VERGIL AS A STUDENT OF HOMER.¹

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THE subject before us is large enough for a substantial book; and no lecture, in any case, could present more than a fragment of it. I had hoped to prepare for the study by reading through at least the whole of the Iliad on my way back from Australia; but some mischievous bacillus, robbed me of half my working time on that voyage and enfeebled the other half. The result is that this survey, so far as it is based on matters of detail, has been shaped mainly by the passages which seem to have caught Vergil’s special notice in some twelve or thirteen Books of the Iliad, including the first ten. I shall be only too glad if what I have to say can be supplemented or criticised by any who may have a deeper knowledge of these Books, or of the rest of the Homeric poems, than I can claim. And I am conscious that such criticism may modify the conclusions which have formed themselves in my mind from this part of the evidence. Nevertheless, even within these limits, I hope to have reached certain general points of view.

It is probable also that the basis of this study, namely, my own recollection of the Vergilian poems, although it has supplied me with a number of resemblances which, so far as I know, have not been noticed, is quite sure to be inadequate; and in this also I shall be grateful for further help.

The general results are concerned mainly with three things: (1) the profound interest and respect with which Vergil regarded the

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great Greek epic; (2) some of the rules of poetic craftsmanship which he set himself to follow; and chiefly, (3) some of the inward preferences or principles or convictions or values (call them by what name you will) which lay deepest in his nature and by which the course of his work was governed and inspired.

When we realise, as almost all of us have already done, that in Vergil's eyes the Homeric text had what we should call something like scriptural authority, we shall realise also that where he deliberately departs from it we have a direct clue to his own personal view of what was fitting for poetry or right in action.

It sometimes happens that a poet revises his own work, and where he changes it we can see the doubts he felt about it, and what parts of it seemed to him to be most open to criticism. Sometimes we feel, for instance, in reading the changes in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, that the poet's doubts were not just, and that his first thought was better than his second. And when we are considering how one artist has remodelled the work of another, the question which we then commonly ask is whether we prefer the earlier artist or the later. And this will often be settled by our individual taste. Let me say, therefore, once and for all, that my object is not to play the rôle of Dionysus, holding up critical scales between competing poets;—each of us can do that for himself, if he wishes, and if he knows enough;—my hope is only to penetrate by this means as deeply as we can into Vergil's mind; for that is a part of creation, if our study can climb far enough to enter it, in which it is supremely good to breathe. And for this purpose, although the varieties of style and character between the different parts of the *Iliad* will necessarily face us, they will not delay our attempt. To Vergil the *Iliad* was a single book, though, as we shall see, a book in which he greatly preferred some parts to others. Our object now is not to criticise the *Iliad*, but to examine how Vergil used it.

Thus much said, let me give first a few examples of the faithfulness with which Vergil loved to reproduce incidents or lines or phrases from Homer, where they suited his purpose. We all know his own remark that it was easier to rob Hercules of his club than to take a single line from Homer. Nevertheless he has taken a large number. I have not attempted to make a complete list of them, even from the Books I have just read; but a few may be mentioned as typical.
Passages taken over bodily by Vergil.

_II._ ii. 859:

... ἢ ῥχε ... "Ἐννομος οἰωνιστής,
ἀλλ’ οὐκ οἰωνοίσι ἐρύσαστο κῆρα μέλαιναν.

_Aen._, ix. 328:

Turno gratissimus augur,
sed non augurio potuit depellere pestem.

_II._, ix. 340:

ἡ μοῦνοι φιλέουσ’ ἀλόχους μερότων ἀνθρώπων
'Atrēdai;

_Aen._, ix. 138:

nec solos tangit Atridas
iste dolor.

_II._, vi. 306:

Πῶτνι 'Αθηναίη ...
ἀξον δὴ ἔγχος Διομήδεος ἢδὲ καὶ αὐτὸν
προνέα δῶς πεσέειν Σκαῖων προπάροιθε πυλὰσων.

_Aen._, xi. 483:

Tritonia virgo,
frange manu telum Phrygii praedonis, et ipsum
pronom sterne solo portisque effunde sub altis.

There need be no gate in the prayer in the _Aeneid_, save for the Scaean
gates in the _Iliad_; and _manu_ is interesting as an equivalent of δὴ.

_Od._, v. 306:

τρὶς μάκαρες Δαναόλ καὶ τετράκις οἱ τότ’ ὀλοντο
Τροίη ἐν ἑώρη, χάριν 'Ατρείδησι φέροντες,
ὡς δὴ ἐγὼ γ’ ὄφελον θανεῖν καὶ πότμον ἐπιστεῖν
ἡματι τῷ ... .

(when the crowd of Trojans cast their brazen
spear at me over Achilles’ body: then I should
have been buried properly.)

_Aen._, i. 94-96:

O terque quaterque beati
queis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis
contigit oppetere.

_II._, xi. 241:

αὕθι πεσὼν κοιμήσατο χάλκεον ὑπνον.

_Aen._, x. 745:

ollı dura quies oculos et ferreus urget
somnus; in aeternam clauduntur lumina noctem.
Among other close parallels which are too long to quote verbally are the comparison¹ of the movements of an army watched from a distance by those whom it is approaching to attack, with a storm gathering at sea and sweeping down upon the land, before the eyes of a shepherd on the hillside.² Similar situations again are described in a proposal to settle the war by a single combat, in the Iliad between Paris and Menelaus, in the Aeneid (Book XII.) between Turnus and Aeneas, including the sacrifice which is made at the truce.³ The picture of the divided counsels in Troy⁴ is reflected by similar discord at the court⁵ of King Latinus. One very close resemblance is in the repudiation of Turnus’s policy by Drances when he is speaking to Aeneas about the truce for the burial of the dead; this recalls rather precisely the repudiation of Paris and his party by Idaeus when he is carrying to the Greeks the proposal for a truce for the same purpose; and the response⁶ of Aeneas in granting the truce has been influenced by that of Agamemnon.⁷

A somewhat amusing likeness may be found in the reproaches addressed by various commanders in the two poems to their troops for not fighting as hard as they ought. In the Iliad⁸ Agamemnon tells his troops that they are very good at eating and drinking and boasting; the same reproach, with some others even more biting, comes from the lips of the Etruscan Tarchon⁹ when his troops are running away in fear of Camilla. This list could be greatly extended, but we have seen enough to be satisfied of the point which I am first concerned to make clear, that Vergil’s attitude towards Homer is that of a pious though enlightened disciple.

Let us now pass from these examples of close reproduction and consider one or two in which though we have still a close resemblance, we have also some definite modification. The motive of the change, either in the wording, or in the use of the material, is generally not at all hard to see.

The incident of Turnus’ sword breaking on Aeneas’ armour is constructed with care from two Homeric passages;¹⁰ the breaking of Menelaus’ sword on Paris’ helmet is combined with Diomed’s having

¹ Aeneid, xii. 451. ² Iliad, iv. 275. ³ Iliad, iii. 95. ⁴ Iliad, vii. 390. ⁵ Aeneid, xi. 129. ⁶ Aeneid, xi. 110. ⁷ Iliad, viii. 408. ⁸ Iliad, viii. 228. ⁹ Aeneid, xi. 732. ¹⁰ Iliad, iii. 362, and x. 256.
left his sword behind him in starting for the night foray. No reason is
given in Homer for his strange forgetfulness; the bard's motive seems
to have been merely to get an excuse for talking about the sword with
which he is provided by a friend. In the Aeneid Turnus has sudden
news of Aeneas' retreat because of his wound, and in his characteristic
haste to pursue, he snatches up the wrong sword, and so is at a disad-
vantage. No harm comes to Diomed from using the sword that is
given him instead of his own, but with what art the breaking of the
sword is woven into Vergil's story of the combat we shall see later on.

The simile in which Vergil compares the gathering and advance of
an army to the rise of waves at sea beneath a freshening breeze \(^1\) comes
from the Iliad \(^2\) with an interesting alteration. According to Homer
the sea grows black under the shivering wind. This apparently Vergil
did not remember to have seen; he describes simply how the waves
begin to grow white. Homer's point of view was that of a sailor in
the open sea, in the dark trough of the waves; the ships of Vergil's
day were larger, small though we should count them.

Again Aeneas's declaration \(^3\) that he can never forget Dido as long
as life lasts is a line of power and swift movement, 'While I still re-
member who I am and while the breath still governs this frame.' But
it is based on an angry threat \(^4\) of Achilles that he will wait for his
vengeance all his life if need be 'so long as breath remains in my bosom
and my good knees have their strength.' Even in Homer there is no
particular relevance in the mention of the knees (save that Achilles was
proud of his power of running swiftly). Vergil replaces it altogether
by the more psychological and more deeply-felt phrase, 'while I re-
member who I am'—though he succeeds in putting the whole into the
space of a single line (which Homer exceeds).

It is worth noting that the well-known simile describing human
activity by a comparison with that of bees is used by Homer \(^5\) of an
army swarming out for battle. In Vergil it is used twice, but both times
to depict peaceful efforts, once that of building \(^6\) the city of Carthage,
once the happy occupations \(^7\) of the Blessed in Elysium. The industry
of ants also is taken by Vergil to illustrate the labours of the Trojans
in re-building their ships in order to escape from Africa. \(^8\)

\(^1\) Aeneid, vii. 528, and Georgics, iii. 237.
\(^2\) vii. 63 ff.
\(^3\) Aeneid, iv. 336.
\(^4\) Iliad, ix. 609.
\(^5\) Iliad, ii. 87.
\(^6\) Aeneid, i. 430.
\(^7\) Aeneid, vi. 706.
\(^8\) Aeneid, iv. 401.
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A characteristic shift of perspective in the use of an old world conception appears when Vergil takes the angry threat which Zeus addresses to Hera that he will throw her down 'twice as deep into Tartarus as earth is below Heaven,' but makes it describe the fate that has already befallen the giant enemies of Jove in the afterworld—not an empty threat of the domestic bully, but a doom already inflicted to punish the worst of crimes, a revolt against Jove, civil war in the Universe.¹

A rather striking change appears in Vergil's use of the lines describing a warrior's scruples against offering worship to the gods when he has only newly returned from battle, defiled with dust and gore. In a beautiful and famous scene Homer attributes this feeling to Hector² who, when he has come out of the battle-field, declines a draught of wine, which his mother offers him, on the ground that he cannot make a libation to Zeus until he has washed himself. Vergil gives almost the same words to Aeneas³ as his reason for asking his father to carry the sacred gods of Troy in their flight since he (Aeneas) dare not touch them yet. In both places the sentiment is entirely appropriate; but in Vergil's setting it strikes a deeper note, because the Penates of Troy represent the great end which Aeneas is working to secure. They are to be the household gods, the guardian spirits, of Rome; that is why they are so sacred. In Vergil a healthy human instinct, clothed in the religious usage of early Hellas, is re-inforced by an oecumenic touch. Not merely the scruple of an honest soldier, but the future of the world is concerned.

A new and charming application of poetic ornament taken from

¹ Iliad, viii. 13:

\[
\text{η} \ \text{μη} \ \text{ελών} \ \text{βύσω} \ \text{ἐς} \ \text{Tάρταρον} \ \text{ἡρῴεινα} \\
\text{τόσον} \ \text{ἐνερθ’} \ \text{‘Αἰδεώ} \ \text{ὀ} \ \text{ουρανός} \ \text{ἐστ’} \ \text{ἀπὸ} \ \text{γαῖς.}
\]

Aeneid, vi. 579:

bis patet in praeceps tantum tenditque sub umbras, 
quantus ad aetherium caeli suspectus Olympum.

A similar change from a threat of vengeance before any wrong has been so much as thought of to vengeance actually invoked after a great wrong has been suffered is found in Dido's curse (Aeneid, iv. 612-627) compared with the merely contingent anathema of Medea (Ap. Rhod., Arg. iv. 382).

² Iliad, vi. 266. ³ Aeneid, ii. 718.
Homer was made by Vergil in the simile of a *woman staining ivory with crimson dye. In the *Iliad* it is applied quite neatly to the look of the wound of Menelaus, the red blood against the ivory-coloured skin. In Vergil it describes the sudden flush of Lavinia when she sees her suitor Turnus listening, or rather not listening, to her mother's entreaties not to fight with Aeneas. And characteristically, as though to free the simile from any painful association that might cling to it in the mind of the reader, Vergil inserts another simile in the same sentence "or as when white lilies seem to turn red because they are mixed with many roses."

Another type of modification equally characteristic is where Vergil rationalises some Homeric story. A striking case is of the plague, which at the outset of the *Iliad* is set upon the Greeks by Apollo who has private reasons for anger with Agamemnon. In the *Aeneid* the Trojans suffer from plague, but it is said to be healed by Apollo and caused only by the heat of autumn. Another case in which Vergil avoids a miracle is in the portent of the snake at the altar, and here he makes other incidental changes natural to a poet so fond of birds and small creatures. In the Fifth Book of the *Aeneid*, when Aeneas is sacrificing at the tomb of his father Anchises, he is greatly encouraged by the appearance of a snake of many colours who comes out of the tomb, eats some of the offerings and vanishes again having done no harm, as the poet expressly adds; this is taken by Aeneas as an assurance of the continued goodwill of his father's spirit, and the protection which it will give him in his enterprise.

Now this is based on a famous passage in the Second Book of the *Iliad*, where we learn how when the Greeks were sailing from Aulis for Troy a serpent appeared from beneath the altar, stretched itself up to a tree that overhung the altar, and from a sparrow's nest on a bough, devoured first eight small birds and then the mother sparrow

1 *Iliad*, iv. 141:  
ως δ' ὅτε τὶς τε έλέφαντα γυνὴ φοίνικε μεθυρ.  
*Aeneid*, xii. 67:  
Indum sanguineo ueluti uiolauerit ostro  
si quis ebur, aut mixta rubent ubi lilia multa  
alba rosa.

2 *Iliad*, i. 10.  
3 *Aeneid*, iii. 137.  
4 *Aeneid*, v. 85.  
5 *Iliad*, ii. 305.
herself. Finally the snake was turned into stone; though what became of the stone the poet has no room to tell us. This was interpreted by Calchas to mean that the siege of Troy would last eight years and that in the ninth the city would fall.

Schoolboys, no doubt, find more pleasure in the Homeric story, but Vergil’s picture is not only complete in itself, but also in harmony with the peaceful scene he is describing and still more with the hopes of peace in the world under Augustus of which it is to be the omen; and both the cruel and the miraculous sides of the Homeric story are quietly left out.

There are many cases, again, in which Vergil takes full advantage of coming second—second not merely to Homer but to a long line of great dramatic poets—to put Homeric material to more vivid and life-like use. For example, as we have seen, the incident of the broken truce in the Twelfth Book of the *Aeneid* may be said to “come from” a similar event in the Fourth Book of the *Iliad*. But in the Homeric story the truce is broken merely by a single act; Pandarus, on the advice of Athene, who wishes to put the Trojans in the wrong, and has disguised herself as a Trojan, shoots an arrow at Menelaus and wounds him—without any particular motive save for the shooting’s sake. In the *Aeneid* the breach of the truce is due to the popularity of Turnus among the Latin troops, who are unwilling to let Turnus fight alone with Aeneas, and who are incited by the outburst of the augur Tolumnius, interpreting as an omen in their favour the escape of a swan from the clutches of an eagle when the rest of the troop of swans unite to stop the eagle’s flight. The whole story is dramatic and full of feeling; and, incidentally, the supernatural element of Athene’s prompting is replaced by the natural impulse of an army to protect its commander. Thus it adds something to our knowledge of Turnus and our sympathy for him. Also, incidentally, the appeal to the supernatural by a professional augur is sternly criticised; for Tolumnius is the first victim of his own false augury—a kind of Protestant touch!

Again the dispute between Turnus and Drances in the Eleventh Book shows many resemblances to that between Agamemnon and Achilles in the opening of the *Iliad*. Achilles and Turnus are both very angry all through; but Agamemnon and Drances avoid violent

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1 *Iliad*, iv. 86; *Aeneid*, xii. 216 ff.
speech, though both show bitter hostility, and say things which rouse their opponents to fierce indignation.

But now observe that Achilles is certainly in the right; he has been shamefully used. Turnus is wholly in the wrong. But it is part of Vergil's imaginative craftsmanship to make us sympathise with him rather than with his opponent Drances, who has an excellent cause to plead and only spoils it by one or two spiteful phrases which seem to slip out by the way. That, so Vergil saw, is like human history; mischief is continually done by the wrong-headedness or passion of men whose cause itself we admire. That is how Antony was so stung by the bitter invective of Cicero's Second Philippic that no vengeance could content him short of the murder of Cicero—and some 2000 others.

Where resemblances are so numerous, it is interesting to note examples of things which Vergil wholly left on one side. Such incidents as the friendly ending of a duel between Ajax and Hector, or the beautiful farewell of Hector to Andromache and their child, could hardly find place in Vergil's story; though for the last, the speech of Evander in bidding Pallas goodbye is an equivalent in feeling. But other things he might well have used, such as the comparison of the stubborn resistance of Ajax, beset by a crowd of Trojans, to that of an ass, belaboured by boys but still going where he chooses in spite of them. Perhaps Vergil knew how to manage a mule or a colt rather better. And there are several similies in Iliad v. which would have been quite serviceable in the Aeneid, but this Book, the feeblest of the whole Iliad, Vergil seems to have disliked and turned away from almost entirely—save that he has taken a hint from one line describing a slain warrior πολυκτήμων πολολήως 'rich in possessions and corn land' and expanded it in his characteristic way, of Galaesus, who fell in striving to allay the outbreak of hostilities:

\[
jussissimus unus
qui fuit Ausoniisque olim ditissimus aruis;
quince greges illi balantum, quina redibant
arma, et terram centum vertebat aratris.\]

\[1\] Aeneid, xi. 347 and 351; auspicium infaustum moresque sinistros and fugae fidens of Turnus; and especially the word pulsus (l. 366) which Turnus repudiates in fury (l. 392).

\[2\] Iliad, vii. 290.

\[3\] Iliad, xi. 558.

\[4\] Iliad, v. 613.

\[5\] Aeneid, vii. 538.
We may now turn to some larger differences of treatment, some of which are obvious. The first is the prevailing brutality of the Homeric soldier in act and in speech. There is no counterpart to this in the *Aeneid* except in two special places, to which Vergil has deliberately confined it; first in the utterances of the Etruscan tyrant Mezentius,\(^1\) who is soon punished for his impiety and cruelty; and the second in Aeneas himself, in the second half of the Tenth Book, when he has been roused to what Vergil calls the ‘madness’\(^2\) of battle by the death of young Pallas.\(^3\) Before that Aeneas has been in fact on the defensive.\(^4\) If particular instances are needed from the Homeric battles, perhaps the most striking is the advice given by Agamemnon to Menelaus to refuse to spare a man who had been thrown to the ground by his own horses taking fright. The poet expressly says\(^5\) that Agamemnon’s advice to kill him was ‘good.’ So, too, even old Nestor insists with vigour on the fate which will fall to the women of Troy when the city is taken. And in the Ninth Book, in the long story of Phoenix, we have an example of old-world domestic manners in the advice given to Phoenix by his mother,\(^6\) which is so bestial that at least one gentle-minded commentator has completely failed to understand it. An even more brutal approval of cruel fashions appears among the gods in the First Book when they all break into ‘unquenchable laughter’\(^7\) merely at the sight of the limping Hephæstus. Similarly the style of speech usual in Homeric controversy, as when Achilles addresses Agamemnon as a ‘drunken, dog-eyed, devourer of his people,’\(^8\) has no parallel whatever in Vergil; though of course warriers occasionally call their opponents or their own slack followers, cowards. The nearest approach to such language is on the lips of Turnus\(^9\) after he has been provoked beyond measure by Drances.

The habitual brutality of the words\(^10\) of Zeus to his consort Hera brings us to another large and obvious point of difference.

\(^1\) *Aeneid*, x. 689; viii. 481. \(^2\) *Aeneid*, x. 604. \(^3\) *Aeneid*, x. 480

\(^4\) *Aeneid*, x. 309-340. It is true that Aeneas primus turnas invasit; but only when the trumpets have sounded on both sides, after Turnus rapit totam acem in Teucros; and we are expressly told that the man whom Aeneas first slew ullo Aenean petit.

\(^5\) *Iliad*, vi. 61 f. \(^6\) *Iliad*, ix. 452. \(^7\) *Iliad*, i. 600.

\(^8\) *Iliad*, i. 225-231. \(^9\) *Aeneid*, xi. 391.

\(^10\) For instance, *Iliad*, viii. 12-16 and 480; i. 567.
On the character of the Homeric gods, and in particular of Zeus, so much has been written that I hardly dare enter upon the topic. Yet it lies directly in our path and a few words are necessary. Putting aside for the moment Zeus and Jove, it is true to say first, that both in Homer and in Vergil the other gods differ in no way from human beings except in point of the supernatural powers with which they can see and move and act upon mortals. But, secondly, it is also true that though the Vergilian deities are exceedingly human—consider especially the speeches of Venus and Juno in Book X—yet they never descend to the childish utterances and merely contemptible manoeuvres which appear in the pictures of the gods in the Iliad, such as the complaint of Poseidon that the wall which the Greeks had built round their camp will eclipse the fame of the wall which he has built round Troy! Or the tricks and the manners of Hera which are set forth with such evident gusto by the author of the Fourteenth Book. Or Zeus' terror of being scolded by Hera, or his humiliation by Hera, Poseidon, and Pallas. The difference, of course, is inevitable in poets who wrote sincerely at two such different epochs; although the procedure of Ovid shows us that it is perfectly possible for a poet in a civilised epoch to please himself by adopting on paper the stories and beliefs of primitive times. The nearest approach in the Aeneid to the Homeric pictures of wrangling between the gods is in the Book which we know to have been the earliest in drafting, namely, the Tenth. The irony with which Jupiter speaks to Juno—it is irony if the lines are printed as a statement—is the only place in the Aeneid where there is the least approach to a disregard of outward courtesy. But they are only a tolerably pointed argument if, as I think they should be, they are printed as a question. Elsewhere, at all events, though the differences between the gods are acute they are expressed in decorous language. In the Iliad, Zeus is quite as human as the other gods; in one passage,
often noted, he cannot hear any prayers because he has gone off to feast with the blameless Aethiopians. In the *Aeneid* he is divine, in a quite real sense; dignified, sympathetic, and at times inscrutable as the repository of the *fata*, the laws of Destiny, must be; but always righteous and wishing the best. Most characteristic of the Homeric point of view is the sulky reply of Zeus to Hera’s protest against his wish to save Troy. “Very well then; Troy shall fall; but don’t you get in my way when it is my turn to destroy some other town.” Such a bargain would be unthinkable to Vergil; the whole story of the *Aeneid* is carefully brought to the reconciliation of Juno, by which Trojans and Latins are both spared.

Turning now to other substantial differences for which Vergil is responsible, we may put aside at once the vast and obvious gulf between the poems in structure and style. An epic based on the fusion of a number of independent lays, certainly not all of them composed at the same time or by the same person, must necessarily be a very different thing from a poem which, though actually written during a period of at least twelve years, was nevertheless planned and executed by a single mind. We do not expect, for instance, to find the naïve repetitions, the primitive traditional diction, the boyish tone of narrative, and the inordinately long speeches at impossible points of the story which were all marks of the professional Greek minstrel. Nor the frequent breaks in the continuity and consistency of the story, due to piecing together different lays, which are familiar to us in the *Iliad*. Yet they confronted every reader in ancient Rome; and to have escaped them completely in all but one instance (the unfinished connexions of Book iii.) is no small mark of the splendid architectural power of Vergil’s imagination.

Let me mention now four changes—out of the many—which Vergil made in the main thread of his story, and which are obviously characteristic. Two of the four I have discussed in previous lectures, so that I need only mention them briefly here. We start from four outstanding incidents in the Homeric poems. As any young Roman poet read the *Iliad*, if he dreamt of writing an epic of his own, we

1 *Iliad*, i. 423.  
2 *Iliad*, iv. 40.  
3 Such as the 172 lines assigned to the speech of Phoenix in *Iliad*, ix. (434 to 605).  
4 *Septima* in i. 755 is clearly inconsistent with *septima* in v. 626, which should be *octava* in the light of v. 46.
may imagine him to have made some such mental notes as these.

‘In the fighting scenes of my epic there must be something to corre-
respond to the end of the Homeric story—the slaying of Hector by
Achilles.’ Or again; ‘Roman readers will feel a certain deficiency
in my story if it contains no picturesque adventures by night like that
of Dolon’. Or again; ‘If I tell a story of travel, the hero will
have a less exciting and instructive experience than that of the hero of
the Odyssey, if his travels be confined to the world of the living; and
if a Roman poet cannot picture the world of the dead as Homer did, so
much the worse for that Roman poet’. Or again; ‘A wanderer by
sea, landed or wrecked on many strange coasts, must have intercourse
with many people; and some of these people are sure to be fair
ladies, and if Odysseus was detained by the loves of Calypso and
Circe, a Roman hero must be brought into at least one romance.’

It is enough to put these presumptions into some such shape as
they might have taken in the mind of any Roman interested in poetry;
—exactly how Vergil would have expressed them to himself, into
what finer form these lines of possibility in his art would grow in his
mind, none of us will dare to say; it is enough for us to recognise
the kind of expectation which was natural, and no doubt audible, in
the thoughtful and widely-read circle of men with whom Vergil was
in contact. But we can ask and we can find what Vergil made of
the Homeric precedent in these four cases.

Well we know what he made of the Descent into Hell. Instead
of its being, as it is in the Odyssey, just a purple patch, or two purple
patches, only loosely connected with each other and with the story, it
has become in the Aeneid, as I have shown, the central and govern-
ing part of the whole story, the key to the poet’s manifold purpose,
the heart of the whole living design. And what of the romance?
The main theme of the Odyssey is the return of the hero to his faith-
ful wife; and the poet, familiar as he clearly was with the experience of
sailors in his own day, chose, by one of the most charming touches of
genius in either epic, to represent the loves of Odysseus as immortal god-
desses who, however beautiful, however irresistible in their own ways
and in their own little islands, could never rival in his heart the fair

1 If we may judge by the recorded experience of sailors—experience not
wholly ancient, if there is any truth in proverbs.

2 In the last of my Harvard Lectures on the Vergilian Age.
image of his wife at home. And starting from this happy expedient, it was not difficult so to shape the story that both of these divine ladies should themselves speed their lover on his way; and that the decree of separation should be sent by supreme authority not to the hero, but to each hostess herself in turn. Such is the simple melodrama of the Homeric story. What has Vergil made of it? He has made Aeneas a real lover, though a widower in middle age; so much so that he forgets his mission. But the poet has made Dido 'every inch a queen and every inch a woman.' With Aeneas she is the victim of a conspiracy framed by two rival powers, superior to the two mortals they play with, from purely political objects and with no thought of the ultimate happiness of the man and the woman but caring only for the (supposed) advantage of the political units which they respectively represent. The call of conscience, of obedience to higher orders, that drags Aeneas away from the royal home which he thought he had found, is no mere passing incident in the tale of a sailor's wandering; it is the central stroke, the sudden recognition of hard facts, the ἀναγνώρισις, which in Vergil, as in Greek drama, makes a tragedy. And in this tragedy, as I have tried¹ to show, Vergil has recorded for all time his poetic vision of the results of such political schemes, springing from a blind and narrow form of national sentiment, and reckless of human misery. It is calamities like the century of war between Rome and Carthage which are the outcome when statesmen aim at the supremacy of their own nation by the destruction of every other, and when they dare to make human affection a mere tool in their planning, a pawn in their game. Listen once more to the last words² of Dido's curse—which picture the end that the tragedy was to have in the destinies of Rome, the destruction of vast Roman armies and the fourteen years' devastation of Italy by Hannibal.

Hear me ye gods, and one day from my bones
Breed an avenger! Rise, thou dread unknown,
Drive from their chosen homes with sword and fire
The Trojan settlers, now or whensoe'er
Occasion gives thee power, drive and destroy!
Arms against arms array, tide against wave,
Embattle continent with continent,
On them, and on their children's children, war!

The art of the epic has discovered, and conquered, a whole new world of thought and passion since it was content with the placid though reluctant leave-takings of Calypso and Circe.

Consider now the final combat between Aeneas and Turnus, as compared with that between the Greek Achilles and the Trojan Hector, of which Vergil was thinking all the time as his greatest exemplar. In each story before the combat begins the scales of Destiny are suspended and Zeus or Jove weighs the prospects of the two heroes. In the *Iliad* Zeus finds that Hector is doomed and the bard announces the fact; in Vergil's story, no one but Jove is the wiser. The reader must wait and discover from the story itself. The gain in power by this use of suspense is clear. When the fight begins Hector, though he had done valorous deeds before this, runs away in terror on seeing Achilles, and is only persuaded to turn and meet him because the goddess Athene, who is a friend of Achilles, takes the shape of Hector's brother, and coming to him promises to support him in the contest. Then, when Hector has thus, so to speak, been brought 'up to the scratch,' the sham brother vanishes into thin air. In Vergil's story Turnus is never a coward, though at the end he is oppressed by a bad conscience. Achilles is never wounded at all; whereas in the *Aeneid*, before the duel begins, Aeneas has been wounded by a chance arrow which is only extracted with difficulty and leaves him lame. All the same he pursues Turnus, who is carried away from meeting him by his divine sister Juturna; she entraps him, not into fighting, but into safety. At length, however, Turnus insists that he must and will meet Aeneas. You see how much more formidable Turnus is made than Hector was. Then when they do approach, both hurl their spears and miss, but Aeneas' spear sticks in the trunk of a tree. Then they meet sword to sword; Turnus' sword breaks and he flees; but Aeneas, since he is lame, cannot catch him, and

1. *Odyssey*, v. 161, 190; x. 489, 572.
2. *Iliad*, xxii. 209; *Aeneid*, xii. 725.
3. Yet so far as I know it has not yet been observed.
Juturna gives Turnus a better sword. Then and not till then Aeneas' spear is given back. So divine help is first given to the hero's enemy, and only in the second place to the hero himself.

And in Homer's story, how is Hector brought down? Both Achilles and Hector throw their spears and miss; but the goddess Athene picks up the spear of Achilles and gives it him back; no one gives Hector's back to him; so he has only his sword which is no match for a long spear hurled from a short distance. That is how Hector falls. Then notice the end. Hector begs Achilles for burial. Achilles refuses, barbarously adding that he wishes his teeth were strong enough to tear Hector to pieces. And you know how all the Greek crowd came and thrust spears into his body, and how Achilles dragged it with every insult through the dust round the walls of Troy before the eyes of his father and mother and wife. Turnus begs Aeneas not merely for burial but for his life, and Aeneas is on the point of sparing him, when he sees the fatal sword-belt which Turnus is wearing, and which, in defiance of the custom of ancient warfare, he had torn from the dead body of young Pallas. Only so can Aeneas be brought to the point of slaying Turnus. These differences were deliberately made by Vergil; his hero is a different man from Achilles.

Finally note how Vergil replaces the episode of Dolon in the Iliad, where two of the greatest Greek champions, Diomed and Odysseus, are sent out by their commander by night to spy upon the Trojans. A Trojan named Dolon has been also sent out by Hector to spy on the Greeks and to try and steal the horses of Achilles. The two Greek warriors catch sight of Dolon, and seize him; he begs for mercy, and Odysseus reassures him in words which Dolon naturally takes for a promise that they will spare him ('Be of good courage and have no fear of death'); so Odysseus gets from him information about the Trojan camp. Having secured this, they cut Dolon's throat in cold blood—the poet gives precise details of this surgical operation, having first told us that Dolon just failed to reach Diomed's chin when he knelt and lifted up his hands in supplication. Had he

1 Mr. Beare reminds me of another example of the disregard of this custom, which also has a tragical end,—the stratagem of Coroebus in Book ii. (389 and 411). The case of Euryalus in ix. 365 is different because Messapus had not been slain, though the prize was fatal to Euryalus too.

2 Iliad, x. 383, θάρσει, μηδὲ τι τοι θάνατος καταθύμος ἐστω.

3 Iliad, x. 454.
touched Diomed's chin, the primitive Homeric code of ethics, not to say magic, would have prevented Diomed from killing him. Knowing their way now, they proceed to the Trojan camp, butcher the sleeping Rhesus and eleven of his men—the poet gives no names but is careful to state the number; as Diomed proceeds with this promiscuous slaughter, Odysseus carefully drags the dead bodies to one side, for fear the horses of Rhesus should take fright at them. His efforts are successful; they carry off the famous horses and return to a dip in the sea, followed by a hot bath and supper in the Greek camp—the third supper that Odysseus has enjoyed that night; but their personal triumph has no particular effect on the course of the story. There is no reason to complain; for though the author of this Book, the Tenth, was far from being one of the best minstrels whose lays were incorporated in the *Iliad*, its author no doubt gives us a faithful picture of the instincts and interests of his age—things still inherent in every one though happily repressed in most of us, except in war.

Now let me remind you how Vergil conceived the same kind of incident—an expedition by night from a beleaguered camp.

Two boys, Nisus and Euryalus, one of sixteen years and the other of fourteen volunteer, without any invitation, to make their way by night from the Trojan camp which is beset by the Latins, in order to fetch back Aeneas from his visit to Evander. There is urgent need; the result of their failure is that Turnus succeeds in breaking into the Trojan camp. After some success at first, in which they make their way through the Latin camp which is buried in drunken slumber, Euryalus is captured—thanks to his having put on the shining helmet of one of his victims. Nisus, in a desperate attempt to rescue him, perishes too.

The differences between the stories are most significant. Dolon, as we have seen, was killed in cold blood on general principles; Euryalus is being carried off prisoner by the Latins; but they do not kill him until they are provoked into doing so by the fall of man after man under the deadly fire of darts from his friend Nisus.

When Diomed enters the Thracian camp we are expressly told:

1 *Iliad*, x. 447.  
2 *Aeneid*, ix. 422.  
3 *Iliad*, x. 482:

τῷ δ᾽ ἐμπνευσε μένος γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη  
kτείνε δ' ἐπιστροφάδην.
that Athene gives him μένος, that is eagerness, ardour for slaughter; and it is in the strength of this that he carries on his bloody work, ἐπιστροφάδην, 'to right and left.' This Vergil seems quite clearly to criticise, first by making Nisus ask Euryalus,1 'whether it is the gods who inspire them with such ardour or only each man's own dread ambition'; and by describing the actual slaughter in the camp as an excess (nimia caede atque cupidine) against which Euryalus is warned by his older comrade. That warning takes the place of a caution given, with no hint of reproof,2 to Diomed, indeed with a compliment by Athene herself.

The most vivid incident in the camp scene in the Aeneid is the fate of Rhoetus, to which there is nothing in Homer that at all corresponds. The suggestion of it no doubt came from the Rhesus of Euripides, where the fate of the hero is described by one of his soldiers who saw it, but himself escaped.3 Now in Vergil's story, while the two boys are killing the Latin soldiers in their drunken sleep, one of them, this Rhoetus, is awake and watching all the time, but he is too much of a coward to give the alarm to the rest and merely tries to hide himself. We feel no sorrow when he is caught and dealt with.

You know how the story ends, with a scene in which the heads of the two lads, impaled on spears, are carried by the enemy under the walls of the Trojan camp before the eyes of the mother of Euryalus, who is led away into mourning by honoured commanders of the Trojan host. It is one of Vergil's moments of deepest inspiration, and he seems to have known it; for he ends with the only line in which he ever expresses any confidence that his own work will survive—this even now with an 'if,' a most Vergilian 'if.' Forgive me for quoting it again. It is one of the three beatitudes of Vergil. The first is in the great passage in Book 11. of the Georgics: 'Blessed are the farmers if they have learnt to know their wealth'; and the second a little further on: 'Blessed is the poet who knows the spirits of the countryside';

1 Aeneid, ix. 184.
2 Iliad, x. 509: 

νόστου δὴ μνῆσαι, μεγαθύμου Τύδεως υἱὲ, 
νῆς ἐπὶ ὡλαφυρᾶς, μὴ καὶ πεφοβημένος ἔλθῃς.

3 Eurip. Rhes., I. 756—a reference I owe to my friend and former colleague, Mrs. Mary Braunholtz (née Herford).
and here we have the third, 'Blessed are ye, Nisus and Euryalus,' that is, 'Blessed are the young who give their lives for their fellows.'

'O happy both. If aught my song avails,
No day shall blot you from remembering years
While by the Capitol's unmoving rock
Aeneas' house shall stand, and he whom Rome
Calls Father, gives commandment to the world.'

fortunati ambo! Si quid mea carmina possunt
nulla dies unquam memori uos eximet aeuo,
dum domus Æneae Capitoli immobile saxum
accolet, imperiumque pater Romanus habebit.

The pledge has been more than fulfilled. Neither the Capitol nor the Vatican now commands the world. But this promise, which Vergil made to no one else, marks the temper of those two boys as the real foundation of the Kingdom of Peace that he longed for, the noblest part of all the inheritance that ancient Rome could leave to the Christian world that was to come.

Let me conclude with a reflection which may seem commonplace; at all events it ought to be commonplace. But it is one which I have seen recently denied by high authority. Professor Wilamowitz Moellendorff in some friendly criticism of an address which I gave in January, 1928, entitled Poetry and Government, demurred to my contention that Vergil and Horace had influenced Octavian towards clemency, contending that he was moved not by these particular authors, but by the Zeitgeist, the spirit that was in the air. This spirit he (apparently) thinks would have produced the change in Octavian, even had Vergil and Horace never lived. I am not concerned, of course, to deny that many great men have delivered themselves of their teaching to their generation and passed away, often as martyrs, without seeing any fruit (or any great fruit) of their labours. But even they, as their repute shows, have in their day and degree led and moved mankind; and I venture to hold very strongly that whatever there may be in the air, as we say, at any given moment, if it implies a vigorous break with what has been customary, if it is a new view of things which it requires courage to advocate, then it is certainly not the product of spontaneous combustion, but the work of strong and brave men. The darkness that surrounds the growth of the Homeric poems forbids us to reason about them from this point
of view; yet it is a permissible speculation that the gulf between the barbarity of *Iliad* xxii. and the humanity of *Iliad* xxiv. and of all the *Odyssey* was not crossed without some courage on the part of the later minstrel. Granting that the spirit of mercy came at last to prevail in Rome in the years between 44 and 29 B.C., and to triumph over the temper of people like Sextus Pompey and Mark Antony and Octavian as he still was at Perusia in 41, it is surely reasonable to ask in what form this spirit took shape. And if we find it splendidly embodied in the work of the greatest minds of that age, surely it is futile to suppose that the anticipations and undertones or echoes of that teaching, which we may conjecture to have been heard on other lips, had anything like the same power to influence events. On the contrary, it is possible to point to more than one epoch in history—some of them quite recent in our own country and in others,—in which hundreds of men knew what ought to be done, and perhaps the majority of the community concerned were conscious of what ought to be done, but none of them had the strength or the genius that was needed to proclaim it and translate it into act. What Horace says of the many brave men who died forgotten before Agamemnon because ‘they had no inspired seer’ to celebrate their struggles, is certainly true of public life. For how many years did every decent Englishman groan over the horrors of the Slave Trade, before Wilberforce succeeded in destroying it? Or does anyone suppose that it would have been suppressed in the United States without the genius and dauntless courage of Abram Lincoln? Or in our own day, that the one hope of civilisation, the League of Nations, would ever have emerged from the tragedy of the war but for the intense and heroic efforts of Woodrow Wilson, pursued over two continents and prolonged over twelve months of desperate struggle, a struggle which cost him his life? By all means be enlightened; by all means dig out of the dust, when you can, whatever factors in a given epoch were making towards the ultimate result; but do not let our interest in these details obscure our gratitude or lessen our reverence for the great men who actually accomplished the great end. Least of all when like Vergil they spent their lives under the burden which comes from clear vision of the end and continually disappointed longing for its attainment. The sadness of the *Aeneid* compared with the lively hopes of the *Georgics* was due, we cannot doubt, to the revelation of the powers of
cruelty still inherent in the Augustan system which came to Vergil with the death of his friend Gallus in 26 B.C.; and if the *Aeneid* through all the ages has exerted and still exerts power to humanise mankind, it is for one reason more than any other, namely, that it represents the plea of a great thinker for an ideal of chivalry and goodwill which though it certainly and demonstrably impressed the government of his day, was still far short of being fulfilled at his death.

We have found this ideal, expressed in the most powerful form which a poet could give it, in the structure and story and spirit of his greatest poem, a poem which was at once adopted as a national creed; and we know further that no other poet or writer of his day had given any like expression, if any expression at all, to some of its greatest aspects,—its intense humanity; its lofty conception of Deity; its deeply felt protest against a superficial view of the position of women in human life; and its not less searching exposure of the tragical effect upon the world of merely nationalistic ethics. These great conceptions were given to the Augustan world, which only partly understood them, and still more partially attempted to put them into practical shape. But they are living still; and the searching questions which they address to our own generation, and to the generations that will follow, come straight from Vergil's heart.