

## THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE EPIC.<sup>1</sup>

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THE title of this lecture may, I fear, suggest a rather ponderous treatment of a ponderous subject. As I began to put it together and to read what others had said on such topics, I confess that I was reminded, by contrast, of a remark made once by an American friend of mine who had been studying the commentary of an Anglican divine on the Minor Prophets. "I do not know when I learnt such a heap of things," he said, shaking his head sadly, "such a heap of things that were not so." My trouble was the opposite ;— I seemed to be smothered by a heap of things that always were so and always had been so and always would be ; and the definite matters which I wanted to discuss seemed likely to be drowned in a flood of respectable doctrines which demanded a passing homage. The only way to escape is to be fiercely dogmatic in general principles so as to leave room to apply them to certain aspects of the structure of Vergil's *Æneid*, about which there are, I venture to think, some questions on which light may still be sought and found.

After all, although the material of architecture is ponderous enough, its greatest triumphs are surely distinguished by the impression which they give of lightness, allied with organic strength and vigour, when a whole building seems to be not dead stone but a living growth, almost moveable and flexible, playing with the sunlight, not blotting it out, communing with the breezes of heaven as with friends, not enemies.

One such building I have in mind is the new Marischal College of Aberdeen, built, I suppose, of the heaviest and hardest stone in the

<sup>1</sup> A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on January 14, 1925. As usual I am profoundly indebted, especially in the verse renderings, to the generous help of my friend Prof. W. B. Anderson, Litt.D.

world ; yet so exquisitely planned that on a sunny day it has all the delicate charm of filigree silver. And but for the sooty conditions under which the ignorance or greed of many individuals in Manchester condemn us all here to draw our breath, something like this would be felt every day of the lovely building in which we are privileged to meet.

Few Epics have stood the test of time ; and there are not more than five of which I can claim any knowledge ; the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of course, the *Æneid*, the *Divina Commedia* of Dante and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Of course there are others ; but none (in Europe, at all events) which are not in close relation with the Vergilian and Homeric models. In saying this I am venturing to assume the truth of the only description of an epic which seems to me to meet the facts ; it is given in that brilliant book—'English Lessons for English People,' the joint work of the historian J. R. Seeley and the great scholar and teacher Dr. Edwin Abbott. They laid down that an epic poem is a chapter in the history of Providence ; that is to say, it must be long enough and deep enough to show the working out of some providential purpose in a given period of human history. Thus in the *Iliad* beneath and behind the whole story, is the prospect of the triumph of the Greeks over barbarians and the doom of the guilty city of Troy ; and the episodes of the fighting, though they extend, I believe, over something less than a month, lead up to two events—the reunion of the Greek forces, and the death of Hector, without which the destruction of Troy could not have been compassed. On the other hand in the *Odyssey* the story spreads over several years ; and although the result is not larger than the restoration of the good Odysseus to his wife and kingdom, nevertheless the poem is so built that the reader has to believe that the greatest powers of the universe have it at heart to accomplish this end and incidentally to punish the lawlessness of the Suitors. To any readers who may not feel this underlying divine purpose, well, to them the *Odyssey* is not to be distinguished from other narratives in verse ; in other words it is for them not an Epic, in the sense in which the name will be used in this lecture.

Put in a less theological shape, the definition means that an Epic must be felt as a single poem whose narrative is continuous, and leads straight to some large result ; and that this result must be fraught with interest of at least national magnitude, possibly more than national, but at least national. The sorrows and the courage of Enoch Arden or

the anxieties of Bishop Blougram may interest us keenly, but their experiences are not of Epic magnitude.

Starting thus we discover quickly that there are two or three practical consequences (there may be more) in the structure of an epic which have been in fact observed by all epic poets who can claim that title without question. Dull and obvious enough you may think them ; but they have contributed a good deal to the shaping of the *Æneid*:

(1) *Never end at the end*.—History never stops, and if any set of events has a real historical importance, that importance will not be limited by any one point of time—certainly not by the point at which its character first becomes fully determined. We have seen that the story of the *Iliad* is epic because it looks forward to the triumph of the Greeks and back to the guilt of Troy. Again, to suppose that the purport of Dante's vision was ended when he resumed his life as a mortal man in Italy after the marvellous time that he spent in the three stages of his journey ; that is to say, to regard the whole *Commedia* as merely a nine-days-incident of Dante's private life, although from one point of view that is what he represented it to be, would, of course, be absurd. We may well be shy of devising a formula for the scope of his gigantic undertaking ; but it certainly was something which pictured the contribution of Italy, past, present and future, to the intellectual and spiritual growth of Europe ; and that, happily, as we know and as Dante knew, was not to end with Easter week in 1300.

On the other hand a poem *must* end somewhere, that is to say, there should be some concrete incident at the end of which the reader feels that he has come to the frame of the picture. Of this need our own John Milton was vividly conscious. The substantial end of *Paradise Lost* is Michael's great prophecy of the final victory of the Saviour who should one day—

“ dissolve  
Satan with this perverted world, then raise  
New Heav'ns, new earth, ages of endless date  
Founded in righteousness, and peace, and love,  
To bring forth fruits, joy and eternal bliss.”

This is l. 551 ; but what happens in the 88 lines which remain of the Book ? Adam and Eve are expelled by Michael and the cherubim from Paradise.

"The world was all before them, where to choose  
 Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.  
 They, hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow,  
 Through Eden took their solitary way."

Their expulsion from the Garden makes the end of the poem, but not the goal of its story.

(2) The second principle is not less obvious—*Never begin at the beginning*. The great pictures of past history, personal, and more than personal, national, and more than national, which make up so much of the *Divina Commedia* range over all the centuries; and the date with which Dante happens to connect the beginning of his vision, the eve of Good Friday, A.D. 1300, has only this importance—it helps us to separate his visions of the past<sup>1</sup> from his vision of the future. In *Paradise Lost* what are really the earliest events, namely the revolt of Satan and his angels and their expulsion from Heaven, are related by Raphael in Books V. and VI.; and the next step in Miltonic history, the creation of this world, is not begun until Book VII. nor completed till Book VIII., although we knew it had happened as early as Book I., when Satan solemnly submits the rumour of it to his infernal council. This council leads to Satan's adventurous journey to explore the new world for himself, which takes up the whole of Books II. and III.

The principle needs no further illustration; but it is interesting to note its origin, which was in a sense accidental. In the world to which the Homeric lays were first recited the professional bard who recited them held a place of honour. Therefore of course in the world of yesterday, only yesterday, of which the bard made a picture, there must be room for his own high calling; consequently, while the story deals with the deeds of yesterday there will be parts of it in which a bard is represented as telling stories of the day before. There are many traces in the *Iliad* of this instinct, to make particular lays serve a retrospective purpose; for example, the long narratives in which the warriors glorify their lineage before they engage in single

<sup>1</sup> Of course many of the incidents foretold in the *Commedia* had happened before the poem was written although the date which Dante had chosen, and chosen no doubt partly for this very purpose, made it necessary to depict them under the guise of prophecy, not of narrative. This *ex post facto* prophecy must be carefully distinguished from the poet's anticipation of what was to come in times really future to his own.

combat ; especially in the famous case of Glaucôn and Diomedes in Book VI., and in Nestor's lengthy history in Book XI. And as we all know, the delightful genius<sup>1</sup> which determined the present form of the *Odyssey*, set the account of his adventures which Odysseus gives to his host Alcinoüs in the four Books IX.-XII. These Books carry the narrative from the fall of Troy down to his arrival at the island of Calypso, his adventures after leaving Calypso having been related more briefly by him to his hosts in Book VII. The earlier books are mainly occupied with the state of Ithaca under the rule of the Suitors and the expedition of Telemachus in search of his father. We see therefore that this retrospective narrative was deliberately adopted by the framer of the *Odyssey*; and it has remained a conventional feature of the epic.

But why has such a convention maintained itself ? "One good custom" does not hold the world for centuries merely because it is old. What are its advantages ?

First, as we have seen,—that it gives to the poem a wider range than the actual limits of the story which it relates at first-hand. But freedom is gained in other ways too. The poet is not obliged to relate everything,—only the things which are of interest and importance to the narrator in whose mouth the story is put. Again the poet finds an opportunity of dramatic description merely by shaping the style in which the narrator delivers his story. It is generally his own story ; and to represent a man talking at length about his own experience creates for an imaginative poet a chance of depicting his character without seeming to do so. All these points may in fact be summed up by saying that the practice of retrospective narrative makes the poem more like the actual experience of its readers ; because, as we all know, we have to make the acquaintance of new people every day, and we judge them very largely from the things they first happen to say in our hearing ; but their previous history we only learn afterwards, if at all. In this point the epic method is closely akin to that of the drama.

(3) The third principle is this : *keep the goal always in mind, but not always on paper.* You must diversify the story, though you

<sup>1</sup> Whether the genius of one man or of a school of men, I must not stay to discuss, though like most English scholars I find it hard to do without the supposition of some one controlling intellect at this stage.

must not break it. The episodes must not be irrelevant ; that is what Apollonius Rhodius and the other Alexandrines failed to understand. So they could not write Epics : they wrote moderately entertaining narratives of which Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the cleverest example.

Now the best interruption to any train of ideas is laughter. Unluckily not all interruptions produce laughter, but for laughter one's ideas or conduct must be interrupted ; no interruption, no laughter. You must be surprised ; *ridiculum secat res* as Horace knew, cuts sharply, not merely slackens or softens, much less forwards or helps the immediate prospect ; though by breaking that to pieces, it may clear the air.

But where does this come into the epic ? It does not come in, and must not. This is what we mean by epic dignity. Hence we reach a fourth maxim : *smile, but never laugh aloud*. One passage in the *Iliad* and one in the *Odyssey* in which the architect of each has admitted some comparatively modern, *fin-de-siècle*-kind of material—or it may be comparatively barbarous and ancient, if Professor Murray's expurgatory theory be right—the cozening of Jove and the trapping of Mars by Vulcan, have been condemned as un-Epic by all critics, in ancient times as much as in our own day.

When we turn to enquire how these points of method affected the design of the *Æneid* we are on more definite ground. In studying the single Books of that poem it has always been my experience that nothing reveals to us so intimately Vergil's governing thought as the order in which he has arranged his subject matter. In a lecture here some years ago we traced the gradual expansion and ascent of the idea of Book VI. through the Approach, the Journey and the Revelation, culminating in the Vision of Anchises. In the Second Book who can forget the succession of the three great acts of the tragedy ? The first is in the sunlight and freedom of the fields outside the city of Troy, enjoyed by the Trojans for the first time for ten years ; the army with the king himself, and indeed the whole people, swarming over the shore and exulting in their apparent deliverance from their Greek invaders, of whom the only trace left is the gaunt wooden horse alone on the wide plain. In the midst of this immense rejoicing strange things happen,—the capture of Sinon followed by his crafty story, and then the protest of Laocoon and his subsequent destruction by the

serpents, ending in the triumphant return of the multitude to Troy with the wooden horse in their midst. The second act gives us the climax of the tragedy in a series of closely related scenes, in all of which Æneas takes part ; first his vision of Hector, then the shifting phases of the fighting in the streets, followed by his attempt from the roof of the Palace to repulse the assault of the Greeks on its walls, ended by the inrush of Pyrrhus and his slaughter of Priam. All this is at night, but night full of the glare of burning houses and the fury of conflict.

In the third act, a sense of desolation gradually succeeds to the strife. Æneas is left more and more alone, both in responsibility for action when with difficulty, and only by divine aid, he persuades his father to join in the escape ; and later when, having put his father and son in safe hiding outside the now merely smouldering city, he plunges back into danger to look for his wife Creusa who had been snatched from him in the escape. Out of all the rejoicing multitude which filled the stage in the first act, from the smaller but still crowded scenes of combat that made the second, Æneas alone is left. Troy has vanished ; the future is with Æneas alone, and to guide him there is only the faint ray of hope contained in Creusa's dubious <sup>1</sup> prophecy with a geographical contradiction which could offer small comfort. The story has swept us along swiftly ; one vivid picture has succeeded another too quickly for us to reflect on the constructive art which has so built the drama. To see how powerful this is, one need only try to remove a single episode from the Book. No episode, not even a single line, can be spared ; remove it, and the whole story halts.—So, for example, those scholars have found who wish to reject the passage in which Æneas debates whether he shall kill Helen. No doubt Vergil himself had condemned these lines ; but he did not live to re-write the passage ; and without it, a place in the narrative is left completely blank.

Or again, we might study the structure of Book X., the Book of

<sup>1</sup> The prophecy of a western land (*terra Hesperia*) combined with an Anatolian river—that of course was the meaning of a *Lydius Thybris* to a Trojan ear. Commentators have been too much taken up with the meaning which the words would convey to a Roman to realise that to a Trojan, some generations before the first Etruscan landing in Italy, the prophecy had no geographical meaning except the riddling ambiguity proper to an oracle. I am glad to note that, since this lecture was delivered, the point has been made independently by a writer in the *Classical Review*.

Homeric combats. All its parts are knit closely, fiercely together, compact with magnificent power, every Act and every scene carrying us straight into the next, and the whole sweeping on to the tragical climax. But to this I must return some other day.

If then the poet's architectural power is so conspicuous in single Books, we may be sure that it will repay our study in the poem as a whole. At least we may discover some main lines of his plan. There is in our favour too one circumstance which at first sight might be thought a disadvantage, and which is, of course, a real loss to us however useful it may be for our present purpose; I mean the fact that the poem was left unfinished at Vergil's death, and that one of the latest changes he had made was in the order of the opening Books. One of these (the 3rd) had been, it now seems, in course of changes to suit the new order; and it was left so far from complete that it is only in its general design, in the beauty of its versification, and in a few passages of characteristic tenderness, such as the picture of Andromache, and that of Polyphemus with his sheep, that we can call it Vergilian in the full sense,<sup>1</sup> and it was perhaps his consciousness of this gap at a vital point of the story which more than anything else led the dying poet to bid his friends destroy the whole poem. But just for this reason, the order in which he did leave the Books is of great significance, because we know that it represents his mature intention. Some of the implications of this order I should like now to examine.

We all know that the *Æneid* contains in itself an *Odyssey* of travel and an *Iliad* of fighting; and it is commonly assumed that

<sup>1</sup> On the Third Book I am much indebted to a stimulating though not always convincing essay by Miss M. Crump on the *Growth of the Æneid* (Oxford, 1920). Her main contentions regarding the Book follow Sabbadini's view and seem to me justified, although the limits of the essay make the treatment of the other Books (especially that of the Twelfth) somewhat cursory. In particular Miss Crump nowhere reckons with the metrical and other evidence, though both are strong, for the view that some of these Books, especially the Tenth, belong to Vergil's earlier period and are closely akin in style and method to the *Georgics*, especially to the 3rd. My own view, which is, I believe, not new, is that the Tenth Book represents the final form of part of the poem about *reges et prælia* which we know that Vergil contemplated at an early stage (Ecl. VI., 3), say in 40-37 B.C., and then put aside; though he recurs to it again, in both retrospect and in prospect, in *Georg. III.*, 40-49.



the two halves of the poem correspond to this double purpose. This is true on the surface, but only on the surface; there is no travelling in Book II. or Book IV.—very little (in the geographical sense) in Book VI.; and there is no fighting in Book VIII. The chief likeness to the Homeric model is in one detail, namely, of time; the first six books cover seven or eight years and the last six occupy a certain number of days. This distinction therefore does not take us very far. The questions to which I will now beg attention arise out of the maxims that we have noted. How does Vergil secure that the real compass of his poem should not be limited by the experience of Æneas? How does he contrive to vary the course of his story without interrupting it? How does he secure that the reader shall be conscious throughout of its national and super-national purpose?

To the first question an answer arises if we ask another—What is the historical order of the events related in the *Æneid*? Clearly Troy comes first; that is to say Book II., then the wanderings from Troy as far as Sicily, Book III.<sup>1</sup> Then the new start from Sicily, the storm driving the wanderers out of their course; the shipwreck on the Carthaginian coast, the welcome by Dido; all this<sup>2</sup> makes Book I. The tragic love of Dido and Æneas, the forced departure of Æneas and Dido's suicide make Book IV. Then the return to Sicily and the incidents there fill the present Book V. These incidents are interesting and important for the development of the character of Æneas and for other reasons as we shall see, but the main narrative stands still until

<sup>1</sup> Here there is a gap. We nowhere learn how Æneas spent the time between his first landing in Sicily and his starting again on the voyage which ended in his shipwreck. Miss Crump offers a plausible conjecture, that the Funeral games of Anchises which, in the poem as we have it, take place a year after his death when Æneas returned to Sicily, were first designed to occupy this gap. There is something to be said for this view; but the total of the evidence does not yet seem enough to make it more than worth further enquiry. If Miss Crump's conjecture were sound, it would render still more noteworthy Vergil's final decision to place Book V. where it stands since it must have involved a great deal of re-writing, as indeed she supposes,—but far more re-writing than she has realised. And it would be interesting to see what, say, the first 500 lines of Book III. would be like, if they were re-written now so that every 1st person were replaced by a 3rd person—a process which Miss Crump strangely thinks 'very simple' (p. 35), 'not at all difficult' (p. 34).

<sup>2</sup> But the Carthaginian pictures of the Trojan War (454 ff.), look backwards; and the prophecy of Jupiter looks far on to Rome (254 ff.).

the end of the Book when the voyage is begun again—Palinurus is drowned, and the whole expedition arrives at Cumæ; then of course follows the descent to the Under-World in Book VI. But the events prophesied by Anchises in its latter part relate to periods that to Æneas are still in a remote future. Books VII., X., XI. and XII. narrate different stages of the relations of Æneas with the Italians and the repeated breach of their covenants with him—thanks to the fierce opposition of Amata and then of Turnus, the whole story being concluded by the death of Turnus.

The incidents in these four books are linked fairly closely, except the story of Camilla in the second half of the eleventh Book;<sup>1</sup> part of this was certainly not composed for that place and the episode as a whole might have occurred anywhere between Book VII. and Book XII., though at the end of Book XI. (l. 901) the news of Camilla's death is neatly linked to what follows in Book XII.

But what of Books VIII. and IX.? Book VIII. narrates the visit of Æneas to the site of Rome where he is taken over parts of the future area of the city, by the Greek King Evander, who had settled on the Palatine, and who genially explains to him the stories connected with each part; the Book ends by Evander's dispatching his young son Pallas at the head of a contingent sent to help Æneas in his struggle with Turnus. Book IX. pictures the events in the Trojan camp during the absence of Æneas. It is hard pressed by Turnus, and we have first the romantic story of Nisus and Euryalus venturing out by night to try and recall Æneas, and so meeting their doom; then the not less interesting pictures of Turnus bursting into the Trojan camp, shut in there, and fighting his way through to the opposite wall, whence he plunges armed into the Tiber. Now the excursion of Æneas to the site of Rome might have come in anywhere between Book VI. and Book XII., and one episode of it—the divine armour made for Æneas by Vulcan, includes upon the shield a long series of pictures from Roman history, ending with the Battle of Actium. If, therefore, we were to arrange the story of these books by strict chrono-

<sup>1</sup> The Speech of Diana (537-584) clearly comes from some early Epyllion. Although it is put into Diana's mouth, she is mentioned three times in the 3rd person and never (in these lines) in the 1st. The number of jingling rhymes in ll. 570-576 is remarkable; and the succession of end-stopped lines in 573-580 with their contents is in the Catullan manner.

logy, this episode ought to come long after Book XII. and somehow be made parallel or subsequent to the historical prophecies in Book VI., only that the end of Book VI., the death of Marcellus, which took place in 23 B.C., is later even than the Battle of Actium in 31 and the triumphs of Augustus in 29 and 28 B.C. respectively. The result may be represented by a string of numbers. In the chronological order of what the Books tell us, they would stand thus :—

- II.
- III.
- I.
- IV.
- V. (in its present form).
- Part of VI.
- VII.
- X and part of XI.
- VIII., IX., and part of XI. (anywhere between VII. and XII).
- XII.
- Part of VI.
- Part of VIII.
- Part of VI.

It is clear therefore that Vergil arranged his poem so as neither to begin at the beginning nor end at the end. Why he did so we have partly seen already, and we shall soon, I hope, realise even more clearly.

Now turn to the second question which goes rather deeper. How has Vergil contrived in marshalling the elements of his story to diversify without interrupting it? One answer at least is provided by the characteristic habit of Vergil's thought traced in a previous lecture,<sup>1</sup> his way of considering things in pairs, of combining two contrasted points of view. When we studied his *Eclogues*<sup>2</sup> we found that he had arranged them in definite alternation so that those with odd numbers had all Italian subjects, and that those with even numbers had subjects outside Italy. Now this love of alternation has shaped the structure of the whole *Æneid* in two ways; (1) by the contrast which Vergil has deliberately made between every pair of

<sup>1</sup> *The Philosophy of Vergil*, 1920 (*Bulletin of the J.R.L.*), vol. 6, pp. 384-401).

<sup>2</sup> *Where was Vergil's Farm*, 1922 (*Bulletin of the J.R.L.*, vol. 7, pp. 184-210).

consecutive Books, and (2) by the correspondence and contrast between each of the Books in the first half of the poem and the Book in the corresponding place in the second half. Take the latter point first.

Book I. and Book VII. narrate an arrival in a strange land, which proffers friendship at first. Venus prevailing over Juno is the controlling spirit of Book I.; Juno prevailing over Venus of Book VII.; and both books are full of oracles. Book II. and Book VIII. each tell the story of a city,—one doomed, the other yet to be founded, the second to succeed to the glory of the first. In both, the Greeks are the main actors; in Book II. they destroy, in Book VIII. they help to found. The story of each leaves the hero Æneas standing in the centre of the picture. In the next pair the hero is in fact out of the picture, for his part in the narrative of Book III. is virtually passive. Both Books are crowded with incidents which in Book III. centre mainly round the aged Anchises, in Book IX. mainly round the young Ascanius. Books IV. and X. again each have the hero in the centre of action; in Book IV. the conflict for him is within, between his duty and his love for Dido; in Book X. it is outside, with the Latins and Mezentius. In Book IV. private passion yields to public duty, in Book X. pity yields to the warrior's stern passion of revenge. In both, the chief mischief is done by the interference of divine persons, and in both the strain of tragedy reaches its highest point. The central movement of each perceptibly follows the path of Greek drama.

Books V. and XI. both open with funeral ceremonies. In Book V. Æneas appears as a wise ruler, allaying by his generous sympathy the disputes between his subjects; whereas in Book XI. the helpless King Latinus completely fails to avert civil dissension between the two factions of the Latins. In both there is a feminine incursion upon the natural order of events, and both end with the fate of a single personality, the death of Palinurus and the death of Camilla, both slain by some strange law of destiny, demanding, apparently, for any great cause the almost irrelevant sacrifice of innocent lives, *unum pro multis caput* (V. 815). Finally, Book VI. and Book XII. show us the founder of Rome first receiving and then executing his commission; first the revelation of the divine purpose, then its enactment through the reconciliation of Juno and the covenants of Æneas. Each Book ends with a death—one, that of Marcellus, consecrating the new order, the

other, that of Turnus, sealing the doom of the old. Any pair of these parallel features you may reject, if you will, as too fanciful ; but their number might easily be increased, and taken together, they seem to make too strong evidence of intention to be ascribed merely to accident.

But turn now to the actual alternation in the character of the Books, a point probably familiar to many ; the contrast of the grave and the less grave ; of a sense of tension and a sense of leisure ; a change from tragedy to something which if not comedy, is at all events melodrama of no very harrowing kind. This is the real division of the *Æneid*. The Books with odd numbers show what we may call the lighter or Odyssean type ; the Books with the even numbers reflect the graver colour of the *Iliad*. The only point of the *Æneid* at which this principle may be felt to apply less plainly than in the rest is in Books IX. and X. Yet a little reflection will tell us that although Book IX. does indeed contain one story of deep pathos, the fate of Nisus and Euryalus, nevertheless the atmosphere of the whole Book is very different from the lurid sky of Book X.

Now observe the effect of this alternation in the kind of matter which Vergil admits. We have seen that the Epic poet must never break into open laughter because that would interrupt the serious course of his story ; but he may, in suitable places, be playful ; he may stoop (or rise) to a gentle smile. In such sections of his work he may watch the actions of young or foolish creatures not merely with the grave historian's eye, but with a certain air of sympathy enlivening his judgement ; whereas in the more tragic parts, if his humour cannot be wholly kept out, it takes a grim form, as in the Sybil's mocking replies to Æneas in Book VI., or in the answer which the gods send to the prayer of the over-confident augur Tolumnius.<sup>1</sup>

Contrast with this the gentle playfulness that we find constantly colouring the story in the Books with odd numbers. For want of realising this difference, grave commentators have passed solemn votes of censure on the poet for his surprising frivolity ; as in the footrace in Book V. where Nisus slips in the mud, but in rising manages to foul Salius so as to leave his friend Euryalus the winner. An incident of this kind, however Homeric, simply could not have appeared in Book

<sup>1</sup> Tolumnius promised victory to the Latins on the strength of an omen which he calls " an answer to my prayer ; " but, in the battle which he began, he is one of the first to fall in their general rout ; see XII. 259 and 460.

IV. or Book VI. ; nor could the spotted snake with its coat of many colours ; nor the wise old ladies who burn the ships to escape sea-sickness, nor several other incidents which together make Book V. very cheerful reading.

What is it, again, that has made Book I. such a favourite in every school all down the centuries ? It is just this gentle, playful touch which lightens so much of the story. Not the Swiss Family Robinson themselves could have lit on a luckier store of good things than Æneas' shipwrecked comrades—rescuing plenty of corn from the waves or from their wrecked ships ; cooking it on fire kindled from a handy flint ; with bows and arrows all ready, and a most obliging troop of stags coming down to be shot ; and plenty of wine in casks, unloaded with marvellous speed ! and how was the storm raised ? By Æolus, bribed to do so by the promise of the beautiful nymph Deiopeia to be his bride. Of course she is Homeric, taken from Book XIV.—the frivolous portion of the *Iliad*, observe—and it is difficult to think that Vergil wished us to regard her as a very serious element in the fortunes of the founder of Rome. If Æolus came by a new wife every time he raised a storm, well, he must have had an expensive household, and a very large cave ! It is a tempting task to trace this gentle humour in all the other Books with odd numbers ; in Book III. the disagreeable but futile Harpies and the muddles of the oracles ; in Book VII. poor Picus turned into a bird ; and the angry old lady Amata spinning<sup>1</sup> about the town so wildly in her fury that she is compared to a top whipped round a courtyard by a crowd of schoolboys ; in Book IX. the ships prettily and suddenly turned into nymphs ; the boyish generosity of Ascanius towards Nisus and Euryalus ; his own lucky shot at the declamatory Numanus ; and the not less boyish prowess of Turnus, shut up within the walls of the camp. In Book XI. we have the high comedy of the debate in the Latin Senate with Drances for Cicero and Turnus for Antony ; and the tragical comedy of poor Camilla pursuing Chloereus for the sake of his fine robes and so exposing herself to a treacherous arrow.

To these obvious examples of Vergil's lighter touch let me add that often, perhaps more often than not, the smile ends in a touch of pathos, sometimes deep pathos, as in the stories of Euryalus and Camilla ; but unless I am mistaken, the spirit in which these stories as a whole are

<sup>1</sup> L. 379 ff.

told hardly appears in the Books with even numbers.<sup>1</sup> And I cannot help feeling that we do not do justice to Vergil in reading any one of his Books, taken alone, unless in our reading we are fully conscious of this fundamental difference between the two series of the Books, those with odd and those with even numbers.

Finally let me point out what it is that unifies the *Æneid* in spite of the facts that it is unfinished, and that each of its Books stands out clearly, designed as a separate unit. What is it, nevertheless, that makes the whole a single, complete poem? It is the governing power of what we have seen to be in truth its crowning Book, but which Vergil has placed in the centre to unite all that stand before and all that stand after.

It is over forty years since I began to study the *Æneid* as a whole, and I have repeatedly been called upon to think about Book VI.; yet it is only in the last few months that this central and unifying function has become clear to my mind. There are several quite different ways in which the Book contributes a sense of unity to the whole Epic. No doubt we might, to start with, regard the visit of Æneas to the Under-world as a picturesque but merely incidental episode, which owed its place to the fact that in Homer's story Odysseus had also had dealings with the dead. This, as Heinze suggests, gave an element not very easy<sup>2</sup> to weave into the general plot. All that is true, and yet its truth is a revelation of Vergil's genius,—a measure of the power of imagination which has made it equally true that Book VI. is the keystone of the whole poem,—so profound is the effect of the Book upon our feelings about what has preceded and what is to follow.

We may note in passing that the frame of the Book is in Italy. Not till he reaches Italy can Æneas learn the truth; the base of the

<sup>1</sup> One clear exception must be admitted, the experiences of the little boy Ascanius at the end of Book II. But in the last Act of that Book, the tension is deliberately relieved; the climax is at the death of Priam. The only other exceptions, I believe, that might be urged are in the Tenth Book—the vision of Æneas on his voyage back to the Trojan Camp, and the one example of real mockery on the lips of Jove when he reproves Juno for her folly (ll. 608-610). I count these among the many indications of a comparatively early date for the first composition of this Book.

<sup>2</sup> In the *Odyssey*, as we all know, it remains a purple patch, or rather two purple patches, hopelessly disconnected from the rest.

Epic structure must be laid on Italian soil. Then observe in the first place that the Book sets the story of Troy and Rome for the first time in the light of universal Providence. It is true that in the First Book, and since, we have had promises and prophecies connecting the Trojan exiles with Rome and giving Æneas a steadily increasing something both to hope for and to do ; yet how small a section is this of the great world-drama, or world-procession, which the Sixth Book unfolds ! It is not, we now discover, the fate of a few exiles which is at stake ; it is the purpose of creation itself ; the whole divine ordering of the world from the first stirring of fiery breath in primæval chaos from the first imparting of divine life to individual men and other creatures, down to the long process of civilising barbarous humanity ; the process of which the Roman Empire was to be the consummation. Seen from such a mount of vision even the humblest details of the search for a site, of local traditions, of finding allies, of councils among gods or men, of sieges and storms, and broken faith and battles and single combats—all these incidents are transfigured. In Book VII. it is not merely a strange river by which the solitary exile lays him down to sleep and to dream of building a city on its banks ; it is the greatest river of human history, 'the source of life,' as Vergil calls it, for a host of 'tall cities,' rising to embrace its destiny. In Book VIII. it is not merely a thieving shepherd from a cave in grassy hills meeting punishment from stronger hands ; it is the whole instinct of social order, of moral law, vindicated by the great Hercules against Cacus, and in Vergil's day vindicated against the Catilines, Antonies and Pompeys who had kept the world in chaos for three generations. And at the end it is not a mere Italian princeling, resisting the establishment of the new order which everyone else has sworn to welcome, whose death marks the end of the story ; it is the whole spirit of no compromise, of 'dying hard,' of resistance to the last on behalf of merely selfish claims, from which the Roman Empire was freed by the fall of Antony, freed for its work of ensuring peace and of opening the roads along which knowledge and Good Will were to spread. At both ends of the Epic the wall of time is swept away ; and the story of Æneas almost suddenly takes its place in an immortal and infinite Design.

Secondly, if the Sixth Book thus links the poem with universal Providence, it does so by frankly adopting a certain universal philosophy.



Whence comes this doctrine of the World-soul, of the relationship of all life to its spiritual source and goal, of the discipline through which the human soul must pass, the ages over which the creative purpose will range? Certainly not from the Epicurean carelessness or defiant despair by which Vergil's boyish questionings were surrounded. It is the creed of Vergil's mature thought; and it is also the finest flower of Greek philosophy, coming down in steadily growing significance from the speculations of the early Ionians to Socrates and Plato, and through them to the Stoics in whose hands, as we know, it became more of a religion than a philosophy, and was closely allied with the fundamental instincts of Roman life.

We must not now dwell on this tempting theme; let me add only that in allying his poem with Stoic teaching, Vergil did a great deal to bring that teaching into the central current of human progress; and that it was a certain spirit from which, till then, Stoicism had been conspicuously alien, but with which, as we shall see, Vergil somehow transfused it, that did more than anything to make it the natural ally of a new religion.

In the third place, it is obvious that the Book in a sense reveals the secret of the whole poem by linking its denouement to a central person, namely, Augustus. The conquests of the Cæsars had been prophesied before; the religious and social reforms of Augustus had been brightly set forth in the dealings of Æneas with his followers, especially in Book V.; but not until the prophecy of Anchises are we told that it is Augustus himself who shall travel through the Empire and make it one; who shall spread the Golden Age, not only over Italy, but throughout the known world. Henceforward when we read of the hard work of Hercules or Æneas, we know that we are to take them as an allegory<sup>1</sup> of the harder and longer task to be accomplished by the founder of the Roman Empire.

We may be sure, I think, that of these three elements in the Book—a central providence, a universal philosophy and a single person—the poet was conscious; that he deliberately set it before him to introduce them. But two other things came in perforce, because

<sup>1</sup>This bold word I owe to my friend Professor D. L. Drew, whose admirable essay on *The Allegory of the Æneid* (soon to be published) I read in manuscript in June 1924.

they had to, because he could not help it, because they were part of himself.

The first is a certain method, or spirit ; the power of which has brought Æneas to the Under-world and which will bring him back enlightened, to carry out his mission. It is the Golden Bough which he discovers amidst the darkness of the forest ; it is the new way of amnesty, ' the custom of peace ' which the Empire is to take for its governing idea ; the conception of mercy, the central warmth of human affection.

It is this which gives a deeper meaning to all the vicissitudes of the Books which follow. Seen in the light of this revelation, every part of the struggle is irradiate with colours of the dawn. Nisus and Euryalus must fall, brave and beautiful boys ; but the story of their generous enterprise, their mutual self-sacrifice, the honour and affection which they receive from Ascanius and the Trojan elders, and the tragedy of the last scene in which the mother of Euryalus beholds their heads impaled on the enemies' spears and is gently led away into mourning by honoured commanders in the beleaguered host, the whole transfused by the depth of Vergil's pity has won the immortality which he promised ; promised indeed in an outburst<sup>1</sup> of confidence, very rare for him, which marks the temper of those two boys as the real foundation of the spiritual Rome.

" O happy both ! If aught my song avails,  
No day shall reave you from remembering years  
While by the Capitol's unmoving rock  
Æneas' 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 vos eximet aevo ;  
dum domus Æneæ Capitoli immobile saxum  
accolit, imperiumque pater Romanus habebit.

Providence, philosophy, person, method, to all these the Book adds one more supreme uniting power. On other occasions<sup>2</sup> we have seen how Vergil's faith in a well-meaning Providence was everywhere attended by a sense of profound mystery ; and that even in the final revelation of Anchises the reader is nowhere allowed to think that he

<sup>1</sup> IX., 446-449.

<sup>2</sup> See *Great Inheritance*, cc. ii. and vi.

knows all that we crave to know. Above all, this sense of mystery haunts Vergil's choice of a theme for the last scene of the revelation,—the crown of the prophecy of the Augustan age. For this Vergil, with sublime daring, chose the bitterest disappointment that Augustus ever suffered,—a calamity from which every other writer of his age had shrunk away,—the death of the young Marcellus. I am constrained to attempt a rough version of the lines to remind you of their general tenour.

Amid the throng  
Beside him moved a youth of royal mien,  
Clad with bright armour but with joyless eye  
And countenance o'ershadowed. "Who is he,"  
Æneas asked, "who follows in such wise  
In great Marcellus' train? Is it his son,  
Or some remoter scion of his line?"  
How eagerly his comrades round him throng,  
How noble his own stature! But his head  
Night, hovering, wraps in gloomy shadow round.  
Then answered him Anchises, through his tears:  
"Seek not to learn the woe of thy descendants.  
The fates will grant men but a moment's sight  
Of that bright star before it sets again.  
Too high the majesty of Rome had towered—  
Such was your thought, ye gods—if men of Rome  
Had boasted such a gift was theirs to keep.  
Hark! from that soldiers' plain, that city of Mars,  
Rises a bitter cry of lamentation.  
What throng of sorrow shall thy waters see  
Great Tiber, as they roll beside his grave!  
Never on any child of Trojan seed  
Shall Latin grandsires build such hope and none when with spur  
He launched his foaming courser on the charge.  
The land of Romulus foster half so proud.  
Weep for that loyal heart, that valorous hand;  
No foe had e'er encountered him unscathed  
When sword to sword he fought, or  
Oh child of all men's pity, could'st thou break  
Fate's iron bar, thou should'st, thou shalt be yet  
A true Marcellus, flower of all the line.  
Come, fill your hands and bring me store of lilies,  
Bring bluebells of the spring to deck his grave;  
Come, let me crown my son, tho' vain the honour;  
Crown him, and leave the issue."

The Sixth Book deals with death, we know, and therefore such an end is fitting. Fitting indeed, but what does it mean? What means

too the last line of the *Æneid*, in which the twelfth Book is brought to a corresponding close by the death of Turnus, whose soul 'fled with a groan indignant through the shades ?' The story of the *Æneid*, like the whole of human life, to Vergil begins and ends in mystery ; and this mystery unites every part of the story, just as it unites every person, every creature under the spell of our mortal condition. And why was this funeral picture, with its terrible memories, so welcome to Augustus and his sister, the bereaved mother, that no wealth or honour they could heap upon the poet seemed to them great enough thanks ? And why, though to us Marcellus is only the name of a young prince who died before his time, why has this passage been counted always among the most golden utterances of all inspired speech ? Because the mystery that it celebrates united Augustus with his subjects in the glow of their sympathy ;—because it told him that though he was an Emperor, yet he was not alone ;—though he was an Emperor, yet the powers of life could deal him as fierce a blow as the meanest of his subjects could suffer ;—though he was an Emperor, he could find comfort, the only comfort, for such a grief, in the human affection to which the meanest of his subjects must turn when the dark day came. And in thus linking the mystery of death with the power of human love, the Sixth Book of the *Æneid* has not merely united the whole of that poem into a great forecast of the Christian good tidings ; it has bound its author by the strongest chain to the heart of every reader through all the generations that came and are to come.

He saw afar the immemorable throng,  
And bound the scattered ages with a song.<sup>1</sup>

Human genius, at its highest, overpasses the mortal limit. Vergil's vision is not of the Augustans, but of all time ; not Roman but cosmic. His epic is less a picture than a part of life. Its architecture springs from the ultimate foundations : its pillars are pillars of the world.

<sup>1</sup> *The Sovereign Poet* (Sir William Watson, *Odes and Other Poems*).