

OBITUARY

JAMES LEIGH STRACHAN-DAVIDSON (1843-1916) AND
WILLIAM ROSS HARDIE (1862-1916).

THE death of these two distinguished scholars, taken away within so brief a period, is not only a grievous blow to their many friends, but a heavy loss to the whole world of classical scholarship and learning. Both were for long Fellows and Tutors of Balliol, and rendered to their College devoted and loyal service. Their success as teachers was known to, and justly appreciated by, not only their immediate colleagues and their successive generations of pupils, but the whole University. It had what was to them its reward in the constant flow of high academic distinctions won by those who enjoyed it. From their classrooms issued a large proportion of those who continue their work at Oxford, and who still profit by their inspiration and instruction. Behind the teaching of both lay an ordered mass of learning greater than was realised in the larger world of scholarship outside the University. They themselves estimated it modestly, or even, though with no shade of affectation, depreciated their own achievements and possessions, and shrank from any display of them. To those who knew them well, the works which their preoccupation with personal tuition permitted them to publish seem but a slight revelation of their stores of solid learning and humane understanding. The world is the poorer because they deferred so late the communication to it of the results of their unremitting study of the sources of our knowledge concerning the sides of ancient life which chiefly attracted their attention. Their monument is where they would have wished it to be—in the more effective teaching of their successors, who learned from them both what and how to teach. What they did publish, small it may be in bulk compared with the productions of many of their contemporaries, is throughout of high and distinguished quality, widely and securely based on first-hand study, fresh,

living, illuminative—always work to which any scholar may return to find help and renewal of interest. Both preached and practised the doctrine of the necessity of personal, direct, continuous contact with the primary sources; not disdaining the assistance of their fellow-students, they never suffered a web of hasty conjecture to interpose itself as a veil between their minds and the original evidence in the view of which they thoughtfully and soberly developed their explanations.

Here is not the place to dwell at length on the qualities which endeared their personalities to their friends, their enduring loyalty and ungrudging helpfulness. There was no one at Oxford towards whom more respect and affection was felt throughout the University than Strachan Davidson—feelings undiminished by any difference of opinion upon College or University policy. In all relations of life he remained a great gentleman, with a high and gracious dignity; and no honours were felt to be more worthily bestowed than his election to the Mastership of his College and the degree of D.C.L. conferred upon him by decree in recognition of the value to legal learning of his studies on Roman Criminal Law. The latter was a great gratification to him, and especially because it was unsought, unexpected, and carried, it might be said, almost by acclamation. To those who knew him and his work it seemed no more than what was amply deserved.

Hardie left the University of Oxford, which he had already so well served, in 1895 to become Professor of Humanity in the University of Edinburgh, which he served no less well. He had from an early period shown quite extraordinary qualifications for the life of a scholar. He possessed a marvellous memory—marvellous not only because of its reach and power, but because of its orderliness, so that at times he seemed capable of almost dispensing

with printed texts. If a novel theory were propounded to him, he could almost instantly produce the evidence required to check it. In composition he could work under the most difficult conditions, and commanded a great variety of styles. Yet the results were never mere centos or imitations, but true reproductions of the manner of the originals which he had in mind. Behind this lay close, patient, minute observation, orderly arrangement, cautious theorising, the result of which were ever generously put at the command of those who consulted him. Much was expected of him, which has been

denied to us by his lamentably early death, but it is to be hoped that there still remains some record of all this store other than the memories of his pupils and personal friends. Certainly what he had collected was no mass of blind and secondhand erudition, but something far more systematic, organised, and vital. He did not express himself easily, and preferred rather to listen and suggest; but it would be a great misfortune to scholarship if it did not prove that the help which his friends enjoyed could be perpetuated and made more widely available.

J. A. S.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE PROBLEM OF HOMER.

To the Editors of the CLASSICAL REVIEW.

SIRS,—Mr. A. Shewan, in his review of Dr. Leaf's *Homer and History* in the *Classical Review*, May, 1916, remarks in a footnote: 'But how the authorities on the *Odyssey* differ! Mr. Thomson makes the wild assertion that "it is impossible to identify a single site described in the poem" (*The Greek Tradition* 221).'

The sentence from which Mr. Shewan quotes occurs in a passage dealing with the comparative absence of 'local colour' in the set descriptions in Homer; and it will be observed that my words are 'a single site described,' not 'mentioned' or 'alluded to.' Mr. Shewan, I fear, has paid no attention to the context of my sentence, although it is the context which defines the meaning of my 'described.'

Not only so. He has quoted half a sentence where he should have quoted the whole — since I really do try to write sentences where the second half has some connexion with the first. The whole runs as follows: 'Half the *Odyssey* is concerned with the adventures of Odysseus in Ithaca, and it is impossible to identify a single site described in the poem.' A single site in Ithaca, I meant. Is that not the natural meaning of the words? It was the meaning in my mind at any rate, and I thought the connexion made it plain.

My point was that you cannot identify places like the Haven of Phorkys or the Cave of the Nymphs or the Farm of Eumaeus. Obviously, if you could, there would be no rivalry between Thiaki and Leukas. Identification is proof, not conjecture.

Such is my 'wild assertion.'

Even if Mr. Shewan understood me as meaning any *Odyssean* site whether in Ithaca or not, he might still have asked himself again if it is a

'wild assertion' to say that none has been identified merely from its description. Pylos, for example, is not in any proper sense described; we identify it partly from its name, partly by an ingenious inference from certain geographical considerations; that is, if we do identify it, for the thing is not absolutely certain. Scheria, the Land of the Cyclops, the Isles of Calypso and Circe are described. They have not been identified. I notice indeed that Mr. Shewan regards Bérard as having 'demonstrated' that Scheria is Corfu. I wonder. Mr. Shewan must think me ridiculously cautious and sceptical. Only he has a quaint way of saying this.

So far as the matter affects myself, I regard it as unimportant and I make no complaint. But the criticism of Homer is important, and this little footnote serves as well as anything else to illustrate Mr. Shewan's point of view. I trust I may be permitted to add a word or two about that, as after his frequent and somewhat pointed references to myself in the *Classical Review* some kind of answer may be expected of me. I will make it as brief as I can.

So far as I understand Mr. Shewan's attitude to the Homeric problem, it amounts to this: 'Every non-unitarian theory of Homer must establish itself by irrefutable proofs; in the absence of these the unitarian theory holds the field.' If I say 'Every unitarian theory must prove its case, otherwise a non-unitarian theory holds the field,' what will he answer? He will answer, no doubt, that the unitarian view 'holds the field' in a different sense from any other because it was the view of the ancients. Now if Mr. Shewan believes that the ancients knew the truth and were not merely conjecturing like the moderns, he is of course entitled to his opinion. But in that case I would point out that for him the Homeric Question is already settled, and he brings to the discussion of other views a closed