

Harvey's Virgilian quotation in his lectures of 1616.

Contributors

Moore, Norman, 1847-1922.
Tweedy, John, 1849-1924
Royal College of Surgeons of England

Publication/Creation

[London] : [Royal College of Physicians of London], 1914.

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/ybrsy4nj>

Provider

Royal College of Surgeons

License and attribution

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by The Royal College of Surgeons of England. The original may be consulted at The Royal College of Surgeons of England. where the originals may be consulted. Conditions of use: it is possible this item is protected by copyright and/or related rights. You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s).



Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

6.

HARVEY'S
VIRGILIAN QUOTATION
IN HIS LECTURES
OF
1616



7

APRIL 6, 1914

Ab Iove principium, Musae ; Iovis omnia plena

Virgil was Harvey's favourite poet, and he wrote this line of the third Eclogue at the top of the title-page of the manuscript notes for the lectures which he delivered in our College on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, April 16, 17 and 18, in the year 1616.

The conversation, of which the line is a part, takes place in a pleasant rural scene :

PALAEEMON :

Dicite, quandoquidem in molli consedimus herba.
Et nunc omnis ager, nunc omnis parturit arbor ;
Nunc frondent silvae ; nunc formosissimus annus.
Incipe, Damoeta ; tu deinde sequere, Menalca.
Alternis dicetis ; amant alterna Camenae.

DAMOETAS :

Ab Iove principium, Musae ; Iovis omnia plena ;
Ille colit terras ; illi mea carmina curae.

MENALCAS :

Et me Phoebus amat ; Phoebus sua semper apud me
Munera sunt, lauri et suave rubens hyacinthus.

Dryden calls the *Bucolics* "the rudiments of Virgil's poetry," and apologises for the roughness of his own translation, yet he had studied Virgil so much that it is always pleasant to read his version after the original :

"PALAEEMON :

"Sing then ; the shade affords a proper place,
The trees are cloth'd with leaves, the fields with grass ;
The blossoms blow, the birds on bushes sing,
And Nature has accomplish'd all the spring.
The challenge to Damoetas shall belong ;
Menalcas shall sustain his under song :
Each in his turn your tuneful members bring ;
By turns the tuneful Muses love to sing.

"DAMOETAS.

"From the great father of the gods above
My Muse begins ; for all is full of Jove ;
To Jove the care of heaven and earth belongs ;
My flocks he blesses, and he loves my songs.

“ MENALCAS :

“ Me Phoebus loves ; for he my Muse inspires,
And, in her songs, the warmth he gave, requires.
For him, the god of shepherds and their sheep,
My blushing hyacinths and my bays I keep.”

The shade of the fresh leaves of the trees, the flowers, the songs of the birds, the woodpigeon's nest, the green sward on which the companions are seated in this eclogue had, I dare say, often come into Harvey's mind in the poet's words during country walks at the beginning of summer. He had, perhaps, the small 'Herbal' of Fuchsius, of which we possess his copy, in his pocket, but for a time thought less of plants than of the beauty of Nature, and repeated again and again fragments which had fixed themselves in his mind from the *Bucolics* and *Georgics*. Thus when he considered a motto for the title page of his lectures this line came into his head and was written down. Scholars differ as to how the line is to be taken, but I think it is clear that Harvey used it as a general statement of the origin and wonders of the Creation. "From God all begins: all things are full of God."

The line itself, as the modern editors of Virgil point out, is based on a passage in the 'Phaenomena of Aratus':

Ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα, τὸν οὐδέποτε ἄνδρες ἐώμεν
Ἀρρητον μεστὰὶ δὲ Διὸς πᾶσαι μὲν ἀγυιαί,
Πᾶσαι δ' ἀνθρώπων ἀγοραί, μεστὴ δὲ θάλασσα,
Καὶ λιμένες· πάντα δὲ Διὸς κεχρήμεθα πάντες
Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν.

The last five words of this passage are those of "certain also of your own poets" which St. Paul quoted to the Athenians.

I asked a great Greek scholar of my own University if he had read much Aratus. "Oh," he said, "the weather man; no, not much." So that, I suppose, the reputation of Aratus, whether on poetical or physical grounds, or both, has sunk in the last few centuries since the time when his works were read at Montpellier as part of the study for a medical degree.

Our library has several editions of this poet. The most ancient was printed by Aldus at Venice in 1499, and is included in a collection of astronomical tracts, the others being Julius Firmicus, Manilius and Proclus, with Linacre's Latin version. The book has noble print and paper, and is in a very ancient binding with the remains of beautiful clasps. It once belonged to Thomas Bing. He was a learned man, public orator at Cambridge, and master of Clare from 1571 to 1598. Besides "Tho. Bingus," he has also written on the table of contents, for there is no other formal title-page, "μὴ σαιτω," "not thine," as if to remind him that the book was not for the owner only, but for others also.

The next most ancient of our copies of Aratus is also in a collection of astronomical and mathematical tracts, and was printed at Basle in 1535. There is a Greek text, with a translation into Latin versé.

The volume belonged to Joannes Ponetus, whose signature, in a very strong handwriting, is on the title-page.

John Ponet was of Queen's College, Cambridge, and, as was fitting in a college where Erasmus once dwelt, was deep in Greek. He was also a good mathematician. In 1550 he became Bishop of Rochester, and in 1551 of Winchester. He wrote several books. None of them are in our library, but this volume, which belonged to him, shows the tendency of his studies before they became wholly theological and controversial. He died abroad in 1556.

The only edition of Aratus alone which we possess is a Greek text with Greek notes printed at Paris in 1559 by William Moreli, Greek Printer to the King.

Another of our editions of Aratus is in an octavo, printed at Basle in 1585. The volume is a collection of treatises beginning with Proclus on the sphere, and ending with a curious antique atlas and the two books of John Honter on Cosmography.

Galen admired the verses of Aratus on the phases of the moon and the consequences of her changes, and quotes sixteen lines of this poet of the age of Euclid in the third book of his 'De diebus decretoriis.'

One of the uses of poetry is that by its power of penetrating into the recesses of the mind, it binds together men of far separated periods and nations. What a curious example of this power is shown by the line of Virgil which Harvey placed upon the manuscript of the lectures which contained the beginning of his exposition of his discovery of the circulation. The line was derived by Virgil from a poet quoted by St. Paul, and by Cicero and by Galen. The influence of Aratus thus extends into the foundations of Christianity, into Latin literature, into the basis of Medicine before the Renaissance, and through Virgil into the history of the discovery of the circulation of the blood.

NORMAN MOORE.