

## OBITUARY

## PROFESSOR ROBINSON ELLIS.

THE death of Robinson Ellis has removed a great scholar from the world and a great figure from the life of Oxford. He was seventy-nine years old, and had for a long time been in frail health. It was twenty years since his election as Professor; thirty since his appointment as Reader in Latin; and probably all the Oxford Latinists of the present day are in different degrees his pupils. When the present writer was an undergraduate the two volumes of Ellis's *Catullus* were the great models of high and severe learning in the eyes of the average candidate for Honour Moderations; his *Ibis* stood even higher, a thing more lifted above criticism and stationed in a more rarefied atmosphere.

The critical text of *Catullus* was published in 1867; the commentary eleven years later; the *Ibis* in 1881, when Ellis was forty-seven. He produced much work of very high quality afterwards: *Avianus* in 1887, *Orientius* in 1888, the *Noctes Manilianae* in 1891, *Velleius Paterculus* in 1898, the *Aetna* in 1901—a particularly skilful and accomplished performance—and the *Appendix Vergiliana* and the *Elegiae in Maecenatem* as late as 1907. His work, as is natural in a man of learning, makes its impression partly by its sheer mass and variety; he roamed through the remotest corners of Roman literature, and everywhere his knowledge was thorough and his touch sure. But if one had to select a single volume to illustrate his finest qualities that volume would probably be the edition of the *Ibis*. The *Catullus*, with all its erudition, its delicate scholarship and its almost inspired emendations, contained one great critical flaw. Ellis had underestimated the importance of the Oxford MS. which he had himself discovered, and a very inferior scholar, Baehrens, did not fail to drive the error home. But the edition of the *Ibis* is almost as good as such a book could be. The text was signally improved, and two or

three of the best MSS. were discovered by the editor himself. The riddles of mythological and historical allusion which constitute the greater part of the poem provided just the most suitable material for Ellis's enormous knowledge of recondite literature as well as for his curious ingenuity.

Ellis cared, of course, for literature. He wrote well in English and beautifully in Latin. His metrical version of *Catullus*, though hardly successful, has in it a touch of real poetry. But as material to work upon he seems actually to have rather avoided great literature. He liked the rare rather than the good. His object was not the desire to elucidate a great writer, but rather the artist's delight in working at difficult material. He liked fixing a reading, puzzling out a difficulty; whether the result was of much value or not did not seem to trouble him. There is something of the same indifference to practical results in his method of annotation. Unlike Munro or Wilamowitz, who always try either to solve their problem or to say nothing, Ellis enjoyed learning for its own sake. He would often write a long note which led to no definite result, provided it gave scope for real erudition and ingenuity. In the same spirit he was always impatient of those over-practical scholars who liked to base a text on the one best MS., rejecting as useless all the rest. An instinct told him they were wrong, and he always rejoiced when he discovered a good reading in a MS. of late date or low reputation.

He was not characteristically a scientific scholar. He had no power of going straight to the heart of a subject by a bold hypothesis which he then followed consistently. His arguments were often not very clear or effective. One felt in his work no great commanding force of intellect. One felt only that he knew Latin wonderfully, understood it, and loved it; that his instinct was apt to be a safer guide than another

man's well-documented reasoning. As Professor Phillimore has well said, Ellis was essentially an artist.

Oxford is full of stories of his quaint sayings, his oddities, and his weaknesses. That was the outer surface. But people who knew him well could feel beneath the surface a power of inspiration and a singleminded simplicity which amounted to greatness. He never questioned the high importance of classical scholarship; he was never shaken by any touch of worldliness or of mere practicality. I remember his speaking of an emendation made by the present Bishop of Oxford in the text of *Orientius*, and lamenting that 'Gore had thrown himself away.' He was quite sincere. He cared for the emendation of *Orientius* more than for the management of any diocese. He was remarkably abstemious, almost ascetic, a little solitary. His answer to an invitation to dinner is justly famous: 'No, my dear —; it is not

so much the food I mind; it is the company.' He lived almost entirely for a particular kind of rare intellectual activity, and you came away from a conversation with him feeling that intellectual work, recognised or unrecognised, was the thing to live for.

And he had his reward. Pupils will not forget his Latin Verse class. The physical languor, the weak, poring eyes, the slight lameness, the slow and tedious utterance with which he dictated his fair copies; and then the verses themselves, so elegant, so dashing and rakish, and so beautifully alive: verily *quales Catullus vel Calvus*. And there must be many men who will cherish throughout life the memory of Ellis's kindness to them as undergraduates, a patient and absolutely simple friendliness which made its particular mark even in a University where friendliness between teacher and taught is a universal tradition.

G. M.

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## CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editors of THE CLASSICAL REVIEW.

### HORATIAN EXPOSITION; A RE- JOINDER.

SIR,—When my Student's Edition of the *Odes of Horace*, Books I-III., was published, you printed a lengthy review of it over the signature of Mr. T. E. Page. It was hostile, as of course it had its right to be: it was scornful as regards my views, but contained a kindly reference of a personal character; such matters would claim no special remark: it represented inaccurately certain things found in my book; this I resented, but I said nothing, thinking it well to wait and see how my work impressed a few competent readers whom I knew it would interest. Three years have now passed, and I have grounds for stating that some of the leaven which I in particular have added to the lump of Horatian commentary is working—slowly no doubt, but I am not impatient. I have not written either for money or kudos, but simply from interest in an important and surprisingly fruitful inquiry.

I must ask you now to let me show how your review misrepresented me. When I read its paragraph beginning thus:—"The *Donec gratus eram*, which Munro sneered at as 'a neat

enough mosaic,' is now declared to be 'little better than euphonious rubbish' unless we connect it with Murena," etc., I rubbed my eyes, because I knew I had written no such thing. Its ingenious implication that I must miss the beauty, and consider the ode as rubbish, is worthy of Mr. Skimpin himself (*vide* The Trial Scene, *Pickwick Papers*). What I do say is that Munro came very close to condemning the ode as bad poetry, that, as generally construed, with an absurd 'Horace' stuck above the odd-numbered verses, it is little better than euphonious rubbish, as Mr. Munro has shown, but that the right conclusion is not that the ode is bad, but that the eye of the critic is out of focus (p. 13). This is in the Introduction, and is an argument that Horace personally is not the spokesman, and is quite independent of any possible association with Murena. Your reviewer should have done me the justice to recognise this: instead he turns to a note on the name Calais (p. 250) and incorporates into his condemnatory sentences other suggestions—expressly guarded by me as tentative only—and treats entirely different points as if they were necessarily connected, and as if I had so presented them in argument.

I fail to see what purpose criticism of this sort can serve. It conveys an incorrect im-