Introduction

Publications on the history of classical learning proliferate. But an important feature of the subject, perhaps *the* important feature, has not yet received the attention it seems to deserve – I mean the emergence of true scholarship, that is critical scholarship, in English classical learning out of its surrounding environment: at home, society at large, universities, schools; and abroad, European scholarship. This is a first attempt at taking bearings in an historical context, with the likely faults but also, I hope, virtues of such an attempt. The book describes some major aspects of the history of English classical scholarship viewed almost exclusively as critical learning. There are many other aspects – classical scholarship in education at universities and schools, or as civilizing influence on society, or as a basic element in the give and take of ideas and intellectual attitudes. The reason why these are either excluded or brought in merely by way of illustration and contrast is not only my ignorance of many of the historical factors or my unwillingness to beat the big drum for the things that I value most highly. As my chief reason I offer the not very recondite conviction that what matters, by definition, in critical scholarship of any kind is that it be critical. No one needs to exhort the natural sciences to be scientific because that is what they are. But, in the sciences concerned with what are called 'arts subjects' or 'humane subjects' or 'literary and historical studies', the very names tell a different story. The causes of that difference are deeply embedded in their history but not, I believe, in their essence. This feature is not sufficiently brought out in much that is written on the history of the subject. I concentrate on the aspects of classics of which I have first-hand knowledge, for I write as a professional Latin scholar with some secondary interests in Greek, ancient philosophy and history. But that is accidental. Similar points to the ones I am making could be made in dealing with ancient philosophy, history and other aspects. Even so it has been involvement with my own subject that has helped me to put in perspective certain facts about its history which I have come to regard as major facts.

The matter at issue may be clarified further if we ask what A.E. Housman, one of the great innovators in classical learning, had in mind when he pronounced on the early centuries of Greek learning in England as follows: 'But these were the years when we were learning Greek and were not yet in case to teach it: our contribution to the European fund begins with the seventeenth century'.[1] With some appropriate changes he might have pronounced similarly on the learning and teaching of Latin.

If we want to get a hint at the kind of scholarship he had in mind, we can do no better than look at the intellectual operations performed by the great classical scholars during the comparatively short periods when that 'contribution to the European fund' was made, and include his own contribution to the fund. Obviously he was thinking not only of textual criticism so called but of the study of the text and language of ancient Greek and Latin literary remains.

Housman was thinking also of the mode of such study, the procedures that might promote scholarship. Sometimes he calls these procedures criticism, sometimes knowledge or understanding, sometimes, with regard to a similar kind of criticism, discovery of what is new and true. These are descriptions of kinds of science, to use this term for an organized body of knowledge. I talk of kinds of science since all sciences differ in the degree of generality aimed at, the formality of their methods of demonstration or proof, the 'Aristotelian' degree of exactness that is appropriate to the object under scrutiny, the various kinds of art or artistry that may be requisite to the science concerned, such as a sense for the elegance of a mathematical proof, the ingenuity in setting up an experiment in the experimental sciences so called, the help afforded by historical imagination in historical study, and verbal or literary imagination in literary study. But they all agree with each other, and differ from the arts, in aiming at something that can be said to be 'known'. 'Valid' or 'true' is the name for what is correctly so established, and 'new' the name for what is thought not to have been established in this or that context before. By contradistinction, when abstract, 'scientific', notions are drawn, say, into poetry or rhetoric and made subservient to poetic or rhetorical purposes, the resulting amalgam cannot be said to be 'known' in the sense canvassed above; philosophical poetry or scientific rhetoric can evoke many things, but they stand or fall by being poetry or rhetoric. If however one ingredient of the amalgam is not made subservient to the other, whichever it may be, then either the cognitive or the poetic or the

rhetorical status of the discourse is frustrated – which may happen accidentally or deliberately, and has often happened deliberately of late. Such frustrations of coherence are here discounted. To chronicle them critically would be an huge task, but fascinating and, I believe, beneficial. The task, however, is not among the many unfulfilled plans of the present writer.

In classical studies the intellectual aims and methods indicated by Housman have not always been in view. They may easily be mistaken for any commerce with the seemingly 'ancient' components of their own civilizations by men, say, of the Italian Renaissance, of seventeenth-century France, or of eighteenth-century England. But the long after-effects of the two ancient civilizations may mislead. Eighteenth-century Horatianism in England, for example, however strong in substance and fine in texture, was of its time and country. Of course, it would not have existed without Roman Horace, but Roman Horace, nevertheless, was a long way off. And as for eighteenth-century Homeric studies, it is hard not to apply to them what Richard Bentley is thought to have said to Alexander Pope about his renowned Homer in heroic couplets – 'that it was a very pretty poem, but that he must not call it Homer'.[2]

The new critical study of ancient texts and ancient historical traditions assumed quite a different complexion. There was little of it during the century of the Renaissance when the Italians made their prodigious effort of drawing Latin letters, thought, and art into their own cultural orbit and thus became the founders and arbiters of the 'Renaissance civilization of Europe'. Their discoveries of ancient manuscripts and their *editiones principes* were indeed indispensable, but their procedures in dealing with the texts turned out to be haphazard and risky. Very few of the sixteenth-century humanists in Italy had premonitions of what was required. A larger number of French scholars of the same century, however, had. The greatest of them, Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540-1609), must be said, but is not always said, to have inaugurated a new era of critical scholarship.[3] Moreover he carried north, to Holland, fundamental notions of the new criticism. It was in Holland, in England, in Germany, that these notions first came to maturity, paradoxically far from the Mediterranean home of the ancient exemplars, to which they radiated back in due course.

But the boundaries and contours of the new intellectual territory cannot be said to have been mapped out until Richard Bentley (1662-

1742). What he set down was magnificent, and indeed quite different in character from some over-daring emendations of texts, which alone his name now suggests to all but a few classical specialists. But it is true that his work suffered not rarely from the faults of the born discoverer – undue hurry and overconfidence. His influence extended also to scholarship abroad, for a considerable time even more strongly than at home, though not so much in France or Italy as in Holland and Germany. The direction of later English developments, therefore, is determined partly by Bentley's thoughts returning from abroad, and partly by influences emanating from Bentley at home. It was left above all to two of his successors, Richard Porson (1759-1808) and A.E. Housman (1859-1936), to specify and consolidate but also to deepen and generalize, with conspicuous virtues indeed but occasional faults of contraction that arise whenever consolidation is the order of the day. The reformed Bentleianism of Housman's work resulted chiefly in a new scientific basis for all verbal and stylistic study in classics; textual criticism was the primary but not the only concern. This takes us to the second World War; the achievement can be seen in a clear perspective without the contemporaries of his later years, some of them sizeable scholars, who would otherwise have merited some notice, even in a book designed merely to find a way along the critical heights. Housman's mature achievement thus marks the apposite end for this book. What comes thereafter is too close for a dispassionate view.

If my observations are just, the layout of this book follows almost of its own accord. Bentley, the Newton of European philological and literary studies, will find his appropriate place in the centre together with a few contemporaries. The centre piece will be preceded by a brief chapter on antecedents, and in particular two outstanding and often under-rated Cambridge scholars, Thomas Gataker and John Pearson. After Bentley there follow Porson and the Porsonians, and some brief observations on Bentleianism abroad; but also, almost instantaneously, the disconcerting spectacle of the new critical scholarship faltering, in spite of the unexampled extension, over the subsequent half-century or more, of classical education in the public schools and the universities. Without this background of Victorian classics, the final topic of the book can scarcely be understood – I mean Housman's opposition to the modes of classical study then prevailing and his laying of new scholarly foundations.

In its concentration on actual scholarship the present book

differs from most writings on English classical studies. It may be useful therefore if I briefly indicate the areas where other books complement what little I can offer and where other writers and I agree, or disagree, in our views of the subject. I begin with works on English classical scholarship and go on to those that discuss classics in a wider setting.

The general reader has been provided by M.L. Clarke with a succinct and pleasant narrative of *Greek Studies in England 1700-1830* (1945). Chronologically this period coincides with what Housman called the English 'contribution to the European fund', but the definition of what constitutes Greek studies does not. Clarke is concerned with classical education at schools and universities, discussed more widely in a later work, *Classical Education in Britain 1500-1900* (1959), and with the whole width of study – from amateur to professional – of ancient Greek literature, thought, and history.

The general reader too will find an instructive and often entertaining examination, from differing points of view, of what the Victorians found in ancient Greek civilization (or what they thought was that civilization) in R. Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (1980) and Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (1981). Neither impinges much on the scholarly issues, technical or general, raised in the Victorian chapter of this book.

Like Jenkyns and Turner, and unlike the present writer, R.R. Bolgar is concerned with features of modern civilization that were believed to be an heritage of ancient Greece and Rome. For that reason his large and learned book, *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries* (1954), is only tangentially connected with the subject of my present work. For critical scholarship or science, as I understand it, is essentially self-fulfilling – it establishes what it can establish, and has done. Hence it must repose on the civilization of which, in certain favourable conditions, it may form a vital part, although it cannot be identified with it in either aim or character. It can cause no surprise, therefore, that Bolgar's survey shows signs of hurrying to a close, once it reaches the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the time when the most effective and clarifying developments in critical scholarship and science had started.

Bolgar, though by no means uninformed on classical matters, writes in the main as a student of modern literature, especially French. H. Lloyd-Jones, on the other hand, is a professional and well-known Greek scholar. His two books of reviews and essays (1980),[4] however, many of them published before, go beyond the

limited professional field into the cultural penumbra of classical studies. They seem to be written largely for the general reader, though there is much from which any reader, however learned, can profit. But I have to declare a basic disagreement of a kind that has close relevance to the topics of the present book. Lloyd-Jones professes himself vitally concerned with the question: What can the ancient Greeks (or Romans) do for us? 'We study antiquity', he says, 'in order to use it for our own purposes.'[5] This seems to me misconceived. Of course we are tied to our own time, and indirectly our own lives will be affected in various ways by the work of scholars and scientists. But direct application to our own purposes will introduce into scholarship or science an ulterior and extraneous aim and, by the same token, ambiguity and ambivalence. There is then a danger that such an 'application' will colour our assessment of scholarship, scholarly topics, and scholars. The facts gathered in these pages, not least in the chapter on Victorian classics, seem to me to signal that danger.

I now turn to some books that are specifically concerned with classical scholarship. Anyone seeking information on its history up to, say, 1900 will usually find some answer by turning to Sandys. J.E. Sandys's three volumes are entitled – admittedly by a misnomer – *A History of Classical Scholarship*. They appeared in the early nineteen-hundreds: Volume I, 1903 (3rd ed. 1921), Volumes II and III, 1908. 'An indispensable work of solid learning which I use with gratitude' – this is what the greatest of German Hellenists, U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, said of Sandys.[6] Generous praise, indeed, for Wilamowitz was aware of the shortcomings of the book. The 'History' in fact offers a conglomerate, normally pedestrian but occasionally jaunty, of quite disparate topics: factual details on works of scholarship, though not always correct; judgements on their qualities, more often than not at second or third hand, and not rarely off the mark; finally, condensed biographies of scholars, great, not so great, and not great at all, which take the place of 'the history of the subject'. It is disconcerting that Sandys offers the only repository of many of the relevant facts, and hence remains indispensable. But the field is so large that it will be a long time until something more adequate can replace this book – and so, finally, gratitude prevails.

On the other hand there are two books that may be read with great advantage by anyone wishing to inform himself on the whole width of this subject – one of them superlative though hard to read

because of its allusiveness, the other a considerable achievement though perhaps not what its writer could have achieved in his prime. Wilamowitz, the author of the first, has already been mentioned. His celebrated *Geschichte der Philologie* (1921) is easily the most fascinating and instructive survey of the history of classics as a whole. (There is now a serviceable translation by A. Harris, entitled *History of Classical Scholarship*, and edited by H. Lloyd-Jones, 1982, with a wide-ranging introduction which canvasses the editor's very personal views, moreover with numerous notes and a useful index).[7] It also happens to be one of the shortest (80 pages in the original) – a marvel of epigrammatic compression. Its subject is rather wider than the strictly philological one here chosen; it is classics as the comprehensive study of Greek and Roman antiquity, its language, literature, history, thought, and material remains: in the shorthand of the German term, *Altertumswissenschaft*, 'science of antiquity', as seen, sometimes idiosyncratically, by one of the greatest practitioners in the history of the subject. Rudolf Pfeiffer's *History of Classical Scholarship 1300-1850* (1976), is, as one would expect, an highly intelligent guide by a master of his craft, welcome also for occasional corrections of Wilamowitz's idiosyncrasies, though not quite 'comparable to the achievements of his preceding volume on the history of scholarship in antiquity (1968). Again, however, I have to warn the reader that my subject is narrower than Pfeiffer's history of comprehensive classical scholarship and its links with Christian humanism, especially that of Erasmus.[8]

Two shorter monographs on more specific topics have particularly assisted my present attempt: Sebastiano Tirnpanaro, *La genesi del metodo del Lachmann* (1963, 2nd ed. 1981) and E.J. Kenney, *The Classical Text. Aspects of Editing in the Age of the Printed Book* (1974). Readers will find them instructive and interesting complements to the picture I have offered.

This is not one of the large weighty books that could and perhaps should be written on these matters. What I do is to draw some guidelines of the kind at which I have already hinted, and my scholarly apparatus is as limited as my intent. But the intent has come out of my own work, which continually sent me back to Bentley and Housman (to a smaller degree, Porson) and, in the end, has made me read them much more intensively than was required by my immediate purposes.

As I have explained in my preface, the first, Italian, edition was a record of a series of lectures to an audience of, in the main, Italian

graduate students. The present edition consists of the English text from which the Italian translation was made. But I have revised it extensively. In particular I have enlarged the introduction and have added a chapter on Victorian classics which would not have been of much concern to an Italian audience, and a second chapter on Housman. The purpose however is unchanged. This remains a little book and its purpose is to instruct beginners in classical research, but also stimulate the interest of others who are not professionals. Any claim it may have to the attention of classical scholars will be twofold. First, I think, many of them fail to *read* (I do not mean, occasionally consult) Bentley and Housman; I hope to incite them to do so. Secondly, the guide-lines I draw may prove not entirely useless to those who contemplate large-scale work on this important chapter in the history of scholarship – and perhaps also to some who do not.

The person who has learned most from these exercises is the present writer. Pondering on my reading of Bentley and Housman, I have been led to many areas of history since 1500 where I possess no expertise and must fall back on impressions, guesswork, and second-hand information. I have persisted nevertheless, in the hope that historians who are qualified to write about these matters might take up the story from the point where my limitations force me to leave it. I point to problems that arise when critical scholarship impinges on the body politic and social. These are tangents to my main concern and I have no more than hinted at them. For example the position of scholars and (later) scientists in society has changed a great deal in the four centuries or so I have been concerned with. Moreover the character and position of what may be regarded as classical scholarship differ widely in the earlier centuries from that in the later, and in the present century. It must be reckoned a virtue that 'the educated and civilized man' in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a man like, say, the Hon. Charles Boyle, interested himself in scholarly matters, though he could not entirely fathom them. Yet once there were true judges of these matters, it was bound to become apparent that he was, and continued to be, falsely credited with the ability to judge. Had it been otherwise, the Phalaris controversy, which must loom large in any account of Bentley's work, could not have taken the course that it did take.[9] Similar difficulties are experienced in our own time in different guises.

Such strains and stresses are bound in turn to affect the lives of the scholars and scientists, and thus their work at a remove. It

is for that reason that I have not entirely omitted, as I might have been tempted to do, some account of the biographies of the half-dozen or so classical scholars to whom, ultimately, we are debtors for most of what we know about the texts and the literatures of that part of antiquity which is still described as classical.