

MELANCHOLY IN VERGIL

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MELANCHOLY seems to be almost an essential element of enduring greatness. It is found in all the world's greatest writers. The conditions of writing and the themes may vary but unless some serious thought emerges born out of the travail of bitter experience and of sober contemplation, the work is already condemned to a brief existence. It is less apparent in some writers than in others. But even beneath the surface gaiety of Mark Twain there runs a deep vein of pensive melancholy. Or in so distant a poet as Homer, whose keen zest for life and action has often been noted, there is a strong undercurrent of sad misgivings for the lot of mankind. And so with the foremost Latin poet, the best representative of what was worthy in Rome, melancholy is generally regarded as an outstanding characteristic. Tennyson epitomizes the general feeling when he speaks of Vergil as "majestic in his sadness at the doubtful doom of human kind." Remove this quality from his poetry and the heart of Vergil is lost. It is no accidental trait but is deep and abiding in the very nature of the poet and man, and the emphasis is as much upon the man as upon the poet. If Vergil had not been so human, his poetry would have been less melancholy.

Insofar as a poet's emotions are the result of physical causes, we may account for Vergil's majestic sadness by relating it to environment and heredity. Of the latter, we may only conjecture, but the conjecture has the appearance of plausibility. Vergil came from that part of Italy where Italian and Celt met. In the generations that preceded him it would be very strange indeed if two diverse strains had not entered his blood. Two contrary natures were constantly fighting within him for mastery. In some degree the same struggle is being waged within each of us but through habit, convention, or discipline, for most of us the conflict has become stabilized.

But Vergil was one of those souls for whom the internal warring never ceased. In his case it was not a clash of depravity with spiritualness but nonetheless the clash was there. The Italian instinct for law and order sought to conquer the Celtic love of personal freedom. It is probably not going too far to say that a Celtic sense of mystic beauty engaged in conflict with the more rational Italian mood. In disposition he was pliant. His patron or the emperor bids him to write on a certain theme and his sense of obedience inherited from Italian ancestors compels him even against his inclination to make the attempt. Then, as with his Dido, because of something within him which he had inherited from a Celtic ancestor, he produces a character out of conformity with the conventions of his theme. Vergil constantly felt the pull of two opposing forces. His heart and mind were forever insisting on going by different roads, and the farther these paths diverged, the deeper grew the melancholy.

Environment merely emphasized his inherited tendencies. He was content with his native Italy. He did not need to travel abroad to learn that the land of the Medes with its boundless forests, the beautiful Ganges and the Hermus, turbid with gold, were no match for the merits of Italy. Here was the land of constant spring, and the summer was not confined to its own months; the land of fruits and wine, of olives and prosperous herds; the land of noble cities and of rivers flowing past ancient walls. Vergil was one of the fortunate who loved the rural gods, Pan and the aged Silvanus, and the sister nymphs. If this were all that environment contained there would be no room for melancholy. But there were other elements involved. Even less susceptible souls than Vergil were profoundly stirred by the events of his day. Perhaps no other age has witnessed so tremendous transformations. Out of countless vicissitudes a world empire was emerging. The way to the triumph of the imperial policies was strewn with the wreck of private fortunes. Thousands of Rome's elite and of the Italian strength lost their lives in struggles the meaning of which they did not understand. Vergil's personal loss, which seems to have been of a minor sort, was made good by Octavian. But his nature was most susceptible and the loss of his paternal acres may have meant more to him than it would have to others. More probably it served as a type of the experiences which he lamented as too nearly universal. In the first Eclogue the note of joy over his restoration has a strong undertone of sorrow for those who were less fortunate. The last line of this

Eclogue with its reference to the deep shadows falling from the lofty mountains seems almost prophetic of the poet's underlying melancholy. Vergil took no active part in the great movements that rocked the Italian peninsula to its foundations. This may have been partly due to his health, which was never good, but far more likely it was due to his inclination. The plan of the *Aeneid* proves that he had at last caught a glimpse of the real significance of the consummated event, but in the struggle leading to the culmination, he had no share. By preference his task was contemplation, such as his deeply poetical nature was capable of, rather than participation.

Such forces do not fully explain but suggest influences acting upon Vergil's view of life. We shall next see how this attitude reacted upon various phases of his thought and poetry.

The melancholy of many poets may be resolved into a consideration of the transitoriness of life and the certainty of death. This kind of melancholy marks much of the poetry of Horace, Vergil's friend and contemporary. Nor is it entirely absent from Vergil's poetry, though it is treated in quite a different way. Horace recognizing the inevitableness of death calls for the wine and ointment and the too brief flowers of the lovely rose that while life lasts it may be lived to the full. Frequently he dwells with sweet and pensive melancholy upon the swift approach of death's dark hour, and in his characteristic mood he sees in it only a warning to enjoy the present moment. Vergil's attitude is shown best by words which he places in the mouth of Jupiter: "Each has his own appointed day. Brief and irrevocable is the span of life to all. But to extend one's fame by his deeds, this is the task of merit." This feeling is exactly illustrated by the death of the youthful Nisus and Euryalus. Death in their case is *placida*, kindly, and is not without its compensation: "Oh fortunate, both! If my songs have any power, an ever-mindful age shall retain your memory, even so long as the house of Aeneas dwells near the unchanging rock of the Capitol, and a Roman father rules the empire." The possessive pronoun, *mea*, makes this passage so warmly personal. The poet does not often thrust himself thus into the story. For that reason we can not doubt that these words represent the inmost conviction of the poet. The melancholy is there but there is also something about their deed that has lifted it to a higher plane than mere sorrow. It is that Roman principle of conduct symbolized in the unchanging rock of the Capitol. Death does not mean despair. Aeneas bids a last farewell to the slain Pallas and straightway goes to take his part

in the battle of life. He does not lose himself in unmanly grief but rather finds in loss a call to duty even though he knows that he is to meet with other sorrows. Death is always a reminder of life and its duties. Aeneas may find life burdensome but suicide is the last thing in his thoughts. Though Vergil sympathizes deeply with Dido he probably regarded her as outside the Roman sphere of propriety when he makes her take her own life.

But it would be impossible for Vergil's susceptible mind to resist altogether thoughts on other phases of death. These thoughts may have been partly due to his philosophical interests or merely to the natural curiosity within every thinking person. They break in at unexpected moments. A reference to the breeding of horses suggests the transitoriness of life: "For wretched mortals it is always the fairest day that first departs; then enter age and toil and stern ruthless death." It is just a passing thought and no more and the interrupted theme is resumed.

But the sixth book of the Aeneid leads the poet straight into the realms of death. It is difficult to say how willingly he approached this more formal treatment of a melancholy subject. Perhaps here as often elsewhere he yielded to a feeling of compulsion based upon rhetorical needs and upon literary conventions. Odysseus had made the journey to Hades. The hero of the Roman epic could hardly do less. Furthermore, the setting is prepared from which Anchises may show to Aeneas the souls of the unborn heroes of Roman history and it is not easy to see how this history could be revealed in any other way than by some such device as this. The theme gives Vergil the opportunity of illustrating certain phases of his philosophic thought. But aside from all those considerations, Vergil's characteristic mood is everywhere exhibited. There is every sign that willingly or unwillingly he had brooded long and deeply over the mystery of death and that his melancholy was deepened because he could find no adequate solution. He but voices a universal sadness when he describes the irrevocableness of death: "Easy is the descent to Avernus, day and night the door of dark Pluto stands open, but to return and to escape to the upper air, this is the task, this, the labor." The inhabitants of Hades would fain depart but fate opposes and the gloomy lake with its loveless waters prevents. Darkness invests the entire region. This darkness of itself would create the atmosphere of death. It seems to haunt the poet's mind and again and again sable melancholy touches his description. The very entrance is enclosed by a dark pool and by the

shadows of the forest. Aeneas and the Sibyl make their way through the darkness under the lonely night.

Ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbram (Aen. VI, 268).

just as one journeys in the forests by the scanty light of the fitful moon when Jupiter has hidden the sky in darkness and the murky night has stolen away the hue of objects. With what gloomy feelings is such a journey associated! Every single object shares in the darkness. The hydra has dark, cavernous mouths, Charon's boat is dusky, the habitations are unvisited by the sun, and even the spacious fields of Elysium, in spite of their general brightness, are regions of mist. Silence accompanies the darkness. The perpetual night is lonely. The grove is still. Even the council called to give advice consists of silent spirits. The region and its associations are hideously ugly. The entrance into Hades is repulsive with its yawning chasm of jagged rock and gloomy waters and wood. At the vestibule sit ominously the terrible forms of all hateful conditions associated with the suffering and death of man, grief, care, pale diseases, morose old age, fear, hunger, want, and death itself. Monstrous shapes of Greek mythology are present. Acheron seethes with muddy water. Charon, the grim ferryman, adds to the prevailing gloom with his filth, his unkempt beard, and his vile garments. The poet leaves nothing undone in order to create the impression of the sheer awfulness of death. But the doubtful doom of all mankind is not utterly desperate. Out of the general gloom of the nether regions Vergil finds one spot serene. Here are the happy abodes, the lovely groves, and the homes of the blest. Here a more expansive air with a purple glow embraces the fields. Instead of the foul smells of Hades, there is the fragrance of the laurel, instead of the raging river of fire there is the beautiful Eridanus, instead of darkness we see the purple light, the snowy fillets, and the gleaming fields. In these regions dwell the souls of the unborn who are destined to make Rome great in the future ages. It is a realm of hope instead of despair. Perhaps it is only one hope, one gleam of brightness, like the golden branch in the dark and boundless forest, but it is enough to save the poet from the charge of utter pessimism.

In a somewhat different way the same gentle melancholy invests the ugly fact of death with a tenderness and beauty that make us forget death's horror. Two such instances, even if there were no others, are sufficient to show this mood: Euryalus dies, "Just as when a purple flower, cut down by the plough, languishes in death,

or as the poppy with weary neck droops its head when by chance it is burdened with the rain." Again, to describe the death of the youthful Pallas: "Just as the flower of tender hyacinth, by maiden finger plucked, whose splendor has not yet departed nor yet its grace, though no longer does mother earth nourish it or lend it strength." Perhaps nowhere else in literature or art has death been represented so delicately and tenderly as in these two similes. It seems impossible for the poet to have expressed himself so beautifully if he had seen only death's ugliness.

From death we pass to the consideration of fate or destiny. Since fate frequently involved death, by an easy metonymy it is often used as the equivalent of death or destruction. In this aspect fate is terrible and inexorable. There is, however, another aspect of fate which is perhaps the dominant element of the *Aeneid*. This relates to the fortunes of imperial Rome. From the beginning to the end the reader feels himself under the spell of an unseen but purposeful power, called Fate or Destiny, which guides men and events to one distant consummation which was then being realized in the establishment of Augustus upon the imperial throne. In all the vicissitudes of Roman history, Vergil writing under the beneficent reign of Augustus could now see the hand of an intelligent and farseeing Fate. In the memorable scene of the first book Jupiter reassures Venus that the fates of her people remain unchanged. Then he reveals the secrets of the fates and shows her the triumph of Roman history, that to the toga-clad race has been assigned no goal or season of power but that they are to be the lords of the world. The cruel ages shall grow mild and wars shall be laid aside. It is the same destined greatness with its promise of final peace that dominates the revelation of Anchises to Aeneas in the sixth book. Fate has already planned the greatness of Rome through a long line of heroes the culmination of whom is Augustus Caesar who will restore the golden ages in lands once ruled by Saturn. It is this historical idea prevailing through the entire poem that prevents Fate from becoming a sullen and unlovable force. She permits evil and hardship to exist in the world but in the face of an expected or consummated triumph it may be a pleasure to recall these hardships. Certainly, the toil and pain have been present but the poet does not give way for any length of time to fruitless lamentations. Once more the melancholy is not without hope. True, it is a depressing thought that man is so circumscribed in his freedom by a Fate which leaves so little to his own volition. It is a pathetic

cry, often heard in the *Aeneid*, that one is doing this thing not of his own accord. More often still the feeling of helplessness is present even when not expressed. But Vergil at least offers the beginning of a happier feeling. To a limited degree man is the master of his own fortunes. He can put his will in accord with that of the fates. And Jupiter himself declares that upon each man's own initiative shall depend his toil and his fortune:

sua cuique exorsa laborem
fortunamque ferent. (*Aen.* X., 111-8).

From the fates it is an easy transition to the gods. Did Vergil's belief in the gods or lack of belief in them contribute to his melancholy mood? Doubt lies at the basis of much of the world's pessimism. The world in which Vergil moved had lost faith in the old religion, and to this one source may be traced much of the melancholy and unhappiness of the age. Did Vergil share in the general pessimism? An unequivocal reply can not be given. Vergil's religious views were composite and not altogether consistent. But as much may be said of many others. With the precise nature of his belief we are not now concerned. But whatever the origin of the gods, whether they were of the Olympian dynasty of Homer, or the Italian abstractions, or local deities, Vergil seems to have been complaisant enough to have accepted all. More firmly founded, however, was his belief in the existence of a spiritual kingdom, and to some extent, hard to define, the whole machinery of gods may have only symbolized this belief. This thought seems to be present in the question Nisus puts to Euryalus: "Do the gods give to our minds this fervor or is each one's own desire his god?" Occasionally he seems to doubt the existence of the gods as when in moments of despondency he implores their aid, "if there are any divinities that respect the pious, if there is any piety in heaven, if ancient piety regards human sufferings." Or admitting their existence he asks as if in wonder,

Tantaene animis caelestibus irae?

"Can heavenly minds be so enraged?" It is with a sad and resigned, not doubting, heart that he marks the death of Rhipheus, a man most just and observant of the right. But neither Vergil's nor Job's faith is to be impugned on the basis of such utterances. They are but passing phases of the poet's thought. Vergil's faith in the gods was on the one hand probably as simple and naive as that of

Evander who thus describes the sacred grove to Aeneas: "This grove," said he, "this hill with its tree-covered summit a god inhabits (what god, we know not), but the Arcadians believe they have here seen Jupiter himself." In like manner, Vergil had a simple faith in the existence of a divine power but the name of this god may easily have been to him a matter of indifference. He seems inclined to accept the common report, whether it is Jupiter or another. On the other hand, Vergil, speaking for himself, might have expressed himself more philosophically but it would have been to the same effect. Blessed is he who knows the simple rustic gods. Scepticism and agnosticism did not touch Vergil. The behavior of the gods toward man was certainly no important source of his melancholy.

Did nature's processes awaken in Vergil any feeling of sadness? Here again the answer is mixed. We keep in mind Vergil's susceptibility. No philosophy could drown for him a voice from nature's heart. I doubt, however, if what has been called the most noteworthy line in Vergil,

sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt,

which has been interpreted by some as referring to the tears of the universe, is to be thus understood. The situation there calls for something else.

But in the famous philosophical exposition of the sixth book, in what appears to be one of the poet's most serious utterances, the entire universe is endowed with a spirit and an intelligence, distributed throughout its parts, while from the admixture of sluggish bodies with this spirit rise fears and desires and griefs and pleasures. In all these moods Vergil shared. He did not with Stoic indifference reject the melancholy promptings. The image of the stricken deer aside from its propriety in describing the love-smitten Dido, suggests a heart that had brooded over the tragic condition of animal life. This tenderness renders appropriate the image of the languishing flower to represent the slain Euryalus or Pallas. His sympathy is very much like that of Burns toward the frightened mouse. In a different way the simile of the leaves produces the same effect: "As many as the leaves that glide and fall in the first chill of autumn." We see more than the recognition by the poet of the pitiful fate of the ghosts in Hades. The simile furnishes more than a suggestion that Vergil was impressed by the coming of melancholy days, the saddest of the year. It is but a step farther

to ascribe to nature the same feelings which he experienced. So when *Allecto* sounds the battle-cry the whole grove resounded, the lakes and rivers far away heard the cry, and frightened mothers pressed their babes to their bosoms. The woods and waters seem to respond as readily as the mothers, and the poet probably felt, unconsciously, it may be, that capacity for sympathy belonged to both. Again, the grove of *Angitia*, *Fucinus* with its crystal waters, and the liquid lakes wept over a fallen hero. Many such instances might be cited to show that Vergil sensed the sorrows of the universe and that man and nature alike shared in them.

But there is another side to this picture. Nature was not always melancholy. Particularly, Vergil drew a pleasure from the woods: "Pallas may cherish the cities which she herself has built; but as for me, may the woods above all else be my delight." Vergil's frequent references to the woods are sufficient to prove that he was familiar with them and loved them for the happiness that they offered. Vergil did not go forth under the open sky, as Bryant did, to listen to nature's teaching in order to find there a consolation against the coming of the last bitter hour. Rather, while recognizing the inevitableness of nature's fixed laws, he derived a satisfaction from the subjugation of the soil by the hardy race of man. Lucretius seeking to deprive death of its horrors invites suicide. Vergil counsels man to rise superior to nature's laws and to live. In spite of all adversities it is good to live. For the sturdy husbandman of the *Georgics* and for the hero of the epic, nature has only one lesson and that is life. And there is an implied criticism of those who fail to see the gladness amid the hardships: "O blest, too blest, the husbandmen, if they only know their happy lot! To whom while war is far away the very earth, most righteous, pours from her bosom a ready sustenance." True, Vergil seems at times to approach nature from a purely philosophical point of view but it cost him no effort to reconcile himself with a point of view that included only the sentimental and aesthetic: "May the fields and the streams that run in the valleys be my pleasure and may I love the rivers and forests, though it be without glory." And turn to an undoubted personal experience of the poet, his acquaintance with the old farmer of *Cebalia*, where the dark *Galaesus* waters the yellow fields. In spite of scanty acres and hard labor this old man found a joy equal to the wealth of kings, in spring-time first was he to pluck the rose, in autumn first to gather in the fruits. Upon this one instance we could rest our case as to whether Vergil derived

more of gladness than sadness from nature. We may just notice the *Aeneid*. As it sings of arms and the man, the contacts with nature are not so frequent as we find them elsewhere. The theme seems to carry him away from what he really loved. Yet at a distance Vergil betrays his keen interest in the world of nature. A close examination may show that the *Aeneid* offers more occasions through which the poet seeks in nature an analogy or a setting for a mood already conceived in his mind. That is not quite nature for nature's sake. But the elaboration of this theme would require another discussion. A single illustration must suffice here. The joy attending the Trojans on their arrival at the mouth of the Tiber is pictured forth in one of Vergil's best descriptions. The sea blushes beneath the rays of the dawn, the lovely river dividing a mighty forest pours its yellow sand into the sea, particolored birds soothe the sky with their notes and fly about the grove. It is a charming picture and shows well how Vergil saw something beside the sadness of nature.

The *Eclogues* are full of nature in her more sentimental moods. Nowhere is this mood more clearly shown than when to grace the coming of the promised Child he weaves a picture of nature's own from the wandering ivy, the fox-glove, the colocasia mingling with the smiling acanthus, the fields turning golden with grain, the reddening grapes, and oaks distilling their dewy honey. In his attitude toward nature Vergil is far more of a Demeter than an Artemis. It is nature subjugated to man's use that he loves most. In a Universal Nature ruled by Universal Mind he finds his joy. There is no need to believe that it was a feigned delight. The adversities are present but they do not make the poet pessimistic. Through the triumph of reason they are dominated by the poet's optimistic mood.

But there is another phase of Vergil's feeling that exhibits almost unrelieved melancholy, and that is his concern in the victim of nature, of fate, or of man. No one before him possessed this sympathy to the same extent, nor among those that come later are there many that equal him in this respect. This sympathy with the victim is largely responsible for the fact that Vergil has frequently been called a poet of melancholy. It appears in every period of his life and in every form of his poetry. This is all the more remarkable when we remember the calloused age in which he lived. Perhaps it was this sympathy rather than ill-health that prevented him from taking any active part in war. On the basis of heredity it is without explanation. It seems to represent neither the stern Roman

or the savage Celt. Vergil was like one born out of his time, he was the forerunner of another age soon to appear on earth. It is still more remarkable when we consider that Vergil accepted with enthusiasm the system purchased at the price of the victim's sufferings. The thing had to be. So he realized with his reason but his heart was travelling by a different route. In the first Eclogue the note of joy is submerged beneath the current of sadness for him whose sorrow forbids him to sing songs at all. Songs of joy have their limitation. They prevail among the spears of Mars only so much as Chaenian doves when an eagle comes in their midst. Vergil enthuses over the work of civilization that fells the forests in order that agriculture may flourish but he cannot refrain from observing the birds which pay for this work in the loss of their nests in the tree-tops. Like Burns he was truly sorry man's dominion had broken nature's social union. It is almost the spirit of the voice soon to be heard in the world, "One sparrow shall not fall to the ground without the Father." It is to this same sympathy with the victim that the development of the Dido episode is due. Here, as elsewhere in Vergil, the incidents run away with him. Many have criticized the poet for the undue attention that Dido receives, which seems to jar the perspective of the story as a whole. As a poet he may have erred but with Dido it is the voice of human sympathy that speaks. His natural tenderness rose above strict rhetorical propriety. There is a significance in the tradition that Vergil's voice broke with emotion as he read to Augustus the line in which Dido recognizes the great gulf which has opened between her and her lover. At such a time Vergil is most himself. Troy must fall and its inhabitants be driven forth in exile. The poet can not for the moment think of the glorious destiny awaiting them in the distant future but finds tears for the human lot and mortal affairs touch his heart. His compassion extends even to the foe: "Alas, how great a slaughter now threatens the poor Laurentians!" It is this mood exactly that impelled the poet to represent Turnus so attractively that some have taken him for the hero rather than Aeneas. As the victim before the altar is beautifully decorated with garlands, so Vergil shows a strong inclination to put a halo of glory about the brows of the victims of fate. This same mood is again exhibited in the tenth book when Aeneas slays Lausus. The deed is done by which the cause of the state is advanced but instead of rejoicing Aeneas looked at the face of the dying boy and wept in compassion and held out to him his right hand saying:

"What now to thee, my wretched lad, what now for such merits will the pious Aeneas give, worthy of so high a character? Keep thine arms which were thy joy, and thy body I shall send back to the shades and ashes of thy fathers, if thou carest aught for that. However, my poor lad, with this shalt thou solace thy wretched death: It is by the hand of mighty Aeneas that thou fallest." It is an unusual thing at this period of history that one offers comfort to his stricken enemy. But even here the glory of the great achievement is dimly seen through the tears and the victim may also rejoice at the fact that in the furtherance of the kingdom he has fallen at the hands of the king himself. Scant comfort it may be but it is there. Something new has appeared in the thought of man.

But the melancholy of Vergil which seems most peculiarly his own and which impresses itself upon the reader at every stage is that which arises from his unsatisfied longing for attainment or perfection. This attitude seems to stamp the poet as Celtic above all else. Perhaps we may say this mood as manifested in Vergil is the first appearance of the Celt in literature. It seems utterly unlike anything Roman. It comes very close to the feeling expressed so often in modern times, particularly, in the song, *The Lost Chord*.

We hear the note in the first Eclogue. No good fortune of Vergil ever lulled him into a forgetfulness of others' sorrows and needs. His happiness failed to be complete happiness because others were not equally blest. The closing line of this Eclogue, "and the shadows are falling deeper from the lofty mountains," is a symbol of the mood of the poet. Nor can the fourth Eclogue with its note of triumph be separated from this mood. The poet's yearning for an unsatisfied ideal lies back of this effort. Whether the immediate inspiration was an expected child or some turn in an oracle, the poet could not have written this Eclogue without having deeply sensed a great need of humanity. The consciousness of the imperfections of the present age projects the poet into the contemplation of another reign of Saturn, and the intensity of his joy at the approach of this age is the measure of his melancholy thought of the present. How different from Horace who found a sufficiency in the present hour for his desires and to whom it was of no concern whether the morrow would bring cloud or sunshine!

Vergil comes more nearly finding the fruition of his yearning in the *Georgics* than elsewhere. The wholesome gospel of the soil does not mix well with a melancholy disposition. Yet there are traces of it even here. The conquest of the soil entails the greatest

hardships and labor and many disappointments. The Father of all has willed it so in order that man's intellect might be quickened. In Saturn's age there had been no need for toil but all things grew freely, just as in the fourth Eclogue it is predicted they will again grow at the coming of the promised Child. Hard toil underlies the Georgics but there is a response from nature to man's endeavor that brings a measure of satisfaction. The poet, however, dwells so much upon the labor that it greatly reduces the joy. It is in the digression of the fourth Georgic that we find the best example of the poet's melancholy thrusting itself into view where some have been surprised to find it. It does not matter if the Orpheus incident or the larger incident of which it is a part was not in the Georgic as first composed. It was Vergil who finally put it there, and it is evident that he did not feel the clash between the sentiment of the Orpheus episode and the tone of the Georgics as a whole. The unsatisfied yearning pervades every phase of the story. The shades restrained by the loveless waters of Cocytus, Eurydice, compelled again to return to Erebus and vanishing like mist from the grasping arms of Orpheus, his sorrowful laments and fruitless wanderings to the tragic close of his life, and even his comparison to the nightingale bereft of its young, all emphasize this phase of the poet's melancholy, and qualify materially the more hopeful atmosphere of the Georgics, and, perhaps we may say, represent more truly the real mood of the poet.

But it is in the Aeneid that the unsatisfied longing cries out most insistently. The theme itself fits such a mood, involving as it does the fate of fallen Troy, the long and dreary quest of the promised land with its ever receding shores, but it is also a theme that is well adapted to the mood of a mature man, who has learned that the morrow does not fulfill the expectations of today, and yet refuses to be baffled while he relentlessly pursues a distant hope. The full fruition is never quite attained. The unsatisfied yearning is well illustrated as Aeneas chides his mother: "Why dost thou, cruel also, deceive thy son so often with false images? Why is it not granted to clasp the hand and to hear and to utter words without disguise?" The mood determines the dominant note of the second book, recurring like a mournful refrain. A city that has been queen through many years succumbs. The pride of man's long effort is brought to naught. Vain and useless are man's best endeavors. How the words *nequiquam* and *frustra* haunt this book! Hecuba and her daughters seek the protection of the shrine, in vain. The altars

which Priam consecrated are desecrated with his own blood. Passing on to the next book, we find it almost a symbol of man's experiences in seeking a goal never attained. Father Anchises, rescued from one disaster, has been saved in vain for he does not live to enjoy the promised land. Aeneas' dearest hopes and most natural inclinations are for a time centered upon Dido. But these he must sacrifice on the altar of duty, Dido herself is disappointed in her hopes and dies wretchedly, *ante diem*, before her day, as even Aeneas is to die prematurely in fulfillment of her curse. Thus aspirations never reach fruition and the yearning soul is ever being denied its satisfaction. Even the mantle that contains the designs of the stolen Ganymede shows also the aged guardians reaching out their hands toward the stars in vain for their lost ward. How appropriate a symbol of man's aspiration and struggle toward an Eternal City! Like the vast throng of shades on the hither bank of the Cocytus, man is forever reaching out his hands toward the farther shore. But out of many examples which we may take from the Aeneid lines from near the close of the last book express most fittingly this aspect of the poet's mood: "And as in sleep when languid slumber has closed the eyes at night, we seemingly desire to push on our eager course, but all in vain, and in the midst of our endeavor we fall afflicted, and the tongue loses its power and the accustomed strength of the body fails, and speech and words refuse utterance." Vergil was searching for the God of perfection and since he never realized this God, he was filled with a sense of melancholy. He never gave up the pursuit however much it came to appear like an empty dream. As the women looking out from the Sicilian shore on the barren sea, Vergil also prayed for a city, the Eternal City, which always lay just beyond the horizon. The quest gave him a hold on life. He planned on the completion of the Aeneid to devote himself entirely to philosophy by which he may have expected to satisfy those questions which had haunted his former years. But the Aeneid was never completed, and such was his sense of its imperfections that on his death bed he directed that it be destroyed. This very fact somehow seems to symbolize the poet's insistent longing that refused to be satisfied with anything less than perfection.

Subordinate elements may have contributed to Vergil's melancholy but they are probably closely related to the larger considerations already discussed. A modern poet has said that "a sorrow's crown of sorrows is remembering things." For Vergil, too, memory

brought a measure of sadness. So when he notes the fall of Aeolus in Laurentum, his mind travels back to the distant land of his birth, to his lofty home at Lyrnesus, which memory contrasts with his tomb on Laurentian soil. The repetition of *domus* adds a peculiar pathos. Memory and pathos combine once more in the reference to the tunic of delicate gold which Lausus' mother had spun for him, stained with blood from Aeneas' victorious spear. The same feeling lies back of the oft repeated phrase of the second book, *Priami dum regna manebant*; and of Dido's last words, "Sweet relics, while the fates of God allowed." But Vergil is too virile to permit himself to dwell long among unhappy memories. It was more like Vergil to anticipate a time when it will be a pleasure to look back upon labor conquered:

forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit.

Rarely if ever did Vergil's melancholy sink to the depths of Poe's despairing "Nevermore." We might note as an exception Aeneas' cry to the shade of Dido: "by fate's decree these words are the last I shall ever address thee." But it is only a momentary cry and the way of duty is resumed. There is nothing in Vergil's melancholy that could lead to suicide. It is significant that it is the outcast Dido who ends her life, and the poet's sympathy with her did not also set his approval upon her course.

Indeed, we may say there was a quality in Vergil's melancholy that always acted as a challenge to duty and to life. Cries of anguish and doubt there are but the wholesomeness of his philosophy precluded all idea of surrender. In heeding the imperious call of duty, he displays his Italian nature. Honor purchased at the price of death is glorious. All flesh must die but, notwithstanding, man is permitted to extend his fame by deeds of merit. The tableau of great deeds represented on the walls of Dido's temple brings a compensation for man's misfortunes. The poet does not allow Troy's last dark and dismal night to end without presenting the bright morning star rising over the crests of Ida. I cannot believe that this is a mere device to justify Aeneas's departure before the glare of day reveals him to the enemy. The same motive appears again at the end of the fourth book where the picture of Iris trailing a thousand varied colors relieves the sad fate of Dido. Frequently, perhaps, almost always, the melancholy thought of Vergil has its suggestion of hope and of gladness. It may be that the gladness comes through the deliberate exercise of the will: "And though

afflicted with mighty cares he feigns a hopeful countenance and forcibly suppresses the grief in his heart." These words describe Vergil as well as his hero. There were weighty reasons in his day for doubt, discouragement, and despair, but Vergil set his will to find a hope for mankind. The full extent and even the direction of this hope he did not comprehend but the hope was not for this reason lessened. His attitude toward this hope cannot be better shown than in the closing lines of the eighth book: "Such legends on Vulcan's shield, his mother's gift, Aeneas beholds with wonder, and though not understanding their significance he rejoices at their portraiture, as he lifts upon his shoulders the fame and the fortunes of his line." The poet has just described the great events of what was to be Roman history. It seems to me that here again Vergil's hero is a close analogy of the poet and of his philosophy. Vergil, like Aeneas, accepts the universe. Equally, they look ahead to that one far off event to which the whole creation moves, whether it is the consummation of Augustus's imperial policies, the sway of the promised Child, the second reign of Saturn, or the advent of the Eternal City, it matters not. Vergil, like Aeneas, does not profess to understand the full significance of the divine purpose. There is in their faith a large element of mysticism, but their faith is unshaken. Tennyson's description of Vergil as "majestic in his sadness at the doubtful doom of human kind" needs to be qualified by the reflection that he also gloried in the blissful years again to be. Without this qualification, his melancholy is meaningless. Over fallen Troy rises the morning star of hope. Aeneas accepts the responsibility of the divine shield and the burdens it represents yet rejoices at the picture of Rome's destined greatness.

There is no reason for denying the melancholy of Vergil. It pervades all his poetry as it must have penetrated into his personal life. But instead of gripping him with despair it only casts a glow of sentiment over his life and over his works and sets in high relief his will to live and to endure. This attitude is the more impressive as we recall the increasing tendency of his age toward suicide. Vergil's philosophy was wholesome and showed the way of escape from despair and utter pessimism.