
T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex (Latin Edition)

Carus Titus Lucretius

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Author: Carus Titus Lucretius

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T. LUCRETI CARI

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DE RERUM NATURA

LIBRI SEX

With an Introduction

AND

NOTES TO BOOKS I, III, AND V.

BY

FRANCIS W. KELSEY, PH.D.

LAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

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P R E F A C E .

In the present volume an attempt has been made to explain some portions of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*. The poem is printed in full for the reason that, being a work of art, it ought to be presented as a whole. The first, third, and fifth books were chosen for comment because they contain the gist of the poet's doctrine and a greater number of fine passages than the others. It is hoped that the reading of the remaining books will be facilitated by the analysis of the subject-matter given at the end of the introduction.

The text is that of Munro's third edition, from which it was reprinted with his authorization. To justify the adoption of this text in a book intended primarily for the use of students, seems hardly necessary ; for Munro's Lucretius marked a new era in the critical study as well as the interpretation of the poet. The more important emendations and variations of reading in the first, third, and fifth books are given in the notes. It has not been thought advisable to indicate in the

text or notice in the commentary the numerous transpositions of lines suggested by Munro, because they are a source of confusion to any but the critical scholar. Most students, and general readers as well, prefer a text in either prose or poetry free from all marks not needful for convenient reference.

The introduction was prepared with the design of offering some suggestions regarding the personality of Lucretius, his mission in philosophy, and his rank as a poet. In the notes it has been the editor's aim not simply to explain the more difficult word-forms and constructions, but also to bring out the philosophic import of the passages annotated in the light of both ancient and modern thought. Most classical writings have an interest for us mainly because of the general human element in them, — because they crystallize in artistic form something that appeals to thinking men of all times and of all nations. But Lucretius stands in close relation with the life of the present. His work is not lacking in the power and finish that mark the true poet, — one the duration of whose fame is to be measured not by decades, but by centuries. At the same time his verse is the vehicle of a philosophic system, which, recurring from time to time in the speculations of the past, has only in the present generation found its fullest development and exposition, and its widest application. The *De Rerum Natura* reveals its deepest significance only when studied in connection with the thought of to-day.

PREFACE.

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Frequent citations in the notes and introduction indicate the works which the editor has found occasion to refer to in the preparation of this book. Of the commentaries, that by Munro has been most drawn upon. The changes in this second edition are comparatively few aside from the correction of some typographical errors.

FRANCIS W. KELSEY.

LAKE FOREST, ILL.,
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"LUCRETIVS, nobler than his mood:
Who dropped his plummet down the broad,
Deep universe, and said, 'No God,'

"Finding no bottom: he denied
Divinely the Divine, and died
Chief poet on the Tiber-side."

MRS. BROWNING, 'Vision of Poets.'

"Lucretius, living mournfully in the moral desert his doubts had scorched into barrenness."—FARRAR, 'History of Free Thought.'

"In Lucretius the Roman character found its most perfect literary incarnation."—J. A. SYMONDS, 'Fortnightly Review.'

"Lucretius had drunk deeper of the scientific spirit than any other poet of ancient or modern times except Goethe."—HUXLEY, quoted by JOHN FISKE in 'Cosmic Philosophy.'

"Lucretius stands alone as the great contemplative poet of antiquity. He has proclaimed with more power than any other the majesty of Nature's laws, and has interpreted with a truer and deeper insight the meaning of her manifold life."—SELLAR, 'Roman Poets of the Republic.'

"I admire him as the first of demoniacs; the frenzy of an earth-born or hell-born inspiration; divinity of storm-music sweeping around us in eddies in order to prove that for us there could be nothing divine."—DE QUINCEY, 'Essay on John Keats.'

INTRODUCTION

I. LUCRETIUS AS A MAN.

OF the life of Titus Lucretius Carus nothing is known with certainty. No allusion to it is found in his poem, while in the Latin writers there are only two passages bearing upon it. Jerome¹ assigns the year of his birth to B. C. 94; and says of him that he became insane by the administration of a love-potion, and that 'after he had composed, in the intervals of his madness, some books which Cicero afterwards corrected, he killed himself in his forty-fourth year.' Donatus, in his life of Vergil, remarks that on the day on which Vergil assumed the *toga virilis* (Oct. 15, B. C. 55) 'it happened that the poet Lucretius died.' Between the two statements there is discrepancy. Either Lucretius died before he reached his forty-fourth year, or the date of his birth must be put earlier than 94.

The *De Rerum Natura* was evidently given to the world in an unfinished state.² The completion of it, as in the case of the *Aeneid*, was probably prevented by the poet's death. Now from one of Cicero's letters to his brother,³ written in the earlier part of 54, it is clear that they were both familiar with the poem. At that time it was likely already published, or being copied for circulation. This seems to confirm the statement of Donatus. In the absence of further evidence we may suppose that Lucretius died in the year 55.⁴ If Jerome was correct in fixing his

¹ In his additions to the Eusebian Chronicle, under the year of Abraham 1923 (= B. C. 94).

² See Introd. p. xlviii.

³ Ad. Q. Frat. 2, 11 (9), § 4.

⁴ But Cf. Bockemüller, 'Lucretius' i. p. 4.