

same subject that has ever appeared. The harmonious and graceful language, the pleasing descriptions of rural scenes, the apt and charming episodes, all combine to lend an interest to a subject, which in any other hands would have been intolerably dull. The time was ripe for such a poem. Agriculture had been the chief employment and the honored occupation of the Romans from the early days of the City. The long-continued wars had, however, desolated Italy,²¹ and Vergil with sorrow laments, "the plough hath not its meed of honor, the fields lie neglected, and the tillers are off to the war; the crooked pruning hooks are forged into stiff swords."²² Even after war had ceased, the soldier, too long accustomed to camps and the excitement of a military life, cared little about the prosaic life of a farmer. To recall the peaceful habits of rural industry, the poem, which Addison pronounces "the most complete, elaborate and finished piece of all antiquity," was written. The *first Contents of* book treats of tillage, the *second* of orchards, the *third* of the care of horses and cattle, and the *fourth* of bees. The two most successful imitations in English of this poem are Philips's *Pastorals*, and Thompson's *Seasons*. Yet, no one can read the English imitations without being struck with their inferiority to the poem of Vergil.

The Aeneid,²³ in twelve books, written between 29 B.C. *Aeneid.* and 19 B.C., recounts the story of the escape of Aeneas from burning Troy, his wanderings over the deep in search of a home which the fates had promised, his final settlement in Italy as the founder of the Roman Empire destined in after ages to rule the world. No doubt, Vergil, borrowed largely from the Greek and Roman writers who preceded him. The Romans were original in no department of literature, except *Vergil charged with* *physiarianism.*

²¹ Civil wars, almost continuous, had raged in Italy from 49-31 B.C.

²² Georg. 1, 507:

non ullus aratro
Dignus honos, equalent abductis arva colonis,
Et curvae rigidum falces constantur in ensen.

²³ The first notice of the Aeneid that we have is in a letter of Vergil to Augustus, written probably B.C. 26, when the latter was on an expedition against the Cantabrians. *De Aenea quidem meo, si mehercule jam dignum auribus haberem tuis, libenter mitterem: sed tanta inchoata res est, ut paene vitii mentis tantum opus ingressus mihi videar, cum praesertim, ut scio, alia quoque studio ad id opus multoque potiora impetiar.* Macrob. Sat. 1, 21, 12.