pastoral poetry now appeared for the first time in a Roman dress; the pictures which they presented of rural felicity, and of simple and innocent pleasures, so strongly contrast­ed with the scenes of violence and bloodshed which had so long deluged Italy; the descriptions of nature so exquisitely blended with human feelings and human sympathies; the allusions to recent and passing events; the polished simpli­city, beauty, and harmony of the verse; all contributed to enhance their merit in the eyes of his contemporaries, and to establish them in popular favour.

But, however great their merit in other respects, the Eclogues of Virgil can lay little claim to the praise of origi­nality. They are, for the most part, imitations, and occa­sionally little more than translations of Theocritus. Ro­man literature was indeed essentially imitative ; and its greatest masters rarely ventured to give unfettered scope to the impulses of their native powers. Seldom venturing to depart from their Grecian models, they were content to follow closely in their footsteps, and deemed it sufficient to clothe in the language of Rome those ideas and descrip­tions which were furnished by their intellectual masters. Yet Virgil, while retaining the substance of Doric song, succeeded in impressing on bis Italian transcript not a little of his own calm and meditative nature, and in awakening the popular sympathies of his countrymen in a manner which at once stamped him as the national poet of Rome. Not the least difficulty which he had to encounter in introducing this new species of composition, was the ap­parently intractable and inflexible nature of the language which he had to employ, little fitted, apparently, for the description of pastoral and rural scenes. But the pow­ers of the poet triumphed, in a great measure, even over this difficulty ; and although unable to rival the matchless melody of the Doric reed, he imparted to his native tongue a delicacy, softness, and variety, of which till then it had been considered unsusceptible. In estimating the immediate reception of the Eclogues, we must not altogether over­look the skill and dexterity with which the poet paid court to his early patrons, whose voice was perhaps no less potential in the literary than in the political world. Their publication must, at all events, be considered an import­ant era in the literary history of Rome, as exhibiting the first-fruits of that genius which was destined to stamp its indelible impress on the literature of future ages.

About the thirty-third year of his age Virgil removed to Rome. Here he experienced the bounty, as well as friend­ship, of Maecenas and Augustus, and appears to have been placed by their liberality in circumstances which enabled him ever after to devote his undivided energies to his fa­vourite pursuits. It is pleasing to find the most cordial relation subsisting, even at this early period, between such men as Virgil and Horace. Both candidates for popu­lar favour, in circumstances which too frequently produce rivalry, if not hostility, these illustrious poets appear to have been united in the closest ties of friendship. Virgil is said to have intoduced Horace to the notice of Mæcenas ; and the deep feeling of respect and admiration with which Horace regarded Virgil, is manifested in several parts of his works. The sixth Satire of the first book exhibits a pleasing picture of the intimate terms on which they lived with their common patron Mæcenas, and with some of their poetical contemporaries. During his residence at Rome, Virgil inhabited a house on the Esquiline hill, near the gardens of Mæcenas. He was treated with universal respect; and on one occasion, when some of his verses were recited in the theatre, the whole audience rose to sa­lute him, with the same respect that they were ac­customed to bestow on the emperor. But his modesty shrunk from the public gaze ; and amid the splendour anil homage of Rome, he longed for scenes more in harmony with his poetical and contemplative genius, and. It may be added, better suited to the delicacy of his constitution. After a brief sojourn in the metropolis, he accordingly re­tired to Naples, at that time the favourite retreat of lite­rary men ; and there, or at a delightful residence in the vicinity of Nola, about ten miles distant, he continued chiefly to reside during the remainder of his life.

Having thus chosen a congenial place of abode, Virgil, at the suggestion of Mæcenas, commenced the composition of the *Georgies.* The subject was selected, we are told, with the view of restoring among the Romans a love of those rural pursuits to which they had been peculiarly ad­dicted in early times, but which, amid the desolation and bloodshed of the civil wars, had been entirely abandoned and forgotten. Little is known of the private life of Virgil during the composition of this immortal poem, which occu­pied the space of seven years. Donatus and others relate, that he was accustomed to dictate a number of verses in the morning, and spend the day in polishing and reducing them to a smaller number. From internal evidence, this ap­pears to be no inaccurate description of his literary habits.

The Georgics more than realized the highest expecta­tions that had been formed of Virgil’s poetic powers. This work, which is dedicated to Mæcenas, is divided into four books, and treats in succession of husbandry, plan ting, cattle, and bees. Our limits forbid any attempt at analysis ; nor indeed could words convey any adequate notion of the wonderful union which this masterwork presents of di­dactic precept, varied and splendid description, touch­ing pathos and sensibility, episodes at once appropriate and striking, historic and mythologie allusion, displaying all the resources of the richest poetical treasury. The sweetness and easy flow of versification by which the Eclogues are distinguished, gave but faint indication of the matchless power, variety, and magnificence of the Georgics. Although the subject of this poem is peculiarly national, yet the same imitative spirit which pervades the whole literature of Rome, exercised its influence here also. As in the Eclogues Theocritus, so here Hesiod formed the chief model for the general structure and conduct of the work. But in this poem Virgil perhaps owes less to his prototypes than in his other productions; and he has dif­fused over the whole a flood of poetical light peculiarly his own. The poet has indeed exhibited the happiest combination of genius and art, and has succeeded in im­parting to didactic themes a life, an interest, and a gran­deur, of which, from their nature, they seem scarcely sus­ceptible. Here the Romans found scenes and modes of life in which their fathers had delighted, depicted in co­lours which could not fail to excite the deepest interest, and rekindle in their breasts the love of pursuits, which, though for a time banished by the rude collisions of civil strife, were associated in their minds with the heroes and patriots of old, with the undying achievements and illustri­ous characters of ancient times. In estimating the merits of the Georgics, we must not pass without special notice the matchless beauty of the versification. In sustained majesty, in melody that ever satisfies but never cloys the ear, in variety of modulation, in stateliness but freedom of march. It stands unapproached by any other Roman poet, and unsurpassed by Virgil himself.

Having with such signal success enriched the litera­ture of his country with two species of poetry, of which till then it possessed no example, he resolved to attempt a work of a still higher nature. It is evident that lie had long meditated such a work; as we find allusions to it both in the Eclogues and Georgics. He commenced the *Æneid,* a.u. 724, the year in which he completed the Georgics. This great work, undertaken, we are told, at the request of Augustus, occupied him till his death, and even then had not received his finishing touch. As he proceeded with its composition, the greatest interest was excited re­-