

INTRODUCTION

I. LIFE OF VIRGIL

About the life of "the chastest poet and royalest that to the memory of man is known", to use the words of Bacon's eulogy of Virgil, we have but scanty information.

Apart from his own writings and those of his contemporaries, our chief authority for the life of Virgil is Donatus. The name, according to all the Lives, the early MSS., and the inscriptions of the Republic and early centuries A.D., is P. Vergilius Maro, but it is as well to acquiesce in the spelling—Virgil—now established by long literary tradition. The poet was born 15th Oct., B.C. 70, at Andes, near Mantua, in Cisalpine Gaul. His father, who was probably in early life a day-labourer and, as the reward of his industry, married his employer's daughter, was a yeoman cultivating a small farm. He seems to have handed on to his son by Magia Polla no other heritage of note than his own sovereign industry. This quality the boy early displayed in his education at Cremona, and afterwards at Mediolanum (Milan), whither he went in B.C. 55. To complete his higher education he took at Neapolis (Naples) a course of Greek with Parthenius of Bithynia, and was finished off at Rome by Siron, an Epicurean philosopher. In the ordinary curriculum he became acquainted with the main outlines of philosophy, medicine, mathematics, and rhetoric; but, like Ovid, he felt no inclination to practise at the bar, being excluded from success in that calling by his shyness, which reminds us of our own Goldsmith, "who wrote like an angel, but