



VIRGIL, AS A LINK BETWEEN THE ANCIENT AND MODERN WORLD.

The Roman Poets of the Augustan Age: Virgil. By W. Y.
SELLAR. Clarendon Press.

WE give no small praise to Mr. Sellar's volume in saying that it has not disappointed the expectations with which we opened it. The recollections of his study of Lucretius had inclined us to look eagerly for a successor, and in many ways we cannot but think that the successor enters on more interesting ground. Of course no one will take those words as a comparative estimate of the two poets to whom they refer. Lucretius is the one original thinker on the long roll of Roman fame; no equally well-known poet is so distinctly an imitator as Virgil. But an echo may be richer and sweeter than the sound which awoke it. The pregnant words that form the seed-corn of thought may represent the vivid intuition of genius, or the transmuted memories and anticipations of a peculiar destiny. And it is not impossible that a second-rate thinker who stands at a turning-point of history, who catches the glow of a coming or a departing age, may embody more of the thoughts and beliefs which are interesting to posterity than some who stand in the first rank. Without attempting to decide on the exact position of the singer of whom so appreciative and thoughtful an estimate is given in the volume before us, we will attempt, taking it as our guide, to point out some of the qualities of his verse that have most interest for a modern; to trace in his picture of the life of the past that first dawn of the life of the future to which it appears to us to owe its most delicate and vivid colouring, and which for us who know that life must be its most important characteristic.

He is, we think, the most feminine of all great poets. This quality of his genius comes out most distinctly when we set him by the side of one with whom he has much in common—our own

Scott. The love of nature, the fine ear for the traditions of his native land, the loyal heart for its faith—these were a common portion to the northern and the southern singer, but Scott's robust manliness presents a striking contrast to the gentle and melancholy temperament of Virgil. A rough soldier, to whom in some imaginary counterpart of the civil wars Abbotsford should have been allotted, would have had a very much harder task than the veteran to whom the commissioners of the Triumvirate assigned Virgil's confiscated farm, and though we think Mr. Sellar is a little hard on the meek poet for the tameness with which he alludes to his spoliation, it is no doubt the expression of something that would seem to a modern more suitable to a woman than a man. And yet by a strange paradox it is the very quality which more opposes the modern than the ancient ideal of manliness which gives Virgil his peculiar interest for a modern. The most obvious point of contrast between the ancient and the modern world, perhaps—to single out any one point of contrast from so many must always be a matter of doubtfulness—is the prominence and development which in the latter is given to the feminine elements of character, and only a classical thinker in whom they were already present could be, as we think Virgil was, the herald of the modern world.

The paradox after all is easily resolved. An individual character cannot be at once feminine and manly, but the age which has no ideal of womanliness, has no ideal of manliness either. Here as elsewhere the opposites emerge at the same moment. The sense of personal honour which belongs to chivalry was utterly wanting in a Greek or Roman. It would be interesting to trace the connection between the new importance given to individual rights and claims, and the endless vista opened to every individual spirit by Christianity, a connection which could not be disproved by pointing out the narrowness of the chivalric ideal. The knightly sensitiveness to every shadow of insult is no doubt the privilege of a favoured few, it could not exist as the heritage of the many; but those few form the ideal of humanity, and the very extravagance and exaggeration of feeling as to what affects them is an indirect tribute to the infinite future opened to all. But this line of inquiry, however interesting, would not be specially relevant to a study of Virgil, for what makes him in so many respects a prophet of the new world is his wealth where chivalry is poor. The reader will recall an eloquent and touching protest against the hardness and narrowness of this ideal, which the poet we have compared to Virgil puts in the mouth of a Jewish maiden. We can without difficulty imagine that remonstrance from one of a down-trodden race in the dialect of Virgil. In his sympathy with the humble—in his sense of the

value of lowly toil and the claim of obscure suffering, we may say perhaps that he is more modern than chivalry. He is indeed the prophet, in some respects, of the feelings of our own day.

But one feeling which we trace for the first time in his page belongs rather to the ages which follow his, and precede ours, than to our own. In him we witness the birth of loyalty. It is easy to exaggerate the poor and slavish side of this feeling, and perhaps without exaggeration it is impossible not to discern something of it in him. But those who look upon his attitude to Augustus through the shadow of Imperialism—who see Nero, Caligula, Domitian, follow one to whom he more than once gives the appellation of Divinity—who hear the base accents of Martial echo his devout reverence—may easily misinterpret this feeling in him. We would especially commend, in this volume, the justice with which Mr. Sellar treats a sentiment that is peculiarly repulsive to Englishmen. It would have been peculiarly repulsive to a Greek. All that is finest in ancient feeling, and all that is finest in quite modern feeling, agree in their vigorous recoil from the prostration of one human will before another not elevated above it by any inherent dignity or grandeur. But this approach of the modern and ancient world follows a long divergence. The modern and the ancient love of liberty are separated by an interval in which the feeling, which of course always exists, was something very different from what it was at first, and what it is at last. And the sentiment of loyalty which predominates in this intervening period, and which no doubt remains, though weakened in our own day, seems to us to take its start with the dominion of Augustus. It is a feeling neither altogether impersonal, nor altogether personal. Strong individual preference or taste would disguise it, as gaslight would overcome moonlight; only where there has been a certain strain on the relation, could a son say, as J. S. Mill says of his father, "I was always loyally devoted to him." On the other hand the word would not be felt appropriate to any devotion that was entirely impersonal. The most unquestioning obedience may exist without loyal devotion: if my allegiance is to the office merely, and not the person—if the general at whose command I am ready to be shot to-day, may be the rebel I am ready to shoot to-morrow—then whatever else the sentiment of subjection is, it is not loyalty. Loyalty must be as closely allied to the reverence for law and the strong impulse of human affection as it is distinct from both. It is the feeling which links moral distinctions with something more tender and mysterious; it binds us together by an attraction that remains as something ultimate when reason and conscience have reclaimed their rights, and haunts with a sense of incompleteness the bonds which own no allegiance that may not adequately

be met by a corresponding claim. Wherever this reverence refuses all surplusage of feeling—wherever it takes its stand on the basis of contract, and proclaims the relation to be a strictly correlative one, so much worth on your side, so much honour on mine—then the relation may illustrate many other excellences, but loyalty will be wanting.

It is by a fine and subtle indication of the true genesis of this feeling that our word *legal* comes straight from the Latin, its twin brother, *loyal*, through the French. Loyalty began to exist with the modern world. The comparison may seem fanciful, but we would illustrate its relation to the patriotism of the old world by the contrast between a Greek temple and a Gothic cathedral. The one is complete in itself; you would spoil it if you added to it; it suggests nothing that is not there. The other is a sort of embodied sigh of yearning and aspiration after that which is not there. The one maintains its place with a serene and satisfied dominion over the earth it adorns; the other seems to soar upward to the heaven above it. The Greek who fell at Thermopylae, the Roman who fell at Cannæ, perished in defence of a reality that was complete and absolute. All modern loyalty, on the other hand, is a sad struggle with the sense of incompleteness. It attaches itself to a flawed, imperfectly realized ideal; it struggles upward to something out of itself. It is one of the most characteristic and pathetic traits of the last days of the poet we have likened to Virgil, that he cared in Italy, as Sir William Gell noticed with much humour, less for all the classic associations of those spots which were most rich in classic associations, than for the tombs of the Stuarts. This undying interest in the embers of genius for a set of people as little worthy of interest on their own merits as any that ever lived is, we think, a specimen of and tribute to the kind of hold that this peculiar sentiment has had on the modern world. It is brought out and exhibited in all its purity by the failure of any responsive or correlative excellence in its object. Of course we are not denying that the Highlander who “sighed by Arno for his lovelier Tees,” as Lord Macaulay has gracefully described him, was blind to something better than loyalty to his prince—still he may exhibit for us something of that sense of the infinite claim in a human bond which a more prosperous devotion could not illustrate to the same extent. And if this sense is, in some of the Eclogues of Virgil and in the invocation at the beginning of the Georgics, allied with baser elements, it is not altogether disguised by them. We may study them as the first utterance of one of the strongest and most powerful feelings which manifest themselves in the movements of history—the reverence for an individual, as the type and symbol of law.

It may be objected that Augustus should have been, to Virgil, the symbol not of law but of lawlessness. The bloody tyrant of the second Triumvirate—the murderer of Cicero—could never, it may be thought, have appeared arrayed in the dignity of “the patriot king”—the Commonwealth could never have worn this strange disguise. But we believe that to reason thus is to look at ancient things with modern eyes. To Virgil, Augustus really *was* the saviour of society. His was, indeed, as far as his own intention could make it so, essentially a conservative revolution. His aim was to bring back the frugal, temperate, religious, law-abiding past; and whatever his reforms failed to bring back, they certainly gave the weary world stability and repose. How much would be forgiven to such a benefactor! The longing of a storm-tossed world for peace is a feeling which unhappily has never been very far from the possible experience of any time; but we can dimly enter into the weariness of a Roman who had lived through the civil wars. It is not merely that the images of fire and slaughter are dim to us, that the dear familiar scenes, fragrant with all tender memories, have never been polluted with horrors, that smoke and blood have never blotted out for an Englishman of our age the very meaning of home. Much more than this, we have to remember that the convulsions of modern Europe do not shake the order which the convulsions of ancient Rome menaced at its very foundations. While the two greatest nations of Europe wrestled with each other in deadly combat, the broad current of a common civilized life flowed on untroubled, ready to absorb them both when they were ready to return to it. There was nothing like this in the first century before Christ. All law, all order, all that was the very type of stability, rocked and swayed under the shock of a perishing world. The difference between war now and war then is the difference of a railway accident and an earthquake. The sufferings of the actual victims at the moment may be much the same, but in the one case there is, and in the other there is not, a stable world to recover in. The earthquake, in the days of Virgil, had lasted, with intervals of only feverish rest, for the better part of a century. The sense of insecurity and peril had become a tradition. The one thing the world craved with deep heartfelt yearning was rest.

This craving has found an expression so ardent, so touched with ecstatic hope, in the celebrated fourth Eclogue, that earlier opinion associated it with the birth of that Deliverer who was looked for by another nation than the Romans. The general consensus of commentators, we believe, forbids us to connect this picture of a returning golden age, and the wondrous child whose birth should initiate it, with those prophecies of Isaiah which it so vividly recalls. Virgil was indeed as erudite a poet as our own

Browning; no lore was strange to his pen, and some reflection of Messianic anticipation is not impossible here; but such a knowledge of the Septuagint as would convert these similarities to quotations is, we are assured by the most competent students, quite improbable. We own that we surrender the fancy with a certain regret. But if we must not believe that the Italian caught any direct echo from the Hebrew singer, we are not obliged to narrow the emotions which that Eclogue represents to any association with the consulship of Pollio, or the triumph of Augustus. It speaks a language fresh and living for every age; it utters the groans of "the whole creation travailing for deliverance;" and we, in the nineteenth century after Christ, may hear in this lyric cry of the first century before Christ a tone of pathetic desire that is not alien from the deepest cravings of our own time. Still, it is also in a special sense the expression of a time that was worn out with warfare and the traditions of warfare; and whoever the mysterious child was who was to rule the pacified world, and see the lion lie down with the lamb, there can be no doubt that the spirit which welcomed him was that which prepared subjects for Augustus. To such an imperious and overwhelming longing he appeared as a sort of incarnate Peace. He was the type of a restored order of things; his name was the promise of a united, re-organized, coherent world. "O Melibœe, deus nobis hæc otia fecit!" was the exclamation of one who had seen a new world issue from chaos. In judging such utterances, we must make allowance for the pressure under which they were sent forth.

Doubtless the love of peace is compatible with the love of liberty. But partial and incomplete as we all are, it does not often happen that these two blessings are desired ardently by the same individual: the longing for peace quenches the longing for liberty; the longing for liberty burns up the longing for peace. We see in our own history how the security of the Tudors rested on the national weariness of the Wars of the Roses; we can imagine how the civil wars to which the Wars of the Roses were a small matter, inevitably prepared a throne for tyrants. "Peace at any price" may be the most ignoble of desires, but it is possible that those words might be accepted, at a national crisis, as expressing the aspirations of the purest patriotism. After a century of civil strife, it is quite possible that to a noble and pure spirit *nothing* might seem so desirable as a condition of things in which what begins to-day may be finished to-morrow. "It were better," says Lord Bacon, "to live in a State where nothing was lawful, than where everything was lawful." Civil war creates a State where everything is lawful; those whose character has been moulded under such a condition can admit no rival to their

imperious desire for its cessation. And everything we know of Virgil's character and circumstances is of a nature to enhance this tendency. This longing of his life comes out finely in the well-known lines where, in the midst of his half-indignant allusion to the battles of Pharsalia and Philippi ("nec fuit indignum superis"), he dreams of a day when these horrors shall be matter of dim recollection to the peaceful cultivator of the soil:—

"Scilicet et tempus veniet, cum finibus illis,
Agricola, incurvo terram molitus aratro,
Exesa inveniet scabrâ rubigine pila:
Aut gravibus rastris galeas pulsabit inanes,
Grandiaque effossis mirabitur ossa sepulchris."

They are the expression of that longing desire with which the mind, overwhelmed by the pressure of painful circumstances, springs forward to a position from which they shall be contemplated from afar, and pictures their dim trace on the horizon of thought as a relief from the pressure of their actual details. It is a state of mind more expressive of profound weariness than any mere wish to escape altogether the memory of these circumstances; it speaks the oppression they have laid on the imagination, which it cannot shake off, which it can only relieve in changing the point of view, and contemplating afar off what it would so gladly cease to contemplate altogether.

And we must not forget that the feeling inspired by Augustus was something new in the world—that the identification of the nation's well-being with the life of an individual was such a sudden concentration of patriotic feeling as might well develop its heat. It is indeed true that in one sense the worship of the Cæsar was not new; the apotheosis of Romulus had already accustomed the Roman mind to the association of a human ruler with the gods. But the deification of the founder of the empire was a different thing from the deification of the founder of the city. It was, we conceive, not the last ray of the hero-worship which is a part of the religion of the old world, but the first of an essentially different feeling—modern loyalty. And it is as true in the world of thought as in the world of sense, that the dawn of a new day has a radiance and purity of which those can know but little who have seen it only in its prosaic noon.

Augustus represented to Virgil the incarnate divine will which had enthroned Rome on the world's summit. The contrast between the monotonous success of Rome and the fugitive glory of Greece is very striking even to a modern. The glancing lights, the sudden vicissitudes of the elder power, bring the monotonous, unpausing advance to universal dominion of the younger into marked prominence even for us, who see it but as a small part of an infinitely wide scheme of human destiny;

but how much more must this have been felt by those for whom it was the whole of history! The Romans turned to Greece for their whole literature; there is not a passage of any importance in Virgil, for instance, that is not more or less a translation from the Greek; and yet when they came to the actual Greeks of their day they felt about them not very differently from what we do. Their masters in thought, in eloquence, in art, had been set aside to make way for them. The latest historian of the Romans has called them "a great nation of commonplace men;" and, however we may regard that saying, it cannot be denied that their unvarying success was, with certain striking exceptions, not due to individual genius, but to a general tendency common to the whole nation. Such a destiny as this was fitted to impress strongly on the minds of those who watched and shared it the decision of an invisible power, acting through and above human wills, and often in direct opposition to them. This idea of the invisible fate of Rome (finely brought out by Mr. Nettleship in his reflections on the *Æneid*) was one of many preparations for the incorporation of this ideal in a visible ruler who should be the type and bond of that dominion to which Rome had advanced with unfaltering and undeviating pace. Apart from some such element as this in the dominion of the Cæsars, that dominion is incomprehensible. What modern nation has endured at the hands of its rulers the injuries of the sovereign Roman people under the hands of a Nero, a Caligula, a Domitian? What modern ruler has lacked elements of strength which to all of these (as the easy overthrow of the first shows) were absolutely wanting? The solution of this problem is, as all historical explanation must be, a complex one, but one element in the mysterious strength of imperialism was, we cannot doubt, that new alliance between the belief in the invisible, and that reverence for the visible, which emerges first, in alliance no doubt with much that is a source of anything but strength, in the attitude of Virgil to his prince. Virgil, says St. Beuve, saw in the coming emperors a line of sovereigns of which Trajan would form the type. With all possible desire to make the most of every excuse for the "undue subservience to power," of which Mr. Sellar is obliged to plead guilty on behalf of his client, it does not seem to us that this was with Virgil so much a delusive ascription of moral strength as a set of ideas that do not belong to morality. The sense of willing submission to superior power cannot co-exist in any mind with a belief in the absolutely evil character of that power, but it is compatible (perhaps it is commonest in this association) with a complete absence of any moral estimate whatever. This is indeed exactly Virgil's attitude towards the gods. Professor Conington translates "*Dis aliter visum*," "Heaven's will be done." That seems to us a translation not only of language, but of

feeling—a transference of Christian to heathen piety. Still it is a good illustration of the kind of change we have to make in his feeling before we can present it in a modern garb. His sense of stern unsympathetic dominion comes out again strongly in the opening lines of the third book of the *Æneid* :—

“Postquam res Asiæ Priamique evertere gentem
Immeritam visum superis.”*

In both cases the gods pass over and act against human desert; they take no count of the virtue of Riphœus, the innocence of Troy. Yet not the less they have a claim on the submission of the worshipper, they are the rulers whom man must obey, and it is something more than slavish subjection which prompts the impulse to obey wholly and willingly. This is the very spirit that prepares subjects for Rome. It is not mere submission to brute force—it is by no means a mere prudent economy of all vain resistance, an enlightened discernment of the true interest of the party concerned. It is a real allegiance, but an allegiance which does not imply anything of the nature of moral approbation.

We shall understand this feeling better, as it is expressed upon the page of Virgil, if we remember that he was not originally a full Roman citizen.† He contemplated the mighty rule of Rome from the point of view of one who was admitted to all its glory and triumph, but who had also stood outside the charmed circle of privilege, and regarded the mighty structure as it presented itself to aliens. He knew it as it is to those within, and to those without. He was not altogether a Roman. The influences which told upon his youth were those which bind the conquered to the conquerors, but do not entirely obliterate the sense of subjection. And the character thus formed seems to us to breathe through all his more important writings, and give them their more distinctive character. The shadow and the glory of Roman dominion are both there, but the first more than the last; this was the side to which his nature responded most keenly, to which alone it was fitted to give any adequate expression. This is the spirit of the *Æneid*. The quotations most familiar to the memory of the reader are those which breathe the spirit of endurance—of a patient resolute acceptance of a hard fate, in the confidence of some ultimate adjustment to human need, if not to human desire.

“O passi graviores! dabit Deus his quoque finem!”

* * * * *
Disce, puer, virtutem ex me, verumque laborem;
Fortunam ex aliis.”

Sentences like these, and the *Æneid* is full of them, are the utterance

* Cf. the passage already quoted, *Georg.* i. 490—“Nec fuit indignum superis”—i.e., to mere human feeling it would have seemed so.

† The Transpadani did not obtain the full franchise till B.C. 49.

of a true subject of Rome. They paint that spirit of endurance which Livy demands by implication in his blame of Cicero ("nihil ut viro dignum erat tulit, præter mortem"), that endurance which is only possible to a thinking mind, when the sufferings to be endured are felt as part of some great coherent system of cause and effect—as incidents in a realm of order. Nothing pleases us better in the volume which has occasioned these remarks than Mr. Sellar's citation, in reference to the death of Turnus, of Sir William Napier's fine account of the death of Sir John Moore. "He saw the inspiring hopes of triumph disappear, but the austerer glory of suffering remain, and with a firm heart he accepted that gift of a severe fate."

"Usque adeone mori miserum est? Vos, o mihi manes
Este boni quoniam Superis aversa voluntas,"

breathes the very spirit of that passage, it gathers up the Roman ideal with a touch of something that is not Roman. It seems to give a voice, in this victim of the ancestor of the Romans, to the whole subject world that lay at the feet of Rome.

The new ideal of Roman dominion, as a power binding the world in a framework of firm and coherent law, is indirectly manifest in another idea which in its fullest development belongs mainly to the modern world—the Order of Nature. No conception, indeed, is older than this—treatises "On Nature" are among the very earliest specimens of Greek literature, and the very fact that the Teutonic languages have borrowed the name from the Latin is a testimony to the deep root that the idea had cast into the soil of the old world. Still we may say that it appears, on the page of Virgil, in a new light—that it takes, with him, an aspect which belongs to the future as well as to the past. The Nature of the Georgics answers to the Fate of the *Æneid*. There is the same hesitation between the ideas of personal and impersonal power, the same latent analogy—the irresistible, mysterious, inexorable *imperium* of Rome. This strong political colouring comes out forcibly in one passage in the Georgics which exhibits as forcibly its entanglement with mythological ideas. "Thus Nature at once imposed these laws, these eternal ordinances ("eterna foedera"), when Deucalion first cast stones in an empty world whence the hard race of men arose" (G. i. 60—63). Did Virgil believe in the legend of Deucalion as he believed in the order of nature? Perhaps he could hardly have answered the question himself. He had the liveliest sympathy with a simple, unquestioning piety; he had a deep sense also of the value of that sturdy scientific habit of mind which questions all received explanation; and he would have been puzzled, doubtless, to define their mutual limits. He seems to have found refuge from the

difficulty in a vague but real sense of superior power, under whose stern control men had been driven from their natural sloth to that hard, patient industry which was an essential part of the Roman ideal of virtue (G. i. 120—145), and the actual existence of the political type of this power must have given it new meaning, while it bound it closely to those mythological conceptions which logically were inconsistent with it. If in contemplation the ideals were irreconcilable, the simple life of the peasant, who even on holy days (G. i. 268) might set up hurdles, burn weeds, or drain land, attained a practical compromise between them, which might well appear as a harmony of both.

In the Virgilian idea of nature as a coherent body of universal law, corresponding to that body of law which the Roman rule had spread from the Euphrates to the Rhine, and which, severe and inflexible, was yet on the whole beneficent, modern feeling may find much that is in harmony with itself. But there is not less sympathy between the spirit of our day and this poetry, when we regard it on another side. Mr. Sellar indeed goes a little further in this direction than we can follow him, in saying that "he has some anticipations of that longing for communion with Nature in her wilder and more desolate aspect, which we associate with modern rather than with classical poetry;" but doubtless the instinct of a true scholar discerns these anticipations where an ordinary reader is blind to them. If Mr. Sellar is right, we can only say that our parallel with Scott would be closer than we can ourselves feel it. Virgil's love of nature seems to us exactly the eighteenth-century love of nature at its best. His description reminds us of Addison's version of the twenty-third Psalm; it leads us

"Where peaceful rivers, soft and slow,
Amid the verdant landscape flow."

We glide along between tawny wheat-fields, by the ancient walls of illustrious cities, or under the shadow of citadel-crowned rocks (G. ii. 155); the mountain gloom and the mountain grandeur are remote. Still there is a very vivid touch of that peculiarly modern feeling—the love of the country. Till great cities arose, indeed, this feeling was impossible. As one of the charms of travel is the added appreciation of home, so the special development of a town life is an appreciation of the

"Secura quies, et nescia fallere vita,
* * *
Speluncæ, vivique lacus, et frigida Tempe,
Mugitusque boum, molles sub arbore somni"—

of which Virgil draws so loving a picture at the close of the

second Georgic.* The turmoil and the din of city life form a necessary background to those images of repose; you could not have the last without the first. We can imagine the hold of these peaceful images upon a shy and gentle nature who had been driven by rapine from a home where they blended with all early recollection; we can conceive how the life of rural industry he sought to ennoble and revive embodied all that was the object to him of admiration, sympathy, or regret. These pictures of rustic life—the ploughman bending over the share, the girl at her distaff, the old soldier with his beehives, the farmer's wife crooning out her ballad over her loom, the frisking kids, the lowing kine, would have been woven together, in modern art, by some human interest, such as two women of genius in our own country and in France have blended with their pictures of English and French farmhouse and cottage-life. Such a mould for imagination and sentiment did not then exist, and Virgil, the most conservative of poets, was not the one to discover it; but the reader of George Sand or of George Eliot is reminded from time to time of some slight touch in the Georgics; and perhaps one reason that the poem is felt heavy, if we read much of it at once, is that we are accustomed to the same kind of images we find represented there in association with strong emotion and varied incident. We miss the foreground, because the background is not altogether unfamiliar to the eye.

But though this dramatic interest is conspicuously absent from the poem which, as the glorification of the peculiarly Roman quality of industry, and as the art to which Roman feeling attached most importance, may in some sense be accounted Virgil's most important, and which is his only great finished work; yet it appears to us that it is in his verse that we may trace the first dawn of that sentiment to which all modern drama owes its main interest. Of course Dido is in outline a mere copy, like every other figure in the poem; the Medea of Apollonius Rhodius, a very inferior poet, supplied Virgil with the outline. But here, as elsewhere, the colouring seems to us to belong rather to the modern than the ancient world.

Throughout the whole range of ancient art you do not find any adequate delineation of that feeling which forms the main subject of modern fiction. We speak of it, of course, on that side

* The passage comes home to an English ear much more closely in Dr. Kennedy's charming translation:—

“Yet theirs are careless ease and guileless life,
In varied wealth abundant;—spacious parks,
Grottoes, and living lakes, the cool deep vale;
Kine lowing, and soft sleep beneath the tree
They lack not, glades are there, the haunts of deer,
And patient working, little craving men,
Gods worshipped, sires revered.”

on which modern feeling dwells most willingly ; on another side ancient art is emphatic enough, but the peculiar note of *love as a sentiment*, which to us is made so flat and trivial by its incessant repetition, is absolutely wanting to the melody of the old world. Let any reader, for instance, try to imagine "the tale of Troy divine" on the lips of a modern, and then recur to its original utterance ; the blank of all that would be emphasized in its modern version must strike him forcibly. Or take another tale which really has, though probably by accident, been treated by the greatest poets of the ancient and modern world ; compare the story of Orestes and Hamlet, and mark how bare the Greek version of the son's revenge is of all that, in its English garb, gives its peculiar meaning, and he will realize vividly the different world that is created by modern and by ancient art. The ancients were in all respects simpler than we are ; they knew the completeness that is impossible to those who have looked towards the infinite ; and—as we have said of loyalty, so we must repeat here—that element in human bonds which makes them a suggestion of something beyond, was wholly wanting to them. But in this respect also Virgil is more than half a modern. Nothing in ancient verse seems to us so closely allied with modern feeling as the meeting of Dido and Æneas in the shades. The silence of wounded love, the hush of a mighty recollection that can as little revive as discard the emotions to which it points, are painted in those few lines, not certainly as a modern would have painted them, but with more force because with more reticence than a second-rate artist of our day would give them, and with more apprehension than any first-rate artist before Virgil could have given them. We meet in his verse for the first time with something like the romantic sentiment of love.

The episode of Dido is indeed from many reasons one of the most noteworthy in the range of fiction. Its interest is by no means confined to the region of fiction. Without following out the elaborate hypothesis of a modern critic of the *Æneid*,* who has found an Augustan prototype for all the principal personages, it is impossible to read the account of the dying Queen and not think of another Queen perishing by her own hand after an attempt to win a heart as cold as, and much harder than, that of Æneas. The proud farewell to life—

"Vixi, et quem dederat cursum fortuna, peregi,
Et nunc magna mei sub terras ibit imago"—

seems to echo the "non humilis mulier" of Horace, and recalls the proud words of the dying attendant of Cleopatra : "It is well done, and worthy of a princess." And though the delineation

* Dunlop: History of Roman Literature.

is not free from a certain hardness, yet when we consider how a flatterer of Augustus might have painted a prototype of his victim, we shall discern in the actual picture no small evidence of the temperance and purity of the painter. But the gentleness of Virgil's nature comes out even more strongly in this picture, regarded under another of those cross lights which history throws upon it. It seems to us impossible to read the address of the suppliant Trojans to Dido, and not feel in them some reflection on the barbarous policy of the third Punic war. Who can think that when Virgil wrote,

"Non nos aut ferro Libycos populare Penates
Venimus, aut raptas ad littora vertere prædas
Non ea vis animo, nec tanta superbia victis,"

he forgot, or remembered without a sigh, that the Romans, made proud by conquest, *had* devastated the Libyan homes, *had* turned the proud city of Carthage to a wilderness? Doubtless it was a very different kind of regret from that with which an Englishman would recall, for instance, the massacre of Drogheda. The feelings with which any virtuous modern would regard an act of cruelty on the part of his countrymen were quite inaccessible to a Roman of the first century before Christ. Still we cannot but think there is regret here. "The time will come," so we would expand the passage, "when our descendants will indeed level your rising walls and leave these stately temples a shapeless ruin. The empire of the world, to which they are called, is not to be had on other than these hard terms. But for such tasks Heaven chooses other ministers. For us, disciplined by a stern fate—taught pity by terrible suffering—no such cruel mandate is issued. Those who have known are not called upon to inflict the miseries of conquest and exile."

If the reader turns from the dying speech of Dido to Cicero's allusions to Hannibal, and contrasts the injustice of one of the greatest of orators to the purest of patriots with the grand space that is prepared for a heroic figure in her prophetic appeal, he will feel the power of that sympathy with misfortune, of that capacity for discerning greatness through failure, which was so unlike a Roman, or indeed an ancient, and was so characteristic of Virgil. The avenger whom Dido summons to arise from her tomb is excused beforehand for the desolation he was to carry to the very gates of Rome. The intolerable injuries which summon the youthful Hannibal to swear an undying hatred to Rome are here as it were at once prophesied and allegorized, and the "poet of the Capitol," as St. Beuve calls Virgil, sets in the fairest light the great enemy whose javelin struck her walls. Not that he hesitates for a moment in his allegiance to the victorious power;—this allegiance is his religion—the will of heaven is manifest in the triumph of Rome;—but he, remembering perhaps the home

he had lost, "where the hills bend in gracious slope to the aged beeches and the river," knew something of what that triumph had cost, and could regard his country's recollections, for a moment, from the side of her victims. He could, even in celebrating the glorious destiny of Rome, remember those she had crushed beneath her irresistible chariot wheels. His will is wholly with the conquerors, but his sympathy is with the vanquished.

Such appear to us the characteristics which render Virgil the prophet of a new political and social order in the world. A yet more interesting line of investigation has followed out this idea to a deeper region, and found in him the prophet of a new religion. Indeed a whole growth of legend clusters round this view. St. Paul is represented, in a Mass of the fifteenth century, as weeping over his tomb and exclaiming, "What a man I would have made of thee, greatest of poets!" Three martyrs in the Decian persecution were said to have owed their conversion to his poetry, and Statius is made by Dante to greet him in Purgatory with the acknowledgment, "To thee I owe it that I was a poet; to thee that I was a Christian." The fact that Constantine translated a part of his Fourth Eclogue at the Council of Nicee as a prophecy of Christianity is matter of history, and a greater than Constantine hailed him as a guide in his dark journey through the awful shades which lie beyond the grave. Virgil, indeed, had borne witness to that mysterious world; he had spoken—perhaps not with undoubting faith, but certainly with reverent solemnity—of the awful penalties at which his greater predecessor on the heights of Roman poetry had scoffed as mere metaphor; he had been a witness to the Christian poet that a heathen might realize the depth of the abyss from which he could not conjecture the deliverance, to which he could not imagine the contrast. So far as this we may accept the fancy which reckoned Virgil among the prophets of Christ.

Perhaps we may go further than this. No Christian poet is so emphatically as Virgil the poet of resignation. A mournful acceptance of the decrees of Heaven breathes throughout his verse and gives it that pathetic tenderness of which Dr. Newman speaks in words that echo its own beauty. His lines have indeed a power to soothe the oppressed heart, which is often wanting to those which have been uttered with that object. They steal upon the mind with a vision of some larger world, where the struggle and the weariness of life is seen as part of a general plan, through acquiescence in which man may shake off something of that sense of baffled effort which makes up so large a part of the burden of human experience, and feel himself at least a fellow-worker with the power which is to prevail in the end. They seem to repeat the strain of human trouble with some added keynote that robs it of its discord. Their plaintive minor sets itself

to the sad rhythm of perplexity and defeat that haunts us all, and lends complaint a certain grace. They open no infinite vista of hope, nor do they ever quite attain that depth of current and volume in which the highest tragedy sweeps all minor emotions into one mighty stream, and, by supplying large and lofty ideal springs of feeling, seems to absorb that kind of distress which is weighted with the sense of inadequacy. But they present human sorrow in an aspect which links it to some mysterious development of a divine purpose; and this idea, even where it brings in no vision of heavenly love and fostering care, robs suffering of its worst sting.

It may be said, perhaps, that the feelings suggested by those words belong rather to the modern than to the ancient world. The word *fatum*, or *fata*, Mr. Sellar reminds us, recurs more than forty times in the first three books of the *Æneid*, and the idea predominates throughout the poem. This supreme decision, identified by an Italian with the dominion of Rome, is rather accepted by, than originating with the will of Jove; it is a conception hovering above and near the world of Olympus, always tending to identify itself with the supreme power there, but never quite consistently embodied in a single will. There can be no doubt that this gradual attraction of the idea of fate to the will of Jove was a preparation for monotheism; but it is also true that this idea of fate, and the resignation which corresponds to it, is not characteristic of historic Christianity. Wherever the ultimate reason that I should suffer this or that lies in the decision of a person, my temptation will be to try to change that will; the sense of a superior wisdom is not so persistent a feeling as the objection to suffer, and our experience of human will as something changeable insensibly affects our view of all will. Οἱ προσκυνῶντες τὴν Ἀδραστειαν σοφοί, is not a Christian feeling; rather the Christian sympathy would be with the rebellious Prometheus, whom these words (not, of course, the whole spirit of the drama of which they form a part) condemn. The truth is that the surrender of individual choice, the merging of the self in a larger whole, in which resignation consists, is opposed by so much of our nature that it has, as a matter of experience, been attained most completely where it is aided by somewhat inconsistent allies. No man has ever resigned himself, in the deepest sense of that word, to the operation of unconscious law. But that blending of the idea of unconscious law and conscious will which we find in the "fate" of Virgil precludes any restless effort to change the will which frustrates man's aims and crushes his hopes by the awful inexorableness of law thus mysteriously associated, and yet not exactly identified, with the will of the divinity; while this mysterious association presents to the mind, in yielding

up its aims and hopes, a being who can be the object of those sentiments which, between human beings, have made sacrifice possible. It suggests at once those motives for the surrender which, to our narrowly limited view, are not perfectly consistent. It presents to the imagination a will which motives cannot move, a law which puts forth a conscious claim to submission. The highest and, we believe, the only secure ground of resignation is belief in a holy will. But the next possibility of this feeling is afforded by some such belief in a mystic combination of will and law as is the ideal of the *Æneid*, and, though the last belief has not been common, it is less rare than the first.

We must allow, therefore, that the religious element to which the *Æneid* owes the greater part of its interest (we are far from saying this of the poems of Virgil as a whole) is one that is not only not introductory to Christianity, it is in a certain sense alien from Christianity. It is a kind of feeling which, so far as it has been realized at all, has been by another form of religion altogether. Nevertheless the suggestion of the legend which connects Virgil with St. Paul does not appear to us altogether misleading. The word *pietas*, which we associate with the hero of the *Æneid* is one of those whose signification has bifurcated in its romance stage,—the feeling which binds high and low in a mutual relation, and which the Latins expressed by that one word, being by us contemplated in its upward aspect under the name of *piety*, while *pity* is its responsive outflow from above. Thus the gods are the “*pia numina*,” thus Priam can appeal with indignant prayer to him who witnesses the cruelty of Pyrrhus, “*Dî, si qua est cœlo pietas*.” Piety is the common virtue of earth and of Heaven, it binds the worshipped to the worshipper; reverence below implying compassion above. It is this belief which links Virgil to the world that is to follow him far more closely than to the world which had afforded him his models. It is a new thing in the world. In Homer we meet with the idea of a number of supernatural beings participating in the interests of humanity and extending their protecting care to individuals. In Plato we find the sense of an invisible Being above man, towards whom he may elevate himself. It is to a feebler genius than any of the great thinkers of Greece that we owe the first dawn of a feeling which though partly developed out of these elements is yet distinct from them, and is the distinction characteristic of the world which followed him—the sense of the claim of weakness, of misfortune. This consciousness is finely brought out in the successful appeal to the compassion of the Trojans on the part of the Greek fugitive from Polyphemus. “*I am*,” cries the suppliant, “indeed a Greek. I have indeed taken part in the attack on Ilium. Cast me into the waves if you deem our offence needs such expiation ;

gladly shall I perish, so it be by the hands of my fellow-men." And though his prayer might well recall the treacherous appeal of Sino, and thus revive all the deadliest hate of the deceived and ruined Trojans, Anchises himself comes forward at once to remove all terror from the trembling suppliant, and the fleet of Troy saves a Greek. That sense of the revelation of a common humanity as the result of misfortune—of the power of compassion to submerge the deadliest hate, and find common ground with a suffering foe—that feeling which in its fullest development we associate with modern life—was certainly entirely wanting to the great nation of whose literature Virgil was almost a servile copyist. That resolution of resentment in pity, apart from which the true might of pity is untested—that power of compassion to create relation—would, we believe, have taken to a Greek a somewhat contemptible aspect. The fierce and impious Diomed would never in the earlier and more vigorous portraiture have reckoned on the compassion of Priam for the woes of his conquerors (*Æn.* xi. 252, "vel Priamo miseranda manus"). The pity of a vanquished enemy would have been, by a Greek, as little imagined as desired.

It is interesting to note how little touches of this feeling come in here and there with a sort of double significance, binding the reader's sympathies to those personages in the drama who are least worthy of sympathy, and bringing in the dumb companions of man's fortunes into sympathy with the world above them. Thus the fierce Mezentius, the "despiser of the gods," the ruthless tyrant of men, turns in his anguish for the death of his son to the faithful companion of his warfare, his horse Rhoebus; and, as though reckoning on his responsive sympathy, promises him, "This day thou shalt bear the bloody spoils of Æneas, and take part in my revenge, or else thou shalt share my fall—thou, bravest one, couldest never endure the command of a stranger" (*Æn.* x. 361—366). Here also Virgil has his model in the appeal of Hector to his steeds (*Il.* viii. 185), but the transference of this little trait from a character distinguished for tenderness, to one whose dying request is that his body may be protected from the hatred roused by his cruelties to his subjects, seems to us especially characteristic of the peculiar quality we are endeavouring to indicate, and which we can only describe as the opposite of ruthlessness. It seems as if some gentle influence held Virgil's hand in all the dark shades of his picture, and infused some touch of light in the midst of the blackest shadow.

The *Æneid* is the epic of failure—of the failure that is pregnant with triumph, of the victory of the vanquished. The defeated Trojan exiles are the founders of imperial Rome. The defeated Italians are the ancestors of the victorious Romans. The victors are absorbed by the vanquished, they conquer the

natives of the Promised Land only to endow their race with an eternal stability and a universal dominion. And if in the single case of Rome's great enemy this generous sympathy seems to fail, and the despair of the unhappy Queen seems drawn with an unsympathizing pencil, this failure is only apparent. The glimpse of Dido re-united to her earlier love in the shadowy groves of the lower world comes in to soften the painful impression of repulse and despair left by her tragic history, and we are left to believe that for many beside her and Turnus, who have not found life altogether benign, something better may remain elsewhere. Mr. Sellar notes the pretty simile by which Virgil describes the shades upon the bank of Acheron, as suggestive of a deeper faith than appears. Those who have known a mature experience of life, and those who have left life almost untasted,—heroes and matrons, youths and girls unwed,—all cluster on the dark shore like flocks of migratory birds, whom the cold breath of winter drives forward to a *sunnier sky*. Perhaps the suggestion does not very exactly correspond to the vision that follows, yet the lines so perfectly express the spirit of what we feel best in our poet, that we can find no word of his more appropriate for our farewell to him, than this comparison of death to the wintry wind which, touching the swallows,

“*Trans pontum fugat, et terris inmittit apricis.*”

The vein of sympathy with suffering, of tenderness for the lowly, which we have endeavoured to trace in Virgil, is unquestionably a modern feeling. For eighteen hundred years the lesson of compassion, of forgiveness, of consideration for the weak, has been a part of the ideal of civilization; it has penetrated every fibre of our moral being, and passed, by long inheritance, into a condition of life we can as little dispense with in imagination as we can with the atmosphere around us. The moral associations of a creed which has found its symbol in the instrument of an ignominious punishment are independent of its historical basis; they influence profoundly many who hear that history with cold and inattentive ear, many who utterly reject it. Thus it has happened that the lesson of pity, repeated by a hundred voices, and not rejected in word by any, has become trite. Familiarized by every variety of statement and illustration, it has gained in its hold on the ethical side of our nature what it has inevitably lost in its fitness for literary expression. The artist, as much as the orator, needs the cynical warning of Quintilian, that the tear of pity is soon dry. That strange fugitiveness of sympathy, which is so often painfully impressed on hopeless sufferers, and perhaps still more painfully on those who witness hopeless suffering, has its intellectual correlate in the law

which inseparably associates pathos and reserve. The expression to which we should apply the word *pathetic* must be always apparently incomplete; there can be no pathos where we are not made to feel "the rest is silence." And the superiority of ancient art on this ground corresponds to its inferiority on a moral ground—its narrower ideal implied a richer fountain of suggestion, a wider scope for the power that touches latent springs of feeling. The peculiar strength of our gentle poet lies in the fact that with him ancient art has been wedded to something like modern feeling. "Il lui a été donné," says St. Beuve, "à une heure décisive de l'histoire, de deviner ce qu'aimerait l'avenir." But that vague presentiment was joined to a set of traditions, a standard of feeling and action, by which it was chastened and subdued, so that it only breaks through the barrier into a shy and incomplete expression—the very immaturity and incompleteness of the feeling supplying its own check. Hence, though much that is said here may suggest effeminacy, he has never been felt effeminate. Hence (to conclude with words to which we have alluded above), "his single words and phrases, his pathetic half-lines, give utterance, as the voice of Nature herself, to that pain and weariness, yet hope of better things, which is the experience of her children in every time."*

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* Newman, Grammar of Assent, pp. 75, 76.