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The fall of Troy

Quintus

London, 1943

Introduction

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HOMER'S *Iliad* begins towards the close of the last of the ten years of the Trojan War: its incidents extend over some fifty days only, and it ends with the burial of Hector. The things which came before and after were told by other bards, who between them narrated the whole "cycle" of the events of the war, and so were called the Cyclic Poets. Of their works none have survived; but the story of what befell between Hector's funeral and the taking of Troy is told in detail, and well told, in a poem about half as long as the *Iliad*. Some four hundred years after Christ there lived at Smyrna a poet of whom we know scarce anything, save that his first name was Quintus. He had saturated himself with the spirit of Homer, he had caught the ring of his music, and he perhaps had before him the works of those Cyclic Poets whose stars had paled before the sun.

We have practically no external evidence as to the date or place of birth of Quintus of Smyrna, or for the sources whence he drew his materials. His date is approximately settled by two passages in

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the poem, viz. vi. 531 *sqq.*, in which occurs an illustration drawn from the man-and-beast fights of the amphitheatre, which were suppressed by Theodosius I. (379-395 A.D.); and xiii. 335 *sqq.*, which contains a prophecy, the special particularity of which, it is maintained by Koechly, limits its applicability to the middle of the fourth century A.D.

His place of birth, and the precise locality, is given by himself in xii. 308-313, and confirmatory evidence is afforded by his familiarity, of which he gives numerous instances, with many natural features of the western part of Asia Minor.

With respect to his authorities, and the use he made of their writings, there has been more difference of opinion. Since his narrative covers the same ground as the *Aethiopis* (Coming of Memnon) and the *Iliupersis* (Destruction of Troy) of Arctinus (*circ.* 776 B.C.), and the *Little Iliad* of Lesches (*circ.* 700 B.C.), it has been assumed that the work of Quintus "is little more than an amplification or remodelling of the works of these two Cyclic Poets." This, however, must needs be pure conjecture, as the only remains of these poets consist of fragments amounting to no more than a very few lines from each, and of the "summaries of contents" made by the grammarian Proclus (*circ.* 140 A.D.), which, again, we but get at second-hand through the *Bibliotheca* of Photius (ninth century). Now, not merely do the only descriptions of incident that are found in the fragments differ essentially from the corresponding incidents as described by Quintus, but

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even in the summaries, meagre as they are, we find, as German critics have shown by exhaustive investigation, serious discrepancies enough to justify us in the conclusion that, even if Quintus had the works of the Cyclic poets before him, which is far from certain, his poem was no mere remodelling of theirs, but an independent and practically original work. Not that this conclusion disposes by any means of all difficulties. If Quintus did not follow the Cyclic poets, from what source did he draw his materials? The German critic unhesitatingly answers, "from Homer." As regards language, versification, and general spirit, the matter is beyond controversy; but when we come to consider the incidents of the story, we find deviations from Homer even more serious than any of those from the Cyclic poets. And the strange thing is, that each of these deviations is a manifest detriment to the perfection of his poem; in each of them the writer has missed, or has rejected, a magnificent opportunity. With regard to the slaying of Achilles by the hand of Apollo only, and not by those of Apollo and Paris, he might have pleaded that Homer himself here speaks with an uncertain voice (cf. *Il.* xv. 416-17, xxii. 355-60, and xxi. 277-78). But, in describing the fight for the body of Achilles (*Od.* xxiv. 36 *sqq.*), Homer makes Agamemnon say

"So we grappled the livelong day, and we had not refrained
us then,

But Zeus sent a hurricané, stilling the storm of the battle
of men."

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Now, it is just in describing such natural phenomena, and in blending them with the turmoil of battle, that Quintus is in his element; yet for such a scene he substitutes what is, by comparison, a lame and impotent conclusion. Of that awful cry that rang over the sea heralding the coming of Thetis and the Nymphs to the death-rites of her son, and the panic with which it filled the host, Quintus is silent. Again, Homer (*Od.* iv. 274-89) describes how Helen came in the night with Deiphobus, and stood by the Wooden Horse, and called to each of the hidden warriors with the voice of his own wife. This thrilling scene Quintus omits, and substitutes nothing of his own. Later on, he makes Menelaus slay Deiphobus unresisting, "heavy with wine," whereas Homer (*Od.* viii. 517-20) makes him offer such a magnificent resistance, that Odysseus and Menelaus together could not kill him without the help of Athena. In fact, we may say that, though there are echoes of the *Iliad* all through the poem, yet, wherever Homer has, in the *Odyssey*, given the outline-sketch of an effective scene, Quintus has uniformly neglected to develop it, has sometimes substituted something much weaker—as though he had not the *Odyssey* before him!

For this we have no satisfactory explanation to offer. He *may* have set his own judgment above Homer—a most unlikely hypothesis: he may have been consistently following, in the framework of his story, some original now lost to us: there may be more, and longer, *lacunae* in the text than any

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editors have ventured to indicate: but, whatever theory we adopt, it must be based on mere conjecture.

The Greek text here given is that of Koechly (1850) with many of Zimmermann's emendations, which are acknowledged in the notes. Passages enclosed in square brackets are suggestions of Koechly for supplying the general sense of *lacunae*. Where he has made no such suggestion, or none that seemed to the editors to be adequate, the *lacuna* has been indicated by asterisks, though here too a few words have been added in the translation, sufficient to connect the sense.

In the notes P = *Codex Parrhasianus*.
v = *vulgata plerorumque lectio*.

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