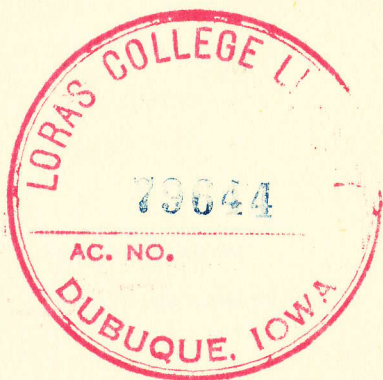


VIRGIL, FATHER  
OF THE WEST *purchase*  
*Long*

BY  
THEODOR HAECKER

TRANSLATED BY  
A. W. WHEEN



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## VIRGIL, FATHER OF THE WEST

### INTRODUCTION

THE world of scientific thought and speculation presents to-day a remarkable spectacle. The mathematical and physical sciences, which for centuries have considered it their proper theoretic task to devise and set up closed systems of the universe, or systems as closed as possible, to-day admit the closedness of no system whatever, but hold rather that all is open to all ; they relinquish the strict concept of law in favour of statistics, denying *ordo* as the final spiritual nature of the universe, and as the word with which to exorcise the confusions of our time. Because of the possibility that many of our so-called natural laws are merely statistical, they assume the questionableness and even unreality of causality in general, setting up accident in place of causality as the Absolute—accident, be it observed, which has causality as accident ! And some are even disposed to regard chance and chaos as the ultimate foundation of things in general ; though it is by no means easy to see how, under such a condition of being, a pure concept of law could arise ; but in face of the discrediting of logic which is rapidly developing into a blind passion, such a naïve objection no longer carries any weight. Whereas the

natural sciences are heading this way, we find on the other hand that the science which concerns itself with human beings, is to-day more and more exercised to discover, or rather to invent, large and small and smallest of *closed* human types and enclaves, and jealously to see to it that no one of them shall have anything whatever to do with another, so that there shall no longer be any such thing as Man, nor shall the walls that are erected between them show the smallest chink or transparency whatever. Cave man, religious man, scientific man, primitive man, magical man, mediæval man, modern man and an infinity of other types of man shall be monads—but monads without windows, of course, and without any *harmonia præstabilita*.

Now this state of affairs is a manifest paradox, and to a man who believes not only in the oneness of science, despite differences of method conditioned by the material, but also in the oneness of mankind, despite differences of blood, race, culture and religion, it is both untenable and intolerable. I believe moreover that there is here great danger of a monstrous Babelish confusion of mind and of tongues, such that soon none will be able to understand another because of the hypnotic limitations that will have been set up. And this must needs be so, for the principle at the root of such attempts is, by definition, that none *can* understand another ; and the more particularised the categories according to which men are segregated, as when we speak, for instance, of 'political man' or

'economic man,' the less they will understand one another.

There must surely be something wrong here. The purely individualistic, almost atomistic, view of man is to-day as good as dead ; its place is now taken by a system which recognises certain distinct types or *social* groups. But these are just as isolated and circumscribed as formerly were the individuals, and it may well be asked whether Beelzebub has not driven out the devil. The individualistic, and subsequently atomistic, view of man, though often ridiculously and pathetically false, did at least have some notion of mankind in the abstract, which it expressed in the ideology of *Egalité, Fraternité, Liberté*. But the fashionable modern type-building attitude towards man, the result, no doubt, of a wholly justifiable contempt of that other abstract humanity which corresponded to no reality, to no concrete truth, is in danger of throwing overboard also the universal Man, the true *idea* of man, the idea of the *true* man and of mankind, which is still most simply and most emphatically to be expressed in the statement that man is made in the image of God, and that his essential being is therefore only to be achieved and fulfilled in the life of the spirit.

No one studying the various kinds of plants and animals, even though specially concerned to discover the differences between these various kinds, would be likely for one moment to forget, much less to deny, that there is such a thing as Plant and Animal, each with



eternally unchanging characteristics. Yet there are many to-day who appear to believe in a radical change in the essential nature of man through the centuries. And this is so, despite the fact that it is manifestly clear that man is after all more comprehensible to himself than is the plant or animal, whose peculiar significance must remain for him for ever wrapped in impenetrable darkness. But is there perhaps some secret thought that man may become a god, if not God himself? Even so, now that the evolutionary doctrine which would seek to derive the higher from the lower, animate from inanimate, animal from plant, man from animal, and, in this absurd sense, God from man—now that this doctrine has been abandoned and persists only in popular, unscientific works, would it not be safe to predict that men, become gods or God, would not therefore cease to have the character of men, just as in former times animals were held to be gods but without loss of their animality? Animals became gods, that is to say, gods became animals. But, as I have already indicated, there are those to-day who, though they can recognise the nature of dog as the same in a pug and a wolf-hound, a bulldog, a fox-terrier, a dachshund and a poodle—which in itself is astonishing enough—yet consider it an impossibility, and indeed sheer nonsense, to suppose there may be anything in common between the man who travels in a railway train, flies, listens to the wireless, and the man who merely fished or hunted, or drove the plough, travelled on foot or at best on

horseback; between the man who no longer believes in God and the one who once held, or still holds, or again holds that belief. Whereas the truth of the matter is that even *these* improbable men who hold such remarkable views are *men*—there have always been such, long before there was any wireless.

The strong and real sense—it is not knowledge—that every young man has to-day, of a break, a break through, a new dawn, is suddenly converted by the spirit of the time to hysteria, so that he thinks he sees not merely a new period but a new era approaching. But even this, which implies complete transcendence, will not do; for to the true believer, even in a new era, which is a theological conception, the eternal nature of man is still preserved, and indeed only revealed more fully, until at last it shall stand wholly revealed in eternity. But our time is disposed to deny precisely this eternal nature of man, and to insist that man may radically change, indeed to describe him as already changed; it exhibits all the most monstrous illusionism of which a dissolving mind objectifying its own dissolution is capable. Yet Man, be he of a thousand types and a thousand ages, remains eternally and unalterably Man. Scheler differs from most modern philosophers in that, notwithstanding he shares the modern doctrine of types, he has formally and clearly enunciated this statement which is fundamental to all speculations about mankind, and though he may often have gone hopelessly wrong in details, he has nevertheless held to



the view of the unchangeableness of man, the unchangeableness, that is to say, of his being and meaning in the universe and in the domain of being in general. The immense differences which exist between man and man in time and space are infinitely less than the essential likeness, in the domain of being, between man and man.

It is apparent, then, that not only the selection and stressing of one type of humanity, the Faustian, for instance, but the more relative or more absolute kinds of selection and stressing, are also conditioned by some definite view of humanity, whether based upon some principle or upon no principle, and must therefore be of a purely impressionistic character. Every typologist should be clear on this point, and should be at pains to make first himself and then his hearers or readers clear as to the bases on which he is constructing his type and as to the perspective in which he sees it. He may, of course, make this clear only at the finish ; but clear he must be, whether he choose to acquaint others with his principle at the outset or, in more artistic, more implicit fashion, to disclose it progressively, and little by little. But in any case he must either be clear himself, or else say that he is not.

If then I also should seem at times to harp on this same fashionable theme, in that I occasionally speak of Virgil or the Virgilian man as being of a definite type, it should be understood that I do not do so wildly or with any obsession, but conformably to the

rules of an eternal harmony, whose first law is that no man, and therefore no human type, is outside the universally human. There is no human note or sound or merest whisper or simple cry but may be brought within the unity of a single primordial symphony. Man when solitary is not man, nor can he by himself make unity out of his diversity. The gulfs which separate man from man are innumerable, and even within that first and ultimate natural unity, the family, they may be desperately deep. But however mysterious the grounds for them may be, it is nevertheless within his power to bridge them superficially by a hundred technical means and inwardly to overcome them through heroic love and self-denying sacrifice, through a voluntarily casting of himself into the abyss, and through a grace-given rediscovery there of some yet profounder common ground.

I do not speak of Virgil or of the Virgilian man without certain presuppositions. No one can do that, let him speak of whom or whatsoever he will. Some principle will lie at the root of every speculation or description, be it the most nihilistic, the absence of all principle. Man understands nothing without presupposition ; even nothingness presupposes full being, not *vice versâ*. The requisite of true science is not the absence of presupposition, but the possession of all the preconceptions which are proper to any definite event, both subjective on the part of the investigator, and objective on the part of the thing. For the historian the present is all perplexity and



confusion ; for him events must be relatively remote if they are to achieve or to reveal any meaning, and even then they achieve that meaning within living history only through the things that preceded that history—and these, whether for good or for evil, must be taken for granted. If then anyone were to ask me to speak of Virgil and the Virgilian man without presupposition, I should ask him what he meant. If he meant that, in the words of the historian, I should speak *sine ira et studio*, without passion to falsify judgement, without partiality, well and good ; and if he demanded that I should omit all that was not relevant, again he would be right. But if he expected that in a discussion and estimate of Virgil and the Virgilian man, I should omit the Faith, the greatest event of the Western world, the advent of Christianity, and judge of Virgil only in the light of his past and immediate present, and not at all in the light of the future, which was implicit in that past and that present, he would be asking of me a thing that is preposterous and against reason.

Whatever the crisis in which we stand at the present moment, it is certain that for more than two thousand years Western man has in principle had pre-eminence above all other peoples and races ; it has been possible for him on grounds of principle—a possibility perhaps not often put into effect—to *understand* all other men, which explains both his actual and possible political dominance. This possibility and this actuality he enjoys only because of his “faith,” and if he should lose

the one, he will lose the other also. Just as every individual history is necessarily part of world history, into which it enters whether as one drop in the broad and unmistakable main stream, or as a little rivulet with labyrinthine windings, or as a tiny brook soon to trickle away and disappear, so every true type—and by that I understand not any ingenious classification that may be contrived, but one that has really existed, or still does exist among us—every true type must be a member, whether a worthy or an unworthy one, of the great family of man whose unity is so uncertainly and precariously poised in that narrow cleft between angel and beast, able to sink lower than the beasts or to ascend higher than the angels. And again as every individual history, and the history of the world as a whole, must enter into and form part of that other history, which in great part remains hid from us, the history of the redemption of mankind, so every true type must stand in some relationship, whether favourable or inimical, to the greatest aspiration of mankind, which is to find salvation.

It is in this sense that I propose to speak of Virgil and the Virgilian man ; thinking of him not as one isolated type of Western man, but as Western man himself, at one definite historical period it is true, but in the sense that one and the same river may have various local names at certain places. Waters that slumber in pools beside the main stream, or, like the rabble, run about aimlessly, may of course be very interesting and should not be ignored nor



forgotten ; but the stream is after all the stream, and one should stay in it or flow into it. Even the most solitary waters must at last find their way into the stream if they would not stagnate or flow down into the caves of death. Everywhere, from the lowest sphere to the highest, there are exceptions' willed of God. In the highest sphere they even have the power not to abide in the will of God, and these are the foundation of hell. I propose to speak then of Western man, including the Virgilian, not as of one isolated, closed type of humanity, but as of an essential part having community with the whole of mankind, just as one may think of a river not as something in itself, but as something flowing into the great common sea. I would not for a moment lose sight of the whole, the sum total of mankind. And now, once and for all, I would emphasize that any mere philological-aesthetic account of Virgil and his work is a falsity, a disintegration of the whole, to be effected only by disintegrated minds.

## CHAPTER I

*ECCE POETA*

THERE have been figures in history, even great figures, who have done what they had to do for their own time, said their say once and for all, and having done so gone their way. They are historical figures, however, and so remain for ever distinct from figures of fiction ; from these they are separated by the unbridgeable gulf which divides reality from imagination. They have lived, they have existed, they have actually been ; which is the essential difference between the work of God's creative power—a power that He shares with no one—and creations of the imaginative power of man, be they the creations even of a Virgil, a Dante or a Shakespeare.

Among them will be some who present little difficulty to the historian ; they pass readily into his narrative ; their meaning is unambiguous and their careers are definitely closed. As a botanist with a plant, or a zoologist with an animal that has existed but exists no longer, so the historian, provided only he gives us the appropriate dates, will be thought to have discharged all his duty by such as these. They form no part of that living and still operative history which includes also the historian himself who desires



to understand and to describe it, whose function it is to interpret it. Because the historian of this living history is himself a part of that history, and because no part can ever be more than the whole, his task is one that can never be complete.

This historian has good reason for diffidence, so much being necessarily hid from him, and particularly the last, final stage which as yet does not exist. However much he may know, and though his task is to tell what is known, such a historian will never forget that he is after all confronted with a mystery. But this historian of still-living history may possess his incomplete knowledge in a different, a more inward, more real form than the other his seemingly complete knowledge. Unless he has become dead to what are the roots of his own being, and therefore dead to the very elements and substance of the history he is writing, he alone is in a position to discover and to communicate the truth; for it is sheer nonsense to say that the true objectivity so necessary in a historian comes to him out of the void, or from that notorious freedom from all preconceptions and prejudices which is nothing but an impossible state of abstraction and a wholly unreal point of view. Such objectivity comes, on the contrary, only from fullness, from participation in the substance and sharing the very blood of the spiritual material of history. A foreigner, for example, may tell us many interesting things about our own land, much that is new and instructive; but that he should be able to

lay his finger upon the heart of the things that are *our* things, upon our own inmost heart, none can believe. A Christian does not accept an explanation of his faith from one who does not hold that faith. Yet the one ambition of present-day historians seems to be not merely to explain from the outside things that they themselves neither have nor are, but also to explain them away. The whole of Emil Ludwig is so, and unfortunately not he alone; at one time or another the whole gang must attempt it. Thus the history of the Middle Ages with which these historians have regaled us is a monstrous falsehood, a miscarriage, a still birth, for the simple reason that they imagine themselves able to write of the faith that is of the very substance of the Middle Ages, without themselves holding that faith—and this they consider a guarantee of their objectivity; whereas in fact it is a guarantee of their incompetence.

I do not propose in this essay to bury again one of the dead, but to call attention once more to one of the living. I wish to honour a twofold indebtedness: firstly in my own personal capacity, and secondly, as one member of the general debtor—the entire Western world. I propose to speak of Virgil, that great poet who neither fell short through cowardice, nor exceeded through presumption, the strict limits imposed upon creation and on man. A few short years before the Advent Virgil lived, that the foreseen measure of ancient paganism might be fulfilled; and he so fulfilled it that not so much as one drop



overflowed. In the last hour before the fullness of time he fulfilled the measure of what was good in the ancient paganism, as others fulfilled the measure of its evil. This he did on the very threshold of the Advent, after which it was granted to man, a mere creature, to exceed his own limitations, and that without doing violence to his status as a creature. Thereafter it was given to man to be limitless, though in one direction only, namely in the love of God, which is the supernatural excess. The loftiest ideal and reality of the ancient world was the hero, the ultimate motive of whose being was his own glory, achieved, whether in life or in death, through two things—fate, and the heroic deed accomplished through freedom of the will. After the Incarnation the loftiest ideal and reality is the saint, the ultimate motive of whose being is the glory of God, also achieved, whether in life or in death, through two things—firstly grace, which implies Providence, the greater name for Fate, more full of light; and secondly, a boundless love of God, which also implies a heroic quality of mind and heroic action achieved through the mystery of freedom. The essential nature of the two ideals remains the same: each is achieved through the agency of one divine and one human factor; but between them lies the Incarnation and the Revelation. No straight and continuous road leads from the one to the other; between them there is a definite breach, and an inner spiritual conversion.

Now I have anticipated at the outset what I had

meant to say only at the end, namely, that Virgil and his work have ensured to us—more so even than Plato and his work—the possibility of a true and convincing explanation of the seemingly inexplicable fact that out of pagan Rome there should have arisen a Christian Rome and a Christian Occident. To us it has seemed strange that Greeks and Romans should have accepted a Saviour Who came not from among themselves but from the Jews; and that the Imperium Romanum, after having armed itself with every engine of the all-powerful State, and having usurped even divinity itself, should at last voluntarily, by a free act of assent, *sua sponte*, from its own inmost being—and its inmost being was the State—have made into the State religion a religion which has stood and must for ever stand above the State. This transition, though it seems to have presented little difficulty to those who actually participated in it, or for that matter to Augustine some centuries later, or still later even to Dante, has with the slow passage of the centuries excited ever greater astonishment, and been explained or explained away ever more clumsily and less adequately.

But it is impossible to understand Virgil in all his fullness and wholeness, conditioned as that was by a sense of something wanting and by a longing excited by that lack—it is impossible to understand him fully, *adventist* pagan as he was, without some reference to the oncoming faith, and to the part which that sense of something wanting played, and



indeed still plays in the history of faith, as its natural, in contradistinction to its supernatural, foundation. To deny that Virgil did feel this lack of the Revelation and knew the longing consequent upon this want—to make of him simply the melancholy man wounded by eternity—is to make him only seemingly greater. It is to evade the real problem, to leave out the refractory element of life, to set up a puppet and pass it off as the true figure of Virgil. To admit of no continuity is to require that a curtain shall suddenly fall upon the classical world, notwithstanding it was rent asunder in the Temple at Jerusalem, in order that an entirely new play, that of the Christian world, or, as the modern historians call it, the magical world, should as suddenly begin, and without any connection whatever with what had gone before.

In the eyes of such an unredeemed and incurably modern observer there is an absolute discontinuity between, let us say, the great Scipio and Ambrose, the saintly Bishop of Milan. For the just observer, however, who is aware of all the premises and disposed neither to add nor to subtract anything, there is, of course, between the two, the Revelation, the Redeemer, and the intrusion of divine grace. But from the natural point of view, which proceeds from the supernatural, there is a clear continuity. Ambrose was a Virgilian and an ancient Roman without reproach, a man of the same spirit and temper as any consul, censor or aedile, as able to govern and negotiate difficult political matters as any of them.

Conversely, it is not improbable that with the aid of divine grace the great Scipio would have guided the Church in the same saintly fashion as the great Bishop of Milan, though the latter now represented a power which did not exist manifestly before, and on one occasion exercised it even against the State, against that power which in the days of Scipio and Augustus acknowledged no visible superior, for the reason that at that time the State was identical with the divine *res* itself. This continuity in spite of an absolute discontinuity, the result of the Christian Revelation, is the problem presented to us by the Virgilian man; but it is more than that, it is the problem of history as science; it is the history of mankind in general.

The essential unity and continuity of the human and natural foundations of the Greco-Roman and the Christian Occident are laid bare to us at the critical moment in the person and work of a great poet; for not only has the *anima Vergiliana*, that most illustrious soul of ancient Rome, found for itself kindred spirits, such as Dante, Racine, and Newman, throughout the centuries; but Christians have in their turn reflected the supernatural light of grace upon that most perfect *anima naturaliter christiana* of antiquity, the soul of the great poet, Publius Vergilius Maro.

Andes near Mantua, originally an ancient Etruscan town, fell to the Celts and finally became the home of Latin colonists. It was granted Roman citizenship in the year 51 B.C. in company with Cisalpine Gaul.



Here in the year 70 B.C., on October 15th, the Ides of October, afterwards to be known as the Ides of Virgil, during the consulship of Pompey and Crassus, Virgil was born. He was of old Latin stock, not a Gaul like Catullus. His father was already a Roman citizen, and as owner of a farm and a pottery-works, was both a farmer and a craftsman. Virgil's childhood was spent among the fields and woods, the rivers and streams, the springs and pools, of which he is already singing in his First Eclogue. He grew up in close familiarity with the beasts of the field, with horses, cattle, goats, sheep and pigs. Remote from the city of Rome, Virgil grew to manhood in the province where the old morality of the Roman Republic still persisted in almost puritanical strictness; in Rome itself the process of dissolution was already far advanced, and every passion was being given free rein by men given up to anarchy or devoured by ambition. But Virgil was the son of an Italian farmer, and lived in closest contact with the *justissima tellus*, the all-just Mother, Earth. And neither as a youth nor as a man was he ever able to renounce his early love of the country; on the contrary, it grew ever stronger in him and increased in understanding.

The last and closest secret of a man, the ultimate foundation of his strength, his most intimate and personal motive, lies far back in the things and memories of childhood. The decisive factor for a man and his work is the extent to which he has been

able to carry over into his adult years, or through grace to recover, the child that is in him. How strange and hostile is the face of a man in whom the child, the boy, is totally extinguished! How familiar and homely an old man in whose features still shines the light of his youth! The child that grew up among the gods of the countryside can never have vanished from the face of Virgil. *Fortunatus et ille deos qui novit agrestes*. Even his outward appearance betrayed his origin: *facies rusticana*, he had the face of a farmer, we are told; and his manner was awkward. He was slow of speech, tall, big-boned and dark-haired, but sickly, perhaps even consumptive.

Virgil's youth was passed almost wholly within the blessed shelter of the family life and in closest touch with Nature—it was Varro, an ancient Roman, who said that the gods made the country for us, but man built the towns. But in the world outside, how much had been happening; how much was happening even then! And what things were yet to come before peace should be restored! We are but halfway through the century that preceded the victory of Augustus and the inauguration of the Pax Romana—the hundred years that Horace described as a delirium. Between 133 B.C. and 31 B.C. there were no less than twelve civil wars—the *bellum sociale*, the wars of Sulla, Lepidus, Sertorius, Spartacus, Cataline, Caesar, the Triumvirate, the *bellum Octavianum*, the *bellum Perusinum*, the naval war of Sextus Pompeius,



and finally the last war with Antony—and interspersed with these were countless political murders, many of them cruel, even brutish, beginning with the Gracchi and ending only with Caesar and Cicero. There were also deliberate and wholesale massacres, such as the slaughter of three thousand followers of the Gracchi ; under Marius and Sulla the crucifixion of six thousand Spartacists along the road from Rome to Capua ; the slaughter of seven thousand Samnite prisoners under the very eyes of the assembled Senate ; and that final proscription instigated no doubt by Antony, but certainly signed by Octavius, the future Augustus. In later years Octavius remembered with shame his consent to it, for Cicero was on that list, and was murdered—his head and his hands nailed to the rostrum by order of Antony, because they had spoken and written against him. ‘Alas,’ sang the voice of Virgil lamenting the time in the first of his Eclogues, ‘see to what strife has brought us, most wretched of men !’

Virgil was twenty-eight at this time. For thirteen years he had worn the *toga virilis*, in which he had been invested during the consulship of those same men, Pompey and Crassus, who had held the office in the year of his birth. Caesar was in Gaul while Virgil was still attending the boys’ school at Cremona ; the town was Caesar’s base, so that Virgil may perhaps have there first seen in the flesh the man whose star he celebrated : ‘Lo, the star of the Aeneades, of Caesar, has arisen !’ At all events he

must first have read there as a boy the successive dispatches of the Gallic War, which have since been read by boys of every generation for two thousand years.

He was sixteen when he came to Rome in 54. This was the year in which Catullus died and in which Cicero published his edition of Lucretius’s great work, the *De Rerum Natura*—two poets to whom Virgil owed an immeasurable and unstinted gratitude. From Catullus, whose passion released at one stroke all the lyricism that lay implicit in the Latin tongue, the youthful Virgil learned how to write verse. And from Lucretius—great poet and greater man, and as man greater of heart than of head—he first learned that great poetry requires something beyond the lyrical, which is the primary element of poetry, and something beyond the immediately apprehended, sensuous-spiritual life of nature to which the lyrical corresponds ; it requires the support of a philosophy, and a theology.

It is one of the laws of great art that its greatness is in direct proportion to the worth of its philosophy and its theology. Not that a poet need study them as a philosopher or a theologian would—though in the supreme case of Dante even that did no harm—but he must either absorb them from the atmosphere of the time or learn them from some elementary text-book. Even the most casual glance at the great literature of the world will show this. At the back of the decline of any great poetic talent, apart, that is,



from personal reasons, there is always a philosophic decadence, and where the true theology has been set aside there results not only a defective philosophy but a sick or crippled art—witness the art of many of our Nobel prize-winners. The passion of the philosopher is *rerum cognoscere causas*, to know the causes and reasons of things, a passion that Lucretius, though a poet, carried into his work. Virgil's primary passion, on the other hand, was for the *res*, for things themselves in all their sensuous imagery, their mutual relations and sharp contrasts, for the word that should be true to the thing, for the melodious line, and for the masterful, harmonious, imperial, antithetically ordered period. More even than Dante he is always the poet; he never abdicates, never writes amiss, never attempts to work material that is too obstinate and will yield only to artifice, not to art. Nevertheless he had the philosophic yearning to know the causes and reason of things, a yearning that ennobled him and was his salvation and instrumental to the perfect fruition of his poetic power. It is but a mediocre poet who has not that desire; if he is to be great he must have it, even though he may be unconscious of it. But Virgil remains always the poet, the revealer of the glamour and glory of things, not merely of things *without their splendour and their glory*, nor yet of an empty splendour and a vain glory *without the things*; that is the mark of an idle talker, of an 'idealist,' so called.

Whether a man is primarily a philosopher or a

poet, is apparent in the method by which he learns. The great, the born philosopher learns what poetry is, like any other man, only from great poets; and the great, the born poet learns what philosophy is like any other man, only from great philosophers. But the philosopher learns what philosophy is, not only from philosophers, but from all being and not-being whatever, and in his burning desire to know, he questions, like Socrates, all men and all things. And so it is with the great, the born poet; he learns his art, which is the art of speech, not only from the great poets, but from every creature with the gift of speech. He gathers the honey of language not only where it is to be had already perfected, but from the meanest flowers, and makes that perfect also and fragrant as his own. A great man sees the smallest thing; a small man only the large. And a great man is feminine as well as masculine; he is more feminine than masculine, for was not the greatest and holiest of all creatures a woman? The great creative man is first and foremost boundlessly 'receptive'; his purity consists not in receiving nothing, but in receiving all that there is to receive. Only thus will he be able to give to it something of himself; only thus will he be able to procreate.

Despite his extraordinary love of philosophy, Virgil's greatness is as a poet, in the art of language. It is not surprising then to find that he had a quick and ready ear for the speech of every man. His most powerful and his sweetest lines are in language every



Roman of his day would speak and write and understand, in words they would use in daily intercourse. The rock on which translators come to grief lies in this inexorable law of classic art: out of the commonest words must be fashioned the most uncommon line; soiled and jaded words must be lifted up into the glory of the pure word. (So, analogously, it is from the loose *sensus communis* alone, not from refinement of subtlety, that the *philosophia perennis* comes.) Thus out of five of the commonest words of everyday Roman speech Virgil has released the undying music of that unforgettable line:

*Infandum, regina, iubes renovare dolorem.*

In Rome he attempted what was the ambition of every gifted young provincial who came to Rome—to enter politics, to become an advocate. But he was *sermone tardissimus*, slow and awkward of speech, and—a more serious obstacle—he had too great a soul.

In Rome he wrote his first verses, which were no more than mere trials of his strength. Then he passed on to Naples to continue his studies in philosophy under the most famous teachers of his day. Naples was a Greek city, overrun with Greek rhetoricians, historians, philosophers, poets and actors; he learned there not only philosophy, but also those messianic and eschatological myths of the East to which he was to give final shape in the Fourth Eclogue.

It was in Naples that he wrote his works. Though

the friend of Augustus, Maecenas, and Horace, he did not often go to Rome. Even when he did so, he speedily returned to Naples, taking little pleasure in the life of the Court. While he continued his study and his work, the destiny of Rome was fulfilling itself in a swift succession of decisive events. In 48 was the battle of Pharsalia, and Pompey and Cato were no more; in 44 Caesar was murdered; in 42 was Philippi. In the subsequent allotment of lands to the two hundred thousand victorious veterans Virgil's paternal estate at Mantua was confiscated, and only later recovered through the favour of Octavius.

About the year 40 B.C. appeared the ten *Eclogues*, or *Bucolics*, and Virgil became overnight the most celebrated poet of Rome. They were set to music, and on one occasion when they were being recited in the theatre, the audience, so Tacitus tells us, rose in a body to do honour to the poet, who happened to be present, an honour otherwise accorded only to Augustus—*populus qui auditis in theatro versibus Vergilii surrexit et forte praesentem spectantemque Vergilium veneratus est sic quasi Augustum*. Latterly it has become a commonplace to liken our own time to that of antiquity. But to mention only one, if the most important, point of difference, which makes it impossible to press the analogy closely, it is a notable fact that whereas in those times Christianity won over the masses with extraordinary persistence and rapidity, to-day it is losing them, *i.e.* the masses, the proletariat, with an ever-increasing rapidity. This



fact alone makes the dissimilarity between the two periods greater, infinitely greater, than any possible correspondence between them, whether for good or for evil. The decisive factor in bringing about Christianity in the first place, was that mankind then had a real sense and a vivid realisation of what sin and guilt are, and in place of the certainty of punishment, was offered certainty of forgiveness, 'the glad tidings.' But to-day things are otherwise. The masses no longer have any sense or lively realisation of sin and guilt. And where that is absent or unrealised, the evangel of the 'forgiveness of sins' has obviously no longer any point of incidence. If any would ask wherein lies the difference between the two periods, there is the answer. It is questionable too, whether the spectators in any football stadium to-day or the audience at a Reinhardt production, listening to the lines of the Pandora or the Diotima, would stand to do honour to the dead poets, as did the Roman populace through almost six centuries whenever a line of Virgil was pronounced. One should be wary of such comparisons.

The *Bucolics*, as we shall see later, embody the elements of Virgil's poetic art, elements that recur continually throughout his later works. They set the standard for that power without which no man is a poet, however great he may be as a man. They reveal the measure and purity of his lyrical feeling for language, thereby demonstrating that he was from the very roots of his being primarily a poet, that the

poet was dominant in him over the thinker. And this must still have been the case, even had he been able to carry out his intention of devoting himself wholly to the study of philosophy once he had finished the *Aeneid*. But such was not his destiny. After many years came the *Georgics*, the songs of work and agriculture, and then—Actium.

To be a great classical poet requires no small measure of good fortune—more even than to be Caesar. Had it not been for Actium, the *Aeneid* would not have been written. Actium was the long-binding, decisive event between the East and the West. For Virgil it was a decision between the spirit of the West, with its ideals of order and light and proportion and confidence, and the spirit of the East, with all its extravagance and despair, its chaos and horror. Into those prophetic pictures on the shield of Aeneas, he put not only the contending armies of Octavius and Antony, but all the abominable gods of Egypt, and the barking, dog-headed Anubis attacking Venus, Apollo and Minerva. Had it not been for this battle and its effective decision for the West as against the East—the latter under the leadership of a traitor to his own Western spirit (a possibility that may always arise again, and one fraught with ever more danger to-day and in the future)—had it not been for this act of fate, the *Aeneid* would not have been possible.

That was Virgil's good fortune. Unforeseen external events, events in which he himself took no



part, were made to serve the great poet, and not merely to serve him, but to serve him and his work willingly. Man may for a brief moment courageously so apprehend the external world and its events that they must serve him ; for, however independent, however subject to laws of their own, however indifferent to man they may seem to be, yet it is for his sake alone that they exist—they must serve him, even though they destroy him. And this is true for every man, be his world great or small ; in the case of the great man it is merely more apparent.

From Actium onwards all Virgil's work was centred on the *Aeneid*, triumphing now in the finished perfection of a line, now almost despairing through failure to achieve the all too elusive ideal ; despairing and weary—for man wearies of all things, even of the loveliest verses—despairing of writing them, and weary of having written them. But it was finished ! And though the untiring, fastidious, cherishing hand would have wished much still more finished, it was ended at last—and with it the life of its maker, in the prime of his years. But even this was part of Virgil's good fortune. It could not but have gone hard with him and his work, had he grown old as sadly, as full of misgiving, as Augustus, having outlived that climax of fortune which the plenitude of the Empire brought to his generation. Virgil fell ill on a return voyage from Greece, and was put ashore in Calabria, where he died, as it is thought, of malaria, a few days after landing.

The writing of epitaphs was a great Roman art. Its greatest achievement is perhaps the one written for Scipio Africanus : '*Consol, censor, aedilis hic fuit apud vos*—This was your consul, censor and aedile.' But the inscription on Virgil's tomb near Naples, written by one of his friends, is also in the great Roman manner :

*Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere; tenet nunc  
Parthenope. Cecini pascua, rura, duces.*

(Mantua gave me birth, Calabria death ; Naples now holds me. I sang of shepherds, farmers and leaders.)

Virgil's work is distinguished by a remarkable continuity, such as is not to be met with in the great philosophers who are under the constant necessity of qualification and recantation. The continuity in Virgil is in part the consequence of the nature of his talent and of the intrinsic given order of his genius ; it is in part the free gift of his good fortune, the result of external circumstances and resistances ; and in part it is the arduous achievement of deliberate toil. In the book of the *shepherd*, the *Bucolics*, the farmer already appears at his toil, grimmer, more serious, more earth-bound than the shepherds, and the power of the ruler for good or for evil over land and people and individuals intrudes itself upon the arcadian scene. In the *Georgics*, the book of the *farmer*, the carefree shepherd has retired into the background ; nevertheless he is still there, though now only as the



servant of a higher purpose ; the need for the leader, without whose sagacity and protection and concern for the maintenance of peace the farmer must perish, begins to loom larger ; and the *iustissima tellus*, the all-just Mother Earth, has now become stepmother to mankind. And then in the *Aeneid*, the book of the leader, we meet again not only the shepherd and his mythical world of Eros with its indiscriminate creative power penetrating into and sustaining the world of political humanity, but the farmer too and the labourer at his toil, *labor improbus*, that toil in the sweat of the brow, which is the condition of blessing and fruitfulness, the condition of every truly great work of man in every branch of his activity, from agriculture, the paradigm of all meaningful toil, to philosophy and art, whose representatives can justify the condition of their existence, namely their *otium*, only by pleading the exactions of a yet higher *negotium*.

## CHAPTER II

## SHEPHERDS

*Amor vincit omnia.*

IT is the normal thing for a great poet in the first consciousness of his unique power, the power of imagination, to attempt at one stroke to master the whole world of his imagination. But this he can do only in a loose and vagrant fashion, as it were. Though there is much that he will see with a clairvoyant sureness and finality of vision denied to others, on the whole he will be able to deal with reality only by ignoring it, by flying above it, not by penetrating into it. This is the normal way, and so it was with Virgil.

What is the world that corresponds to this poetic view, to this light-hearted activity ? It is the world of Eros. *Amor vincit omnia*, Virgil wrote in the last and most finished of the *Eclogues*. This phrase is the key to the *Bucolics* as a whole : love conquers all ; not divine love, but Eros, who is destructive as well as creative, and able to gain the mastery over things higher than himself—which the divine love may not do, for it knows nothing higher than itself. It is to be found in most tragedies, for it is one of the primary sources of the tragic. We learn in the *Bucolics* how great is the power of Eros among men, among these



shepherds, where the passions still have free play *more ferae*, after the manner of the animals, without morality, without marriage (which is a pact with the high gods), and without fidelity, if not without regret :

*Tityrus hinc aberat, ipsae te, Tityre, pinus,  
ipsi te fontes, ipsa haec arbusta vocabant.*

(Tityrus was gone from home. The very pines, Tityrus, the very springs, the very orchards here were calling you. \*)

And again :

*Trahit sua quemque voluptas.*

(Each is led by his liking.)

And again :

*. . . Et quisquis amores  
Aut metuat dulcis aut experietur amaros.*

(. . . and whoever shall fear the sweets or have tasted the bitters of love.)

And again :

*Nerine Galatea, thymo mihi dulcior Hyblae,  
Candidior cygnis, hedera formosior alba,  
cum primum pasti repetent praesepia tauri,  
siqua tui Corydonis habet te cura, venito.*

(Galatea, child of Nereus, sweeter to me than Hybla's thyme, whiter than swans, lovelier than the pale ivy, soon as the bulls come back from pasture to

\* The translations are from the Loeb edition ; translated by H. R. Fairclough. Heinemann, London, 1930.

the stalls, if thou hast any love for thy Corydon, come hither.)

And again :

*Aret ager, vitio moriens sitit aeris herba,  
Liber pampineas invidit collibus umbras :  
Phyllidis adventu nostrae nemus omne virebit.  
Juppiter et laeto descendet plurimus imbri.*

(The field is parched ; the grass is athirst, dying in the tainted air ; Bacchus has grudged the hills the shade of his vines : but at the coming of my Phyllis all the woodland will be green, and Jupiter, in his fullness, shall descend in gladsome showers.)

And again :

*Nascere, praeque diem veniens age, Lucifer, alnum,  
coniugis indigno Nysae deceptus amore  
dum queror et divos, quamquam nil testibus illis  
profeci, extrema moriens tamen adloquor hora.*

(Rise, Morning Star, heralding genial day, while I, cheated in the love which my promised Nysa spurned, make lament, and though their witnessing has availed me naught, yet, as I die, I call on the gods in this my latest hour.)

And again :

*Saepe in nostris parvam te roscida mala  
(dux ego vester eram) vidi cum matre legentem.  
alter ab undecimo tum me iam acceperat annus,  
iam fragilis poteram ab terra contingere ramos.  
ut vidi, ut perii ; ut me malus abstulit error !*



(Within our garden-close I saw thee—I was guide for both—a little child, along with my mother, plucking dewy apples. My eleventh year finished, the next had just greeted me ; from the ground I could now reach the frail boughs. As I saw, how was I lost ! What fatal frenzy swept me away ! )

And again :

*Effer aquam et molli cinge haec altaria vitta  
verbenasque adole pinguis et mascula tura,  
coniugis ut magicis sanos avertere sacris  
experiar sensus . . . .  
ducite ab urbe domum, mea carmina, ducite Daphnim.*

(Bring out water, and wreath these shrines with soft wool ; and burn rich herbs and make frankincense, that I may try with magic rites to turn to fire my lover's coldness of mood. . . . Bring Daphnis home from town, bring him, my songs.)

And again :

*Omnes ' unde amor iste ' rogant ' tibi ? ' Venit Apollo :  
' Galle, quid insanis ? ' inquit. ' Tua cura Lycoris  
perque nives alium perque horrida castra secuta est ' . . .  
' Ecquis erit modus ? ' inquit. ' Amor non talia curat  
nec lacrimis crudelis Amor . . . '*

(All ask : ' Whence this love of thine ? ' Apollo came. ' Gallus,' said he, ' What madness this ? Thy sweetheart Lycoris hath followed another amid snow and amid rugged camps.' . . . ' Will there be no end ? ' he cried. ' Love reckes nought of this : neither is cruel Love sated with tears. . .')

And again :

*Omnia vincit Amor : nos et cedamus Amori.*

(Love conquers all : let us, too, yield to Love.)

Love, Eros, is the theme of the *Bucolics* : Love that is so apt to turn to tragedy once it enters the lives of men—and the more tragic through its conflict with the higher love of things or the love of higher things. Ever since Euripides, with whom woman first became the great tragic motive, this has been the chief element in tragedy. It was so for Virgil—witness the authentic tragedy of Dido in the fourth book of the *Aeneid*. It was so for Dante, for Shakespeare, and for Racine, the last great tragedian of the West, whose tragic verse is to be matched, if at all, only in certain isolated lines of Kleist and Baudelaire. And it is so still ; though now indeed there are no tragedians but only psycho-analysts, and no tragedy but only novels and reports of divorce proceedings.

The *Bucolics*, alone in a poetical interregnum, have this for their theme, and they magnify it until it covers almost the sum of all being. It is carried over into the *Georgics*, the book of the farmer, though now in its innocent form, as the fertilisation and fructifying of the *iustissima tellus*, the all-just Mother Earth. And it figures again in the *Aeneid*, the book of the leader, but now involved in the last tragic conflict with duty, with love of the higher life, with the higher love of life which alone gives dignity to man. But it remains undiminished in power. There is no be-



littling of it from shallow prejudice, no suppression of it from false modesty.—‘Son, my sole strength and holy power, O Son, who laughest e’en at the Typhoian bolts of the great Father’: it is thus that Venus speaks to her son Eros—Eros we must call him and not Amor, as does Virgil (for in Virgil’s day the name, like many another noble and forceful expression, had lost its greatness through the ill offices of the precious triflers of Alexandria). It is in this wise that his mother addresses Eros, her greater son, himself the eternal pre-condition of his own existence, but for whom even his own mother would not have existed. (The goddess bore the son who had existed before her, without whom she herself would not have been—which is a mystery of the ancient mythology.)

But Dido cursed Eros—for Dido was no nymph or shepherdess of the *Bucolics*, even as Aeneas was not one of its shepherds. Dido was a great queen, *dux femina facti*, a woman of power to govern, capable as any of the great Roman women; she ruled her city and her kingdom royally, and even in death she remembered her greatness: *magna mei sub terras ibit imago* (now the shade of me shall pass majestic to the world below).—Dido cursed Eros, who had gained the mastery over her and her purer will, over her piety toward her dead husband, over her modesty, her duty and her pride. On that first starry night when Aeneas told his tragic tale, opening with one of the most sonorous lines in all the literature of the world: *Infandum, regina, jubes renovare dolorem* (Un-

utterable, O queen, the grief thou biddest me revive), while she yet gazed upon him, *longumque bibebat amorem*, drinking deep draughts of love, Eros the accursed, had overcome her. ‘That day was the first of my overthrow,’ she laments, ‘the first cause of all this evil.’ Yet even when she has been forsaken, and in extremity of hate, she cries: ‘How blind are your souls, ye seers! What avail votive offerings and prayers the heart that is wild for love! While the flame licks deeper into the tender marrow, in the deepest heart yet slumbers the still quick wound.’ Up to this point, in her complaints and her anguish, the great queen differs in nothing from the forsaken or faithless shepherd, from the faithless or forsaken nymph of the *Bucolics*. But the manner of their death is not like hers. With them no pride, no modesty, no lofty spirit has been outraged; with Dido, to accusation against the betrayer is added self-accusation of betrayal, and to hatred of another’s guilt—*exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor*—despair at her own. For she had called that marriage which was no marriage, and under this name, the poet tells us, would have hidden the guilt that her inmost heart acknowledged. She searches her heart, and she bridles at the realisation that she has tried to persuade herself of something that was not, of something that was untrue—she knows that she, though innocent, is guilty; and that her lover, who has broken no sacred vow, though guilty, is yet innocent. This lofty conception of marriage as a binding covenant with the deity—



this lofty Greco-Roman conception of the sanctity of matrimony, which the ancient world readily acknowledged to be a holy estate, was no mere ideal, but a full reality—and it is her recognition and acceptance of this, the groundwork of the Church's doctrine that marriage is a sacrament, which makes the forsaken queen a great tragic figure, *magna imago* ; for, notwithstanding she herself had acted contrary to it, she still maintained that high ideal in all its implication—she had not rejected it. And it is this that lifts her above Phyllis and Amaryllis, out of the tragedy of nature into the tragedy of the spirit.

In these affairs of the heart the man cuts almost a sorry figure in contrast to the consuming, destroying passion of the woman ; and the greater and more virile the man, the sorrier his role. And so it is with Aeneas. He was not, of course, a mere vulgar philanderer ; he had broken no vow ; he had practised no deceit ; he had been straightforward and frank. But what does that avail ? A woman who allows herself to be consumed with passion for a man is never small ; a man who allows himself to be deflected from his task, his mission, through passion for a woman, is never great. The passion of Othello belongs wholly within the order of nature and he by no means plays a sorry part ; but then he is not a great man. Romeo and Werther are of the same order, but not so Aeneas, or Hamlet, or Titus in Racine—for these are great men with a mission and for that very reason seem to make but sorry figures

beside Dido, Ophelia and Berénice. It is as if a man were to hold up his lantern in front of a burning house, with the remark that it also is burning—this is virtually what Aeneas does. Aesthetically it is bathos. The greatness of Aeneas cannot show itself here ; it lies elsewhere ; but it loses nothing here only because it has not been false to itself. Every Roman reading the story of Aeneas and Dido must have thought of Caesar and Cleopatra, where the man won and the woman lost ; but so must he also have remembered Antony and Cleopatra, where the woman won and the man lost. The essence of this mode of tragedy—it is not the only mode—lies in the disparity and possible, though not necessary, hostility between different orders of greatness—on the one hand the order of natural passion, and on the other the order of spiritual passion. All the suffering, the tears, the beauty, the complaint and the question to heaven, the incomprehensible mystery of this type of tragedy, where Fate has united in the order of nature two hearts which, in the order of the spirit, were not destined for one another, has been expressed in two lines by Racine :

*Ah, par quel soin cruel le ciel avait-il joint  
Deux cœurs, que l'un pour l'autre il ne destinait point ?*

In tragedies of this kind it is the woman who wins our sympathy ; it is for her sake that the cathartic tears are shed. It was not for the sufferings of Aeneas that the youthful Augustus wept, but for Dido, *quae ob amorem se occidit*, who killed herself for love.



But this element, the Eros, which unless it is checked by the harsh bridle of discipline, by *labor improbus*, by morality and institutions, by the restraining influence of a higher spiritual love, is apt to waste and degrade the very nature of man, and to end even in crime, yet operates as a powerful and innocent force throughout the rest of animate nature, where there is no question of freedom and responsible judgement, as there is in man, whether to control it or to be controlled by it ; for in nature it is obedient to the direction of the highest spirit itself. Thus we read in the *Bucolics* :

*Et nunc omnis ager, nunc omnis parturit arbos ;  
nunc frondent silvae, nunc formosissimus annus.*

(Even now every field, every tree is budding ; now the woods are green, and the year is at its fairest.)

And it is thus that a drunken Satyr, Silenus, celebrates the cosmogonic Eros, who is able to give life even to the mechanistic materialism of Democritus :

*uti magnum per inane coacta  
semina terrarumque animaeque marisque fuissent  
et liquidi simul ignis ; ut his exordia primis  
omnia, et ipse tener mundi concreverit orbis ;  
tum durare solum et discludere Nerea ponto  
coeperit, et rerum paulatim sumere formas,  
iamque novum terrae stupeant lucescere solem,  
altius atque cadant submotis nubibus imbres  
incipiant silvae cum primum surgere, quumque  
rara per ignotos errent animalia montes.*

(How, through the great void, were brought together the seeds of earth, and air, and sea, and streaming fire withal ; how from these elements came all beginnings and even the young globe of the world grew into a mass ; how then it began to harden the ground, to shut Nereus apart in the deep, and, little by little, to assume the forms of things ; how next the earth is awed at the new sun shining and from the uplifted clouds fall showers ; when first woods begin to arise and living things roam here and there over mountains that know them not.)

These lines must have lain near to the poet's heart, for they recur almost word for word in the *Aeneid*, where they are sung at the court of Dido, before Aeneas begins the tale of his sufferings. And the song in praise of spring reappears, expanded and more like a hymn, in the midst of the *Georgics*, the book of the farmer, of *labor improbus*.

The *Bucolics* then, which are Virgil's first work, though they open on a tragic note drawn from history and politics, with a reminder of the civil wars and their results, belong wholly to the world of Eros, an unhistorical, unpolitical world, yet one that brings in its train all history and all politics, for by Eros these are conditioned. Eros is the primary ingredient in humanity, the ground upon which later the farmer and ruler have to work. *Amor vincit omnia*, this is the theme—Eros is conqueror. It was Eros that enabled Lucretius and Virgil to build up an imaginative story of creation from the material of Epicurean philo-



sophy, of which they both were followers, though Virgil indeed only for a time and merely as a poet. It was entirely illogical that Epicureanism should be put to such a use, for the doctrine of both Democritus and Epicurus is in theory the purest and most complete materialism ; logically its only science would be mechanics, and its highest product the machine. In fact that most logical of nations, the French, has urged this conclusion in La Mettrie's *L'Homme Machine* ('man as machine'—a very different thing, of course, from the present-day 'machine as man'). But Lucretius and Virgil dealt otherwise ; they broke through the mechanics to the psychodynamics of the Eros, and figured creation and the world as only great poets see them—as they appeared when time was young, and things were for the first time. For when time first was, was not eternity nearer ? And though eternity is not comparable with any time, of all time is it not yet most like to the 'first' time, when things first were, or rather first were seen ? Clearly it is better to see things as they were in the beginning, fresh from the hand of God, than only to see them stripped of their mystery in the light of the endless duration of things, or in the disenchantment of commonplaceness to fail even to see them at all. The starting-point for every great poet, which is that moment when, full of a consciousness of the mystery, he first discovers himself in Nature and Nature in himself, is always a vague pantheism. This stage is poetical—not in any sense philosophical or theological

—and for us of the West is one that may not be omitted. It is concerned with the creative as such, and the creative in the poet is an analogue of the creative in God ; poetical creation is creation of form only, of images, not of reality, not of the things themselves. A poet's future greatness depends upon whether or not he stops at pantheism. Virgil did not stop there, though pantheism remained always with him.

Sensuously the most beautiful and most perfect of Virgil's poetry is to be found in the *Bucolics*—not indeed the most profound nor the loftiest, but the most beautiful from the point of view of language and the essentials of the literary art. There are entire lines that are nothing but strings of names, resounding musical lines ; lines pulsing with the incomparable joy of the born poet in the magic of the singing, the sonorous word, a delight which is the first requisite of his art ; lines that spring from this most sensuous, most indispensable, element to flower in the magic of 'names,' which in their turn derive from the spiritual might of man—from his faculty to give names to persons and to things. So closely joined for poets are the senses and the spirit. And it is so for art in general. All perfect art is an anticipation through the power of imagination—itself the highest sense—of that real perfection which lies at the end of time. Each individual art speaks through its own medium : architecture through wood or stone or steel, painting through colour, music through sound, and poetry through the



sonorous word. Not only are these media substantial symbols of pure spirit; they are themselves in ascending measure steeped through and through with spirit, and linked together into one ordered hierarchy.

Language, with the sonorous word, gives readiest access to the spirit; it is the topmost rung of the ladder of art upon which the angels go, ascending and descending. It would appear at first a humiliation of mankind that it must allow itself to be led to thought only on the apron-strings of speech, but it is a humiliation that brings a crown at last. There are, indeed, prouder and less earth-bound spirits among men who are not under this necessity; language, which, to the true poet, is the tenderest of mothers, is to them a step-dame. But the poets have never let fall the thread; they can find a way back to us again, and can tell mortal men what perfections they have seen, though what they have to tell may be less, perhaps, than what those prouder, less earth-bound spirits have only thought. Virgil's own attitude to language is made clear in a letter to a friend, where he says that he handled the first draft of his work as the bear does her newly-born cub, when she licks it over tenderly, and by gentle pats and manipulations fashions the uncouth creature, until at last it appears in its proper form as a bear. Not to be charmed by this comparison is to fail to understand both Virgil's spirit and his literary method. The latter is the highest possible, for it regards language as a living organism, a thing at one time pliant and tractable,

at another obstinate and contrary, now firm, now flowing, by turns static and dynamic. Horace, of the Augustan poets the next in rank to Virgil, has a correspondingly inferior attitude to language. For him the perfect poem is a statue, either of marble or of bronze, a *monumentum aere perennius*, not a dynamic body filled with the breath of life. Horace thinks of a plan, of a design; Virgil of a birth. That constitutes a great difference, and the relative value of the two attitudes is to be judged from the results. For the perfecting of his work, for the improvement of even a small part of it, for the alteration of so much as a single word, a poet such as Virgil requires to renew within himself in their entirety both the idea he intends to express, and the medium—in this case, language—through which he intends to express it. He must be capable of possessing it ecstatically anew.

The activity of Eros constitutes the lower level of the Virgilian view both of Nature and of man. *Amor vincit omnia*. But if that were all that Virgil had to say, he would then have been not greater, but less, than Catullus; for whereas Catullus sang Eros directly, and passionately, like one obsessed, Virgil's verse is from the very outset controlled by mind, and, like Lucretius, both his vision and his verse embrace the whole of Nature.



### CHAPTER III

#### FARMERS

*Vincit omnia labor improbus.*

*Labor vincit omnia, labor improbus*—Toil overcomes all, toil in the sweat of the brow. Who in the ancient world, in a society based upon slavery, where nobility was recognised only in *otium* and not in *negotium*—for then no one so much as dreamed of the possibility of that modern stupidity which regards work for its own sake as a sort of religion—who in the ancient world could have written that sentence? No Greek, no sea-faring people, no trading, no predatory, no military, no pastoral people could have written it; none but a race of agriculturalists could have arrived at such complete understanding of the essential nature of toil. None but the son of an Italian farmer, who even at the summit of sublimest art still remembered his unalterable love of the humility of the cultivable Earth, could have written those most beautiful of all songs of earth, the *Georgics*, which treat of husbandry, of viticulture, gardening, cattle-raising, and of bees, those most mysterious, most admired creatures in all the literature of the ancient world from Plato to Virgil.

The *Georgics* are not in any sense a romantic production, but the most classic of poems imaginable;

there could be no more grotesque misconception than the likening of them to the sentimentalism of Rousseau and the Rousseauists. (Not that even they were without their justification, flying, as they were, from the Cartesian falsehood of the disanimation of Nature; but unfortunately their flight only carried them into yet another falsehood.) In the *Georgics*, his second work, Virgil has supplemented his original poet's love of Nature with the born farmer's intuitive understanding of the land and the things that belong to it, and a scientific knowledge of agriculture which is the result of thoughtful observation and of observant thought. In his powers of observation Virgil is akin to Fabre, that great Virgilian, and greatest naturalist of our time.

As St. Benedict was the spiritual father of the first monks of the West, so Virgil was their secular father, and together with the Holy Scriptures and their *regula* they may well have carried the *Georgics* of Virgil. It was as the sons of St. Benedict that they went forth to clear away the forests from savage northern souls and prepare them for the reception of the Word—and this they accomplished through their *orare*, their prayers. But they went forth also as the sons of Virgil, to clear away the forests from the savage land and to prepare it to receive the corn and vine—this they accomplished through their *laborare*, through toil, toil in the sweat of the brow—which scriptural phrase remains by far the best translation of Virgil's *labor improbus*. In the order of grace they



were Benedictines ; in the order of nature, Virgilians. This alone suffices to show how great is the gulf that separates Virgil from Rousseau, the true beauty of reality from the beautiful seeming of romance. It requires the farmer and the craftsman to tell us what is the essence of meaningful toil ; for it is they who furnish the standard by which all other work and its worth are to be measured, including the most sublime, the artist's. Toil, *labor improbus*, though it exist objectively as the lot of certain animals, in full consciousness and freedom it belongs exclusively to man ; it comes as mediator between the urgent, Eros-quickened *iustissima tellus*, the all-just Mother Earth—who is the beginning—and the perfected fruit, to nourish and gladden the body and soul and mind of man.

The word 'culture,' which to-day engages all Western minds, came not from the Greeks, who have given us almost every other catholic word, but is a gift from Latin farmers, and means the science and art of husbandry. Culture, both in substance and word, requires the inseparable union of three things : first is the given material, whether inanimate or animate, which is not of man's making, but rather that of which he himself is made and is part ; to this must be joined the indispensable, ineluctable, mediating, enabling *labor improbus* ; and finally there is the perfected fruit, the product of the inward compounding of the other two, of which the former has the character of grace and the latter of works. Nor

is this all ; to every true culture there is added glory, to which belong both the immediacy and the absoluteness of beauty. Immediacy of beauty is at the beginning only and at the end ; all the fears and anguish that lie between and have gone to the *labor improbus*, have vanished without trace. It is a far call from the immediacy of the beauty of a folk-song to that of a Beethoven symphony, yet both have it ; but that of the symphony, supporting and illuminating, as it does, such rich content, is to be achieved only through *labor improbus* or not at all—and this is one of the most mysterious paradoxes of life. Virgil would have been astounded at the mediocrity of the æsthetic theory that admonishes the poet passively to await inspiration and to rely on that alone. It is true that no amount of toil will take the place of inspiration, just as no amount of toil on the farmer's part will make corn spring out of stones ; but it will sustain an already existing inspiration and bring it to the final goal of fruition. It will do more, it will set free new things and multiply them a hundredfold—it does not, indeed, create them, but through loosening the soil, through devotion and expectancy, it brings them to light.

Beauty is to be found both at the beginning and at the end—the wild cherry is lovely, and the wild grape, but what are they to the glory of the perfect cherry, the glowing darkness of a full cluster ? What is the flowering weed to a sea of golden ears, the wild fruit to the sweet miracle of the apple, the feminine grace of



the pear, the blue swelling cushion of the plum, the downy cheek of a peach? What are the wild ears, the wild fruit, to the humble glory of bread, of wine, of oil, all good things that exist only through culture, whose beginning is Eros, whose middle is toil, subduing, cherishing, directing, and whose end is the physical and spiritual nourishing of man, and the glory of the thing in itself? And so it is with higher things. A colour is beautiful; but what is it to the glory of a picture by Angelico? A musical sound is beautiful; but what is it to the glory of a Mozart sonata? A sonorous word is beautiful; but what is it to the glory of a single line of Virgil? And yet how far from the one to the other! Beginning in the inexhaustible givenness of colour, musical sound and speech with all their immanent relationships and laws—beginning in things that the artist does not *create* but has access to by right of birth, as to his own natural home, they are brought to their goal, to fruition, through the artist's power of creation and synthesis with the help of *labor improbus*. Through the utmost effort to achieve the effortless, through the most daring complexity to achieve the simple, is most perfect art attained, in so far as art is power. That is one of the few absolute laws of an absolute æsthetic in its subjective aspect; it is 'imitation of nature' in the Aristotelean sense. The complexity of our most complicated machine is simplicity compared with the complexity of the apparatus that Nature has created. What is there more complex, what more

dependent upon a thousand nice adjustments, than the apparatus and functioning of the eye? And yet what could be more overwhelmingly, more blessedly simple than sight? And this is the great difference between the machine and nature: the triumph of the former is its complexity, its result has never the redeeming simplicity of a vital, much less of a spiritual, act.

It is part of the greatness of the *Georgics* that with surest insight it discovers what is the meaning of toil,—which is one of mankind's greatest problems, and to-day, when that meaning has been lost, one of the most vexed and perplexed—discovers it in its first home, in agriculture, with the farmer. For the shepherds of the *Bucolics* it is still only play, not yet toil in the sweat of the brow, not yet the *labor improbus*. Virgil does not over-estimate the value of work; neither does he under-estimate it. Toil of itself creates nothing; the lean and poor fruit and the rich and full are alike the gift of Mother Earth alone. Yet there is a difference between wild and cultivated corn, the difference made by toil, by culture in the narrower sense. The earth, the *tellus*, will yield the wild corn anyway, but the other only as the all-just, the *iustissima tellus*, only at the price of *labor improbus*. Toil, *labor improbus*, has an analogous part in all culture at whatever level, alike in the high and the highest. It is the inevitable condition if what already has grace is to have it more abundantly. *The triumph of true work shows itself through the triumph of grace.*



## CHAPTER IV

## CLASSIC ART

THE great epics of mankind date back to the days of myth, and their authors are not known to us, as are the great historical poets—it is the exception, if, as in the case of Homer, we know even their names. Myth belongs to the true epic, which is its expression. But the mytho-poet is not he who speaks *through* a myth—that is reserved for the great historical poets, the great tragedians for example, who are no longer mytho-poets ; the poet of myth is a stage higher in reflection than the mytho-poet. At this level the drama, especially tragedy, is the appropriate expression. Only the lyrical, which is the basis of all poetry, is always possible, remains always the same and is always appropriate.

Now if in a civilised, almost 'enlightened,' self-conscious historical period a man yet writes an epic—which means that he must penetrate to the mythical elements of his theme, weaving the history into the myth, and that myth one that is as yet unfashioned—if he does this, and in the judgement of the whole world succeeds in the undertaking, as Virgil succeeded, one can only assume that he is almost incredibly fortunate. (The disparity between the *Aeneid* and the *Iliad* or the

*Odyssey* is the necessary disparity between the grown man and the youth or child, and it is manifestly as absurd to complain if a man lives and thinks and talks less unrestrainedly, more intellectually than a child, as it would be to complain because the noonday is not the same as the morning.) But all classic art, every meeting of a great poet with a great and real—not a fictitious—theme is not to be explained otherwise than as the outcome of an extraordinary chance. Though Virgil himself may have felt with certainty that this was his fate—in point of fact he not only did know what he was and what it was he was writing, but he even said so—to us it can only appear a sheer act of Providence.

Many things were needed for the success of the *Aeneid*, above all a powerful poetical genius ; but that alone could not have sufficed to preserve the writer of such an epic from lapsing into the grossest absurdities. For genius is sometimes a sleep-walker ; in its concentration it hears an immense number of voices, but woe betide it if anyone of them wake it from its vision and its listening ; for then, unsupported by any sure critical sense, it must inevitably plunge into the visionless abyss and fall victim to its haphazard and empirical impressions. Equally necessary then for the poem's success was a sure, inborn spirit of self-criticism—an inborn spirit I say, for, though the true spirit of criticism may, like everything else, be systematically cultivated and strengthened, it is no more to be learned than is the art of poetry itself or



the gift of philosophy ; it is a *sensus*, a sort of instinct, and cannot be learned ; it is a *donum*, a gift of God. But poetical power and critical sense together are not enough, unless the poet have also the industry of a bee. He must bring to it also unremitting toil, *labor improbus*. The life of Virgil was arduous, almost ascetic, always bent upon his task, always intent upon his mission. His was no life of pleasure such as destroyed the talents of lesser men like Catullus and the still smaller Ovid. ' *Parthenius*, the virginal ' they called him in Naples, that voluptuous city.

But from without there was given him no less a thing than the whole myth and history of Rome. The myth, which was still vague and formless, he had first to fashion ; and the history was that of which he himself was a part—he was of it in spirit, it was his own. He was granted the whole myth and history of Rome in the hour of its final splendour—after twelve civil wars, and before the onset of the long agony of decline. Not only was he given all this ; it was granted him also to know the advent hour already dawning out of the East, when life at last should be fulfilled on its most exalted plane. Was ever poet before the year of grace granted so great a theme ? Certainly within the sphere of secular history there has never been one comparable to it.

As I have said, all classic art is, on the surface, the outcome of an extraordinary stroke of good fortune—it is the result of the most intimate encounter of a great creative power with a great theme, such that

each would seem almost to have grown to match the other. As a rule they do not meet ! It is patent and beyond argument that a painter who paints a bunch of asparagus well creates a greater work of art than another who paints a Madonna badly. It is equally obvious and beyond dispute that a Madonna is a loftier theme than a bunch of asparagus ; and again, one who paints a bunch of asparagus well will not necessarily on that account paint a Madonna well—not because he lacks the specific artistic qualifications—these we suppose he has—but because he may lack certain other higher qualities, which make him rich or great or profound not merely as an artist but also as a man. But he who can paint a Madonna well also will be greater, not specifically as an artist (though he is that too), but as a man.—These are simple matters, and only prejudice or perversity can represent them otherwise.

Classic art, then, is the result of the chance meeting at a *given* moment of the greatest poetic power with the greatest *real* theme. That is the first law of all classic art. The creator of a classic work of art does not create his theme, but is creator and poet only within the range of possibilities left open to his creative freedom by a *really* given *real* theme. That is why there is no art, whether inside or outside classic art, that can be opposed to it, or that may even be regarded as in the same rank. Classic art contains them all within itself, and relinquishes them only when it dies. The modern and oft-repeated



relativist formula, that art oscillates, or exists in a state of tension, between two poles, called Classic and Romantic, is false. Romanticism may, however, be regarded as a relative antipode. It confuses the reality of 'becoming' with that of 'being,' applies the laws of either indifferently, and so errs. It aspires to relate itself not merely with the eternally 'being' (to which, indeed, one should always go back) but also with what has 'become,' has merely endured, and sometimes even with what simply 'has been'—no matter for how long or short a time—and cannot, by reason of the ontological law of contradiction, be repeated, whereas 'being' is eternal repetition. But in that case what are we to make of naturalistic, realistic, idealistic, symbolist, realist, *surréaliste* and all the other varieties of art? These are nothing but by-products of one single classic art in decay. The one absolute criterion of classic art is, I repeat, that it shall be the fruit of the inward union at a given moment of the greatest artistic power with the greatest theme of that moment—though not, of course, to the exclusion of lesser themes, which will indeed abound in it to gladden the heart and delight the sense. But the greatest real theme given to mankind at the time—it may be given only to an elect few—this alone may not be omitted.

All classic art fulfils this condition. Homer, the Greek tragedians, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, the great Spaniards, both the humorists and the tragedians, Racine, all have fulfilled this requirement.

Only the German classic writers fall short of it—though they have often almost attained to it, they yet have not quite grasped the highest reality that Western man has known through two thousand years. Goethe tacked it on as a conclusion to the second half of his Faust, but even there the break and the join are still visible, and the whole is not whole, as it is with the great musicians who retrieved for Germany the honour of participating in the highest theme of the Western world. In this field the highest is always the same, it is the whole—in this sense one may say of all classic art that it is based upon restraint and omission. In comparison with what is given, what may be left out is infinite. One thing only may not be omitted, namely, the whole, the totality—which is the meaning of the Aristotelean saying, so often and so grievously misinterpreted, that an artist should imitate Nature. What is meant here is not the *natura naturata*, but the *natura naturans*, which does not leave out the one thing essential, namely the whole. In a stone, for example, there is the whole of inanimate matter, in a leaf the entire vegetable kingdom, in a worm the entire animal kingdom, and in a single human being the entire creation, stone and plant and animal and mind. And again, in a stone, a leaf, a worm, a man there is, not the half, but the whole of the Creator, as Creator. It is in this double sense that an artist should imitate Nature, and it is thus that Virgil imitates it.

There is the whole of Rome in a single line of the



*Aeneid*; and in a single line, the whole of Virgil. All created things point toward something beyond and outside themselves. And so it is a characteristic of great poetry that it will always contain just so much of being and of truth as will go into it, and then something more, something in addition that lies beyond and exceeds itself. Fullness will be one of its characteristics; but of the greatest it will be not so much the fullness as the overflowing, a fullness so full that no comprehension could comprehend more. On the other hand the master is equally he who knows when to put a full stop. With amateurs it is apt to be a mere comma, an indication of their inability to punctuate at all. The period is a fundamental element of mastery. In Virgil both are there, both the stop and the overplus. *Ecce Poeta!* It has been said that Virgil plagiarised Theocritus and Homer, and could this be proved of the least of our present-day writers as indisputably as it can of Virgil, it would disgrace him for ever. But with Virgil something more enters in; in him we see again fulfilled the law that the higher includes the lower, as, for example, the animal includes the vegetable, and man both the animal and the vegetable. A poet may without blame plagiarise another who is on the same level as himself, provided only he is a greater poet than the one he plunders; how much the more so then, when he is on an objectively higher level! And this is Virgil's case, whose fullness and whose limits are

spiritually more abounding and more definitive than Homer's.

Those grandiose, sonorous epithets of Homer, which are the delight of every man with heart and ear alive to the fundamentals of poetry—epithets that accord with a direct, sensuous, passionate attitude toward life—do not figure in Virgil to the same extent. With him they have lost something of their sonorousness and their sensuousness. This is so not merely because of the less sonorous, less sensuous language, but rather because Virgil's epithets search more deeply into the invisible things of the spirit. Consider, for example, Aeneas. What are the epithets wherewith he is characterised?—First and foremost he is *pius*; then he is *pater*, father and friend; and finally, as leader, he is *magnanimus*.



## CHAPTER V

### LEADER AND MISSION

*ego poscor Olympo.*

THE German rendering of the Virgilian *pius* by *fromm* (pious) is a good translation ; it is good particularly for the inwardness and sincerity of the *pietas* of Aeneas. But it has the defect of neither comprehending nor expressing as clearly and categorically the outward factor inseparable from Virgilian piety ; indeed it tends rather to treat that as something inimical and opposed to true piety, and to emphasise the purely inward aspect of piety. In this it falsifies man, who is so wonderfully made up of spirit and of sense, of the inward and the outward, who possesses the quiet chamber of the secret heart and the city that is set on a hill, visible to all. Opposition between an outward piety that is no piety and an inward piety that scorns and belittles the outward piety, is not possible to pure spirits, for there all is inward, both form and content ; but for man this opposition does exist. The pagan Aeneas is not only inwardly pious, but outwardly is most careful to observe all the rites and sacrifices—indeed without this outward piety he would certainly not consider a man to be *pious*. This should be remembered when we speak of the *pious* Aeneas ; for, though the out-

ward practices of the Roman state religion are of no vital interest to us now ; though all the gods of Olympus (who, even for Virgil, are, with the exception of the rural gods, only so much beautiful poetry, possessed of a purely external symbolic significance) are as obsolete as the legal prescriptions of the ancient Jews, we are nevertheless still concerned for the principle of outward forms, without which there can be no lasting religion among men, and no *pietas*.

Out of Greeks and Romans came forth Christians ; and the Roman state—terrible in an actuality so universally accepted that neither of the prevailing philosophies of the day, Epicurean or Stoic, ventured on any political theory (a thing that could never happen with us, even under a dictatorship)—the Roman state itself, after kicking long against the pricks, at last voluntarily established Christianity as the state religion. For what inner reason, one asks, did it do this ? For it could never have been imposed from without : the Romans did not become Christian in the way that the Saxons became Christian—the Romans became Christians as the conquerors, not as the conquered ; as the civilisers and bringers of culture, not as the barbarians. The full, inner natural explanation (we do not speak of grace) is given by Virgil in the poetical figure of Aeneas, which was at once accepted and acknowledged by the best of the Romans to be the embodiment of the ideal Roman, as a man drawn from reality and called into reality.



Aeneas is pious, firstly in his capacity as a son. This relationship is the natural home of the Roman *pietas*. To be pious meant to be 'son,' and lovingly to fulfil the duties of the filial relationship. Love fulfilling duties, or rather the loving fulfilment of duties, this is the meaning of piety. Himself a father, the forefather of Caesar and Augustus, Aeneas saw in his own son and his son's son yet other ancestors and fathers of sons who should in their turn be pious toward their fathers and their ancestors. This interchangeable relationship of father and son, with the primacy of the father, is the basis of Virgilian piety. It is not for the sake of his beloved, not to recover the Queen, not to accomplish any heroic feat, but simply for the sake of his father that Aeneas goes down to the underworld, pressing on through Hades to the Elysian Fields, where his father welcomes him with tears :

*Venisti tandem, tuaque exspectata parenti  
vicit iter durum pietas ? datur ora tueri,  
nate, tua et notas audire et reddere voces*

(Art thou come at last, and hath the love thy father looked for vanquished the toilsome way ? Is it given me to see thy face, my son, and hear and utter familiar tones ?)

To which the son replies :

*Tua me genitor, tua tristis imago  
Saepius occurrens, haec limina tendere adegit.*

(Thy shade, father, thy sad shade, meeting me so oft, drove me to seek these portals.)

The source of this piety is the family, and especially the relationship of son to father and father to son, where it is a fond, familiar and simple thing. Nor does it lose any of its essential character when it plunges into the mystery of the incomprehensible and the divine, and in the service of the deity comes face to face with the foundations of existence.

Rebelliousness, whether Titanic or Promethean, whether from envy or sympathy, belongs to the nature of Western man ; but it forms only one ingredient, and one that is at the last acknowledged to be a fault, even a sin involving those who are guilty of it in sure punishment. This is a fact that deserves attention, especially by Germans, who have revived the Promethean and Titanic forms in the Faustian, before which even Goethe shrank a little at the close of the piece towards the end of his life. The so-called 'Faustian man,' about whom so much nonsense has been written, is not a new type of man in the sense that the pagan, the Jew and the Christian are types of man (*numero deus impari gaudet*, God delights in an odd number). The Faustian is merely a man of hypertrophied passions and atrophied intelligence, such as existed before among both Jews and pagans. But in the loftiest regions trodden by Jews and pagans there was no place for men who set God at defiance. Job buried the thought deep within himself, and the two greatest pagans, the secular fathers of the West, *vates gentilium*, Plato and Virgil, have left us in their ideal man not a single trace of defiance of the deity.



Nevertheless it is not a fact, as modern ignorance in its mania for setting up hard-and-fast types would have us believe, that Plato and Virgil knew nothing of the Faustian man. They knew him, not indeed in the form of his accidental temporal manifestation among us, as one expression of Protestant humanism, but in his essence, as one variety of the human spirit, and that a vicious one. There is in fact more to be learned of Faustian man from the dialogues of Plato than from Spengler himself, or at least more that is essential, for in Plato he is assigned his due place. And Virgil, who had had experience of both Sulla and Antony, at least knew what the so-called Faustian nature means in the political realm.

*Cede deo!* Aeneas early learned that lesson and commends it to others.—Yield to the god! If you find that a god is against you, acquiesce.—None had so harassed him, none so desired and schemed his destruction, as the all-powerful Juno. But he was told not to oppose, and he listened, and brought offerings instead; he worshipped, he implored, he propitiated her; and she was appeased, and restored him to harmony with his fate, for it had merely been a proving, a testing. All was now ready, and the way open for the greatest of all Christian virtues, humility. The father of the Roman Empire, after whose pattern all subsequent, and all future, empires have been and will be made—they are all but partial resuscitations of that one empire which never has been, and never will be, overthrown—the

father of that Empire was no proud man, but the pious Aeneas. He came very near to humility, and to the understanding which belongs to, and arises out of, humility, the realisation, namely, that all true human greatness grows from the least and the lowest things, and further that, if the reality of that greatness is not to be lost once it has attained to majesty and power, it must ever remember and keep close contact with that humble origin. *Paupere terra missus in imperium magnum*—from poor earth called to great empire. Where Rome now lifts its might toward heaven Aeneas saw, so Virgil reminds us, but a few poor walls, a fort and handful of scattered houses. Cattle grazed where now is the Forum Romanum, and the Capitol, now glittering with gold, was covered then with brambles; nevertheless a god already dwelt there, even Jupiter himself, whose right hand had oft been seen to shake the aegis and summon the storm-clouds. King Evander, who had been driven out of Arcadia and had built the town of Pallanteum on the Palatine hill, overlooking the Tiber, led Aeneas to his lowly dwelling. ‘The victorious Alcides deigned to enter these portals,’ said he; ‘this roof welcomed him. Mayest thou also, O my guest, have the spirit to scorn riches; like him, the god who walked beneath this roof, be not thou disdainful of our poverty!’ These lines, over which Fénelon shed tears, were learned by every Roman child, even in the reign of a Nero or a Heliogabalus. With each new generation they cannot but have fallen on some



fruitful soil—perhaps even into the heart of a child destined for empire.

In this world where man may sin it is of immense importance that a people should receive from its poets true and faithful doctrine concerning the nature of beauty. Virgil's doctrine is both great and pure. For upwards of a thousand years the *Aeneid* was the only profane book to rank with the Bible ; it was the book to which men turned in the hours of their greatest joys or adversities, of clearest light or profoundest darkness, the book in which through blind divination (the *sortes Vergilianae*) they sought to obtain oracular approval, consolation, enlightenment. This practice has persisted even into our own times. An English devotee of Virgil has told us that during the War he would occasionally open the *Aeneid* with this intention, and that once, after the Russian catastrophe, his eye fell upon the line that describes the end of Priam, the great King of Asia :

*iacet ingens litore truncus,  
avulsumque humeris caput et sine nomine corpus.*

(On the shore his great body lies, his head hewn from his shoulders—a nameless corpse.)

Next to the Bible it was *the* book. It is very remarkable that the only book to enjoy this distinction should have been not a Christian but a pagan book, not a Greek work, but a Latin, not Plato, but Virgil, not a philosopher but a poet—the poet who concluded the great line of poets stretching down-

wards from Homer and which includes all the Greek tragedians, especially Euripides.

Be it observed that it was not to us 'moderns' that Euripides first appealed as the most understandable of the tragedians. He was so for Aristotle, who called him the most tragic of poets ; he was so for Seneca, for Virgil, Plutarch, Racine ; and he has become so once again to us to-day. Humanism, that true subjectivism *conditioned by existence*, which for us Westerners lies at the very heart of things, had already achieved full consciousness in Aristotle. The Christian West is as much founded upon the fact that God became man as on the fact that God is God, and it is consequently in this middle region, the human, that the authentic art of the West lives. And though a very different thing after the Faith from what it was before it, nevertheless the humanity is always there, from Homer onwards, and at its most tragic in Euripides. The West has, no doubt, much to learn from Eastern theocratic art, and by contrast one cannot but deplore the decline of Western art into a godless humanism which no longer represents a balanced mean, but has become instead a goal and end in itself ; but far be it from us ever to surrender this fundamental principle of the West and Western art, the principle of humanity. Through the medium of Christianity humanity entered into the truth of God, not indeed to be overwhelmed and lost there but rather to abide and dwell in it.

The path to Virgil leads through and beyond



Greek philosophy ; it leads through the terrible, self-pitying anguish and inward agonies of the Imperium Romanum ; and it leads through and beyond the Alexandrines. From their influence also Virgil was not wholly free ; to them he owed on the positive side the strict schooling of his taste in small things. It was an ill repayment of this debt to allow Aeneas to repeat, in most unnecessary fashion, some part of the adventures of Odysseus ; they were appropriate enough to Odysseus and his world but most inappropriate to Aeneas ; by their introduction Virgil sacrificed the aesthetic unity of the whole. Odysseus's adventures are too puerile for Aeneas ; it is as if Napoleon or Bismarck—though indeed this is to belittle the case—were to experience the adventures of Robinson Crusoe or the Path-finder. They are incongruous, and though in themselves not infrequently masterpieces of literary art, in the context they are nevertheless mere extraneous ornament. For with Aeneas an entirely new factor enters into the scheme, a factor which marks him off sharply from all Homer's heroes—Aeneas had a mission to fulfil, and he knew it. He did not know how it was to be fulfilled, and but dimly guessed its full significance ; still, he did know it, and that unshakably, though now in torment and fear, now in exultation and blessed assurance. The same King Evander who addressed to Aeneas that exhortation to humility which we have already quoted, also said to him : *'Fatis huc te poscentibus affers, 'Tis at the call and*

summons of Fate that thou comest hither,' and again, 'Thou art he on whose years and race Fate smiles'—*quem numina poscunt*, whom Heaven demands and will have. And again shortly afterwards, when recalling the dramatic moment in which his mother promised him the shield of Vulcan, Aeneas himself give the clear, and confident response : *'Ego poscor Olympo, 'tis I who am demanded of Heaven ; I am called.'* Thrice within the space of sixty lines the divine mission of Aeneas is affirmed with the self-same verb, *poscere*, which means 'to ask for,' not merely in the sense of desiring to have, but also in the sense of insisting upon having. And what Olympus 'must have' will surely come to pass, for, even before it comes to pass, it already *is*.



## CHAPTER VI

### ODYSSEUS AND AENEAS

It was twenty long years before Odysseus at last returned to his homeland—returned poor, naked and a beggar, it is true, but a conqueror. He returned and found again there almost everything that home stands for ; he found his island, his earth, the place where as a child he had first known the light and beauty of the world ; his old father was still there, his wife and his son, his faithful hound—surely the very picture of a happy home-coming ! But what of Aeneas—to what did he come ? Does he really resemble Odysseus at any point ? No—there is no greater difference within the whole compass of ancient literature ; and to understand that is to see how absurd are those critics who would dismiss Virgil contemptuously as a mere plagiarist and imitator of Homer. There is no more profound or astonishing originality in all the literature of antiquity than Virgil's ; and that precisely because it operates within the limits imposed by the inherited and traditional forms, which it reverently observes. But to return to Aeneas—does he, like Odysseus, come back to the land of his childhood ? We are told incidentally, it is true, that Aeneas's ancestors had once dwelt in Italy, but this is mere political

rhetoric, and has nothing to do with the story proper, the personal fate of Aeneas, where in fact it is entirely forgotten. Aeneas did not return to the home of his childhood ; on the contrary, he left it, and he left it as a fugitive (*fato profugus*)—witness the fact that Turnus, who had always remained at home in Latium, refers to him contemptuously and reproachfully as *desertorem Asiae*, deserter of Asia, a coward forgetful of his duty, flying from the colours. And this of Aeneas, of the ancestor of Caesar, of the mirror of Augustus ! Aeneas was no victorious Greek, but a defeated Trojan like Hector. In that night of horror and desolation in the burning city of Troy, his wife, *dulcis conjunx*, had perished, and alone he had carried away his aged father and the *penates* ; beside him, hardly able to keep pace with him, ran his little son. His father died on the journey—the father of *pius Aeneas* whose very life, the inmost spring of whose being was love of his father and his father's love of him—and he buried him. So far as he alone was concerned, so far as concerned only his own selfish will, his personal inclination, his own earth-bound, memory-bound desires, it is true he would rather have turned back to build old Troy again. Yet he dared not ; for Fate, the will of the all-powerful, had bidden him seek out a new homeland—Italy. So armed only in the might of *virtus*, he went forward against the malignity of *Fortune* ; for Aeneas never had fortune with him in the way that Odysseus always had.



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

(Learn virtue from me, child, and true toil ; learn fortune from others.)

And with the help of war (though a thing in itself hateful) he made his way against the opposition of men ; he made it despite the jealousy of the lesser gods, despite the promptings of his own desire, despite even pity ; against his own will, and strong only in the strength of submission and the supreme might of Fate, he went on to find Italy, his new home. *Italiam non sponte sequor*—Not of my own will I seek Italy.

*Me si fata meis paterentur ducere vitam  
auspiciis, et sponte mea componere curas ;  
urbem Troianam primum, dulcesque meorum  
reliquias colerem*

(Did the Fates but suffer me to shape my life after my own pleasure and order my sorrows at my own will, my first care would be the city of Troy and the sweet relics of my kin.)

In all pre-Christian literature there are no more Christian lines than these. Sainte-Beuve hardly penned a truer line—though a bold one and one open to misunderstanding—than when he wrote : *La venue même du Christ n'a rien qui étonne, quand on a lu Virgile*. Against his will then Aeneas journeyed to that Italy which he knew not, and which was full of perils. But even as he listened to the mysterious, unsearchable higher will, gradually there kindled within him,

and burned into the very marrow of his soul, a longing that was prepared for any sacrifice, for this second homeland, for Italy, which as yet was his only in the command of Jupiter, a land of promise from which he was still separated by long, and ever longer, trackless ways, *viae inviae*. Thus Virgil breathed into his hero that love for Italy, not merely for Rome, which was his own ; for Virgil was not merely a Roman, he was an Italian also.

How full of paradox, how dialectical is the inner life of Aeneas ! Does he in this resemble any of Homer's heroes ? Though remote in time, of another race, and of another country, yet in spirit, which knows no distinctions of time or race or country, is he not akin rather to Abraham, the father of the faith ? Did not Abraham also have to leave the homeland of his heart, and, for the sake of the faith and in obedience to an inscrutable will, a *fatum*, take upon himself the sorrow and bitter smart of memory, which for star-bound man is the meaning of a change of homeland. So it was with Aeneas.

It is of the essence of the greatness and artistic unity of the Homeric poems—a unity irretrievably lost to us—that these men could say, and in fact did say what they lacked and what they had. (For man this is unity : though he have, yet will he also lack.) And even where they do not say it, but speak falsely, theirs is no more than a simple *dolus*, akin to animal cunning in the animal world. The Homeric heroes



can state plainly their truths and their falsehoods, and both are in the nature of self-revelations. But Aeneas cannot do this. Like all reticent men, he can speak only the truth that is in him, and that only occasionally and darkly. And again, like all reticent men, be they so from necessity or of their own free will, he makes no such brave figure as Achilles or Odysseus ; it is easy to misunderstand him, as it is not the cunning Odysseus, or the transparent Achilles. Perhaps Virgil is here throwing some light upon the difficult character of Augustus—was he too, and of necessity, reticent ? (which is, of course, not the same thing as ‘sullen’). Aeneas is a grave man, *gravis*, a man burdened with one idea—for having many thoughts makes a man light, but having few and anxious thoughts makes him grave ; and the burden of one thought only will make him grave indeed. It was this that made him a leader ; this that made him the founder of Rome. At all events Virgil is not here drawing simply upon his imagination ; this is no mere poetic invention. He here makes explicit in truth and in beauty what had for so long lain implicit in the character of Rome itself. And with one accord, without a moment of hesitation, Rome accepted and sanctioned this explanation of herself at the hands of her greatest poet. That is an historical fact, and a highly significant one ; for what a people endorses and appropriates for ever to itself from the writings of its greatest poet is always something that is at once both a self-confession and a self-revelation. Goethe,

for example, would never have been able to foist Faust upon the German people if he had not really belonged to them. Any historian who would omit from his history such a fact brought to light by a poet, leaves out a great deal, and not infrequently the whole ; he denies himself a master-key, and seals up the one clear and abundant source of understanding.

Rome had no original speculative philosophers, but she did possess great practical, realistic thinkers, and her greatest was a poet, Virgil. All the great and simple things of our reality have been meditated by him. That ideal of the man of mind, the spiritual man, union of contemplative sage and creative artist, was realised only twice in the classical world—first in Greece by Plato who was thinker and poet, after the Greek fashion ; and then in Rome by Virgil who was poet and thinker, after the Roman fashion. (Among the Jews of pre-Christian times, that is of the Old Testament, this union was practically never broken ; none was there a poet without being also a sage, and none a sage without being also a poet.) Virgil has demonstrated that Rome was fully conscious of her own character, both as to the things she lacked and as to the things she possessed to overflowing. She acknowledged without envy the superior gifts of the Greeks in the fine arts and in philosophy, though hardly in literature ; and with unshakable steadfastness and confidence she devoted herself to her mission—itself also an art—to the mission of



governing. But her mission—and here is a fact often ignored and easily forgotten—her mission was not primarily based upon force. Where that alone exists as a foundation, Virgil's condemnation is unequivocal. Not only is Catiline—that true political criminal, *contemptor divum*, despiser of the gods—hateful to him, but for him Sulla and Antony—brutal generals without any of the *magnanimitas* of true statesmen—also share the fate of the political criminals of Dante. He blames even the great Caesar, because he did not rule *more patrum*, after the manner of the fathers. Rome's mission was essentially not founded upon force ; it was power rather, and based upon certain great and simple virtues, chief of which was *pietas*, love fulfilling duty, whose political expression is justice. Hence the paradox of a Rome founded not by a conqueror but by a defeated man. Let King Pyrrhus or any other petty tyrant preen himself because Achilles, the unconquered, was his ancestor ; Rome was for Hector. And Aeneas, the fugitive, who after one defeat built a new city, was the ancestor of Caesar and Augustus. No State that would stand, still less an empire that would endure, was made of the Greeks, for all their qualities ; neither would Achilles serve, for all his impetuous storming to victory and, equally impetuously, to a profitless death ; nor yet Odysseus—he knew too much, he was too fickle and he had too large a sense of humour, a thing which may easily prove an insuperable obstacle to successful statecraft. The ancestors of

Rome were required to be builders and rebuilders, not destroyers, of cities. The Greeks built cities too, of course ; they gave us the very name and science of politics ; they taught us to understand wherein the essence of it lies, namely in that justice which accords to each man his own, not merely to each man the same, but to each man differently, for the reason that each is not only like, but also different from, every other man. The Greeks—I mean the philosophers, not the politicians—understood this science and gave it its name ; but a *real* State that should *last* they were unable to build. The Greek did build cities, it is true, but he built them only once ; when they were destroyed he did not build them again. But Aeneas would have built Troy again had Fate willed it ; instead he built Latin towns. Though Rome was to be destroyed many times, it would always be built up again.

It is truths of this order that lie hidden in the *Aeneid* ; truths which, though through long periods they may fail to be appreciated, will again suddenly flash out brilliantly in the light of their own truth, touched anew into life by some catastrophe of the time. Virgil is the only pagan who takes rank with the Jewish and Christian prophets ; the *Aeneid* is the only book, apart from Holy Scriptures, to contain sayings that are valid beyond the particular hour and circumstance of their day, prophecies that re-echo from the doors of eternity, whence they first draw their breath :



*His ego nec metas rerum, nec tempora pono :  
imperium sine fine dedi.*

(To these I have set bounds neither in space nor in time ; dominion have I given thee without end.)

—so runs the *fatum Jovis*. For, whether we like it or not, whether we know it or not, we are all still members of that *Imperium Romanum*, which finally and after terrible errors accepted Christianity *sua sponte*, of its own free-will—a Christianity which it could not abandon now without abandoning itself and humanism too. The *Imperium Romanum*, which Virgil knew in all its natural grandeur and revealed in the splendour of beauty, is no hazy ideal ; nor is it merely a true ideal, but a reality, deep though that reality may at times lie buried. The thing ‘Rome’ is not idea alone, though a true one, but actuality, *res*, a thing of flesh and blood. Wherever there is the will and urge to empire, the measure of its wisdom or its excess, of its blessing or its curse, is to be determined by the standards of the enduring reality of the *Imperium Romanum*. And it is so still even where anarchy and ignorance, the results of a spiritual back-sliding, are so great that they despise or fail to see these real relationships.

A revival of this empire, which has never quite perished, could only be effected in one of two ways. It might be brought about through some renewal of the *Pax Romana*, whereby the Western world might be denationalised and levelled ; this would be possible only if one nation were by force to gain over-

whelming ascendancy over all the rest, and it would be the greatest crime against both humanity and Christianity. For to-day no nation enjoys such pre-eminence above the rest as did the Romans in their day (and even they with their *Pax Romana* did not accomplish any particularly lovely thing). Moreover the value of the ‘nation’ has been magnified by Christianity, in that the value of the ‘individual,’ the ‘person’ thereby came to be infinite. It is *not* required of us that we should denationalise, and thereby renounce, our individuality, our uniqueness. Leveling in the spiritual realm is antichristian. Before ‘the embannered throne of God’ are ranged the angels of each nation—and who will level angels ?

The second way which, through mutual understanding, conciliation and respect, would preserve all that is valuable in each nation, thereby uniting all in one higher commonwealth—which could only be a spiritual one—is infinitely the better. But this spiritual commonwealth must omit nothing essential in what has gone before, neither pagan Rome, which in Virgil became adventist, nor Christian Rome, which is also adventist, but must be in the nature of a fulfilment and transcendence to a new age, and in the spiritual form of faith, hope and love.

It has not been difficult to find a *leitmotiv* for the *Bucolics* and the *Georgics* ; in the former it is *Amor vincit omnia* ; in the latter, *Labor omnia vincit improbus* ; in the one, the elemental power of Eros, the force, the urge that is in creative, procreative, fruitful nature



to which man himself belongs ; in the other—and here we have already entered a more spiritual world—that sublimely antithetic, yet welded, unity of substance and attribute, *labor improbus*, a blessing from a curse, a blessing not to be had except under the compulsion of the curse. The greatness of Virgil's art, one of which only a powerful intellect and no mere impetuous emotion is capable, achieves its zenith in *labor improbus*, this bold, clear and realistic antithesis of a blessing and a curse. But in the *Aeneid*, whose theme is the leader—primarily the political leader and only secondarily the warrior—the implications are still more numerous, so that no one phrase suffices to comprehend or fully to express its content. Yet there is perhaps one ; let us examine it. The theme

:Aeneas—Aeneas, the leader toward the glory of Rome. But the true leader—and this, be it remembered, was Virgil's opinion after a century of civil war—the true leader is not he who makes himself leader, but he who is called and dedicated to that end by Fate. Whoever would elevate himself to that position without the will of Fate is abhorrent to Virgil's theological soul.

The content of the *Aeneid* is a hazy, inchoate theology expectant of the inseminating spirit—the best of which paganism was capable before the fullness of time was come. Paganism as it existed before Christ is no more to be revived than is the Jewish world before Christ. The decisive difference between the submissive adventist humanity of a Virgil and the

pale, decadent humanism of the so-called humanists of the Renaissance lies in the fact that, whereas the one was a material soil awaiting the springing seed, the other was a sort of horticulture occupied with growing cuttings from lovely pot-plants ; the one, a womb of longing which cried aloud for fulfilment ; the other a mere precautionary measure which, if the worst come to the worst, should serve to hide from men's eyes for a few centuries approaching disaster. The Classicists pretend to see in Virgil their own image ; yet, whereas he has denied nothing of his, not an iota of the tragedy and shame, they have often in the ultimate things denied the past of their ancestors, so that it seems unlikely that their opinions will be respected in the future which lies ahead, but rather that they in their turn will be denied by their offspring. A humanism devoid of theology cannot stand. To-day men are searching desperately for 'Man,' but they seek what does not exist, namely autonomous Man. If they would find the *whole* man, they must not mistake the part for the whole, but, what is more important and more essential, must see that man realises his wholeness only in the fact that he is wholly *creature* and cries out *unceasingly* for his Creator when He is not near, even as a child cries for its mother.



## CHAPTER VII

### FATE

*et sic fata Jovis poscunt.*

THE typical theological term of the *Aeneid* is not any one of the many names of the gods of Olympus, but the word *fatum*. Great poetry is not, of course, theoretical speculation ; nevertheless the *Aeneid* is grounded in this mystery, which, though in its nature unfathomable and of all things the least knowable, is yet in its actual operation most manifest. This word *fatum* with its long *a* is woven into the texture of hundreds of lines ; whenever Aeneas is meditating most deeply, whenever he is suffering most profoundly, whenever he has to do violence to the dictates of his own heart, this thread reappears upon the surface of the wondrously woven fabric. It is his last comfort when he is beginning to despair ; it is his final justification when, guiltless, he appears guilty before Dido. Does Virgil anywhere tell us then, plainly and unambiguously, what fate is ? He does not, for he does not know ; he is too great and too honest to pretend to know more than he does. In this reverence that he pays to the unsearchable he only does honour to himself. In the clearest language in all the world he speaks darkly, thereby clearly

showing that he is talking of the darkest mystery of all being. He is dark, not because he stands in the twilight of decline, but because he stands in the first radiance of the advent. He stammers, not because he has lapsed into speechless unreason, into pre-human chaos, but because he is near to the fountain of the speech of mankind, which fountain is the speech of the Deity, nay, is the Deity Himself. If to-day a man were asked to name the word which as far as possible will be valid as the final explanation of all things, whether of appearance or reality, he would not hesitate long, for it is a word which he often uses. The word is 'fate.' On reflection he would perhaps feel disposed to remark that it seems to be our fate these days to have to talk constantly of fate. Fate too is the word which any translator of Virgil would use without hesitation to render *fatum*, and that not merely for metrical reasons, because it fits most readily into the rhythm, but deliberately, for considered reasons. *Fatum* ? What else is it if not fate ? But here lurk the profoundest, the most tragic of misunderstandings, the outcome of distinctions based upon radically different meanings of the word. Language is a reckless betrayer of thought.

For the moderns fate is primarily a matter of the will and the act, though ultimately and necessarily based upon the urge, the primal urge, which itself is exalted into the Deity. Ever since the German Faust violated the truth in its theological, philosophic and philological aspects by substituting the phrase 'In



the beginning was the Act' for 'In the beginning was the Word,' the German genius has fallen into confusion without end. In comparison with the immense consequences of this spiritual crime, this personification of an absurdity, the whole mischief of Nietzsche fades into insignificance as but one symptom of the malignant influence of this word, this *act*, nay, this *crime* upon which generations have been nourished in ridiculous and pitiful pride. It has extinguished the light of intelligence, making of it what all the modern sophists make of it, a perversion that interferes with the free operation of the Act *which was in the beginning*. It is a fallacy that denies the foundations of humanity as we received them from Greece and Rome, of that adventist humanity which has its beginning and its end in the Logos. Language is a faithful betrayer of thought. As it is easy for the Germans, with their word *Schicksal*, to misconceive the intellectual foundations of being, so it is difficult for the Latins even in their darkest moments to lose sight of it, so deeply embedded does it lie in their language. What is the meaning of *fatum*? Etymologically, literally, it is that which someone has spoken, or, more simply, a thing spoken, an *utterance*. The ultimate reason for all human happenings, for all events in this world, is an utterance. *Fatum*, as Virgil understood it, comes from the mystery of light, not of darkness. Both the light and the darkness are mysteries, the one the mystery of the divine self-transparent spirit, the other the mystery of the

absolute incomprehensibility of chaos, which even to itself is incomprehensible. But for mankind there is a difference between them, the difference between hope and despair, between joy or happiness even in the midst of sorrow and horror, and anguish even in the midst of gaiety. *Fatum* is an utterance. But by whom and to whom? The great mystery, concerning which human speech is so obscure that whoever speaks lightly and clearly of it thereby only proves himself an idle prater, is that it is the thing spoken of itself to itself. To express it otherwise is not possible. The darkest of all things may be insupportable light.

Our moderns tell us that all things come from the darkness and some time or other return to the darkness, and they are seemingly content to leave it at that. Nietzsche belonged to what one might almost call classical humanism; for he at least understood the meaning of 'totality' and its clear alternatives—either this or that. He knew that either God is or He is not. The question for him therefore was one of existence, not of essence. If God exists, then it is in the way spoken of by conscience, the Church and the Bible. But since, for Nietzsche, this essence fails to achieve being or actuality, then God does not exist. Scheler on the other hand, who is a much more dangerous detractor, has turned romantic and fallen away from the heights of the classic view according to which the all-important thing for mankind is to be clear upon the *existence* or *non-existence* of God. Scheler allows that God *is*, but says that He is weak, and



powerless to exceed His nature (holiness) even by one inch, though thereby to attain its summit, which is existence. There can be no question but that this inexistentiality of the essence of God which only 'becomes,' may cause greater confusion and clouding of the mind than could the classic atheism of Nietzsche which would deny the existence of God on grounds of inessentiality. According to Nietzsche God is an *empty* conception, therefore He does not exist; according to Scheler the God of Christianity is the fullness of all *conceptions*, but this fullness is one that only 'becomes'; the god that exists is quite another, namely the Urge. But Virgil's *fatum* has a spiritual-intellectual basis, is itself a spiritual-intellectual basis. The ultimate being is an utterance. Only occasionally and at second-hand is the *fatum* foretold to some chosen man, as it was to Aeneas by the prophetess. And even she revealed the light through a dark word, speaking the truth of the *fatum* in conundrums, *obscuris vera involvens*. Truth is a necessary predicate of the Virgilian *fatum*, for the first question which is asked of an utterance is whether it is true or false; only afterwards do questions arise as to its desirability or not, whether it is obligatory or free, good or bad.

The ultimate being is an utterance. This is the profoundest mystery to which adventist paganism penetrated; it is the last that may be said even now. Within the precincts of this darkness there shines a light which if uncovered would destroy mankind; here

Virgil makes his way gropingly one step forward. The impersonal, neutral medium remains, either as *fatum* or as *lumen*, but the passage is at last surely, if hesitatingly, made to the divine Person who not merely gives effect to the utterance, the Fate, but who Himself utters it—whence it appears that the thing uttered, the Fate, *is* the utterer. The usual view of the ancient idea of fate is that, like the modern fate, it is the inexplicable power which, being in its unchanging essence impenetrable darkness, has even the gods under it; especially is this the view nowadays, when belief in fate, and nothing less than blind fate, appears to be the only religion. And it is true, in that Virgil's fate did in fact stand above all the gods but one. No other god, not even Juno, the mightiest, could alter fate, any more than the truth is to be altered; even Juno, calling upon the powers of Hell itself—*Acheronta movebo*—can do no more than delay or put off the fulfilment of Fate. And this very fact is *fatum*; she herself knows it and says so. There is none of the gods or goddesses, to say nothing of mankind, who would not like at one time or another to change the fate, if they only could—all of them would do so, all but one, namely Jupiter, *pater omnipotens*, the almighty father. He is the guarantor who gives effect to the fate. But this is merely an external relationship—Jupiter also may be regarded as subject to Fate, in that he *must* give it effect, *must* carry it out. So the next step had to be taken: Jupiter cannot alter the Fate, for it is



stronger than he, though he have all power ; he cannot change it, for the fate is his fate—*et sic fata Jovis poscunt*—he is at once the utterer and the utterance ; he himself is the fate ; in him there exists no external relationship to fate, that he should be able to will a thing otherwise than as he has spoken, to desire it otherwise than as he has said and done. This is the summit and perfection of Virgil's theological ideas—*haec summa est*. In the First Book Jupiter, by way of reassuring her, explains to his daughter Venus, the mother of Aeneas, what is *his* fate—*his, the Father's* fate, for here *fatum* is subjective, and not, as for the other gods and for men, an objective happening which they must accept—and he concludes with the final mystery : *sic placitum*, it is decreed. Who has decreed ?—it is a dull mind that does not ask this question. Fate has decreed. But how ? What is it, this fate ? It is a sorry world that can be content with an impersonal, a neuter, *fatum*. It is decreed. By whom ? By me, Jupiter ! The adventist paganism of Virgil and the Stoics in this phrase anticipated one of the revealed mysteries of Christianity, the *beneplacitum Dei*. *Bene* is the new thing, the evangel. The last, inevitable step taken by the pagan world was belief in a fate identical with the chief of its gods, with Jupiter. It belongs to the fullness of Virgilian humanity not to shrink from the seeming paradox, but to respect the mystery and to believe in a divine fate, without prejudice to the freedom of the will and the responsibility of man.

This twofold mystery is 'fulfilled' through Christianity in the *beneplacitum Dei* of the Triune God who is both the spirit and the life, a *beneplacitum Dei* as inscrutable and incorruptible as the old fate, but dark, not through darkness, but through excess of light, and bringing suffering not through arbitrariness but from wisdom—not mere perfect justice but the very flame and fire of love. In fate Virgilian humanism acknowledged preordination, and that *labor improbus* through which mankind in freedom creates culture, just as Christianity acknowledges foreordaining grace and the fact that man must work out his own salvation. A humanism that would surrender either one of these mysteries surrenders both—indeed surrenders all mystery whatever—and must rank far below the Virgilian. Nothing that man may say when talking of ultimate things is worth saying if it is less than this *placitum*, this decree by Jupiter who is fate, or contrary to the Christian *beneplacitum Dei* ; it is then only weariness and torment of spirit.

For all that is done in heaven and on earth the final reason is the *beneplacitum Dei*, *le bon plaisir de Dieu*, for which German has the beautiful word *Wohlfallen*—a possession which may well vex and even infuriate our Kantians, who are the very antipodes of Job, the father in suffering to us all. Here is the identification of the ethical with the aesthetic, or rather—dare we say ?—the priority of the aesthetic, at least in its transcendental form as holiness, as glory. The *beneplacitum Dei* is the *σκάνδαλον* of the



angels, of pure spirits ; it was the cause of the fall of Lucifer. It is the mystery of mysteries. It is the infinite source of mystery. Of two righteous men to prefer one, to love him before the other, is this not to exceed justice ? It is, or at least would appear so. Is it then also to exceed love ? No ! (And because love is the perfection of justice neither does it exceed justice.) It is its fulfilment, its overflowing—its freest giving of itself.

That a thing may be an ever-increasing mystery to us does not mean that it must be something wholly alien to us, the more alien the more its mystery deepens into the unfathomable ; rather is it true that the nearer, the more closely akin to us the thing is, the greater the mystery. Man needs but to contemplate his own body, his own soul, and he is plunged into depths of the incomprehensible such as no block of stone, no animal or plant—though these are more truly alien to him—can open up. And is not the absolute mystery, God Himself, nearest to man of all things, nearer to him than he is to himself, and yet even more incomprehensible ? Surely it is so, for is not that the most blessed experience of the saints ? But if man is so great a mystery to himself, is he in this also an image of God ? In a certain sense, yes. Is God then also a mystery to Himself ? In a certain sense, yes. In that case then is not the mystery more than God ? And precisely that was the final position of authentic paganism—for it the mystery is *more* than God<sup>†</sup>; out of the night which *abides*, comes the ephe-

meral light, which only *perhaps* may abide, whether for a day or for a whole aeon, but equally well may be extinguished—and at the last surely will be extinguished. But the Stoics and the poet Virgil came near to the Christian belief that God is light, and everlasting light. And is not light also ‘mystery’ ? Yes, unfathomable, worshipful ! *Lumen adorabile !* Yes, yes, thrice and everlastingly, yes ! But with what difference—a universe of difference, and that universe the universe of God ! There is One to Himself transparent, One that sees Himself in the light that is Himself, seen only by the blessed, and by them only in the ‘sight’ of God Himself—a mystery. The equating of mystery with night and darkness is the supreme mischief and folly of our time. Though the light is darker and more unfathomable to us than the night, it is as ‘light,’ as ‘light,’ as ‘light,’ as Triune Light.



## CHAPTER VIII

### TEARS

*sunt lacrimae rerum.*

BETWEEN man and fate lies an ocean of tears ; Virgil knew that. And Aeneas, the ancestor of Caesar, Aeneas, the great hero who not only bore his aged father and the penates on his strong shoulders from the burning city of Troy, but who, a second Atlas, took upon himself the immense burden of the responsibility for all the deeds and misdeeds of posterity and of that Imperium Romanum which was never to be overthrown and which still lives on subterraneously—this Aeneas, exemplar of the Roman hero, would seem at times almost to have had the gift of tears, the *donum lacrimarum*. Unrestrainedly, naturally, unsentimentally, in most un-Roman fashion, tears would fill the great leader's eyes in response to events which, as we are told in one immortal line, demanded and could be discharged by no other answer.

In the First Book we are told how Aeneas after escaping the perils of the sea, reaches Carthage and, roaming unrecognised through the halls of Dido's palace, is suddenly confronted by the pictures of the fall of Troy. Overcome with emotion he sees again all those things which he himself had experienced and

suffered. The lights swim before his eyes, *natantia lumina*, and he, a Roman and chief ideal of the Romans, utters the words : *sunt lacrimae rerum*, words which, together with the other countless lines upon fate, make up a whole philosophy of life. This is the most untranslatable half-line in the whole of the *Aeneid*, and for that matter, in the whole of Roman literature—it is not to be translated into German, nor any Romance language, nor yet even into English. It is Latin through and through. Not only does it tell us there are things over which men will shed tears—that is but the first and obvious interpretation ; it tells us also that things themselves have tears ; or rather, that there are things to which there is no answer but tears ; things that cannot really be faced or fully known but through tears—and sometimes not even through them : *aut possit lacrimis aequare labores*, can tears outweigh our toils ? None but the bloody tears of the Son of Man, the Second Person of the Trinity. All that in three words ! No language but Latin could do it.

This half-line, which reveals the Virgilian view of the world, contains also the key-word, the kernel, of the Latin speech, the word *res*. The invisible and peculiar spirit of a people is manifest in all its outward and visible activities, but most clearly in the living body of its language. And in every such body of language we detect from time to time words that are its heart-tones, words that reveal to us by what things this heart sets most store, what is its constant



care, what its hopes, its sufferings, joys, and desires. These heart-words, these most intimate words in a language, are for that very reason the most untranslatable. If one is really concerned that they should be understood then it is best to leave them as they are, for really to understand such words one must first have mastered the whole language.

In the case of Greek, for example, one of its heart-words is *logos*, the spiritual all that penetrates and gives meaning to all things—to everything, from the article upwards, from the least particle of language to Deity itself. Other languages, when they would express this meaning, do best to leave it its original sound and name, and to say simply *logos*. So too for the French language, its heart-word is *raison*—with them a substance of such extraordinarily diverse activity as to coin a verb, *raisonner*, of its own, and of an ubiquitousness and general validity such as no other language can equal; it is best referred to, therefore, by its French name. So in English the word *sense* is one of its heart-words—sense is a richly organised, unmistakably individual concretion of sensuality and spirituality, compound of pragmatic intelligence and the intellectual-sensuous faculty, such as has been developed in no other language, and whose meaning is, therefore, clearest when given its own name, whether as the *moral sense* or as *common sense*; it may, of course, have yet profounder significances, as for instance, when Cardinal Newman speaks of the *illative sense*, the faculty of inference.

For German, *das Wesen* is one of its heart-words, one whose meaning is not easily accessible to foreigners, for it says more and goes deeper than *essentia*, the word that all other European peoples are obliged to use in its stead. *Essentia* is a substantive without any proper verb of its own, whereas the German *Wesen* can be both substantive and verb in one. German is the only European language which has yet another word, the verb *wesen*, with which to differentiate among the many meanings of that most difficult of all words, the verb 'to be.' This word *Wesen* is of the very essence and destiny of German philosophy, it is responsible both for its felicities and its infelicities, accountable both for its truths and its fallacies. And just as *logos*, *raison*, *sense*, *Wesen* are heart-words of the several languages to which they belong, so *res* is a heart-word for Latin. And like all such heart-words it is essentially untranslatable. Whatever the translation, not excluding the most felicitous—and the German and English translations, *Ding*, *thing*, are happy, or at any rate happier than the French *chose*, which introduces the dynamic element of the *causa* into the predominantly static character of the Latin *res*—any translation must inevitably enfeeble or distort the inner structure of its meaning, a meaning that could have arisen only out of a unique attitude towards, and special aptitude for, the practical life.

The Roman has given the word *res* to the entire world. There is no European people, nor before long will there be any people over the whole earth,



who can refer to the logic of being otherwise than by the word *logic*, for which we are eternally beholden to the Greeks ; and so there is no people who can speak of *reality* otherwise than by the word *real*, for which we are eternally beholden to ancient Rome. *Res* means *thing* and the relations of things ; it means affairs and the state of affairs ; it is being and movement in one, but with the emphasis on things, affairs, and on being, and not, as with the German *Wirklichkeit* (actuality), on the dynamic relation, on the event, the movement. The Roman speaks not of *Staatswesen* (the State) but of *res publica* ; fortune, he calls favourable things, *res secundae* ; misfortune, unfavourable things, *res adversae* ; and history is the *res*. The Roman historian does not write about ideas or culture as concepts, as 'becoming,' he writes about things ; he is *rerum scriptor*. The only Roman to bear the distinctive mark of the philosopher—which is a passion for knowledge and theoretical truth, *rerum cognoscere causas*—who was also a great writer, discoursed not of physics, metaphysics, the soul, logic, number, the good, the beautiful and the true, but *de rerum natura*, of the nature of things—by which is meant all things, everything, the entire universe including man and his soul, his hope and hopelessness. To the Roman Rome is the head of the world, the head of things, *caput rerum*, *domina rerum* ; Caesar is guardian of the world, *i.e.* of things, *custos rerum* ; Rome in all its fullness, Rome as city and state, Rome as senate and people, Rome as peace and culture, as piety and

justice, Rome as Caesar and Empire, is not primarily an idea, but, in the words of Virgil, who is the greatest of Romans, it is *maxima rerum*, greatest of all things ; nay, *pulcherrima rerum*, loveliest of all things, the glory of all human affairs.

From this exposition of the meaning and place of the word *res* in the nature and life and language of the Roman people, let us return to that heart-word of Virgil and of the *Aeneid*—to the phrase : *sunt lacrimae rerum*. *Things* have their tears. *Things* : all things, the whole world, which in turn only exists through fate, for fate belongs to the things of this world, to the *res*. Tears are a constituent part of this world, whence adventist paganism looked with longing for another. *Sunt lacrimae rerum*—this was said by a Roman but a few years before the birth of Christ. He was not an old man that he should say it, nor is it a sentimental saying, but an ontological. Neither are they the words of an effeminate or faint-hearted spirit, for Virgil was masculine and brave ; they are the language of an incorruptible spirit stating the truth about the structure and elements of existence. An ancient Roman may be accused of many things, but certainly not of sentimentality. And though Virgil was surely the most humane, the most sensitive, the gentlest, the most vulnerable, the shyest spirit of all antiquity, he was not sentimental. Not one trace of it is to be found in this singer of the Roman Empire at the summit of its greatness, this poet who so frankly and consciously celebrates the one truly original art



of the Roman people, the art of government—an art that is no stranger to many faults and iniquities, such as cruelty and even brutality, and ignorance and disregard of the higher things; but of necessity sentimentality is not one of those faults. And yet, or perhaps for the very reason that the world, the things, the *res* cannot subsist in this dispensation without the state and its power, without empire, without government, without war-making, all of which have claimed so many tears—because of these things this is a true saying: *sunt lacrimae rerum*. Not a sentimental saying, but an ontological.

Virgil is Rome's greatest and only tragedian; he is tragic because the things, the *res* are so. And in Latin *res* means all things, the whole world. The last line of the *Aeneid* is a tragic line; it is a beautiful, powerful line, full of truth and life, of essence and reality; it is a virile, unflinching line, which asks implicitly the eternal question, the eternal why, and knows no answer; it is a line grounded deeply in the reality of existence, a sweet, a bitter line—bitterness had ever the sweetest lines—a bitter, tragic line:

*Vitaque cum gemitu fugit INDIGNATA sub umbras.*

The finest line of the First Eclogue, which was written in Virgil's youth, ends with the ominous word *umbra*:

*Maioresque cadunt altis de montibus umbrae,*  
(Longer fall the shadows from the towering hills).

And the last line written by Virgil in his manhood ends with this same word, *umbra*:

*Vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras.*

But how the scene has altered! From the idyllic line of the First Eclogue with its quiet music inviting to slumber, to the last tragic line of the *Aeneid* in which the unblessed goes to his death; from that line where music so sweetly, unforgettably moving through singing eternities, prevails over all, over subject and image and thought, to this last line where the music almost is mute, is still, ceases in blood-stifled sighs, silent to sense, but to the spiritual ear eloquent still of the unredeemed tragedy of a human soul leaving this earth, *INDIGNATA*; from that first wondrous, youthful line, which none hears but with ever fresh delight, where the shadows, though sad indeed, are but announcing with joy the coming of the vast choir of the stars of the night, calling down from the heights the light-song of the spheres and from the depths the music of streams—to this last line written in manhood, where of all this world's glory is left now only an *umbra*, a shadow, ghostly and mocking, a shade, the utterly despairing shade of a desperately proud—creature! A creature, *INDIGNATA*, dishonoured utterly, resenting to his last gasp, resisting to the very threshold of faith; indignant, with Pascal he sees that *Dieu serait injuste si nous n'étions pas coupables*—until the victory of Love who is as strong, nay, stronger than Death, for it



destroys him, the Destroyer—dishonoured, resenting, resisting until the assurance of the resurrection, until the shout of Allelujah! Turnus, on the point of being forgiven was yet slain by Aeneas for his crime, and his soul goes INDIGNATA—unwillingly, dishonoured, embittered—to the shades. The final word in the work of Dante, Virgil's greatest and greater pupil, is no longer *umbra*, but *stelle*; not shadows, but stars.

Our modern castrated paganism does not know the saying *sunt lacrimae rerum*, nor does it wish to know it. But adventist paganism formulated it truly and beautifully in the fullness of time through the voice of its rarest spirit and so made itself ready and thirsting for the bloody tears in the Garden of Gethsemane. One may accuse the Middle Ages of many things, whether from antipathy or from hatred, but not the blindest will accuse it of sentimentality; of that there is no trace. Yet did not the Middle Ages think of *this* world, this age as the *vallis lacrimarum*, the valley of tears? Is not this again the same judgement as to the nature of existence in this world? Has it not the same clear meaning that whosoever leaves out of account the tears can have neither full understanding nor just dealings with life, but must both understand and deal falsely? How near our poet of adventist paganism comes with his immortal line *sunt lacrimae rerum*, to the approaching Revelation—remote from it, a stranger to it, yet relatively as near as were the Hebrew prophets.

The last few centuries of particularist, disruptive philosophies, which represent a bourgeois attempt to evade or conceal such embarrassing items as the ultimate and fundamental intuitions, would like to relegate this pronouncement, *sunt lacrimae rerum*, to the realm of fine phrases, as the product of mere individual melancholia and sentimentality, notwithstanding it has received the endorsement of adventist pagan, and Jew, and Christian alike. And modern philosophy would like to show that it is invalid for the Age of Progress, of technical science and machinery (which last is to take upon itself all the trouble and responsibility), and to prove it invalid also for the self-sufficient, self-denaturing men of that age. A castrated humanism has sought to quash this clear verdict of the past. And indeed man may, under favourable circumstances, hide from himself for a time a particular truth, but he cannot abolish it. Already for more than a decade mankind has been returning, with fresh understanding of its objectivity and reality, to this ancient view, and in the years to come the truth of it must become still more apparent. Tears are right in this world, those tears which shall be wiped away in the next, the tears of the righteous who have suffered, and without which there is no right. Woe to him who has no tears, for tears have almost power to redeem.



## CHAPTER IX

### VIRGIL AND THE GERMANS

I MUST explain that I preach my gospel *in partibus infidelium*. If a German to-day, looking beyond the mists and fogs of contemporary, current literature, sees clear sky and stars at all, he sees Virgil (if he does see him at all) as a star of less magnitude, a star whose light is borrowed, not as one shining by his own light, at best as a satellite of Homer's sun, or perhaps merely as one particle of a long since vanished comet—a sad astronomy indeed! From the mass of articles called forth by the recent anniversary celebrations it is apparent that only a pitiful remnant survives of that knowledge which until the eighteenth century the German nation, as a member of the Holy Roman Empire, shared with every good European—the knowledge that Virgil is a fixed star, a shining star of the first magnitude. The reason is not that Virgil's star has set or ever can set, but that German eyes have become weak. If Beauty really vanish from the life of man then the Good and the True must likewise slowly perish, and *vice versâ*, for these three are one. Beauty is most endangered, and therefore the struggle for it may be the most heroic and most fruitful of anguish. New beauty is for ever being born. But more beauty is being destroyed than is

being born. And that is a *res lacrimosa*. The physicists tell us that the world will perish through loss of heat, but the world will perish through loss of beauty. Beauty, as soon as it leaves the realm of accidental, individual taste, is no longer something relative but an absolute, just as the True, once it leaves behind it the realm of interestedness and pragmatism, or the Good, once it passes beyond the realm of the individually desirable and useful, is no longer relative but absolute. God is true and good and beautiful; and if a poet but touch the hem of the garment of God's beauty, wherein he will at the same time touch the hem of the garment of the True and the Good, then something absolute, something imperishable, must of necessity enter into his work. Virgil is such a poet. The Italians, French, Spaniards, English and (until the eighteenth century) the Germans also, who paid homage to Virgil, did so not because Virgil was Roman or Latin, but simply because they found in him *beauty* and *truth*. These erections of Romanitas, Latinitas, Germanitas—excellent, closed, and therefore untrue, systems, as they are—shut themselves off from any view into the natural catholicity of the True and the Beautiful.

As for those modern, all too noisy, slightly arrogant, and at times even hopelessly ridiculous champions of 'Romanism,' which they speak of as if it were a second incarnation of God, rather than as what it doubtless is—a highly important religious-economic concept, but nevertheless one that belongs



fundamentally to the immanence of *this* world—as for these folk, un-Virgilian latinists as they mostly are, there is at least one thing that may be said of them: they are deplorably unmusical souls. Even Belloc, the best of them, in one satirical passage presumes to set off Gounod and Bizet against German music. And no doubt Massis does the same. A common adherence to one fanatical thesis leads both the just and the unjust astray. They would do better to orient themselves by others who, though also ‘Latin,’ at least understand what German music is and what Bach is—that he is without compare, that he is a German of the Germans, and at the same time the most absolute of all musicians, and that notwithstanding he was an orthodox Lutheran. Were they in the least musical, these ardent ‘Romanists’ would realise that the great German music ranks at least as high, and is as reverent, humble, unique, inimitable a manifestation of the beauty of God, of God’s infiniteness imposing limits and order, as Greek tragedy. Had they a vestige of the faculty for distinguishing and labelling peoples as such, they would not presume to speak of the ‘German,’ whether as person or as thing, with the sweeping contempt of which they are so lavish, and which, if it is to be excused at all, is excusable only on the grounds of gross ignorance.

There are indeed both rational and nationally comprehensible motives for the neglect of Virgil by Germans who have logically followed the classic

tradition of their own national literature and lived exclusively within it. (I speak now of the past, for this is no longer true to-day.) There is a certain incommensurability of language, or only of the language of our classic literature, or perhaps even only of one overrated part of that. Every translation hitherto attempted is too Greek in character. It would appear to be impossible to translate *arma virumque cano* into German, with anything of the ease and simplicity with which English can render it: *Arms and the man I sing*. . . . I say, it would seem so, but only *seem*, for a living language can overflow all time-made barriers, and German more so than any other language, for potentially it contains *quodam modo omnia*. The German language holds secrets and possibilities undreamed of by its children, which they may bring to light and realise only through devotion and *labor improbus*. Who would have expected *a priori* to find that it is not the Romance languages that possess the best translations of Virgil, but English, which at bottom is a Germanic language—just as German best translates Shakespeare. But there are other reasons why Virgil is neglected in Germany. There is, for example, that inborn indifference, or cynicism, on the part of intelligent Germans towards the State and the life of the State; Virgil on the other hand affirms the State, and in the ultimate instance admits the necessity even of war on its behalf, though he abhors it from the very depth of his soul—war, which, according to his own poem,



none loves but Allecto only, the most detested of all the Furies of the Underworld. This is a profound reason ; for may it not be that the English language translates Virgil so well for the very reason that no Englishman, just as no Roman, with the one exception of Catiline, *contemptor divum*, was ever cynical toward the *res publica*, and because, moreover, England is an empire ? An empire begets an imperial language, and the language of Virgil is an imperial language.

Then again the German artistic ideal is the opposite of the Latin. To the German the doing of the work is more important than the work as a thing done. Both attitudes have their metaphysical basis and each has its own dangers. The German is apt to forget in the course of his work that his object is not *more* work, but *the* work ; and the Latin too easily confounds the constituent material of the *finished* work with the creative grounds from which an authentic work of art springs. Allied to this is the German's avoidance of the purely intellectual, a field in which he has little success. Germany has no purely *intellectual* mission, as for instance France has. It is the will of Providence that the German people shall be too complex, too bound up in themselves, hardly explicable even to themselves, and therefore extremely hard for others to understand. To the German abstraction does not come easily. On the other hand the German spirit is not so earth-bound as the Russian—it comes between the two and properly exists 'in suspension.' Germany is the land of the spiri-

tualised, the musical, the 'suspended' image. The reasoning German is a monstrosity, an absurdity ; the true native genius lives and works through the power of the imagination. He loves the vivid image more than thought—a love which may well prove his ruin when, forgetful of the spiritual life, he descends to mere 'biology' and puts blood—doubtless because it is colourful, the brightest of all colours, red—before spirit, which is *light* and white and invisible and no concrete image ; but which is his glory, so long as he keeps his place within the *ordo*, and his colourful image hangs, like a rainbow, composite of light and matter, between heaven and earth, secure and unconsumed. He is, as it were, a bush burning with the colourless flame of the eternal spirit which is light, yet retaining his own colour and form as a bush. This is his explanation, this his special, indispensable mission in which no other people dare oppose him unpunished, and on account of which none may presume to scorn him without revealing himself as an ignoramus or as a slanderer blinded by hate.

But the profoundest reason, and one that lies at the root of all those previously mentioned, is perhaps that the German is for ever trying to find out the source of things—which in itself is good—but in the process he is apt to neglect the stream that has come into being from that source and which is also *nature*—and this is not so good. The work of Virgil is a stream from many sources, yet they are all in him. The German imagines that only the source is pure ; but the



stream is pure too—both are real, and he who ignores the stream and thinks only of the spring becomes deluded, and fails at the last even to find the spring.

In Aachen stands the chair of Charlemagne. It is no comfortable chair, nor was it so in the beginning. It is made of marble slabs brought to Aachen from the city of Rome. On one of the slabs has been scratched a morris game—Roman soldiers or Roman children may have played on that slab. The chair of Charlemagne stands in a church and above it arches the dome with the *Majestas Domini* enthroned. Out of the Imperium Romanum came the Imperium Sacrum of the Christian West. And the chair of Charlemagne stands on German soil. This chair is the most awe-inspiring, the most richly significant national shrine of the German people. And yet, do the Germans bother themselves about it?—No, they must still be for ever searching after their sources, and for starting everything all over again from the very beginning. School children in France, England, Italy, Norway, are taught that the chair of Charlemagne is in Aix-la-Chapelle, which of course must be a French city. When they actually travel to see this chair they are astonished to find that Aix-la-Chapelle is a German city, Aachen by name. No German has ever troubled to tell them. What do the Germans care?—they must begin at the beginning! But Aachen stands for more than Weimar in the destiny of the German people. There the roots go down into a real, not a fictitious, soil.

## CHAPTER X

### ANIMA NATURALITER CHRISTIANA

*Aude, hospes, contemnere opes, et te quoque dignum  
finge deo rebusque veni non asper egenis.*

HERE then is the Virgilian's view of the world : the importunate, collaborating cause of his own visible existence in the world, cause of the existence of the world itself, which is to say of all things, all *res*, from the star to the worm, is the Eros. But were it not for the *labor improbus* which conducts to higher things, Eros would destroy man, and through him destroy all things. *Cultura*, the tilling and ploughing of the earth, is the prototype of all culture, including the highest, and it is at the same time the taming, the cultivation, of Eros. Higher things then begin to make their appearance. The family comes into being ; piety, that relationship between fathers and sons ; tradition, inherited from the fathers by the sons ; and the state, and the leader. Virgil was like Euripides in that he hated war, but he was unlike him in that he did not deny the State, but rather affirmed it, even though in extremity it cannot be preserved without war. The leader proves his worth through the great and simple virtues of piety, justice, moderation, magnanimity. And glory is his imma-



nent-transcendent reward. No individual, no people that has declined the ambition, the struggle and the self-sacrificing toil after fame, and in which fame consists, has ever attained the summit of achievement. Whatever has climbed up by other means than these falls back at last into the abyss of oblivion. Highest things, the All-Powerful Itself, profoundest mysteries, are above the stars. Supreme over all things stands fate, a word at first sight of dark meaning, yet one that cannot signify blind force, for it is 'what has been spoken.' It must ultimately rest therefore upon spirit which alone has the power of utterance. Little by little fate reveals itself as a mystery of light, though thereby it loses none of its mystery. The utterance is identified with the utterer—so that fate is Jupiter himself, *pater omnipotens*. But the things of this world are tragic—*sunt lacrimae rerum*—and no completely human soul can rest content. Hence the yearning after another world, hence the eschatology of Virgil; hence that fourth messianic Eclogue, which the early Christians and the Middle Ages took in all literalness to be a prophecy of the coming of the Redeemer. This it was not, of course; and yet in a higher sense Christian antiquity was right, for what is said there of the coming era denotes something that is far above the merely human, something far above and beyond Augustus and his age. It was not a Roman, but an oriental, mythical premonition of the divine story of the Redemption which came to Virgil there in Naples; and it laid hold upon his heart that so

yearned after peace and perfection, and ravished his genius to the utterance of those prophetic lines, which stand out so strangely amid the rest of his work.—I have said elsewhere \* that Virgil was not a prophet as Isaiah was a prophet. He did not prophesy the birth of the Saviour as the angels and patriarchs and prophets foretold it. But he gave form to a myth which had direct kinship with the eternal truth of the angels, patriarchs and prophets. And he did so at the moment that not he but Providence had determined, that same Providence which had chosen him above all others of adventist paganism to achieve that formulation, because he above all others before Christ was the *anima naturaliter christiana*; because he, as none other in the history of paganism, not excluding Plato or Aristotle, was the vessel chosen to foreshadow the coming of the Christ. Without these messianic hopes and eschatological expectations the Virgilian was incomplete; it was of his essence that he should look to the future, and, knowing himself to be not an end but a way, be always ready.

Virgil, like Horace, began as an Epicurean in philosophy, though not in life. But even as a philosopher he was not strictly logical, in that out of the materialistic and mechanistic theory of atoms he constructed a pantheistic vitalism, in order (like Horace) to embrace even more and more of the higher teachings of Stoicism. His gradual departure from the strict Epicurean view of fate as something

\* In *Wahrheit und Leben*, p. 59 sq.



superior even to Jupiter himself, which terminated in the *Aeneid* with his final identification of the two, of the utterance with the utterer, is of Stoic origin. But Virgil was not a Stoic, as Horace was at the end—at least in theory. His view of the triumph and blessedness of toil—ceaseless unremitting toil which of itself is not a blessing, and valid only in a world of hard necessity—is perhaps a stoical outlook. Stoical too is his resoluteness and courage in facing and overcoming the obstacles and difficulties, lesser analogies of highest fate, which are the incalculable *casus*, the chances and accidents of jealous fortune. According to Virgil, man should not resign or give up on account of these things, which only look like fate; for man is stronger and more than they, and fate itself—the true, real fate—will even help him and show him how to overcome them. Here one must act in accordance with the almost Kantian phrase: *possunt quia posse videntur*—they can because it seems they can. One should yield to the *fatum Jovis* alone, only to the *numinal* decree of the Deity, and then not resignedly, but co-operatively for creation. Wholly unstoical however is Aeneas's unconcealed expression of joy, as, for instance, when he sees his father again. Unstoical too is his undisguised grief, which finds its most moving expression in the lament for the young Marcellus, the *magna imago* of all youths who have died before their prime—'Venetian glasses,' as Francis Thompson calls them, 'which foamed and burst before the poisoned wine of life had risen to their

brims.' *Mens aequa in arduis*, unshakable equanimity in all life's vicissitudes, and particularly in the most difficult, this alone is stoical. Aeneas, the man of tears, is not stoical—no Stoic ever had the *donum lacrimarum*. Least of all is that extraordinary pronouncement—*sunt lacrimae rerum*—the verdict of a Stoic; with this verdict a greater than the Stoics has superseded a principle that was great in itself—Europe might indeed rejoice if it had to-day Stoics of the order of Epictetus, or Seneca or Marcus Aurelius—but that did not answer to the whole nature of man. The soul of the Stoic was a heroic soul. It was heroic to excess, and this no virtue should be—except only love, which is more than a virtue. Under some circumstances the Stoic will endure even despair itself, and this borders close upon evil. Not so the *anima Vergiliana*—faced with despair he seeks relief in a flood of tears. But he has the Stoic heroism also. He undertakes and expects *labor improbus*. But for him it is easier because of his conception of the earth as *iustissima tellus*, the all-just Mother Earth, and of his pleasure in her beauty. He submits to and exacts the inevitable sacrifices that go with the practice of the high and simple virtues; but even these are made easier for him through the operation of the highest of all the high and simple virtues—through *pietas*. And the foundation of *pietas* is trust in the ultimate, unsearchable righteousness of fate, which is above all things, above Eros and toil and Mother Earth, above family and state and empire—fate :



which is Jupiter himself, *pater omnipotens*. The *anima Vergiliana* does not despair. He is not a Stoic, who, despite nobility and greatness, is nevertheless a proud and self-sufficient, and therefore desperate, spirit; Virgil's is a *humble* spirit, *humilis* as the soil of Italy—it must surely have been of him that Tertullian was thinking when he invented the phrase, *anima naturaliter christiana*.

## EPILOGUE

No other great poet has been so beloved as Virgil, the *anima naturaliter christiana*. There has been no other so qualified by nature to inspire love and to retain it as he. This ability to win and to retain affection has been the distinctive and, from the human point of view, the noblest characteristic of each new *anima Vergiliana* who has appeared from time to time throughout the ages; it is thereby that we know them. Who could fail to love Angelico, Mozart, Racine, Newman? They were all Virgilians. Of Homer we know nothing; Aeschylus stands remote in archaic grandeur; Sophocles's greatness is too closely bound up with his own time and race; the greatness of Euripides, though more comprehensible, is too sarcastic, too tormented. Lucretius, who wrote:

*aeternumque*

*nulla dies nobis maerorem e pectore demet*

(The day shall not come that will take away the eternal grief from our heart)

words to be echoed later by Hölderlin:

*Und niemand*

*Kann von der Stirne mir nehmen den traurigen Traum.*

—Lucretius one loves even as one loves Hölderlin, but, if there is to be any criticism, then regret for errors



of the spirit must be joined to love of the pure heart. Catullus is too small; Horace too smiling and insincere; Ovid too impure. Even in Christian times there has been no poet to match Virgil in this order of nobility—Dante is too masterful, too great a hater; Shakespeare too great a mystery; and Goethe suffers from too long stretches of self-complacent philistinism. They are many who have passionately loved the spirit of these and other poets, only to lose it little by little and at last to grow indifferent. But whoever has once begun to love Virgil has never ceased to love him; to have loved him as a youth is to love him still more as an old man, and with that ever-growing love of which he himself sings in his Tenth Eclogue to his friend Gallus:

*cuius amor tantum mihi crescit in horas,  
quantum vere novo viridis se subicit alnus*

(. . . for whom my love grows hour by hour as fast as in the dawn of spring shoots up the green alder.)

This so lovable *anima Vergiliana* shines forth from every line of his poetry. It is a wise saying that a poet should withdraw and hide himself behind his work; wise indeed, when one reflects that behind the greatest of all works, before which man stands in wonder—behind this visible world—the Creator stands withdrawn, hidden, *absconditus*. One is persuaded too that it is a wise saying, when one sees how in these days famous writers display the least pitiablenesses of their own pitiful egos in the most prominent place in their works, thereby setting themselves in the pillory.

Nevertheless it would be absurd to ask that a poet shall not be in his work at all. The saying is to be understood as Pascal understood it:—the creator is to be in his work as if he were not in it; but the 'being' must precede the 'not-being.' He must be wholly in it, but hidden, *absconditus*, hidden from the vulgar; but manifest, open to him who would find, to him who has already found because he already loves. It would be a false view too, if it were thought to mean that an author must be less than his work. This is not good philosophy and is the consequence of a bad theology, though it is an error that is certainly explicable in times like Juvenal's or our own, for then words seem of themselves to make poetry, sounds of themselves to make music, colours to paint of themselves, and the very contradictions and discordances in things to make a satire of themselves. But in the morning they will all be seen to be rubbish; and that they should survive two thousand years is but a nightmare which no awakening will ever see fulfilled. Man is greater than his works, and these are true lines of Francis Thompson's:

Our towns are copied fragments from our breast;  
And all man's Babylons strive to impart  
The grandeurs of his Babylonian heart.

Man is ever greater than his work; and his real possibilities greater than his actualities, even though they are infinitely less than the actuality of God and of His creation.

But why choose Virgil? it may be asked. Is it



merely because on the *Ides* of October 1930, the two-thousandth anniversary of his death was celebrated? No, it is a choice *cum fundamento in re*. It is true that the Eleatics and Heraclitans, the Pythagoreans, the tragedians, the Platonists and the Aristoteleans, the Epicureans and Stoics and Cynics, the comedians and elegiacs, the historians, the lyricist Catullus, Horace, the Roman jurist, statesman, orator, general and soldier, all of them belong essentially to the West and to us—but among them all Virgil is *princeps*. And not only is he so in our judgement, but in the opinion of all the secular and spiritual fathers of the West for two thousand years. His contemporaries acknowledged him at once. He came to be the symbol of all that was Rome, of that eternal city whose sack by Alaric St. Jerome lamented: *Deus, venerunt gentes in haereditatem tuam*. Thereafter the grammarians began to cite Virgil three times as often as Cicero, though he also was a symbol of Rome and a great writer. But this is his least title to fame, though by no means one to be despised, for the solid work of the old grammarians is not to be confounded with the versatile activities of our present-day historians of letters, intent as these are on very different matters, more ephemeral, more psychological and less ontological. A greater title to fame is to have had his pre-eminence rediscovered again and again by great spirits who do not merely repeat what has been told them at school, but who in the light of their own understanding and experience, have reaffirmed the

ancient verdict. Augustine, the ripest spirit of Christian antiquity—not by nature so pure as Virgil, nevertheless *anima Vergiliana*—tells us that before his conversion it was his daily practice to read the *Aeneid*. St. Anselm commends the study of Virgil. It is unnecessary to recall the part played by Virgil in the life and work of Dante, for to know Dante is also to know Virgil. But why did he choose Virgil, and not Plato or Aristotle, as his guide? Was it not because in Virgil the natural man, who must be farmer and statesman as well as philosopher, is found at his purest, his most natural? It is significant too, that Virgil, not Cicero or Livy, was the author most often quoted during that classic period of the English parliament when the sails were set for empire. Racine, the greatest of France's poets, is immediately recognisable as a complete *anima Vergiliana*; his poetry is Virgil's poetry resurrected, freshly dewed with the sweetness of a new dawn, saturated with the unforgettable fragrance of a native-alien soil. The last noble *anima Vergiliana*, the saintly English cardinal, Newman, has in his noble English explained the reason for Virgil's apotheosis:

'Let us consider, too, how differently young and old are affected by the words of some classic author, such as Homer or Horace. Passages, which to a boy are but rhetorical commonplaces, neither better nor worse than a hundred others which any clever writer might supply, which he gets by heart and thinks very fine and imitates,



as he thinks, successfully, in his own flowing versification, at length come home to him, when long years have passed and he has had the experience of life, and pierce home as if he had never before known them, with their sad earnestness, and vivid exactness. Then he comes to understand how it is that lines, the birth of some chance morning or evening at an Ionian festival, or among the Sabine hills, have lasted generation after generation, for thousands of years, with a power over the mood, and a charm, which the current literature of his own day, with all its obvious advantages is utterly unable to rival. Perhaps this is the reason of the Mediaeval opinion about Virgil, as of a prophet or magician, *his single words and phrases, his pathetic half-lines, giving utterance, as the voice of Nature herself, to that pain and weariness, yet hope of better things, which is the experience of her children in every time.*'