

# **VERGIL, A BIOGRAPHY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649291175

Vergil, a biography by Tenney Frank

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**TENNEY FRANK**

**VERGIL, A  
BIOGRAPHY**



# VERGIL

*A Biography*

*By*

TENNEY FRANK

*Professor of Latin  
in the*

*Johns Hopkins University*



NEW YORK  
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1922

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PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

*To*  
THE MEMORY OF  
W. WARDE FOWLER

CORRIGENDA

Page 8, line	19,	read	"Vergilius"
" 29, "	25,	"	consensus
" 30, footnote 1,	"	"	Velleius
" 38, line	2,	"	naiveté
" 52, "	22,	"	δργῆς
" 53, "	1,	"	περὶ
" 57, "	21,	"	necromantic
" 68, "	18,	"	Syracosio
" 94, "	17,	"	thoroughly
" 106, "	15,	"	Zephyrique
" 113, "	3,	"	monotonous
" 116, "	14,	"	Theocritean
" 131, "	16,	"	validas





## PREFACE

MODERN literary criticism has accustomed us to interpret our masterpieces in the light of the author's daily experiences and the conditions of the society in which he lived. The personalities of very few ancient poets, however, can be realized, and this is perhaps the chief reason why their works seem to the average man so cold and remote. Vergil's age, with its terribly intense struggles, lies hidden behind the opaque mists of twenty centuries: by his very theory of art the poet has conscientiously drawn a veil between himself and his reader, and the scraps of information about him given us by the fourth century grammarian, Donatus, are inconsistent, at best unauthenticated, and generally irrelevant.

Indeed criticism has dealt hard with Donatus' life of Vergil. It has shown that the meager *Vita* is a conglomeration of a few chance facts set into a mass of later conjecture derived from a literal-minded interpretation of the *Eclogues*, to which there gathered during the credulous and neurotic decades of the second and third centuries an accretion of irresponsible gossip.

However, though we have had to reject many of the statements of Donatus, criticism has procured for us more than a fair compensation from another

source. A series of detailed studies of the numerous minor poems attributed to Vergil by ancient authors and mediaeval manuscripts — till recently pronounced unauthentic by modern scholars — has compelled most of us to accept the *Appendix Vergiliana* at face value. These poems, written in Vergil's formative years before he had adopted the reserved manner of the classical style, are full of personal reminiscences. They reveal many important facts about his daily life, his occupations, his ambitions and his ideals, and best of all they disclose the processes by which the poet during an apprenticeship of ten years developed the mature art of the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*. They have made it possible for us to visualize him with a vividness that is granted us in the case of no other Latin poet.

The reason for attempting a new biography of Vergil at the present time is therefore obvious. This essay, conceived with the purpose of centering attention upon the poet's actual life, has eschewed the larger task of literary criticism and has also avoided the subject of Vergil's literary sources — a theme to which scholars have generally devoted too much acumen. The book is therefore of brief compass, but it has been kept to its single theme in the conviction that the reader who will study Vergil's works as in some measure an outgrowth of the poet's own experiences will find a new meaning in not a few of their lines.

T. F.

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