collection of Odes, it must be considered Horace's private and intimate tribute to his dead friend, placed in the context of his more public monument. And if we find the ode difficult and in some ways unsatisfactory, it may well be because it is a neoteric poem in an Augustan book.

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THE GAMES IN AENEID V

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In general, the first six books of the Aeneid have been more highly esteemed than the second half of the poem, and among the first six, unlike the Beethoven symphonies, the even numbers have enjoyed more favour than the odd. This may be partly because each of these three books has an obvious central theme, the Fall of Troy, Dido, the Underworld. Books I and III have no such unifying element. They get the action started and keep it going with a variety of brief episodes. Alone among the odd numbers, Book V can properly be given a title from the event which supplies the bulk of it - the Funeral Games.

We have now so many epics which contain descriptions of such Games that it might seem unnecessary to ask why Virgil included them in his Aeneid. The obvious answer, and no doubt part of the right one, is that he found them in Homer and followed his great exemplar in this as in many other details. Yet in Virgil's own time, Funeral Games may not have seemed such a sine qua non of an epic as they do to us. It is worth noting that they are not to be found in the one epic which has survived from the period between Homer and Virgil, the Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius. For his sporting interest, Apollonius was content with a description of a boxing match between Polydeuces and the barbarian king Amycus of the Bebrycians. He performed his task with so little spirit that Theocritus was moved to attempt a rival account of the same fight (Id. XXII), and rather surprisingly for the poet of the placid pastoral scene, he produced the most vivid description of a boxing match that has come down to us from the ancient world. The example of Apollonius shows that when Virgil embarked on the Aeneid, Funeral Games were not considered essential to an epic, but after Virgil almost every epic poet felt compelled to include them. Statius and Silius Italicus in Latin and Quintus Smyrnaeus and Nonnus in Greek follow Virgil's example. The only important exception is Valerius Flaccus, who in his Argonautica accepts the lead of Apollonius in this as in many other details. If Virgil, like Apollonius, had failed to follow Homer by including Games in the Aeneid, his successors might well have imitated him here as elsewhere; it is

possible to argue that the tradition of Games in epic owes at least as much to Virgil as to Homer.

It is particularly surprising that Apollonius Rhodius avoided this path which Roman Virgil was later to tread. He belonged to the Greek world, where athletics and chariot racing as spectator sports aroused the same violent enthusiasm that football evokes to-day. His native Rhodes had a great athletic tradition. In the 5th century B.C. it produced the greatest family of athletes in history, that of Diagoras and Dorieus. If we draw up a 'League Table' of Greek cities which produced known Olympic winners during the seven centuries of the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods from the death of Alexander to 369 A.D. when records peter out, Rhodes comes second in the list, excelled only by Alexandria in Egypt. It is quite certain that Virgil had no such strength of tradition behind him, and that he could not rely on any comparable enthusiasm, for athletics at any rate, among his Roman readers. It is interesting to enquire what knowledge of the subject he could expect in those to whom he was addressing his poem.

The earliest Roman _ludi_ were limited to equestrian events. Livy (I.35) tells us that the elder Tarquin extended the programme by introducing boxers from Etruria. In 364 B.C. (Livy VII.2), _ludi scenici_ were performed, to expel a plague from Rome, by _ludiones_ also from Etruria, dancing to the music of pipes. Gladiatorial exhibitions, no doubt Etruscan in origin, were at first given only as part of funeral games. According to Valerius Maximus (II.iv.7), the earliest gladiatorial show given in Rome apart from such funeral rites took place in 264 B.C., and Livy states (XXVIII.21) that in 206 B.C. P. Scipio Africanus gave funeral games at Carthage, including gladiators, in memory of his father and uncle, killed five years earlier. The first Greek games at Rome, according to Livy (XXXIX.22), were given by M. Fulvius Nobilior in 186 B.C. We hear of other Greek games offered by Sulla in 81 B.C., by M. Aemilius Scaurus in 58, by Pompey in 55, by M. Curio in 53, and in 46 by Julius Caesar. There is no reason to suppose that these were the only occasions.

How far these Greek games in the Republican period produced enthusiasm for athletics among the Romans is uncertain, but presumably popularity-hunting politicians would not have continued to give them if the people had not enjoyed them. The evidence from contemporary literature is scanty. There are some allusions to athletics in Terence and Plautus, but we have to remember that both these authors were translating or adapting Greek plays. However, neither of them would have retained words or phrases which were meaningless to their audiences, particularly Plautus, who obviously Romanised his material freely. There is an interesting reference in the two surviving prologues of Terence's Hecyra. The first production of the play had apparently resulted in a fiasco, and in these prologues Terence is at pains to explain the failure; he attributes it to the rival attractions of a tight-rope walker, gladiators, and what he calls 'pugilum gloria', a phrase which suggests that even in those days boxers had good publicity agents. In the Eunuch (315) Chaereas complains about the fashionable pencil silhouette of the girls of his day; 'Their mothers try to make them bottle-necked and flat-chested so that they shall look slender; if one of them happens to be a bit more curvaceous, they call her a boxer, and put her on a slimming diet'. Twice in Plautus someone

enquires about the health of an absent person. In one case the answer is 'Pancratice atque athletice' (Bacch.248), in the other, 'Pugilice atque athletice' (Epid 20). We must not attach too much importance to these. The phrase 'Fit as a fiddle' does not necessarily imply a wide knowledge of music in the one who uses it. But the former phrase suggests that even as early as Plautus' time, most Romans had some idea of what a pancratiast was, as well as a boxer. In Bacchides (423 ff.) there is a much more significant passage. In words strongly reminiscent of Aristophanes' 'Clouds', Lydus is regretting the passing of old-fashioned education; 'In those days, if you did not arrive at the palaestra before sunrise, you were severely punished by the Head of the gymnasium. Then things grew tougher and tougher. They got their exercise by running, wrestling, javelin-throwing, discus-throwing, ball-play and jumping'. In a similar passage in 'Mostellaria' (151) the rake Philolaches regrets his lost youth; 'Then there was no keener or more outstanding athlete among the young men than I. Discus, javelin, ball-play, running, weapon-drill, horsemanship, - that was the life. I was a model of toughness and strict training. All the others looked on me as an example'. In these two passages Plautus includes every event of the Greek athletic programme except boxing and the pankration. He would hardly have retained all this from his originals if the terms had not been understood by his audience. Even more conclusive are the words of a threat in Rudens (721); 'I'll make a punch-ball of you and hang you up and go for you with my fists'. At the beginning of the second century B.C., a Roman audience was clearly familiar with the details of a boxer's training.

(A minor point of interest is that references to ball-play are much more frequent in Latin than in Greek literature. The Romans used a Latin word for it, 'pila', though when they provided a special place for it, they called it by the Greek term 'sphaeristerium').

We get less enlightenment than we might have hoped from Cicero's letters. He himself makes quite clear the reason for this. In July 44, less than 4 months after the murder of Caesar, Brutus gave Games in Rome. Cicero writes to Atticus (Att. XVI. 5); 'It is rumoured that at the opening of the Greek Games there were not many spectators. That did not disappoint me in the least, for you know what I think of Greek Games'. Earlier, when his brother Quintus was governor of Asia, Cicero had congratulated him (QF I.1) on his edict prohibiting the spending of public money on Games, - which in Asia would have been mainly athletic meetings. In 55 he wrote to M. Marius about the Games given by Pompey; 'Seeing that you despise even gladiators, why should I suppose that you minded missing the athletes? Pompey himself admits that the effort and oil he expended on them were wasted'. (Ad Fam. VII.1) (Tyrrell's notion that 'oil' here means 'Midnight oil' is nonsense. One of the most important duties of an Agonothete was to supply olive oil for the competitors, who by this time had become highly critical in this matter; on occasion they were appeased with scented oil).

There is, however, one very significant passage in Cicero's letters. In August 44, undecided about what he ought to do in the confused situation after Caesar's death, he set out for Greece but turned back before arriving there. He tells Atticus (XVI.7) that Brutus and his friends were particularly glad about his return, because he had thereby escaped the imputation of being thought to be going

to the Olympic Games. (Quod eam vituperationem effugissem, me existimari ad Olympia). No conduct, he adds, would have been more disgraceful at any crisis of the state; in this one it would have been ἀναπολόγητον. The last sentence disposes of any idea that Cicero was being facetious. The implication surely is that many Romans did in fact go off to Olympia that August. And if this happened in that summer, far more Roman tourists must have visited the Games in Olympic years of less political tension. The colloquial phrase used by Cicero, me existimari ad Olympia, in itself suggests that the practice was well established - 'He's off to Olympia'.

It may be added that, slight though Cicero's enthusiasm for Greek sports may have been, his house in Rome possessed a palaestra and a sphaeristerium.

Other authors of the Republican period give little help. Catullus has nothing, the description in Propertius of the scandals of women's athletics at Sparta is scarcely relevant, and Lucretius provides only the famous simile from the torch race. But we have seen enough evidence to suggest that when Augustus came to set the Empire in order, there was already in Roman circles some interest in Greek athletics, and it is clear that he did something to foster this interest. When he founded Nikopolis in honour of his victory at Actium, he reconstituted an ancient athletic festival there as a quadrennial meeting, the Aktia, and built a stadium for it. He also inaugurated Ludi Actiaci at Rome; Dio Cassius reports that well-born men and boys took part in the chariot racing, which suggests that this was an innovation in a Roman sport which had previously been entirely professional. Dio also states that on this occasion Augustus had a wooden stadium constructed in the Campus Martius for the γυμνικὸς ἀγὼν. This is the first mention of a stadium in the western Roman world; earlier athletic contests in Rome appear to have been held in the Circus, probably as part of a mixed programme. Now the conventional Greek programme was followed, probably at Rome and certainly at Nikopolis, whose Aktia, as we know from inscriptions, at once assumed an importance equal to that of the four great 'Crown' meetings in Greece itself.

It was natural enough that Augustus should take this line. He was well aware of the fission between the Latin and Greek halves of his dominions and of the necessity of integrating them as far as possible; our own times have shown the value of a shared sport in maintaining links between peoples. Nearly two centuries before Augustus, the Romans had shown that they realised the importance of athletics meetings in Greek eyes when in 196 Flaminius chose the Isthmian Games as suitable occasion for proclaiming the liberty of Greece. Apart from the question of 'integration', pro-consuls and pro-praetors with their staffs were regularly being sent out from the Latin west to govern the Greek-speaking provinces, and it was obviously desirable that they should know as much as possible about the life of that world.

We can catch glimpses of this fresh impetus to the Roman interest in Greek sport in the pages of Horace. In Odes I.8, where he complains that young Sybaris is being ruined by Lydia, he asks; 'Why does he avoid olive oil more carefully than if it were vipers' blood - Sybaris who was once renowned for hurling the discus out of the ground (trans finem)?' In Odes III.6, Hebrus, beloved of Neobule, is

described as 'A better horseman than Bellerophon himself, unbeaten at boxing and running'. Horace could rely on his readers understanding an allusion to the pankratiast Glykon of Pergamum, who was an Olympic victor probably in 32 or 28, and also, as an inscription tells us, a winner at the Aktia of Nikopolis (Ep.I. ii.30). Two metaphors in the Epistles also presume an acquaintance with athletics in his readers. Summing up his gospel of aurea mediocritas (Ep.I.ii.70), he writes; 'If you set a slow pace in the race, I shall not lag behind with you, and if you exert every effort to take the lead, I shall not run at your shoulder'. Again (Ep.I.19.46), he declares his refusal to argue with his critics in these words; 'For fear of being scratched by the sharp nail of my opponent (luctantis), I cry "Displicet iste locus" and demand "Diludia"', This passage contains the only reference in ancient literature to what must always have been a danger to a wrestler - the sharp nails of his opponent, a danger which must surely have been guarded against by the rules. The phrase 'Displicet iste locus' is our only evidence that a wrestler who did not approve of the piece of ground chosen for the ring could refuse to fight on it. Diludia is found nowhere else. Acron says that it was a postponement of a match by up to 5 days granted to gladiators. Horace could clearly rely on his readers understanding these technicalities.

Generally, however, Horace mixes the Greek athletic events with others which he regards as Roman. Thus in the Lydia ode he asks, 'Why does Sybaris fear to touch the tawny Tiber? Why are his arms no longer black and blue with bruises from weapons?' - an obvious allusion to fencing and other military exercises. Hebrus too bathes in the Tiber and is expert in hunting. In Ars Poetica (371), to drive home his point that skill and training are needed in everything, he writes; 'The man who knows nothing of games keeps away from the weapons of the Campus, and being ignorant of ball-play, the discus or the hoop, he keeps quiet, for fear that the spectators may justifiably roar with laughter at his efforts'. He admits Greek superiority at their own sports, for he gives as an example of an absurb statement by Romans about themselves, 'We are better at wrestling than the oil-smeared Greeks' (Ep.II.i.32). He is even willing to grant that these Greek sports demand arduous preparation (A.P.412); 'The man who wishes to achieve the longed-for victory in a race must as a boy have trained long and hard, have sweated and groaned, and abstained from wine and women'. But from time to time the Roman contempt for the Greek colours his thought even on this subject. Dealing with the Greek love of novelty, he writes; 'It was when Greece laid aside her wars and began to devote herself to trifles (nugari), and prosperity began to degenerate into vice, that enthusiasm for athletics and horses flared up'. Historically of course this is nonsense, but the Roman attitude is plain. Again, praising the simple life (Sat. II.2), he advises hare hunting or horse-breeding, and then goes on; 'Or, if Roman pursuits wear you out because you are used to playing the Greek (Graecari), try the quick ball-play, which by its excitement makes you forget your exhaustion, or if you prefer discus-throwing, then aim high in the yielding air with your discus'. Even more open is his contempt in Od.III.24.54, where he is lamenting the degeneracy of Roman youth, ignorant of horsemanship and hunting, 'more skilled at playing with a Greek hoop, or, if you would rather, with illegal dice'.

But, allowing for this traditional feeling about Greeks, there can be little doubt that a fashion for Greek athletics did spread among Roman youths of good family in the Augustan age. That it was no mere flash in the pan is clear from

many allusions in later Latin literature, which do not concern us now. A final example from Augustan times must suffice. Ovid, recalling in Tomi the joys of spring in distant Rome, includes; 'Now they are riding their horses, now they are fencing or playing with ball or hoop. Now the young men, streaming with slippery oil, bathe their weary limbs in the Aqua Virgo' (Tr.III.12).

It is clear from these quotations that the Romans of Virgil's time were no slavish followers of the narrow Greek athletic programme; they gave free rein to their own preferences, as for ball-play and swimming. The latter is particularly interesting. The Greeks obviously took the ability to swim almost for granted; their phrase for the Three Rs was γράμματα καὶ νήχεσθαι. Yet references to swimming are rare in Greek literature, especially to swimming for pleasure or exercise. But Horace clearly delighted in it. We have seen that Sybaris and Hebrus were keen swimmers; in Od.III.7 he says of Enipeus that 'no-one swam so fast in the waters of the Tiber', which seems to imply swimming races, if only informal ones. And in the Satires (II.i.7) he advises those who want sound sleep to swim the Tiber three times. Like ball-games, hoop-bowling figures more in Latin than in Greek literature, but it is called by its Greek name. Ovid throws an unexpected sidelight on this variety in Roman sporting interests. He devotes the whole of Tr.II to complaining about his ill-treatment at the hands of Augustus; in particular he protests that exception had been taken to his Ars Amatoria, while other poets had written with impunity on far more socially dangerous themes, such as gambling. The mention of gambling leads him on to call attention rather irrelevantly to other games which had been treated in verse without evoking protest, and he ends this section with the intriguing line; Hic artem nandi praecipit, ille trochi. (Tr.II.486). When we are mourning all the missing masterpieces of Greek and Latin literature, we might perhaps spare a small sigh for that lost Latin poem 'On Bowling a Hoop'.

Possibly then it was this enthusiasm for sport among his readers that led Virgil not to follow Apollonius Rhodius in being content with a simple boxing match in his epic, but to go back to his Homeric examplar and include a more comprehensive programme of Games. He is not likely to have been influenced by memories of any very active participation in sport in his own youth. In the famous description of the Journey to Brundisium in the Satires (I.v), Horace reveals that at Capua, when Maecenas went off after dinner to his ball-game, he and Virgil went to bed, 'For ball-play is no friend to the short-sighted and dyspeptic'. But Virgil may well have been aware that Augustus would view with approval the introduction into his poem of this encouragement to healthy exercise.

By deciding to include these games in his epic, he was facing one of the most difficult tasks of literature. It has often been noted with surprise that the Christian religion has inspired so little poetry of the highest excellence. In the same way, sport has produced little verse that is even passable, and not much more in the way of memorable prose.

Football, for instance, arouses men's wildest enthusiasm all over the world; yet, though it is the subject of vast quantities of writing every day, it has evoked hardly anything that rises above the commonplace, and most of the output is drivel.

Rugby in its primitive form gave us one classic, the game in Tom Brown's Schooldays, but that is all. Rowing has inspired a few good descriptions of races; athletics hardly any. The exceptions are chariot-racing and steeplechasing and above all cricket, which has produced a considerable literature to which its votaries can return with pleasure time and time again.

The reason for the difficulty of sporting literature is summed up in a single line of Ovid in his splendid description of Atalanta's race (Met.X.560 ff.). He excuses the abrupt end of his account with the words; 'Lest my story be longer than the race itself' (Neve meus sermo cursu sit tardior ipso. 679). Herein lies the secret. It is rarely possible to match the pace of sport with the pace of narration. Football, for instance, at its best consists of a rapid succession of exciting moments, each involving the position and movements of perhaps a dozen players. The eye can take it all in at once. But by the time the swiftest narrator has described the whole situation, the excitement has vanished. Cricket on the other hand is a slow-moving game; even its most thrilling moments depend for their intensity on a certain deliberateness in the action. Description can eliminate the boring stretches and match the pace of the climaxes; Cobden's Over can be recounted in just the time that it must have taken to bowl. The difficulty with athletics is obvious. Field events are hopeless material for literature. X jumps or throws further than Y, and there is an end of it. Short races are over too quickly for description to keep up with them. With races over longer distances, chariots and steeplechases have clear advantages. An account of spills and crashes can fill up the early stages of the story, before the exciting final dash for the line. Moreover in these early stages, drivers and riders can call out to one another, and so characterisation is made easier. But runners in a long-distance race have no breath to spare for such exchanges. The 'Stream of Consciousness' technique offers the best hope of combining the inevitable Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner with the excitement required in sporting literature.

The writers of the ancient world were not yet masters of this technique, but they were well aware of the problems. Homer, after spreading himself over 270 lines for his chariot race, devotes 58 to the footrace, 48 to boxing, 40 to wrestling. He can spare only 24 for the discus, and disposes of the javelin in 9, without a javelin being thrown at all. Sophocles showed his realisation of the difficulties even more clearly. In the supposed appearance of Orestes at the Pythian Games (El.681 ff.), he made his hero win every athletic event of the Games in 10 lines, leaving himself 60 for the chariot race. Virgil profits from his reading of Homer to restrict his programme of events on land; he includes only a foot-race, boxing and archery. At the first mention of the Games he promises javelin-throwing (V.68, aut iaculo incedit melior), but wisely he forgets all about it.

The ancient writers were not merely aware of the problems; they also knew some tricks for increasing interest. In any contest, especially a race, a better effect is achieved if the winner comes from behind, preferably from an apparently hopeless position. A runner or driver may keep out of trouble by going ahead from the start and steadily increasing his lead, but this produces a race dull to watch and even duller to read about. The winner may be held back in the early stages by his own conception of the best tactics, or by an accident, as in John Masefield's

steeplechasing poem 'Right Royal', in which the hero is thrown and remounts before riding to victory. Mention of accident reveals a difference between our outlook on sport and that of the Greeks and Romans. A certain element of chance is inevitable in any game. For us, bad luck must happen to the hero, and he must conquer in spite of it. It is quite unacceptable for him to win through an accident to one of his opponents. For the Greeks and Romans, winning was all-important, and it did not matter in the least how victory was achieved. In the most famous race of antiquity, that between Atalanta and the last of her suitors, Hippomenes prevailed only by the most flagrant bribery of his opponent; but perhaps that belongs to the literature of Romance rather than of athletics. In Homer's foot-race, Odysseus won because Ajax when leading slipped in a mess of blood and dung. Virgil uses the same accident in his race, but from our point of view makes matters even worse by making the final result depend on a deliberate foul. Nisus when leading slips just as Ajax does in Homer; lying on the ground, he realises that his boy friend Euryalus is now second, so he cunningly trips the new leader Salius, leaving Euryalus to finish first. To the reader's surprise, Salius' protest is disregarded by Aeneas, and Salius receives only a consolation prize, as does also the guilty Nisus. Even more disconcerting is the fact that all the spectators are on Euryalus' side, because he is a good-looking boy and bursts into tears at the thought of losing the first prize. 'Tutatur favor Euryalum lacrimaeque decorae' (V.343).

(I doubt if Mr. Williams is right in explaining these <u>lacrimae</u> <u>decorae</u> as 'modest' in the sense of not offending against Roman propriety. Statius makes his Parthenopaeus behave in exactly the same way, and says of him, 'Accessit lacrimarum gratia formae').

Virgil's example here had deplorable results for the future of epic athletics. In Silius Italicus the winner of the foot-race in the funeral games achieves his prize by grasping the hair of a rival runner and pulling him back; there is no objection or protest. In Statius the same foul is perpetrated; this is at least followed by a protest but not, as might be expected, by disqualification; the race is re-run.

It is impossible to form a consistent mental picture of Virgil's race. The reason is that he closely follows Homer's corresponding event which is equally unsatisfactory. Homer appears to have envisaged a straight race without a turn. 'Achilles pointed out the finish to the runners' (Il.XXIII.757. σήμηνε δὲ τέρματ' Ἀχιλλεύς must imply this. If the race had been out-and-home, a diaulos, the runners would have been standing on the finishing line, and there would have been no need to indicate it to them. The race is therefore the stade of later Greek athletics, a sprint; yet Odysseus employs in it the tactics of a long-distance runner, dropping in behind Ajax and running at his shoulder. Virgil nowhere makes clear the length of his race, but if he had had a turn in mind, he would surely not have missed the opportunities it offered for description of spills and tactical skill in racing. As in Homer, although a straight and therefore short race seems to be implied, much of the description fits only a long-distance race. At the start, he tells us, the runners leaped from the line 'effusi nimbo similes'. This is an admirable image for the bunch of runners in a distance race. In a straight

furlong the runners do not bunch but maintain a line which becomes increasingly ragged as the race goes on. Virgil makes the same mistake as Homer in his account of the tactics of the race. Helymus is lying third; directly behind him comes Diores, 'treading on his heels and running at his shoulder', excellent strategy in a distance race but hopeless in a sprint. In the absence of marked lanes and in the jungle world of ancient athletics, Helymus with a short lead might well have tried to 'bore' Diores off the track by steadily edging in front of him, using the tactics which Cicero quoting Chrysippus deplores (de Off. 3.42), 'Qui stadium currit supplantare eum quicum certet aut manu depellere nullo modo debet', but no sprinter would ever drop in behind another.

Virgil's vagueness about the distance of his race is partly responsible for the difficulty of the chief crux of the passage - _simul ultima signant_ (317). The words occur immediately after the start, _limenque relinquunt_, and are followed by the picture of Nisus taking the lead. Four interpretations have been suggested, which may be grouped according to whether simul is adverb or conjunction.

A. _Simul_ as adverb. The words then look back.

1. Conington. 'At the same time they mark out the finishing line'. This may be rejected on grounds of common sense and awkward change of subject.

2. Sc. 'oculis'. 'At the same time they fix their eyes on the finish'. Servius' first interpretation. This would make it certain that Virgil envisaged a straight race. The phrase is then the equivalent of Homer's σήμηνε δὲ τέρματ' Ἀχιλλεύς.

It is permissible to ask why this change of direction of sight should have happened after the start; we might have expected an eager gaze at the finishing post to be part of the nervous tension of runners awaiting the signal. There is a possible explanation. Homer and Virgil do not, of course, envisage the use of a starting gate for their races, but it remains true that every race which Virgil himself watched in a stadium was started from such a gate. Runners at the gate must have been strongly tempted to keep their eyes on the bar to catch the first signs of its movement of release. The change of direction of the gaze would then come naturally during the first few strides of the race. The same thing must have happened to charioteers starting from the _carceres_. Virgil then may be unconsciously transferring a phenomenon of his own day to the heroic age.

B. _Simul_ as conjunction. The words then look forward.

3. Sc. 'pedibus'. 'As soon as they entered the last stage'. More applicable to a distance race than a furlong. Matches Homer's ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ πύματον τέλεον δρόμον. (Il.XXIII.768). Servius' second interpretation. F.H. Sandbach, _C.R._ 1957.

4. Henry. 'When the last blast of the trumpet rang out'. If we could be sure that the race was one of several laps, this might be the best interpretation. Pausanias reveals that at Olympia a trumpet was sounded to indicate the last lap in horse races.

It is not easy to choose between 2, 3 and 4. I am coming to the conclusion that Virgil had picked up a colloquial term of racing, like our 'at the bell' or that curious horse-racing phrase 'at the distance', and incorporated it in his account, perhaps not quite accurately.

There are some memorable phrases in Virgil's race, notably in his account of Nisus' fall;

Hic iuuenis iam uictor ouans uestigia presso
haud tenuit titubata solo.

Perhaps simply 'As he trod on the spot', or possibly 'though he pressed against the ground' (in the hope of regaining his foothold). R.D.Williams. The words presso solo have not always been fully appreciated. Poets, Virgil among them, often speak of runners skimming the ground and hardly marking the track with their footprints. This is nonsense. A sprinter's foot hits the ground very hard; he depends for speed upon thrust, and the greater the speed, the fiercer is this piston-like thrust. Presso solo brings this out vividly, but it defies translation. 'As he pounded along' gives the sense, but is more suggestive of policemen than of high poetry. 'As he thrashed the track' might perhaps serve. Possibly concessive, as R.D.W.

To add interest to his boxing match, Virgil employs another cliché of sporting literature by pitting a crafty old veteran against a brash and over-confident youngster and thus enlisting the sympathy of his readers for the former right from the start. Lovers of Tom Brown's Schooldays, a work invaluable to students of the history and literature of sport, will remember that Hughes uses the same device in his account of the back-sword contest at the Cotswold 'Veast'. Virgil contrives to give adequate length to his description by an account of the two sets of boxing gloves produced by the competitors, of the metal-loaded pattern familiar to his readers, for whom boxing was usually part of a gladiatorial show. They are rejected in favour of 'caestus aequos', 'paribus armis', by which Virgil probably wishes us to understand the more civilised Greek pattern. The tactics of the boxers are well contrasted, the veteran Entellus necessarily economical of movement, while Dares tries to exploit his youthful nimbleness of foot. The poet then turns to another stock device, the early set-back to the hero. Entellus aims a mighty blow at Dares but misses completely and falls to the ground. He recovers from this so satisfactorily that Aeneas is compelled to stop the fight in order to save Dares' life. This might appear tame, but Virgil achieves a splendid climax to the episode by making Entellus kill the ox he receives as prize with a single blow of his fist.

A minor point of interest in this passage is that it reminds us that in the epic tradition Priam's son Paris was a great boxer. Dares is described as 'The only man who could hold his own with Paris' (solus qui Paridem solitus contendere contra. 370). Generally we base our conception of Helen's paramour on Hector's contempt for him as a carpet knight and lounge lizard, and forget the story that he proved himself to be Priam's son by his victory in Games at Troy.

The archery contest which follows the boxing is dull, possibly because it sticks so closely to Homer. Virgil tries without much success to enliven it by adding the supernatural incident when the final arrow bursts into flames in mid-air. He avoids the feeble anti-climax of Homer's funeral games by ending his programme with the Lusus Troiae, apparently a kind of Lancers on horseback, which doubtless meant more to his readers that it does to us. But, like Homer, Virgil missed the opportunity of securing a strong climax, as a modern writer would do, by placing his best event at the end of the meeting, for undeniably the great glory of his Games is the boat-race, as the chariot race is in the Iliad.

There is no reason to doubt Hyginus' statement that Virgil was the first to include such a race in an epic. Had he been following some lost Hellenistic poem, the ancient commentators would surely have known of it. In view of his success, the wonder is that he found no imitators; the next account of a boat race in literature other than journalism appears to be the brief description of the Cambridge Mays at the end of Fitzgerald's Platonic dialogue Euphranor (1851). Virgil must have had a strong motive to induce him to abandon his great master in this way. Probably it is to be found in a wish to please Augustus, who had added a regatta to his Aktia at Nikopolis, a reasonable item in the celebration of a naval victory. He must have felt tempted to try to rival Homer's chariots, but chariot racing needed no recommendation to Romans; boat racing did. Moreover he cunningly made the best of both worlds by introducing chariot racing in the vivid simile which describes the start of his boat race; 'Not so speedily do the chariots dash out onto the track as they leave the starting-traps for the race; not so eagerly do the drivers shake the waving reins as they give the horses their heads or strain forward over their teams to lash them on' (144-7).

Though we have no descriptions of boat races in Greek literature, there is Thucydides' statement (VI.32) that the ships of the Athenian fleet setting out for Sicily raced as far as Aegina (ἅμιλλαν ἐποιοῦντο). More formal races seem to be implied in the lines of Plato Comicus, quoted by Plutarch at the end of his life of Themistocles, that the tomb of the great statesman at the Peiraeus looked out at ἅμιλλαν νεῶν . And we might infer from Catullus' claim for his yacht, phaselus ille, that she was the fastest of all boats afloat, whether under sail or oar, that the Romans enjoyed boat racing.

How valuable it was for Virgil to escape from Homer's tutelage is shown by the fact that, while it is impossible to form a clear mental picture of his foot-race, it is easy to do so with the boat-race. He seems to be describing a race which he had himself witnessed with keen enjoyment but without any knowledge of racing technique. For while incident follows incident with vivid realism, many of them would not in real life have happened for the reasons which the poet assigns to them. His course, like that of Homer's chariots, is out-and-home, with a left-hand turn round a rock rising from the sea at some distance from the shore. He describes with great sympathy the nervous tension of the crews awaiting the start; 'Their fluttering hearts are drained of their strength by shuddering panic mingled with keen anxiety to win', words which produce an answering flutter in the heart of anyone who has ever sat in an eight awaiting the gun. Then comes the start, and thereafter Virgil wisely concentrates on the tactics at the turn, which in the event are decisive. Such a turn is unknown in modern rowing, though it is standard in punting races and frequent in sailing. The techniques of turns are completely different

in rowing and in sailing vessels. Under sail, the aim is to maintain maximum speed to the last moment and then to use the helm as vigorously as possible without overturning, to take way off the boat, to bring her round and to get the sails filled on the new course. With oar-propelled vessels the rudder must be used as little and as gently as possible, and the oars must help the boat round the bend. In Virgil's race, it would appear to the uninstructed spectator or the unskilled helmsman that during the first leg the point to aim for was immediately to the right of the rock, i.e. if he was approaching from 6 o'clock, he should try to graze the rock at 3 o'clock. But if the helmsman does this, he cannot begin to use rudder for the turn until his port-side oars have cleared the rock. He is therefore bound to overshoot, and he will be strongly tempted to use rudder violently to bring the boat round and so will lose speed. The proper course is to take water out to the right on the first leg so that the helmsman can begin the turn early and come in close under the rock at 12 o'clock with the turn half completed. This no doubt was what was in the mind of Gyas' steersman Menoetes when he took this course, and not, as Virgil says, fear of 'caeca saxa'. But Gyas knew better. Every coach of an eight must sometimes have longed, as he watched a race from the bank, to throw the cox overboard and take his place; every owner or trainer of a horse must have yearned in the same way to jettison a jockey in mid-career when he disapproved of his tactics. They fortunately are helpless. Not so Gyas, who yielded to the impulse. He was clearly no expert at the helm, and his Chimaera lost the race which she ought to have won; 'Cedit, quoniam spoliata magistro est'. It was the sight of Cloanthus taking the inner - and inferior - line which had infuriated Gyas, but Cloanthus almost missed victory by doing so. The slower boats, those of Sergestus and Mnestheus, approached the turn. Sergestus, leading by half a length, took the same poor line as Cloanthus, went too close and crashed. Mnestheus, either by design or perforce because he was deprived of the inner position by Sergestus took a wider sweep and therefore a better course, and so closed up on Cloanthus. Virgil makes this the result of an impassioned appeal to his crew by Mnestheus, reminding them of former glories. It is a magnificent piece of rhetoric and we would not be without it. In real life, however, Mnestheus would have been calling on his starboard oars for an extra effort to bring the ship round the turn; they are the right-hand trace-horses, the δεξιόσειροι, in the chariot-racing of the sea. Indeed, this may be the force of the line 'agmine remorum celeri uentisque uocatis' (211), often regarded as ablatives of attendant circumstances; 'with oars fast-dipping and winds at his call' (Mackail). It is at least as likely to be a temporal abl. abs., 'summoning to his aid the swift bank of oars and the winds'.

And now the scene is set for a desperate finish between Mnestheus and Cloanthus. Virgil works up the excitement superbly; we are all agog for the result of the final dash for the line; and then he lets us down with a dreadful bump. Scared apparently at his own temerity in departing so far from his great pattern, he now reverts to the example of Homer's foot-race and makes the issue depend on the direct intervention of a god. Once again we are confronted by the wide gulf between ancient and modern ideas of sport. We are constantly adjured from the pulpit that religion should pervade every aspect of life, but even the most profoundly religious sportsman to-day would probably not wish to achieve success as the result of a special grace descending on him in response to prayer. He would be content that Divine Justice should maintain the principle 'May the best man win', a sentiment