

PD14 - Alternate Translations

Post by "Cassius" of September 4, 2021 at 8:14 PM

Here is at least part of what I am remembering about Munro's commentary. The first line about not caring if it is true is not good but may be part of the old issue of self-protection. However read the part marked in red as to "sterile wisdom" and "barren virtue" and I think we have good evidence of an Epicurean heart:

poetical conceptions.

Is then the epicurean system well or ill adapted to these purposes? As a poet in that age could scarcely be the inventor of a new system of philosophy, Lucretius could hardly help adopting some one of those which were then in vogue; if not the epicurean, then the academical or peripatetical or stoical. To construct a poem out of either of the first two with its barren logomachies, wire-drawn distinctions without a

difference, would have truly been to twist a rope out of sand: of course I am speaking of these two systems as they were in the days of Cicero and Lucretius; though much the same might be said of them in the age of their first propounders. Well then the stoical? I unhesitatingly assert that for all purposes of poetry both its physical and ethical doctrines are incomparably inferior to those of Epicurus. Read the *de natura deorum*; compare their one wretched world, their monotonous fire, their rotund and rotatory god, their method of destroying and creating anew their world, with the system of nature unfolded by Lucretius, grand and majestic in its general outline, with some strangely suggestive anticipations of the latest marvels of physical science. Then look at their sterile wisdom and still more barren virtue with their repudiation of all that constitutes the soul of poetry. Lucretius on the other hand can preach up virtue and temperance and wisdom and sober reason with as loud a voice as any of your stoics; and then what inexhaustible resources does he leave himself in his *alma Venus* and *dux vitæ diu voluptas*! Are examples wanted? then contrast the varied graces and exuberant beauty of Virgil, when he is pleased to assume the garb of an epicurean, with the leaden dulness and tedious obscurity of the stoic Manilius; or compare the rich humour and winning ways and ease of a Horace with the hardness and thinness and forced wit of a Persius. All this it may be said is in the men, not their systems. Yes, but the proper choice of a subject is half the battle. And yet the picturesque English historian speaks of the epi-