

THE CONCLUSION OF VIRGIL'S *AENEID*:  
A STUDY OF THE WAR IN LATIUM, WITH  
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BOOKS XI AND XII.<sup>1</sup>

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I HAVE heard of a scholar who never reads the second half of the *Aeneid* because he feels that Virgil's greatest achievement is contained in the first six books and that the latter part of the poem is a decline from this high standard of excellence. I would not deny that Books VII-XII suffer by comparison: they have not the timeless universality of Books II or IV or VI; but I believe that, if the earlier part of the *Aeneid* did not exist, and if the poem dealt, not with the voyage, but only with Aeneas's arrival in Italy, his war there, and the final settlement, this truncated epic would still be the best continuous poem in Roman literature, having all the characteristic Virgilian qualities and being a greater and more varied poem than the *Georgics*: it would never rise to the exalted intellectual passion which at moments flames in Lucretius, but it would have far more human interest and appeal from its far richer variety of scene and action, and it would maintain throughout its 5,000 lines a far more even standard of accomplishment and a much more melodious harmony of words and sound. Virgil in his description of the war in Italy is perhaps less than his own best; but his good infinitely surpasses in its range of incident, situation, characterization, and feeling, anything that has reached us from preceding or subsequent Latin epic writers.

The critics of the last century used to say that Virgil, in the two halves of his poem, had produced a Roman *Odyssey* and a Roman *Iliad*, an epic narrative of Aeneas's adventurous voyage from Troy to Italy, and an epic account of the war he fought in Italy in order to settle his Trojan exiles in a new kingdom. This

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judgement has gone out of fashion nowadays ; but when one considers the profound influence which the Homeric model constantly exerts on the practice of Virgil, both in minor imitations too numerous to list in detail, and in important major similarities, I think it is inescapable that the older critics were right and that Virgil consciously accepted the Homeric pattern for the broad structure of his work, or for what I may call the architectural design of it. For example, the *Iliad* of Homer is more than a quarter as long again as his *Odyssey* ; even here Virgil seems to have kept the same proportion, and his war has a similar preponderance in length over the voyage. But the Alexandrine scholars imposed on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* a seeming equivalence, a seeming appearance of symmetry, by dividing each into twenty-four books, and Virgil has accepted the same idea of balanced symmetry for the voyage and for the war by making each consist of six books. But why *twelve* books rather than eight or ten or twenty? I know of no prescription before Virgil's time which appointed twelve books as a proper length for an epic poem in Greek or Latin. I can only suppose that the twelve books resulted from the growth of the work in the process of composition. I think it likely that he first planned the details of the voyage from Troy to Italy—that would seem to be the natural order of development : and then as the first half found its evolution to be complete in six books, the second half for reasons of symmetry was constructed to the same length. It seems to me, therefore, not unreasonable to say that the second half is in six books, not so much from an inner compulsive growth, but partly at least from the poet's desire for a formal equilibrium between the halves.

But if the account of the war had to fill six books, each of some 800 to 900 lines, will there be sufficient material to make out the space? After all, this war was the comparatively minor affair of a small Trojan descent on a petty kingdom in Latium, very different from the great Greek armament which sailed against the city of King Priam ; and such an insignificant war might seem by itself to afford small scope for epic portrayal (and by a non-military poet) when contrasted with the magnificent kings and heroes and divinities who fought in that terrific

struggle around Troy. The importance of this Italian war lay not in itself but in what it involved for the future. So apart from Aeneas and Turnus and a few others, the Roman poet has few characters to present in action compared with the Homeric. And if the Homeric pattern requires that the final combat of Achilles and Hector at the end of the *Iliad* shall be paralleled by a final combat between Aeneas and Turnus at the end of the Roman *Iliad*, how is Virgil to find and contrive and dispose his material so that he may fill his six war-books with credible, relevant, and interesting matter and save the duel of the protagonists for a final scene in the twelfth book? This combat of Aeneas and Turnus is to be made the *terminus ad quem* : how to reserve it for its place and how to furnish out the intervening books with action, episodes and events which will be probable in themselves and reasonably related to the main theme and be not unworthy of the poem, that is the poet's problem, and I would like to see how he deals with it. Speaking summarily and proleptically, I would say he does it in two ways, first by the insertion of episodes and descriptions which, however interesting in themselves, have a certain, but not very close, connection with the main theme and may therefore be counted as largely expletive ; and secondly, by such a manipulation of the plot as will allow him plausibly to postpone the duel between Aeneas and Turnus to the very end of the poem where epic convention based on Homer would require it to be. In our scrutiny we shall see him using both these methods.

In Book VII the poet starts at once to lay the plot for his account of the war which in the earlier part of the *Aeneid* he had spoken of as awaiting the Trojans once they have landed in Italy at the appointed place ; at the outset of the Book they have entered the Tiber and established themselves on the south bank of the river, in an encampment which they fortify strongly with earthworks and walls. Reconnaissance in the surrounding country reveals the city of Laurentum, some ten miles to the south, the capital where Latinus rules over his ancient kingdom of Latium. Friendly relations are soon established between the king and these famous Trojans, and it appears likely that the newcomers will soon be admitted to the kingdom as citizens with

equal rights, and that Aeneas will become the king's son-in-law and heir by marrying his only child Lavinia. Nothing could have been more promising and more satisfactory to the Trojans : they seem on the point of achieving a settlement without the predicted war : but their relentless enemy the goddess Juno, who had pursued them from Troy with her hatred and vengeance, now takes measures to render a peaceful settlement impossible ; and first by rousing the Latins against the strangers and invaders, and then by working on the mind of Turnus, prince of the neighbouring city of Ardea, who till then had been the most favoured suitor (though not the formally accepted suitor) for the princess, and finally by forcing an incident between the Latins and Trojans which leads to bloodshed and death, Juno creates alarm, resentment, fear and fury among the native peoples, so that Turnus with his injured pride and ambition finds it easy to whip up the excitement into an open declaration of war, and the summons goes forth to rouse all the associated Latin peoples and to mobilize an army that will hurl the invader back into the sea. It all forms a very fine and convincing description of the pathology of war-fever. Amid it Turnus emerges as the lordly, forceful, militant leader of the war-party in the Latin city : he commands influential support : he understands war and battles : he is at the head of an alarmed and excited population ; and he at once stands out as the Prince Rupert of the war, the fearless, active, dashing champion who will be Aeneas's chief opponent. The contrast between this proud, explosive young man who believes himself grievously wronged both as a patriot and as a suitor—the contrast between him and the grave, middle-aged, *pious Aeneas*, weighed down with responsibility and fate, is very marked, and Virgil seems at the beginning to be preparing our expectation for what he intends to be the climax of the war, an epic battle to the death between these two on the Homeric model.

There can be no combat yet, for in Book VIII both sides are looking for allies to support them in the war that has now been declared but has not yet been started in earnest. It is to the Greek cities (which at that time Virgil anachronistically imagines to be in process of establishment in Italy) that both Italians and Trojans turn for assistance ; the Italians with some confidence approach

Diomedes who is founding the city of Arpi in south-east Italy and it is thought that he will not refuse aid in a war against his old enemies the Trojans ; the Trojans surprisingly find aid in a Greek city, Pallanteum, which has been founded up the Tiber by Argive exiles under King Evander and his son Pallas, and they are willing to help the Trojans because Turnus has long been their enemy. I always find that Book VIII is strangely invested with an air of contentment and success which is unusual in the *Aeneid* : it shares this feeling with Book V ; and these are the only two books of the poem where, for a while, Aeneas appears unencumbered and moderately relaxed ; for he is out on an excursion, away from care and responsibility. He has left most of his people in the fortified encampment and has come upstream to treat with King Evander. The negotiations go well : trust and friendship are established : help is promised, and the possibility of larger and stronger help is indicated—for in Etruria, just north of the river, the Etruscans of Caere have rebelled against their king, Mezentius, who has escaped and put himself under Turnus's protection and is indeed one of Turnus's lieutenants in the war against the Trojans : and at that very moment (says Evander) the Etruscans are mobilizing to sail south and recapture Mezentius for punishment. Aeneas determines to win them as allies and, sending instructions to his men in the fortified camp to stay strictly under cover, he mounts on horseback (this versatile man !) and goes to Etruria where he soon arranges a compact. That is the skeleton outline of Book VIII, as far as the war is concerned : but as Pallanteum, Evander's city, is imagined to be on the site later to be occupied by Rome, and as the *Aeneid* is a national rather than a personal epic, Virgil enjoys the opportunity of escorting Aeneas round the seven hills where the oxen and sheep are grazing and of contrasting the prehistoric with the actual Rome, and of explaining the origin of the worship of Hercules and the special place of Hercules and his altar in the religious ritual of the city. This appeal to national interest and pride is further stressed at the end of the Book by the account Virgil gives of the pictures emblazoned on the divinely made shield of Aeneas—each picture connected with some memorable scene in the history of Rome. In this second half of the *Aeneid*

there will be much less opportunity for historical display or historical eulogy than in the first part : and here in Book VIII Virgil has magnificently used two splendid opportunities of appealing to the patriotic interest of his audience—the contrast between the obscure Pallanteum of the heroic age and the Imperial Rome of Augustus, and the *clipei non enarrabile textum* (VIII. 625) containing the *res Italas Romanorumque triumphos*. In a national poem like the *Aeneid* such patriotic and historical themes undoubtedly merit their place : but as I read the eighth book I always find myself wondering whether in the general economy of the epic the long episode of Hercules and Cacus (whatever its merits as a story) is really justified in the space it occupies and whether it is not in some degree to be described as expletive. It seems to me to exemplify one method by which Virgil used semi-relevant material to fill out his projected measure.

I have already said that the Homeric influence throughout the *Aeneid* is strong, not only in details of expression, action and behaviour, but in important resemblances like the making of the shield and the descent into Avernus. I should add in justice that Virgil is not a copyist. He *does* take the idea or device from Homer ; but he alters and varies it to suit his purpose. The plan of an *Iliad* and *Odyssey* has suggested to Virgil the idea of a voyage and a war in his *Aeneid*, but neither the voyage nor the war is a close copy of its Homeric prototype ; the visit to the spirits of the underworld and the making of a shield with heraldic emblems are Homeric in origin, but vastly altered in Virgil. It is so in every major incident which is based on Homer : each is changed in its application and development : the situation in which Virgil uses it is of his own invention, not a copy of Homer's. And so, as we approach Book IX, we shall see two situations which must have been suggested by the *Iliad*: the dominance and success of Turnus during Aeneas's absence from the war recall the success of Hector during the absence of Achilles, and the expedition of Nisus and Euryalus is doubtless suggested by the foray of Odysseus and Diomedes in *Iliad* X : but while the idea of such scenes comes from Homer, and Virgil thus recognizes in the Homeric practice a canon of epic, the

actions themselves are very far from similar. Virgil follows his model, constructively, not slavishly.

The actual fighting begins in Book IX. It begins when Aeneas is away in Etruria and when the main Trojan force, in obedience to his orders, is keeping within the defences of the encampment and not venturing to meet the enemy in the open. The fighting begins suddenly, with the swift approach of Turnus's cavalry from Laurentum: the Trojan ships are set afire as they lie beached on the river bank: the camp is invested: the watch-fires of the enemy can be seen glowing in the darkness all round the perimeter of the fortifications: the main attack of Turnus is timed for the following day. Now follows the long episode of Nisus and Euryalus: they volunteer to carry to Aeneas in Etruria the news of the Trojans' danger, and they receive permission to leave the camp on this errand. But, once away, they allow themselves, in a youthful passion for winning glory, to be beguiled into a foray against the Latins, and this misguided valour costs them their life, and means the failure of their mission. This episode makes a most interesting and moving tale. It is one of the memorable scenes in the war. It derives from the crisis in the Trojan camp. It takes place by night when no other fighting is contemplated. But with its origin, its development, its climax, its conclusion, and its aftermath of suffering and mourning, it occupies from line 176 to line 502, a large section of the Book: and if you add the immediately preceding transformation of the ships which Turnus had attempted to burn, 426 lines or more than half the Book have been given to two episodes which contribute nothing to the action of the plot or the progress of the war. Indeed it is not till line 503 that the war-trumpet sounds and the attack proper begins:

at tuba terribilem sonitum procul aere canoro  
inrepuat, sequitur clamor caelumque remugit.

The remaining 300 lines are largely given to the ἀπιστεία of Turnus, as he drives home the attack on the camp and even manages to penetrate through the gates and carry the fighting into the passage-ways, until by a supreme effort of the defenders he is driven back and forced to escape by swimming the river.

Virgil is always exceedingly good in the episodes of his epic. They are finished blocks of narrative having some connection with the main theme ; but being complete in themselves they can be enjoyably read in isolation. But it could never be said that our poet presses on with any urgency of action. “*Semper ad eventum festinat*”, says Horace in praise of Homer, stressing the directness of his narrative and its freedom from undue digressions. Virgil, on the contrary, has no such forward surge of movement : he almost indulges himself in these digressions : the war which had started with such intensity of excitement in Book VII has been almost forgotten in the peacefulness of Book VIII ; and now when it makes a bold commencement in Book IX, it is not allowed to get going. “*Erat in celeritate omne positum certamen*”—you will recall the recurrent phrase of Caesar in his description of battles in the Civil and Gallic Wars : nothing could be less true of Virgil’s battle-order : he almost seems to have an interest in delay—as if, having determined on six books of the war to balance six books of the voyage, he was anxious to make sure of having sufficient material to fill out the measure of them. I again suggest that it is Virgil’s intention, by whatever device, by whatever intercalation, to postpone the combat of Turnus and Aeneas and to ensure that it forms the final scene of the epic at the close of Book XII ; and I believe that it is possible to watch him inventing and inserting material so that the desired climax may be plausibly put off till its appointed time.

In Book X we are given more than one indication that, though Turnus has been successful in the first battle, his fate is impending. The Council of the Gods, with which the Book opens, contributes nothing to the advancement of the action : it follows the example of Homer in the Fourth and Eighth Books of the *Iliad*, but (as Conington remarks) “it seems to be introduced for its own sake rather than to serve the needs of the poem”. It is impressively scenic and decorative, but it achieves nothing, though Jupiter had summoned it in chagrin because he thought one of the gods must be treacherously extending and prolonging the war to the disadvantage of the Trojans and in opposition to the decrees of Fate of which he



was the mouthpiece. At the end of the Council, after listening to the fervid *ex parte* pleas of Venus and Juno, the Father of Gods and Men, far from taking a decisive line, makes an inconclusive utterance proclaiming his neutrality in the conflict and leaving human affairs to work themselves out, for the time being, in whatever way they will develop. The ineffectiveness and indeed uselessness of this otherwise magnificent scene suggest that Virgil did not want at this point to bring matters to a conclusion between Aeneas and Turnus: it suits him to present Jupiter as aloof and undecided, for otherwise a drastic intervention (such as comes in Book XII) would have brought an end to the war far too soon—at any rate, far too soon for a poet who is trying to maintain the symmetrical balance of the two halves of the epic! But the Book is full of hints and warnings of the doom that awaits Turnus. Though the crisis may be postponed, we are not allowed to suppose that it may be totally avoided or changed. It will come in its due place as the conclusion of the poem: meanwhile the poet will use any suitable device of epic machinery to defer the inevitable and to keep the protagonists apart—a necessity which makes a considerable call on his inventiveness and our credulity; for by now Aeneas and his Etruscan allies have arrived in the Tiber estuary and have landed on the beaches and are storming up to the relief of the camp, and both champions are fighting in the same battle and Aeneas is looking for his enemy Turnus all over the field. But at this very point when Aeneas, infuriated by the killing and spoliation of his young ally Pallas, is bent on finding and killing Turnus,

. . . latumque per agmen  
ardens limitem agit ferro, te, Turne, superbum  
caede noua quaerens,

at this very moment, when we should have expected them to meet and to finish the war, the poet dodges the emergency and carries us again to witness a scene in heaven where Juno is begging Jupiter to grant a deliverance for Turnus, so that she may convey him safely out of the battle and out of danger and save him to succeed his aged father as king of the Rutulians: and Jupiter is represented as saying that to deliver Turnus from his doom is

beyond the power even of the omnipotent, but that a short reprieve, a brief remission, is possible and may be granted :

“ si mora praesentis leti tempusque caduco  
 oratur iuueni meque hoc ita ponere sentis,  
 tolle fuga Turnum atque instantibus eripe fatis :  
 hactenus indulsisse uacat.”

Juno at once avails herself of this permission : the poet calls to her aid a not very convincing Homeric device—an apparition, or artificial wraith of Aeneas, which she sends within sight of Turnus so that, following to kill it, he is lured away from the neighbourhood of the real Aeneas, enticed on to a ship, carried out to sea, and landed further down the coast near the home-city of his father Daunus. So the final struggle is again avoided ; and the genuine Aeneas spends the rest of the Book vainly looking for Turnus and, in default dealing with Turnus's lieutenants, Mezentius and his son Lausus.

At this point let me say that I am not in this paper primarily concerned with the poetry of these Books : I am concerned with the frame and structure of the work, and to show roughly how it took on its present shape. I do not forget the supremely moving beauty of some of the scenes which Virgil has portrayed here, nor the nobility of his characters, nor the sheer executive accomplishment of his poetic technique. It is not my intention in any way to ignore the artistic achievement of this very great poet. But at the moment I am chiefly interested to see if one can discern in Virgil's arrangement of material some indication of his studied planning to make the structure of the epic conform to what one may call the Homeric pattern. The studied planning is well concealed : the very beauty of the poetry sometimes disguises it : but it is possible to see it and to realize how the development, the arrangement, of the scenes and episodes, is controlled by the poet's concern to make his epic take the required shape and last out for the pre-determined length, so that much even of the most admired episodic material has been inserted to fill out the six books, or to render feasible the postponement of the clash between Aeneas and Turnus. How then will that clash be prevented in Book XI, where we find Aeneas organizing his forces for a march against the city of Laurentum,

and we see Turnus again in command of the Latin army which is drawn up to defend the city? Will the personal combat, which seemed inevitable in Book X and yet was avoided, be equally avoidable in the new battle of Book XI?

When Book XI opens, Aeneas is still at the Trojan camp where the first decisive battle against Turnus and the Latins had been won. He is erecting a trophy of victory, clearing up the battlefield, collecting and burning the dead, sending home to Evander the body of his son Pallas with a splendid contingent of troops as escort, arranging a burial truce with the Latins, and at the same time heartening his commanders with a strong assurance of rapid and complete success in the next phase of operations. In the city of Laurentum Turnus has somehow returned from Ardea and has reassumed leadership of the Latin army; and though the recent defeat and loss have created among the citizens a peace-party which is now all for making an arrangement with the Trojans, Turnus still occupies a dominant position and is still supported by a strong anti-Trojan party which admires his war-record and is glad to trust him (XI, 222-4). But there can be heard the grumbling anger of disappointed or bereaved citizens, protesting against the use of them as expendible lives to enhance Turnus's glory and ambition, and calling on him to save them and end the war by offering a personal combat between himself and Aeneas. This demand for a personal settlement of what has now come to be regarded as almost a personal issue is so angrily and tauntingly voiced in the Council meeting (XI. 368-75) by the demagogue Drances, Turnus's chief opponent, that Turnus in his reply is prepared to accept the challenge if that should seem necessary (XI. 434-44). Thus Virgil is again preparing his readers' minds for his projected conclusion to the epic; but the time is not yet, for the combat does not take place in Book XI. We shall see how Virgil postpones it again.

The political pressure that was being put on Turnus in the Council is suddenly relieved by the arrival of a messenger with the news that the Trojans and their allies are approaching the city: and the general feeling of danger is so immediate and so sharp that all rally to Turnus for leadership and protection, and

he finds himself again the war-lord with unquestioned command of the Latin forces. He is exultant. This is the breath of life to him : he is a fighter, a warrior, a man who loves action and despises the wordy processes of deliberation and statesmanship. He has information from his scouts that Aeneas's army is advancing in two columns, the cavalry along the maritime plain, the infantry under Aeneas's personal command through the hills a little inland. So he orders his own cavalry under Camilla and Messapus to meet the Trojan cavalry, while he and his soldiers go into the hills to prepare an ambush and there destroy Aeneas's army : whereupon he lays the ambush and waits for the kill. For the moment it looks bad for Aeneas. But no sooner has Virgil arranged this encounter than he switches from Turnus, and proceeds at great length to describe the cavalry-battle on the plain and in particular to follow the fortunes of Camilla : through 300 lines of the Book he gives details of her *curriculum vitae*—her birth, her curious upbringing, her father's eccentricity, her dedication to Diana, her prowess in general, her exploits on this occasion, and finally her wounding and death on the field—a vast excursus, undoubtedly of much interest and beauty and very moving to read, but almost a separate entity, a poem within a poem. When Camilla is killed and her troops are forced back on the city and the danger of an attack is imminent, the news of the disaster makes Turnus abandon his ambush and withdraw hurriedly to the city, so that Aeneas passes the scene of the ambush unscathed and unsuspecting, and reaches the city almost at the same time as Turnus. They catch sight of one another momentarily, says the poet (XI. 908-14), and then and there would have fought it out between them, only the sun was setting and the day was darkening to night. So both armies camp outside the walls and build defences (XI. 915) in a solid Roman way,

considunt castris ante urbem et moenia uallant.

“ That most ineffective ambush of the eleventh *Aeneid* ”, says Professor Summers in his *History of Literature*. It may seem so, but we know better. As a military manœuvre it is useless : as a dilatory poetic tactic it is most effective. Again Virgil has skilfully arranged his situation so as to postpone the combat which heaven and earth now know to be inevitable and which,

once it is decided, will give a firm settlement to harassed Latium.

At last the poet has reached his Twelfth Book and it might be thought that there is now no more need for temporizing. The Homeric precedent of an *Iliad* coming to a climax with the duel between Achilles and Hector will now be fulfilled by a Roman *Iliad* ending with a single combat between Aeneas and Turnus. And indeed the Book opens with a clamour among the twice-defeated Latins for just this kind of issue to the war (XII. 1-3 and 10-13):

Turnus ut infractos aduerso Marte Latinos  
defecisse uidet, sua nunc promissa reposci,  
se signari oculis, . . . ita turbidus infit :  
“ nulla mora in Turno ; nihil est quod dicta retractent  
ignauī Aeneadae, nec quae pepigere recusent.  
congregior.”

The following day a solemn agreement, solemnly made with due ritual and formality, is concluded between Aeneas, Latinus and Turnus, with the assembled forces of both peoples looking on : and the arena for the fight that will end the war is marked out, with places fixed for the soldiers of both sides, while the women and non-combatants crowd along the walls and the buildings. Surely the long-expected duel will take place at last and, as an outcome of it, we shall see Aeneas organizing his new kingdom and establishing his Trojans in their new lands and amid their new neighbours. In reading the *Aeneid* I have always felt a certain disappointment that Virgil did not end the epic on a happier note. I wanted Aeneas to win after all he had gone through, and I would have liked to see him come into his kingdom amid a scene of triumphant rejoicing because all the dangers of the voyage and of the war had been faced and at last overcome. This man of sorrows has had so much to endure in the course of the poem that I wished for him and his people a time of tranquil accomplishment in which we could see him at peace—like Antenor in Book I, 249, *nunc placida compostus pace quiescit*. But it was not to be. Virgil is resolved that the duel must be reserved for the final scene of the poem, and so here at the outset of the Twelfth Book he must postpone the climax for another 800 lines.

How does he achieve this? He imagines that perpetual enemy of the Trojans, the goddess Juno, to be watching the scene of preparation for the combat from her viewing-post on the Alban Hills. She recognizes that Turnus is doomed if he once engages in the battle (XII. 149-50):

nunc iuuenem imparibus uideo concurrere fatis,  
Parcarumque dies et uis inimica propinquat.

So she sends his sister Juturna, a divinity of the Italian lakes and rivers, with full authority to attempt any expedient that will help to save him; and Juturna, taking on the form of an Italian warrior and seeing that the Italian army is moved with sympathy for Turnus's predicament, passes to and fro among the watching troops, working on their feelings and urging them to rescue their leader and avoid subjection to these foreigners. Her trick succeeds: the fight between the armies begins as a skirmish of individuals but soon develops into a general engagement in which the treaty and all its solemn undertakings are completely forgotten (XII. 282),

sic omnes amor unus habet, decernere ferro.

The good Aeneas is much appalled at this faithlessness: he rushes unarmed into the battle and tries to recall his Trojans from the *mêlée* (XII. 313-17)

“quo ruitis? quaeue ista repens discordia surgit?  
o cohibete iras! ictum iam foedus et omnes  
compositae leges, mihi ius concurrere soli,  
me sinite atque auferte metus; ego foedera faxo  
firma manu, Turnum debent haec iam mihi sacra.”

But at this very moment Aeneas is wounded by a chance arrow and so badly wounded that he has to be helped off the field for medical treatment; and Turnus makes full use of this intermission to retrieve his fortunes. Again Virgil has contrived the situation in such a way that Aeneas and Turnus are not ranging the battle together. The incident of Aeneas's wounding and healing is an admirable little episode, one of the most attractive in the Book, full of human interest and human sympathy; but exquisite as it is, it serves a definite purpose in the dramatic movement of the epic—to take Aeneas out of the way when every circumstance proclaims that *now* is the moment for the final

combat, and it keeps him out of the way until Turnus, by another device, can be conveyed from the immediate foreground and placed well out of reach of any immediate harm from Aeneas. "But what reason had our author to wound Aeneas at so critical a time?"—the indignant question is asked by John Dryden in his *Dedication to the Aeneis*. The plain answer is that our author had his own very good reason: he is once again delaying the catastrophe, and he has done it by a device so attractive that the watchfulness of his readers is almost beguiled.

When Aeneas does return (cured by the miraculous intervention of his divine mother), Turnus has been conveyed, well out of danger, to the opposite side of the battle by his sister Juturna's ruse of turning herself into the semblance of his chariot-eer and so steering him away from Aeneas's orbit. It is only when Aeneas, in despair of finding Turnus, directs his army against the city itself and when the Trojans are bursting into the gates and over the walls—it is only *then* that Turnus, in order to save Laurentum from destruction, decides to offer himself as a sacrifice for his people, and returns to stop the general fighting and at last meets Aeneas as man to man in what is to be the final decision. Meanwhile up in heaven the finality of the war is realized: in a magnificently impressive scene the Father of Gods and Men forbids Juno to harry the Trojans further, and it is agreed between them that a new combined nation of Trojans and Italians shall be formed, Italian in name, customs, speech, and laws, but with Trojan worship merged in the Italian, and that from this new nation shall in process of time be born Rome and the Romans. On earth the duel between the two champions continues its grim course: Virgil has expended all his art in depicting it: by similes, by epithets, by descriptions, by comparisons, by hyperbole, he writes up the labours and exertions of these two heroes:

stupet . . .  
 ingentes, genitos diuersis partibus orbis,  
 inter se coiisse uiros et cernere ferro  
 (XII. 707-9):

but to me it loses effect after that authoritative closure of the opposition in heaven: it is merely the working out, on the human

plane, of the portentous decision that is the Will of Fate. The end is determined. Turnus knows that he must die because heaven is against him (XII. 895): “*di me terrent et Iuppiter hostis*”; and the knowledge saps his physical strength: but one admires his courage of spirit and his self-sacrifice as he meets death. The contest between him and Aeneas is prolonged and is full of conventional heroic prowess; but I doubt whether, when it comes, it was worth waiting for, over such a stretch of time. It has been postponed and reserved as the greatest scene to form the conclusion of the Roman *Iliad*, and yet I feel that it is rather an anti-climax, as it were a consequential tail-piece, to the lofty and majestic decision that has just been taken in heaven—where, after all, the final authority resides to settle men’s destiny for more than a thousand years.

As I consider Virgil’s task in the *Aeneid*, I have much sympathy with that unhomeric follower of Homer, and I would like to present his apologia. He had set himself to imitate the heroic epic, and in trying to deal with war and battle-scenes he found he could not do it easily, but had to excogitate, to elaborate, to work hard at presenting fighters of the supposed heroic age, those tough virile stalwart untiring beings, whose killings and braggart destructiveness he could indeed describe but only with an effort of invention. He is far more at home with the human qualities of courage, faith, endurance, and magnanimity, the qualities that most often call out his admiration and sympathy. He understood human weaknesses—the noble weakness of Dido, the futile weakness of Nisus and Euryalus in their hunger for glory, and the lack of pity that was Turnus’s weakness: he understood the political arts, and on occasion he can argue a case with as much clever and pointed rhetoric as any declaimer in the elder Seneca’s *controversiae*. He understands the grandeur of power as exemplified in Jupiter who presides over the governing Council of the Universe, and whose spoken will is Destiny. I think, therefore, that being the man he was, Virgil in his epic welcomed any diversion, episode, personal exploit, which would be connected with the war by however tenuous a link, but which would deliver him from the necessity, abhorrent to a gentle and peaceful nature, of multiplying the incidents of the battlefield.



If he does give descriptions of the carnage, he does it as a requirement of the Homeric epic, and it was doubtless attractive to some of his Roman readers. He gives enough to prove that this kind of thing is not beyond him ; but I am sure that he was conscious, as most modern readers are conscious, of what Conington has called " the tedium of the Virgilian battle-scene ". His invention and imagination are therefore directed to finding scenes that, as far as is possible, will deliver him from the fighting and will make the war a matter of character, situations, descriptions, and human emotions rather than an account of battles and tactics and wounds and death and glory. This partly explains why our poet is so slow in getting to the war itself. He prefers the preliminaries and related activities of war, as in Book VII the negotiations between Aeneas and Latinus, the return of Turnus from Ardea to Laurentum, the wild riot of Queen Amata's Bacchanals, the chance accident that sparks off the explosion, the war fury that sweeps the people, the custom of opening the Gates of War, the mustering of contingents from the towns and villages of Italy. Similarly in Book XI Virgil seems in no hurry to get to the fighting : all the funeral ceremonies and obsequies are most exactly detailed : the scene in the Council Chamber of Latinus is one of the most varied and dramatic in the whole epic—I would venture to say that, artistically considered, it is the most exciting piece of major construction in Books VII to XII ; and then we have at great length the story of Camilla's upbringing. All this is allied to the war, but how much more sympathetic it is to Virgil's temperament than the details of fighting ! It seems to me that he welcomes the chance of dealing with matters which, though they give little or no impetus to the action, are vastly more interesting and congenial to himself (and indeed to his readers) than the fighting.

I have one further reflection to suggest about the conclusion of the *Aeneid*. We have seen how Virgil is resolved, in obedience to Homeric precedent, to keep the combat between Aeneas and Turnus for the final scene of his poem—and on the earthly plane of action it makes a suitable ending. But the decision on the heavenly plane is by far the more important. The purpose of Heaven (for all action commences and derives from a

celestial decree of Fate) is to bring the Trojan remnant to Italy and establish it there : this is the compass of the heavenly plan and it is the compass of Virgil's epic. The plan is willed by Jupiter : opposition to the plan is started by Juno : the earthly minister of Jupiter's will is Aeneas, the god-guided man finding his way from Troy to Latium by such pointers and indications as communication between the divine world and the human world can provide. The obstacles to his progress are created by such means and by such temptations to deviation as a divine opponent can contrive. On the human side we naturally see more of the difficulties and delays and dangers : but the heavenly contest is by far the more significant ; and when in Book XII Jupiter calls Juno to account and she submits, the struggle is over : the will of Heaven is now united and single : Jupiter, Juno and Venus are reconciled in an agreement that the people, which is to be Rome, may be established in Italy : this is the paramount decision and the paramount triumph : and on the earthly plane the combat ends as is inevitable, once the divine opposition is withdrawn. Turnus is killed by Aeneas as, in a way, a visible sign that the decision taken in heaven is effective on earth : but the earthly cessation is no more than a consequence of the heavenly compact. All through the *Aeneid* the earthly action seems to be the working out (with such strength or ability or wisdom or submission as men can command) of grave and momentous decisions taken by supernatural beings.

Does all this give any indication of the religious belief of Virgil? Had he a gradually accumulated conviction (such as experience brings to many men) that there is a power in the Universe which governs for good, whose purpose may be traced in past history, but which cannot be seen in its present workings because the evolution of its policy is timed to the passage of centuries, not to the speed of months or years. Apart from some such belief I cannot comprehend the *Aeneid* : in it there is a Fate, a god, whose will is beneficent, not for the individual mortal as such, but for the totality of mankind. This Will uses men for the accomplishment of its purpose : there are means of communication between heaven and earth—prayer, signs, oracles, portents, omens and apparitions : the means are often

ineffective, but the attentive can hear and can be made to cooperate with the Supreme Will in a limited way and with only partial knowledge : but sometimes (as to Aeneas in Book VI) a vision of the fuller extent and scope of God's will is granted, and that is a joyful and inspiring occasion. Mostly, however, man's work with and for God is hard, beset with dangers, restless and exhausting : the search for peace and security (as exemplified in Aeneas) is frustrating. Man has faith in the wisdom of God ; but man is not allowed to see the end from the beginning, and therefore his faith is born of hope, not of knowledge. Man is necessarily an empiricist, doing his best from day to day to cope with situations and guiding his decisions and actions by such light as has been given to him : but he makes many mistakes and may go far wrong and may have to retrace his steps. In the end, like Aeneas, he may see some accomplishment or the beginning of something which his children or children's children may be destined to accomplish : if one may misquote Virgil, *requies ea sera laborum*.