

Jackson Knight: a biography by G. Wilson Knight
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Members of the Virgil Society will have a special interest in this biography by his brother of that eminent and most individual of Virgilian scholars, W.F. Jackson Knight, and particularly in those sections which deal with the society's early beginnings. Together with Father Bruno Scott James, JK was largely responsible for the foundation of the Virgil Society and was its first Secretary (with T.S. Eliot as President). His brother records in this connexion: 'The Secretaryship did not in the least appeal to him. He was being burdened by a responsibility which he did not like and for which he was not by nature equipped' — a phrase which strikes an answering chord in the present incumbent. We are reminded elsewhere in this issue by our longest-serving Secretary, Dr. A.J. Gossage, of the aims and objectives of these original founders in 1943: in a draft statement of these aims in 1944 JK speaks of the varied nature of the membership . . . 'as well as an Archbishop, a Field-Marshal and scholars there are "people eminent in the arts, in medicine, and in accountancy" and "some members do not even know any Latin", and also the wideness of its scope: "The subject of Virgil is small . . . But the subject of Virgil is also large, co-extensive even with the whole human plight and adventure: for Virgil, and perhaps Virgil alone, is just such a poet — reaching everywhere.' Jackson Knight's own studies of Virgil were themselves of a kind to show a wide-ranging intellect with a highly individual approach. Apart from his work on accentual symmetry which has been for many the first initiation into a deeper appreciation of the texture of Virgil's hexameters, JK's pervading interest was in the poet's mind at work and in those influences which go beyond deliberate imitation to the subconscious associations from a much wider background of cultural experience. His anthropological interest is attested — and a valuable feature of this biography is the reminiscences and appreciation of JK by friends and colleagues like John D. Christie and Hugh Stubbs — by Miss Theo Brown, a lecturer in Folklore and a member of the Council of the Folklore Society. 'It is the characteristic of genius such as his, that by cleaving austerely to his own path of knowledge, he has created works that are unique and his own, and because of this, they will gradually permeate and influence contemporary thought for many generations. It implies an almost fantastic degree of integrity and courage to bring so much knowledge and learning to bear upon the agonising intricacies of ancient etymologies, and from that narrow point to make prodigious and convincing leaps in informed intuition and controlled imagination that will enter into the point of view of early Greeks, Latins, Etruscans, Trojans, sufficiently to make understandable obscure passages on forgotten rituals and beliefs.' Certainly intuition and imagination were present in JK in large measure.

There is much else in this book; it is a record of close family relationships; it shows the brilliant lecturer and highly original scholar who failed to receive the official accolade he would have dearly loved: there are glimpses of his passionate interest in spiritualism, of which no-one who met JK could fail to be aware, a spiritualism through which he even received personal messages from Virgil himself, mostly through the agency of his close friend T.J. Haarhoff. It is altogether a uniquely documented and intimate background to Jackson Knight's considerable Virgilian *opus*, giving a colourful portrayal of this most devoted and inspirational of Virgilian scholars.

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