

legal forms was confined to the Jews of Assuan. Until proof arrives that it was not so confined, the above theory holds the field that they brought these forms from Judea, and that therefore Judea before the captivity was "permeated" as far as its lawyers were concerned, at least, by Assyrian culture. Whether this was absorbed during the Assyrian conquests of the seventh century, or whether it along with Assyrian culture itself goes back to the Babylonia of the First Dynasty, must depend upon other evidence. In the latter case we should have the pre-Israelite Canaanites as the intermediaries. As it stands, there is food for thought and much need for further research.

C. H. W. JOHNS.

THE DIVINE CHILD IN VIRGIL :

A SEQUEL TO PROFESSOR MAYOR'S STUDY.

PROFESSOR J. B. MAYOR has treated afresh the interesting and oft-discussed problem of the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil in a recent number of this magazine ;¹ and on the whole the present writer is in agreement with the general results of the treatment. In particular, it seems impossible to understand the Fourth Eclogue without the supposition that Virgil had experienced a certain influence from Hebrew poetry ; and in this present article other reasons for this opinion besides those mentioned by Professor Mayor will be mentioned.

But, whereas Professor Mayor is inclined to reject the supposition that this influence came direct to Virgil from the works of Isaiah as translated (we must of course understand a Greek, not a Latin, translation), and argues that the Roman poet knew no more of the Hebrew poet than what filtered through the poor medium of the Sibylline Books, I confess that this appears to me an inadequate

¹ EXPOSITOR, April, 1907.

hypothesis, and that there seems no difficulty to prevent us from believing Virgil to have been acquainted with a Greek translation of Isaiah. It is mentioned by ancient authorities that he had read widely in remote regions of philosophy; and as Isaiah had certainly been translated into Greek, and as the lofty religious thought of the Jews had certainly exercised a strong influence over many Roman minds and over the popular imagination of the ancient Roman world, it seems quite a fair supposition that he had become acquainted with Isaiah in Greek. I shall not, however, enter into this question in detail, except to remark that the influence on Virgil's metre in this poem (which will be pointed out in the sequel) seems inconsistent with the idea that he was indebted to the Sibylline verses alone. I am not concerned to deny or to affirm anything about his having seen the Sibylline poems; but it seems quite safe to assert, in the first place, that no such commonplace lines as make up those poems could have any influence on Virgil's metrical form—one might as soon imagine that Shelley was influenced in his metrical form by Shadwell or Pye—and, in the second place, that only the original expression of the ideas in the suitable metrical form by a great poet could have determined Virgil to make this unique experiment in Latin metre—an experiment which he never repeated—or could have inspired him to express the anticipations of the champions of the New Empire in so Hebraic and un-Roman a form.

We may assume all that Professor Mayor has so well said about the relation of Virgil's details and words to Isaiah. I shall add some remarks on the Hebrew and non-Roman character of the main subject and of the metre, and on the form in which Virgil develops an idea which was floating before the minds of many in Italy at the time. To show how naturally our results rise from the facts, I shall use the

statement which I made on the subject many years ago to a meeting of the Franco-Scottish Society, only slightly modifying the form, but leaving the thoughts unchanged.

There are two facts which determine the evolution of this ideal picture in Virgil's poem. Virgil is perfectly sure that the glorified and idealized Italy of his vision is being realized in their own time and before their own eyes, and he connects that realization with a new-born child. These are two ideas to which no real parallel can be found in preceding Greek or Roman literature. The Better Age had been conceived by the Greeks as lying in the past, and the world's history as a progress towards decay. Even where a cycle of ages was spoken of by the Greek philosophers, it was taken rather as a proof that no good thing could last, than as an encouragement to look forward to a better future. Moreover Virgil's new age, though spoken of in his opening lines as a part of a recurring cycle, is not pictured before his view as evanescent; it is coming, but its end is not seen and not thought of by him.

How does Virgil arrive at his firm conviction that the best is last, and that the best is surely coming, nay that it now is? We cannot regard it as arising entirely from his own inspiration, springing mature and full-grown, like Athena from the head of Zeus. Rather we must agree with Professor Mayor that we ought to trace the stages in its development to the perfect form which it has in this poem.

Again, the association of a young child with this coming age is something entirely alien to Greek and Roman thought. It springs from a sense of a divine purpose, developing in the growth of the race and working itself out in the life of other new generations, a thought not in itself foreign to the philosophical speculation of Greece, but developed here in a form so unusual that it imperatively demands

our recognition and explanation. It was too delicate for the philosophers, though one finds it to a certain degree in the poets. Nowhere can we find any previous philosophy or religion that had grasped the thought firmly and unhesitatingly, except among the Hebrew race. To the Hebrew prophets, and to them alone, the Better Age lay always in the future :—

The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made.

The Hebrews always recognized that the divine purpose reserved for them a future better than the past, and they alone associated the coming of the Better Age with the birth of a child. We must, I think, look to the East and to Hebrew poetry for the germ from which Virgil's poem developed, though in the process of development nourishment from many other sides determined its growth and affected its character.

Looking at the poem from another point of view, we recognize that it is a metrical experiment, which Virgil tried in this one case and never repeated. Its metrical character seemed to him appropriate to his treatment of this one subject ; but he found no other subject which it suited, and he considered that the true development of the heroic verse lay in another direction.

Landor, in his criticisms on Catullus's twelfth ode, has the following remarks on the metrical character of this Eclogue. "The worst, but most admired, of Virgil's Eclogues, was composed to celebrate the birth of Pollio's son in his consulate. In this Eclogue, and in this alone, his versification fails him utterly. The lines afford one another no support. For instance this sequence (lines 4-6):—

Ultima Cumæi venit jam carminis ætas.
Magnus ab integro sæclorum nascitur ordo.
Jam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna.

Toss them in a bag and throw them out, and they will fall as rightly in one place as another. Any one of them may come first ; any one of them come last ; any one of them may come immediately ; better that any one should never come at all." But in this criticism (apart from the fact that the force of lines 4-6 would suffer seriously if they were transposed, though grammar and metre might be uninjured), Landor has not observed that Virgil is deliberately trying an experiment in order to obtain a special effect. We do not maintain that the ruling metrical form would be unsuitable for ordinary Latin use, but its employment in this case is obviously intentional, and dictated by the subject ; it is no case of accidental failure in versification.

The two most distinguishing and salient metrical characteristics of this Eclogue are, first, that the stops coincide more regularly with the ends of lines than in any other passage of Virgil, so that to a large extent each single verse gives a distinct sense ; and, secondly, that in a number of cases the second half of the line repeats with slight variation the meaning of the first half, or, when the sense is enclosed in two hexameters, the second repeats the meaning of the first. These characteristics are unlike any previous treatment of the hexameter. As to the first, it is true that in the earliest stages of Virgil's metre the stops are placed at the ends of lines to a much greater extent than in its later stages. But there is a general agreement among Latin scholars that the fourth Eclogue is not the earliest ; and even compared with the earliest, its metre is seen to be something peculiar and apart.

These characteristics are distinctly those of Hebrew poetry ; and it appears to me that the metrical treatment of this Eclogue can hardly be explained except as an experiment made in imitation of the same original, from which

sprang the central conception of the Better Age surely approaching, and inaugurated by the birth of a child. Virgil found the idea and the metrical form together ; that is to say, he did not gather the idea from a secondary source, but had read it (in translation) as expressed by a great writer, whose poetic form dominated his mind for the moment. Only a writer of the loftiest poetic power could have so affected the mind of Virgil. We notice, too, that the peculiar metrical form is most marked where the expression approaches the prophetic type, while in the descriptive parts the metre is closer to the form common in the Eclogues.

That such an origin for Virgil's idea is possible, will be doubted by no one who takes properly into account both the width of his reading, and the influence which the strange and unique character of the Jewish nation and religion (and here the religion made and was the nation) already had exerted and was exerting on the Græco-Roman world. That is a subject over which there hangs, and must always hang, a thick veil ; but enough is known to give us increasing certainty, as time goes on, that the fascination which Judaism exerted on a certain class of minds was very strong, and its influence on Roman society far greater than is apparent in the superficial view which alone is permitted us in the dearth of authorities.

Finally, the often quoted analogies with several passages of the prophet Isaiah afford some indication as to the identity of the great poet whose words, either in a Greek translation or in extracts, had come before Virgil, and influenced the development of his thought. It is true that there are numerous points in this Eclogue which go back to Greek models. The ideas taken up from Virgil from a Semitic source are developed in a mind rich with Hellenic knowledge and strong with a vigorous Italian life. Virgil

is never a mere imitator except in his most juvenile work ; he reforms and transforms everything that he has learned from his great instructors. It is an Italian idyll that he has given us, not a mere transplanted of a foreign idea, or of any number of foreign ideas.

The aim of this paper is rather to add to what Professor Mayor has said than to differ from him. The process of adding, however, may sometimes change the point of view, though it does not really express any essential difference of opinion, but merely builds on what he has said already very well. Thus, though I think that mere knowledge of Sibylline verses is not sufficient to explain the origin of the Fourth Eclogue, I should entirely agree in thinking that most probably Virgil was acquainted with those verses. In all that Professor Mayor has said on this curious subject I must be taken as agreeing cordially ; and I quite admit that Virgil may have ideas from them and have been directed in his reading by them ; but I cannot consider that they are the sole or the chief foundation of the Fourth Eclogue.

Professor Mayor sees quite clearly and rightly that the Fourth Eclogue must be studied as simply one moment in the long evolution of pagan thought. He sees that ancient thought and philosophy always turned on the idea of a steady degeneration in human life and in the history of the world. Even where there was among the ancients some conception of a cycle in mundane affairs, the cycle consisted of a degeneration culminating in total destruction, following by a fresh beginning on a better scale. This is not really anything more than a degeneration and a recreation by divine power. We have here nothing in any degree corresponding to the modern idea of development and growth and steady improvement.

Now the modern theory of human history, and especially of the history of religion, is that it is a continuous evolution

from the savage state to the civilized, from cruelty to kindness, from ignorance to knowledge. Is the modern theory based on a true assumption, or on a false one? It is certainly based on a very big assumption; and I cannot see that any real attempt is ever made to establish the assumption on a firm basis. We are now all devotees of the theory of evolution; it is no longer to us a theory, it has become the foundation and guiding principle of all our thought. We must find some principle of development everywhere and in all things; and we arrange our view of history accordingly. But this is all very good, if we get hold of the right principle of development in history: then it is a truly scientific process that we are following. But what if we have got hold of a false principle? Then our whole procedure is pseudo-scientific, and only leads further and further away from the truth.

The ancient view was diametrically the opposite of the modern. To the ancient all history was a progress towards decay, a degeneration from good to bad. We are too apt to set aside this old view without a thought as pure prejudice and as the ancient fashion; all people used to think so. We remember the usual tendency of old persons to moralize on the better state of the world in their youth, and on the decay of good conduct and good manners. But is that all that lies underneath the ancient view? When we remember the practical universality of that view, and the way in which it colours all ancient literature, I cannot think that this is a sufficient explanation of the phenomenon. It was not merely the conscious expression of philosophers or of popular moralists: it was the deep, almost unconscious, hardly articulate view of all men. It caused that undertone of sadness which one hears in all Greek and Roman poetry, a certain note of hopelessness which makes itself felt everywhere. Every person who has to lecture on ancient poetry,

and especially Roman poetry, to young students must often call their attention to this deep-seated feeling. It is the same that every one who lives in Constantinople at the present day becomes conscious of. It arises from the inevitable perception that one is in an atmosphere of decay, degeneration, degradation, and that there is no improvement to be hoped for. The contemplation of and living among the degenerate aspects of modern civilization, as seen in great cities, produces something of the same feeling ; but the sense of hopelessness is here not so strong ; the evil and the decay are equally conspicuous, but there is also a correcting impression of error that may be rectified and fault that must be struggled against.

But that hopelessness was the almost universal feeling in the world of Greek and Roman paganism. To regard it as mere popular fallacy, and lightly to set it aside as of no account, as the modern writers generally do, is neither scientific nor justifiable. That the professional philosophers should have erred is not impossible or even improbable ; but the universal deep-lying feeling of the people, underlying all their poetry and guiding their half-articulate expression of thought, cannot be wrong, and must be accounted for. To one who looks at ancient history in the Mediterranean lands it must seem to rise from a perception of the truth and the facts.

It was patent to every observer in late Greek and Roman times that the history of the Mediterranean lands had on the whole been a process of degeneration and decay ; and as we now look back over that history we must come to the same opinion. In the sphere of agriculture we can trace in outline the peaceful conquest in remote time of a naturally rocky and barren land for the use of man. We can recover through recent research some faint idea of the way in which prosperity, civilization and well-being in the Mediterranean

lands were built up in early time—of the knowledge, accumulated experience, wisdom and forethought which were applied in order to lay the foundations of that prosperity—of the order, peace, settled government and security of property which made that slow, laborious process possible. Of this subject the present writer has published a brief study in the *Contemporary Review*, December, 1906, "The Peasant God."

And to take just one example in the intellectual sphere, we now know that the art of writing was well known and familiarly practised at a very early time in the Mediterranean world (especially the East Mediterranean); and that practical administration presupposed the existence of that knowledge and familiar use of writing. The processes of government and law were based on the principle that everything must be written down at the moment, e.g. that all sales and conveyance of important property must be registered in writing. But this inestimably important fact we have learned only in quite recent times from the discovery of the writings themselves: a process of discovery in which this University has played the leading part. We know that people wrote at a very early time, because we have found the documents which they wrote—on stone, on bronze, on pottery, partly incised or in relief, partly in ink. The use of ink is an extremely important fact, because ink was never invented for use on materials of that kind; it was invented for the purpose of writing on more perishable materials, such as paper or skins or parchment; ink-written pottery implies the previous and contemporary use of those less durable materials.¹ But Egypt is the only country which is dry enough to preserve such perishable substances; and the wider knowledge and use of ink furnishes the proof that similar perishable materials for writing were used in other countries besides Egypt.

In this way we are beginning to elaborate an outline of

¹ See *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, chap. i.

the ancient Mediterranean civilization, and to trace the steps of its history and its gradual decay.

Its decay arose from inner weakness ; and the inroads of eastern barbarians, which finally destroyed it, became dangerous only when its weakness increased. There is always going on the same historic conflict between civilization and barbarism ; and so long as civilization is true to itself, healthy in its construction, or, as Paul would say, so long as it listens to God, it can resist and overcome the forces of barbarism. Paul, in his brief way, sums up the stages of decay as the stages in the degeneration of human sympathy with and knowledge of the Divine nature, i.e. in the growth of idolatry. We may work them out in more detail, and show the precise changes in circumstance and outward form by which the decay proceeded. We may trace how the inner weakness showed itself first in one region, then in another. We may see that Sicily and Greece were already a prey to ruin, when some other parts of the Mediterranean world were still growing and healthy. We can delight ourselves with the picture which Statius draws, as late as A.D. 92, of the improvement effected by wisely planned operations on the bare rocky headland of Surrentum (Sorrento), on the southern horn of the Gulf of Naples, where the barren expanse of stone was subdued to the use of man and became docile to his hand, where the projecting rocks were cut down to the level, and the soil brought and laid down, so that groves of trees could grow, where no soil, but only bare stone, formerly was seen ; where a marvel greater than the fables of Orpheus and of Amphion was taking place before the sight of living men, under the orders of a wise owner, who made the rocks move and the tall forests follow after him. In that picture you have an account which may be applied all round the Mediterranean Sea in ancient times, and which still applies to a few regions like Malta (naturally

a bare rock, where almost all the soil has been introduced by man).

Not merely was this idea of a continuous degeneration of the Mediterranean world practically universal in Greek and Roman thought, it is also a fundamental principle in the view of the Apostle Paul. There was only this one mighty difference: the pagan opinion was hopeless and despairing—with one remarkable exception, which we must proceed to study in its character and extent—whereas Paul made this opinion the foundation on which to base his argument that all nature and all men were eagerly looking for a Saviour from this impending ruin and death, and that the Saviour was before them, and offered to them, if they would only recognize and believe.

In this way Paul presented his doctrine to the men of the Graeco-Roman world as the completion and culmination of their own philosophy and their own experience. He did not denounce their philosophical or religious views as wholly wrong. He maintained that in their original opinions there was contained some true knowledge about the nature of God and about His relation to mankind; but that there had been a degeneration from this fair beginning. The reason of the degeneration lay in the growth of false ideas about the nature of God, i.e., in idolatry. Yet man, as Paul says, never becomes so wholly corrupt that it is impossible for him to recover his lost advantages and return to the truth. Some of the Gentiles, knowing not the higher truth of the Law as revealed to the Jews, are a Law unto themselves; but in most of them this instinct towards the truth has become so obscured by wrong-doing that they have lost all consciousness of it, and cannot and will not hear the voice of God in their hearts. Still in the most utterly vitiated pagan man there remains a sense of misconduct, a feeling of pain, and a consciousness that he is wrong. This remnant of the original power of apprehending the Divine truth is

traceable in the sorrow and the pain and regret from which no man is free entirely. So long as this pain lasts, hope exists that the man may return to God. The pain is an accompaniment of the coming birth of higher ideas, of regeneration and redemption.

This Pauline view, as stated in Romans i. 19 ff., ii. 14 f., viii. 19 ff., has been described more fully in the *EXPOSITOR*, April, 1906, p. 374 ff.

The Pauline theory of degeneration is simply the application to human history of the ultimate fact from which he begins, and on which his whole mind and being rests—his consciousness that the Divine alone is real, and that all else is mere error and false appearance. From this initial fact it follows that a serious error as to the nature of God distorts and vitiates the nature of man. If the error goes on increasing and deepening, the distortion and vitiation of man's nature becomes worse and worse : in other words, the history of man and of society, in a state of idolatry and thorough misconception of the Divine nature, must be a process of steady, continuous degeneration. There can be no standing still in human life. The mind which sees God and hears His voice must move towards Him, and comprehend His nature better and better. The mind which is closed against the Divine voice is necessarily involved in a process of hardening, of increasing blindness, and of progressive degradation.

Thus the universal pagan view about the history of the Mediterranean lands seemed to Paul merely the correct perception of the facts of life, a proof of the original affinity to truth and the Divine in human nature ; and the tone of melancholy in pagan literature was to him a symptom of the pain which afforded some hope that the Graeco-Roman world might awaken to the consciousness and true perception of God.

The degeneration of the pagan world had worked itself out by certain stages, which it is the business of the historian

to trace in detail. Paul's business was only to insist on the fact of this degeneration, to prove it from the universal consciousness of men, to insist on the one and only possible remedy, and to point out that this remedy was open and ready and certain for the whole world.

Now, as we have said, there was one exception to this universal hopelessness in the pagan world ; and this exception was born out of the most desperate straits to which the Mediterranean world had yet been reduced, viz., the Civil Wars of Italy, and the apparently imminent ruin of the one great remaining power of order in the Mediterranean. The terrible suffering entailed by those wars and disorder proved, just as the Pauline view declared, the birth-pangs of a new hope. It was in this situation that the Fourth Eclogue sprang into being, the announcement by a great poet of the hope which was coming into being in the minds of many at this crisis. The poem had its origin in an almost accidental occasion of literary history, at which we must for a moment glance.

W. M. RAMSAY.

(To be continued.)

NOTES ON RECENT NEW TESTAMENT STUDY.

IN a recent monograph on the apostolic decree of Acts xv. (*Das Aposteldecree nach seiner ausserkanonischen Text-gestalt*), issued in the *Texte und Untersuchungen* (Leipzig, 1905), Gotthold Resch pleads for the revolutionary hypothesis that the original form of Acts xv. 28 f., substantially preserved in the Western text, ran thus : ἔδοξεν γὰρ τῷ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι καὶ ἡμῖν μηδὲν πλέον ἐπιτίθεσθαι ὑμῖν βάρους πλὴν τούτων τῶν ἐπίαναγκες ἀπέχεσθαι εἰδωλοθύτων καὶ αἵματος καὶ πορνείας καὶ ὅσα μὴ θέλετε ἑαυτοῖς γίνεσθαι ἐτέρῳ μὴ ποιεῖν ἀφ' ὧν διατηροῦντες ἑαυτοὺς εὐ πράξατε φερόμενοι ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι ἔρρωσθε. In defence of this view (pp. 68 f.), he has to meet the objection that the Western text seems merely to be a later attempt, made during the second