

A REPLY TO DR. WASMANN.

BY THOS. L. CASEY, VICKSBURG, MISS.

Truth may be likened to a bull's-eye—it is much more difficult to hit than to miss. The “splitters” frequently throw their shots too high and the “lumpers” too low, and there are many other sources of aberration which cause the careless worker to miss the bull's-eye. It has sometimes been my misfortune to aim a little too high in monographic work, where the familiarity engendered by long and close investigation may have led to the assignment of too great weight to certain differential characters, but, in the case of the genera allied to *Homæusa* (Journ. N. Y. Ent. Soc., VIII., p. 53), I feel myself obliged to dissent from the views advanced by Mr. Wasmann in the September number of this journal.

Myrmobiota differs so completely in habitus from *Homæusa*, that it is only by considering the general characters of the group that it can be discovered to be allied in any way to that genus. *Soliusa* resembles *Homæusa* in general habitus, but differs profoundly in abdominal structure, the basal tergites being strongly constricted at base in the latter and unconstricted in the former. It is rather unfair for Mr. Wasmann to cite other genera, in which such and such characters become valueless, because it is well known to every biological worker that characters perfectly suitable as generic criteria in one group of species may lose all taxonomic value in another group, which may not even be far removed in the series.

It is not, however, primarily the defence of the genera in question that moves me to make this reply, but rather a singular feature, allied to disingenuousness on the part of Mr. Wasmann, which appears from some recent personal correspondence, and which reappears in the third paragraph of his article. To properly show this forth, it is necessary to reproduce the three postal cards which I have received from Mr. Wasmann during the current year. The entire text only of each card is given, the salutation and endings being omitted. The first is as follows:

“LUXEMBURG, March 5th, 1901.

“I acknowledge the receipt of your kind letter from February 20th; also your paper on *Corylophidæ*, etc., has arrived, but I could not find time to inform you of its arrival till now. Your publications will be always welcome to me; also specimens of myrmecophilous or termitophilous species, especially of those which you describe.”

Nothing occurred after this acknowledgment of the receipt of my paper containing the table of the *Homæusa* group until the arrival of the following postal and little box :

“ LUXEMBURG, May 1st, 1901.

“ Will you have the kindness to name the species of *Myrmobiota* for me, which I send you by the same post in a little box? It was sent to me by one of my correspondents, who found it with *Lasius niger*.”

It seems quite evident that the crafty wording of this missive was intended to ensnare if not to delude me, and as I had taken particular care in the paper mentioned to show why *Myrmobiota* could not be the same as *Homæusa*, the tacit assumption here implied that I did not know one genus from the other caused me to answer Mr. Wasmann rather sharply, and I informed him in positive terms that the specimen sent was in no manner a *Myrmobiota*, but a true *Homæusa*, and alluded to my recently-published paper, which I stated he could not have examined. Thereupon, I received the following postal :

“ LUXEMBURG, June 1st, 1901.

“ Having not your ‘*last paper*,’ in which you explained the differences between *Homæusa* and *Myrmobiota*, I ask you to send it to me. Your letter has come to my hands, and I learned the existence of that paper only by your note in the letter. My specimens of ‘*Myrmobiota crassicornis*’ were from Wickham too ; I am curious to know how you explain the generic difference between *Myrmobiota* and *Homæusa* now.”

My astonishment on receiving this postal can well be imagined, but I nevertheless sent him another copy of the paper, and heard nothing more until the article in question appeared in this journal.

The fact that Mr. Wasmann still adheres positively to his original theory that *Myrmobiota* is congeneric with *Homæusa*, without having even a specimen, seems to savour of that form of narrow-mindedness which occasionally comes to light, even in men of acknowledged ability and reputation—a hesitancy to correct or withdraw a statement once made, although demonstrated to be untenable. I have always admired the work of Mr. Wasmann, and regret the necessity of going into print in dispute with him, but it will probably be admitted that there is at least some justification for it in this instance.