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ARTICLE III.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE FOURTH ECLOGUE OF VIRGIL.

By Rev. Leonard Withington, Newbury, Mass.

THE fourth Eclogue of Virgil has always been regarded as a remarkable specimen of Pagan spirituality. The poet has been supposed to have uttered higher strains than he understood; and to have borrowed his sublimity from Hebrew inspiration. The Sibylline verses were of great account in the estimation of some of the fathers; their forgery and falsehood are pretty clear before the light of modern criticism. Still the design of this Eclogue is by no means certain; so obscure was it to Lowth, that he even expresses a doubt whether it ever can be explained.¹ Yet we should never despair, because poetry is the language of the affections; and they are as permanent as the nature of man. If Virgil had any presages of his own immortality, he must have addressed his predictions to all generations.

My design is, to make some remarks on pastoral poetry in general, and then consider this Eclogue in particular.

Pastoral poetry is not intended to give us the most rigid representation of life and manners. It is not the design of it to hold the mirror up to nature, and to produce those feelings of recognition with which we read the dramatic writers. A pastoral is essentially a fancy piece by which we may obtain a distant glimpse of rural life, in those modes in which it plays before the imagination and exhilarates our hearts by relieving us from our present cares. As when we sail by some green island, or take a view from the sea of some Turkish city, we see nature and art dimly, with a few hints from reality for fancy to dress and adorn, and we contemplate the image while, at the same time, our reason tells us that a nearer view might impair the picture and dissipate the delusion; so, in pastoral poetry, the hint is taken from life, but we dress it at our pleasure; and the mind is delighted with the

¹ Quid fuerit ipsius poetæ consilium, quæ mens, quanquam hic multum sese exercuerint doctissimorum virorum ingenia, tamen nec adhuc sciri arbitror, neque spem habeo, fore, ut unquam clarè investigetur.—*Prelectiones XXI.* p. 284.

landscapes and personages of its own creation. Hence Mr. Pope has told us, that pastoral poetry "is an image of what they call the golden age. So that we are not to describe our shepherds, as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceived to have been, when the best of men followed the employment."¹ Dr. Johnson has denied this allusion to the golden age.² It is certain, however, that the thought which Pope was feeling after in this remark is mainly correct. He felt that naked nature here could not be pleasing, and his object was to show that descriptions of country life only charm refined minds when shown in distant perspective. The imagination must be permitted to dash them with the radiance of fancy and the colors of fiction. The tending of sheep can neither be romantic, nor pleasing to the man actually engaged in that occupation. A poetic excursion is commonly a migration from what we *are* to what we *are not*. The real shepherd knows too well the cares and toils of the employment, the noon-tide heats of summer, the rains and snows of winter, to relish the painting. Eclogues are the delight of those who dwell in cities and palaces; and to whom the country life seems pleasing because it is always in contrast with the art and excessive civilization around them. We all of us become tired of experienced life; we love to change the scene; to escape from the world of sensation to the world of fancy; and hence an age of refinement is always an age of pastoral poetry.

We find this remark verified by the whole course of literary history. The Songs of Solomon, (the piece of Hebrew poetry that comes the nearest to this species of verse,) were written at Jerusalem in the golden age of Jewish refinement. We know that Solomon was married to some of the Arab princesses;³ and perhaps in the summer season he might leave the city, and go to the native mountains of his rustic wife and enjoy the brooks and breezes, the flowers and forests of her paternal land. The beautiful Idyls of Theocritus are supposed to have been written in the court of Ptolemy Philadelphus, long after the Greek nations had passed the acme of their glory and were verging to the excesses of civilization. The age of Epic and Dramatic literature was over. The Doric dialect was on the wane even in Sicily; and probably would

¹ Discourse on Pastoral Poetry prefixed to his Eclogues.—*Works*, page 4.

² I cannot easily discover why it is thought necessary to refer descriptions of a rural state to remote times, nor can I perceive that any writer has consistently preserved the Arcadian manners and sentiments.—*Rambler*, No. 37.

³ 1 Kings 11: 1, 2.

sound to the Egyptico-Greeks very much as the phrases of Burns sound to us. It was looking through the shades of time to new modes of thought and a different organization of life. Virgil has followed the same natural law. He introduces his Greek shepherds on the Latin plains; he calls the Sicilian Muses to the banks of the Mincio; he gives the agreeable contrast between past simplicity and present refinement:

Et variis albae junguntur saepe columbae
Et niger a viridi turtur amatur ave.

The Italian and French pastorals illustrate the same remark. Nothing can be more insipid than what is called nature in this kind of writing. The pastorals of Philips compared with those of Pope are an exemplification. We do not want the picture to be held too near. We wish to tend our sheep only on a sunshiny day; to shear them without greasing our hands; to sit under a tree without catching the rheumatism; to embrace poverty without its wants; and to find in rural labor only sweet recreation.

If these remarks are just, they show the perversity of that criticism which Niebuhr has aspersingly cast on Virgil.¹ Niebuhr is a man of profound learning, but certainly not always of correct taste. He has wonderful sagacity in gathering all the items of probability which bear on the civil constitution of the Roman State; to trace the laws of their history and the secret of their success. Sometimes, too, his remarks on literature have the rare union of originality and truth. But, in general, I should rather hear his investigations than trust his taste. He regards Virgil's Bucolic poetry as a total failure! The *Æneid* is bad, the pastorals much worse. The *Æneid* is laid too far back among the shadowy personages of mythology; though he allows it to be a tessellated pavement of beautiful pieces, where the polish of the parts scarce atones for the incongruity of the whole. He thinks also that in worshipping Greek literature, the Roman poet totally forgot nature; and to introduce Greek names into Roman lays, to make the Trinacrian rustic pipe on the Italian plains, and in his Bucolics to be such a servile imitator of Theocritus, not only impairs his genius but depreciates his judgment. Then his attempt to give such refined songs to such rural characters and to apply such artificial versifications to such rustic descriptions, was to encounter difficulties which not even his genius could conquer.

¹ In his posthumous Lectures on Roman History; I quote from memory and cannot refer to the page.

But does not the critic forget, in these severe remarks, the very origin and nature of the pastoral Muse? She is never born amidst the flowers and shades, which she pretends to celebrate. It is her duty and delight to throw the veil of refinement over the nakedness of nature. Pastoral poetry is essentially retrospective. It depends on *that* faculty in man for its enchanting power. Sailors never like songs about rocks and tempests. Farmers never wish to hear about the privileges and enjoyments of rustic life;

'Tis nature pictured too severely true.

The blended imagery of fact and fancy always pleases us most.¹ The poor love to inspect the scenes of the rich. On the other hand, Horace has informed us, that the rich delight occasionally in the grateful vicissitudes of a voluntary poverty.

Plerumque gratæ divitibus vices,
Mundæ parvo sub lare pauperum
Coenæ, sine aulacis et ostro,
Solicitam explicuere frontem.

Perhaps there is no poetry in which the deception is so complete (namely that while we are looking after nature we are really

¹ Perhaps there is no way in which we can so find the force of these remarks as in appealing to youthful recollections. The individual is a specimen of the race; and the literary history of our world is mirrored in the experience of the individual. I recollect when I was young (a country boy) and read Addison's *Cato*, the first play I ever read, the part which struck me most, was, not the soliloquy in the fifth act, not the stoicism of *Cato*, or the grandeur of his sentiments, but it was those few lines where *Marcus* describes to his brother, the *position* of *Lucia*. It was music to my ear.

But see! where *Lucia* at her wonted hour,
Amid the cool of yon high marble arch
Enjoys the noon-day breeze.

O that marble arch, with such a paragon of perfection on it, was a perfect picture to my juvenile imagination. Whereas a cottage nymph, though a *Helen* in beauty, would have been tame and uninteresting. Fancy loves innovation and hates experience. In my youth, two of the most popular writers were *Richardson* and *Fielding*; both of them, in themselves and in their effects on their readers, are exemplifications of our remarks. *Richardson* was a printer's boy; *Fielding* was brought up in high life; and yet the printer is always seated in the cedar parlor and the patrician is always among stables and inns; the one is all fastidious refinement and the other always revels in low life. *Richardson's* novels, in New England, owed as much to their aristocratic manners, their titles, coaches, masquerades, balls and servants as they did to their buckram imitations of nature; for *Richardson* *did* imitate nature, though he always dressed her up in stays and hooped petticoats and mounted her on a pair of high heeled shoes.

feeling for something better) as in the pastoral. We can better bear a defective palace than a justly represented field. Suppose a painter to draw a landscape with Damon and Phillis sitting under a tree, and suppose the accompaniments to be what may naturally be expected in real life—two or three toads shall be around them, a rattle-snake shall be coiled in the rear, caterpillars falling from the boughs and a drove of pigs shall be rooting up the soil. This would be pure nature, but who does not see that it would destroy the illusion?

Such then is the design of pastoral poetry. The history of literature shows us that it arises long after the rural age has passed away, that it takes those distant views of country life which please the patricians of literature in their palaces and gardens; that it delights in those embellishments of nature which exaggerate its beauties and conceal its defects; that it is allied to fiction; and paints a mode of life pleasing to the readers because conscious, on reflection, that it never existed; and though it may be said that something of this is the aim of all poetry, yet it is eminently true, that the Bucolic writer snatches us to the mountains brow,

Where sits the shepherd on the grassy turf
Inhaling, healthful, the descending sun;
Around him feed his many-bleating flock
Of various cadence; and his sportive lambs
This way and that convolved, in frisking glee,
Their frolics play.

From this view, it will follow that the most polished writer—he that throws an air of refinement over his vernal scenes is the best. Virgil is, in our opinion, eminently happy in his pastorals. He wrote them at the right time and place; and was actuated by the right spirit. We like even his Greek names. He wished his pictures to have an historical remoteness. We have seen contrasts between him and Theocritus; giving the palm of art to one and of simplicity to the other. The truth, is they are both of the same school. They both held a polished mirror to the reeds and rushes of nature. Perhaps Theocritus had a little advantage in the directness of his path from high life back to simplicity. Virgil had peculiar difficulties to encounter; but the skill with which he surmounted them restores the balance and equals him in reputation to his more lauded competitor.

This view of the nature of pastoral poetry may prepare us, in some degree, to find the design of the *Pollio*.

The poem opens then by informing us that the poet intends to

strike a loftier strain; if he sings of woods they must be worthy of a consul's ear;—the groves and humble tamarisks delight no more. Thus to the usual fictitious character of this kind of poetry, something additional is to be expected. We are not to look for truth in the literal direction. The poem was written *Urbe conditâ*, 714, four years after the death of Cicero and about nine before the battle of Actium which gave Octavius the undisputed empire of the world. It was made just after the peace of Prusina, when Antony and Octavius held the empire between them. The star of the latter was rising to its predominance. He was about twenty-three years old. Now the suggestion of Servius is, that Pollio, consul that year, was about to have a son; and that the poet sung the blessings he was to see, not without allusion to Augustus. But this has been questioned, as such a son must have been a very inadequate personage, to meet the splendid predictions of this poem. Drusus and Marcellus have been brought forward, but neither of them was then in existence. Some have supposed that the poet alluded to the pregnancy of Scribonia, the wife of Augustus; and that Virgil prophesied, in hope that the birth would prove a son, which, however, turned out to be a daughter, the infamous Julia. We can hardly conceive, however, that a writer of such severe judgment as Virgil would hazard the ridicule of having his splendid predictions thus confuted.

In opposition to all these absurdities, Mr. Granville Penn has brought forth a new hypothesis. He supposes that Octavius himself is the progeny alluded to. He compares the Eclogue with the sixth book of the *Æneid* and finds a striking resemblance. See lines 780—807. But as Augustus was not born in the year when Pollio was consul, (that is, he was born twenty-three years before,) Mr. Penn supposes that the whole Eclogue, after the first four lines, is spoken not by the poet, but by the Sibyl, who being a long-lived, prophetic being, may be imagined to recount by retrospection, what she foretold of Augustus during the pregnancy of his mother. Such supernatural beings are not circumscribed by our modes of succession, and the Eclogue's being published in the name of Pollio, has no emphasis, no reference to *his* son; it is merely a note of time.

Now this hypothesis seems to me partially true, though as a whole, attended with unproved assumptions and great objections. It seems clear to me that Augustus is the subject of this prophecy; though we cannot agree that after the fourth line the speaker is the Sibyl.

In the first place, the transition is too violent from the close of the first four lines to the rest of the Eclogue; no notice being given of this important change of persons. *The last age of the Cumanian Song has now come; there arises a new and illustrious course of ages.* Who would conjecture that between these two lines the poet was sunk in the Sibyl? It is remarkable that in the sixth book of the *Æneid*, where the Sibyl really does speak, we have sufficient notice of her presence, as she accompanies *Æneas* through the infernal shades and teaches him the wonders of the scene. Why not the same explicitness here? In the second place, all the ancient grammarians and critics have understood it otherwise. Neither *Servius* nor *Macrobius* hints such a constraction. Is it not wonderful that such a meaning should escape the Latins themselves, to be revealed to an Englishman? In the third place, some of the sentiments of the Eclogue seem natural in the mouth of the poet, and are very much out of place in that of the Sibyl. *O that I might live long enough to sing thy deeds; neither Linus nor Thracian Orpheus should surpass me in song; although Calliope was parent to one and beautiful Apollo to the other. Pan, if he were to contend with me, Arcadia being judge; even in the judgment of Arcadia, Pan would confess himself conquered.* Does this sound like the language of the Sibyl? Would the long-lived Sibyl doubt the continuance of her life, and enter into competition with these mortal poets? The *humanity* of the feelings here expressed is very striking. It suits *Virgil* and no other; and although *Mr. Penn* suggests that the Sibyls were mortals yet they were mortals of a peculiar kind. Such wishes hardly become them, and are the very expressions by which a youthful bard might pant after immortality.

Rejecting this part of *Mr. Penn's* theory, I should be inclined to adopt the other part, namely; that *Augustus* is undoubtedly the subject of this poem; and that the birth spoken of is a *mystical* one; his birth into the ranks of the celestials; the poetic way in which he became a god; or a figurative account of his *Apotheosis*; or in other words, his destination to the Roman Empire.

Nothing was more common than for the Romans to deify their Emperors, and for the ancients to deify all their great heroes. This was done in several ways; first by a decree of the senate; secondly in the strains of some flattering poet, and lastly, by tradition. In the case before us, the poet steps in; and at a time when the *genius* of *Augustus* was rising, and yet the result is somewhat doubtful, the bard by his well-timed flattery helps him to the

empire. He threw the golden weight of his Muse into a trembling balance. But how is a mortal to be made a god but by a fictitious birth? It was well known that he had a mortal father and mother. But the poet gives him a kind of celestial birth and thus brings him into the class of divine heroes.

But you demand evidence. Did the ancients ever have these fictitious births?

Pliny, in his natural history, Lib. II. c. 25, speaks of the comet which appeared after the death of Caesar, and says, while others were alarmed, Augustus beheld it with *secret joy, interiore gaudio*; because he interpreted it as born for himself and he himself BORN IN IT. Here we have an express mentioning of the mystic birth. Suetonius tells of several prodigies at the real birth of Augustus, such as his being snatched from his cradle into a high tower, lying exposed to the rays of the rising sun, i. e. Apollo. While he was dining in a wood, an eagle came and seized his bread out of his hand and restored it again. Quintus Catulus after the dedication of the Capitoline temple, dreamed that he saw boys playing around the altar, one of them was secreted and bore the sign of the republic on his bosom; and afterwards this boy was found in the arms of the statue of Jupiter; and when Catulus commanded him to be taken away, he heard a voice saying that he was to be there educated for the protection of the republic; and the next day meeting Augustus, he was astonished to find that he looked exactly like the boy which he had seen in his dream; Vita Oct. † 45. What is this but a kind of celestial adoption? The same author tells us of a supper, where all the guests were habited like a god or goddess, and Augustus-like Apollo; to which the Eclogue may allude when it says—*tuus jam regnat Apollo*. In the second ode of Horace we find Augustus impersonated in one of the deities.

Sive mutata juvenem figura
Ales in terris imitatis, almae
Filius Maiae, patiens vocari
Caesaris ultor.

Lastly Virgil himself is authority. The *Aeneid* was expressly written to compliment Augustus. Its hero is his emblem, and he is goddess-born, *Natus Ded*. Now if we recollect that some of the ancients made a distinction, (for Plutarch tells us that the Egyptians¹ held that it was not impossible for a woman to be impregnated by a divine spirit, but that a man can have no cor-

¹ Life of Numa.

poetical intercourse with a goddess,) we may conclude that the very impossibility of the thing would give propriety to the fiction. Every reader saw that it must be figuratively understood.

In the poem itself, we find several indications that the birth is not literal. It is a law of celestial imagery that it must be like and unlike earth; it must resemble and excel the operations of time and sense. It must resemble, or we should not understand it; it must excel in order to exalt our ideas of the upper world. Thus Christ was clothed in white raiment, yet it was so as "no fuller on earth could white them." Before the throne of God there is a sea, but it is a sea of glass. Heaven is a city with golden streets and pearly gates. This rule is followed by all writers sacred and profane from Homer down to John Bunyan; and the same indication is given here that the birth is mystical and supernatural.

Jam nova progenies demittitur alto—
 —incipient magni procedere menses—
 Ipsa tibi blandos fundent cunabula flores—
 Matri longa decem tulerunt fastidia menses.

The last line is remarkable; it indicates no mortal mother. A hue of supernaturalism is thrown over the whole description, to make the flattery more delicate and the design more clear.

Horace has given us a view of these poetical deifications. *By this art, i. e. by valor and firmness of mind, Pollux and wandering Hercules became gods, among whom, reclining, Augustus shall drink nectar with purple lips. By such merits Bacchus was drawn by tigers; and thus Quirinus escaped from Acheron on the horses of Mars; Lib. III. Ode 3d.* That is, they were adopted deities. The closing ode of Horace to the second book is remarkable, not only as it shows this mystic and allegorical way of speaking, but as it approaches the very imagery which it is here contended has been used by Virgil. The sentiment, in simple prose, which he wishes to express is, that his works will be universally read and he shall be immortal. But he thus adorns it. *Already half transformed, I am borne through the liquid air with no mortal or slender wing. I shall not much longer linger on the earth; victorious over envy, I shall leave cities behind me. Not, I the progeny of poor parents; not I, whom you call friend, am doomed to die; and be imprisoned by the Stygian wave. Even now my wrinkled skin subsides. I am changed to the white bird; and the downy plumes are expanding through my fingers and shoulders. Now when he denies his parentage—Not I the progeny of poor parents—what is*

this transformation but a kind of celestial birth; the same imagery which is used in the Eclogue before us.

I have spoken of the laws of celestial imagery; perhaps I ought to explain the meaning. It is very evident that, logically speaking, we can form no conception of the mode of existence among spiritual beings in the future, or upper world. When the Angel in Paradise Lost begins to tell Adam about the revolt and defections in Heaven, he forewarns him;

I shall delineate so
By likening spiritual to corporeal forms
As may express them best.

This is more than poetry, it is philosophy. It is what is done throughout the whole Bible. It is giving us divine things in such resemblances as may express them best. Yet every nation and every individual, on the least improvement, has felt the conviction that it is only by a distant approximation that we can approach these sublime mysteries. We therefore find that all writers sacred and profane, from Isaiah down to the bard of yesterday, have fallen naturally and unconsciously into this expedient, that when they would give us any notion of the celestial world, they have resorted to earthly images, taking care however to dash them with some coloring of superiority. Their imagery must be like earth or we should not know their meaning; it must be superior to earth or it would not exalt our conceptions. This principle is engraven on every statue of Jupiter and every picture of the heathen Heaven. Thus the gods eat and drink like mortals, but their food and beverage are ambrosia and nectar; something like and something better. The palace of Apollo in Ovid¹ is like a real palace, but it is built with lofty columns flashing with gold and carbuncle, covered with ivory:

Argenti bifores radiabant lumine valvae.

The same god rides in a chariot and is drawn by horses; but such horses as were never seen on earth—*ignemque vomentes*. Jupiter and Juno go to bed together like a common husband and wife, but they sleep on flowers and all nature revives beneath their balmy couch.

Τοῖσι δ' ὑπὸ χθῶν δια φύεν νεοθηλέα ποιήν,
Λωτόν θ' ἐρσηέντα, ἰδὲ κρόκον, ἠδ' ὑάκινθον,
Πυκνὸν καὶ μαλακὸν· ὃς ἄπὸ χθονὸς ὑψὸς' ἔεργεν.

¹ Metamorphoses Lib. II. line 1—3.

Τῷ ἐνι λεξάσθην, ἐπὶ δὲ νεφέλων ἕσαντο
 Καλῆν, χρυσεῖην· στήλην δ' ὑπέκριντον ἑρσοῦ.
 Iliad, Lib. XIV. 347—351.

When we pass to the Bible, the same law prevails. Moses caught a glimpse of the glory of God, though he saw no form, no mortal figure, revelation assuming this superiority over paganism; yet "they saw the God of Israel, and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire-stone, and as it were the body of Heaven in its clearness.¹ In Revelation, there is a sea before the throne but it is a sea of glass."² The river in Ezekiel which gushes from the foundation of the mystic temple is remarkable. It seems to contradict the whole geography of the country. The limestone mountains had a little stony brook which ran through deserts and desolation into the Dead Sea in the rainy season, and was dry the rest of the year. Such is the real scene. But in the vision of the prophet is a river, with very many trees on one side and on the other. *Then said he unto me, these waters issue out towards the East country, and go down into the desert and go into the sea; which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed.*³ The first chapters in Ezekiel are to be explained in the same way. It is a remarkable specimen of describing the majesty of the immaterial God by material symbols. Forbidden as the Jews were to make any image of God, the prophet describes the majesty of Jehovah by a confused machine, partly a chariot, partly a throne, drawn not by horses but by *living creatures*; producing the material figure which poetry must use without departing from the strict spirituality which his religion enjoined. Milton also is full of similar expedients. Now when I see natural similitudes thus dashed and colored by supernaturalism, I think it safe to conclude that I discern the writer's object. He is not literal; he is mystic and allegorical; and this is exactly the character of this Eclogue. We have no need to suppose a mortal birth because the child is a *new progeny, come down from Heaven; flowers grow around his cradle; the serpent dies; his mother passes through a supernatural period of gestation*; and finally we are told obliquely that the table to which he is to be admitted is *that of a godless and a god*. We scarcely can have more notes that such a birth is not literal; it is a poetic adoption into the family of the immortals.

The last lines of the poem seem to seal this conclusion. They

¹ Exodus, 24: 10.

² Rev. 4: 6.

³ Ezekiel 47: 8.

have always been obscure to me, and on the old construction are absolutely unintelligible. The lines are as follows :

Incipe, parve puer : cui non risere parentes,
Nec deus hunc mensa, dea nec dignata cubili est.

Two ways of construing them have been devised. Quintilian, instead of *cui* in the last line but one, reads *qui*, in the nominative ; and the meaning will be, *Those children, O ye parents, that have not smiled on you, will never be admitted to the seats of the gods.* But that reading is harsh and unnatural. That of Servius is much easier, as we have it in the common text. *That child will never reach the immortal seats, on whom (immortal) parents have not smiled.* That is, there must be a celestial birth to exalt a mortal hero into an immortal god ; “ If some god or goddess have not smiled on the child as parents, the god will not receive him to his table nor the goddess to her couch.” On the above theory the concluding sentiment is plain ; or the very obliqueness of the sentence makes the compliment more delicate and imposing.

It is certain that the idea of a mystic birth was very current among the ancients. Cicero calls his restoration from banishment a *παλιγγενεσία*, or a *new birth*. The persons initiated into the mysteries were considered as *new born*. The fable of the GOLDEN ASS, written by Appulejus, was intended to figure this process. The term *renatus* is repeatedly used. He calls the day of his initiation his natal day ; and the priest by whom he was initiated his *father*. When a Roman slave was released, it was called his natal day, the day of his regeneration. It is also clear that the Julian family considered themselves as the descendents of the gods. When Julius Caesar pronounced the *laudation* or funeral discourse on his aunt, Julia, he said, “ that the maternal race of his aunt was from kings ; the paternal was found with the gods. The Marcii were descended from Ancus Marcius ; which was the race of his mother ; the Julian race were from Venus. Therefore in our race is the sanctity of kings, who have power among men ; and the ceremonies of the gods in whose power kings are ;” Suetonius, Vita Caes. Sect. 6. A frequent watch-word of Caesar to the army was *Venus Genetrix*. No doubt the whole of this family line, long before it reached the goddess, was, like the Roman genealogies generally, constructive and fabulous. But such were the claims of the Caesarian family ; and it is morally certain that when Virgil made Eneas *goddess-born* and descended from Venus,

or rather when he adopted that fable from Homer, he intended to pay a compliment to Augustus.

Consider now the circumstances under which the Eclogue was written. Octavius was yet very young, about twenty-three years old; not yet matured in wisdom, not yet confirmed in empire, but rising; connected with the greatest hero Rome had produced; belonging to his family and his adopted son. He had begun to favor Virgil; he was aspiring to empire, and the most auspicious prospects were opening upon him. What more natural than that Virgil, knowing the pretensions of his family, should sing his apotheosis by making him *goddess-born*? He has a celestial mother, probably Venus. He is a *new progeny sent down from Heaven*. We may compare this Eclogue with the Fifth, which is supposed to be the Apotheosis of Julius Caesar. *Him the nymphs besmooze, while the mother embracing the body of her miserable son calls the stars and the gods cruel*. Who is this mother? One of the critics supposes Calphurnia, his wife; absurd! Ruæus the Jesuit says, Rome. But surely he who gave the signal *Venus Genetrix*, could have no other than Venus for his mother.

Candidus insuetum miratur limen Olympi,
Sub pedibusque videt nubes et sidera Daphnis.

I confess, I am not able to bring an exact parallel of an apotheosis shadowed forth in a mystic birth. The poem has long been considered as *unique*. But it seems to me that every probability conducts us to this conclusion; and it seems more probable from the fact that, if true, it would be a new proof of the delicate taste and good judgment of the most *selective*, if not the most *original* of the Roman bards.

Before closing, perhaps a word may be expected on the alleged coincidence between this pastoral and some of the Hebrew prophecies. It struck the ancient Christians and it has struck the modern. Constantine discoursed on it; Pope expressed his astonishment; and even Lowth hardly knew what to say. For so general an impression perhaps it may be said there must be some real cause. I must confess, however, for one, that I have rather wondered at the wonderers. Is there any necessity of supposing that Virgil, either through the Sibylline verses or more directly, caught his fire from the Hebrew prophets, when the same imagery and the same impressions prevailed throughout the world? There are certain convictions which seem to be common to the *Jewish and Gentile* mind. First, that man is a sinner; secondly,

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that he has degenerated from a better state ; and thirdly, that he will be restored. Man has always looked back to a paradise and forward to a millennium. These impressions seem to be forced upon us from our ideas of justice and goodness in God, and from our convictions of guilt in our race. The coincidence between this Eclogue and certain passages in Isaiah is not greater than that between the chaos of Ovid and Moses, the deluge of the pagans and the Jews, the golden age of Hesiod and the history of Genesis. It is a remarkable fact that man always believes that he is a fallen creature ; and always fancies himself just on the verge of the millennium. As to the imagery here used, *the lion lying down with the lamb*, etc., it is too natural for us to say from the closest resemblance, that it must be borrowed. If we could sweep away every vestige of antiquity, and if from the waters of oblivion a new order of bards could arise, they would express moral happiness by material figures ; and it is vain to attribute that to tradition, which comes from the most established laws of human thought. It is a common inspiration ; it is the everlasting voice of nature.

These observations have been read in a company of literary gentlemen ; and it is due to the public to say that the writer failed of producing a conviction of the truth of his hypothesis. Several objections were urged. Some of them forcible ; all of them acute and ingenious. One of the company thought, that the pagans were accustomed to a magniloquent style ; at least what appears so to us ; that an apotheosis was a very cheap affair ; and that, therefore, such compliments paid to an expected son of Pollio, were not so inadequate as is often supposed. It appears to me, however, very clear that Augustus himself, and no son of his or any other person, is the auspicious hero of the piece. This is evident from the nature of the case ; and from a comparison of the Eclogue with the passages in the sixth book of the *Æneid*. If this position be fixed, we seem then to be forced upon the supposition of a mystic birth. But if this should be rejected, I should be inclined to take, as *second best*, the opinion, that the poet, rapt above time and succession, goes back in his thoughts, and imagines himself singing his predictions over the cradle of his celestial hero. At any rate, the poem is so dark that my suggestions cannot be completely absurd.