

**AGATHYNIAN CLUB.
PUBLICATIONS. NO II. THE
WORKS OF THE FAMOUS
ANTIQUARY, POLIDORE VIRGIL**

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INTRODUCTION.

POLYDORUS VIRGILIUS, or Vergilius, otherwise named de Castello, was born at Urbino, in Italy, toward the close of the fifteenth century. Of his family and antecedents little is known. In 1498 he published a collection of proverbs in Latin, "*Proverbiorum Libellus*," and in 1499 the book *De Rerum Inventoribus*, which has frequently been republished, and of which the present issue of the AGATHYNIAN CLUB is a translation. Having taken holy orders he was, about the year 1501, sent to England by Pope Alexander VI., whose Cham-

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berlain he then was, to collect the tax called Peter's pence. He was the last person who held the office of sub-collector of this tribute previous to the separation of the English Church from the Church of Rome in the reign of Henry VIII.

Soon after his arrival in England he was appointed rector of Langton church, in Leicestershire, and subsequently by the King, Henry VII., archdeacon of Wells. Other benefices were also bestowed upon him.

In 1517 he republished in London his work *de Rerum Inventoribus*, which he extended to eight books.

In 1525 he issued an edition of Gildas' *De Calamitate*, and in 1525 a treatise *De Prodigis* in which he attacks divination.

In 1533 he finished his history of England, begun in 1507, in twenty-eight books, from the earliest times to the reign of Henry VIII. This

work was undertaken at the request of Henry VII., with whom Polydore appears to have been a great favorite. Considering the fact that the author was a foreigner, it is a somewhat remarkable production, though it has never been regarded as of high authority in disputed points of English history.

During the reign of Edward VI., Polydore Virgil left England and returned to his native city, where he died in 1555, retaining till the last, by permission of the king, the archdeaconry and a prebend in the cathedral of Hereford.

Several points in the history of Polydore Virgil have, as Sir Henry Ellis* declares in his edition of Polydore's English History, been satisfactorily

* Polydore Vergil's English History, from an Early Translation preserved among the MSS. of the old Royal Library in the British Museum. vol. i. containing the first eight books comprising the period previous to the Norman Conquest. London. Printed for the Camden Society, 1846. Preface. p. v.

settled. Thus from a letter written by Henry VIII., to Pope Leo X., in 1513, it is expressly stated that Polydore had been twelve years in England, and from a passage in the Register of Bishop Smith, of London, it appears that Sir Nicholas Griffin, Knight, in 1503, presented him with the rectorship of church Langton in Leicestershire.

Another incident is mentioned; in 1509 he wrote a letter to James IV., of Scotland, requesting that monarch to send him a catalogue of the Scotch kings, and memoirs of their most remarkable actions. Ruddiman, who mentions this fact in his preface to Gawin Douglas's translation of Virgil, says that he met with but little encouragement from the Scotch king, who looked upon the application with suspicion, and who desired that the history of Scotland should be written by one, more in his interest than was Polydore Virgil. Gawin Douglas, Bishop of Dunkeld, at a later day supplied the desired information. In regard to this point, Polydore,* in speaking of the difference be-

* *Op. cit.*, p. 105.

tween his statement relative to Reuda, and that of the Scotch historians, says: "But peradventur there will bee somme which will not a littel bee aggrieved at these thinges, for of late one Gawine Dowglas, Bishop of Dunchell, a Scottische manne, a manne as well noble in ligneage as vertewe, when he understoode that I was purposed to write this historie hee camme to commune with mee; in forthe with wee fell into friendshippe, and often he vehementlie requiered mee that in relation of the Scottische affaires I shoulde in no wise follow the president of an historie of a certaine countriman of his, promifinge within a few dayse to fende mee of those matters not to be contemned, which indeade hee performed. * * *"

During the reign of Henry VIII., Polydore was imprisoned in consequence of charges made against him in an anonymous letter addressed to Cardinal Wolfey. This letter was afterward ascertained to have been written by Andreas Ammonius, the King's Latin Secretary, who, upon Polydore's

imprisonment, succeeded him as collector of Peter's pence. How long he remained in prison is not certain, but in 1517 he wrote to his brother that he was at liberty and ease.

In 1550 he obtained permission from Edward VI. to return to his native country, the infirmities of age requiring a warmer climate for him than that of England. He does not appear to have left till 1551.

His history of England is the largest and most complete work written by Polydore. Begun in 1507 at the request of Henry VII., it was not finished till 1533, in the reign of Henry VIII. The first edition was published at Basle, in 1534, and was followed by several others in tolerably quick succession. That this history is very valuable there can be no doubt, and it bears upon its face the impression of fairness and a conscientious desire to be full and explicit on all points. Nevertheless it has been roundly abused as being partial,