

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

VIRGIL AND ISAIAH :

AN INQUIRY INTO THE SOURCES OF THE FOURTH
ECLOGUE OF VIRGIL.¹

THE editors of Virgil seem content for the most part to regard this poem as merely a hyperbolic expression of the hope that the agreement made at Brundisium between Antony and Octavius in the year 40 B.C. might put an end to the civil strife from which Rome had so long suffered. The few who have made any attempt to account for the special features of the new era foretold by the poet have usually assumed without proof that these features were capable of explanation out of the commonplaces of Greek or Roman literature, and that there is nothing to justify Merivale's assertion² that "the glowing language in which the reign of happiness is depicted appropriates almost every image, and breathes some portion of the spirit, of the Messianic predictions." I propose to consider in this paper how far it is true that parallels for these images are to be found in pagan literature, and, if they are not to be found, whether it is possible to trace them back to a Jewish origin. I will begin with an examination of the line in which Virgil appears to disclose to his readers where he found his materials—

Ultima Cumaei venif iam carminis aetas.

¹ This paper was written as a sort of appendix to a sermon entitled "Teste David cum Sibylla," which is included in a volume recently published by Mr. Francis Griffiths. Through the kindness of the Editor it is inserted here as offering some points of more general interest.

² *Hist. of the Empire*, vol. iii. p. 231.

The learned Fabricius, in his *Bibliotheca Graeca*, vol. i. p. 181, followed by J. Geffcken, the latest and in some respects the best editor of the *Oracula Sibyllina*, maintains that we have here an allusion to the Ages of men described in the *Works and Days* of Hesiod, whose father migrated from Cyme in Asia Minor to Bœotia, and who might therefore be himself styled Cumaëus. But is this a natural interpretation? Is there any other example of the epithet Cumaëus being applied to Hesiod? We should gather from Hesiod's own words (l. 650) that he was born after the removal to Bœotia, as he tells us that the crossing from Aulis to Eubœa was the longest voyage he had ever made. In any case he wrote his poems at Ascra, near Mount Helicon, and is accordingly referred to by Virgil as "Ascraeus senex" (*Ecl.* vi. 70), by Propertius (iii. 32. 77) as "Ascraeus poeta," by Ovid (*Am.* i. 15. 11) as "Ascraeus" simply, while the phrase "Ascraeum carmen" is used as a synonym for pastoral poetry in general in *Georg.* ii. 176. On the other hand, Virgil's thoughts were much occupied with the Sibyl of the Italian Cumæ, a city which is said to have been the oldest of the Greek colonies of Italy, and to have been founded jointly by the Eubœan Chalcis and the Aeolian Cyme. In the *Aeneid* Aeneas is twice bidden to consult the Sibyl, once by Helenus (*Aen.* iii. 441-460), and again by Anchises (*Aen.* v. 730-736), while the Sixth Book gives us the story of the actual visit to the Sibyl's grotto. So Ovid speaks of the "Virgo Cumæa" (*Met.* xiv. 135), of the "Cumæae templa Sibyllae" (*Met.* xv. 712), of "Cumæos annos," referring to the longevity of the Sibyl (*Ex Ponto*, ii. 8. 41); so Valerius Flaccus of the "Cumæa vates" (i. 5), and Lucan of the "vates Cumana" (v. 183). I think, therefore, there can be little doubt that, in using the phrase "Cumæum carmen," Virgil refers to the Sibyl, not to Hesiod.

Postponing for the present the inquiry whether Virgil borrowed from Hesiod any part of his description of the golden age, we enter on the difficult question, What was the Sibylline song to which he here alludes as foretelling such an age, the world's crowning era of virtue and happiness? We can hardly suppose that it is the poet himself who is "rapt into future times" and utters his own visions under the mask of the Sibyl. More than any other of the great poets Virgil depends upon his predecessors. It would seem, therefore, that he must have had in his mind some distinct Sibylline utterance when he used the phrase "Cumaeum carmen."

The first thing which this phrase would suggest to any Roman would be the *Sibylline Books*, called also *Libri Fatales*, or simply *Libri*, which were believed to have been purchased by Tarquin and preserved with such care, first by the *Duumviri*, and finally by the *Quindecimviri*, until they were burnt in the conflagration of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in the Social War, B.C. 83. Constant references are made to these books in the pages of Livy. According to Dion. Hal. (*A. R.* iv. p. 792) they were consulted, upon the order of the Senate, in any serious trouble, whether of foreign war or civil discord, and also on the occurrence of any prodigy, to ascertain how the wrath of the gods was to be appeased. In accordance with this is Marquardt's statement (*Röm. Staatsverwaltung*, vol. iii. p. 43) that their purpose was not to reveal the future, but to provide counsel and help in calamities, where the ordinary rites were of no avail. These books came originally from the neighbourhood of Troas, and pointed to the help of gods who were either themselves foreign or to be worshipped after some foreign ritual. Their introduction, aided by the intercourse with the Greek colonies of southern Italy, brought into Rome the knowledge of various Graeco-

Asiatic deities ; and we are expressly told that the inauguration of the *Lectisternia* and *Supplicationes* was due to directions contained in the Sibylline Books (Liv. v. 13, vii. 27). As these books were only to be read by the official interpreters, the Quindecimviri,¹ upon the order of the Senate, and could not be promulgated, after being read, until the Senate had given their consent,² it is plain that very little could be known of their contents to the ordinary citizen beyond the ceremonial rules published from time to time, of which Livy gives so many examples³ ; rules which have certainly very little in common with Virgil's prophecy of the golden age.

If we turn, however, to the original home of these oracles in Asia Minor, they appear in a very different light in the famous saying of the great Ephesian philosopher, Heraclitus, towards the end of the sixth century (i.e. about the time of the expulsion of the Roman kings). In Fragment xii. of Bywater's edition we read the striking words—Σίβυλλα δὲ μαινομένῳ στόματι ἀγέλαστα καὶ ἀκαλλώπιστα καὶ ἀμύριστα φθεγγομένη χιλίων ἐτέων ἐξικνέεται τῇ φωνῇ διὰ τὸν θεόν, “the Sibyl with frenzied lips uttering things unmirthful, unadorned and unperfumed, reaches by her voice through a thousand years by the will of the god.”⁴ Plato

¹ They seem to have had the assistance of two officials skilled in the use of the Greek language : see Alexandre, *Excursus ad Sibyllina*, vol. ii. p. 197.

² This is shown by the general disapproval of Cato's action, when, as tribune, he compelled the Quindecimviri, against the vote of the Senate, to publish the Sibylline oracle as to the restoration of King Ptolemy with an armed force : see Cicero's letters to Lentulus (*ad Fam.* i. 1, 2, 5) ; Dion. Cass. xxxix. 15.

³ A synopsis of these is given by Alexandre, *l.c.* pp. 198 foll.

⁴ The genitive is used with ἐξικνεῖσθαι by Xenophon, *Anab.* iii. 3, 7, οἱ ἀκοντισταὶ βραχύτερα ἠκόντιζον ἢ ὡς ἐξικνεῖσθαι τῶν σφενδονητῶν, “the range of the javelins was too short to reach the slingers.” In other passages the word is better translated “to hit,” “to cover.” The meaning of Heraclitus would thus be “covers with her voice a thousand years,” i.e., utters truth bearing on far distant ages. We may conjecture, how-

gives an equally lofty idea of the Sibyl in the *Phaedrus*, p. 244, where, after speaking of the many benefits public and private bestowed on man through the divine madness of the prophetess at Delphi and the priestess at Dodona, he adds that it would take long to tell of the good wrought by the Sibyl and others *ὅσοι μαντικῇ χρώμενοι ἐνθέρψαν πολλὰ δὴ πολλοῖς προλέγοντες ἐπὶ τὸ μέλλον ἄρθωσαν*.

What do we gather from these, the most ancient testimonies to the fame of the Sibyl? ¹ In the first place there is only one Sibyl. Later ages speak of four or ten, or even more, the number being increased partly through the rivalry of competing cities, partly perhaps through the influx of a new strain of prophecy, as in the case of the Jewish, the Babylonian and the Egyptian Sibyls. The inspiration, according to both authorities, is a literal possession, such as that of Cassandra and of the Cumaean Sibyl in the *Aeneid* (vi. 45-51, 77-80). The utterances themselves, according to Heraclitus, are limited to words of warning and of woe (*ἀγέλαστα*); they are harsh and uncouth, with no smooth flattering phrases (*ἀκαλλώπιστα καὶ ἀμύριστα*); they foretell the distant future; and Plato adds that their effect has been to bring about reform in nations and individuals. There seems to be a special significance in "the voice sounding on through a thousand years," for Ovid records the complaint of the Sibyl who has still to live three hundred years out of the destined thousand, during which she will continually dwindle away till nothing remains but a voice (*Met.* xiv. 143)—

Voce tamen noscar, vocem mihi fata relinquunt.

Virgil, on the other hand, states that the oracles were usually

ever, from Ovid's "Cumaes annos" quoted above, as well as from other references, that some understood them as attributing long life to the Sibyl herself, "attains a thousand years."

¹ The Aristophanic parodies will come in for consideration later on.

written down on leaves,¹ which were liable to be scattered in disorder by the wind when the door of the cave was opened, and which, when once scattered, the Sibyl took no pains to rearrange. Hence those who apply to her for advice—

Inconsulti abeunt sedemque odere Sibyllæ.

For this reason Helenus warns Aeneas to implore the prophetess to utter the oracles with her lips, instead of writing them down (*Aen.* iii. 448–457). The disordered leaves were no doubt intended to signify the incoherence and the sudden transitions of the oracular books.

Far different from this is what Livy tells us of the *Libri Fatales*. It is of course possible that the oracles known to Heraclitus may have included ritual matters, which were of little interest to him, but which had a special charm for the prosaic Romans. It is also possible that the visions of the future, with their appalling pictures of divine vengeance, may have been too revolutionary for Roman conservatism; and the method of consulting them by the Quindecimviri may have been such as to leave large scope for the interpreters, like the *sortes* used in other Italian oracles.² But it is also quite possible that the Capitoline copy of the oracles may have differed from the Asiatic original both in the way of omission and addition.

Can we think of any class of writings which would agree better than the *Libri Fatales* (so far as we can con-

¹ See also Varro quoted by Servius on *Aen.* iii. 444.

² So Virgil, where he makes Aeneas promise the Sibyl that her oracles shall be held in high honour in Latium and be deposited in the temple of Apollo, uses the words (*Aen.* vi. 71)—

Te quoque magna manent regnis penetralia nostris :
Hic ego namque tuas *sortes* arcanaque fata,
Dicta mese genti, ponam, lectosque sacro,
Alma, viros.

jecture their nature from the facts mentioned by Livy), with the hints dropped by Heraclitus? There are books dating from a hundred years before his time, which speak of another voice "crying in the wilderness." The prophets, of whom they tell us, profess to speak in the name of God and under His inspiration. The larger part of their prophecies consists of threats of judgment. They deal with the fate of nations and of individuals reaching on to the end of time. They are often confused, apparently self-contradictory, difficult to understand, mixed up of blessing and cursing in an inexplicable way. Yet they have been signally successful in bringing sinners to repentance, and in raising the moral standard both in nations and individuals. In one point they depart from the old type as described by Heraclitus. They appeal to hope as well as to fear; they hold out the prospect of a final reign of righteousness and peace. As to the style in which these books are written, in so far as the original Hebrew is concerned, they might be characterized in a good sense as *ἀκαλλώπιστα καὶ ἀμύριστα*; but, if we think of the later Greek translation, we should have to apply these words in the same depreciatory sense as that in which they seem to have been used by Heraclitus of the Sibylline verses current in his time.

The conquests of Alexander initiated a period of growing intercourse between Greeks and Jews. Before the end of the third century B.C. a large part of the Old Testament had been translated into Greek, and the Jews were beginning to interest themselves in the literature of Greece. In this literature nothing would be more likely to attract their attention than the Sibylline oracles, which, if we may judge from the earliest mention of them by Greek writers, had so many features in common with their own prophecies, and which offered them such a good opportunity of winning

fresh proselytes by surreptitiously introducing to the Gentiles the religious ideas of the Hebrews. This work had been already commenced in the second century B.C. by the insertion of longer or shorter sections of Jewish history or prophecy into the acknowledged oracles, to which whole books were subsequently added by Jewish, and then by Christian forgers. In the words of Schürer (Eng. tr. vol. iii. p. 276), "The collection as we have it is a chaotic wilderness. . . . Even the single books are some of them arbitrary aggregates of single fragments . . . Every reader and writer allowed himself to complete what existed after his own pleasure, and to arrange the scattered papers now in one, now in an opposite manner. Evidently much was at first circulated in detached portions, and the collection of these, afterwards made by some admirer, was a very accidental one. Hence duplicates of many portions are found in different places."

I return now to Rome and to the measures taken by the Roman Government to replace the *Libri Fatales* destroyed by fire in B.C. 83. After the rebuilding of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus by Sulla, the Senate, in B.C. 76, at the instigation of the Consul, C. Curio, sent envoys to the different places which were supposed to possess collections of Sibylline writings, whether public or private; and, after careful sifting, about a thousand verses were deposited in the vaults of the restored temple.¹ It is evident from the writings of the time that there was a widespread interest in this search for oracles, and in the question of their authenticity, and we are told that

¹ A majoribus decretum erat post exustum sociali bello Capitolium, quaesitis Samo, Ilio, Erythris, per Africam etiam ac Siciliam et Italicas colonias carminibus Sibyllae, una seu plures fuere, datoque sacerdotibus negotio, quantum humana ope potuissent vera discernere (Tac. *Ann.* vi. 12); *Lact. Inst.* i. 6.

many spurious oracles were manufactured to further political intrigues. Thus Lentulus, the conspirator, in 63 B.C. affirmed,¹ “ex falsis sibyllinis haruspicumque responsis, se esse tertium illum Cornelium, ad quem regnum hujus urbis atque imperium venire esset necesse; Cinnam ante se et Sullam fuisse . . . fatalem hunc esse annum ad interitum hujus urbis atque imperii, qui esset decimus annus post Virginum absolutionem, post Capitolii autem incensionem vicesimus.” Similarly the authority of the Sibyl was invoked in support of the proposal to give the title of king to Julius Caesar (Cic. *De Divin.* ii. 110). “Sibyllae versus observamus, quos illa furens fudisse dicitur; quorum interpres nuper falsa quadam hominum fama dicturus in Senatu putabatur, eum quem re vera Regem habebamus, appellandum quoque Regem, si salvi esse vellemus. Hoc si est in libris, in quem hominem et in quod tempus est? Callide enim qui illa composuit perfecit, ut quodcunque accidisset praedictum videretur, hominum et temporum definitione sublata”; and a similar story is told by Suetonius (*Jul. Caesar*, 79): “Fama percrebuit . . . proximo senatu L. Cottam, quindecimvirum, sententiam dicturum, ut, quoniam libris fatalibus contineretur Parthos nisi a rege non posse vinci, Caesar rex appellaretur.”

One method of distinguishing between true and false prophecies appears to have been the use of acrostics in the latter. Thus Cicero (*De Div.* ii. 111) argues that such an artificial form of composition is inconsistent with the divine frenzy ascribed to the Sibyl, and Varro is quoted to the same effect by Dion. Hal. (*A. R.* iv. 62), as saying that the spurious oracles may be detected by the so-called acrostics.²

¹ Cic. *Cat.* iii. 9.

² Possibly the use of acrostics may be derived from the Jews, as something

The continued multiplication of books claiming to be oracular is further shown by the action of Augustus in the year 12 B.C., when he succeeded Lepidus as Pontifex Maximus, and called in all the unauthorized oracles, whether Greek or Latin, which were in circulation. Suetonius tells us¹ that he destroyed upwards of two thousand volumes, retaining only a selection of the Sibylline books, which he moved from the Capitol and deposited in the vaults of his new temple of the Palatine Apollo, thus fulfilling, as Servius says, the promise made by Aeneas to the Sibyl of Cumae (*Aen.* vi. 69 foll.). We learn from Dio Cassius (liv. 17) that he required even these, since they were getting illegible from age, to be replaced by new copies, made by the priests with their own hands, in order that no one else might read them. As the existing copies had been placed in the Capitol only about sixty years before, it seems probable that this was merely a pretext for the omission of any passages which might be thought dangerous. For the same reason Tiberius, when excitement was caused, in reference to the feud between Piso and Germanicus, by the supposed discovery of an ancient prophecy of the Sibyl, declaring that in thrice three hundred years Rome was doomed to perish by internal strife, ordered a re-inspection and fresh sifting of the oracular books, *καὶ τὰ μὲν ὡς οὐδενὸς ἀξία ἀπέκρινε, τὰ δὲ ἐνέκρινε* (Dio. Cass. lvii. 18).

I think we are now in a condition to answer with some confidence the question where Virgil found his "Cumaeum carmen." (1) It was evidently impossible for him to have any knowledge of the old Roman books which perished in 83 B.C. some years before his birth. (2) There is no ground

resembling it is found in some of the Psalms and in the Book of Lamentations. It occurs also in the Prologues to the Plautine Comedies, written about 50 B.C., and is said to have been used by Ennius. There is a famous example in *Orac. Sib.* viii. 217-250.

¹ Oct. 31.

for supposing that, in the year 40 B.C., when he wrote this Eclogue, he could have had any knowledge of the books which replaced them in the restored temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. We have seen how strict were the conditions under which the *Libri Fatales* might be inspected. Even the keepers were not allowed to consult them, far less to publish their oracles, without the express order of the Senate, and Justin (*Apol.* i. 44) states that those who read them (without permission, we may suppose) were liable to be put to death. (3) We have no reason for thinking that Virgil could have seen any collection of oracles preserved in Erythrae or elsewhere out of Italy; and at Cumae, the one place in Italy where one might expect to find such, we learn from Pausanias (x. 12) that there were none to be seen. (4) We are driven therefore to the conclusion that Virgil's "Cumaeum carmen" was one of those which, having been imported from Asia Minor about the year 76 B.C., had not been thought worthy of admission to the Capitol, but were apparently still in circulation in Rome at the time when the Eclogue was written. It is possible, nay it is probable, that this *carmen* was of Jewish origin. No other people had such strong reasons for composing such oracles; no others could make them so interesting; no others had such opportunities of pushing the sale of them as the ubiquitous Jew. We may even indulge the fancy that the interest which Virgil had shown in the Sibylline poems may have led to his being consulted by Augustus and Maecenas in the selection of Oracles for the Palatine temple, which was dedicated in 27 B.C. It is true that Augustus did not succeed to the office of Pontifex Maximus till the death of Lepidus in 12 B.C., seven years after the death of Virgil, but he had taken a leading part in the restoration of the national religion, as in the celebration of the Ludi Saeculares, ever since he

became supreme by the battle of Actium; and Virgil (as we have seen) was aware of his intention to transfer the Sibylline Books to the Palatine, when he wrote the sixth book of the *Aeneid*. Possibly the actual Jewish original of his Eclogue found a place in the new *Libri Fatales*.

It may be well to notice here Forbiger's objection (see his edition of Virg. vol. i. page 63) to the idea that a Roman poet could have condescended to borrow from a Jewish writing. "Quis vero scriptorum Latinorum superstitiones Judaicas, nisi illas deridere vellet, adsciscere vel tractare dignatus est?" In the first place, there is no reason to suppose that Virgil was aware of the Jewish origin of the Sibylline oracle which he follows. Doubtless it professed to come from Erythrae. In the next place the tender-hearted and widely sympathetic Virgil was just as little likely to share the hard Roman contempt for the Jew, as he was to share the bitter prejudice against Carthage. If he could take the Carthaginian Queen for his heroine, if in her story he dared to reverse the old idea of Roman and of Punic faith, why should we suppose him to be less sensitive than was Longinus afterwards to the sublimity of the sacred books of the Hebrews? Besides, we have plenty of evidence to show that, in this time of the breaking up of old faiths, the eastern religions exercised an extraordinary attraction in Rome.

Supposing, then, that such a vision as we have in the eleventh chapter of Isaiah had been taken as the subject of a Sibylline poem, are there any allusions in the fourth Eclogue which would correspond with and might be explained by this?

We will take first the general idea of a golden age still to come. So far as the Greeks or Romans knew or dreamt of a golden age, it belonged to the infancy of the world, corresponding to the Garden of Eden among the Hebrews.

Hesiod,¹ Aratus,² Ovid,³ all start with this, descending to their own generation by a gradual decline from golden to silver, from silver to brazen, from brazen to iron, except that Hesiod interpolates an age of Heroes between the brazen and the iron. Still more plainly is this principle of degeneration expressed by Horace (*Carm.* iii. 6. 45)—

Damnosa quid non imminuit dies ?
Aetas parentum pejor avis tulit
Nos nequiores, mox daturos
Progeniem vitiosiore;

and by Juvenal (xiii. 28)—

Nona aetas oritur peioraque saecula ferri
Temporibus, quorum sceleri non invenit ipsa
Nomen et a nullo posuit natura metallo.

But may not this imagination of a golden age in the future be derived from the Stoic doctrine of the periodic renewal of the world, a *παλιγγενεσία* or *ἀποκατάστασις* at the end of the cosmic year, the *magnus annus* of Virgil ? This very phrase, as well as the belief in the recurrence of the past, described in the lines which follow—

Alter erit tum Tiphys et altera quae vehat Argo
Delectos heroas ; erunt etiam altera bella,
Atque iterum ad Troiam magnus mittetur Achilles,

leave no doubt that Virgil was familiar with the teaching of the Stoics on this point.

It is true that the "magnus annus" was originally an astronomical conception, not confined to the Stoics, but shared by all men of science. As the solar year was com-

¹ *Opera* 109.—Goettling thinks that Hesiod looked forward to an improvement after the iron age, because he utters the wish that he might either have died before it, or been born afterwards; but there is nothing to support such an interpretation, and it is better to take the words as Paley does, as merely expressive of strong dislike—"better any age than this." Paley even holds that *vv.* 180–201 are descriptive of a sixth and still more degenerate age.

² *Phaenomena*, 110 foll. Aratus omits the iron age.

³ *Metam.* i. 89 foll.

plete when the sun returned to his original position in the heavens, so the "great year" was complete "cum ad idem, unde semel profecta sunt cuncta astra redierint, eandemque totius caeli discriptionem longis intervallis rettulerint, tum ille vere vertens annus appellari potest, in quo vix dicere audeo quam multa hominum saecula teneantur" (Cic. *De Republica*, vi. 22).¹ The Stoics connected this with their doctrine of the periodical conflagration of the universe, and also with their astrological views. Since the life of man was determined by the aspect and influence of the stars, when the stars returned to their original position, there must be a recurrence of human history.²

But though Virgil adds to his sketch of the golden age some colours from the Stoic natural philosophy, he says not a word of the most important part of it, viz. the universal conflagration which precedes the new world, and the hopeless outlook of predestined decline which follows. His view seems rather to be that there will be a gradual progress corresponding to the age of the child whose birth initiates the new era. This child is—

Cara deum soboles, magnum Jovis incrementum,

the offspring of the gods, the mighty embryo of a Jupiter. There is nothing parallel to this in Stoic teaching, but it might well be a paraphrase direct or indirect of Isaiah ix. 6, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father"; and of Isaiah vii. 14, 16:

¹ See the passages quoted in my note on Cic. *N. D.* ii. 51, and Zeller, *Die Phil. d. Griechen*, vol. iv. p. 154.

² See Orig. *c. Cels.* v. 20: *φασὶ δὲ οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Στοῆς κατὰ περιόδον ἐκπύρωσιν τοῦ παντός γίνεσθαι, καὶ ἐξῆς αὐτῆ διακόσμησιν παντ' ἀπαράλλακτα ἔχουσιν ὡς πρὸς τὴν προτέραν διακόσμησιν . . . καὶ Σωκράτην μὲν πάλιν Σωφρονίσκου υἱὸν καὶ Ἀθηναίων ἔσσεσθαι . . . καὶ Ἄνυτος δὲ καὶ Μέλητος ἀναστήσονται πάλιν Σωκράτους κατήγοροι.* So Servius on *Ecl.* iv. 4: "Quod si est idem siderum motus, necesse est ut omnia quae fuerunt habeant iterationem. Universa enim ex astrorum motu pendere manifestum est."

“Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign : behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and thou shalt call his name Emmanuel . . . Before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.”

We go on now to consider the other details of the new age depicted by Virgil, and, if possible, to find out where they are taken from. It is not necessary to fix on some one authority to the exclusion of all others, nor need we even expect to find perfect consistency. Virgil is a poet, writing at the most critical epoch of human history, with a heart and mind open to all influences ; and in this poem he embodies the half-conscious hopes and forebodings of his time. The Sibyl was never supposed to be logical, and Virgil here makes no attempt to reconcile the rival claims of Apollo, Saturnus and Jupiter, who are all named as presiding over the new age.

I take first the phrase “*ultima Cumaevi carminis aetas.*” Servius, in his note on *Ecl.* ix. 47, quotes the Memoirs of Augustus to the effect that the soothsayer Vulcatius had interpreted the appearance of the comet at the funeral games held in honour of Caesar, as denoting the end of the ninth age and the beginning of the tenth. Plutarch (*Vita Sullae*, 7), speaking of the signs which foreboded the rise of Sulla, mentions in particular the piercing and terror-striking sound of a trumpet which came from a clear sky, and was understood to announce the end of the eighth stage of the great year. Censorinus (*De Die Natali*, 17) adds that the Etruscan soothsayers believed that, when the tenth stage was completed, there would be an end of the Etruscan name. Servius, in his note on this line, says that, according to the Sibyl, the last age is the tenth, the age of the Sun or Apollo. In the existing Sibylline books (e.g. iv. 20, 47, viii. 199) the tenth age is also mentioned as the

concluding age of the world's history. In the Old Testament the age of the Messiah has of course no number attached to it, but it is constantly spoken of as the "last time," as in Isaiah ii. 2.

I. 4. "*Iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna.*" There is no doubt that "Virgo" here is to be explained by *Geor.* ii. 474 :

Extrema per illos
Iustitia excedens terris vestigia fecit;

and by Seneca, *Octavia*, 423—

Astraea virgo siderum magnum decus.

Justice driven from earth by the wickedness of man was enshrined in heaven as the constellation Virgo. The story is borrowed from Aratus (*Phaen.* 96-136), which is itself expanded from Hesiod, *Op.* 200. It is not impossible, however, that Virgil may also have had in his mind the "virgin" of Jewish prophecy as concerned in the coming epoch. The happy reign of the Latin god Saturnus was commemorated in the Saturnalia, the festival of equality and peace. In later times he was identified with the Greek god Cronos, who was believed to have held supreme authority in the golden age (*Hes. Op.* 111) and also to have ruled over the dead Heroes in the Isles of the Blest (*ibid.* 169; Pindar, *Olymp.* ii. 123 foll.). Virgil combines the two in *Aen.* viii. 319—

Primus ab aethereo venit Saturnus Olympo
Arma Jovis fugiens et regnis exul adeptis.

See also *Georg.* i. 125, ii. 536.

I. 7. "*Iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto.*" We may compare with this and the tenth line the third and oldest book of the existing Sibylline oracles, l. 652—

καὶ τὸν ἀπ' ἡελίου Θεὸς πέμψει βασιλῆα
ὃς πᾶσαν γαῖαν παύσει πολέμοιο κακοῖο.

It must be confessed, however, that the Sybil, like her predecessor of the sixth century, still prefers to dwell on the sadder side of life, ἀγέλαστα φθεγγομένη.

“*Tuus iam regnat Apollo.*” We have already seen that, according to the Sibyl, Apollo was to preside over the tenth age. Another feature of the golden age is the recovery of pristine innocence, denoted by the return of the virgin Astraea, and expressly declared in ll. 13, 14—

Te duce si qua manent sceleris vestigia nostri
Irrita perpetua solvent formidine terras.

Hesiod does not actually mention the virtue of the first men, but it stands out by contrast with the corruption of their successors. On the other hand, in Jewish prophecy righteousness is the most prominent note of the final reign of blessedness. Virgil's meaning here is much the same as in *Georg.* i. 500, where he prays that the young Augustus may be permitted “*eversio succurrere mundo . . . ubi fas versum atque nefas, tot bella per orbem, tam multae scelerum facies.*”

l. 15. “*Ille deum vitam accipiet divisque videbit Permixtos heroas,*” taken from Hesiod, *Op.* 112: ὦστε θεοὶ δ' ἔζων ἀκηδέα θυμὸν ἔχοντες, but also in accordance with Jewish belief, as recorded in Exodus xxix. 45; Leviticus xxvi. 11, 12.

ll. 18, 19. “*Nulla minuscula cultu tellus . . . fundet.*” So Hesiod, l. 117: καρπὸν δ' ἔφερε ζεῖδωρος ἄρουρα αὐτομάτη πολλὸν τε καὶ ἄφθονον. The same idea is repeated in lines 29 and 30 and with far more grandeur in Isaiah xxxv. 1: “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose,” ib. lv. 13: “Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree.” Compare also *Sib. Orac.* ii. 314–325; iii. 743–759.

l. 22. “*Nec magnos metuent armenta leones.*” The same idea is repeated in *Ecl.* v. 60. There is no parallel in Hesiod, but in Isaiah xi. 6 we read, “The wolf shall dwell with the

lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain," which is nearly reproduced in *Sib. Or.* iii. 787-794.

l. 24. "*Occidet et serpens et fallax herba veneni.*" This again is not Hesiodic, but resembles Isaiah xi. 8, "The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk's den." In *Georg.* i. 129 the same thought recurs; after the dethronement of Saturn, Juppiter "*malum virus serpentibus addidit atris.*"

l. 27. "*Quae sit poteris cognoscere virtus,*" "when the child has learnt what virtue is"; compare Isaiah vii. 16, "Before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good."

l. 30. *Durae quercus sudabunt roscida mella.* This is named among the rewards of the righteous in *Hes. Op.* 230, and in *Sib. Orac.* iii. 745.

ll. 31 foll. "*Pauca tamen suberunt priscae vestigia fraudis.*" In this and the following lines we have a curious feature of the new age. Navigation, agriculture, the life of towns, the arts of civilization generally are spoken of as marks of a falling away from that primaeval perfection, the restoration of which is described as the hope of humanity. No scope seems to be left for human effort and skill. There is no more place for commerce, since "*omnis feret omnia tellus*"; the dyer's hand is idle, since wool of every colour is produced by nature. This is an elaboration of Hesiod, *Op.* 236—

*θάλλουσιν δ' ἀγαθοῖσι διαμπερές· οὐδ' ἐπὶ νηῶν
νίσσονται, καρπὸν δὲ φέρει ζείδωρος ἄρουρα.*

We may also compare it with the "Sabbath rest" of Israel, the promised peace which is to mark the reign of the Messiah (Isa. ix. 7). There are, moreover, occasional suggestions to be found in Hebrew writings which denote a high esteem

for a life of Arcadian simplicity, such as the ascription of inventions to the fallen angels and to the descendants of Cain, and again the disappearance of the sea from the new heaven and earth.

l. 36. "*Iterum ad Trojam magnus mittetur Achilles.*" It has been shown above that this is taken from the Stoic doctrine of the ἀποκατάστασις. [It may also have been suggested by Hesiod's interpolation of the Heroic age, with its battles and adventures, in his picture of the four world-ages, possibly also by Jewish pictures of the Millennium, which was to be followed by a fresh outbreak of the powers of evil; or it may merely reflect the sudden transitions from good to evil in the visions of Isaiah and the other prophets. The interruption to the triumph of good is in any case merely a passing phenomenon, whether we are intended to see in it the last struggle of evil, or a necessary part of the training of the Conqueror for the high office to which he is appointed by

Concordes stabili fatorum numine Parcae,

a line which reads like a protest on the part of the poet against the sad never-ending round of which the Stoics dreamt.

ll. 50-52. "*Aspice, venturo laetantur ut omnia saeclo.*" A faint echo of such passages as Isaiah xlv. 23, "Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it; shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and will glorify Himself in Israel."

I think the above comparison between Virgil and Isaiah naturally leads us to the conclusion that the thoughts and expressions of the prophet must have somehow filtered through to the poet; and the poet's own confession leads us to the Sibyl as the actual organ or medium of communi-

cation reaching through 700 years. But such a view is not without its own difficulties. The Eclogue is much nearer to the original prophecy than to the subsequent paraphrase, so far as that is to be found in the still extant Sibylline Oracles. We must remember, however, that these extant oracles contain only an infinitesimal portion of the oracles existing in the time of Virgil. The great mass of our Sibylline books are of Christian origin, retaining no doubt something of the character of the older books, whether Jewish or Pagan: and we are probably justified in supposing that the existing books owe their preservation mainly to the preference of Judaistic Christians, who valued them as the voice of prophecy among the Gentiles, confirming the prophets of Israel by confuting the errors of polytheism and idolatry, and setting forth the terrible punishments in store for unbelievers. The bitterness engendered by persecution solaced itself by dwelling upon the still heavier woes stored up by righteous vengeance for the persecutors. This, I think, will account for the prevailing tone both of the Sibylline passages cited by the Fathers, and of the body of Sibylline writings which have come down to us. But the parallels which I have cited above show that the future happiness in store for the righteous was not left entirely unnoticed, and I think Virgil's Eclogue is a proof that he must have had before him, if not an actual translation from Isaiah, at least some closer paraphrase of Messianic prophecy than we now possess.

Another interesting question is how Heraclitus could have spoken so highly of the Sibylline oracles of his time. Judging from the parodies in Aristophanes,¹ as well as from what are regarded as the most ancient of the extant oracles,

¹ Aristoph. *Eq.* 61: ἀδει δὲ χρησμούς· ὁ δὲ γέρων σιβυλλία. The oracles given in ll. 1015, 1030, 1037, etc., are generally ascribed to Bacis, but we may suppose them to represent the Sibylline type. See Alexandre, p. 140 foll.

we should hardly have thought they could have deserved the encomiums passed on them by him and by Plato.

It may help to explain this high appreciation, if we call to mind the words of Simmias in the *Phaedo*, p. 85 *d*, where, discussing the question of the immortality of the soul, he says it is man's duty to find the best and most irrefragable of human words, and trusting himself to this, as to a raft, to set forth on the hazardous voyage of life, unless it were possible to find a surer and less dangerous way on board a stronger vessel, some word of God (*εἰ μὴ τις δύναιτο ἀσφαλέστερον καὶ ἀκινδυνότερον ἐπὶ βεβαιοτέρου ὀχήματος, λόγου θείου τινός, διαπορευθῆναι*). So, at a later period, Porphyry justified the publication of his treatise on the "Philosophy to be derived from Oracles," on the ground that the use of such a collection of the divine responses would be understood by all who had felt the painful craving after truth, and had sometimes wished that, by receiving the manifestation of it from the gods, they might be relieved from their doubts by information, not to be disputed (*ὅσοι περὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ὠδίναντες ἤϋξαντό ποτε τῆς ἐκ θεῶν ἐπιφανείας τυχόντες ἀνάπαυσιν λαβεῖν τῆς ἀπορίας διὰ τὴν τῶν λεγόντων ἐξιόπιστον διδασκαλίαν*).¹ If we suppose something of this feeling in Heraclitus and Virgil it would make it easier to understand the interest they took in the Sybilline Oracles.

On the other hand, nothing could be more appropriate than the words of the Ephesian philosopher, if they were meant to describe, say, the prophecies of Balaam, or the first five chapters, or any of the "Burdens" of Isaiah. Can we conceive any way in which these could have come to the knowledge of an Ephesian of 510 B.C.? We know that Psammetichus had encouraged the residence of Ionians in Egypt and surrounded himself with a body-

¹ Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* iv. 7.

guard of Greeks, about the middle of the seventh century. He and his successors, Necho and Psammuthis, were engaged in wars in Syria and Palestine, and we read of Jewish settlements being established in Egypt during their reigns (Jer. xlv. 1). Amasis (B.C. 569–525) was even a warmer philhellene than his predecessors, and received the honour of a visit from Solon. It was perfectly possible, therefore, for Greeks and Jews to fraternize in Egypt, and a native of Ephesus might thus bring back with him from Egypt some knowledge of Jewish prophecy, or a Greek soldier might get hold of some sacred scroll in an invasion of Judaea. Possibly future exploration in the tombs of Egypt may supply definite information on these points.

But granting this possibility, how are we to explain the use of the name *Σίβυλλα* in connexion with Jewish prophecy? Perhaps the note of Servius on *Aen.* iii. 445 may help us here. Discussing the etymology of the word, he says, “Aeoli *σίου* dicunt deos; *βουλῆ* autem est sententia: ergo *Σιβύλλας* quasi *σίου* (*θεοῦ*) *βουλᾶς* dixerunt”; see Alexandre, pp. 1, 2, where this etymology is accepted and defended. If the word *σίβυλλα* meant originally the “counsel or will of God,” we can see how it might be used for the utterance not only of the Greek prophetess, but also of the Jewish prophet declaring that will.

PS.—To those who desire further information on this abstruse and interesting subject I would especially recommend Alexandre’s exhaustive *Excursus ad Sibyllina*, containing 624 pages (unfortunately without an index), which constitutes the second volume of his first edition of the *Oracula*; and next to that, Klausen’s *Aeneas und die Penaten*, pp. 203–312; Marquardt’s *Römische Staatsverwaltung*, vol. iii. pp. 42–54 and 366–344; Schürer’s *History*

of the *Jewish People*, div. ii. vol. iii. pp. 270–292, containing a full bibliography; and Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la Divination*, vol. ii. 93–199. It may be worth while to compare the old edition of the Sibylline Books by Gallæus (A.D. 1689) which is followed by an Appendix containing a collection of other ancient Oracles by Opsopœus.

J. B. MAYOR.

THE TESTIMONY OF ST. JOHN TO THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF OUR LORD.

IN recent discussions on the Virginal Birth of our Lord it has been felt to be a difficulty that there is no direct mention of it in the Fourth Gospel. The silence of St. John on this momentous point has been admitted as an undoubted fact both by those who accept in their literal sense the accounts of the nativity in St. Matthew and St. Luke, and by those who reject or explain away these accounts. Bishop Harvey Goodwin, for instance, goes so far as to say: "Here also (in St. John's Gospel) the birth into the world is simply and absolutely omitted," meaning of course that there is no circumstantial account of it; for he proceeds to say: "As a matter of fact, the birth is omitted altogether, as has been already noticed; but can it be seriously maintained that the omission in any way prejudices the truth of the miraculous story?"¹ And in a recent work on the Fourth Gospel² the author argues that the tradition of the Virgin Birth must have been known to St. John, but that he deliberately passed it over for reasons which the author proceeds to state. It appears, however, to the present writer that a deeper examination of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel will demonstrate that although St. John gives no

¹ *The Foundations of the Creed*, p. 104.

² *The Fourth Gospel, its Purpose and Theology*, by Ernest F. Scott.