his friend a poet as great as Virgil. But the younger Pliny gently says that he wrote poems with greater diligence than talent, and that, when, according to the fashion of the time, he recited them to his friends, “ he sometimes found out what men really thought of them.” It is indeed strange that the poem lived on. Silius is never mentioned by ancient writers after Pliny except Sidonius, who, under different conditions and at a much lower level, was such another as he. Since the discovery of Silius by Poggio, no modern enthusiast has arisen to sing his praises. His poem has been rarely edited since the 18th century. Yet, by the purity of his taste and his Latin in an age when taste was fast becoming vicious and Latin corrupt, by his presentation to us of a type of a thousand vanished Latin epics, and by the historic aspects of his subject, Silius merits better treatment from scholars than he has received. The general reader he can hardly interest again. He is indeed of imitation all compact, and usually dilutes what he borrows; he may add a new beauty, but new strength he never gives. Hardly a dozen lines anywhere are without an echo of Virgil, and there are frequent admixtures of Lucretius, Horace, Ovid, Lucan, Homer, Hesiod and many other poets still extant. If we could reconstitute the library of Silius we should probably find that scarcely an idea or a phrase in his entire work was wholly his own.

The raw material of the *Punica* was supplied in the main by the third decade of Livy, though Silius may have consulted other historians of the Hannibalic war. Such facts as are used are generally presented with their actual circumstances unchanged, and in their historic sequence. The spirit of the Punic times is but rarely misconceived—as when to secret voting is attributed the election of men like Flaminius and Varro, and distinguished Romans are depicted as contending in a gladiatorial exhibition. Silius clearly intended the poem to consist of twenty-four books, like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey,* but after the twelfth he hurries in visible weariness to the end, and concludes with seventeen. The general plan of the epic follows that of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid.* Its theme is conceived as a duel between two mighty nations, with parallel dissensions among the gods. Scipio and Hannibal are the two great heroes who take the place of Achilles and Hector on the one hand and of Aeneas and Turnus on the other, while the minor figures are all painted with Virgilian or Homeric pigments. In the delineation of character our poet is neither very powerful nor very consistent. His imagination was too weak to realize the actors with distinctness and individuality. His Hannibal is evidently at the outset meant for an incarnation of cruelty and treachery, the embodiment of all that the vulgar Roman attached to the name "Punic.” But in the course of the poem the greatness of Hannibal is borne in upon the poet, and his feeling of it betrays itself in many touches. Thus he names Scipio “ the great Hannibal of Ausonia he makes Juno assure the Carthaginian leader that if fortune had only permitted him to be bom a Roman he would have been admitted to a place among the gods; and, when the ungenerous monster of the first book accords in the fifteenth a splendid burial to Marcellus, the poet cries, “ You would fancy it was a Sidonian chief who had fallen." Silius deserves little pity for the failure of his attempt to make Scipio an equipoise to Hannibal and the counterpart in personal prowess and prestige of Achilles. He becomes in the process almost as mythical a figure as the medieval Alexander. The best drawn of the minor characters are Fabius Cunctator, an evident copy of Lucan’s Cato, and Paullus, the consul killed at Cannae, who fights, hates and dies like a genuine man.

Clearly it was a matter of religion with Silius to repeat and adapt all the striking episodes of Homer and Virgil. Hannibal must have a shield of marvellous workmanship like Achilles and Aeneas; because Aeneas descended into Hades and had a vision of the future history of Rome, so must Scipio have his revelation from heaven; Trebia, choked with bodies, must rise in ire like Xanthus, and be put to flight by Vulcan; for Virgil’s Camilla there must be an Asbyte, heroine of Saguntum; the beautiful speech of Euryalus when Nisus seeks to leave him is too good to be thrown away—furbished up a little, it will serve as a parting address from Imilce to her husband Hannibal. The descriptions of the numerous battles are made up in the main, according to epic rule, of single combats—wearisome sometimes in Homer, wearisome oftener in Virgil, painfully wearisome in Silius. The different component parts of the poem are on the whole fairly well knit together, and the transitions are not often needlessly abrupt; yet occasionally incidents and episodes are introduced with all the irrelevancy of the modern novel. The interposition of the gods is, however, usually managed with dignity and appropriateness.

As to diction and detail, we miss, in general, power rather than taste. The metre runs on with correct smooth monotony, with something always of the Virgilian sweetness, though attenuated, but nothing of the Virgilian variety and strength. The dead level of literary execution is seldom broken by a rise into the region of genuine pathos and beauty, or by a descent into the ludicrous or the repellent. There are few absurdities, but the restraining force is trained perception and not a native sense of humour, which, ever present in Homer, not entirely absent in Virgil, and sometimes finding grim expression in Lucan, fails Silius entirely. The address of Anna, Dido’s sister, to Juno compels a smile. Though deified on her sister’s death, and for a good many centuries already an inhabitant of heaven, Anna meets Juno for the first time on the outbreak of the *Second* Punic War, and deprecates the anger of the queen of heaven for having deserted the Carthaginians and attached herself to the Roman cause. Hannibal’s parting address to his child is also comical: he recognizes in the “ heavy wailing ” of the year-old babe “ the seeds of rages like his own.” But Silius might have been forgiven for a thousand more weaknesses than he has if in but a few things he had shown strength. The grandest scenes in the history before him fail to lift him up; his treatment, for example, of Hannibal’s Alpine passage falls immensely below Lucan’s vigorous delineation of Cato’s far less stirring march across the African deserts.

But in the very weaknesses of Silius we may discern merit. He at least does not try to conceal defects of substance by contorted rhetorical conceits and feebly forcible exaggerations. In his ideal of what Latin expression should be he comes near to his contemporary Quintilian, and resolutely holds aloof from the tenor of his age. Perhaps his want of success with the men of his time was not wholly due to his faults. His self-control rarely fails him; it stands the test of the horrors of war, and of Venus working her will on Hannibal at Capua. Only a few passages here and there betray the true silver Latin extravagance. In the avoidance of rhetorical artifice and epigrammatic antithesis Silius stands in marked contrast to Lucan, yet at times he can write with point. Regarded merely as a poet he may not deserve high praise; but, as he is a unique specimen and probably the best of a once numerous class, the preservation of his poem among the remains of Latin Literature is a fortunate accident.

The poem was discovered in a MS., possibly at Constance, by Poggio, in 1416 or 1417; from this now lost MS. all existing MSS., which belong entirely to the 15th century, are derived. A valuable MS. of the 8th or 9th century, found at Cologne by L. Carrion in the latter part of the 16th century, disappeared soon after its discovery. Two *editiones principes* appeared at Rome in 1471; the principal editions since have been those of Heinsius (1600), Drakenborch (1717), Ernesti (Leipzig, 1791) and L. Bauer (1890). The *Punica* is included in the second edition of the *Corpus poetarum Latinorum.* A useful *variorum* edition is that of Lemaire (Paris, 1823). Recent writing on Silius is generally in the form of separate articles or small pamphlets; but see H. E. Butler, *Post-Augustan Poetry* (1909), chap. x. (J. S. R.)

**SILK,** a fibrous substance produced by many insects, princi­pally in the form of a cocoon or covering within which the creatures are enclosed and protected during the period of their principal transformations. The webs and nests, &c., formed by spiders are also of silk. But the fibres used for manufacturing purposes are exclusively produced by the mulberry silk-moth of China, *Bombyx mori,* and a few other moths closely allied to that insect. Among the Chinese the name of the silkworm is “ si, ” Korean "soi"; to the ancient Greeks it became known