writing of the Romans, that it may be dangerous for unclassical folklorists to be using his material without some kind of criticism to guide them. A single error may lead, and often has led, to a whole train of wrong reasoning.

But Mr. Jevons's introduction, though it could not supply this kind of criticism, is full of valuable suggestions. He begins with an account of the Roman religion,—almost the only one, strange to say, which has been published in our language for many years; this occupies nearly eighty pages, and is followed by sections on sympathetic magic, and more especially on the mysterious qualities of beans, and on Aryan marriage,

which is treated of at considerable length. In dealing with this last question, he speaks as an authority, and I shall not attempt to criticize his account further than to say that it is most lucidly and happily expressed, and will repay careful reading.

In dealing with the great bean-puzzle he does not seem to me very successful. Beans appear as 'medicine' in so many different ways, that it is hardly to be expected that we should be able to arrive at any explanation which will cover them all; the puzzle is not of supreme importance, and can wait for its solution awhile. Meanwhile it may be judicious not to stir up the mud by random conjectures. Mr. Jevons concludes that beans were eaten by the Romans at funeral feasts in order 'to convey the propagating powers of the deceased to his kinsmen'; and he quotes Pliny's statement that 'the spirit of the deceased was in the bean.'<sup>1</sup> I would invite his attention to a genuine bit of old Italian folklore preserved by Ovid; he may be able to co-ordinate it with his view, though I confess I cannot do so to my own satisfaction. Writing of the Lemuria in May, as celebrated in the Italian household, Ovid gives a common receipt for getting rid of ancestral ghosts (*Fasti* v. 429 foll.). Among the items we find the following:

Cumque manus puras fontana perluit unda,  
Vertitur, et nigras accipit ore fabas,  
Aversusque iacit. Sed dum iacit, 'Haec ego  
mitto,'  
'His' inquit 'redimo meque meosque  
fabis.'  
Hoc novies dicit, nec respicit: umbra  
putatur  
Colligere et nullo terga vidente sequi.

When he has said 'Manes exite paterni' nine times, he may look round, and the rite will be completed. Again, when describing the Feralia in February, he gives a graphic picture of an old woman performing various magical tricks, while she 'septem nigras versat in ore fabas' (ii. 571 foll.).

Mr. Jevons's account of the religion of the Romans, which occupies the first few sections of his introduction, is remarkably clear and explicit, considering the extreme

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact Plutarch does not say that beans were eaten on these occasions; the word he uses is *χρῶνται*. Pliny (*N. H.* xviii. 118) says 'parentando *adsumitur*'; and so also Festus (s. v. *fabam*), 'parentalibus adhibetur sacrificiis.'

difficulty of the subject. He seems, if I may say so, to be able to speak with perfect confidence of ideas and practices of which we hardly know anything until they had already begun to be overlaid with other ideas and practices imported from Greece. There is much truth, no doubt, in his main contention, which may be expressed in the words he quotes from Preller, that the belief of the Romans in gods may be termed more rightly *pandaemonism* than polytheism. But he seems to me to push this view a little too far,—much farther at any rate than Preller himself would have countenanced. He seems to rely on Mommsen and even on Ihne, and also on writers of *Religionsgeschichte*. The latter I should be disposed to distrust in their dealings with the Romans, and even Mommsen himself has been chiefly occupied with other matters. But, fortified with these, he contrasts the Roman religious ideas in the strongest way with those of the Greeks. The Greeks had gods, myths, and oracles: the Romans had none of these. Such definite assertions need qualification. I must not be led into a lengthy criticism, but I will venture the opinion, based on the studies of several years, that the Romans had not only the material out of which gods, myths, and oracles are made, but also had gone some way towards their development when they were invaded and conquered by Greek ideas. It is hardly to be believed that Greek personal gods should have found so congenial a soil in the minds of a people who, to use Mr. Jevons's expression, had only fetiches to worship. We used once to believe that English feudalism dated from the Conquest; more careful research has shown that practices akin to those of feudalism had long been growing in England,—that the Conqueror did not force on us a wholly new system. In the same way I think it might be shown that the Greek religious forms were engrafted in Italy on ideas which were already beginning to approximate to them: and further, that the contrast which Mr. Jevons so strongly accentuates should not be looked at simply as a contrast between Greeks and Italians, but rather as one between the highly literary form of the religion of the educated Greek and the undeveloped ideas of the ordinary Greek as well as the ordinary Italian.

W. WARDE FOWLER.