

# VERGIL

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**P**UBLIUS Vergilius Maro was born October 15, 70, and died September 21, 19 B. C. His father was a prosperous peasant farmer, who had married his employer's daughter. Donatus says that he bought up forest land and kept bees. His mother's name was Magia Polla: a fact which, as Nettleship says, "has probably much to do with the middle-age fable which made the poet into a magician." We have little enough knowledge of either parent; but it is clear that Vergil, like Horace, could scarcely have become a poet without the careful toil and thought of his father. It is a little striking that two Italian peasants, one of them of servile birth, should have been able so largely to influence the course of civilization.

Every text-book tells the story of Vergil's life. He was born at Andes, near Mantua. He studied at Cremona, Milan, finally at Rome. He was always a great student; and it ought not to be forgotten that in his day *doctus* was an epithet of praise for a poet. So far as learning went, there is no doubt that he could have held his own with any of the *cantores Euphorionis* who rivalled or attempted to rival the polymathic poetry of Alexandria. His knowledge of all ancient literature and his devotion to philosophy are obvious; Donatus tell us that he studied, among other things, medicine and especially astrology. He adds that Vergil once attempted to plead a case, but not more than once, "for Melissus says that he was very slow of speech, and almost like an uneducated person." At any rate, he appears to have given up public speaking for ever. He had trouble with the disbanded soldiers of the triumvirs; when lands were assigned to them in his district, one of them occupied his patrimony. Friends at court intervened with Maecenas, and his property was restored. If it was again taken from him for a time, as seems possible, at any rate he never knew want. Maecenas befriended him, and some of his powerful friends gave him an estate in Campania. Thereafter he spent his time in study and poetry. The Eclogues were finished before 37; the Georgics about 29; the Aeneid was left unfinished at Vergil's death. He was in Greece once, and probably twice. We know little more about his private affairs. His fortunes were secure, and

he led a life of learned and peaceful leisure, the best possible opportunity for a man of Vergil's temper to complete his great work. We are told of his personal appearance and ill health; tall, dark, rustic, a sufferer from indigestion. We get from Horace pleasant glimpses of the attitude of Vergil's friends to him. Horace was not a sentimental person, and his *et serves animae dimidium meae* is not rhetorical affectation. Vergil is the thoughtful student coming from the farm, who succeeds in spite of himself. His lack of ambition seems unconscious. He was too much interested in greater things to have much concern for worldly success. Nor did he consider himself to have succeeded. In a letter to Augustus, quoted by Macrobius, he says he thinks he attempted so great a work "almost in madness", *paene vitio mentis*, and his last instructions to his executors to destroy the Aeneid show what he thought of his achievement. One can scarcely believe that he thought the Aeneid really bad; but it fell so far short of what he wanted, that it seemed hardly worth keeping. Then he died at Brundisium of a fever at the age of fifty-one. He had planned to revise the Aeneid, and to finish his days in the pursuit of philosophy. He may appear to have deserved this privilege; *dis aliter visum*.

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Vergil's birth fell in the consulship of Pompey and Crassus, when Julius Caesar was about thirty years old. Cicero, at the age of thirty-six, had lately delivered the speeches that drove Verres into exile, and was next year to be curule aedile. The republic was apparently alive, and not unlikely to endure. Sulla had been dead eight years, and the memories of proscription, plunder, and massacre must have been vivid. Octavian, who later reaped the reward of the toil and pain of that generation, was not born until seven years later. Horace was five years younger than Vergil; but Lucretius, the only Roman poet that greatly influenced Vergil, was in the middle or later twenties. Catullus was somewhere in his teens, and had not yet met Lesbia. Had he never met her, his life would probably have been much happier, and the literature of the world certainly much poorer. Vergil was born into a stirring time, amid the clash of powerful personalities. He saw the triumph and murder of Julius Caesar, "the greatest man in all this world", and the strife of the lesser men that followed him, with another proscription accompanied with plunder and murder; not so terrible as Sulla's, but meaner, as the actors were meaner men than the mulberry-faced dictator, who was, indeed, greater than any public man of the century except

Julius Caesar himself. He lived to see years of the rule of Octavian, now become Augustus, and with claws neatly sheathed; willing to forget the proscription, and the murder of Cicero; not anxious to recall the methods by which he had risen to power; suave, urbane, the munificent patron, generous to his friends and dependents so long as they were sufficiently obedient, veiling his despotic rule under republican forms. Vergil saw in the case of his friend Gallus what could happen to anyone who fell under imperial displeasure, even though Augustus might lament after the event that he was the only man who could not be angry with a friend. But Augustus brought one great gift that atoned many times for his despotism, the gift of peace. Peace was what the Roman world had wanted for a century, since the time of the Gracchi. The Oriental danger was past; Cleopatra's wiles had been powerless in the presence of the calm calculation of the master of the world. Rome was secure, Augustus was secure, and men could rest in contented prosperity. So the empire started on toward two happy centuries—as happiness is counted under an empire; the second of which, indeed, Gibbon regarded as the happiest period mankind had ever seen. Then came the Decline and Fall, and from the ruins the modern world was created; concerning the outcome of which we know as little as did Vergil of the future of the state established by Augustus.

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There are four great Roman poets, Lucretius, Catullus, Vergil, Horace. The earliest was younger than Julius Caesar, and the latest died more than twenty years before the death of Augustus. It is only ninety years, perhaps less, from the birth of Lucretius to the death of Horace. It is six centuries from Ennius to Claudian; yet the four stand easily in the first place. Ennius was great, perhaps as great intellectually as any of them; but, powerful as was his genius, his art had not attained its maturity. Quintilian's words have often been quoted: *Ennium sicut sacros vetustate lucos adoremus, in quibus grandia et antiqua robora iam non tantam habent speciem quantam religionem.* We know him only in fragments, but he was, before Vergil, the national poet. Plautus was perhaps great; but great rather as a dramatist, and skilled adapter of Greek plots and measures to the Latin language—or *vice versa*—than as a poet. Ovid was a wonderful teller of stories, and an artist of a metre almost too impeccable; but he had not the serious purpose or the depth of passion that is essential to great poetry. Juvenal was a better man than Mr. Garrod thinks him; but his great qualities are perhaps more akin to rhetoric than to poetry. There is no

absolute antithesis, but a very real difference. *Maxima debetur puero reverentia* is a great saying, perhaps the greatest in Juvenal. Compare it with *O passi graviora, dabit deus his quoque finem*, not the greatest in Vergil, though one of the best known; or with *Adspirant aurae in noctem, nec candida cursus Luna negat, splendet tremulo sub lumine pontus*. Juvenal's verse is in the province of ethics, Vergil's in the kingdom of the imagination where great poetry belongs. There is no one to challenge the four. They stand at the summit of Latin literature, and Latin literature educated, and still directly and indirectly educates, the civilized western world. The great original force that men call Greek lies behind Latin, and all other significant elements of that world, inevitable as fate. But the direct influence upon the western nations was more immediately Latin.

It is perhaps idle to attempt to discriminate among the four as to absolute rank. It is alien to the purpose of this paper to discuss in detail their varying merits. But it would probably be agreed that, owing to choice of subject and to historical accident, Vergil has directly influenced the mind of the civilized world more than the other three. For sheer imaginative power, Lucretius has no superior, but his work did not greatly affect or interest the educated world until relatively late; and probably at this day fifty people read something of Vergil where one reads anything of his great predecessor. The swift and piercing phrase of Catullus, his occasional organ music—*multas per gentes et multa per aequora vectus*—strike the sensitive mind as a revelation of compelling beauty and pathos; but he, like Lucretius, has a relatively small audience. Horace is the friend and companion of the civilized man. His poetical quality, indeed, has been impugned by those who should know better. If a man can read the Regulus ode and not realize that he is in the presence of great poetry and perfect art, he has not, to adapt an old phrase, experienced literature. He is, as Quiller-Couch points out, *par excellence*, the patriotic poet of Rome, though he wrote no epic. He is something greater, the most nearly central figure in literature, the one who judges values most impartially. But he did not so seize the imagination and direct it to lofty and noble themes as did Vergil. Consider Vergil's effect on St. Augustine, and Dante, and the legend about St. Paul at Vergil's tomb. Vergil's ethos is his own, as is that of every independent mind; and the Christian world felt it as naturally akin to the ethos of Christianity. Indeed Mackail's phrase, "that note of brooding pity", suggests Morley's "legend of pity."

The minor works need not detain us here. They were formerly considered to be spurious; they are now held by some scholars of repute to be genuine. Investigations of such topics are of great interest to students; and their results, when assured, are of genuine value to the world. In the present instance, the authorship of the *Culex*, *Ciris*, *Moretum*, or any of the others could not increase or diminish Vergil's reputation. They resemble the work of any young writer of talent who tests his skill by experiments in composition, as is the custom of young writers. The three great works do not resemble the production of any young writer of talent.

It may seem odd to speak of the *Bucolics* as a "great" work. This collection is not great in size, which to be sure is no test. The poems are not great in what would ordinarily be called originality, for the imitation of Theocritus is obvious; indeed, some editors will point with unction to at least one patent mis-translation. But it is of the *Bucolics* that Mackail says: "through these immature and tremulous cadences there pierces, from time to time, that note of brooding pity which is unique in the poetry of the world." There is, of course, no question of plagiarism. Vergil took what he wanted to use wherever he could find it, as did most Roman poets. In one particular, too, he is more genuine than his model. The pastoral may be impossible now in English, and the imitators of Theocritus and Vergil may deserve what Johnson says and Conington repeats about them. It may be true that Vergil made further development of the pastoral as a serious form of literature impossible. But Vergil himself, however artificial his shepherds and however composite his landscapes, had a genuine feeling for land and flocks and herds. He knew the rustic life and mind as perhaps no other great poet has known it. The machinery may be artificial, but the spirit is real. *Amaryllis* is not of much consequence, but his *nos patriae fines et dulcia linquimus arva* means much: Vergil had known what it was to be for a time an exile from his fields. *Aspice aratra iugo referunt suspensa iuveni Et sol crescentes decedens duplicat umbras*, is old as Homer, old as agriculture: every reader of Homer remembers the appropriate epithet for that time of day. Yet there are still many places in Nova Scotia where the ox brings in the plough as the evening shadows lengthen, just as he did in Corydon's time. *Grandia saepe quibus mandavimus hordea sulcis Infelix lolium et steriles nascuntur avenae* represents the experience of many a poor farmer on his lean acres. Yet it is from the *Eclogues* that Macaulay and Voltaire selected the same passage as the best in Vergil: Macaulay, indeed, goes even further: "I think that the finest

lines in the Latin language are those five which begin *saepibus in nostris parvam te roscida mala*". It is from a reference a few lines further on that Johnson barbed one of his shafts against Chesterfield. "The shepherd in Vergil at last grew acquainted with love, and found him a native of the rocks." No one could be less likely to sentimentalize over rural pursuits than Macaulay, unless it were Voltaire or Johnson. The minor literary references to the Bucolics, too, must be innumerable—everyone remembers how in *Tom Brown's School Days* it was the murder of "*Triste lupus stabilis*" by a luckless boy that moved Dr. Arnold to unwonted wrath: and in *Two Years Before the Mast* the redoubtable Captain T. quotes "*Tityre tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi*" to his Harvard sailor. Already the mastery of phrase is complete. It matters little now that the machinery of the pastoral is antiquated, that Corydon and Thyrsis and Daphnis are only an outworn convention. What matters is the perfection of phrase, and the attitude of mind revealed through it. The poet's thought and feeling inform the conventional frame. The evident sincerity of his interest, his evident knowledge of the rural mind, remove the suspicion of unreality. It is unnecessary now to defend or praise the Bucolics. Scholars, poets, and philosophers can always be quoted in their favour. But they tell, perhaps, a tale of special interest to the country born.

The Bucolics took some years to write, and were finished before 37 B. C. Vergil appears never to have hurried over his work. The traditional tale of the Georgics is that they were written at the rate of one line per day. They too, even more than the Bucolics, speak with a peculiar intimacy to those in whose earliest consciousness rural sights and sounds are for ever imbedded. The nostalgia for the plough may be hidden from public view, but it comes to some whenever appears the good gigantic smile of the brown earth. Vergil knew and felt it: and perhaps there is no better comment on the difference between Vergil and Horace, both men of early country training, than the fact that Horace did not. We can imagine Vergil as active at rural tasks himself: ploughing, if his strength were sufficient, pruning, feeding and tending his cattle, reaping his grain. Perhaps he did none of these things; though we cannot say what kind of farmwork he may have performed as a boy. But Horace one cannot see any closer to the actual labour of the farm than as a mildly interested and sympathetic master of his servants. The hills and woods and all the delights of the neighborhood of his Sabine farm that restored him to himself made a pleasant background for his studies, and his conversa-

tion with his friends. He knew enough about the farm to know that much of the talk about it on the part of the sentimental townsman is humbug: witness the Second Epode.

Dryden, as is well known, called the Georgics "the best poem of the best poet", and it is significant that the work generally regarded as artistically the most perfect thing in Roman literature should have been a didactic poem about farming. There is something in the genius of agriculture congenial to the Roman disposition, with its fondness for solid massive results of practical value. Farming feeds the world: in the Roman world, whose tradition and history Vergil knew so well, the farmer found the means of sustenance and the soldier protected him and it; indeed, farmer and soldier used in the old times to be one. "Pyrrhus" says Heitland, "is said to have been impressed by the discipline and bravery of the Roman soldiers, and also by the good cultivation of Roman farms. The two things were in truth the same, for the average soldier of the legions was a yeoman tilling his land in time of peace." These occupations were therefore more highly esteemed than other forms of manual labour. "*Proposuit Maecenas Georgica*," but even if Maecenas did start him at this task, it was Vergil's own, and a labour of love.

The relation of Vergil to Hesiod is, as has often been pointed out, less close than his relation to Theocritus or to Homer. Paley says that the *Works and Days* is not properly a didactic poem, nor a professed treatise on either economy or agriculture. Hesiod was thinking of his brother, the "great simpleton Perses": and the general laws in which he is interested are those that apply to Perses's case. Direct imitation of Hesiod is most apparent in the First Book. Vergil's temper, like Hesiod's, was docile toward religion and tradition: and both Hesiod and Vergil set a proper value upon hard work. But Vergil's mind ranges far beyond Hesiod's ken. He had examined the works of the Alexandrians, and the technical treatises of his countrymen. And he had saturated himself with the *De Rerum Natura*.. As Sellar says: "The influence, direct and indirect, exercised by Lucretius on the thought, composition, and even the diction of the Georgics was perhaps stronger than that ever exercised, before or since, by one great poet on the work of another." His theology differed from that of Lucretius: at least, it was not a theology of revolt. In sympathetic insight into the processes of nature they were near akin; and each was a master of language.

Vergil has drawn from treatises on husbandry what they had to teach him. But it is no mere store of carefully amassed learning

that he has to give the world. Here, as in the *Bucolics*, he speaks as one on intimate terms with the soil, and here his intimacy with his own Italian soil applies as it does not apply in the semi-Sicilian, semi-Arcadian, country of the *Bucolics*. It may well be, as Keightley says, that Vergil did not fully understand all the details of all the agricultural operations of which he speaks. Perhaps few people at any time have been thoroughly conversant with the details of the growing of grain and vines, horticulture, the raising of live stock, and the culture of bees. Agriculture is a highly complicated science, as well as a great art. But Vergil had the point of view. He knew on which side of his team to walk. And while there is abundance of evidence of joy in rural life and in rural sights and sounds, there is no sentimental avoidance of the hard and tedious details of a farmer's life. In this respect he is as much of a realist as Hesiod. Hesiod tells us that the gods placed sweat before excellence; it sounds better in the Greek, though even there it inevitably suggests some rude English sayings. Vergil's melodious Latin conveys the same idea: *pater ipse colendi Haud facilem esse viam voluit*, he says in the first *Georgic*, and a few lines further on, *labor omnia vincit Improbus et duris urgens in rebus egestas*. City people often look upon rainy days on the farm as a time of rest. Vergil knew better, as any farmer knows better, and he enumerates occupations that may be carried on on rainy days, and further those suitable for holy days. We remember the *O fortunatos nimium sua si bona norint, the felix qui potuit and fortunatus et ille*, and forget that they come at the end of a book devoted to rather careful and somewhat technical, though not very orderly, discussion of trees and especially the vine, and of soils. Perhaps these great passages, as is usual in Vergil, are even better in their context than in quotation. Everywhere there is knowledge of the subject, even though it may not all be entirely accurate, and greater than knowledge, insight. His "notes" of the good cow or horse still furnish good criteria. Of the horse he says: *Illi ardua cervix Argutumque caput, brevis alvus, obesaque terga Luxuriatque toris animosum pectus*. Shakespeare gives more detail,

Round-hoof'd, short-jointed, fetlocks shag and long,  
 Broad breast, full eye, small head, and nostril wide,  
 High crest, short ears, straight legs, and passing strong,  
 Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide,

but his is not so neat a summary of the more important characteristics.

It would be easy to multiply examples of Vergil's careful observation. In the case of the bee, he seems not to have known



the sex of the monarch; though that knowledge is not a matter of great importance in the practical production of honey. Bees have passed pretty well out of our ken now; but to the Italian farmer they were live stock of some value. We are so familiar with sugar that we forget that the ancients did not know it; just as we so easily forget that among the Greeks olive oil, besides its edible function, had to take the place of soap and kerosene among our ancestors. The story of the bees is probably in itself the least interesting part of the *Georgics* to-day; but it contains passages of beauty and interest, and it leads up to the episode of Aristaeus. This subject of the artificial method of the generation of bees has only an antiquarian interest now, and may have had only an antiquarian interest for Vergil,—but it recalls immediately the fate of Gallus, whose encomium it is said to have displaced. The memory must have been a bitter one for Vergil. Gallus was his friend, who rendered Augustus great service in the conquest of Egypt. He afterwards took upon himself too much the attitude of a monarch in dealing with the administration of Egypt. He was exiled, his property confiscated, and he committed suicide. Augustus thought it not seemly to have the praises of Gallus sung publicly after that fate had befallen him. Hence the change. Perhaps Vergil could not have done otherwise: certainly he could not have disputed with the master of thirty legions. One wonders whether Horace would have yielded so quietly.

Schanz, in his *History of Latin Literature*, says that criticism has put the *Bucolics* and the *Aeneid* in the shade, and the *Georgics* on the throne. This is a rash saying, and raises a large question. But Schanz is evidently under the influence of that group of scholars who blame Vergil because he is not Homer. In the *Georgics*, so far as a man can, Vergil has achieved perfection. It is his best, but not his greatest work. In the *Georgics* we see him on intimate terms with nature. His task is entirely congenial, and does not tax his strength as did the *Aeneid*. "Man's reach should exceed his grasp"; in the *Aeneid*, too, Vergil succeeded. But he did not succeed so easily. At the close of the Fourth *Georgic* he casts his glance from rural pursuits to matters of State:

*Haec super arborum cultu pecorumque canebam  
et super arboribus, Caesar dum magnus ad altum  
fulminat Euphraten bello, victorque volentes  
per populos dat iura, viamque affectat Olympo.*

It may be mere flattery, but after the event it suggests the *Aeneid*.

The Aeneid is the only great epic whose theme is the State, its history, character and purpose. Shakespeare's historical plays give many readers their most vivid impression of some interesting periods of English history: Hardy's *The Dynasts* handles in the severe and restrained manner of Greek tragedy a notable epoch in European history. But Vergil celebrates in the Aeneid Rome and her greatness, the greatness that made the modern world, the State on whose broad foundations are built and still endure the civilized values that men hold most precious to-day, through whose instrumentality the Christian world was, humanly speaking, made possible. We sometimes too readily think of Vergil in terms of Homer. He had Homer before him indeed, but Homer's purpose, if we think of Homer as having a conscious purpose at all, was quite other than his.

The Aeneid is sometimes supposed to owe more in content to the Iliad and Odyssey than it really does. One thing for which Vergil was ultimately indebted to Homer was his metre; yet he made it his own quite as much as if he had invented it. The ancient writers wisely preferred the freedom that convention brings. Certain measures were adapted for certain kinds of poetry. Ennius took over the dactylic hexameter as the proper measure for the epic. Vergil had no real choice but to use that measure in writing the Aeneid. Tennyson, as everyone remembers, called the hexameter as fashioned by Vergil the "stateliest measure ever moulded by the lips of man", and if the meaning of the adjective and not merely the superlative be considered, it is quite likely that Tennyson, whose ear was faultless, may have been right. It is not the music of Homer. That is more intimate, more searching, more deftly modulated to the expression of every sort of human experience. In the hexameter Homer can describe the details of dressing, cooking, eating, all the familiar domesticities of common life, with no diminution of grace. The rage of Achilles, the sorrow of Priam, the pathos of Andromache, the laundry episode of Nausicaa, the death of the favorite dog, the play of children, the thunder of Zeus, the charm of Aphrodite, all find their appropriate expression from the inexhaustible stores of the great magician in the varying cadences of the richest of human tongues. But the single epithet "stately" marks out the province in which Vergil is supreme. Aeschylus might have surpassed him, had he turned to epic; Lucretius, who in sheer poetic power yields to no one, ancient or modern, except Homer alone, might have surpassed him, but for a certain stiffness in the Latin of his day. The strong vigorous speech, with its embarrassing richness of dignified consonants, was not yet

quite subdued to the subtle music of the hexameter. Then, too, Tennyson's word is "lips". There is no study—no real study—of Vergil or Homer or any other poetry without the use of audible speech. One has done nothing except to solve puzzles and get some practice in English composition until he can hear the music of the verse;—and the rhythms of Vergil, once known and remembered, are a possession for ever, a thing of unique charm, the key to a world of beauty. To one who has grasped the cadence and meaning of such lines as *Tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem* or *Purpureus veluti cum flos succisus aratro*, still more the movement of whole masses of the verse, the world is ever after a better place to live in.

It is true, as Mackail points out, that Vergil did not merely fasten together an Odyssey and an Iliad. The Aeneid is a unity; indeed,—in despite of the verdict of some eminent scholars—it is not as a congeries of beautiful passages, but as a massive structure of adapted parts, that the Aeneid is greatest. But it is also true that some of the earlier machinery of the epic appears in the Aeneid, and that at times it is a little too obvious. It does not, however, much retard the movement of the poem, which, indeed, is inconceivable without it. Rome had to be shown from the beginning. The race must rise from the conquered remnant, "the leavings of the Greeks and cruel Achilles," to the imperial people who fulfilled the prophecy *Phthiam clarasque Mycenae Servitio premet, ac victis dominabitur Argis*. The Rome of Augustus, a Rome as tangible and perhaps as sophisticated as Paris or London or New York, Rome where augurs could laugh in each other's faces, and the chief pontiff of their religion might be merely a cynical agnostic, must be derived from a people who were in daily intercourse with the ancient divinities in days when these divinities assumed human form and could be wounded by human hands. It cannot be said that there are no discrepancies; but they do not mar the total effect. Then, too, the battle pieces are cold, and Vergil's heart is not in them. The games of the fifth book are a dutiful—and dull—adaption of Homer. Domestic details are clumsy after Homer; but that can be shown only by quoting the incomparable Greek; there was and is only one language like that, and to require more of Vergil in these matters is to require a different Vergil and different Latin.

The primary unity of the Aeneid is a unity in the Roman character as exemplified by Aeneas. Aeneas must be led over seas and lands—*profugus fato*,—it has often been pointed out how large *fatum* bulks in the Aeneid. As hero of the Aeneid,

Aeneas must derive from the great epic; he must be one of sufficiently high standing, the possibilities of whose character had not been fully explored. Vergil might have chosen another hero, but it is difficult to find in Homer one better suited to his purpose. The character of Aeneas has been very fully criticized by scholars and schoolboys for generations. It is, of course, a mistake to compare him with what he was never intended to be, a hero of romance. Professor Conway is nearer the truth in his term "a middle-aged widower". But perhaps the best analogue of Aeneas is to be found in some of the great figures of the Old Testament. He carries out the Roman equivalent of the will of God; often with tears, for the ancients were great enough not to fear the expression of emotion; often in weariness, sometimes in error, for he was human and lonely. Of course, the crucial test for the modern reader is the Dido episode; and if that episode be abstracted from the context, and viewed without consideration of the ancient atmosphere, it is impossible to justify Aeneas. But the ancient world had not learned that the motto of a hero could be "All lost for love". Homer's attitude in such matters was more sympathetic than that of most ancients, but Hector's reply to Andromache shows something of the point of view of Aeneas. Loyalty is the virtue of Aeneas; and when a conflict of loyalties comes, he follows what to the ancient world was the more compelling. It is, again, submission to the will of God. But it is a misreading of the poem to regard Aeneas as a mere lay figure to carry out the designs of Providence. It is significant that his character fits so naturally into the mould required of the Roman citizen even in Vergil's time. The *pietas*, *gravitas*, and *constantia* that made the ancient Roman a power in the world and the Roman state the foundation of modern Europe are exemplified in Aeneas, who is unchanged from the first verse of the Aeneid to the last.

Then, too, Dido to the Roman of Vergil's day must have suggested, first of all, not the pathetic figure of a woman trusting and betrayed, or of a queen doomed to cruel tragedy, but the sinister memory of the Egyptian enchantress whose charms diverted the great Julius from his course, enslaved and ruined Antony, and were of no avail against the stern resolve of the youthful Octavian, who in this respect did more for Rome than could a greater or a more generous man. The passion of loyalty to his own soil, a genuine relic of old Italy, mingled no doubt with baser motives, prevented the Roman from seeing the desertion of Dido as the modern world sees it. Had there not been a danger that Cleopatra might lead Rome captive and govern a degenerate Italy from her

Eastern capital? Of that fear of the translation of his capital there are various indications in the literature of the time.

So far, in his treatment of Aeneas and Dido, Vergil has been the orthodox Roman; loyal, serious, firm. So far, though we cannot in this matter blame him, there is no reason to praise. But Vergil could not be constrained within the limits of the orthodox Roman. The *anima naturaliter Christiana* defeats the stern Roman temper, and the result is the atmosphere sympathetic to *infelix Dido* that for a time defeats the purpose of the Aeneid, and seriously deflects the interest of the poem from the main theme for the only time in its course. Nisus and Euryalus and Pallas move us, and the great story of the second book carries us away; but all these are consonant with the emotional current of the poem. One cares little for the fate of Rome within sound of Dido's pathetic cry "*Si quis mihi parvulus aula Luderet Aeneas*"; and the broken haunting melody of "*Quaesivit caelo lucem ingemuitque reperta*", makes the "*pius Aeneas*" seem a poor creature. For the foreign queen, dangerous to the Roman cause, Vergil can have no mercy; for the wronged and suffering woman he has infinite pity and sympathy. In this respect, as a modern scholar says, he is two thousand years ahead of his time.

But the Dido episode passes, and as one works leisurely through the Aeneid, assumes its more just proportion. One moves through the rather tiresome relief of the fifth—the schoolboy's book—and into the magic and beauty of the sixth, amid "*res alta terra et caligine mersas*", and its vision and prophecy of the majesty and dominion of Rome. Thence "the Iliad of war which succeeds the Odyssey of travel"; the gathering of the clans, the visit to Evander on the site of Rome, the various episodes and fortunes of the war. There are no books in the second half of the Aeneid that have the fame of the second, fourth, and sixth: yet the second half as a whole does not fall far short of the first. Scholars point out that the handling of the hexameter is even more subtle than before, and that the psychological interest and insight here reach their highest point. Elaborate analysis of the dactylic hexameter, as, for instance, in Winbolt's book, may seem at first a barren labour; but the careful student returns from it with a deeper insight and fuller appreciation of Vergil and of poetry. And there is no better ground for this study than in the later books of Vergil. The characters of Latinus and Amata, Nisus and Euryalus, the maiden Camilla, the eloquent but not bold Drances, Juturna the sister of Turnus, and Turnus himself, fearing no mortal, "*di me terrent et Iuppiter hostis*", but driven on his fate by the will of

the gods, all abound in interest. Lavinia does not, but she is a mere lay figure. In the last hundred and fifty lines of the last book, says Mackail, "Vergil rises perhaps to his very greatest manner". At the last comes one most significant touch. The death of Turnus is due to fate, and Aeneas is his appointed conqueror; but Aeneas felt compassion, and would have spared him, had not the baldrick of Pallas that Turnus wore fixed his attention and determined his wavering resolve. Thus do the gods act through their human instruments.

It is a commonplace of literary criticism that quotations from any great poem, rich and full of meaning as they may be even isolated from their context, are yet more full of meaning and richer in their original setting. So it is with quotations from Vergil, even of the many lines that were once household words. "*Tantaene animis caelestibus irae?*" is more significant in its context than alone, especially if one considers further the fate of Gallus. "*Stat sua cuique dies, breve et irreparabile tempus Omnibus est vitae; sed famam extendere factis Hoc virtutis opus*, noble lines, and the begetters of noble lines, gain in depth and pathos when one thinks of them as the answer of Alcides to Pallas. The sententiousness is not affectation; it is a deliberate turning aside from the only possible direct reply. The passage about Fama "*malum qua nec aliud velocius ullum Mobilitate viget, viresque acquirit eudo*" means more in the light of the knowledge of the effect of Fama on Dido's fate. With "*una salus victis nullam sperare salutem*," one must think of Aeneas nerving his little band to their hopeless task. Even the "*timeo Danaos*", now so hackneyed, regains its original value when spoken by Laocoon, and the incomparable "*sunt lacrimae rerum*" comes with more poignant force from the lips of the toil-worn and tempest-tossed Aeneas. Everywhere the details show to greater advantage as parts of the completed whole. But to begin any detailed discussion of the felicities of the Aeneid is to enter upon a road to which there is no end. It has all been said so many times; it will all be said to successive generations so many times again. The great authors of the past are not dead ancients, but living influences; and the appeal of Vergil in his Aeneid will not fail whenever a sensitive mind encounters the various music of his verse, the glorious diction, the apt suggestion of his epithets, his similes, miracles of art and insight, and all the wealth of the poet's mind and heart, above all, perhaps, his grave compassion as he moves, stately and gracious, in sure development of his theme along the spacious ways of "reverend antiquity."

Vergil may be viewed in at least four aspects, as farmer, patriot, philosopher, and poet. He was a farmer by descent, a patriot by conviction, a philosopher, as far as he was a philosopher at all, by choice, and a poet by natural necessity. The farmer is seen in his ancestral affection for the soil, in his feeling for beasts and plants, known only to those who have watched growing things on the farm. It is an intimacy no stranger knows, not to be learned from books. There were subtleties in Vergil's mind that did not permit quite the robust and hearty satisfaction with the Augustan régime that the ordinary prosperous Roman must have felt; but the higher qualities of patriotism he had, in particular that comprehension of the course of events that we call "historic sense"; and that respect and love for the early story of his country without which patriotism is merely a large commercialism, defensive propaganda for one's own party. No doubt Vergil thought of the Roman as better than other men: did not Milton speak highly of God's Englishmen? But to Vergil the outside world was composed of men of like feelings and possibilities to his own. Even Mezentius, *contemptor divum*, appears as a human and pathetic figure.

It is, of course, useless to attempt to classify Vergil as a devotee of any system of philosophy. It is not, perhaps, the most candid and sympathetic students of philosophy that make dogmatic philosophers; unless, indeed, they profess a system of their own. Vergil was not and did not pretend to be an original philosopher at all: what poet ever did? But Tenney Frank is no doubt right in regarding his philosophy as primarily Epicureanism. "Vergil's sixth Eclogue . . . is a fitting tribute to his master: '*Namque canebat, uti magnum per inane coacta Semina terrarumque animaeque marisque fuissent.*' The music of that song of creation the poet never forgot." Munro, in his introduction to Lucretius, points out that the Epicurean philosophy is much better adapted for purposes of poetry than is the Stoic with "their one wretched world, their monotonous fire, their rotund and rotatory god." Vergil was a careful student, in some sense almost a disciple of Lucretius: but he must have felt what any candid soul feels, that there is always something left that does not fit into any philosophical system. He was deeply learned; Macrobius speaks of him as "*Nullius disciplinae expers*", "*disciplinarum omnium peritissimus*"; but the fire of his genius, to borrow Macaulay's metaphor, was not quenched by the superincumbent mass of fuel. Where excellence was concerned, he was eclectic, humane, a poet.

For all other qualities of Vergil were subordinate to his poetic genius. Poets are like the rest of us, but finer, more sensitive,

with greater command of language, more delicate perception of the values of things and words, keener insight into reality. They are not, certainly great poets are not, a strange race apart, some weird sort of specialists. Some, as Spenser, are spoken of as poets' poets. Vergil is everybody's poet, in particular the poet of the civilized man; with his glorification of the toil on which civilization rests, and of the State, which is perhaps the greatest achievement of civilized men.

Consider the company of his friends, sometimes worshippers. Propertius says of the incipient Aeneid that a greater than the Iliad was being produced. Macrobius quaintly compares Vergil to nature herself. Everyone remembers St. Augustine's comparison; how he lamented the date of Dido which befel her for loving Aeneas, and did not lament his own fate that befel him for not loving God; and could not forget to make a good rhetorical antithesis in telling it, as indeed rhetoric properly understood is only the language of the emotions. To the middle ages he was saint or magician or both. And in the crowning work of mediaeval civilization, Dante looks upon Vergil as his master; and Dante's verses have been so often quoted, and so well deserve quotation:

*Tu se' lo mio maestro e il mio autore;  
Tu se' solo colui da cui io tolsi  
Lo bello stile che m'ha fatto onore.*

To Bacon, a far remove from Dante surely, he was "the chastest poet and royalest". Speaking of the many sources which Milton's wide reading and profound study laid open to him, Mackail says: "But of all these, the Aeneid takes the foremost place." The eighteenth century in Europe might be taken for one long commentary on Vergil and his contemporaries. Pitt concludes sonorous periods with Vergilian quotations: Fox and his friends talk Vergil at each other. It is hard to touch that century anywhere without finding some reference to the great Augustans. Latin was then still in some sense a universal language: its disuse as such, an eminent Englishman has lately called a great calamity. Yet the list may be extended even to the present day. Who more Vergilian than Tennyson? And the late laureate's "*Ibant obscuri*" reminds us again of the journey with the Sibyl.

There are, in a broad sense, two kinds of knowledge of which learning is made—technical knowledge, limited to experts, and humane letters, unlimited in interest and appeal. The present generation has found out many inventions and made many machines; but it has changed human nature no whit. In the course



of centuries, when the far-flung empires of the day are one with Nineveh and Tyre, it may well be—indeed, if one may infer the future from the past, it will be—that the most precious things that remain from these empires will be words as arranged by poets. Words are the very substance of which civilization is builded, the product of and inspiration to thought and feeling, labour and delight. It is by his mastery of language and all this implies that man becomes most truly civilized. Intellectual interest soon becomes barren without aesthetic appreciation; aesthetic appreciation, lacking moral rectitude, is an idle vanity, and all depends ultimately upon the implicit philosophy of a man. So poetry, with its appeal to the entire nature, moves us more than other studies; and “appreciation”, debased sometimes into a mere literary counter, is the most valuable thing in education. Properly to appreciate Vergil, to enter into his thoughts and feelings, to grasp the whole sweep of his theme, the foundation of civilization as we understand it, to enter with unhurried joy into the beauties of his words and cadences, is to become in so far more like Vergil; that means—for most of us—to become wiser and better.

For Vergil is as real to us as he was to Seneca, and has as much to say now as he had to say to St. Augustine or Dante, if we have the ability and will to understand him. The examples of famous men who are lovers of Vergil are mentioned because their names are known and have come down to us. They are typical of a great host that no man can number, who have for nearly two thousand years known something of the great poet's charm. It is the quiet students, unheard of by the world, that hand on the torch of learning to successive generations, “*Et quasi cursores vitai lampada tradunt.*” Here and there among them some man of prominence hands down his own name, and we think of him as in some sort a guarantee of the value of Vergil or Homer or Sophocles. But in these matters, “*securus iudicat orbis terrarum.*” There may be people who do not like these authors, as there may be people who do not like Chartres Cathedral or the Winged Victory of the Louvre. They judge merely themselves. Vergil belongs to civilized mankind. Specialists cannot make or much mar him.

In an address delivered in Halifax, Mr. Baldwin, then premier of England, referred in kindly words, perhaps not wholly deserved, to the reputation of Nova Scotians for intellectual pursuits, remarking that they were said “to read Vergil on Sunday afternoons in the garden.” As to how many Nova Scotians follow such pursuits on Sunday or other afternoons, statistics are not available; but there could be no more delightful occupation, and few more

edifying. One knows that if Vergil were to be sent to one of our farms he would not find himself very long a stranger. With joyful interest he would watch the haymakers driving their teams afield; or the grass rippling over the mower knife, while the perfume of yesterday's cut fills the air; or the patient ox, not yet wholly banished from our fields, as he draws the strong plow through the moist earth, while the straight furrow gleams in the afternoon sun; or the ruddy fruit that shows against the glistening foliage; or the farmer putting away his beasts as the autumn night falls fast, while the nearby chimney smokes in preparation of the evening meal. Amid such sights and sounds Vergil would be entirely at home; as well as—could he have overcome his shyness—in the council chambers of the mighty, and always in the studies of the learned. He could grasp and delineate, as perhaps no other poet, the epic of a mighty empire, and describe with keenest and most delicate insight, the habits of plants and beasts and all the minutiae of the countryside.

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There is a hill a few miles from Rome, abandoned now to shepherds and tourists, where once the great men of Republic and Empire were accustomed to retire for study or rest. Here one may lie on a summer afternoon, and listen to the tinkle of the bells below, and fancy oneself for the time in a Nova Scotian farm. Then at a glance one may see beyond the pastures cultivated fields, and the whole plain of Latium spread below; while in the centre the city, the source and fount of European history, sparkles like a grain of salt, and farther on the Tuscan sea stretches to the horizon. It is natural to think of Vergil in that spot. He delighted in pastures and cultivated lands; and the great city still commemorates in solid and massive masonry the genius of the Roman character that he celebrated. There is a magic and mystery on that hill; but there is magic and mystery in our own landscape, and Vergil lives here as well as there. He belongs to humanity. In Canada as in Italy he is that Vergil "whose fame still lasts in the world, and will last as long as time".