

## CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor of GREECE AND ROME.

Sir,

In the October issue of *Greece and Rome*, the Rev. C. J. Ellingham drew attention to certain features of the battle pieces in the latter part of the *Aeneid* which seem to him poetic failures. 'Incidents which are telling in the *Iliad* are reproduced and embellished with a care that shows that Virgil's direct inspiration had run dry' (p. 10), and 'the greater his care, the greater the unreality' (p. 12). The implication is that Virgil lacked personal experience of battle and therefore failed to describe it effectively. I agree that Virgil hated bloodshed; but for that very reason it is unlikely that he did not understand it in all its horrible details. I should like to propose an alternative view of the passages discussed.

1. To the sensitive mind imagination can supply the experience that by chance life itself has not offered. To be able to describe a battle it is not necessary to take part in one.

2. If Virgil hated war, he probably understood its horror only too well.

3. By elaborating his descriptions, he retards the tempo. Virgil must have realized this and have done it purposely. He is more interested in the minds of the people fighting than in the fighting itself. To the mind of a person fighting in a battle time passes at a different speed from the speed felt by an onlooker. A person involved in an accident may, owing to the enhanced intensity of observation induced by his feelings, receive the impression that the events of a split second take a much longer time to occur. He may see the windscreen of a car cracking and being penetrated by a flying object apparently quite slowly. It is possibly this horror-struck impression of slowness in the mind of the victim that Virgil is attempting to describe. Admittedly, he is not always fully successful; but I think that he achieves the desired effect in two instances at least, x. 335-41 and xi. 561-3.

4. It does not follow from this that Homer did not have real experience of battle, of course. The difference in treatment of such incidents by each merely shows a difference in temperament. The difference between their actual experience, if any, is irrelevant.

Yours faithfully,

H. G. MULLENS.

Andover.